

‘A More Beautiful Spectacle was Never Presented to My Gaze’: Discussing Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq’s Concept of Person by Analyzing His Description of Ottoman Dress

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I.

“Now come with me and cast your eyes over the immense crowd of turbaned heads, wrapped in countless folds of the whitest silk, and bright raiment of every kind and hue, and everywhere the brilliance of gold, silver, purple, silk, and satin. A detailed description would be a lengthy task, and no mere words could give an adequate idea of the novelty of the sight. A more beautiful spectacle was never presented to my gaze.

Yet amid all this luxury there was a great simplicity and economy. The dress of all has the same form whatever the wearer’s rank; and no edgings or useless trimmings are sewn in, as is the custom with us, costing a large sum of money and worn out in three days. Their most beautiful garments of silk or satin, even if they are embroidered, as they usually are, cost only a ducat to make.”¹

These are the words with which Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq describes a celebration at the Sultan’s winter camp in Anatolia. In my view, it is the most significant passage concerning the description of Ottoman clothing in his well-known *Turkish Letters*. Even though Busbecq frequently mentions clothing, we can nearly see the sparkle in his eyes when reading this paragraph, the fascination he experienced during his inauguration as legate of the Holy Roman Emperor at Sultan Suleiman’s court. The sight he describes is so curious to him that he claims to have never seen anything as beautiful or spectacular.²

When we read the above quoted paragraphs for the first time, they seem to be unproblematic and coherent, but when we take a closer look, inconsistencies, controversies, even contradictions emerge: How can silk cost only a ducat? How can luxury and thrift be reconciled in the same sentence?

In this article, I will attempt to resolve these tensions with a close reading of the quotation from the *Turkish Letters*. In my view, the inconsistencies regarding

¹ Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, *The Turkish Letters of Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq. Imperial Ambassador at Constantinople 1554-1562*, translated from the Latin of the Elzevir Edition of 1633 by Edward Seymore Forster in 1927 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 61.

² On the current understanding of term “spectacle” in historical research, see the issue: “Spektakel,” *L’Homme. ZfG* 23.1 (2012).

Busbecq's dress description can be resolved by exploring how he presents his multi-layered identity. Indeed, Busbecq portrays himself as a humanist, who is familiar with intellectual discourses of his time, and as an agent of his sovereign, who strives to give useful political advice. Both of these dimensions of his persona are expressed in his depiction of Ottoman dress.

To give each of these aspects the space it deserves, after giving a few biographical notes, I will then probe how Busbecq's *Turkish Letters* can be understood as an immaterial, epistolary collection of curiosities: a collection of cultural practices and techniques. Together with his collection of curious material objects, these letters allowed him to appear as a learned scholar of the republic of letters. In the following chapter, I investigate how he uses his published works at the same time to counsel policy makers on possible strategies concerning the Ottomans and thus states that he served as a statesman over his lifetime for three Emperors of the Holy Roman Empire.

II.

Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, who lived from approximately 1522 to 1592, was a highly educated humanist and diplomat in the employ of three generations of Austrian monarchs (Ferdinand I, Maximilian II, and Rudolf II). In 1536, he enrolled at the Latin-language Catholic University of Leuven and from there he went on to study at a number of well-known universities in northern Italy such as Bologna and Padua. Busbecq, like his father and grandfather, chose a career at a noble court. He entered into the service of the Austrian monarch Ferdinand I around 1552. It was in 1554, however, that Ferdinand named him *ordinarius orator*³ to the Ottoman court under the rule of Suleiman I, where he spent the following eight years of his career. Busbecq's diplomatic mission in Constantinople was to negotiate a renewal of the peace treaty of 1547,⁴ which he accomplished in 1562.⁵

Busbecq reported on his stay in Constantinople in his widely known work *The Turkish Letters*, which he wrote entirely in Latin. It consists of four literary letters to an imaginary friend. This self-narrative in the form of a travelogue refers to Busbecq's actual stay in the Ottoman Empire. It is not a chronological account of it, however. The author describes his adventures in the Ottoman Empire in a rather eloquent and well-structured way, thus successfully creating an interesting

³ Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, *Augerii Gisenii Busbeqvii legationis Turcicae epistolae quatuor: Adiectae sunt duae elterae; Eiusdem de re militari contra Turcam instituenda consilium* (Paris: Beys, 1589), 49.

⁴ Ernst Dieter Petritsch, "Der habsburgisch-osmanische Friedensvertrag des Jahres 1547," *Mitteilungen des Österreichischen Staatsarchivs* 38 (1985): 49–80.

⁵ *Die Schreiben Süleymans des Prächtigen an Karl V., Ferdinand I. und Maximilian II.*, ed. Anton C. Schaendlinger (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1983), document 25.

and entertaining piece of literature. Busbecq's letters today remain one of the principal primary sources of the 16th century Ottoman court. Until recently, the *Turkish Letters* were considered to be an outstanding and novel piece of literature, because of their open-minded descriptions of everyday Turkish life. Thanks to the work of Zweder von Martels, we are now able to date Busbecq's writing to the 1580s.⁶ At this time, a trend had developed within the republic of letters for describing visited places in an impartial and unprejudiced way.

