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## Beautiful Daughters and Rich Tournaments: Pleasures of the East in Correspondences between Ottoman Sultans and Christian Princes in the 14th and 15th century

Karoline Döring (München)

When I was working on Anti-Turkish print products of the 15<sup>th</sup> century I came across a most curious little letter written by a certain Morbisanus to pope Pius II. It was printed on three quarto pages at the end of a late 15<sup>th</sup> century edition of the pope's *Epistola ad Mahumetem*, his famous but much disputed attempt in 1461 to convert the Ottoman sultan to Christianity.<sup>1</sup> Since the conqueror of Constantinople was called Mehmed, the second of his name, I wondered whether Morbisanus could be simply a corrupted form. Anyway, I was interested what this Morbisanus might have to say to the pope's offer. When reading the letter I soon realized that this was not much. Instead of responding to the elaborate ideas in Pius's letter the sultan curtly advised the pope to refrain from propagating a crusade against the Ottoman Empire. He argued the legitimacy of his purpose: He, the successor of Priamus, Antenor, Aeneas, revenged ancient Troy and rightfully reconquered Greek lands that have always lawfully belonged to him. Besides, he opts for peaceful coexistence, clarifying that the Turks had played no part in the murder of Christ. On the contrary, they would consider him indeed a great prophet. Should Pius not abandon his crusade plans, the sultan threatened him with mighty alliances, immediate invasion and utter destruction.<sup>2</sup>

Could this really be the sultan's answer to the pope's offer of conversion? Needless to say, that it could not. Morbisanus's letter belongs to a group of letters known as "Sultansbriefe". These very short letters of hardly more than two pages only pretended to have been

<sup>1</sup> Pius II., *Epistola ad Mahumetem* [Rome: Stephan Planck, 1490/91] (ISTC ip00703000, BSB-Ink P-506, GW M33657). The copy I used is BSB Munich, 4 Inc.s.a. 1733 w, 46r-47r. [http://daten.digital-sammlungen.de/~db/0006/bsb00063300/image\\_97](http://daten.digital-sammlungen.de/~db/0006/bsb00063300/image_97)

<sup>2</sup> The text is printed in: Pio II., *Lettera a Maometto* (Collezione Umanistica 8), ed. Giuseppe Toffanin (Napoli 1953), p. 181f.

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written by an Egyptian or Ottoman sultan to a Christian prince and were highly popular in the 14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Giles Constable has told in his typology of letters and letter-collections real from fictional letters apart, saying that “the term ‘fictional’ will be used for letters, like model letters and treatises in epistolary form, which were not intended to be sent but which were considered letters by contemporaries.”<sup>3</sup> Hans Martin Schaller argued in his study of humour in medieval letters that “among the numerous medieval forgeries forged or rather fictional letters belong to the most harmless. In general, they did not pursue improper aims, but served as religious and moral edification, were used for political purposes, such as church propaganda, or just provided entertainment.”<sup>4</sup> In this sense the Sultansbriefe were indeed popular epistolary fiction. However, with regard to the rapid expansion of the Ottoman Empire they touched on serious historical realities. This paper reviews the Sultansbriefe in the light of anti-Turkish propaganda and literary entertainment. First I give an overview of the extant sources and introduce different versions and main topics of the Sultansbriefe. Then I look into the transmission history of these texts. I want to put forth some thoughts on the handwritten collections in which they were passed down and contrast these with the contexts in which the printed copies circled. In a final step I position the Sultansbriefe within the anti-Turkish discourse of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, considering particularly the role of the printing press.

## I.

The first scholars that called attention to correspondences between Christians and Muslims were Moritz Steinschneider<sup>5</sup>, Wilhelm Wattenbach<sup>6</sup> and Reinhold Röhricht<sup>7</sup> at the

<sup>3</sup> Giles Constable, *Letters and letter-collections* (Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental 17) (Turnhout 1976) p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Hans Martin Schaller, “Scherz und Ernst in erfundenen Briefen des Mittelalters“, *Fälschungen im Mittelalter. Internationaler Kongreß der Monumenta Germaniae Historica München, 16.-19. September 1987*, (Hannover 1988) vol. 1, p. 79. (English translation KD).

