

Tema kulturmöten och kulturkonfrontationer



# Dragomanen

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# Dragomanen

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# Diplomats and painters

## Cultural encounters between the Ottoman Empire and Sweden

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The Ottoman siege of Vienna in 1683 and the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) led to a shift in the balance of power in Europe and the intensification in diplomatic relations between European powers and the Ottoman Empire. In the seventeenth century Russia increased its political power in Muscovy, while in the Mediterranean France overtook Venice with regards to trade. Sweden had also begun to increase its political power in Europe (Atasoy and Uluç 2012, 401). Taking into account Sweden's evolving political role in Europe and its relationship with the Ottoman government, this article will concentrate on the cultural encounter between Sweden and the Ottoman Empire in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. After a brief survey of the historical development of diplomatic relations between Sweden and the Ottoman Empire through the contributions of artists, travellers, dragomans, diplomats and scholars, it will examine the artistic consequences of the interaction between Sweden and the Ottoman Empire as illustrated by the Rålamb and Celsing collections, works in the Royal Swedish Library and the Swedish Palace in Constantinople, and the artworks of Cornelius Loos and Carl Gustaf Löwenhielm.

## Diplomatic relations between the Ottoman Empire and Sweden

The first diplomatic contact between Sweden and the Ottoman Empire began in 1587. In response to an appeal from the Ottoman government for support against Russia, Sweden's King Johan III proposed a defence treaty against mutual adversaries to Sultan Murat III (Theolin 2001, 25). This treaty is one of the reasons for the increasing diplomatic relations between Sweden and the Ottoman Empire during the seventeenth century, despite their geographic distance and a lack of common borders.

Conflicts between Sweden and other European countries, including Poland, Austria, Denmark and Russia, became another reason for the convergence of Sweden and the Ottoman Empire. Since Sweden needed more reliable allies, the Swedish King turned first to Georg II Rakoczi in Siebenbürgen, then to the Cossacks in Ukraine, and then finally to Turkey (Theolin 2001, 26). The Swedish ambassadors Gotthard Wellingk and Claes Brorson Rålamb<sup>1</sup> were sent to the Ottoman government in 1657-1658 to form an alliance with the Ottomans against Russia, but they left Constantinople without achieving their goal.

The third reason for the close relations between Sweden and the Ottoman Empire was the long visit of King Karl XII to the Ottoman Empire. Karl XII stayed in the Ottoman Empire from July 1709 to October 1714. His long stay led to the reaction of the Ottomans by cynically saying that "*A guest stays for five days, not for five years!*" (Theolin 2001). Due to his long stay, he was also nicknamed *Demirbaş Şarl* (Ironhead Karl) by the Ottomans (Theolin 2001, 32). The motive behind Karl XII's lengthy stay was his hope to attack Russia with the military aid of Turks, Tatars and Cossacks. Together they could march against Tsar Petro and force him to make a peace settlement, and if all

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<sup>1</sup> Rålamb took during his travel to Constantinople notes in his diary. The diary was published in 1963 under the name "*A Short Account of What Happened during the Trip to Constantinople*". This is one of the fundamental Swedish sources on the life of Constantinople. More details about the source and the impact of Rålamb's diary are discussed in this article under the section of *Rålamb Collection*.

went well, Sweden could regain its possessions around the Baltic Sea. However, Karl XII did not achieve his goal and left the Ottoman Empire on 27 October 1714 (Theolin 2001, 34). Although his long stay was not welcomed by the Ottomans, it led to the recognition of the Ottoman culture and language by the Swedes.<sup>2</sup> King Karl XII's visit also acquainted the Ottomans with contemporary technological and artistic innovations from Europe, which stimulated the spread of Rococo and Baroque artistic style in Ottoman art and architecture during the "Tulip Age."<sup>3</sup>

After the death of Karl XII and the loss of Swedish possessions in the Baltics, Sweden turned to overseas trade, and on 10 January 1737, the Swedish diplomat von Höpken and the French diplomat Claude Alexandre de Bonneval signed a trade agreement with the Ottomans. This treaty was not limited to only commerce and navigation; it also outlined the respective privileges of the parties. For example, the treaty gave Swedish citizens the right to practice their religion freely and to produce their own wines, although wine was banned in the Ottoman Empire (Theolin 2001, 55).