While staying in the Ottoman Empire, Busbecq not only practiced his profession as a diplomat, but also pursued his wide range of humanistic interests, collecting ancient coins, Greek manuscripts and inscriptions. He was also widely interested in the flora and fauna of the Ottoman Empire. Thus, he was the one who sent the seeds and bulbs of the narcissus, hyacinth, the lilac and, most famously, the tulip, to the imperial court in Vienna and introduced them to botanists throughout the Roman Empire.⁷

Busbecq returned from the Ottoman Empire in 1562 and became a counselor at the court of Emperor Ferdinand I in Vienna. He ended his career in Paris, however, as the guardian of Elisabeth of Austria, daughter of Maximilian and widow of the French king Charles IX. It was in Paris that he wrote down the final version of the *Turkish Letters*.⁸ The first of the letters was published in 1582. All four letters were then first published together in Paris in 1589. Numerous editions and translations soon followed throughout Europe, some of which are still in print today.⁹

III.

In the 16th century, collecting rarities and exotica in so-called "cabinets of curiosities" was a widespread trend.¹⁰ Next to pieces of art, they presented padded animals and plants, mechanical and scientific instruments as well as everyday-life

⁶ Zweder R.W.M. von Martels, *Augerius Gisenius Busbequius. Leven en werk van de keizerlijke gezant aan het hof van Süleyman de Grote. Een biografische, literaire en historische studie met editie van onuitgegeven teksten* (Groningen: Universiteitsdrukkerij, 1989). On the dating of the letters, see esp.: idem, "The Colouring Effect of Attic Style and Stoicism in Busbequius *Turkish Letters*," in *Travel Fact and Travel Fiction. Studies on the Fiction, Literary Tradition, Scholarly Discovery and Observation in Travel Writing*, ed. idem (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 140–157.

⁷ "Osmanische Blumen – Osmanische Gärten, Gärtner, Gartenpflanzen – Pflanzen des Osmanischen Reiches in Mitteleuropa. Begleitheft zur Ausstellung 26.04.–12.05.1985 im Palmengarten in Frankfurt am Main," *Zeitschrift des Palmengartens der Stadt Frankfurt am Main* 49 (1985). Concerning the question about whether Busbecq was actually the first to introduce the tulip into the Northern-alpine countries, see: Jack Goody, *The Culture of Flowers* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 188, and note 87.

⁸ Von Martels, *Attic Style and Stoicism in Busbequius Turkish Letters*.

⁹ For example, the 2005 edition of Edward Seymore Forster's English translation from 1927, quoted above and throughout this article. Busbecq, *The Turkish Letters*.

¹⁰ Friedrich Jaeger, "Kuriösitätenkabinett," in *Enzyklopädie der Neuzeit* 7 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2008), col. 404–408.

items from foreign cultures. In the first theoretical tract on the “cabinets of curiosities,” entitled *Inscriptiones vel tituli theatri amplissimi* and written in 1565, Belgian author Samuel Quiccheberg formed a precise structure for organizing collections of rarities: He separated the materials into five main divisions: pictures, portraits, and models directly related to the collector; *artificialia*; *naturalia*; instruments and tools; and other pieces of art. These main divisions were classified into sub-divisions, which were based on the traditional theoretical concept of mnemotechnic and Giulio Camillo’s *L’idea del teatro*, first published in 1550.¹¹ In Camillo’s understanding of theater, the complete knowledge of the time needed to be saved, stored, and organized. He thought the collections of the Renaissance should portray the “macrocosms in the microcosms” and create a universal image of the “real” world.¹² Curiosity and wonder were understood as integral parts of knowledge production, as shown extensively by authors like Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park.¹³ Pieces of art in the collections were often statues, paintings, and miniatures; *naturalia* were fossils and compounds; and the mechanical and scientific instruments were compasses and globes. The collections, however, also included armor, weapons and foreign dress.¹⁴

During his eight-year mission at the Sultan’s court, Busbecq collected many different materials such as ancient coins and inscriptions, Greek manuscripts, unknown plants and flowers, and exotic animals and had them transported to Northwestern Europe. In light of this, I found it curious at first that Busbecq did not accumulate Ottoman clothing as well.¹⁵ Instead, he seems to have been satisfied with “only” describing it in his writings. In this chapter, I will therefore focus on reading the introductory passage of the *Turkish Letters* as a part of a humanist’s text. I will take into account existing collection practices and travelling concepts and finally suggest that Busbecq’s travel-narrative has to be understood as a collection of cultural practices. In fact, together with his collection of material goods, it can even be regarded as a collection within the collection.

While Busbecq served the Habsburgs, several family members were collectors of curiosities. Among them were Emperor Ferdinand I, who in 1563 founded the cabinet of curiosities in Vienna (*Wiener Kunstkammer*), Archduke Ferdinand II,

¹¹ Giulio Camillo, *L’idea Del Teatro* (Firenze: Torrentino, 1550).

