

Introduction

The sixteenth century was an notable era for its effervescence on the religious, political and military stage. Geopolitics map of that time reveal the powers, the opposition and the minority: Habsburg's hegemony, emulation of France to rule in Europe, the threat of Ottoman Imperialism and the Protestants efforts to survive. Ottoman policy intended to maintain political disunity in Europe in order to weaken the Habsburgs and prevent a crusade that could coalesce disparate forces of Europe. Ottoman intervention was thus not only a decisive factor in the rise of national monarchies, as in France, but also in the rise of Protestantism in Europe.

The paper will research to what measure did the Ottoman Empire influence the genesis of the Protestant movement in Europe. The question - „whom did the Turks support more: the Protestants or the Catholics? was for a long time a realm of debates for theologians and even for historians.

From providence to geopolitics

Luther was against overturning an arbitrary and repressive government through revolution, because the time or external enemies will turn the situation.¹ However, Protestants have negotiated extremely carefully any military support that Catholics had asked them to fight against Ottomans or its allies. One of their favorite slogans was: “No help without even a concession”.² The same happened when Ferdinand, the king of the Romans in Hungary, asked for help against his rival usurper Zápolya, which had struck a deal with the Turks. Their refusal was due to their desire that the king to cancel unfavorable decisions of the Diet of Speyer in 1529.³

The Protestants were the main beneficiaries of the conflict between Charles and Ferdinand on the one hand and on the other hand the Ottomans. “It wouldn't have been Turks the Reformation would have had most likely the fate of Albigensian's uprising”.⁴ What prevented Carol in 1526 to settle by force the *religious problem* and to dissolve the Diet of Speyer was the pressure exerted by the Ottomans on Hungary and Central Europe, and the need to be able to resist using

¹ Earle E. Cairns, *Creștinismul de-a lungul secolelor. O istorie a Bisericii Creștine* (Oradea: Editura Cartea Creștină, 2007), 288-289.

² Even in these circumstances, when danger was imminent, Protestants put the interests of their country above their own survival religious' interests.

³ Stephen Fischer-Galați, *Ottoman Imperialism and German Protestantism 1521-1555* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), 30.

⁴ Kenneth Setton, *Lutheranism and The Turkish Peril, in Europe and the Levant in the Middle Age and the Renaissance* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1976), 3.

German Protestants.⁵ For this reason, Charles was forced to sign with the Protestant princes, in 1532, the Peace of Nuremberg,⁶ to accept the Treaty of Passau and, finally, to sign, in 1555, the Peace of Augsburg, due to which was recognized formally the Protestantism in Germany.

Andre Clot summarizes very well this causality:

“Due to the Turkish threat, the Habsburgs were embarrassed, if not paralyzed in their fight against the Reformation. Charles and Ferdinand could not devote all the forces fighting against the heathen, being constantly forced to fight the Protestants. Because he could not simultaneously pursue two goals - the return of Protestants to the Church and to drive the Turks out of Europe - they dropped the crusade against the Ottomans. The Ottomans knew that too well when they encouraged Protestantism everywhere. Forcing the Habsburg to divide their forces, the Turks and the Protestants of the sixteenth century were probably saving one another.”⁷

The *religious problem* of Germany⁸, as it was called in the chronicles, was to see if Charles V was more serious than the Ottoman enemy. Charles V was aware of the expansion of Islam in the Mediterranean while Protestantism was expanding in Europe. At the same time France was challenging the supremacy of the Holy Roman Empire. His political implications were determined by the confrontations with Soliman and Luther.⁹ On the one side, the Protestant leaders, who hated the Turks as much as the king, took advantage of every opportunity provided by the continuing battle between the Turks and the Habsburgs; but they had hardly ever given the aid requested by Charles and Ferdinand. On the other side, officially, they never accepted the alliance that Suleyman proposed to them in several occasions, especially in a letter sent in 1522

⁵ “Ottoman pressure between 1521-1555 forced the Habsburgs to ensure concessions to Protestants and was a decisive factor in the final official recognition of Protestantism. We ought to add that at first Martin Luther and his adherents followed a line of passive conduct (theological view), claiming that the Ottoman threat was a punishment from God, but when the Ottoman danger began to be a threat in Germany, Lutherans didn't hesitate to support Ferdinand of Habsburg with financial and military aid, however, they always got instead concessions for the movement” - Halil Inalcik, *Imperiul Otoman, Epoca clasica: 1300-1600* (București: Editura Enciclopedică, 1996), 84-85.

