

The Description of Turkey in One Swiss Chronicle from the End of the Eighteenth Century

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ABSTRACT

The paper analyzes the chapter about Turkey from a hand-written manuscript on history of the world composed by an anonymous author at the end of eighteenth century. The manuscript was composed in Switzerland during the Enlightenment era, when this kind of publishing began disappearing and gave way to developed printed book. The manuscript is now kept in the State archive in Fribourg in Switzerland. The author of the manuscript is unknown, and nowhere in the text did he/she leave name or any other sign of identification which would help researchers with solving the problem of his/her identity. The manuscript consists of 167 pages, and as a special sort of historical text, tells about the history of the world. The chronicle is considerably based on data from the well-known travel-records by Joseph de La Porte. One of the characteristics of the work is that it is bilingual, written in French and German. One part of it, which is interesting in particular, tells about the European part of Turkey and the Balkan towns. Within the chronicle there are also interesting descriptions of Istanbul, Izmir, Bursa, Edirne, and Thessaloniki.

Key words: Khronicle; History of historiography; travel record; Turkey; Turks

XVIII. Yüzyıl Sonlarına ait bir İsviçre Elyazması Eserden Türkiye

ÖZET

Bu çalışmada 18. Yüzyıl sonlarında anonim bir yazara ait el yazması tarih metnindeki Türkiye'ye ait bölüm değerlendirilmiştir. Bu metin; el yazısı yayınların yerini baskı kitaplara bıraktığı aydınlanma döneminde İsviçre'de kaleme alınmıştır. Bu el yazması, günümüzde İsviçre, Fribourg'daki devlet arşivinde tutulmaktadır. Metinde; araştırmacıların yazarın kimliği ilgili bir bilgiye ulaşmasını sağlayacak hiçbir isim ya da imza bulunmamaktadır. Metin 167 sayfadan oluşan bir çeşit tarih kitabı niteliğindedir ve dünya tarihi hakkında bilgiler vermektedir. Eserdeki bilgiler önemli ölçüde ünlü seyahat yazarı Joseph de La Porte'a ait verilerden alınmıştır. Bu çalışmanın bir özelliği de, Fransızca ve Almanca yazılmış olmasıdır. Eserin bir kısmında, ilginç bir şekilde, Türkiye'nin Avrupa kısmı ve Balkan köyleri hakkında bilgiler verilmiştir. Eserde ayrıca; İstanbul, İzmir, Bursa ve Selanik tasvirleri yapılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kronoloji; Historiografi tarihi; Seyahat yazıları; Türkiye; Türkler

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Manuscript chronicles of modern history period were written in the time where printing was not developed, but that does not diminish their value. There are scientifically valuable accomplishments among them that do not fall behind contemporary printed works. Such manuscripts are subject of scientific processing and may keep precious data based on relevant sources. They were composed in different ways and for various reasons, so that they are mostly special, compared to the works of the same kind. We can look into the development of historiography through this kind of historiography works and the history of historiography as a branch of history is most significant for the research of modern history chronicles.

The chronicle which is the subject of our study is not one of those of unique scientific importance, but it is a valuable and special historiography reading for many reasons. The work in our disposal was written at the end of the 18th century, when the last manuscript histories disappeared and gave way to the era of printing.² It was written in Switzerland where a significant number of manuscript chronicles was published during modern history, of which a great number were not processed, as is the case with the present work.³

The author is unknown and nowhere in the text did he leave a name or a piece of information that would help the researcher to answer that question. As for the time of composition of the manuscript, it is clear that it was at the end of the 18th century, since the author indicated the year 1792 at the end of the text.⁴

The manuscript was entitled "The French traveler" but it does not belong to a travelogue by its composition. The concept of this late chronicle was twenty four volumes with the description of a large number of countries. The chapters of these volumes represent a concise review of the histories of many countries that existed at that time. Those are short reviews of the countries of European, Asia, America and Africa, and it gives interesting depictions of the histories of Egypt, Greece, Persia, Russia, England, Germany, Turkey, and other countries. The chronicle is small sized and written in French and German.⁵

With regard to the sources, the author primarily relied on travelogues and some older historiography works. Considerable part of the manuscript is based on the data from a well known travelogue by Joseph De La Porte (1718-1779), a Jesuit, an outstanding literary critic, a poet and a playwright of the 18th century France.⁶ De La Porte published his multivolume collection of extremely valuable travelogues that offer significant

2 CH AEF Chroniques 42, "*Le Voyageur françois*", T. I-XXIV.

3 About the chronicles composed in Fribourg see: Büchi, A., 1905, „Die Chroniken und Chronisten von Freiburg im Üeschland“, *Jahrbuch für Schweizer Geschichte*, Bd. 30, 197-326.

4 CH AEF Chroniques 42, "*Le Voyageur françois*", T. XXIV.

5 *Ibid.*, T. III.

