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## **Caricatures as a Sphere of Communication in the Late- and Post-Ottoman Context**

### **1. Caricatures as a Historical Source**

In the ‘visual age’ (‘Visuelles Zeitalter’),<sup>1</sup> in which we currently find ourselves, images as sources (‘Bildquellen’) are more important than ever before. These images include various forms of graphic representations, from sketches to portraits to paintings, from photography to film and video. Just as memes and other visual materials are of great importance for today’s producers and recipients to express, share, and form their opinions, caricatures were and still are a medium for positioning oneself on social, cultural, and political issues and helping to shape them. The caricature does not (only) want to inform or illustrate, it wants to enlighten, uncover, denounce, expose, stimulate reflection, and sometimes also call to action. By assessing a certain—usually current—situation from an individual point of view, it contains a factual and value judgment.<sup>2</sup> Caricatures are therefore an ideal source for researchers from various disciplines to gain insights into events, views, and ideologies that lie in the past. In academia, caricatures are increasingly being taken seriously as an independent source with their significance and impact as an important form of communication.<sup>3</sup>

However, caricatures are not isolated sources that focus on certain topics without any context, but rather they may refer to each other and to caricatures published in other regions and language areas, even distant ones. Caricatures often react to topics that are also discussed in daily newspapers and offer their own comments or criticism. Furthermore, they may also have a connection to other cultural and social areas such as literature, theatre, and art.<sup>4</sup> However, these can only be understood if one is aware of the developments in time and space. It is therefore not enough to look at the caricatures in isolation. In order to understand them and analyse the statements they embody or address or to use them as sources for social-historical study, they must be examined in their specific and broader contexts. Depending on their complexity and interconnectedness, some of

1 Paul 2016.

2 See Barth and Schnakenberg 2021.

3 Most recently published in the context of the special issue: Yolaçan 2025.

4 Two early examples are Teodor Kasap for the Ottoman and Ya’qūb Şanū’ for the Egyptian case. These caricaturists are known equally for publishing satirical journals and for translating and authoring plays, and both of them spent years of exile in Paris after being targeted for their satirical critique of politics. See, e.g., Anna Kollatz and Veruschka Wagner (eds.) 2025; see on Şanū’ Etmüller 2012. On the interplay of nightlife, cabaret, and (satirical) journalism in Cairo, see Cormack 2021.

the caricatures can be ‘read’ and understood in an ad hoc fashion, while others can only be deciphered after examining the circumstances and micro-events close to their publication date, as they were addressed to the public of the time and were linked to contemporary issues, often even daily regional news. If caricatures are to be examined as historical sources, it is therefore essential to undertake a thorough contextual analysis on the basis of primary and secondary sources, as this allows for the decoding of the statements and meanings condensed within them.

## 2. Late- and Post-Ottoman Context

The Arabic-, Turkish-, and Ottoman-speaking world may serve as an example here, with Istanbul as the capital of the Ottoman Empire and Cairo as the capital of Egypt, which had been relatively independent of Ottoman rule since the reign of Muḥammad ‘Alī Pasha (r. 1805–1849), being its most important and globally best-connected metropolises at the time. Both capitals would become centres of (satirical) journalism and cartooning from the last third of the 19th century onwards. Colonial and imperialist interests and conflicts between ‘European’ superpowers and the Ottoman Empire characterised the eastern Mediterranean in particular. The emic reform endeavours that began in the second half of the 19th century, which led to the Tanzimat period in the Ottoman Empire and encouraged members of the upper classes in the eastern Mediterranean and in the Levant and Egypt in particular to seek to catch up with Europe, such as in the areas of education and ‘technical progress,’ also set the tone for society, culture, and, not least, politics in the entire region. This resulted, for example, in establishing special schools, especially for future civil servants, and in sending students to Europe.

Ultimately, the people in the region were confronted with a variety of influences that were often—from a Eurocentric historical perspective, but also from emic voices of the time—labelled as ‘Western,’ but also as ‘modern’ or ‘progressive.’ From the very beginning, however, this contact should be understood as an exchange that was actively pursued by at least certain sections of the population and thus quickly translated the influences brought to the region from outside into something ‘of its own.’ These processes began in the 1850s–1870s and, at least in this region, extended well into the 1930s; we will refer to this period with the term ‘the long 19th century.’ However, it would fall far short of the mark to view the interdependencies and interactions of this period purely as a ‘transformation of the world’ triggered solely by Europe; rather, we should assume globally networked, multi-layered processes of exchange and translation, which did not end with the close of the 19th century, but can also be observed, for instance, in Egyptian and Ottoman caricatures of the 1920s.

Unfortunately, the sometimes Eurocentric perspective of academia, but of course also the obvious language barrier for fields such as history (whether local or global) and political science, continues to obscure the view of these emic processes all too often. This also holds true for other regions of the world, such as China, Northern Europe, and the Balkans. Cartoons and caricatures published in regions requiring specialised language knowledge are still not sufficiently recognised in the international academic debate. The

same naturally also applies to a greater extent to public perception outside the region. But even though some time has passed since the appearance of Shmuel N. Eisenstadt's concept of multiple modernities, even though researchers such as Sebastian Conrad have problematised and deconstructed these Eurocentric positions from a global historical perspective, there is still much to be done before we even come close to a balanced perspective on the phenomena mentioned, which must first and foremost include a complete reappraisal of emic positionings.