⁶ The Protestants have understood that after 1539 permanent legal recognition can only be achieved by exploiting the Habsburgs crisis with the Turks in Eastern Europe.

⁷ Andre Clot, *Suleyman the Magnificent* (London: Saqi Books, 2012), 146.

⁸ Carol wanted urgently to resolve this schism within the divided Christianity, that diminish its forces, but powerful Elector, such as Frederick of Saxony supports the Reformation, messing up the plans of the king. Carol claimed fervently to summon the council in order to resolve the problem, but until politico-religious conditions could be colagulated to determine such a meeting, the Diet set that every believer (Catholic or schismatic) could profess his religion as he believes it is better to God and Imperial Majesty - Fischer-Galati, *Ottoman Imperialism and German Protestantism from 1521 to 1555*, 26.

⁹ David Abufalia, *Marea Cea Mare. O istorie umană a Mediteranei* (București: Editura Humanitas, 2014), 459.

to the Protestant princes.¹⁰ Later, the Sultan offered his help to the Lutheran princes from the Netherlands. Melancthon and the Orthodox Patriarch of Istanbul were friends, the Patriarch serving him as an intermediary in relations with the Gate.

Daniel Goffman, one of the most famous American turcologist, claims that the major factor for the expansion of Lutheranism in Europe was the Ottoman's menace, which directly encouraged Protestantism, as in northern Hungary and Transylvania, where Calvinism ("Calvino-Turkism") became the dominant religion. Supporting and protecting the Lutherans and the Calvinists against the Catholicism was meant to be the cornerstone of Turkish policy in Europe.¹¹

In the second half of the sixteenth century the French Calvinist faction argued that the alliance with the Ottomans¹² must be used against the Catholic Spain, and the massacre of the Calvinists in St. Bartholomew (August 1572) angered the Ottoman government.¹³

In the paper "Ottoman influence on the Protestant Reformation in Hungary" Alexander Sandor Unghvary contradicts at least partially, with local examples, the claim that the Ottomans have preferred schismatics, arguing that Ottomans did not support any Protestants, nor Catholics. After the victory of Mohacs, the Sultan asked the Hungarian nobility to assemble the Diet to work out a *modus vivendi* in the conquered territory. Most of the Hungarians regarded the Turkish as the natural enemies of the nation. In general the Roman Catholic clergy in Hungary was regarded by the Ottomans as the natural agent of the Habsburg dynasty.¹⁴ But when the Ottoman administrators realized that neither side was willing to make alliance with them, they tried to pursue only their own interests. Whenever there were disputes between the Hungarian Catholics and Protestants, the Cadi or the Mufti who was in charge was very careful to favor

¹⁰ Although formally the Ottoman Empire has not concluded any alliance with the Protestants, the Turks have always regarded the League of Schmalkalden as a natural ally because they struggle against the hegemonic trend of Charles V, who was regarded as a successor of Charlemagne, a *Rex Romanorum* who - like David, will gather the sheep into one fold. Suleyman the Magnificent transmitted in a letter to Protestant princes that they will not be the target of Ottoman soldiers when they will pass through Germany. In another letter sent from Ottoman Empire, the Calvinists were commended for their courage with which they fought against the Catholics under the command of the Prince of Conde: "If these white men were under my command, I would have conquered the whole world with them and nobody would have could stop me."

¹¹ Daniel Goffman, *The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 111; Inalcik, *Imperiul Otoman, Epoca clasica: 1300-1600*, 84-85

¹² If in the first decades of the sixteenth century the Ottoman threat was justly labeled *Terror Europae*, in the second part of the century, the Ottoman invasion was no longer an imminent danger.

¹³ Suleyman assured that, if Eastern armies will penetrate the Western Europe, he intended to grant amnesty to Lutheran princes. One French envoy sent in Istanbul reported to his superiors that several times the imams prayed, in the mosques of Istanbul, for the enmity and disunity of all Christians in Europe. The Turks felt sympathy to the Protestants because they were condemning the veneration of icons and were against the Pope.