¹² Andreas Grote, *Macrocosmos in Microcosmo. Die Welt in der Stube. Zur Geschichte des Sammelns 1450 bis 1800* (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 1994).

¹³ Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature 1150–1750* (New York: Zone Books; Cambridge, Mass.: Distributed by the MIT Press, 1998).

¹⁴ Virginie Spenlé, “Kunstsammlung,” in *Enzyklopädie der Neuzeit* 7 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2008), col. 351–359, see: Chapter 5, “Die Kunst- und Wunderkammern,” col. 353–355; Stephan Roseke, “Kuriösitätenkabinett,” in *Enzyklopädie der Neuzeit* 7 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2008), col. 404–408; Anke te Heesen, “Sammlung, gelehrte,” in *Enzyklopädie der Neuzeit* 11 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2010), col. 580–589.

¹⁵ He remarks that at his discharge audience with the Sultan, he “received nothing beyond the customary gifts which are presented to departing ambassadors.” The customary gifts in general included robes of honor. Cf. *ibid.*, 231.

who collected at his Ambraser residence, and, most prominently, Emperor Rudolf II, who housed his famous collection at the Prague Castle.¹⁶ A lot of the exhibited materials were collected during travels. Busbecq also describes in his *Turkish Letters* his adventures while travelling and presents within the text a variety of curious events, clearly indicating that travelling and collecting were also in Busbecq's particular case closely related.

To fully appreciate the intertwinement of travelling and collecting in the 16th century, it is essential to consider early modern concepts of travel and travel narratives as well as recent research findings. Simultaneously, along with the enhanced mobility of the Late Middle Ages, *curiositas* underwent a theoretical appreciation of value: it became a legitimate reason for non-utilitarian travelers, particularly humanists.¹⁷ As a European movement, humanism involved seeking out the developmental path for becoming a truly human being by studying the ancient, particularly Greek, cultures. Consequently, humanists looked for opportunities to travel and describe the landscapes of antiquity – even those which were under the rule of “barbarians.”¹⁸ This new rationale for travel was mostly favored in the circle of Erasmus of Rotterdam. As mentioned earlier, Busbecq studied at the University of Leuven, where Erasmus had inaugurated the *res publica literaria* – the republic of letters.

Through an ordered recording of the abundant details accumulated during travel, newly gained knowledge should be systematically written down afterwards in a travel narrative and then circulated, enabling this knowledge to become widespread. The theoretical considerations for structuring and presenting newly acquired knowledge resemble the theoretical approaches to presenting the collected materials featured in the cabinets of curiosity.

In his work *A History of Curiosity* and the *ars apodemica*, Justin Stagl states that the humanist travelers were recognized as having a distinct relevance. As “outposts” and corresponding members of scholar-societies, they were expected to collect knowledge as carefully as merchants collected their goods. They were supposed to keep an account of their experiences and introduce new knowledge so it could be integrated into the existing corpus of knowledge through mutual exchange and thus benefit the republic of letters as a whole.¹⁹

¹⁶ Julius von Schlosser, *Die Kunst- und Wunderkammern der Spätrenaissance. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Sammelwesens* (Braunschweig: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1978), 45.

¹⁷ Justin Stagl, *A History of Curiosity. The Theory of Travel 1550–1800* (Chur: Harwood Academic Publisher, 1995), 71–73.

¹⁸ Barbara Kellner-Heinkele, *Das Osmanische Reich im Spiegel europäischer Druckwerke. Kostbarkeiten aus vier Jahrhunderten. Begleitbft zur Ausstellung des Instituts für Orientalische und Ostasiatische Philologien, Turkologie, der Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität und der Stadt- und Landesbibliothek Frankfurt am Main, 12. April bis 18. Mai 1985* (Frankfurt am Main: Universitätsbibliothek, 1985), 10.

¹⁹ Stagl, *History of Curiosity*. Cf. idem, “Ars Apodemica. Bildungsreise und Reisemethodik von 1560–1600,” in *Reisen und Reiseliteratur im Mittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Xenia von Ertzdorff (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1992), 141–189 (p. 161).

In all the Renaissance collections of curiosities, books, especially travel narratives, constituted an important element. In recent publications regarding the cabinets, travel narratives have been interpreted as instruments of verification for the collected and displayed *exotica*.²⁰ I therefore want to propose a supplementary understanding of these texts: The travel-narratives were not only a vital part of the collection like all other material goods, but with their descriptions of foreign, even previously unknown phenomena, they can be understood as collections within the collection.

