

Soliman, an emperor of Turkey

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The print *Suleyman ain Kaiser der Tirckei* (Soliman, an emperor of Turkey) (c. 1526, pictured opposite), recently purchased by the University of Melbourne for the Baillieu Library Print Collection, tells us much about the way in which the people of modern-day Germany and Hungary viewed their Ottoman neighbours in the early 16th century. It suggests that, despite the tense geopolitical situation that characterised the years around 1526—the date of the print’s creation—the relationship between the central European states and the Ottoman Empire was an amalgam of fear and curiosity. Through a close study of the individual elements in this print—its pseudo-script, biblical texts and portrayal of the sultan—this article aims to untangle some of the complexities surrounding the manner in which the West understood the East at that time.

This etching depicts the Ottoman Emperor Soliman I (1494–1566, r. 1520–66), the tenth and longest-reigning Ottoman sultan, commonly known in Europe as Süleyman the Magnificent. It was created during a time of great political upheaval.¹ The early 16th century saw the expansion of the Ottoman Empire into the Kingdom of Hungary and Bohemia, as well as into territories controlled by the Habsburg monarchy.² The progress

of Soliman I’s troops resulted in an increase in contact between central European artists and Ottoman culture.³ This close proximity made the sultan, his people and their costumes popular subjects among European artists, with a total of 600 portrait medals and illustrated military pamphlets produced during this time.⁴ However, aside from a 1550s portrait of Soliman by sea captain Hayder Reis, which was made from life, extant likenesses are largely copies of other works. Instead of depicting an aged and elderly Sultan, as does Reis’s portrait, these images present a mostly clean-shaven 30-year-old man with a luxuriant moustache and long, elegant neck.⁵

The University of Melbourne’s print is one such central European copy. Although we do not know for sure in which year it was made, it shares remarkable similarities with a 1526 depiction made by the anonymous Italian engraver known as Master AA (pictured on page 48).⁶ Unlike Reis, Master AA based his engraving on an existing image (since lost), and Master AA’s version became in turn the source for the university’s etched portrait.⁷

The inclusion of a fir-cone above the letters ‘T’ and ‘H’ on the left-hand side of the university’s print enables us to attribute this work to the

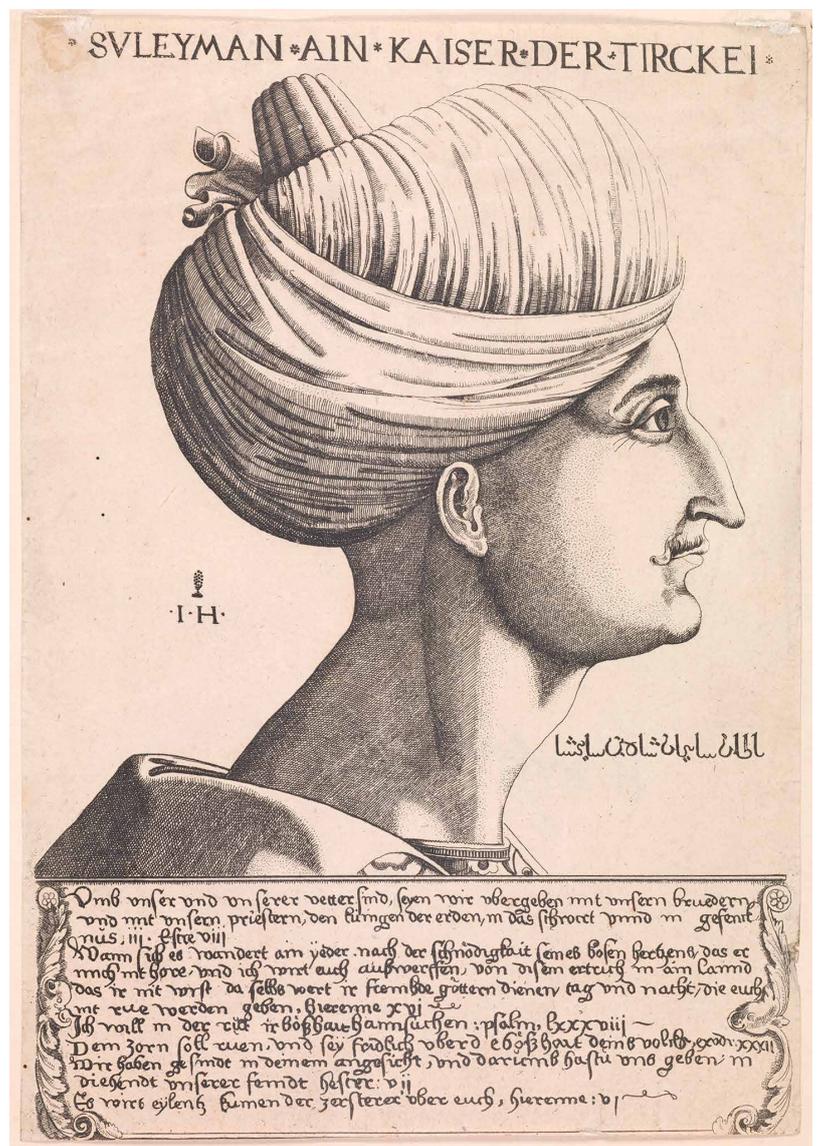
Augsburg etcher Hieronymus Hopfer (c. 1500–1563), as the fir-cone was both the emblem of that city and the artist’s personal monogram.⁸ Although the etching was done on an iron plate, it has both the details and finesse of those done on copper.⁹ Hopfer’s adoption of this medium can be credited to his father, Daniel Hopfer (c. 1470–1536), who was an armour decorator before becoming a pioneering etcher.¹⁰