¹⁴ Alexander Sandor Unghvary, *The Hungary Protestant Reformation in the Sixteenth Century Under the Ottoman Impact* (Queenston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), 117.

those who was paid more and usually those who formed the majority in that area. The motivation was very simple: what mattered most was the financial interest of the Gate and the stability in that area. In Szeged, the demands for a church building, coveted by both Lutheran Congregation and the increasing number of Calvinist Protestants, and the dispute about who should pay the pastor, led to a rather draconian decision of an wise Aga: “Preachers, if you wish to keep your infidel heads on your shoulders, make peace among yourselves. If not, your head will roll in the mud like pumpkins.”¹⁵ Due to ill and inhuman treatment the Hungarian rayas were subjected to, the author questions the concept of *Pax Ottoman*, preferring instead, for a better understanding of the cruel reality, the syntagma *Holocaustum Ottomanicum*.

Mutual strategic interests

According to the Romanian historian Stephen Fischer-Galati not only Protestant reformers tried to benefit from the association with the Turks and the Ottoman threat amplification. Often the Habsburgs used the same political stratagem of exaggerating the Ottoman danger. Emperor Maximilian exaggerated the Ottoman danger to convoke the Diet.¹⁶ Many Catholics no longer took seriously the desperate calls to crusade because the Pope repeatedly collected large sums of money. The Protestants and the Catholics accused each other of secret agreements with the Turks and by pointing out that they had a more common background with Islam than with Christianity. The pamphlet “Papismo-Turkism” published in 1599 was an attack and a response of Jesuit William Renolds to the “agreement” of the Church of England with the Ottoman Empire, the so-called “Calvino-Turkism”.¹⁷

Machiavelli must have understood that difficult times were ahead and he was looking to a great Ottoman victory which would have saved Italian liberty. He even welcomed the news of the crushing defeat in Hungary in 1526 and he foresaw the siege of Vienna. He hoped that the Habsburgs would not be able to resist the pressure of the Turkish forces, especially as they were not helped by the revolts of the Lutherans in Germany and the rebellion of the Moors in Spain.¹⁸

¹⁵Alexander Sandor Unghvary, *The Hungary Protestant Reformation in the Sixteenth Century Under the Ottoman Impact*, 3.

¹⁶ Stephen Fischer-Galati, *Ottoman Imperialism and German Protestantism 1521-1555* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), 10.

¹⁷ Andrei Pippidi, *Visions of the Ottoman World in Renaissance Europe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 162.

¹⁸ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Lettere* (Milan: Editura F. Gaeta, 1961), 264, 266, 409, 477.

This was in fact a scheme which would be revived from time to time during the following century: concurring with the Turks seemed a solution for everyone who fought to counter the political system of the Counter-Reformation first in Netherlands, then in Bohemia. It was not only the Anglican Robert Cecil, Huguenots, but their friend, the Catholic Paolo Sarpi, who rested their hopes on the Turks' incursions.¹⁹ Paolo Sarpi endeavored ceaselessly to free Venice from the political and religious' yoke of Rome. He wrote to his Huguenot friend Groslot, whose father was killed in the massacre of St. Bartholomew: "Sancta Turkey, libera nos!"²⁰

More still, France tried to create an anti-Habsburg alliance with the Turks. This agreement was not as solid as they would have liked, yet, through it, they managed to limit the force of the Habsburg imperialism, generating what is called "the geopolitical balance of power"- which helped the Reformation survive.²¹ The sultan, who knew this idea, saw in the alliance with France an effective tool against the hegemony of the Habsburg dynasty.²² Suleyman renewed from time to time the hostilities against the king of the Romans in order to discourage the compromise that could happen between the two rival European powers: France and the Western Roman Empire, which could unite them against the common enemy - the Ottoman Empire. In this context the Protestants have always moved and won.²³

Visions of the Ottoman world in reformers' writings. Paradoxes in the interpretation of Martin Luther

In this context of anti-Habsburg policy, Erasmus' humanists gained influence throughout Europe. The supporters of irenicism and of non-doctrinal religion: Rabelais, Montaigne, Vives, Sarpi and Laguna, gained followers in France, Spain and Italy. These thinkers, headed by Melanchthon regarded the sultan as the heir of Byzantium.²⁴ Luther became the exponent of a

¹⁹ Andrei Pippidi, *Visions of the Ottoman World in Renaissance Europe*, 68.

²⁰ Ibidem.

²¹ Mark Greengrass, *Christendom Destroyed. Europe 1517-1648* (UK: Penguin Random House, 2015), 260.

²² Victor Tapic, *Monarchie et peuples du Danube* (Paris: Editura Fayard, 1969), 76.