<sup>5</sup> Moritz Steinschneider, *Polemische und apologetische Literatur in arabischer Sprache zwischen Muslimen, Christen und Juden, nebst Anhängen verwandten Inhalts* (Leipzig 1877) pp. 237-241.

<sup>6</sup> Wilhelm Wattenbach, „Fausse correspondance du Sultan avec Clément V.“, *Archives de l'Orient latin* 2 (1884) pp. 297-303.

<sup>7</sup> Reinhold Röhricht, „Zur Korrespondenz der Päpste mit den Sultanen und Mongolenchanen des Morgenlandes im Zeitalter der Kreuzzüge“, *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* 64 (1891) pp. 359-369.

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end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They already pointed out that some of these letters were not real. The Sultansbriefe neither escaped Nicolae Iorgas<sup>8</sup> notice, who at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century printed some apocryphal letters in his collection of sources on the history of the crusades. Since then some scattered research has been done. However, it focused on individual, very prominent examples. Franz Babinger<sup>9</sup> dedicated an insightful study to the *Epistolae Magni Turci*, a collection of letters attributed to Mehmed II. The *Epistola ad Mahumetem* written by Pius II. has seen many modern critical editions, translations and detailed studies.<sup>10</sup> Yet none of them deals satisfactorily with the curious little letter by Morbisanus that occurs in several print editions of the pope's letter, not only in the one I mentioned above. To make a long story short: A comprehensive study of the Sultansbriefe is wanting. Only quite recently has Bettina Wagner given a new impulse to the old topic: As a by-product of her research on the legendary letter of Prester John she collected 14 handwritten copies of two different Sultansbriefe that were transmitted in the same manuscripts as Prester John.<sup>11</sup> On the basis of Wagner's preliminary work I have so far compiled 90 handwritten and over 300 printed copies of the Sultansbriefe. 76 of them are dedicated to six greater topics which constitute six versions. 14 constitute deviant versions

<sup>8</sup> Nicolae Iorga, *Notes et extraits pour servir l'histoire des croisades au XVe siècle*, vol. 2 (Paris/Bukarest 1899) p. 525f. and vol. 4 (Berlin/Bukarest 1915) p. 126f.

<sup>9</sup> Franz Babinger, *Laudivius Zacchia, Erdichter der 'Epistolae Magni Turci' (Neapel 1473 u.ö.)* (München 1960).

<sup>10</sup> Modern editions and translations of Pius' letter: Toffanin, *Lettera* (see above note 2); Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini, *Epistola Ad Mahomatem II (Epistle To Mohammed II)*, ed. Albrecht R. Baca (American University Studies II, 127) (New York/Bern/Frankfurt a. M. 1990); *Epistola ad Mahumetem, Einleitung, kritische Edition, Übersetzung* (Bochumer Altertumswissenschaftliches Colloquium 50), ed. Reinhold F. Gleis and Markus Köhler (Trier 2001); *Il Corano e la tiara. L'Epistola a Maometto II di Enea Silvio Piccolomini (papa Pio II)* (Le Sfere 54), ed. Luca D'Ascia (Bologna 2001); *Eneas Silvio Piccolomini – papa Pio II, Epistola a Mehmet II* (Colección Nueva Roma 20), ed. Domingo F. Sanz (Madrid 2004). Gleis/Köhler, *Epistola*, 115-123 offer a rather extensive bibliography. In addition to that cf. Nancy Bisaha, "Pope Pius II's Letter to Sultan Mehmed II: a Reexamination", *Crusades* 1 (2002), pp. 183-200, Luca d'Ascia, "L'epistola di Papa Pio II a Maometto II, un manifesto in favore della 'translatio imperii'", *Conferenze su Pio II nel sesto centenario della nascita di Enea Silvio Piccolomini, (1405 – 2005)*, ed. Enzo Mecacci (Siena 2006) pp. 13-25; Marie Viallon-Schoenveld, "L'epistola latina a Maometto II", *Pio II umanista europeo* (Quaderni della Rassegna 49), ed. Luisa Secchi Tarugi (Firenze 2007) pp. 165-177.

<sup>11</sup> Bettina Wagner, *Die 'Epistola presbiteri Johannis' lateinisch und deutsch. Überlieferung, Textgeschichte, Rezeption und Übertragungen im Mittelalter. Mit bisher unedierten Texten* (Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters 115) (Tübingen 2000), p. 667, n. 16. She also published a fundamental article in the *Verfasserlexikon: 'Sultansbriefe', Deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters. Verfasserlexikon* 11 (2004), 1462-1468.