The print exists in two states, the first being Hopfer’s original plate, the second being created in the 17th century when David Funck of Nuremberg issued new impressions of 230 works by the Augsburg etcher. The university’s etching is a first-state print.¹¹ Its authenticity is corroborated by the absence of the number 71, which is found at the bottom-left of Funck’s version of the Soliman print.¹²

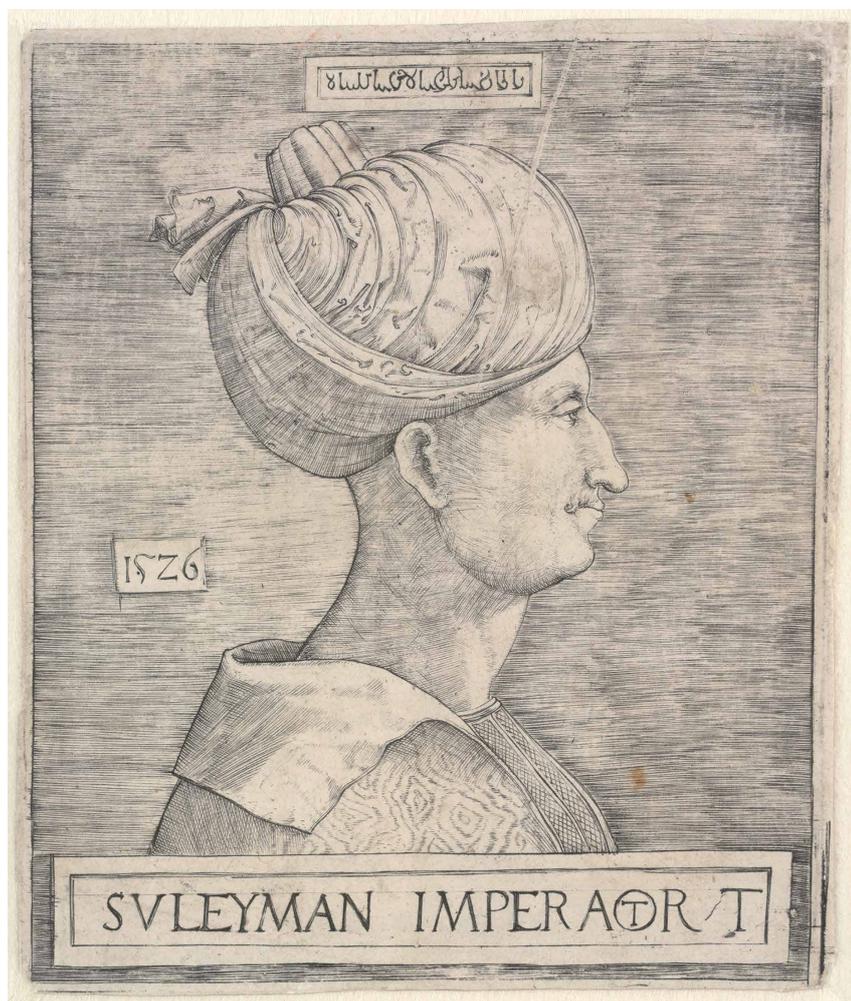
Although the Baillieu Library’s print appears to be a straightforward portrait of the sultan, investigation into its various artistic and textual elements reveals a greater complexity. The print is more than just a likeness; it is an historical source that expresses some of the emotions, ideologies and culture of 16th-century central Europe. Even a cursory viewing reveals the West’s curiosity and wish for accuracy in depicting Ottoman