Here we come to another desideratum. Many aspects of the larger developments of the 'long 19th century' have already been extensively researched; however, this is less true for the contemporary satirical engagement with the aforementioned influences in the Middle East, as well as in other regions mentioned above. Although numerous interesting individual studies are available, these have so far mostly remained relegated to a small niche and have not been included in broader research discourses. Likewise, research in emic languages, such as Arabic or Turkish, often goes unconsidered in international academic discourses.

The Arabic, Turkish, and Ottoman worlds in particular offer a veritable treasure trove of caricatures, which have been published in different forms of print media from the mid-19th century to the present day, including newspapers, (satire) journals, or postcards. However, although a heightened interest in the national history of caricature can be observed both in the Turkish Republic and Egypt<sup>5</sup> and in spite of the fact that research on eminent caricaturists has been conducted in both countries, visual satire has not yet been established as a recognised field of interest in Middle East studies on an international level. This is all the more astonishing considering that the history of satirical journals in the late and post-Ottoman Empire and Egypt went through significant ups and downs. Closely linked to political events and the mechanisms of censorship, there were profound fluctuations in the volume and frequency of satirical publications across languages and regions that constitute an indispensable part of the political and social history of the respective times and places. These fluctuations may serve as a starting point for modern research to tap into alternative histories and to follow strands of action or discourse that ceased to exist at a certain point. Reading caricatures as sources could thus enable research that takes into account the multiple voices active at a certain point in time and that thereby

5 In Egypt, a number of associations and private initiatives are engaged in both fostering contemporary caricature culture and supporting caricaturists who, just like their ancestors of the turn of the century, are often subject to pressure and persecution. Among these associations, the *Al-Jāmi'a al-Miṣriyya li-l-Kārikātūr*/Egyptian Caricature Association hosted the 8th International Caricature Gathering in Egypt in 2024. The Fayoum Art Centre, founded in 2006 on a private initiative in the village of Tunis, Fayoum, near Cairo, stands out for running the first museum dedicated to caricature in Egypt and for organising an annual international competition for caricatures and satirical portraits (<https://fayoumartcenter.com>). Turkey is home to the Kadıköy Municipality Cartoon House (Karikatür Evi), which regularly offers drawing courses and hosts exhibitions, as well as the Cartoon and Satire Museum (Karikatür ve Mizah Müzesi), which provides insights into the history of cartoons in Turkey and is dedicated to important cartoonists. There is also the Association for Cartoonist (Karikatürcüler Derneği). Furthermore, the Turhan Selçuk Culture House (Turhan Selçuk Kültür Evi) recently opened in 2025.

works against the historian's urge to construct a coherent narrative 'from beginning to end.' The polyphony of contemporary discourses can even be observed despite censorship efforts, and the latter may at times result in a certain polyphony within the same publication. Some journals were banned within just a few months of their first publication and their editors and authors were imprisoned. Teodor Kasap, for example, was sent to prison for a caricature on the subject of censorship.<sup>6</sup> Some of the magazines were renamed in order to circumvent the bans, while others were published abroad. Jacob Sanua's Egyptian journal *Abū Naḍḍāra Zarqā*, for example, was printed first in Cairo, but later in Paris under a multitude of names, all playing with the elements of the editor's 'blue glasses,' sometimes adding 'Egyptian' to the name. Other editors and caricaturists, such as Ahmet Rifki, changed their location and continued their work and activity.<sup>7</sup>

Caricatures and their illustrators were shaped by the dynamics and mobility movements of their time. They were engaged in an exchange with European caricaturists and publishers, which influenced the style, form, and themes of their caricatures. On the European side, a vivid interest in the region is also visible in the time, and caricaturists took the region and its people for a topic in many caricatures, in a way that extended beyond addressing colonial political interests.<sup>8</sup>

### 3. Content and Aim of this Issue

This special issue of *Diyâr* is the result of a workshop that took place at the Karikatür Evi (Caricature House) in Istanbul in March 2024. The event that was titled 'Caricatures as a Sphere of Communication in the Late- and Post-Ottoman Context' was organised by Veruschka Wagner (University of Bonn/Bilgi University Istanbul) and Anna Kollatz (University of Heidelberg). The historical time frame of the workshop was the late- and post-Ottoman period. This time is determined by upheavals and change and was influenced by global events to an extent almost unparalleled by any other. As research on this period (up to and after the founding of the Turkish Republic) is largely considered to be fragmented, the aim of our research is to counteract this by focusing on this inter-war period and its aftermath up to the 1930s—which was moreover affected by colonial interests—as a coherent time of investigation. Furthermore, we would like to illuminate the late- and post-Ottoman context from different perspectives by examining caricatures from journals from different regions that were both part of this context and outside of it.<sup>9</sup> We therefore present caricatures from Ottoman (Turkish and Armenian) and Arabic sources, but also from Finnish satirical journals.

