Visions of Germany in Turkey: Legitimizing German Imperialist Penetration of the Ottoman Empire

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Weighty memories merge with the impressions of the present; to the mind, what was is wed to what is (...) And it is German traces that have engraved themselves deeply upon the classical soil (...)—Paul Lindenberg 1902

On the day we hear the classic call, “Hot sausages, have a glass of beer!” at the train station of Angora, Germany will have its foot in the door in Asia Minor.—Friedrich Dernburg 1892

Hegemonic power, or even the attempt to establish it, is accompanied by a multitude of legitimizing discourses that are shaped both in conscious and subconscious debate with it. These discourses have been subject to considerable attention in the research on nationalism and imperialism since the seventies, in contrast to ‘political’ and macroeconomic interests, which had until then enjoyed the main attention of historians. In the research on German imperialism however, the analysis of legitimizing discourses has so far played a minor part. This is due on the one hand to the special circumstances under which German imperialist expansion took place and to a certain reserve towards discourse analysis among the German academic establishment.

In particular, the attempt to establish hegemony over West Asia by employing a policy of ‘pénétration pacifique’ towards the Ottoman Empire, one of the major imperialist projects of the Kaiserreich, has been neglected by historians in this regard. The ‘political’ strategies of the German Empire towards the ‘Eastern Question’ have been and still are a subject of interest, and the economic strategies, especially of renowned German companies such as Krupp, Philip Holzmann, and the Deutsche Bank, were a major focus in the seventies and eighties. However, the public discussions that accompanied these endeavors were always of limited interest. All historians acknowledge the lively interest of Wilhelmine society in the Empire’s oriental policy. But most of them see no relationship between this and the decisions made in the cabinet, the army headquarters, or the upper levels of the banks. Another characteristic of these earlier analyses is that they focused on the ‘political’ debate in the narrowest sense of the word. It was not asked why the public at large showed such fervent interest in seemingly dry subjects such as foreign trade, technology transfer, education, and emigration, whenever they concerned the Ottoman Empire.
More recently, research has been undertaken by authors dedicated to the approach of ‘Orientalism’ in order to analyze German Oriental studies. Their work shows however that the German case does not yield as obvious parallels between academic and state run imperialist activities as the British or French case. Edward Said had already conceded this in *Orientalism*.

Both these approaches and the more ‘classical’ historiography of imperialism tend to neglect the fact that these public debates took place against the background of popular orientalist discourses that had had a strong influence on the general public of the Reich. Travelogues, travel guide books, memoirs, and popular science books helped to confirm an image of the Eastern Mediterranean that was not conceived of as being political, but always explicitly or implicitly discussed German imperial endeavors. These publications drew on a number of paradigms, which had been established by the education system, political debate, or popular literature and were broadly accepted in the Kaiserreich’s society. These paradigms enabled the authors to stir emotions and invoke desires among their readers.

In search of these dominant elements, it is more efficient to read the individual text not as a unit, but only as part of the discourse of the society as a whole. To exclude the special focuses of individual authors, only those themes will be mentioned that can be found repeatedly. This does not mean however that these writings form a monolithic block. The authors certainly had different emotional approaches, positions towards foreign policy, and interests. Should one let free German settlers migrate to Anatolia, establish plantations, or concentrate on trade, finance, and railway? Should Germans who take up positions in the Levant, as the Eastern Mediterranean used to be called, adapt to oriental etiquette or resort to Prussian military aloofness? Who were the right partners for German interests: the Turks, the Greeks, or maybe even the Armenians or the Jews? This paper, however, will concentrate on those topics which are not subject to debate but are repeated unquestioned in these texts.

The paradigms mentioned here are meant to show the particularities of the German case. For this reason a number of motifs which are characteristic of this orientalist literature but simply reiterate a general superiority of the occident will not be considered, e.g. the lethargy and barbarity of the indigenous population, the fatal influence of Islam, the greater prevalence of health hazards.

The main legitimizing strategies can be divided into those that position themselves in relationship to French culture on the one hand and in relationship to Greek culture on the other. I shall first comment on this relationship to French culture and then on the more important issue, the relationship towards Greek culture.
Germans, the Avantgarde of the Civilizing World Order

The point of departure for most contemporary German descriptions of the Orient was not unlike that of French or British attitudes: the Orient, especially the area which had once been dominated by ancient Hellenic culture, was considered the cradle of the development towards human civilization, and the industrialized states of Western Europe were seen to be the preliminary peak of this development. Western Europe was believed to be the heir of Hellenic culture not in a genetic, but in a Hegelian sense. This widespread attitude even led an anti-imperialist poet like Arthur Rimbaud to speak of the Orient as “patrie primitive”, the original homeland. Pro-imperialist partisans described Western activities in the region accordingly:

As we all know, civilization is flooding from West to East, back to its roots.⁷

An attitude such as this justifies the guardianship of the Occident over the Orient against other claims, like Greek nationalism, which also sees itself as the heir to ancient Hellenic culture. It does not however answer another question, which seems to have plagued the German writers of descriptions of the Orient: what qualified Germany of all countries to bring civilization back to the East? The French or British were not as anxious about the matter of their calling as exporters of Western values. The success of the British course towards world dominance seemed to answer the question by itself; France had already achieved something of a cultural predominance at least among the Christians of the Eastern Mediterranean by means of its school policy. By comparison, the German Reich, immediately after its founding, had only marginal economic and cultural contacts to the region.⁸ Sympathizers of German ambitions in the Orient were thus caught in a double bind: on the one hand, despite Germany’s upstart position, they had to establish the nation’s claim to be the only one worthy of spreading ‘western’ thought and ‘western’ technology, and to pronounce France unworthy of this role; on the other hand, they had to maintain the collective claim of the West to domination of the East as a whole, especially towards the Greeks.

Germans vs. French: Victorious in War, defeated by Cultural Propaganda

To the German public, the fact that they had won the war of 1870/1871 seemed to prove their superiority over the French in military and technical respect and also concerning inner virtues. To show that this idea was spreading even to the most remote areas, an anecdote of Carl Humann’s, an engineer living in Smyrna (Çınır), from 1883 was often quoted:
Two years ago I was the guest of a simple Turk beyond the Halis in inner Asia Minor. As we were smoking çibuk after dinner, my host asked me: “What countryman are you?” A Prusyali or, if you’ve heard the name before, an Almanyali. “No, I haven’t heard of it, is it far from the Moskofs?” We have the Moskofs as our neighbors on the one side. “Is it far from the Ingiliz? Well we sort of live between the two. “Poor you!” I laughed and said, “We are not afraid; haven’t you heard of the great war we waged against the Fransiz?” Hearing this, he leapt to his feet, “That means you are a Bismarkli; you should have told me right away.”

Still the Germans could not hide the fact that even after the founding of the Reich their influence in the Eastern Mediterranean remained negligible. The predominance of French language and culture remained unchallenged. German ambassadors had to explain to Berlin why the Anatolian and Oriental Railways, despite being dominated by German capital, had to resort to French as company language, and even the German Protestant school of the Kaiserswerther Diakonissen in Smyrna taught its students in French until 1890. German pro-imperialist authors, to whom this situation seemed unfair, attempted to deride the protagonists of French influence. For the French educational institutions, it was enough to refer to their predominantly Catholic character to discredit them in the eyes of German readers. Having gone through the Kulturkampf, the German public was used to equating Catholic with fanatical, anti-progressive, and perverted. We can find an example of such a casual derisive remark in the writings of the newspaper correspondent Hans Barth. Explaining his contempt for the Catholic population of Smyrna, he comments,

In addition we find an army of spiritual and educational workers of all colors and kind in “intimate” intercourse with the families, concentrating almost all education of the Levantine circles in its hands. The influence of these “priests”, ranging from Jesuits to Wallenstein-like Capucinians, has such a strong influence on the “creme” of our society that, for fear of being excommunicated, no good Levantinian would dare to send his children to a Greek or European, i.e. independent school.

Polemical statements such as this concerning the Oriental Catholic population, the so-called Levantinians, is characteristic of German texts. Even Meyer’s Travel Guides, which usually employ a more sober tone, pour derision on them. The fact that Levantine culture tended towards France disappointed the hopes of German expansionists to find an as yet ‘uncivilized’ Orient. Accordingly Germans attempted to discredit the francophile attitude of these Catholics as pseudo-European. Two more short quotes from Hans Barth’s endless ramblings on Levantine women should suffice to illustrate this:

The ape-like adoration of everything coming from France, the Promised Land, does not quite match with her astonishing ignorance. A German farm girl would be as wise as a queen of Sheba by comparison. (...)

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In toilet matters, the Levantine woman lags behind her idol, the Parisian, only by a matter of six to eight days, depending on the arrival of the Messageries steamers. Her self-indulgence with a luxury lacking all “chic” and of indescribable bad taste concerning the choice of combinations though makes one pity the poor husband.\textsuperscript{15}

**The “Tyranny of Greece over Germany”**

By comparison, it proved much harder for Germans to legitimize their supposed supremacy in the face of an implicit Greek claim on the lands of the East. Reference to Greek antiquity as opposed to the Roman era had been a key element in developing an anti-French German national identity. In particular after Humboldt had reformed the Prussian education system at the beginning of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, Greek classics became the intellectual nexus for the middle and upper class to such an extent that this has been described in retrospect as the “Tyranny of Greece over Germany”.\textsuperscript{16} This tyranny especially enthralled those Germans who actually came into contact with the Eastern Mediterranean. For example, reading the enthusiastic account of the renowned virologist Rudolf Virchow’s visit to Troy one could believe he was actually visiting the city on the coast of Asia Minor at the peak of its power and not simply a rather unimaginative excavation field.\textsuperscript{17} In his travelogue, which is intended to cover the ‘German’ railway construction from Salonica (Thessaloniki; Salonico; Selânik; Solun) to Monastir (Bitola), the commander-in-chief of the German military mission to the Ottoman Empire, Count Colmar von der Goltz, spends the first 75 of 150 pages on his unsuccessful visit to the ancient sight of Pella.\textsuperscript{18} A contemporary study on the trade of Smyrna by the Austrian consul Karl von Scherzer, the German merchant J.M. Stoeckel, and the aforementioned Humann goes back to the Phoenicians.\textsuperscript{19}

In the face of an environment which they had been taught to revere since their early school days and which even provoked enthusiasm among middle-aged men, how could partisans of German imperialist ambitions justify the attempt at domination of West Asia?