## Cultural encounters between Sweden and the Ottoman Empire

The *Ottoman-Swedish Trade Agreement* in 1737 and the *Defensive Alliance of Peace, Unity and Friendship* in 1939 between Turkey and Sweden stimulated the development of cultural relations. These relations with Sweden resulted not only in the advancement of diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire, but also in cultural encounters in art and architecture. The *Defensive Alliance of*

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<sup>2</sup> Turkish words such as *kalabalık*, *divan*, *sofa*, *yıldırım* and *yaramaz* were introduced into Swedish, but these words did not become part of the vernacular until the end of the eighteenth-century, with the *Turquerie* movement in Europe (Theolin 2001, 40).

<sup>3</sup> The term *Tulip Age*, coined by Ahmed Refik Altunay in 1912, is attributed to the first three decades of the eighteenth-century Ottoman Empire. Since the tulip was the most popular luxury commodity in the Empire in that period, Ahmed Refik uses the word *tulip* to symbolize the luxurious life of the Ottomans.

*Peace, Unity and Friendship* was one of the first military-political alliances to be agreed upon between the Republic of Turkey and a Western European country, so Sweden was given the honorific name *Turkey's oldest friend* among the Western European powers (Theolin 2001, 58).

## Seventeenth century

### *The Rålamb Collection*

When the Swedish ambassadors visited the Ottoman Empire in the seventeenth century, they collected information about the Ottoman lifestyle, which gradually led to a rising Swedish interest in Ottoman culture. For instance, in 1657, the Swedish King Karl X sent Claes Rålamb as an ambassador to Mehmed IV in order to make an alliance with the Ottomans against Russia. During his visit, Rålamb took notes in his diary about what he saw and what he experienced and then published the account of his mission called *Kort Beskrifning om thæt som wid then Constantinopolitaniske Resan föreluppit* (*A Short Account of What Happened during the Trip to Constantinople*) (Theolin 2001, 28). He described his experiences in detail, including his first entrance to Constantinople through Edirnekapı:

*The 14th May, at six o'clock in the morning... I met the ambassadors of Transylvania, who brought a horse for me with fine trappings... I was received in the name of Turkish ağa or officer called Ali Ağa, who had with him twenty-four chiauses on horseback, and conducted me into the city to my lodging in a procession, according to the custom here... (Ådahl 2006, 9).*

What is remarkable about his visit to Constantinople is that Rålamb commissioned a series of twenty paintings<sup>4</sup> depicting a procession of the

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<sup>4</sup> Fifteen of these twenty paintings belong to the Rålamb family foundation, but have been kept in the Nordic Museum in Stockholm since 1937. The additional five paintings were bought by the Nordic Museum in 1988 from the owner in Uppsala. These five paintings are today in storage for restoration (Ådahl 2006, 24).

Ottoman courtiers, the sultan, and the grand vizier through the streets of Constantinople. The subject of the paintings is a procession of the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed IV and his court, officials and functionaries, starting with the Janissaries and the *şehremini* (governor) of Constantinople, ending with the Grand Vizier and the Sultan himself, surrounded by Janissaries and courtiers (Ådahl 2006, 31). This collection is unique not only as a visual document from the Ottoman Empire in the middle of the seventeenth century and of the rule of Mehmed IV, but also as a significant presentation of seventeenth-century Ottoman life through foreign eyes. It is inferred from his diary that Rålamb was watching the sultan and his household, Janissaries and *sipahis* (*cavalrymen*) from the window of his rented house. Rålamb conjectured that since this procession was made in September, the sultan was going to hunt in Adrianople (Ådahl 2006, 85). Karin Ådahl argues that despite Rålamb's uncertainty about the reason for the procession, he describes in accurate detail the order of the procession, participants, their functions and dresses as well as their attributes and what they are carrying.

There is no signature on the paintings and Rålamb surprisingly does not mention the artist of the paintings or the places where they were painted in his diary, although he writes in great detail about his travels to Constantinople. According to Adahl, the only clue about the paintings is a note made in January 1658 by Rålamb's valet Olof Hansson in the account book kept during the Rålamb's mission: "*Ditto paid the Polish man who painted the exit of the Sultan to Adrianople*" (Ådahl 2006). This is the only reference from Rålamb's embassy in documents that relate to the procession painting, but the Polish man mentioned here has not been identified. There are also three more notes referring to the payment to the Polish Turk. The only Polish Turk mentioned in Rålamb's diary was Wojciech Bobowski who is also known as Ali Beg or Albertus Bobowski. However, there is no biographical information about him to prove that he was trained as an artist (Ådahl 2006, 97). Therefore, the identification of Bobowski with the painter of the collection remains in doubt.

