



The Public Defense of the Doctoral Dissertation in
Medieval Studies of

Ágnes Drosztmér

on

Images of Distance and Closeness:

The Ottomans in Sixteenth-Century Hungarian Vernacular Poetry

will be held on

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Gellner Room

Central European University(CEU)

Nádor u. 9, Budapest

Examination Committee

Chair

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*The doctoral dissertation is available for inspection in the CEU-ELTE Medieval Library,
Budapest, 6-8 Múzeum krt.*

Dissertation Abstract

The dissertation is an analysis of references concerning the presence and campaigns of the Ottoman Empire in vernacular Hungarian literary discourses in the sixteenth century. The “Turks” often appeared in various forums of cultural discourse and public discussion as the archetypes of enemy, nourished by religious texts (both Protestant and Catholic) and historiographical sources. At the same time, descriptions of campaigns of the constantly expanding Ottoman Empire provided new kinds of information and experience. Further, under the Ottoman rule there were longer periods when the Ottomans and Hungarians lived together through necessity, not in an explicitly peaceful, but in a balanced relationship. In these more or less peaceful periods – for instance, between the “fortress campaign” of Suleyman (1549–66) and the Long Turkish War (1593–1606), the everyday interactions of Ottomans and Hungarians were determined by a peculiar mix of rivalry and curiosity towards each other in both military acts and cultural encounters.

This novel experience resulted in novel perceptions. The representations of the Ottomans varied along several axes: they were dependent on the cultural and social context; on the author who created or mediated the image, on the audience for whom the image was made; and on the depicted subject. The goal of the dissertation is to recover the features, similarities and differences presented by different authors for different audiences. Due to the transformations of language and literacy, and to other developments, such as the spread of the printing press and Protestantism, the second half of the sixteenth century corresponds to the period in Hungarian cultural history when vernacular literature was established in written form and its specific forms and rules evolved. The analysis of representational patterns of Ottomans and their contextualization has the potential to help reconstruct this process.

The research maps traditions followed and representational patterns created in sixteenth-century Hungarian poetry produced under the Ottoman rule. I attempt to answer the question to what extent the literature of the era follows traditional patterns of depicting the Ottomans or to what extent it created new ones. The investigation also concerns various social and cultural aspects of language, and the progress of transition from orality into written culture, that was both the result and the means of reflecting decisive events of the era.

Approach

In order to research on Hungarian sources with regard to the representations of the Ottomans, one must take into consideration the particularities of the contemporary source material and its context, along with the current approaches of scholarship. As the first systematic recordings of literature in the vernacular emerged in this era, texts are connected to oral traditions by myriads of ties – irrespective of their actual manner of composition. It is self-evident that all that is left from the literature of the era exists only in writing, and one can make only presumptions regarding contemporary oral traditions, the structures of mediatory forms between solely oral and written texts, or preceding versions of sources that were finalized in a written form. Still, the investigation of the source material focusing on oral and literate features of the sources offers insight not only into processes of formation

and establishment of vernacular literary forms, but into the genealogy of concepts of reflecting the “other,” and of the literary reflections of a massive military presence. The Ottoman expansion and events connected to it indeed marked an epic moment in the development of vernacular literature in both senses of the term. The textualization of events had a foundation that relied on orality, but this form was actualized in manner that was shaped also by new media (printing) and new conceptual frameworks (reformed religious ideas).

The source corpus of the research shows transitional features between orality and literacy: texts were composed in writing, but especially in the case of popular works, they were based on oral traditions (using thematic and linguistic formulas, texts have multiple variations), their transmission might have happened on the basis of aural reception, but also by silent reading, and the performer was often even able to provide a printed version of the text to the audience. In order to grasp methods of transition from oral traditions to written culture and the modes of coexistence of the two types of traditions, various levels of repetitions and their corresponding formulas and themes are examined. The purpose of analyses is to trace repetitions and formula types in the corpus, and if possible, sketch a script, a structure that could be filled with a set of elements. As the functioning of works was built on the repetition and the variations of known elements, formulas provided the aesthetic value of the works as well. In this manner, the use of formulas was becoming more than merely a set of techniques: it became a style that determined the development of written culture.

Structure

In order to understand the processes of the particular discourses about the Ottomans in Hungary, certain aspects of the religious, military and cultural contexts have to be introduced in the first place. The second chapter investigates the representational practices of Ottoman rulers, putting emphasis on the most representative example of sultans, Suleyman the Magnificent, who consciously created a strong political-artistic campaign mediating his claims for universal rule. At the same time, he was the leader of campaigns in Hungary resulting in decisive, grand-scale events such as the battle of Mohács or the fortress campaign in the middle of the century. The role of the sultan as a protector of tributary states was also emphasized in Hungarian works and is analyzed in the chapter.