As mentioned above, during his stay in the Ottoman Empire, Busbecq collected a variety of objects that he transported to Northwestern Europe such as Greek manuscripts, coins, floral seeds and bulbs. Many of these objects found their way into bigger collections. These included the Greek manuscripts, which Hugo Blotius, the first librarian of the Imperial Library in Vienna, bought from Busbecq in 1576,²¹ or the tulip bulbs, which Busbecq sent to Carolus Clusius, the director of the emperor's gardens in Vienna.²²

I would now like to argue that Busbecq not only collected noteworthy curiosities in the form of physical objects, but also provides an important account of cultural phenomena, which he described in his *Turkish Letters*. Interestingly, the material objects he collected are barely noted in the *Turkish Letters*, as if the mere mentioning of them would allow him to achieve an inventory of what he had assembled. In contrast, he describes in great detail the cultural practices and techniques – the non-material objects. This, therefore, constitutes a significant portion of his self-narrative. Besides his collected objects, Busbecq displays yet another collection of curiosities in his text. He does so, though, in a literary way that presents them to the mind's eye of his readers.

In reading the text in this way, it is possible to understand Busbecq's decision to not provide a strict chronological report of his stay. By choosing to not systematically order his precious collected phenomena sequentially, he is able to give each cultural practice its own appropriate space in the collection and in his documentation. As a result, each phenomenon is able to unfold in its complete distinctiveness. The described practices and techniques range from habits and local customs to food and foreign animals and, of course, to dress. Busbecq appears to have portrayed the cultural practices detailed in his writing which he could not physically assemble as material goods and transfer to the imperial court. In doing so, he additionally refers to his eye-witness encounters and the credibility of his report. The distinct character of the performance of these cultural practices could only have been fully appreciated in their own particular cul-

²⁰ Dominik Collet, *Die Welt in der Stube. Begegnungen mit Außereuropa in Kunstkammern der Frühen Neuzeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), esp. chapter I.

²¹ Josef Stummvoll, *Geschichte der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek*, vol. 1: "Die Hofbibliothek (1368–1922)" (Vienna: Prachner, 1968), 81–127.

²² Goody, *The Culture of Flowers*, 188, and note 87.

tural surroundings. This is why he puts their spectacle on display in an imagined theater performance.²³

Two other passages of his text clearly convey in a literary narrative the animated cultural processes. The first one is a story about the incubation of eggs in Egypt:

"The same (I have been informed about it by so many reliable witnesses that I believe their accounts as though I had seen it with my own eyes) is true also of the following story, which is so widely reported and generally admitted to be true that he would be thought a fool who ventured to throw any doubt upon it. Those who come hither from Egypt – and many come continually – constantly affirm that their eggs are not put under hens, as they are with us, but certain men, whose duty it is, construct in the spring a kind of oven, made of heaped-up manure and dung, to which the whole neighbourhood brings its eggs from far and wide. In this oven the eggs are quickened by the heat of the sun and of the rotting dung, and in due time produce chickens, which are handed back to the person who brought the eggs by those who superintend the business, who do not count them (for this would be too long a task) but weight them out [...]"²⁴

This local custom could not have been simply transplanted to Vienna. Although Busbecq could have taken chickens and eggs and even an Egyptian oven, he could not have executed the same process, which required a combination of all the materials in the interaction with the Egyptian sun. Instead, Busbecq tried to inspire the imagination of his readers by vividly capturing any similarly non-exportable practices. The reader senses that the author is performing an imaginary theater play directly aimed at captivating the inner eye of his audience.

Another part of Busbecq's literary collection is his encounter with two members of a Gothic tribe of the Crimea. Here, too, the author describes a historical process, namely, the process of an extinction of a language and culture.

"At this time I must not forget to tell you what I learned about a tribe which still inhabits the Crimea, and which, I have often been told, showed traces of German origin in speech and habits, and even in facial and bodily appearance. I had, therefore, long been anxious to see a member of this tribe and to produce, if possible, something written in that language. Hitherto, however, I had been unsuccessful. Chance at least to some extent satisfied my desire. Two delegates had been sent from that district to Constantinople to submit some kind of complaint to the Sultan in the name of the tribe. My interpreters happened to meet them, and, remembering what I had told them to do if such a chance occurred, brought them to dine at my house."²⁵

This passage is followed by a short account of their conversation and a description of the tribe given by one of the visitors.

²³ Cf. Mineke Bosch, Hanna Hacker, Ulrike Krampl, "Editorial," *Spektakel, L'Homme. ZfG* 23.1 (2012), 5–9; Claudia Ulbrich, "Tränenspektakel. Die Lebensgeschichte der Luise Charlotte von Schwerin (1731) zwischen Frömmigkeit und Selbsttünzenierung," *Spektakel, L'Homme. ZfG* 23.1 (2012): 27–42.

²⁴ Busbecq, *The Turkish Letters*, 104–105.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 201.

"I will next write down a few of the many Germanic words which he repeated to me; for there were just as many words which were quite different from ours, either from the nature of the language or else because his memory failed him and he gave foreign instead of native words. He prefixed the article tho or the before all substantives. The following are the words which were identical with or only a little different from ours."²⁶

The subsequent list of about 120 words is the last remainder of this Gothic tribe.²⁷ Busbecq tries to locate the tribe's origins within other Germanic tribes. He assembles as many details and characteristics as possible to provide a coherent portrait of this tribe.