6 Chouillet, A., "Joseph de La Porte (1718-1779)": <http://dictionnaire-journalistes.gazettes18efr/journaliste/455-joseph-de-la-porte>

information on many parts of the world that this world traveler had visited. He described his journey through Turkey in a work that was published in Paris in 1772, and those were the data that the anonymous writer used to write his own history.⁷ Valuable data about Turkey that were presented in the manuscript, especially demographical ones which are based upon the abovementioned travelogue, depict the conditions in Turkey during the first thirty years of the 18th century. De La Porte outlined this, stating that he finished the chapter on Turkey in Constantinople on October 3rd, 1737.⁸

Using travelogues as sources and their interpretation is one of the most interesting aspects of manuscript chronicles, through which we perceive the directions of development and the pursuit of new forms of historiography texts at the end of the 18th century. Travelogues are a special research topic in the literature and historiography of modern history and it applies to contemporary science as well, and they contain extremely valuable data on various places and historical figures. Speaking of travelogues in the time of late humanism in German speaking area, Volker Meid concludes that educated people and enthusiasts left a fair amount of travelogues while traveling through Europe. Travelogues that bring news of non-European area are particularly important, while those that describe European territory usually do not offer anything sensational, that were not known before. Most of these diaries and reports were not meant to be published, and that is why so many of them are preserved in manuscripts.⁹

Travelogues from the end of the 18th century differ from the earlier ones from 16th and 17th centuries, when people used to travel by the will of their sovereigns in order to get to know certain areas. Travelogue writer from the Enlightenment era could have been an explorer and enthusiast who would note down data the way he saw them. Thus the image of travelogues considerably changed, it critically described the landmarks of other cultures and compared them to European civilization.¹⁰

By comparing the parts of the chronicle about Turkey with De La Porte's travelogue, one gets the impression that it is a kind of a resume of a famous collection. The entire chronicle was not written in that spirit, for some volumes were based on the data from other sources, as is the case with the chapter on the history of the town of Fribourg in Switzerland.¹¹ Thus the form of the chronicle is unusual, which makes it a special historiography reading; in one part it approaches the form of a review, and in another one the author uses various sources and the then historiography results. Such

7 Porte de la J., 1772, "Le voyageur françois, ou la connoissance de l'ancien et de nouveau monde, Mise au jour par M. l'Abbé de la Porte, Quatrieme Edition, Revue, corrigée et augmentée. Tome second", Paris, Chez L. Cellot.

8 Ibid., 119.

9 Meid V. 2009, "Die deutsche Literatur im Zeitalter des Barock Vom Späthumanismus zur Frühaufklärung 1570-1740", München, C. H. Beck, 851.

10 About the travelogue from the Enlightenment era see: Zlodi Z. 2007, "Putopis Aleksandra Sapiehe u kontekstu epohe prosvetiteljstva", *Povijesni prilozi*, 32, 184-185.

11 CH AEF Chroniques 42, "*Le Voyageur françois*", T. XXIV.

a combined methodological approach makes this manuscript special, although it is obvious that the author's idea was to try to write a history of the world in accordance with the views of the time and based on available sources.¹²

An important description of Turkey from the second half of the 18th century is of crucial importance; it is found in the second and third volumes of the chronicle and it is divided into two short chapters. The first is entitled "Turkey" and it is about the Ottoman Empire in general, i.e. its Asian part. The second chapter is entitled "The sequel on Turkey" and it provides description of the European part of the empire. In general, the descriptions of Turkey from this period are useful because there are not many of them, while especially important are those written by Europeans.¹³

The author begins the story about the history of Turkey with the description of Istanbul, the capital of the Empire where the most distinguished construction is St. Hagia Sophia (today Ayasofya) whose grandeur and beauty he compares with Saint Peter's cathedral in Rome. Then he emphasizes the size, the power and the extensiveness that the Ottoman Empire has towards the East and Africa, underscoring the importance of Baghdad and holy Islamic places of Mecca and Medina being included in the empire.¹⁴

The chronicler further follows the travelogue writer on his journey through Turkey, its leading city centers which were at the same time the centers of some formerly well-known provinces.¹⁵ The author shows a prized part of the text which relates to European Turkey in the second part of the chapter namely "The sequel on Turkey".¹⁶

The terminology that the author uses is characteristic for the works of western authors of the time, and it could be seen in the texts from the names of the cities to some administrative terms. Following the travelogue writer on his way from Asian to European part of the Empire, the chronicler states his main sections of the travel and impressions that he noted. These were the cities of Anatolia, the first of those where the writer found himself was Mudanya, which he describes as an important harbor and a densely inhabited place.¹⁷

The travelogue writer then arrived in Bursa, which was once the capital and the center of the Ottoman Empire, stating that the city was built by Prus I (228-182 B.C.), the king of Bithynia. The traveler went around this important trading center and concluded "that it was two and a half miles long in perimeter".¹⁸

Obviously, the travelogue writer was guided by two ideas in planning his journey through Turkey; he visited meaningful towns and centers of economy in Turkey, while

12 Ibid.

13 CH AEF Chroniques 42, "Le Voyageur françois", T. I.

14 Ibid.

15 Kreiser K., 2001, "Der osmanische Staat 1300-1922", München, Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 19-22.