Here we find three main discursive patterns. In the first pattern the Hellenic legacy is appropriated and exploited for the German cause. In the second pattern it is disregarded and a separate history of the Germans in the Near and Middle East is invented. In the third variety the question of historic continuities is avoided by discovering the inner likeness (‘Wesensverwandtschaft’) of the Orientals and the Germans. Although these three patterns follow very different paths, individual authors often make use of all three patterns, mixing contradictory modes of argumentation and sets of images without hesitation. One can only find a gradual difference in regard to which pattern of images different authors prefer. The first discursive pattern is preferred among men of the establishment and with classic humanist education, such as military and civil
officers, archeologists in part. The second pattern is found predominantly in the accounts of persons who vociferously demanded a more ambitious approach to German imperial expansion, especially in the context of the Baghdad Railway. The third is found among both groups of authors to the same extent.

**Germans as the True Hellenes**

In his memoirs, Gustav Humbert, German consulate official in Constantinople (Istanbul; Carigrad) and Smyrna, gives a strange interpretation of a casual and possibly ironic compliment his Greek cook Marigo made him.

“Oh,” she answered, “the monsieur speaks so beautifully that even I can sometimes not understand him” – this is proof that the ancient Greek forms, which I habitually employed, sound more beautiful to today’s Greeks than their own contemporary language. This contemporary Greek means nothing but an oversimplification of the traditional forms of expression.20

In his travelogue, Julius Centerwall, a Swedish school director sympathetic to German nationalist ambitions, describes his visit to the excavations by the Royal Prussian Museum in Pergamon (Bergama) and comments on the housekeeper of the “German House” at the site:

Ikaterina, the widow of Giorgi Pliris in Olympia, was very obliging, washed socks, undershirts etc. without being asked to, protected the gentlemen from being ripped off by artisans and looked up to the German scholars and their friends as if they were demigods.21

If the German Humbert speaks better Greek than contemporary Greeks, if the Greeks Marigo and Ikaterina confirm the superiority of the classically educated Germans, and if the Kaiserreich, unlike the Kingdom of Greece, is one of the major powers like the Attic League, Alexander’s empire and those of his successors, does this not make the Germans the better Hellenes?

Many German commentators believed the Germans to be the true heirs of ancient Hellas in contrast to modern day Greeks, based on their classic education and the important role of the Reich in world politics. This is also an important factor in the German archeological activities in the Kingdom of Greece and Asia Minor. The collecting of ancient archeological finds and other artifacts and gathering them at the centers of imperial power was a means of demonstrating one’s might and a field in which the major powers jostled for position (did the British Museum, the Louvre or the Museumsinsel hold the greatest treasures?). The Kaiserreich was especially ambitious in this and even risked middle scale diplomatic crises in order to appropriate outstanding artifacts.22

But the new state’s intention in the archeological sphere went well beyond simply comparing its assets to those of its rivals. Especially the complete
dismantling, transport, and reconstruction in a monumental museum erected for this purpose in Berlin of the Pergamon Zeus altar is to be seen as an attempt to stage the Reich as the successor of Hellas. Pompous ceremonies and processions in Berlin, which had adopted the nickname “Athens on the Spree”, were intended to support this production.  

The Hohenzollern dynasty, usually considered to be upstarts among the older royal families of Europe, reinvented their ancestry to include an ideal lineage: the Royal Museum issued a medal with Eumenes II. of Pergamon on the one side and Kaiser Friedrich III. on the other. It held the inscription “of Pergamonian metal”. The head of the excavations at Pergamon and Magnesia, Carl Humann, called among other things the “Viceroy of Asia Minor” by his contemporaries, did not neglect to extend this ancient lineage to the founder of the new Reich. Humann sent Bismarck a paperweight for his 80th birthday, that Humann’s friend Hallbauer had forged from ancient pieces of metal. His dedication read, For you, Lord Bismarck, the Iron Chancellor,

Hermogenes forged this iron at Magnesia 200 BC,
Humann found it in the temple of Artemis
After two thousand years and sent it
To Hallbauer, who gave it this shape,
In which it shall be witness
That what you have created will last for millennia.

Being a resident of Smyrna, Humann was well aware that by appropriating the Pergamon altar for Germany, he was curtailing the ambitions of Greek irredentists.

We do not wish to scold the feeling of envy among some of the Greeks towards our acquisition of the finds, who would have preferred the ruins to have remained in the ground until they someday become the masters of this land. But even among the Greeks, some had the insight to consider Greek art the property of the entire educated world and to be happy for the new honors the Greek genius was gaining thanks to our discoveries...