floral textiles and turbans in the bands of cloth wrapped around the ribbed cap known as a *taj*, as was also the case in contemporary portrait medals.¹³ However, in the context of the period's great political unrest, this image can also be seen as a reaction against the crushing power of the Turks. It identifies the sultan as the tyrannical ruler of the Ottomans, who initiated the disastrous Battle of Mohacs (1526), which resulted in the death of King Louis II of Hungary, and the Kingdom of Hungary's subsequent partition between the Ottoman Empire, the Habsburg monarchy, and the principality of Transylvania.¹⁴ Unlike the European military pamphlets being published at the time, which promulgated a negative and exaggerated image of the Turks, and the more neutral mid-16th century costume books that pictorially recorded life and costumes under the Ottoman Empire, this print is not singular in its purpose. Rather, it is a carefully thought out cross-cultural product, which delineates the complicated relationship between central Europe and the Ottoman Empire.

The print's ability to reflect both the West's trepidations and its interest in the Ottomans is highlighted by Hopfer's inclusion of a partially accurate Ottoman inscription, located



Master AA (Italian), *Suleyman Imperator T*
(Emperor Soliman T[urchorum]), 1526,
copper engraving, 14.8 × 12.4 cm. Inv. no.
DG1962/1175, The Albertina Museum, Vienna.



on the right-hand side of the print, next to the emperor's neck.¹⁵ Due to successions of changes that often occurred in the copying of Eastern scripts by artists such as Hopfer, the accuracy of these scripts diminished, transforming the resulting inscriptions into pseudo-scripts.¹⁶ The apparent letters are merely a collection of arbitrary strokes, which correspond to individual letterforms but are in fact in no known language.¹⁷ For example, while the last word in the print might represent the Ottoman Turkish word *shah* (which is a combination of three letters: ش ه س), the squiggly line at the start of the word and the missing last letter render it meaningless.

Although pseudo-scripts were employed since the medieval period, their adoption by painters became more common in the late 13th and early 14th centuries, and as ornament on textiles, gilt halos and frames for religious images. The scripts were often wrongly thought to be Hebrew, and this helped emphasise the image's sacredness by association with the Holy Land. The first crusades gave early Renaissance viewers a familiarity with such scripts, and encouraged people to associate them with the Holy Land and eastern Mediterranean royalty.¹⁸ Hopfer's

unsuccessful attempt at reproducing the Ottoman Turkish translation for 'Süleyman Shah, son of Selim Shah' served a similar purpose.¹⁹ The resulting 16th-century pseudo-script simultaneously helped to localise the etching, and portray the West's curiosity towards Ottoman cultures. Due to the tense geopolitical relationship between the eastern European states and the Ottoman Empire, Hopfer's inclusion of pseudo-script identified the Ottomans not only as Muslims, but also as the principal threat to Christian control of the Mediterranean and to the stability of eastern central Europe.²⁰ Therefore, similar to his portrayal of the sultan, Hopfer's use of pseudo-script presents a European response that combines both fear and curiosity.