To conclude this first close reading, I want to re-emphasize my argument that certain characteristics of clothes – or rather the way in which people wore these clothes as well as other cultural techniques of daily life – could only be presented by Busbecq to his readership through literary description. Mere spectators of any collected pieces he might have brought back with him would not have had the same insight. Returning to the passage I quoted at the outset, Busbecq continues as follows:

"The Turks were quite as astonished at our manner of dress as we at theirs. They wear long robes which reach almost to their ankles, and are not only imposing but seem to add to their stature; our dress, on the other hand, is so short and tight that it discloses the forms of the body, which would be better hidden, and is thus anything but becoming, and besides for some reason or the other, it takes away from a man's height and gives him a stunted appearance."²⁸

For Busbecq, the fact that the Ottoman fashion bestowed a dignified appearance in comparison to the rather stunted one evinced by formal Central European dress was clearly significant. I argue that this would not have been understood as fully had Busbecq simply brought Ottoman clothes back to Vienna. As a collector, Busbecq presented his gathering of Ottoman clothes in a literary fashion to better transmit as many of their attributes as possible.

My reading of the text passages above yields a new perspective on Busbecq's letters. His wide-ranging interests and open-minded descriptions of his experiences in the Ottoman Empire are well known. My argument offers a supplementary interpretation: His educational background as a humanist influenced and structured his perception of, and also his writing about, the Ottoman Empire. However, it was not ultimately solely responsible for his way of writing, for his early modern practices of collecting and organizing rarities and curiosities also obviously had a considerable influence on Busbecq's writing. The pivotal term here seems to be the *curiositas*:²⁹ The reader stumbles upon it in regard to travel,

²⁶ Ibid., 202.

²⁷ MacDonald Stearns, *Crimean Gothic. Analysis and Etymology of the Corpus* (Saratoga, CA: Anna Libri, 1978).

²⁸ Busbecq, *The Turkish Letters*, 61.

²⁹ For an introduction to the concept of curiosity, cf.: Arthur MacGregor, *Curiosity and Enlightenment. Collectors and Collections from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century* (New

finding new knowledge and insight, as well as the cabinets of curiosities themselves. Busbecq seems to have used different strategies for collecting curiosities: while he shipped material objects to the emperors' court and introduced them to scholars, he also transformed cultural practices into literary descriptions so that he could, in effect, carry them with him.

IV.

So far, the reading of Busbecq's description of Ottoman clothing has focused on understanding it as a collected item of an interested humanist. The persona of Busbecq, therefore, has only been viewed as such. However, to understand the full meaning of the paragraph it is not sufficient to simply locate the text and its writer within collection practices of the 16th century. Its author must also be examined as a political advisor and hence in terms of another facet of his identity. When taking into account that his stay in the Ottoman Empire was the result of a diplomatic mission, the need for this broader view becomes self-evident.

The stated contradictions of the introductory quote cannot be resolved by focusing solely on a humanist analysis. When the political dimension is reflected on, it becomes understandable how an observer could combine a fascinating luxurious spectacle with thriftiness: The depicted organized performance of wealth and power in association with simplicity and restraint becomes an achievable model that the political adviser Busbecq is able to present to his emperor. So here we can still see the sparkle in his eyes, not only from curiosity, but also from seeing an opportunity to learn from an adversary on how one can better oneself and overcome defeat.

Therefore, in the following chapter, the quotation will be re-read, more specifically, in terms of the broader context of the *Turkish Letters* and other writings by Busbecq, and emphasis will be given to the political dimension of the passage on Ottoman clothing.

In the introductory quote, Busbecq describes Ottoman clothing as a beautiful spectacle unlike anything he has ever witnessed before. Along with the luxury, he noticed great simplicity and economy. He observes that everyone's dress had the same form, no matter the wearer's rank. Additionally, there were no extra accessories sown into the clothes, which were the custom for very costly Western clothing. The Ottoman dresses he describes in the paragraph were mostly made of embroidered silk or satin, but still cost only a small amount of money. To read and analyze this passage within a diplomatic framework, we only have to look at the larger context in which Busbecq presented this description: The para-

Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); *Curiositas. Welterfahrung und ästhetische Neugierde in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit*, ed. Klaus Krüger (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2002); Neil Kenny, *Curiosity in Early Modern Europe. Word Histories* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998).

graph portrays Busbecq's first audience at the Sultan's court upon his arrival in the army's winter camp in Amasya.³⁰ In order to demonstrate a political dimension within the *Turkish Letters* in general and the paragraph on Ottoman clothing in particular, special attention should be given to Busbecq's curriculum vitae and his writings.