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that could not be placed without a doubt. So, they will be excluded. At the beginning of my paper I have already introduced the *Epistola Morbisani*. In the early manuscripts the author calls himself a *collateralis pugil* of Orhan, an Ottoman sultan reigning between 1326-1362. The letter is commonly dated to the period between 1344 and 1346.<sup>12</sup> A second Sultansbrief is known as the *Epistola Soldani*. It circulated under the name of a certain Balthasar or variants of this name.<sup>13</sup> It seems to be the oldest version of a Sultansbrief. Wattenbach, who provided the text based on a copy from the University Library of Leipzig, dated its origins back to the period between 1291 and 1314.<sup>14</sup> In this letter the sultan announces his invasion plans and warns the pope to sacrifice his crusader armies and accuses him of inhumanity. Referring to the conquests of Jerusalem, Acre and Tripoli the sultan demonstrates his power and advises the pope not to challenge him. In many manuscripts and print editions the pope answers: Biblical examples show how the weak have always triumphed over the strong. Besides, the Christians are not weak. They comprise the invincible Holy Roman Empire, rich Anglia, ferocious Hungary, brave Bohemia, Portugal, Spain and they are prepared to suffer death and martyrdom.<sup>15</sup> The third Sultansbrief is actually a small bundle of various *Epistolae Magni Turci*.<sup>16</sup> They are a popular epistolary fiction written and edited by the humanist Laudivio Zacchia in the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Zacchia styles himself in his foreword as being only the collector of a small quantity of very short letters exchanged between Mehmed II. and various Christian and oriental principalities. Indeed, they are a curious mishmash of historical allusions, principles of humanitarian law, morals, aphorisms, truisms and platitudes that Zacchia put into the mouth of the sultan and his correspondents. Already Babinger found the contents hardly worthwhile to interpret. Instead he focused on the still unknown author and the dissemination of the work.<sup>17</sup> As far as I can see only Wolfgang Friedrichs recently addressed the contents of these letters again. He examined the image

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<sup>12</sup> Wagner, „Sultansbriefe“ p. 1464.

<sup>13</sup> For the text see Wattenbach, „Correspondance“ pp. 299f.

<sup>14</sup> Wattenbach, „Correspondance“ p. 298.

<sup>15</sup> Wattenbach, „Correspondance“, pp. 301-303.

<sup>16</sup> Since there is no modern text edition available see the digitized copy 4 Inc.s.a. 1197 p of the Bavarian State Library in Munich: [http://daten.digital-sammlungen.de/~db/0006/bsb00065225/image\\_1](http://daten.digital-sammlungen.de/~db/0006/bsb00065225/image_1). Babinger, *Laudivius Zacchia* (see above note 9) offers the most comprehensive study so far.

<sup>17</sup> Babinger, *Laudivio Zacchia* 26f.

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of the Turk in Lodovico Dolce's Italian translation of the *Epistolae*.<sup>18</sup>

Apart from the Latin versions Sultansbriefe circulated also in the German vernacular. One group of Sultansbriefe are the translations<sup>19</sup> of the *Epistola Morbisani*. It is true to the Latin version and originated in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, probably around the fall of Constantinople in 1453. Far more interesting are the vernacular versions that obviously evolved independently and extended the range of issues discussed in the correspondences. From around 1477 dates a fourth Sultansbrief. It is a feudal threat addressed to the duke of Burgundy.<sup>20</sup> Sultan Mehmed II. lets it be known that he is aware of the duke's crusade plans and he threatens him with the prospect of a deathly feud that will lead to the duke's conversion to Islam or utter destruction, should he insist on war. More peaceful topics appear in the last two groups of Sultansbriefe. The sultan of Babylon proposes a marriage between one of his daughters and either the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire or a Christian prince.<sup>21</sup> He flatters the addressee and entices him with promises of a lavish dowry, but leaves no doubt that he wants to get rid of his daughter, because she has converted to Christianity and thus robbed herself of God's grace. As confidant and negotiator in this matter he sends Prester John, his alleged son-in-law. The last version of a Sultansbrief is an invitation to a great tournament to be held in the city of Babylon.<sup>22</sup> The sultan promises safe conduct for all guests and participants, including the pope, the emperor and other noble princes. He offers not only precious presents for the guests but also a sumptuous prize for the best knight and the best squire, which his beautiful daughter will hand over. And yet, with all of his unbounded generosity, the sultan thought it