The biblical quotations in German below the portrait, however, predominantly express the anxieties and trepidations of the European states.²¹ This selection of texts, all from the Old Testament, echoes the fears of disparate Christian denominations, who were attempting to fight the overwhelming powers of Islam. While Catholic writers called for a united crusade to reclaim Constantinople and defeat the Ottoman foe, Protestants initially promised only to lend their

support to a defensive war.²² The Protestants' refusal to join forces in a crusade was born out of Martin Luther's proclamations that the threat to Christianity and Europe was not the Ottomans, but rather the papacy's subjugation of the Church to false doctrine.²³ As the seminal figure of the Protestant Reformation, Luther had attracted a large following with his ambition to rid Germany of the tyranny of the papacy. The Lutherans' belief that the Ottomans were the 'rod' with which God was punishing the world²⁴ is reflected in the text from Psalm 89, which translates as 'I will punish their sin with the rod'. Although the adversary might initially be identified as the papacy, it becomes apparent that the enemies are the Ottomans. This is reflected in the line from Jeremiah 6, *Es wirt ejlentz kumen der zersterer uber euch*, which literally means 'It will be misery when the destroyer will reign'. This verse would have evoked the crushing defeat of the Kingdom of Hungary, which marked the beginning of Ottoman infiltration into eastern central Europe, starting with the march into Buda, the ancient capital of the fallen kingdom, and even threatening Lutheran territories.²⁵ God's punishment no

longer discriminated; it included even the sinless and morally outstanding Lutherans. The Ottoman victory at the Battle of Mohacs united the Christian populace—Catholic and Protestant—against this common enemy, transforming the Ottoman Empire from God's weapon into the enemy of Christianity. The juxtaposition of a likeness of Sultan Soliman I with such a text is testament to this metamorphosis: the Ottoman Empire was the dominant symbol of threat and thus the rightful recipient of divine retribution.²⁶ When viewed in its totality, this print reveals that, while the growing power of the Ottoman Empire evoked widespread trepidation in central Europe, it also stimulated Europeans' interest in their Ottoman neighbours. This presents a more sophisticated form of cultural interaction, one that was dependent on both these emotions.²⁷