This seemingly cosmopolitan reasoning is rather unconvincing, considering that the object, which is meant to be “the property of the entire educated world,” had just become the property of the Prussian state, i.e. a very specific part of the educated and uneducated world. The medals and the honorary doctorate that Humann received in Germany were always to honor his securing the finds for the nation.
Crusaders in the Land of Sleeping Beauty

The more radical exponents of German expansionism, especially those in favor of the Baghdad Railway project, openly attacked the “Greek tyranny” over their perceptions and means of expression. Paul Lindenberg rejects the dominance of Greek antiquity. He intends to focus on “the present, so invigorated by its deeds, which belongs to us and to which we belong; we no longer revere the past, but the future, which, as we hope, holds great tasks in store for us and our fatherland (...)”27 Friedrich Dernburg, somewhat less resolute, hides his heresy behind an apparition he claims to have seen upon returning from a journey to the Baghdad Railway construction site. In front of his house in Berlin’s Grunewald appear Croesus, Diocletian, and Sultan Osman.

Let the dead bury their dead, said Diocletian. Give to life its dues. You have so little time. So act and make out of your span of existence as much as possible. Draw your railways, cover the land we once inhabited with fertile fields, build factories, from revived activities in all fields weave a gown behind which the past may disappear. That is all it desires.28

But even Lindenberg and Dernburg did not manage to liberate themselves of the sway the past held over them. Dernburg is puzzled by the fact that despite his intention to report on the German railways in Anatolia, he took a detour of several hundred kilometers to visit ancient graves; and Lindenberg often evokes the grandeur of the ancient past.

In their attempt to liberate themselves from the “tyranny of Greece over Germany” and not to fall behind other countries with more traditional contacts to the Orient, several authors chose another path, which did not question the primacy of the past, but tried to use it for their own ends. German writers of travelogues started searching for their own history. Possibly the most thorough search was undertaken by R. Oberhummer and R. Zimmerer. Trying to invent a genetic – and not, as above, simply ideal – German tradition in the East, they present the Goths, the Vikings, the Normans, and the crusaders as predecessors of Wilhelmine expansionism.29 Most of these groups were not taken up by other writers; only the crusaders enjoyed great popularity. They had already served as the ideal for Helmuth von Moltke’s Oriental ambitions earlier in the 19th century.30 By identifying with the crusaders, Germans took their seat among the former rulers of the Eastern Mediterranean and indirectly claimed to have older rights on the soil than the Turks. 31

At first glance, the choice of the crusaders by the German expansionists seems strange. The Germanic tribes had their established place in German national myth; the crusaders however had acted in the name of despised Catholicism and had been recruited from all countries of the Western church. But it is actually the Pope’s blessings that make the crusaders the ideal of the partisans of German
imperialism. Whereas historiography usually ascribes no other purpose to the Goths’ campaigns but the desire to plunder, the crusaders have a holy mission: to liberate the Orient, particularly, the Holy Land from unbelief. This is the way the pro-imperialist writers like to see German activities in the Orient. Railway construction, German schools, trade – all these things are not intended to serve the egoistic exploitation of one country by another (as with the Goths); they serve a holy cause – to spread the German version of Western civilization. In the German crusader fantasies, the role of the Pope and of other countries involved are blacked out to create a purely national narrative. An example of such a fantasy is provided by the following remarks of Paul Lindenberg on the Bosporus (İstanbul Boğazı).

German memories are closely linked with this place – long ago, at Easter of the year 1190, Kaiser Barbarossa, full of belief and vigor, passed here heading his hand-picked crusader army. He crossed the water here for Asia Minor, which he traversed, heading for Jerusalem, the city he never reached. (...) Century after century passed by, and the vast territories the German armored riders had traversed seemed to have been forgotten. Now and then, when the strong wooden plow of the Turkish farmer dug up the earth, the pale remains of one of the redbearded Hohenstaufen’s heroic comrades would be found; or a timeworn stone cross would mark the resting place of a manly knight who had succumbed to the hot sun or to his foes (...) Rarely and only distortedly did news from the world outside, news of the enormous events that often revolutionized the fate of old Europe arrive here. (...) But one day the Germans themselves entered Anatolia following the same paths the crusaders had taken. Unlike them they did not wield heavy weapons or ride high with waving banners. They were carrying all kinds of tools and machinery, in their wake an army of industrious workers; they dug, they built, bridging enormous cliffs and raging rivers, penetrating mountains and drying up swamps. Where until then long camel caravans had trodden on treacherous paths, now the shining rails stretched. At the beginning of the nineties the first locomotives – called land steamers by the Turkish farmers – arrived huffing and puffing. They brought new life, movement, culture to the almost forgotten territories, that had once been the cornucopia of first the Roman, then the Greek Empire, and that are now growing more important politically and economically from year to year.