The next focus of the research is connected to the various aspects of religion: reflections on Islam as a religion and the interpretative strategies of evaluating the presence and military successes of the Ottomans. The chapter attempts to survey the roles and ratio of existing, influential traditions such as the Wittenberg view of history and eschatological ideas, and to map new patterns that were formed in vernacular narratives. The discourse on religion had been strongly interconnected with medieval and humanist discourses of the role of countries bordering the enemy, involving topoi of the “scourge of God” and “propugnaculum Christianitatis,” which had a determining role in the early development of the concept of nationhood.

The last chapter has the military encounters in its focus, investigating the representational practices of active and less active phases of military interactions between Ottomans and

Hungarians. The focus of the discussion falls on the features of existing literary practices that highly influenced methods of narrating military events, addressing formulaicity and its functioning in event poetry. Great-scale campaigns, sieges and battles are examined as they are narrated by various genres, and most representatively, by event poetry. The course of the discussion follows the guideline of reflections from bigger-scale military events through decisive battles and sieges, to finish with narratives that deal with smaller raids and person-against-person combats. This discussion is followed with the analysis of narrating success and defeat, representations of the protagonists of the two sides of military encounters, and the development of the concept of the ideal soldier. Finally, the chapter discusses the toolkit of reflections that concerned activities and persons who crossed the military borderlines.

Results 1. The Sultans

The most important results of the investigation of references concerning the Ottoman sultans show that under the four-decade long rule of Suleyman and his intense military presence in Hungary, a literary structure came into being that was based on both oral and written traditions. This structure applied various formulas to organize knowledge for its audience in a manner that was suitable to mediate recent and far events alike. The analyses of the descriptions of landmark events and the designated roles of the sultans in these situations resulted in demonstrating that in addition to the image of the sultan as a distant, powerful ruler, his personal emotions and reactions likewise played a determining role in the development of military decisions. The complex image, at the same time, includes elements that are present in general, topos-like references regarding the Turks – such as unreliability, arrogant pride and selfishness, or the “scourge of God” imagery. Event poetry as a genre focuses on affairs that were based on first- or secondhand eyewitness observations, thus in an obvious manner, these narratives lack a personal image of the sultan. He is depicted as a distant figure, albeit he is positioned to determine ongoing events in the vast majority of sources, taking an established place in the plot. This system of representations has strong ties with oral traditions, applying numerous elements of its apparatus such as formula-type expressions and various topos. The system often lacks in-depth information about inner political mechanisms of the Ottoman Empire, and focuses mostly on attempts to explain the Ottoman presence and the losses of the Hungarian Kingdom.

Results 2. Representations in Religious Narratives

The presence of the Ottomans in Hungary generated a variety of religious reflections, with two fundamental perspectives: one is directed towards “us,” the subjects of the Ottomans and their situations, while the other dimension involves reflections of the Turks themselves and the discussions of their perceived or supposed religious affairs. Despite the coexistence of Christians and Muslims since the foundation of the Hungarian state, there were no nuanced reflections on Islam in religious narratives. Discussions of religious affairs did not differentiate between “new” and “old” Muslims, nor did they reflect confessional transitions within the Ottoman Empire. Extant religious discussions relied on medieval traditions, declaring Islam heretical, Mohammed the Antichrist and Muslims unfaithful. These

traditions influenced references on the Ottoman Turks, who were often represented as punishment sent by God, and appeared in the context of Christian apocalyptic imagery. The narratives are ruled by conflicting dimensions of unitedness and dividedness: the strong interference of the Ottoman expansion and the cause of Protestants as well as fears emerging from their attributed political and religious similarities are present along with attempts of the Catholic Church to mediate the self-image of *unitas christiana*. The process of the formation of particular confessions (*Konfessionsbildung*) and their influence on the systems of culture and politics (*Konfessionalisierung*) are fundamental factors in building national identities. Such a system of identity-formation is destined to be jaundiced, and as a consequence, cultural division and hostility, or competition at most, was more common than cultural exchange between the forming confessions.

Results 3. Military Interactions

As a conflict zone throughout the sixteenth century, Hungary had to continually defend its shifting borders: the era had been interspersed with waves of intense campaigns and peaceful periods. Constant ethnical and military rearrangement necessitated constant adaptation to new circumstances, and even to change as a condition. Literary traditions were also undergoing a rapid evolution in the century, developing new forms of literary activities while reflecting on events on the military, political and religious scene. The social and ethnic diversity of armed forces that made the military scene, resulted in likewise manifold reflections in the narratives.