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- 1 J.M. Rogers, *Süleyman the Magnificent*, London: British Museum, 1988, pp. 26–8.
- 2 Charlotte Colding Smith, *Images of Islam, 1453–1600: Turks in Germany and central Europe*, London: Pickering & Chatto, 2014, p. 4.
- 3 Smith, *Images of Islam*, p. 4.
- 4 Robert Born, 'Depicting the sultan', in Robert Born et al. (eds), *The sultan's world: The Ottoman orient in Renaissance art*, Brussels: Bozar Books, 2015, pp. 171–206.
- 5 Rogers, *Süleyman the Magnificent*, p. 46.
- 6 Rogers, *Süleyman the Magnificent*, p. 1.
- 7 Born, 'Depicting the sultan', p. 178.
- 8 F.W. Hollstein, *German engravings, etchings, and woodcuts, ca. 1400–1700. Volume 15: Elias Holl to Hieronymus Hopfer*, Amsterdam: M. Hertzberger, 1954, p. 231 (the Hopfer print is Hollstein reference no. 62); Giulia Bartrum, *German Renaissance prints, 1490–1550*, London: British Museum, 1995, p. 158.
- 9 Bartrum, *German Renaissance prints*, p. 158.
- 10 Bartrum, *German Renaissance prints*, p. 158.
- 11 Bartrum, *German Renaissance prints*, p. 158.
- 12 Hollstein, *German engravings, etchings, and woodcuts*, p. 231.
- 13 Charlotte Colding Smith, 'Apocalyptic battles and exotic courts: Printed images of the Turk from sixteenth-century German territories', PhD thesis, School of Historical Studies, University of Melbourne, 2010, p. 63.
- 14 Smith, 'Apocalyptic battles', p. 63; Stephen A. Fischer-Galati, *Ottoman imperialism and German Protestantism, 1521–1555*, New York: Octagon Books, 1972, p. 27.
- 15 Jürg Meyer zur Capellen and Serpil Bağcı, 'The age of magnificence', in Ayşe Orbay (ed.), *The sultan's portrait: Picturing the House of Osman*, Istanbul: Isbank, 2002, pp. 96–134.
- 16 Archibald H. Christie, 'The development of ornament from Arabic script', *Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, vol. 40, no. 231, 1922, pp. 287–8, 291–2.
- 17 Alexander Nagel, 'Twenty-five notes on pseudoscript in Italian art', *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, nos 59–60, 2011, pp. 228–48.
- 18 Rosamond E. Mack, *Bazaar to piazza: Islamic trade and Italian art, 1300–1600*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002, pp. 51, 52, 54, 56.
- 19 Meyer zur Capellen and Bağcı, 'The age of magnificence', p. 98.
- 20 Christine Woodhead, 'Introduction: Ideal sultan, ideal state', in İ Metin Kunt and Christine Woodhead (eds), *Süleyman the Magnificent and his age: The Ottoman Empire in the early modern world*, London and New York: Longman, 1995, pp. 117–21.
- 21 The following transcription of the text in Hieronymus Hopfer's print is taken largely from Gerd Unverfehrt (ed.), *Gerissen und gestochen: Graphik der Dürer-Zeit aus der Kunstsammlung der Universität Göttingen*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001, p. 170. English equivalents are from the King James Bible.
SULEYMAN. ain. Kaiser. der. Tirckei
[Suleyman, an emperor of Turkey]
Und unser und unserer vetter sind, seyen wir ubergeben mit unsern bruedern / und mit unsern priestern, den kumgen der erden, in das schwert und in gefenck/nüs, iii. Estre viii [Ezra 9:7: Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass unto this day; and for our iniquities have we, our kings, and our priests, been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity.]
Wann sich es wandert ein jeder. nach der schndigkeit seines bösen hertzens, das er / mich nicht hore, und ich werde euch aufwerffen, von diesem ertrich in ain lamnd / das ir nit wist da selb wert ir frembde göttern dienen tag und nacht, die euch / nit rue werden geben, hieremie xvi—[Jeremiah 16:12–13: for, behold, ye walk every one after the imagination of his evil heart, that they may not hearken unto me:
- Therefore will I cast you out of this land into a land that ye know not, neither ye nor your fathers; and there shall ye serve other gods day and night; where I will not shew you favour.]
Ich will in der rut ir Bösbait aimführen: Psalm, lxxxviii—[Psalm 89:32: I will punish their sin with the rod.]
Dein Zorn soll ruen, und sey fridlich uberd ebößbait deins volks, exodi: xxxii [Exodus 32:12: Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people.]
Wir haben gesindt in deinem angesicht, und darumb hastu uns geben in / die hendt unserer feindt, Hester: vii [Esther 7:4: For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish. But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king's damage.]
Es wirt eylentz kumen der zersterer uber euch, Hieremie: vi—[Jeremiah 6, probably from verse 21: Behold, I will lay stumblingblocks before this people, and the fathers and the sons together shall fall upon them; the neighbour and his friend shall perish.]
- 22 Adam S. Francisco, *Martin Luther and Islam: A study in sixteenth-century polemics and apologetics*, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007, p. 31.
- 23 Francisco, *Martin Luther and Islam*, p. 68.
- 24 Francisco, *Martin Luther and Islam*, p. 80.
- 25 Geza Perjes, *War and society in east central Europe. Vol. XXVI: The fall of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary: Mohacs 1526 – Buda 1541*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1989, p. 260; Fischer-Galati, *Ottoman imperialism and German Protestantism*, pp. 18–19.
- 26 Born, 'Depicting the sultan', p. 178.
- 27 Gerald MacLean, 'Introduction', in Gerald MacLean (ed.), *Re-orienting the Renaissance: Cultural exchanges with the East*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, pp. 1–28.