

MALEČKOVÁ JITKA, “THE TURK” IN THE CZECH IMAGINATION

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One of the nations perceiving Ottoman and Turkish identity as ‘other’ is the Czechs. Although the Czechs were never under Ottoman rule, the formation of an ‘image’ for the Turkish and Ottoman identities is quite remarkable. Jitka Malečková’s study is unique in that reveals the perception of Ottoman identity in general, and Turkish identity in particular, through the Western gaze. The study starts in the 1870s and ends in 1923, when the Ottoman Empire disappeared from the stage of history and the Republic of Türkiye emerged. This period is also significant for illustrating how the ‘sick man’ description of the Ottoman

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Empire was perceived by the others. The significance of 1923 is that it allows us to see how the young Republic of Türkiye, which had turned towards Western civilisation, was perceived.

Malečková in her introduction states that the book will tell two stories. The first narrative concerns the perception of the Turk as the 'other' in European eyes, while the second focuses on the parallels between Czech and Turkish modernisation. The evaluation of the fact that these two nations, despite never having been under each other's rule, have passed through similar cradles of modernisation is important for understanding the study's overall framework. The study, which is an example of how the consequences of the global dimension of modernisation transform the perception of independent nations, also gives the opportunity to evaluate the cultural effects of Czech-Turkish relations.

The theoretical framework underlying the study is 'imagology'. The author has tried to make sense of the Czech-Eastern relationship through the lens of national discourses and stereotypes. In this context, another aim of the author is to address the modernisation relationship that the Turks experienced first with the Arabs and then with the Western civilisation through the Czechs. In this way, Malečková has charted a unique path for the Czechs in establishing their own national discourse and developing their historiography by looking for the effects of the 'Czech-Slavic' approach. The author's search for her findings in the 19th century, which was the spiral of European transformation, gives the main correspondences of Czech-Turkish modernisation and reveals the global influence of some criteria (national discourse, national identity consciousness, etc.).

In the light of this scope, the book is organised under four main headings and these chapters deal with four different problematics. The first chapter is entitled 'The Return of the Terrible Turk'. In this chapter, the Turkish nation, which is evaluated from the perspective of the other, is discussed with concepts such as 'terrible' and 'warrior', which are common images. Malečková states that the origin of these images is related to the fact that Turks were seen as Christian enemies in the Middle Ages. This 'image', which would later be reinforced by the expansionist policy of the Ottoman Empire, was transformed in the 20th century. It should not be forgotten that before this transformation, the Ottoman

Empire in particular had a charismatic identity that attracted 'interest', 'curiosity', 'excitement', 'entertainment' and even 'sympathy'. Malečková also notes that this charismatic identity created a sensation in Europe and fuelled the desire for discovery. The remarkable aspect of this distinction is Malečková's treatment of Turkish and Ottoman identities within the framework of 'orientalism'. In the Westernisation section of *Orientalism*, the author sees Turkish modernisation as weaker than Ottoman modernisation, and explains this with the Ottoman focus on Istanbul.

It is quite remarkable that the author constructs his findings and arguments based on the connotations of the concept of 'transformation'. Because, the transformation of the Ottoman-Turkish image into a more positive light in European eyes began in the 17th century, and a transition period of neutral perceptions was experienced in the 18th century. However, it is observed that the transitional period was a time when Turkish modernisation progressed in a largely 'passive' manner. The transformation of the actual perceptions and images into a 'zigzagging' pattern occurred during the 19th and 20th centuries, when Turkish modernisation was actively taking place.

Malečková states that the transformation of the image of the Turks in Czech eyes began with the decline of Ottoman military power in Europe. Moreover, the loss of Ottoman power led to a decline in the curiosity, excitement and interest of the Czechs. Malečková attributes another important reason for the decline in interest to the Czechs' realisation of their own modernisation in the 19th century and the creation of a national discourse with a national content. Looking at the history of negative images, Czech and German Protestants regarded the 16th century as a period when the Turkish threat to Europe was felt intensely. They claimed that 'the Turks were sent by God to punish humanity for its sins' (Malečková, 36). Another negative image (mostly centred on 'religion') is the Czech characterisation of the Turks as 'antichrist'. According to the works of Rataj and Wagner, in the context of 'religion', the Turks were 'the mortal enemy of all Christianity' (Rataj, 2002). However, in these centuries, Malečková noted that there were not only negative maxims. One of the 'moderate' attitudes given by the author is that 'the Turks can be corrected'. In this respect, Malečková praised Komenský's

praise of the Turks' piety and charity, and advised the Sultan to translate the Bible into Turkish. In this respect, it can be said that there is no straight line in the transformation of the image of Turks in the eyes of Europe in general and Czechs in particular. The transformation that is meant in this study is a radical and mostly holistic change in perception. Perception transformations, on the other hand, have cultural, political and social dimensions and present a broad lens. Another noteworthy aspect is the treatment of images in literature. The author states that especially in the 18th and 19th centuries, with the intense influence of the Balkan wars, Czechs wrote vaudeville, songs, poems and plays and Turks were included in many works. Malečková also stated that the Czechs, who wanted to reach a national and national discourse in these works, acted with a sense of superiority over the Turks. These feelings also led to the treatment of Ottoman-Turkish images as 'funny' and 'ridiculous'. The author also noted that there were ridiculous sculptures such as 'Turek z Kamenýho mostu' and songs written in an ironic, sarcastic manner.