<sup>18</sup> Wolfgang Friedrichs, "Das Türkenbild in Lodovico Dolces Übersetzung der 'Epistolae magni Turci' des italienischen Humanisten Laudivio Vezzanense", *Europa und die Türken in der Renaissance* (Frühe Neuzeit 54), ed. Bodo Guthmüller and Wilhelm Kühlmann (Tübingen 2000) pp. 333-344.

<sup>19</sup> The text is available in: *Die Chroniken der fränkischen Städte. Nürnberg 4* (Chroniken der deutschen Städte 10) (Leipzig 1872) pp. 200-203.

<sup>20</sup> Iorga, *Notes* 4, pp. 126f. provides the text copied from BSB Munich, clm 27068, 131r.

<sup>21</sup> The text was inserted into a Nuremberg chronicle and is thus available in: *Die Chroniken der fränkischen Städte. Nürnberg 4* (Chroniken der deutschen Städte 10) (Leipzig 1872) pp. 169-171 (to Frederick III.) and in *Andreas von Regensburg. Sämtliche Werke* (Quellen und Erörterungen zur bayerischen und deutschen Geschichte N.F. 1), ed. Georg von Leidinger (München 1903) pp. 713f. (to Christoph of Denmark).

<sup>22</sup> For the text see Christoph Heinrich Friedrich Walther, „Zwei strassburgische Handschriften der Hamburger Stadtbibliothek“, *Verzeichniss der Vorlesungen welche am Hamburgischen Akademischen und Real-Gymnasium gehalten werden sollen* (Jahresbericht Akademisches und Real Gymnasium Hamburg), ed. Hamburgisches Akademisches und Real-Gymnasium (Hamburg 1880) pp. 9f.

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necessary to point out that contrary to the rumours, the Antichrist was certainly not born in his city.

To sum up the contents of the Sultansbriefe I borrow Bettina Wagner's accurate characterisation: "They combine criticism of the Western world, particularly of the crusade plans that were judged as hopeless and inhuman, and oriental power [...]".<sup>23</sup> Indeed, they broach also issues of Eastern pleasures. Not all were of such outright hostility as the letter from Morbisanus or the *Epistola Soldani*. Humorous and ironic invitations to tournaments and marriage proposals circulated, too, albeit to a far lower extent.

## II.

Having outlined the different versions, I want to look into the transmission of these texts, now. The point I want to make is that there is a significant difference in the way handwritten and printed copies were passed down. Consequently, this leads to a significant difference in the way both were received. I base my observations on 20 manuscripts from the Bavarian State Library. On the one hand this collection preserves actually all known versions of the Sultansbriefe, on the other it also shows the greatest variety of contexts, in which Sultansbriefe were transmitted. The low hanging fruits first: Naturally, Sultansbriefe are found in text collections of the 15<sup>th</sup> century that centre on Turkish affairs of political urgency. Evident examples would be BSB Munich, clm 14668, clm 14610 and clm 5141.<sup>24</sup> Here Sultansbriefe are found next to news about the progress of the Ottoman expansion and Christian countermeasures, next to papal briefs, indulgences or bulls, decisions of the German Reichstage, even religious prognostications on the victory of the Christians over the Turks and Islam or bound together with other real letters that report news about the Turkish threat. Similar are historical miscellanies that include the Sultansbriefe because of their general historical relevance. Humanist collections use the Sultansbriefe obviously as model letters and transmit them alongside

<sup>23</sup> Wagner, "Sultansbriefe" 1462. (English translation by KD).

<sup>24</sup> Karl Halm, Georg von Laubmann and Wilhelm Meyer Meyer, *Catalogus codicum latinorum Bibliothecae Regiae Monacensis, vol. 2,2, Codices num. 11001-15028* (München 1876) pp. 201f., pp. 213f.; Karl Halm, Georg von Laubmann and Wilhelm Meyer Meyer, *Catalogus codicum latinorum Bibliothecae Regiae Monacensis, vol. 1,2, Codices num. 2501-5250* (München 1894) pp. 268f.