Thus do the new Germans fight in Asia Minor. Their victory is the Anatolian Railway, built with German money, by German engineers, and administered in an exemplary way by Germans. But no true victory goes unexploited! Against the background of this nationalist interpretation of Friedrich Barbarossa’s crusade, the ‘pénétration pacifique’ mutates to become a quite martial scenario. Although the intent of this endeavor claims to be based in ideals
(reaching Jerusalem, bringing culture), serving German self-interest is a welcome byproduct of it.

In Lindenberg’s and in many other depictions, the historicising crusaders myth forms part of another myth, which at first glance seems contradictory to it: the myth of ‘America’, the terra incognita.

Although there had been no German colonies before 1883 except for a handful of failed attempts, the colonial novel had had its place in German literature since the 18th century. These novels imagined a German colonial empire. One of the main attributes of this literary genre was the setting of a virile young colonizer against a feminized, impassable, but ‘virgin’ land. This land – usually imagined to be ‘America’ or an island of the Western hemisphere – was meant to be ‘penetrated’ in order to take possession of it. Susanne Zantop believes these barely veiled appeals to libidinous desire in the popular genre of colonial novels to be responsible for the “colonial obsession” among the subjects of the Kaiser.

The proponents of German Oriental activities employ the same sexually loaded language and set of images in their depictions, especially concerning Anatolia. In contrast to the ‘New World’ the ‘old’ Orient, the cradle of civilization, could not be imagined as being virginal. But as the passage above by Lindenberg has already indicated, the authors knew a way out of this dilemma: the land had fallen into a sleeping beauty slumber after the departure of the crusaders. In this state it was waiting for a German prince to come and kiss it awake. The symbol of the phallus that is meant to penetrate the Sleeping Beauty is the railway train. In another passage Lindenberg is more explicit:

It is the sound of the steam train that has awakened the Land of Sleeping Beauty from its long slumber; and like a fertilizing river the railway tracks have brought abundant blessings into those hitherto remote areas (...)

Other texts also speak of awakening sleeping princesses, America, and most of all of the virginal power and enormous fertility of the Anatolian soil.

**German ‘Heimat’ in the Orient**

In May of 1893, the commander-in-chief of the German military mission to the Ottoman Empire, Count Colmar von der Goltz, visited the Macedonian provincial town of Monastir. Although the town borders on steep hills with sparse vegetation as they are typical of the central Balkans, von der Goltz was reminded by the countryside of the North European Plain, especially of his native East Prussia. Besides describing the environment as “northern”, he is also nostalgically touched by the town itself.

As we know contemporary visitors from the Occident do not only treat this place, but all Oriental towns with contempt. The young Turkish beys, having been educated in Europe
and idealizing the boulevards of Paris, are even harsher. But with the rapid progress the Occident has made in the last thirty years, we forget too easily how things used to look like in our towns. Visiting the Turkish provincial towns, especially on the European side, years ago in Adrianople and now in Monastir, vivid images of my childhood in my East Prussian homeland appeared to me. Those long, slow rides on unpaved paths, until finally the old carriage would heave and sway over the bad pavement into the dark town gate, the big, still unpaved market square with the leftovers of hay and straw, all the refuse from the last market day, a pond in the middle, where ducks and geese roamed freely, those crooked alleyways with low single story houses to both sides, garden fences in between, finally the driveway to the inn “The Three Crowns”, “The Swan” or “Eagle”, the wide courtyard, surrounded by crooked stables filled by unhitched farmers’ carts, the worn steps, and the large, dark guest rooms with green blinds on the windows and a Swiss landscape printed on them. Today all that has disappeared; but if one remembers it, the comparison is not unfavorable to the Orient. (...) 

The next morning at four o’clock, the old carriage swayed and moaned as it left the town and entered the waking plains. As I was looking out of the carriage window, seeing the meadows and corn fields covered in misty morning dew, and the trees of the avenue, swaying past to the left and the right, I immediately dreamed myself back into my distant homeland forty years ago, when the summer vacation was over and we children were put into the old carriage, rolling along the avenue almost as slow as here, with heavy heart towards the town and school.  

Von der Goltz cannot be blamed for excessive exoticism, on the contrary: discovering and subjecting a fascinating terra incognita is not his issue. Instead he attempts to find an ahistorical, ‘natural’, relation of kindred spirits (Wesensverwandtschaft) between this land and Germany. Thus he intends to depict the Ottoman Empire as a particularly German ‘Heimat’ (homeland). Since the German concept of ‘Heimat’ originates from the romanticist period, and is constructed to be anti-modern and anti-urban, these discoveries of ‘Heimat’ common to many travelogues almost always took place in nature, small towns, or villages. But there, no occasion was too small to feel oneself transplanted to Central Europe. A German folk song, a cool breeze, the sight of a poplar, of woodruff (Waldmeister), the call of a cuckoo or nightingale, even daisies evoked this feeling. This romantically idealized nature was the setting for the meeting of the idealized representatives of the two countries: the Germans, who had remained virtuous in spite of the tantalizing aspects of modernity, and the as yet uncorrupted, predominantly ethnically Turk rural population. In the words of pro-imperialist author Alfred Körte,

One does not get to know the Turkish people in Constantinople, where the confluence of the most diverse elements and the fungus of decay have entrenched themselves beyond hope of extermination to corrupt both the purity of his blood and the vigor of his character. But almost everyone who has met the core of this people in the provinces
comes to respect and love the Turks, feel contempt for the Greeks, and to hate and despise the Armenians.  