First, I will take an even closer look at Busbecq's career as a whole. He was a counselor at the imperial court in Vienna, and undertook missions on the court's behalf. Like many other humanists, Busbecq started to work at a noble court after finishing his university studies. Following Christine Trembl's work on humanists, there were five different functions for learned humanists at court: secretary, diplomat, councilman, preceptor, and possibly at the end of a successful career, chancellor.³¹ Trembl points out that none of the people she studied exercised only one of the listed functions at a time or one after another.³² Busbecq's life at court follows precisely this trajectory: As mentioned above, in 1552, Busbecq entered the service of Ferdinand I without a specific position (*Extraordinari Dienen*).³³ Of special value were his erudition and his command of languages,³⁴ which led Ferdinand I to appoint Busbecq as his *ordinarius orator*³⁵ to the Ottoman court. After successfully negotiating a six-year extension of the peace treaty of 1547 and returning just in time for Maximilian II's coronation as German king in Frankfurt in 1562, he was made a counselor of Ferdinand's Aulic Council (*Reichshofrat*).³⁶ In the protocols of the council, his name is first found on July 10,

³⁰ Busbecq, *The Turkish Letters*, see 58–62, quotes 61.

³¹ Christine Trembl, *Humanistische Gemeinschaftsbildung. Sozio-kulturelle Untersuchung zur Entstehung eines neuen Gelehrtenstandes in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1989), 17–20.

³² Ibid., 18.

³³ Friedrich Firnhaber, "Der Hofstaat König Ferdinands I. im Jahre 1554," *Archiv für die Kunde Österreichischer Geschichtsquellen* 26 (1861): 1–28 (p. 28).

³⁴ Charles Thornton Forster and F. H. Blackburne Daniell, *The Life and Letters of Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq. Seigneur of Busbecque, Knight and Imperial Ambassador*, vol. 2 (London: C. K. Paul, 1881); see Ferdinand's letter to Busbecq on April 3, 1564 (Patent of Knighthood) 295–299 (p. 296).

³⁵ *Ordinarius orator* is the title Busbecq uses himself for his position in Constantinople, see: Busbecq, *Legationis Turcicae epistolae quatuor*, 49. Since the development of the Habsburg diplomatic policy towards residing diplomats, in contrast to occasion-orientated legates, was not yet finalized, the title ambassador seems inappropriate. On Habsburg diplomatic policy in the 16th century, cf.: Christina Lutter, *Politische Kommunikation an der Wende vom Mittelalter zur Neuzeit. Die diplomatischen Beziehungen zwischen der Republik Venedig und Maximilian I. (1495–1508)* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1998); on the diplomatic relations between the Roman and the Ottoman empires, cf.: Ernst Dieter Petritsch, "Tribut oder Ehrengeschenk? Ein Beitrag zu den habsburgisch-osmanischen Beziehungen in der zweiten Hälfte des 16. Jahrhunderts," in *Archiv und Forschung. Das Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv in seiner Bedeutung für die Geschichte Österreichs und Europas*, ed. Elisabeth Springer and Leopold Kammerhofer (Vienna: Verlag für Geschichte und Politik, 1993), 49–58.

³⁶ Zweder R.W.M. von Martels, "On his Majesty's Service. Augerius Busbequius, Courtier and Diplomat of Maximilian II.," in *Kaiser Maximilian II. Kultur und Politik im 16. Jahrhundert*, ed. Friedrich Edelmayer and Alfred Kohler (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1992), 167–181 (p. 174).

1562.³⁷ After Ferdinand's death in 1564, Busbecq stayed on the council until 1567.³⁸ In 1563, however, Busbecq accompanied two sons of Maximilian II, Rudolf (the later emperor Rudolf II) and Ernest to the Spanish court of Phillip II, where they were sent to be educated. During this time, Busbecq held the title “Marshal of the Hall” or *Praefectus depiferum*.³⁹ As mentioned above, Busbecq resumed his function as a councilman after returning from Spain. In 1566, Vienna was in a state of crisis as a new war had broken out with the Ottomans. Emperor Maximilian II was in need of good counsel regarding the Ottomans, which may explain why Busbecq was called back from Spain.

Nevertheless, Busbecq regained his position at Maximilian's court in 1567. There, he was responsible for overseeing the education and the household of Maximilian's four younger sons, since the emperor needed a “Catholic but moderate man to reconcile the demands of the Empress Maria and Philip II”⁴⁰ in order to provide the princes with a Catholic education. In 1570–71, he visited Spain again to accompany the princes Albert and Wenceslaus for their education at court. He travelled back to Vienna with the princes Rudolf and Ernest. In 1574, after the death of the French king Charles IX, Busbecq was ordered to Paris as seneschal of the household and possessions of Elisabeth, daughter of Maximilian II and widow to the king. Although Elisabeth returned to Vienna, Busbecq spent most of the rest of his life in Paris. Historians are not certain whether Busbecq was appointed official legate of Rudolf II to the French court after Maximilian's death in 1576, but he resumed writing letters with important political information and analysis to the emperor.⁴¹ The letters Busbecq sent to Maximilian and Rudolf from Paris clearly show that even though he was far away from the court in Vienna, he was still involved in decision-making processes. One example is the appointment of Hugo Blotius, a fellow Flemish man, as the first official librarian of the imperial library in Vienna.⁴² Busbecq recommended Blotius in a letter to Maximilian from Paris in 1575.⁴³ It was during this time in Paris that

³⁷ Oswald von Gschließer, *Der Reichshofrat. Bedeutung und Verfassung, Schicksal und Besetzung einer obersten Reichsbehörde von 1559 bis 1806* (Vienna: Holzhausen, 1942), 108.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 108, 111.