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rhetorical study material, upholstered with letter-writing manuals and instructions.<sup>25</sup> Such collections of model letters were used in chanceries, too. Here the requirements have slightly changed. Older manuscripts from the 14<sup>th</sup> and early 15<sup>th</sup> century also transmit the Sultansbriefe with other collected letters, yet these were often letters of the church fathers intended for moral edification. Exploiting also biblical exempla, the Sultansbriefe suited this purpose well enough.<sup>26</sup> The *Epistola Morbisani* and the *Epistola Soldani* are often transmitted with Prester John's letter thereby anticipating the later print compilations. From the 14 manuscripts Wagner has found four, i.e. cgm 317, clm 4143, clm 9503 and clm 22377, are preserved in the Bavarian State Library in Munich.<sup>27</sup> As Prester John supposedly wrote his letter to the emperor of Constantinople it is not surprising that texts concerning the Turks have also found their way into these collections. Occasionally, Sultansbriefe can be found together with literature *contra-iudeos*, the letter form and the polemic contents apparently being a uniting element. BSB Munich, clm 4143 for example transmits the *Epistola Morbosani* together with Rabbi Samuel, *Epistola de captivitate Judaeorum* and an anonymous *Tractatus contra Judaeis*. Clm 22377 includes even more anti-Jewish works from the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>28</sup>

In sum, Sultansbriefe appeared in several textual traditions. It is furthermore evident that the medieval compilers clearly preferred the *Epistola Soldani* and the *Epistola Morbisani*. Of 76 manuscripts only a handful contains the marriage proposal and the feudal threats, even less the invitation to the tournament. Most copies, that is to say 37, preserve the *Epistola Soldani*. Offering possibilities of political, moral and socio-critical interpretation, this letter was certainly most adaptable to different textual traditions.

<sup>25</sup> See e.g. BSB Munich, clm 14644. Cf. Karl Halm, Georg von Laubmann and Wilhelm Meyer, *Catalogus codicum latinorum Bibliothecae Regiae Monacensis*, vol. 2,2, Codices num. 11001-15028 (München, 1876), pp. 2013-214. See also University Library Munich, 2° Cod. ms. 667. Cf. Natalia Daniel, Gerhard Schott and Peter Zahn, *Die lateinischen mittelalterlichen Handschriften der Unversitätsbibliothek München: Die Handschriften aus der Folioreihe. Hälfte 2* (Wiesbaden, 1979), pp. 131-138.

<sup>26</sup> See e.g. BSB Munich, clm 16201. Cf. Karl Halm, Georg von Laubmann and Wilhelm Meyer, *Catalogus codicum latinorum Bibliothecae Regiae Monacensis*, vol. 2,3, Codices num. 15121-21313 (München 1894) pp. 59.

<sup>27</sup> See Wagner, 'Epistola' p. 667, n. 16.

<sup>28</sup> See Wagner, "Sultansbriefe" p. 1463. The *Epistola Soldani* on 214r is not described in the manuscript catalogue of Halm, von Laubmann and Meyer. For the accompanying texts see *Catalogus codicum latinorum Bibliothecae Regiae Monacensis*, vol. 2,4, Codices num. 21406-27268 (München, 1881), pp. 45-46.

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The 15<sup>th</sup> century brought not only a climax of the Ottoman expansion but also important technical innovations. The fall of Constantinople in 1453 to the Ottoman Turks coincided with the invention of the printing press. I have discussed the relationship between the war against the Turks and the printing press elsewhere,<sup>29</sup> so what I want to discuss in the last part of my paper is the role the printing press played for the dissemination and reception of the Sultansbriefe and draw conclusions on how the letters could be fitted into the anti-Turkish discourse of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