German imperialist speculations concerning which of the ethnic groups in the Ottoman Empire was open for German cultural influences usually spoke in favor of the rural Turkish population. The travelogues hold plenty of anecdotes in which Germans and Turkish villagers pronounce their mutual friendship, trust, and honesty. Occasionally Turkish farmers were even said to possess “Germanic racial traits.”

It is not only due to the anti-urban German conception of ‘Heimat’ that the writers had these experiences only in the countryside and along the railway. The modern port cities like Smyrna and Salonica and to a lesser degree the capital attested to the subordinate role Germans played in the Ottoman centers. French was the lingua franca here, the few German companies and cultural institutions were negligible compared to the number of French, Italian, Austrian, British, and American institutions. Mixed marriages and acculturation made it difficult to draw clear national lines between the various inhabitants. Because of this it comes as no surprise that partisans of German imperialism turned to the hinterland, where they could delude themselves that they were the sole bringers of progress. Again Alfred Körte,

What makes Eskişehir especially fascinating is the direct clash of the Oriental and the European. Here there is no mention of the Orient being assimilated into the occidental cultural forms. The image of the Orient is not yet distorted by annoying European additions, as for example in Constantinople and even more so in Smyrna. Without any intermediary the colorful oriental life stands next to the occidental cultural wave suddenly rushing in.

German ‘Heimat’ had no place on the quays. In the above mentioned cities it was restricted to a very introverted existence in German clubs, where German speakers played bowling or read German newspapers, and in German Protestant churches.

The only exceptions were the centrally located fancy hotels serving imported beer. In Salonica the Hotel d’Angleterre’s Pschorrbräu, the Olympos Palace’s Spatenbräu, in Smyrna the Café Krämer’s Pilsener attracted numbers of Germans. Sitting intoxicated amongst countrymen one could feel at home. The popularity of Bavarian beer among other foreigners and the local nouvelle riche seemed to affirm German culture and its growing influence abroad. Sitting on the Aegean coast with beer mug in hand, listening to a visiting Bohemian orchestra one could succumb to “honesty-in-beer fantasies” and personally experience “the invigorating fusion of Homer and Gambrinus.”
German Masters in the Orient

All these varieties of quixotic images legitimized not only the German project to dominate the Ottoman Empire, but also the protagonists’ direct and personal domination of the indigenous population.

The staging of Germans as true Hellenes justified especially the Germans’ domination of modern Greeks. The latter’s lack of an adequate relationship to ancient culture made their position as housekeepers and cooks of the Germans seem appropriate. They should respect the Germans “as demigods.” The following memory of the German Protestant reverend of Salonica Max Brunau gives a glimpse of what the life of such a German-Greek demigod would look like. Years after his stay he still recalls with longing the trips the German community used to go on to Mount Hortaç (Disoron) in the Macedonian hinterland:

The German colony often wandered up here in springtime. We then set up camp at 1000 to 1200 m, where the deciduous forest was still in its full spring glory and all German forest flowers could be found. In the next village one or two lambs were bought, slaughtered, and roasted on a stick. Servants had brought up beer and wine. You could find woodruff in the beech forest. Ice was available from the ice pits in the dark of the forest, which the villagers of Hortaçköy had kept in use since old times. With it we mixed a Maibowle better than anything to be found in Germany. We stayed up there for hours. Through the green of the trees one’s gaze would wander across the sea to Mount Olympus. To the other side there lay the lakes of Langaza and Be’ik, and the peninsulas of the Halkidiki, fading away in the summer haze at our feet.

In contrast to von der Goltz, who saw East Prussia in West Macedonia despite all topographic evidence to the contrary, something even more radical takes place here. Brunau fuses the imagery of a German romanticist experience of nature with that of ancient Greek mythology. On the one hand we see a company of wanderers “in the dark of the forest”, picking from “all German forest flowers” to mix a punch. On the other hand we have a gathering of “demigods” who have gathered (not actually on Mount Olympus, but seemingly on a mountain almost as high) to celebrate a Dionysian orgy. The Macedonian land lies to their feet. From down below the mortals carry up their lambs and their ice as offerings.

By contrast the image of the German crusaders evokes a totally different logic of legitimizing power. The modern day crusaders do not interact with an enemy who they wish to expel or exterminate. Other people than the crusaders, such as the naive rural Turkish population, play a subordinate role. Only the relationship between the masculine colonizer and the virginal land that has been promised to him is of importance. It does not spring to mind here that there could be others claiming the land.
Considering the ‘Heimat’ discourse, one could imagine at first glance that von der Goltz’ sympathies could make a meeting on equal terms with the locals possible. But the relationship through equal values does not mean real equality between Germans and Anatolians. The German writers proposed taking up the position of a benevolent guardian, whereas the unenlightened Turks were to play the role of the child, gratefully accepting their teachings and their ‘presents’ of technological progress – such as iron plowshares and railway access – and accepting the Germans as masters. It is not by chance that von der Goltz’ positive description of Monastir is embedded in a defense of the feudal land order in Western Macedonia. Many Germans enjoyed the Ottoman Empire’s outdated ceremonial, such as celebrities being escorted by pompously dressed Cavasses (Gendarmes).

