

Visions of the future in Ottoman Europe (15th – 20th century)

Conference of the study group „Ottoman Europe“ (22.-24.11.2018)

Ruhr-Universität Bochum

Historians who seek to understand the people of the past have to know their visions of the future – visions that oftentimes differed from the future that those people were confronted with in their actual life.

In his famous work “Die Entdeckung der Zukunft”, Lucian Hölscher, pioneer and most prominent researcher of historical visions of the future in the European modern period, dates the historico-philosophical disclosure of the future back to the 18th century while pointing at two remarkable turns around 1770 and 1830. According to Hölscher, the crucial driving force for the change from pre-modern to modern visions of the future was the progressing historicization of the world through modern historical science since the early modern period. Due to this development, the change of the world was no longer considered to be the result of Christian determination and eschatological expectation, but a consequence of historical events that for their parts were now increasingly interpreted as progress.

As every essential new approach in historical science, Hölscher’s argument regarding the discovery of the future was criticized – one major point of criticism being his focus on elitist cultures. Other historians pointed to the fact that even after the implementation of the modern concept of the future older ideas still continued to exist. Following Peter Burke, many historians referred to the rationality of the early modern period and the ability of many people in this period to anticipate and plan future developments for the long-term. These last considerations particularly comply with the goals of the study group Ottoman Europe which focusses on the research of South-Eastern Europe in the early modern period.

From the perspective of the history of Ottoman Europe, which is not merged into the normative history of Western Europe, the following questions arise: When and under what circumstances did the change from eschatological expectation to the secular and modern vision of future occur there? What were the driving forces of that change? Were all pre-modern visions of the future just as unconnected to the emergence of the modern concept of the “progressive” future since about 1770? Were there Ottoman-European specifics to the visions of the future that might have resulted from the competitive co-existence of Islam, Orthodoxy and Catholicism? What was the relation between the “indigenous” visions of the future and those that the conquerors and hegemonial powers from different parts of the world brought with them? Were there waves in which the political-social visions of the future unfolded as was the case in Western Europe according to Hölscher?

With the annual conference 2018 of the study group Ottoman Europe at Ruhr-Universität Bochum from the 22nd to the 24th November that year we want to apply Lucien Hölscher’s approach to South-Eastern Europe and thus close an academic void. We are open for suggestions that – inspired by the concept of “visions of the future” – unlike Hölscher himself also focus on the pre- and the early modern period and their continuation into the 19th and the 20th century. Please send suggestions (frame of about 2000 to 3000 characters) for

presentations of about 30 minutes in German or English to the following e-mail-address until March 30th, 2018:

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