The second part of the book is titled 'Czechs Abroad'. In this chapter, Malečková focuses on the perception of Turks by Czechs living abroad, especially those who stayed in Istanbul (Constantinople) during the Ottoman period. The important concepts emphasised in the chapter are the Orient and Orientalism. In this context, seeing the real first contacts/encounters of the Turkish image through Czech eyes makes the basic arguments in Western perception understandable. The most important of the original aspects of the study lies here. Seeing the positive and negative images of the Czechs, who were never under Ottoman rule, allows us to understand the Turkish perception or prejudices in the eyes of Europe.

Czechs who visited the Ottoman Empire for various purposes had the opportunity to spread their travel and historical narratives over a wide area. Malečková argues that through their travels, travellers had the opportunity to understand the distinctions in the pre-modern and modern condition of 'Eastern spaces', as well as to study the relationship of Turkish men and women with other ethnic groups. In addition, the occupational group of the travellers who came to the Ottoman Empire is also heterogeneous. The structure is generally composed of

upper-class individuals, including teachers, academicians, lawyers and doctors. One of the main arguments of the travellers in their travelogues was 'the backwardness of the East' in contrast to the 'modernity of the West'. Within this context, the images representing the Turkish-Ottoman Empire were largely shaped by negative narratives. Malečková stated that the travellers acted with 'feelings of superiority' rather than hostility, especially in the use of negative connotations such as 'Turek (Turk in singular), Tureček (little Turk)'.

The use of depiction and negative images coincides with the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. In this context, it is quite natural that Czech travellers, who witnessed a collapsing state, had more negative judgements than positive impressions. Regarding positive impressions, there is generally a homogeneous judgement: Constantinople's external beauty. According to Malečková, the travellers found the appearance of the city 'mesmerising'. However, the travellers, who made an 'inside-outside' distinction, continued their negative arguments for a decadent empire in terms of the interior depiction. Another point to be emphasised in this section is Svátek's categorisation of the Turkish people:

1. Educated, advanced, open to progress and European-like intellectuals
2. The uneducated, lazy, fatalistic and violent, defending outdated values

The third chapter, 'Civilising the Slavic Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina', deals with the Czechs' activities, which are more related to their own "Orientalist" views. The nationalist ideas that have transformed the world have instilled in societies the consciousness of nationhood. The Czechs interacted with the 'ethnic' and 'linguistic' tribes belonging to the 'Slavs'. The ambivalent attitude of the Czechs towards Slavic Muslims allowed us to see again their negative view of Eastern values. Malečková stated that Slavic Muslims were associated with the Ottoman Turks in many respects and were therefore regarded as the 'other', as opponents and enemies. This Czech view of Muslims strengthened the Muslim=Turk hypothesis and led them to negatively view the 'ethnically' Slavic nations as well.

The fourth and last chapter of the book is entitled 'Our Mission in Oriental Studies'. The chapter is very valuable in terms of showing how Oriental Studies are approached from a European perspective in general, and from a Czech perspective in particular, while also providing a historical overview. The main problematic of the chapter is the following: How do Czech academics evaluate the purpose and mission of studies in the Middle East and especially in the field of Turkish language and literature? In this context, if we list the reasons for the demand for Orientalism and Orientalism studies based on the study:

1. The material and intellectual superiority of Europe, which was effective in imperialism
2. To belittle Eastern elements by treating them solely as objects of study.
3. Special curiosity arising from admiration and sympathy
4. To have questionable and interpretative arguments about Middle Eastern civilisation
5. The shortcomings of non-European societies
6. Evaluation of the East according to Western criteria

Within this framework, orientalist of German, Hungarian, Polish, Russian, etc. nations analysed the Middle East and compared it with the dynamics of their own ethnicity. Malečková states that the study of everything related to the Turks (history, past and present of the Turks) under the umbrella of Orientalism (*Orientalistika* in Czech) began in the 19th century. The chapter includes the writings of key figures in Czech-Turkish studies such as Josef Brandejs, Rudolf Dvořák, Alois Musil, Jan Rypka and Felix Tauer, as well as the contributions of various researchers at Charles-Ferdinand University to the field. The domestic and international impact of these studies and Czech Orientalism is also discussed.

'In the concluding chapter, 'The New Republics', Malečková begins by stating that 'the Czechs do not have a "Turk" of their own'. This observation shows that Czechs do not perceive the Turks as an essential 'other' and that the positive and negative images of the Ottoman-Turkish image are transmitted as 'clichés'. One of the arguments that is not conveyed as a cliché is the distinction between

people with backwardness/modernity dichotomy among Turks. The author characterised that positive and negative images of 'Turks' in Czech literature have never disappeared from the existing culture. Turks occupy a vivid place in the Czech imagination in folk songs, fairy tales and historical narratives, and are included in the elements of heritage from tradition. Images and images of foreign ethnicities are kept alive as the 'other' and used as a continuous 'motivational tool' in strengthening national consciousness. The Czechs did not keep their view of the Turks in an orientalist perspective and in general considered all ethnic groups living under Ottoman rule as 'exotic' and especially Muslims (including Slavs) as the 'other' under the guise of 'Christian enmity'. Malečková characterised that nowadays, after the emergence of the Czech Republic and the Republic of Türkiye as two independent states, a certain commonality of interests has developed between the two countries. Nevertheless, the author also states that the persistent negative images, especially the 'Terrible Turk' description, can be revived through political actors and the media. The most significant aspect of the book's relevance lies precisely in this spiral of 'continuity'.