16 CH AEF Chroniques 42, "Le Voyageur françois", T. II.

17 CH AEF Chroniques 42, "Le Voyageur françois", T. II.

18 Ibid.

on the other hand he opted for visiting significant historic sites. According to his visit plan for historic places, it can be concluded that he was acquainted with the past of Asia Minor. He begins his "historical route" by visiting Sardis and Thyatira, ancient cities that are mentioned in biblical texts. The travelogue writer says for Thyatira that "one of the seven churches of the apocalypse was there". Little was left of Thyatira in his time, the Turks renamed it to Akhisar and the position of the city enabled its quick development, so that it turned into a great trading center.¹⁹

The world traveler did not avoid the ancient Greek town of Ephesus, of whose fame he had read a lot, but he was disappointed by its condition because very little remained of this ancient city. He stated regretfully that Ephesus, "where the famous temple of Diana had been, was now only an ugly place whose ruins keep a trace of its former shine."²⁰

The traveler thought that Izmir was "a large and pretty trading town in the Asian part of the Empire". He reports the demographical data of Izmir, which had 30,000 inhabitants at that time. It was a trading center where various peoples and believers lived.²¹ It is a known fact that the presence of western merchants began to increase in the 18th century Turkey, caused by the rise of mercantilism, and as the power of Ottomans decreased, western merchants had more and more influence in the Empire.²² The travelogue writer noted a piece of information that the chronicler reports that the city was in an earthquake zone, prone to frequent earthquakes. It is interesting that the Turks used the name "Francs" for all the foreigners from Europe who lived and worked in Izmir. Having visited Anatolia, the travelogue writer returned to Istanbul, preparing himself for the journey to the European part of Turkey.²³

In the part of the chronicle that refers to European Turkey, there are no data of the inner Balkans, because the travelogue writer limited his tour of Rumelia to Macedonia and Trachis. He first reached Thessaloniki, a famous city, once the capital of historical Macedonia, which gave many great historic names but in the 18th century was not the intellectual and cultural center anymore. He saw the people of Thessaloniki as "gloomy and uneducated."²⁴

Edirne, the center of Trachis, impressed the visitor, so he said that "it grew more developed and beautiful day by day," and an important reason for its fast development is the fact that the Sultan often stayed there. Apart from the Sultan, the Grand Mufti, the head of religious power, often stayed in Edirne, and the Grand Vizier, the "prime minister", as he explains. Beylerbey, the commander of janissaries also dwelled

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Мантран, Р., 2002, „Османска држава у XVIII веку: европски, притисак“, у *Историја Османског царства*, уредник Робер Мантран, Београд, Clio, 340-345.

22 CH AEF Chroniques 42, „*Le Voyageur français*“, T. II.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

in Edirne, as well as imams, priests “who were people’s servants”.²⁵ Suleyman the Lawgiver regularly spent the winter in this town, because it was nearer than Istanbul for his western conquests. There were extraordinary hunting grounds around it and he enjoyed the climate which was healthier than the one in Istanbul.²⁶

The travelogue provided the explorer with the data that refer to Turkish mentality, which he points out in several places. He thinks that the Turks are “very debauched people” and emphasizes the difference between the Turks of Asian and European part of the country, declaring that “the Turks from the European part are more advanced and cultured.”²⁷

The historian did not go into the analysis of Turkey’s social organization, which is understandable considering the fact that it was not easy then for one westerner to comprehend Turkish feudal system.²⁸ He did not convey certain De La Porte’s analysis of Turkish feudalism who gave his opinion of the *timar* system and janissary service. Writing about the *timar* system, he refers to *zeamets* and *timariots* as the “lower class gentlemen.”²⁹

The form and contents of the chronicle indicate undoubtedly that the author was a historian from the circle of Fribourg’s intellectuals, which is proven by the special attention given to the question of the town’s history. The chronicler used different sources of information in his writing, the data related to the history of earlier past, as well as the news of contemporary happenings of the time. It is certain that the most valuable characteristic of the manuscript is a special approach to writing historiography texts and the description of slightly known parts of the world at the time. Interpreting the author’s view of the realization of the task at hand- writing a short history of the world, we come to the enlightenment attitudes to the importance of science in general. The conserved texts of this kind provide better understanding of the development of historiography and the methods of the enlightenment era. The chronicle enables us to understand the territory and conditions in 18th century Turkey to a certain extent. Also valuable are some assessments of the inhabitants of this grand empire. The work would have acquired more quality if the author had used more various data for writing of the then Turkey and the Balkans. It is important to read how Turkey was seen in the eyes of the West; Europeans definitely had a blurred image of this country.

25 Veinstein Gilles 2002. “The Empire at the Height of its Power (16th century)”, in *The History of the Ottoman Empire*, editor Robert Mantran, Belgrade, Clio, 2002, 209.

26 CH AEF Chroniques 42, “*Le Voyageur françois*”, T. II.

27 Ibid.

28 Porte de la, J., 1772, “*Le voyageur françois, ou la connoissance de l’ancien et de nouveau monde, Mise au jour par M. l’Abbé de la Porte, Quatrieme Edition, Revue, corrigée et augmentée. Tome second*”, Paris, Chez L. Cellot, 90, 93.

29 Ibid.