Many partisans of German expansionism however did not share von der Goltz’ nostalgia for the good old days of Central Europe. They envisioned a more modern, colonial power structure including German plantations run with local workers.

Many depictions illustrate the lust of having power over people, such as Reinhold Menz’ account of his encounter with a Cherkessian village elder in Central Anatolia.

He expressed his esteem by assuring that he would sell me any inhabitant of his village, if I would so wish, even the black Osman. Mr. Schneller told me these were civilities, but later we found out that Sekiriya was even willing to offer a beautiful female slave. Only 50 to 60 Turkish Pounds (1200 Marks) and she is yours. This seemed to me to be a serious offer. I imagined how exotic a Cherkessian servant would be in Cologne, but my wife would probably not have accepted this oriental specialty. In Constantinople someone told me dryly upon hearing from me the vague plan of my import, I believe that would have disturbed the family peace! Too bad! Cologne, which has so many choses de Cologne, would have had yet another attraction.

In accordance with a widespread topos of German colonial literature, those Germans that actually came into situations, where they had to make life and death decisions during their stay in the Orient, portrayed themselves as milder masters than the Turks in retrospect.

Beyond Imperial Vision

Imperial discourse permeated almost all travelogues and similar publications concerning the Ottoman Empire. While the writings of the 1870s and 1880s are still somewhat reluctant to be explicit on this topic, those from the 1890s and later show a definite colonial tone or undertone. Only the massacres perpetrated against Armenians by Muslims in East Anatolia in 1895 and 1896 temporarily shook public enthusiasm for the policy of ‘pénétration pacifique’ towards the
Ottoman Empire. In view of the massacres many commentators now considered strengthening the role of humanitarian aspects and Christian solidarity in foreign policy. This contemplation did not last long however. Soon after the tragic events, the previous discourse experienced a renaissance.\(^{61}\)

German writers who were immune to the imperialist gaze towards the Orient are rare. Martin Hartmann, professor of Islamic studies and a left wing liberal, is probably an outstanding singular exception. In his “Nonpolitical Letters from Turkey” he writes about his experiences with the labor movement, Bulgarian nationalists, and other modern phenomena that other writers chose to ignore.\(^{62}\) A few German Zionists, dedicated to a completely different nationalist project, also did not share their compatriots’ ideals.\(^{63}\) But both the Zionists and Hartmann must be considered marginal in the face of an overwhelming pro-imperial mainstream.

Résumé

Even figures vital to the Reich’s interests in the Ottoman Empire, such as von der Goltz and Humann, as well as consulate officials, were affected by the above mentioned images and in turn proliferated them. In light of this, and presuming that “social actions of various kinds acquire form through the metaphors and paradigms in their actors’ heads (put there by explicit teaching and implicit generalization from social experience),”\(^{64}\) the study of German imperialism must move beyond materialist and rationalist interpretations. As this study has shown, the Reich’s image of the Orient was strongly influenced by certain emotional patterns that had influenced the Germans. They included the belief in progress of civilization, prejudice against Catholics, anti-French chauvinism, humanist education, a romantic image of ‘Heimat’, adoration of the crusaders, and sexually loaded colonial novels. These elements often mixed to form bizarre symbioses. The imagination of consulate officials, museum directors, and military officers proves to be no less fantastic than that of adherents of the radical right opposition and the pro-colonial movement.

Already in 1874 Friedrich Nietzsche had predicted that imitating such historically inspired fantasies could have grave consequences:

> The monumentalist interpretation of history deceives by its analogies: it tempts by seductive similarities the brave to become reckless, the enthusiast to become fanatical. And if one imagines this history in the hands and heads of talented egoists and quixotic evildoers, then empires are destroyed, noblemen murdered, wars and revolutions provoked, and the number of effects “an sich”, that is effects without a cause, grows again.\(^{65}\)

Taking into account the historical development and the defeat of 1918, the above mentioned self images must be seen as documents of the vanity of
Wilhelmine society, ranging between excessive romanticism and polemic, whenever the experienced Orient does not match one’s desires.

Looking through the writings of this self-indulgent genre, it comes as some surprise that the pro-imperialist writers documented the cries of Cassandra that questioned the German quest for grandeur as early as 1885. We return to Carl Humann’s anecdote quoted at the beginning, to his after dinner conversation with his host in Eastern Anatolia. The “simple Turk”, having identified his guest as a ‘Bismarck-man’, goes on to ask some questions about the health of the German ruler and the danger of a new war with France.