³⁹ Von Martels, *On his Majesty's Service*, 175.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁴¹ See: Busbecq: “Epistolarum Legationis Gallicae,” in *Busbecq, Ogier Gislain de: Omnia quae extant opera. Um eine Einleitung vermehrter Nachdruck der 1740 bei Jo. Brandmüller in Basel erschienen Ausgabe*, Einleitung Rudolf Neck (Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1968). This edition is the easiest to access and based on the Elvizar edition of 1633, which is also the basis of Edward Seymore Forster's translation. An English translation of the letters from Paris can be found in: F. H. Forster: *The Life and Letters*, vol. 2 (London: C. K. Paul, 1881).

⁴² Josef Stummvoll, *Geschichte der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek*, 81–127.

⁴³ Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Handschriftensammlung, Cod. 9737, 15, fol. 80r. An English translation may be found in: Forster: *The Life and Letters*, 2: 73f.; on the importance of letters of recommendation for acquiring positions, see: Tremblay, *Humanistische Gemeinschaftsbildung*, 77–98.

Busbecq finished the final version of the *Turkish Letters*, which were published in their first complete edition by Beys in Paris in 1589.⁴⁴

As this portrait of Busbecq's career at the imperial court in Vienna shows, Busbecq held a great number of positions throughout his life, proving his value to such a degree that three Roman Emperors trusted his advice⁴⁵ and judgment as an expert⁴⁶ on a variety of political subjects. Research on the humanists at court suggests that Busbecq had an exemplary career, having held positions in the fields of diplomacy, education, and policy making. In all of these positions, his political advice was specifically requested, and Busbecq offered it up in quantity.

Not only were the *Turkish Letters* and his important scholarly discoveries linked to his stay in the Ottoman Empire, but so was another important work: the *Exclamatio, sive de re militari contra Turcam instituenda consilium*.⁴⁷ In this text, Busbecq conceived of a standing army that would be trained and educated for many years before entering the "war against the Turk." This text, however, has not yet received adequate attention from historians.

The *Exclamatio* was first published in 1581, along with the first *Turkish Letter*. When all four letters were published in a complete edition in 1589, the *Exclamatio* was further appended to it. This means that Busbecq probably wrote this text around the same time he wrote the description of his stay in Amasya and thus also the quote cited above on the Ottoman clothing.⁴⁸ In my view, Busbecq gives an account of his experiences within the *Turkish Letters*, on the one hand, to secure his scholarly position within the republic of letters and, on the other, as a political advisor. As the title already suggests, the *Exclamatio* can only be read as a political document. Being the humanist that he was, he used a variety of ancient models such as Lycurgus and Caesar. The most detail, however, is given to the Ottoman model for an elite troop that shows great discipline and diligence, modesty and morals, but also strength and self-confidence: the Janissaries. Busbecq in fact already points out in the *Turkish Letters* the exemplary character of

⁴⁴ Busbecq, *Legationis Turcicae epistolae quatuor*.

⁴⁵ Christian Wieland, "Gelehrte Räte," in *Enzyklopädie der Neuzeit* 4 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2006), col. 380–384.

⁴⁶ Frank Rexroth, "Das späte Mittelalter und die Anfänge der Europäischen Expertenkultur," *Jahrbuch der Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen* (2006): 19–25 (p. 24); Klaus van Eickels, "Legitimierung von Entscheidungen durch Experten. Friedrich II. als Gesetzgeber im Königreich Sizilien und als Richter nördlich der Alpen," in *Herrschaftsräume, Herrschaftspraxis und Kommunikation zur Zeit Kaiser Friedrichs II.*, ed. Knut Görich, Jann Keupp, and Theo Broeckmann (Munich: Utz, 2008), 391–405; see also: Jens Häsel, "Gelehrter," in *Enzyklopädie der Neuzeit* 4 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2006), col. 395–397 (p. 395).

⁴⁷ Busbecq, *Omnia quae extant opera*, *Exclamatio*: 374–428. Unfortunately, no English translation exists.

⁴⁸ The *Encyclopedia of the Renaissance and the Reformation* dates the composition of the *Exclamatio* to 1576. No other publication, however, dates the text to any other time than before its first publication in 1581. Thomas Goddard Bergin et al., "Busbecq, Ogier Ghiselin de," in *Encyclopedia of the Renaissance and the Reformation* (New York: Market House Books, 2004), 77.

the Ottoman army: their “strength unimpaired, experience and practice in fighting, a veteran soldiery, habituation of victory, endurance of toil, unity, order, discipline, frugality, and watchfulness.” In the travelogue, he nevertheless does not devise a strategy for fighting the Ottomans, but rather paints a picture of despair about possible outcomes of future military encounters between Christian and Ottoman troops.⁴⁹