My first observation is trivial: Going to press meant more copies in less time and the possibility of a greater dissemination. While I found only 37 handwritten copies of the *Epistola Soldani* from both the 14<sup>th</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> century altogether there exist six incunabula and three post-incunabula editions of this text from the roughly ten years around 1500.<sup>30</sup> Of each at least a dozen printed copies survive. Even more convincing is the result for the *Epistola Morbisani*. It was the only Sultansbrief that was printed independently in 1473 as a broadside.<sup>31</sup> Since it was also considered a pseudo-response to Pius II.'s *Epistola ad Mahumetem* it was also printed in three incunabula editions of the pope's letters.<sup>32</sup> From these editions over 75 copies survive. In contrast I only counted 15 handwritten copies. Certainly the most striking example are Laudivio Zacchia's *Epistolae Magni Turci*. They were printed for the first time in 1473 in Naples and have seen 18 incunabula editions by the year 1500.<sup>33</sup> The extant copies add up to a total of over 300. And as far as I can see: The few handwritten copies I have found are all transcripts from printed copies. So, Zacchia's letters were clearly intended to be read by circles that formed part of the new emerging public sphere promoted by the new print medium.

<sup>29</sup> Karoline Dominika Döring, *Türkenkrieg und Medienwandel im 15. Jahrhundert. Mit einem Katalog der Türkendrucke bis 1500* (Historische Studien 504) (Husum 2013) and Karoline Döring, "Rhetorik und Politik im 15. Jahrhundert. Die 'Türkenreden' und ihre Verbreitung im Druck", *Rhetorik in Mittelalter und Renaissance: Konzepte - Praxis - Diversität* (Münchner Beiträge zur Geschichtswissenschaft 6), ed. Georg Strack and Julia Knödler (München 2011) pp. 429-453 with further reference.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Döring, *Türkenkrieg* p. 448.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Döring, *Türkenkrieg* p. 446.

<sup>32</sup> [Rome: Bartholomaeus Guldinbeck, about 1477] (ISTC ip00701000, GW M33652); [Rome: Eucharius Silber, about 1485] (ISTC ip00702000, GW M3365810); [Rome: Stephan Planck, 1488-90] (ISTC ip00703000, BSB-Ink P-506, GW M33657). Cf. Döring, *Türkenkrieg* p. 241, 315-316 and 339.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. the list of incunabula and post-incunabula editions in Babinger, *Laudivius Zacchia* pp. 39-42. (source material as of before World War II). See current status of extant incunabula editions in Döring, *Türkenkrieg* pp. 445f.

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My second observation regards the dissemination and contexts of transmission and reception of the Sultansbriefe. Printers and editors clearly preferred some versions over others. The variety of versions and topics in the handwritten copies disappears. Apart from Zacchia's immensely popular *Epistolae Magni Turci* only two versions were printed: the *Epistola Soldani* and the Latin version of the *Epistola Morbisani*. The variety of addressers and addressees disappears, too. Following the handwritten Sultansbriefe from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> century a chronology becomes apparent: Addressers and addressees were regularly updated and adjusted to the new historical context. While in the handwritten copies the addressees changed from Clement VI, Eugene IV and Nicholas V to Calixtus III, Paul II, Sixtus IV, and even Innocent VIII, the addressee of all printed Sultansbriefe was Pius II – of both the *Epistola Soldani* and the *Epistola Morbisani*. The addresser of the printed *Epistola Soldani* was always one *Johannes Soldanus*. *Morbisanus* stayed *Morbisanus*.<sup>34</sup> Textual and linguistic deviations of the handwritten copies such as the variants of the sultan's name (*Balthasar*, *Waldach*, *Haldrach*) or of his elaborate titles were consolidated in favour of an authoritative version that was printed. And a third variety disappears: The variety of contexts in which the Sultansbriefe have been transmitted. The *Epistola Soldani* was printed in six incunabula editions, though not as a stand-alone text, but inserted in between a travel narrative written by Johannes Witte de Hese and the letter of Prester John. Johannes Witte was a Dutch cleric who claims to have undertaken a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1389 and visited also the lands of Prester John.<sup>35</sup> This was obviously the reason why the famous letter was included in the edition. Comparing Johannes' account with other medieval travel narratives like Johan Mandeville's book Scott D. Westrem comes to the conclusion that “John Mandeville and Johannes Witte de Hese are both, in all likelihood, figments of the imagination of to anonymous authors who managed to fashion a traveller with name, a vocation, and a set of experiences that

<sup>34</sup> See Döring, *Türkenkrieg* 446 and 448.