Your *Padi?ah* is said to be a very old man, over 100, is he still healthy?” *Elhamdülillah* (Thank God). “Don’t the *Fransiz* want to start war with you again?” He who has burnt his tongue blows even on sour milk. “Horses that are beaten tend to kick out.” A horse that kicks out must be seized by the head. “If two jars hit against each other, one of them breaks. God alone knows which one.”66

Humann wanted to illustrate to his readers the naiveté of the rural Anatolian population and his own experience with the people of the East, especially his knowledge of popular Turkish sayings. But history has proved the skeptical Turk and not Humann to be correct. After the conversation, Wilhelm I. had very few years left to live. The heir to the throne’s health failed mere weeks later. The conservative regime of Wilhelm I. was followed by the reign of his grandson Wilhelm II., which was to have disastrous results for Germany. What happened the next time the two jars hit is well known.

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1 This paper is based on preliminary results from ongoing PhD research supervised by Prf. Holm Sundhaussen, FU Berlin, and Prf. Karl Kaser, Graz. I thank Manuel Borutta, Mützeeyen Ege, and Alistair Noon for valuable critique and comments.

2 Paul Lindenberg, *Auf deutschen Pfaden im Orient*, Berlin 1902, 244. All quotes from German texts translated by MF.

3 Friedrich Dernburg, *Auf deutscher Bahn in Kleinasien. Eine Herbstfahrt*, Berlin 1892, 100, 101; Angora – Ankara; Turkish place names have been changed to match modern Turkish orthography.


5 Fikret Adanir comes to this opinion in his essay (“Wandlungen des deutschen Türkeibildes in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts”, in *Zeitschrift für Türkeistudien* 2/1991, 195-211), focussing on macro-economic imperial dependencies, Armin Kössler draws the same conclusion (*Aktionsfeld Osmanisches Reich. Die Wirtschaftsinteressen des Deutschen Kaiserreiches in der Türkei 1871-1908*, New York 1981, 159-164). Concentrating on the ‘political’ texts of the pro-colonial movement, Gregor Schöllgen believes these motifs to have had potentially vital influence. (‘’Dann müssen wir uns aber


9 Carl Humann, “Etwas Türkisch”, in Carl Schuchhardt & Theodor Wiegand (Ed.), Der Entdecker von Pergamon. Carl Humann, Berlin 1931 (reprint), 167. Approximate translations of Turkish words: Prusyali – Prussian; Almanyali – German; Moskof – Moscowite; Ængiliz – English; Fransiz – French; Bismarkli – Man of Bismarck; emphases in original.


11 Ernst Steinwald, Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen evangelischen Gemeinde zu Smyrna 1795-1904, Berlin 1904, 67.


17 Rudolf Virchow, Troja und der Burgberg von Hisarlik, Berlin 1880.


20 Gustav Humbert, Konstantinopel-London-Smyrna. Skizzen aus dem Leben eines kaiserlich-deutschen Auslandsbeamten, Charlottenburg 1927, 16; similar passages can be found in Hans Barth, Unter südlichem Himmel. Bilder aus dem Orient und Italien, Leipzig 1893, 82-84.
26 Carl Humann, Berichte, in Carl Schuchhardt & Theodor Wiegand (Ed.), Der Entdecker von Pergamon. Carl Humann, Berlin 1931 (reprint), 44.
27 Paul Lindenberg, Auf deutschen Pfaden im Orient, Berlin 1902, 201.
31 Meyers Reisebücher, Griechenland und Kleinasien, Leipzig 1901 (reprint) 275.
32 Kaiser Friedrich I. of Hohenstaufen, known in German nationalist myth as Friedrich Barbarossa (Redbeard), drowned during the Third Crusade in Anatolia in 1190 while trying to cross a river.
33 Paul Lindenberg, Auf deutschen Pfaden im Orient, Berlin 1902, 175, 176.
34 Susanne Zantop, Colonial Fantasies. Conquest, Race, and Nation in Pre-Colonial Germany, 1770-1871, Durham 1997 (epilogue).
35 Paul Lindenberg, Auf deutschen Pfaden im Orient, Berlin 1902, 190.
36 Friedrich Dernburg, Auf deutscher Bahn in Kleinasien. Eine Herbstfahrt, Berlin 1892, 188.
38 See for example R. Herrmann, quoted in Paul Lindenberg, Auf deutschen Pfaden im Orient, Berlin 1902, 204.
42 Max Brunau, Das Deutschtum in Mazedonien, Stuttgart 1925, 28.
43 Julius Seiff, Reisen in der asiatischen Türkei, Leipzig 1875, 389.
45 Alfred Körte, Anatolische Skizzen, Berlin 1896, 52.
50 Max Brunau, *Das Deutschtum in Mazedonien*, Stuttgart 1925, 51.
53 “Village at the foot of Hortaç”. (Brunau’s annotation (Hortiatis))
54 Max Brunau, *Das Deutschtum in Mazedonien*, Stuttgart 1925, 28; Waldmeister – woodruff; Maibowle – traditional May punch; Lake Langaza – Limni Koronia; Lake Be?ik – Limni Volvi.