We believe that caricatures published in media of different languages and from different parts of the region are a suitable and valuable source for gaining insights into different

6 Bostancı 1852–1919, 68.

7 See the article by Eberhard Dziobek in this volume.

8 See the articles by Juho Korhonen in this volume.

9 We are aware that we are only covering a portion of the regions and languages that belonged to the Ottoman Empire or its successor states. Transregional caricature research is still in its infancy and must be built up bit by bit.

aspects of daily life and public sphere. These caricatures will provide us with information about different perceptions and meanings of discourses on political, historical, and social issues. Caricatures from ‘outside’ are particularly suitable for addressing the topic of ethnic, cultural, or national stereotypes and dealing with the ‘other,’ which is why we are also including them in this special issue.

To examine caricatures from the late Ottoman and post-Ottoman contexts from different angles, both as outcomes and as drivers of social discourses, this special issue contains five contributions. The individual contributions, written by people from different disciplines and at different stages of their careers, cover a period beginning in the 1850s, moving through the first decade of the 20th century, and ending in the 1920s and 1930s. In chronological order, Elif Kiraz focuses on caricatures from the first humour periodical published in the Ottoman Empire, *Zuarchakhos*, and in *Tiyatro* (1874) and *Latife* (1874). Kiraz deals with questions on morals in the context of modernisation. Juho Korhonen’s contribution presents an analysis of caricatures from the Grand Duchy of Finland in the period 1900 to 1910, depicting another perspective on the Ottomans from the last phase of the Ottoman Empire. Eberhard Dziobek and Katrin Köster both contribute from an Arabic perspective. Eberhard Dziobek will provide insights into the Egyptian *al-Fukāha* from the 1920s and its main caricaturist Ali Rifqi, who dealt with issues such as gender and technology in his drawings. Katrin Köster uses the example of the Lebanese *al-Maraḍ* newspaper to show the role of classic media, in particular newspapers and magazines, in the everyday culture of post-Ottoman regions, and the importance and place of editors in the political sphere. Anna Kollatz and Veruschka Wagner make a joint contribution on visions of the future in Egyptian and Ottoman caricatures. They focus on a series of caricatures in the Egyptian magazine *al-Fukāha* and various individual presentations in Ottoman satirical journals of the 1920s.

The contributions bring together not only sources in different languages but also different disciplines: Sociology, Philosophy, Ottoman Studies, Translation Studies, Middle Eastern Studies, and Arabic and Islamic Studies. This special issue therefore offers a trans-disciplinary and transcultural approach that emphasises the importance of caricatures, which are often perceived as less important than other written sources and are therefore still neglected in research.

The individual contributions either focus on specific publications (Korhonen, Kiraz), on a single newspaper/editor (Köster), or even on just one caricature (Dziobek, at least in the analysis), or they concentrate on a specific topic and make use of several journals (Kollatz and Wagner). What is important is that the caricature as a source is brought into the focus of the investigation here. In this context, however, it is also essential to consider in which medium the caricature was published. It makes a difference whether it was published in satirical magazines or in the ‘serious’ press, as this has an effect on aspects such as thematic scope, target group, and function. Relevant questions in this context are: Are political controversies included? Is there censorship that restricts the subject matter? Are other topics used as substitutes, such as women as a vehicle for social and political discourse?<sup>10</sup>

10 Wagner (forthcoming).

The articles in this volume show that in interaction with censorship, as well as in response to the needs of the readership, caricaturistic publications range from sharp criticism, which may have landed publishers or artists in jail, to softened humorous illustrations that merely make fun of uncontroversial topics, such as the role of women. Visual satire as a communication tool seems to have been widely accepted both by authorities and the (independent) press. However, censorship (including self-censorship) would critically observe and sanction visual satire the moment it crossed political or moral boundaries. Thus, the genre found itself in a constant state of probing the possible range of criticism and adjustment to limits. This constant need to maintain a balance between the two poles of humorous illustration and caricature leads to an interplay of accepted, but innocent content and sharp criticism that risked punishment. It is in field of this tension that the characteristic ambiguity of the genre lies. The wide range of functions and topics that caricatures might address and react to is comprised, in the source languages, in one overarching term: *karikatür/karikatir*. In this volume, we try to dissect these functions and characters, on the level of analytic terminology, using *visual satire* as an overarching term and specifying *humorous illustration* for the ‘innocent’ type of content and *caricature* for the critical sort.

In addition to the wide range of topics that are addressable when examining caricatures, this special issue also shows the different approaches that are possible when using caricatures as sources for examination. The contributions reveal transregional and interrelationships, whether thematic, stylistic, or linked to individuals. The caricaturist Rifqi, who was first active in Istanbul and later in Egypt, serves as a suitable example of this type of connection. Caricatures that have been directly adopted and provided with translations or their own inscriptions demonstrate very clear links.

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