Frequent contacts in the border zone resulted in differentiated illustrational practices of most of the topoi inherited from medieval and humanist traditions that were related to the Ottomans. Event poetry and religious narratives show parallel features in concentrating more thoroughly on self-oriented perspectives, and neglecting detailed descriptions of the actual experiences about the Turks. The type of narratives that seem to be exception from this tendency is event poetry which discusses smaller scale events such as minor sieges and raids. As the narratives give evidence, texts were produced to mirror the perspectives of soldiers, or for them as an audience. Frontier ideology characterized parlances on campaigns, especially in narratives that were part of some of the existing literary traditions, such as chronicles or crusading literature. However, interactions in the borderland area were recorded in a literary form that was based on and supposedly continued to exist in oral traditions, allowing for the development of national and historical identities.

Conclusions

The analysis of narratives that reflected to the presence of Turks was performed in a manner that attempted to grasp the relationship of the sources to oral and written traditions. The analysis of this literature demonstrated that the occurrence of certain plot formulas, or themes, is a frequent phenomenon in event poetry narratives. Although the exclusive oral origins of these grammatical and plot formulas cannot be confirmed, these constructions

organize knowledge to suit the horizon of expectation of an audience with a predominantly oral background. The study of the organization and functions of formulas and themes led closer to the understanding of literary discourses in practice. Repetitive and recurring elements may be present at any level of the narratives, and their sequence, a script provides the framework that is responsible for maintaining the working mechanism of the texts. This script invoked certain characteristics of oral cultures, attributing importance to structural stability instead of a formal variability. However, the presence of each and every formulaic element is not obligatory for all the narratives, and elements could be varied to a considerably high degree.

With regard to the primary concern of this work, the practices of representing the Ottomans in vernacular literature, the narratives confirm a complex synchronism of religious and confessional, military and political affairs. The sources also attest that literary discourses used appropriate forms and formulae to present the varieties of interconnected forms of these attitudes. Actual dialogues with Ottomans, both religious and political, were rare: instead, dialogues often took other forms than actual discourses. Raids, captive taking and other forms of military rivalry were common methods of interactions – which, subsequently, found their ways into religious and military narratives. At the same time, the narratives were heavily dominated by the perspective oriented towards “us”: the search for answers to essential questions of the period, such as the political takeover and military successes of the Ottoman Empire and the disintegration of the Hungarian Kingdom often resulted in self-accusation, and in blaming other Christians or compatriots for the current situation. As a result, the term “pagan” – as the Ottomans were widely mentioned – came to be used to cover religious, political and legal categories alike. As a consequence of the self-oriented perspective of literature, a complex system of lamentations was developed that reflected miseries from the personal to congregational level, and was used both in religious and military contexts, while its literary formulations played a significant role in the establishment of new patterns that allowed for expressing individual and lyrical contents.

All in all, the investigation of representational strategies necessitates the consideration of multiple dimensions of European–Ottoman, Hungarian–European and Hungarian–Ottoman settings. Early Hungarian literature in the sixteenth century had to create its own representational conventions and patterns relying on medieval, humanist and oral traditions combined with firsthand experiences. This literary practice created such representations of the Ottomans that reflected Ottoman and European patterns, but at the same time, a particular practice evolved that facilitated the creation of proto-nationalist identities and discourses, and the development of a new literary language.

Curriculum Vitæ

Master’s Degrees

2005 MA in Hungarian Language, Literature and Education from the Faculty of Arts at Eötvös University, Budapest (Thesis: Textology and Diagnostics: The Online Critical Edition of the Complete Works of Bálint Balassi)

2007 MA in Russian Language, Literature and Education at the Faculty of Arts at Eötvös

University, Budapest (Thesis: The Autobiographical Prose of Marina Tsvetaeva)

2007 MA in Medieval Studies at the Central European University, Budapest, Hungary
(Thesis: Presentation of the Self in Different Genres: The *Song Book* of Ferenc Wathay)

Scholarships, research and educational programs

2001 – 2005 Participation in the Department of Early Hungarian Literature’s program
“Philology in the Internet Era”(<http://magyar-irodalom.elte.hu/>)

2009-2010 Université Lumière Lyon 2, Erasmus scholarship, participation at the Master program “Cultures de l’écrit et de l’image” of Université Lumière Lyon 2 and the research institute *CIHAM - Histoire, archéologie, littératures des mondes chrétiens et musulmans médiévaux*

2010 September-October Guest researcher at Geisteswissenschaftlichen Zentrums
Geschichte und Kultur Ostmitteleuropas (GWZO), Universität Leipzig

2015 October Workshop participation at the “Italy and Crusading in the Fifteenth Century”
workshop of *Leverhulme History Project on the Later Crusades* in Rome, funded by Henrik
Birnbaum Memorial Fund

Publications

“Self-fashioning in the Song Book of Ferenc Wathay: Ideas and Ideals of Private Life and
Authorship.” In *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU* 14 (2008): 23-45.