Another question about the Rålamb collection is where these paintings were made. The inventory text of the paintings in the Nordic Museum displays that the paintings were made in Constantinople, but according to Karin Ådahl,

considering the short period from the end of September until late January when Rålamb left Constantinople, it would have been difficult for one artist to paint twenty large paintings. Thus, it is possible that there could have been a workshop with several artists, but there is no evidence of any such workshop in Constantinople at that time.

Although the Rålamb collection contains unconfirmed information, the collection itself is evidence illustrating the strong diplomatic and cultural relations of the Ottoman Empire and Sweden.

### *The Rålamb Album of Turkish Costumes*

The Rålamb diary also includes a costume album with one hundred and twenty-one small watercolour paintings<sup>5</sup> of Turkish men and women produced in Constantinople for foreigners as souvenirs, or maybe as a handbook providing information about Ottoman society (Theolin 2001, 23). This was most probably the consequence of the Western interest in Ottoman ceremonies and the role of different functionaries in the Ottoman court. Knowledge about the Ottoman court and society was usually provided to diplomats by dragomans, who were interpreters with many functions and had profound knowledge of the court and the Ottoman government (Ådahl 2006, 98). It is also possible to read Rålamb's descriptions of the costumes of Ottoman functionaries in the Rålamb diary while he narrated the imperial procession.

*...the emperor's cooks dressed in black leather and a silver girdle. Then a crowd which brought falcons with three-cornered caps, then a crowd of servants of the chiauses on foot, which carried their smaller turbans... Then a few dwarf on horseback all with golden brocade coats lined with sable fur... (Ådahl 2006, 53).*

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<sup>5</sup> Originally, the costume album depicting both men and women in Ottoman society consisted of 137 paintings, but today only 121 paintings are left. Twenty-three of the paintings show ladies who would not be seen in the streets of the city (Ådahl 2006, 98).

The interest of the Swedes in the Ottoman culture in the seventeenth century continued in the eighteenth century, particularly as a consequence of the increasing attention of the Celsing family to the Ottoman culture and of the Swedish diplomat Cornelius Loos' artworks.

## Eighteenth century

### *Artworks of the Swedish diplomat Cornelius Loos*

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Swedish King Karl XII required close relations with the Ottoman Sultan Ahmed III because he was invading Russia in the battle of Poltava. Fortunately for the Swedish king, Ahmed III's attitude towards Karl XII was positive, as is indicated in the *ferman (edict)* written to Mehmed Çelebi about the Swedish King Karl XII.

*Eğer İsveç Kralı memaliki mahsuremiz toprağına gelüp dahil düşmekle biz ana sahib çıkarız; eğer Mosku ile sulh olmak mukadder olup sulh olursak beraber sulh oluruz ve cenk itmek iktiza ider ise beraber cenk ideriz ve bu seferimiz ve masrafımız anın rahattı içündür ta ki hayattayız dostlıkda sabit kademiz (Kurat 1943, 119).*

This means that Ahmed II welcomes and accommodates the Swedish King Karl XII and intends to make an alliance with Karl XII against Muscovy. If one day they make peace with Russia or if they need to fight against Russia, they will make the decision together. Cornelius Loos, a Swedish diplomat, came to Constantinople during the reign of Karl XII. Since Loos gained a privileged position in the Ottoman Empire, he was able to depict the paintings of the Sultan's palaces as well as holy places, particularly the Hagia Sophia Church.

Loos also painted many panoramas which depict various buildings at that time. These images can give an impression of what the city looked like. Some examples that are displayed in his drawings are The Golden Horn, below the Saray and further to the north-west, different types of towers, and groups of houses outside the walls (Westholm 1981, 168). His privileged position was no doubt the result of the good diplomatic relations between Sweden and the Ottoman Empire which concomitantly brought out the preparation of a

pictorial book with many illustrations of neighbourhoods and important structures of Constantinople.