<sup>35</sup> Scott D. Westrem, *Broader Horizons: A Study of Johannes Witte de Hese's Itinerarius and Medieval Travel Narratives* (Cambridge Mass. 2001); Scott D. Westrem, *A critical edition of Johannes Witte de Hese's "Itinerarius", the middle dutch text, an english translation, and commentary, together with an introduction to european accounts of travel to the east (1240-1400)*, (Northwestern University 1985); Bettina Wagner, “Witte, Johannes, de Hese“, *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters. Verfasserlexikon* 10 (1999), pp. 1276-1278.

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sounded authentic enough for readers to credit his words, at least for a time”.<sup>36</sup> Obviously, fictional travel literature became the context in which the *Epistola Soldani* could and should be primarily received in the 15<sup>th</sup> century – a trend that was already given in the earlier handwritten compilations where Prester John, Sultansbriefe and travel literature were sometimes bound together.<sup>37</sup> This new context indeed worked out: In three manuscripts of the *Itinerarius* from Vienna, Prague and Ghent that all originated around 1500 a printed edition provided the textual basis for the copies.<sup>38</sup>

I believe a similar situation can be observed as far as the *Epistola Morbisani* is concerned. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century it was transmitted as a pseudo-answer to Pius's efforts to convert the sultan. Reinhold Gleis, the modern editor of Pius's *Epistola ad Mahumetem*, has collated 40 manuscripts, unfortunately without a description of the accompanying texts.<sup>39</sup> I have not yet examined the manuscript tradition of the *Epistola ad Mahumetem*. So, at the moment I have no clear evidence, whether or not the *Epistola Morbisani* was transmitted together with Pius's letter before the print editions. However, I assume that the contemporary editor of the print edition of Pius's letter, that also contains Morbisanus's answer, has purposefully established this new context and not until then became this Sultansbrief the response to Pius's efforts. In any case, this context seems to be an Italian, more precisely, a Roman invention, for it is remarkable, that all later editions are Roman (1477, 1485 and 1490/91) and add the *Epistola Morbisani* as pseudo-response to Pius's letter while earlier, Northern Alpine, editions do not.<sup>40</sup> Further evidence that the two texts were actually received as a letter-exchange comes from a copy belonging to the edition of Pius's letters that was printed in Treviso 1475, now kept in the Bavarian State Library in Munich: Initially, 4 Inc.c.a. 68 did not include the *Epistola Morbisani*. However, its later possessor, an Italian

<sup>36</sup> Westrem, *Broader Horizons* p. 60.

<sup>37</sup> Wagner, 'Epistola' p. 70 and pp. 78f.

<sup>38</sup> See the descriptions in Westrem, *Broader Horizons* pp. 294-299.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. the list of handwritten and printed manuscripts: Gleis/Köhler, *Epistola* pp. 98-103.

<sup>40</sup> See the digitized copies of Württembergische Landesbibliothek Stuttgart, Inc.qt.177b, fol. 42v-44r (1477): <http://digital.wlb-stuttgart.de/purl/bsz34835603X> and Inc.qt.175, fol. 60r-61v (1485): <http://digital.wlb-stuttgart.de/purl/bsz346921457>; see also above note 1 for the 1490/91 edition. I further substantiated that with the help of copies from the various editions kept in the British Library in London, in the Bodleian Library in Oxford, the Jagiellonian Library in Krakow, the Royal Library in Copenhagen, the Royal Library in Brussels and the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris that are all available as microfiche in Lotte Hellinga, *Incunabula. The Printing Revolution in Europe, 1455-1500* [full-text incunabula on microfiche], vol. 52 and 53: Current Affairs, Reading 2002/2003.

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humanist of the 16th century, entered manually Morbisanus's response on three adhering pages, obviously fully aware that they belong together.<sup>41</sup> That remains to be proved.

### III.

Since this is still work in progress I would like to end not with a summary but with raising some more worthwhile questions for my further research.