²³ The news that the Turks were advancing towards Hungary and Germany were auspicious for Protestants. Against this background they have obtained significant concessions: the survival, expansion and consolidation of Lutheranism in Germany. The approaching of Turks close to the borders of the Roman Empire and their hostility against the Habsburgs' interests in Hungary acted as a deterrent against any clashes between Charles and Lutherans. These factors have also influenced the decision imposing the Diet of Augsburg. Lutherans wished extension of war between the Habsburgs and the French and stimulate actions against the Turks that Germans should not focus on the Protestant schism. (Fischer-Galati, *Ottoman Imperialism and German Protestantism 1521 to 1555*: 60, 62, 78).

²⁴ Andrei Pippidi, *Visions of the Ottoman World in Renaissance Europe*, 117-118.

considerable part of the German population who wanted Ottomans to lead them because German people was wild and uncivilized - "half men and half devils".²⁵ Reformers interpretations paradox is that although the Turks were enemies of the Christians, there was a greater enemy to be feared, a foe who was the head of the Christian Church - the papacy. Actually, the Ottoman Empire, through its incursions, tempered the papacy's aggressiveness.²⁶ Luther's warnings about Ottomans menace sprang from a background of apocalyptic fear as expressed in German popular hymnology.²⁷ The Turks were the instruments of God's wrath. The secret of their success was unmistakably - God fight against a vicious and corrupt Christendom. From this point of view the understanding of that time - "Let the Turks be Turks" convey more tolerance than accepting God's whip.²⁸ For millenarians like Muntzer and the early Anabaptist preachers, the whole world was soon to be conquered by the Turks, preparing the way for the abominable reign of the Antichrist.²⁹ Luther's perspective revealed in his study "Tischreden" was a little bit different: "Just as the Pope is the Antichrist, so the Turk is the Devil incarnate".³⁰ Since 1522, Luther had criticized the Pope's Bull *Coena Domini*, where Leo X repeated the old interdiction against supplying weapons of war to the Turks: "What evil does the Turk do? He occupies his provinces and governs them reasonably".³¹ The same disapproval of the anti-Ottoman war can be found in that famous text, *An den Christlichen Adel Deutcher Nation*, where Luther stated: "If we want to fight against the Turks, let us begin here where they are worst of all". Luther's rhetoric continues in *Von den guten Wercken*: "Christendom is being destroyed not by the Turks, but by those who are supposed to defend it. Roman Curia is more tyrannical than any Turkish".³² His attitude changed with time, there being notable differences between his first approaching and what he wrote after the siege of Vienna, or again, later, during his final years. After the Turks abandon

²⁵ Martin Luther, *On war against the Turks*, in *Luther's Works*, 1529, vol. 41, 174-175.

²⁶ Daniel Goffman, *The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe*, 110.

²⁷ Sydney H. Moore, "The Turkish Menace in the Sixteenth Century," *Modern Language Review* XL (1945): 30-36; Carl Golner, "Zur Offentlichen Meinung uber die Schlacht von Mohacs (1526)," *Revue roumaine d'histoire* VI (1967): 67-76.

²⁸ John Bohnsted, "The Infidel Scourge of God. The Turkish Menace as seen by German Pamphleteers of the Reformation Era," *Transaction of the American Society*, new series (1968): 9-58.

²⁹ Norman Cohn, *The pursuit of the Millenium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 304.

³⁰ Kenneth Setton, *Lutheranism and The Turkish Peril, in Europe and the Levant in the Middle Age and the Renaissance*, 133-168.

³¹ Luther in his writing "Admonition to pray against the Turk", published in 1541, warned that oppressed of greedy princes, prefer to live under Turkish leadership than under the terror they faced in Europe - Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East. A Brief History of the Last 2000 Years* (New York: Scribner, 1995), 128.

³² Adam S. Francisco, "Martin Luther and Islam. A Study in Sixteen Century Polemics and Apologetics," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly LSQ/I* (2010): 9-27.