### *The Biby Mansion and Celsing Collection*



*Fig 1. Turkish Room in the Biby Mansion (Photo courtesy of Günsel Renda).*

Günsel Renda points out that the artworks exhibited in Western collections today is mostly thought of as a result of historical artefact smuggling; however, according to her, the fact is that artefacts were sent to Europe with the permission of the sultan (Renda 1989). The Celsing collection in the Biby Mansion, like the Rålamb collection, exemplifies how the interest of ambassadors led to the transfer of artworks to Sweden. Gustaf Celsing, sent to Constantinople as an envoy together with Karl XII between 1679 and 1743, was an important figure for the formation of the Celsing collection in the Biby Mansion.

The Biby Mansion, belonging to the Celsing family, houses a unique eighteenth century Turkish collection near Stockholm. It includes more than one hundred oil paintings on the Biby Mansion's walls, a special fur-lined *kaftan (robe)* gifted to Gustaf Celsing by Ahmed III, a genealogical tree painting of the Ottoman dynasty and a Turkish style room (Theolin 2001, 63). The Turkish Room in the Biby Mansion is totally decorated with Turkish elements taken by the brothers Gustaf and Ulric Celsing when they were ambassadors in Constantinople. For instance, on the walls of the room there are small-sized paintings of Turkish costumes, carpets, pillows and Istanbul panoramas which suggest that Turkish culture was very impressive and attractive to the Swedes (Fig. 1).

### *Royal Swedish Library*

Apart from the masterpieces in the Biby Mansion, the Royal Swedish Library also bears the trace of Turkish culture, although there are only a few artefacts about Turks. The library includes panoramas of the Ottoman Empire and Ottoman costume albums.

The panoramas not only reflect the chronological urban fabric of the city of Constantinople in detail, but also the changing silhouette of the city. For instance, the Istanbul panorama, engraved by Franz Gudenus in 1740 and painted by Johann Gottfried Theoltt, is one of the most important panoramas (Renda 1990). It is assumed that the panorama was painted from the view of the Pera and illustrates the Bosphorus and Anatolian shores, the Topkapı Palace, the Hagia Sophia Church and the Sultanahmet Mosque, the Süleymaniye and Şehzade Mosques, the Bozdoğan Arch and the Eski Fatih Mosque, the Süleymaniye Complex, and the Golden Horn and Tersane. In addition to the Istanbul panorama, the Turkish costume album in the Royal Swedish Library, consisting of fifty-eight costume drawings, was published in *L'histoire de la decadence de l'empire grec et établissement de celui des Turcs* (the History of Decadence of the Greek Empire and the Establishment of Turks) in Paris in 1612 and found in the library of a famous collector Carl Gustaf Tessin (Renda 1990). According to Renda, the costume drawings of this book were originally copied from the drawings of Nicolas da Nicolay.

During his travels to the Ottoman Empire, he produced a lot of drawings and published them in his travel account called *Les Quatres premiers livres des navigations et peregrinations orientales* (The First Four Books of Navigation and Peregrination to the East). The drawings include depictions of men's and women's costumes, military costumes, dervish and religious men's costumes.

### *The Swedish Palace*

In an architectural context, the Swedish Palace on the borders of the Ottoman Empire symbolizes an outstanding influence of diplomatic contacts between Sweden and the Ottoman Empire. Sweden had been allowed to construct a palace in Pera and most probably, this originated from Sweden's privileged position in the Ottoman Empire. A new Swedish envoy, Gustaf Celsing, bought the present grounds situated in Sarı Lütüfi quarters, outside the walls of Galata, on 10 May 1757 to build a Swedish Palace (Theolin 2001, 66). This became Sweden's oldest property in a foreign country and closest embassy to the Topkapı Palace at that era. The closeness of the embassy to the Topkapı Palace became an object of envy, especially for the Russians across the street.

## Conclusion

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the cultural encounter between the Ottoman Empire and Sweden, particularly with the contributions of ambassadors and dragomans in diplomatic relations, became quite apparent. It seems very likely that this cultural encounter was not the consequence of a conscious interaction. Rather, it was an outcome of diplomatic contacts as a necessity of external relations. The development of diplomacy and trade between the Ottomans and the Swedes brought out increasing curiosity and interest towards the Ottoman culture, as exemplified above with the Rålamb and Celsing collections, costume albums, panoramas and artworks of diplomats and artists. This cultural exchange also suggests that the Swedes' interest in the Ottomans in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was replaced by a general fascination with the exoticism of the orient. Thus, the

oriental appearance of the Ottoman Empire provided endless inspiration for artists not only in Sweden, but also in other parts of Europe.

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