Noteworthy is, that the Sultansbriefe provided in the 15<sup>th</sup> century a pseudo-response to the reactions on the Ottoman expansion in the Latin West. While the Turk was at best a faceless object in most contemporary texts, he stepped forward in the Sultansbriefe as subject that thinks, feels and acts. The letters suggest the enemy's perspective and give a voice to the sultan. Hence they are close to other literary treatments and interpretations of the Turkish threat. Carnival plays and drama for example used the figure of the sultan to criticise the situation of church and realm and to boldly call for reform.<sup>42</sup> A satirical poem printed in Trento in 1475 not only gave the sultan a voice but also a face. The poem was illustrated with a woodcut that showed the narrator, obviously a sultan, a grim looking, bearded man in oriental clothing, wearing the Greek emperor's crown. He warns the readers that he will soon sweep the Christian territories and seize great plunder.<sup>43</sup> Pius II. himself wrote a poem addressed to Mehmed II. Someone, possibly not Pius, added a pseudo-answer by the sultan. Both were printed together as a stand-alone edition in Italy,

<sup>41</sup> Since the Sultansbrief is not mentioned in any bibliography and neither of the copies I examined include it, I assume that this first Italian edition did not publish it.

<sup>42</sup> Prominent examples are Hans Rosenplüt and Jakob Locher. See Ingeborg Glier, "Rosenplütsche Fastnachtspiele", *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters. Verfasserlexikon* 8 (1992), pp. 211-232; Christiane Ackermann, "Dimensionen der Medialität: Die Osmanen im Rosenplütschen 'Turken Vasnachtspiel' sowie in den Dramen des Hans Sachs und Jakob Ayrer", *Fastnachtspiele: weltliches Schauspiel in literarischen und kulturellen Kontexten*, ed. Klaus Ridder (Tübingen 2009) pp. 189-220; Martin W. Walsh, "Conquering Turk in Carnival Nürnberg: Hans Rosenplüt's 'Des Turken Vasnachtspiel' of 1456", *Fifteenth Century Studies* 36 (2011), pp. 181-199; Cora B. Dietl, *Die Dramen Jakob Lochers und die frühe Humanistenbühne im süddeutschen Raum* (Berlin 2005), pp. 109-135. See also the older study by Josefine Reischl, *Die Tragedia De Thurcis et Suldano des Jakob Locher Philomusus*, (Wien, 1951).

<sup>43</sup> Incipit: "Turckischer kayser bin ich Machametus Bely von Chomani genant" ("Emperor of the Turks I am, they call me Machametus Bely of Chomani", translation KD). See the *Verzeichnis der typographischen Einblattdrucke des 15. Jahrhunderts im Heiligen Römischen Reich Deutscher Nation (VE15)*, ed. Falk Eisermann (Wiesbaden 2004) vol. 3 p. 566 for further reference.

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creating the impression of a letter-exchange.<sup>44</sup> According to James Hankins, who printed the pseudo-answer, “[t]he two texts together form a poetic parallel to the better-known pair of letters supposedly exchanged between Pius II and pseudo-Mehmed [...].<sup>45</sup> And indeed, they circulated at roughly the same time as the broadside with Morbisanus's letter and the early print editions of the *Epistola ad Mahumetem* transmitting also the *Epistola Morbisani*. All these works echo set pieces of the Sultansbriefe. So, the correspondences between Muslims and Christians in the 15<sup>th</sup> century form part of a wider literary approach to the Ottoman threat that needs further inspection.

The transmission history raises furthermore questions concerning the transformation process of religious discourse. The first letters originated obviously shortly after the conquest of Acre and the loss of the Holy Land in 1291. They were written in the context of the crusading movement of the High Middle Ages. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century and especially after 1453 they were updated and circled also in print copies. But only the correspondents changed, the texts stayed the same. Yet no one would seriously doubt, that they were not interpreted in the light of the Turkish threat. In this respect they echo an old discourse in new clothes.

In the end I return to Giles Constable and Hans Martin Schaller: The Sultansbriefe fit indeed both purposes of fictional letters: propaganda and entertainment. Not even beautiful daughters, rich tournaments and the pleasures of the East could hide the fact that the Latin West stood helpless in the face of the Ottoman expansion.

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<sup>44</sup> The poem is edited in *Enee Silvii Piccolominei postea Pii pp. II carmina* (Studi e Testi 364), ed. Adriano van Heck (Città del Vaticano 1994) pp. 157-159. For the print edition see Döring, *Türkenkrieg* p. 234.

<sup>45</sup> James Hankins, „Renaissance Crusaders: Humanist Crusade Literature in the Age of Mehmed II“, *Dumbarton Oaks papers* 49 (1995) pp. 206f.