Vienna, because the Turks were at the gate (*Turcas ante port*) he writes the brochure “Sermons against the Turks”. Inspired by the Ottoman threat and invasion beyond the gates of Vienna, Luther composed a very known christian hymn *Unser Gott Ein feste Burg* called later by German poet Heinrich Heine the “Marseillaise of Reformation”.³³

Ottoman invasion of Hungary and Austria in the 1529 campaign, when the German population was cruelly attacked, prompted Luther to change the paradigm. In these troubled times he summons people to organize resistance. In two of his works “Von Kriege Turcken wieder die” and “Eine Heerpredigtwidder Turcken den”, Luther points out that no defense of Christianity is possible without fighting on both fronts: against Turks and Papacy. At this time, the imminence of an anti-Ottoman war corresponds with mobilization and coalition of forces which God approves: victims of Ottoman attacks have revenge.³⁴ Another reason that led him to change his perspective on the Ottoman danger was represented by the so-called negotiations between pope, France and the Western Roman Empire, in order to sign an alliance with the sultan. This imminent danger grew from day to day, changing the optics of Luther: “The Turks drive the people to the market, buy and sell them, and use them as animals, be they man or woman, young or old, married or unmarried - so evil is the Turkish nature”.³⁵ Calvin qualify, papacy as the little horn 'of Daniel's prophecy. Pagan and Papal Roman Empire together with the Eastern Roman Empire and Islam, represent the two horns of Antichrist and the fourth beast of Daniel 7. In the Institutes of the Christian Religion, Calvin read Daniel 7:25 referencing the Pope: “Roman Pontiff is Antichrist, whereof Paul says that sits in the temple of God (2 Tes.2: 4).”³⁶ French reformer was convinced that Christ's kingdom will triumph over both the papacy and the Turks, both being religions that were human inventions. There were also other European writers who have written books to help Christians overcome fear of Turks. Scholars have launched writings on how it can be destroyed Ottoman Empire.

Unlike Luther, Erasmus approached the subject from a more optimistic outlook: “the size of Ottoman Empire should not scare people. The Roman Empire and that of Alexander the Great were very large and thought to be invincible. But today, they no longer exist.” Erasmus, one of

³³ Alexander Sandor Unghvary, *The Hungary Protestant Reformation in the Sixteenth Century Under the Ottoman Impact*, 257.

³⁴ Luther appreciate that Europeans had repented of their sins by fasting and prayer.

³⁵ It is an image certainly borrowed from George Hungary, a Christian prizionier who described the sufferings they endure in captivity in Ottoman Empire, in the book “The Tractatus of Moribus Condicionibus et Nequicia Turcorum”.

³⁶ J. Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*. London: James Clarke, 1975, IV, 7:25 apud Francis Nigel Lee, “Calvin on Islam,” *Lamp Trimmers*, June (2000): 6.

the most famous philosophers of Europe, which has had great success with his book *Praise of madness*, wrote in *Ultissima Consultatio de Bello Turcis Inferendo* (1530) the following words about the Turks “they are barbarians with dark origins that conquered part of Europe due to differences of opinion between Christians and that the time has come for brothers of the same religion to be rescued from captivity.”³⁷ Erasmus did not agree with the war, but believed that elimination of the Ottomans means survival of Christians.

Conclusions

Beyond religious reasons, one of the real reasons that Luther changed optics regarding the Ottoman menace, was the nearness of the Turkish *invincible armada* at the gates of Vienna. From a circumstantial outlook, Luther regarded the Turks as allies against the papacy. Luther's main concern was theological, not political, so he regarded the Turks as „, the rod of God's wrath against the Europe’s sins.”³⁸

The tradition of princes and many cities to oppose to the imperial authority, the economic and religious call of Lutherans, the opposition of Germans to Roman policies, the refusing of Pope to summon a council, and perhaps the most significant - the Ottoman threat - all created favorable conditions for Protestantism survival.

Protestants have taken advantage of this instability provided by Turkish attacks and strengthened their power in Germany. They exploited the need of Habsburgs for military assistance against the Turks. Almost all the concessions made by the Habsburgs before 1526 were directly influenced by the Ottoman danger. It seems paradoxical that the Reform strengthened because the Turks diverted the attention of the Habsburgs from the religion dispute in Germany, making the latter dependent on cooperation with Lutherans in order to achieve their ambitions secular Europe.

Consolidation, expansion and legitimacy of Lutheranism should be assigned to Ottoman imperialism more than any other factor. We have to remember that every principal actor on this stage of effervescent century has played his role, be it about the Habsburg Empire, the Ottoman power or the Protestant Reformation. Turks favored Protestants insofar as they served their interests in Europe, while the latter took full advantage of the Ottoman incursions to consolidate

³⁷ J. Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*. London: James Clarke, 1975, IV, 7:25 apud Francis Nigel Lee, “Calvin on Islam,” *Lamp Trimmers*, June (2000): 6.

³⁸ Carter Lindberg, *The Europeans Reformations* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2010).

their power. Both sides wanted to diminish the power of the Habsburg, consequently of the Catholic Church.

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