Through his experiences at the Ottoman court, Busbecq was familiar with the procedures behind the formation of the Janissary corps. The Ottomans collected young boys from Christian families in their South-Eastern European territories, the so-called *devshirme*.⁵⁰ Like the Roman army in its time, only skill and practice enabled the Ottoman army to control the huge terrain that was under their rule in the 16th century.⁵¹ Busbecq portrays in great detail how the Ottomans collected, educated, and treated the boys and young men. He also describes the different positions that were available for them, not only in the military but also in the administration. For Busbecq, this army, which had many years of physical and educational training, was the model that the emperor and other Christian commanders needed to use in the future when fighting the Ottomans.⁵² It seems that many readers were convinced by Busbecq’s argument, even a century after the first publication, since the *Exclamatio* was published in at least two single editions shortly before, and at the time of, the second Ottoman siege on Vienna.⁵³

In placing Busbecq’s quoted description of Ottoman clothing in its overall textual framework, the political dimension of the paragraph becomes more obvious. In all of his writings, Busbecq underscores the discipline and organization of the Ottoman army; he also points out that the Ottomans themselves had many virtues such as simplicity and modesty, which was also reflected in their clothing style.

V.

Questions of identity, concepts of personhood, and senses of belonging are central to the work of many early modern historians – especially to the work of many of the contributors to this volume. An important new term that has enabled us to better understand and portray our historical actors is “multiple cultural associations.” An approach which recognizes that a person belongs to a

⁴⁹ Busbecq, *The Turkish Letters*, 111–112.

⁵⁰ V. L. Ménage “Devshirme,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 210–213.

⁵¹ Busbecq, *Omnia quae extant opera*, 401.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 412–421.

⁵³ Martin Wrede, *Das Reich und seine Feinde. Politische Feindbilder in der reichspatriotischen Publizistik zwischen Westfälischem Frieden und Siebenjährigem Krieg* (Mainz: von Zabern, 2004), 105–107 (p. 105, note 81).

multitude of cultural groups and settings reveals the multi-contextuality of the introductory quotation and its author, despite their apparent contradictions.

In this essay, I placed Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq in two different, but not separate or even separable surroundings. First, I read Busbecq's descriptions of Ottoman clothing as part of his collection of curiosities. In this way, he was able to follow his interests as a scholar who was fascinated by anything new, different, and, in a word, exotic. His wide range of scholarly interests extended from finding antiquities, examining flora and fauna and linguistic studies, to observing cultural practices. Looking at the importance of the emergence of collections and their preservation in cabinets of curiosity in the 16th century, a connection between Busbecq's own collection of material goods and his collection of cultural practices in the *Turkish Letters* seems inevitable. As I have discussed, Busbecq could not include Ottoman dress into his collection of materials, since they would then forfeit a great part of their authenticity. After all, the characteristics of the dress were linked to its use in a given performance and presented in the cultural setting to which it belonged. In a cabinet, the pieces of clothing would be "dead," only hollow objects. To have the full effect on the observer, they needed to be part of an imaginary theater performance and therefore – in Busbecq's case – could only be transmitted through literature, letting the reader marvel and wonder about the "legendary Orient."

Secondly, I read the quotation – contextualizing it in a broader setting – in reference to Busbecq's political advice to the Holy Roman Empire on how to succeed in the war against the Ottomans. In placing the quote at the Sultan's army's winter camp in Amasya, it obtains not only a political, but even a military dimension. From this vantage point, Busbecq was able to present the Ottoman Empire as an organized system characterized by reason, discipline, and thrift. On the basis of his detailed account throughout his work, he presented his advice on how to overcome the Ottoman military superiority.

Through a close reading, the introductory quotation about Ottoman clothing loses its contradictory quality as the multiple aspects of the text and its author are gradually illuminated. On the one hand, the text should be understood as the writing of a learned humanist who used his text to present a collection of cultural practices that otherwise could not be exported back to the Roman Empire for public display. On the other hand, the author was clearly a diplomat and as such was involved in policy making. A text by such an author thus also has to be understood as a form of political advice. In contextualizing Busbecq and his writings in these different settings, new multi-faceted interpretations become possible: The Ottoman dress can be fascinating, spectacular, luxurious, and even extraordinarily beautiful, while at the same time thrifty, rational, and well-organized.

Through a broad network of friendships, correspondence, visits, and publications, the republic of letters was formed by early modern humanists who worked as teachers and scholars, but also as counselors and advisors at court. Through

their writings, knowledge transfer shifted from being local and oral to omnipresent and universal. The knowledge that the members of the republic of letters collected and organized was communicated in letters and books, and libraries and collections functioned as reservoirs of knowledge.⁵⁴ In writing the *Turkish Letters* and the *Exclamatio, sive de re militari contra Turcam instituenda consilium*, Busbecq recorded his collected experiences and the conclusions he drew from them. He also inscribed into these works his persona, his status and the legacy by which he wanted to be remembered.

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⁵⁴ Martin Gierl, “Gelehrte Medien,” in *Enzyklopädie der Neuzeit* 4 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2006), col. 377–380.

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