“Szilágyi Mihály fogsága és a hercegnő szerelme. Egy magyar és egy oszmán-török
széphistória párhuzamainak értékelése” (The captivity of Mihály Szilágyi and the love of the
princess. Evaluating the parallels of a Hungarian and an Ottoman Turkish epic). Proceedings
of the conference “Identitás és kultúra a török hódoltságban” (Identity and culture in the
Ottoman period), organized by the Institute for Literary Studies of the Hungarian Academy
of Sciences, 18-20. September, 2008. Budapest: Balassi, 2012, 305-317.

“Self-fashioning in the Song Book of Ferenc Wathay - Ideas and ideals of Authorship in
Ottoman Captivity.” In *Türkenkriege und Adelskultur in Ostmitteleuropa vom 16. bis zum 18.
Jahrhundert*. Ed. Robert, Born and Sabine Jagodzinski. *Studia Jagellonica Lipsiensia* 14.
Leipzig: Thorbecke Jan Verlag, 2014.

Forthcoming

“The Good Fowler as a World Conqueror: Images of Suleyman the Magnificent in Early
Modern Hungarian Literary Practice.” In *Practicing Coexistence. Constructions of the Other
in Early Modern Perception*. Budapest: CEU Press. In press.

“From Fast to Feast: Ottoman Food and Consumption in Religious and Urban Contexts in
Central European Sources (Fifteenth-Sixteenth Centuries),” proceedings of the conference
“From Kebap to Cevapcici. Eating Practices in Ottoman Europe,” Justus-Liebig Universität
Giessen, 24-26 September 2015.

Reviews

Históriák és énekek (Histories and songs) by Pap, Balázs, ItK, in press.

“The European Tributary States of the Ottoman Empire in the Sixteenth-Seventeenth Centuries. A Comparative Perspective” Symposium des Geisteswissenschaftlichen Zentrums Geschichte und Kultur Ostmitteleuropas (GWZO) an der Universität Leipzig und der Dubrovnik branch of HAZU (Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts) Dubrovnik, 21. bis 23. Mai 2009. Arbeitsgemeinschaft historischer Forschungseinrichtungen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland e.V. (AHF), No. 251, 2009. <http://www.ahf-muenchen.de/Tagungsberichte/Berichte/pdf/2009/251-09.pdf>

Conference papers

“Szilágyi Mihály fogsága és a hercegnő szerelme. Egy magyar és egy oszmán-török széphistória párhuzamai” (The captivity of Mihály Szilágyi and the love of the princess. Parallels of a Hungarian and an Ottoman Turkish epic), presented at “Identitás és kultúra a török hódoltságban” (Identity and culture in the Ottoman period), conference of the Institute for Literary Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 18-20 September 2008.

“Self-Fashioning in the Song Book of Ferenc Wathay. Ideas and Ideals of Authorship in Ottoman Captivity”, presented at “Türkenkriege und Adelskultur in Ostmitteleuropa vom 16.-18. Jahrhundert”, conference of the project "Osmanischer Orient und Ostmitteleuropa. Vergleichende Studien zu Perzeptionen und Interaktionen in den Grenzzonen (16.-18. Jh.)" , of the Geisteswissenschaftliches Zentrum (GWZO), Leipzig, 23-25 October 2008.

“The Image of Suleyman in Hungarian Literary Production”, The Fifty-Sixth Annual Meeting of the RSA, Venice, Italy, 8-10 April 2010.

Summary of PhD research at the “Postcolonising the Medieval Image Postgraduate Workshop”, AHRC Research Network, School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies, University of Leeds, 8-9 July 2010.

“From Fast to Feast: Ottoman Food and Consumption in Religious and Urban Contexts in Central European Sources (Fifteenth-Sixteenth Centuries),” presented at “From Kebap to Cevapcici. Eating Practices in Ottoman Europe”, Justus-Liebig Universität Giessen, 24-26 September 2015.

“Shackles and Glory: Early Modern Hungarian Practices of Narrating Ottoman Captivity,” presented at “Tribute to Miklós Bethlen (1642–1716): Sources, Genres and Scribal Habits of Early Modern Prison Literature”, conference of the Institute for Literary Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 18-21 May 2016.