The Point of Departure: Just Why Start in the 15th Century?

The topic of my doctoral thesis lies at the turn from the middle ages to early modern times. It ties two phenomenons together that each has already resulted in a copious research. Yet, a close examination of their correlation was attempted only in rudimentary form. Since Wilfried Schulze's studies on the impact of the Turkish threat on the Holy Roman Empire in the late 16th century researchers take it for granted that letterpress printing played a pivotal role in the formation of an early modern public sphere. Schulze attributed a distinctly propagandist and discursive function to the war against the Ottoman Turks that helped to stabilise the political institutions of the Holy Roman Empire and served as analytical category for the emergence of a political public sphere. Moreover, with Carl Göllner's repertory, beginning in 1501, there is a fundamental work of reference for anti-Turkish print products (the so-called Türkendrucke) available. Göllner collected more than 2400 print editions and evaluated their relevance for the formation of a public opinion, anticipating Schulze's ideas. In general, the Turkish problem and its “media preparation” seem to be adequately researched for the time from 1501 onwards. Less can be said about the approximately 50 years prior to this date. For despite the remarkable coincidence between the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the invention of the printing press at roughly the same time, the correlation between the war against the Turks and the media change in the 15th century was of hardly any interest to researchers so far – and that despite the fact that Falk Eisermann recently observed “how much the 1450ies and 1460ies were influenced by the Turkish threat, how much its topicality characterized the public discourse and how well it was understood to integrate the new printing technique into the on-going propaganda machine.”¹

Therefore my doctoral thesis addresses the question, whether the preoccupation with the Ottoman enemy can be associated more closely with the usage of the new printing technology in Europe in the 15th century. And if so, what practical forms and consequences did this relationship have?

The Approach: Compiling and Evaluating Extant Material

As the reason for the lack of scholarly interest was not least the lack of a systematic collection of source material, my approach was a heuristic compilation of all extant editions and copies of anti-Turkish texts that have been printed in Europe by the year 1500. Therewith I accomplished basic groundwork and bridged the gap to Göllner’s repertory. I collected 841 editions and nearly 8000 copies of anti-Turkish prints that I converted into a “Catalogue of European Türkendrucke of the 15th century”. The large amount of editions and copies in my catalogue testifies to the importance of the war against the Turks in the political and social debate of the 15th century and shows what medium authors soon preferred to discuss the Turkish problem.

Statistical analysis of the catalogue resulted in some instructive observations: Along with a continuous production of texts on the Turks there are peak demands that correspond to the political situation. This means, that important events of the Ottoman expansion were directly reflected in the print medium. Contemporaries heavily relied on the new technology to treat the war against the Turks. Comparing the production times of all extant editions makes it obvious that the conquest of Negroponte in 1470 caused a critical reflection of the precarious political situation that appeared for the first time in print. Since 1470 texts about the Turks were published regularly – sometimes more and sometimes less editions each year – but they were never suspended. A survey of the places of printing confirms that print shops in the Holy Roman Empire and in Italy, being the regions where the crusade against the Turks was most fiercely preached, produced a fortified amount of the Türkendrucke. The statistical distribution of languages in which the texts were written, corresponds to another observation regarding the main syndicate that stood behind the production of the Türkendrucke: Almost 75% of the Türkendrucke derive from church administration (indulgences, papal bulls and briefs, tax mandates etc.) and were consequently drawn up in Latin. Only to a forth did other text genres such as anti-Turkish speeches, treatises, news coverage, poems or drama add up. The majority of these were likewise written in Latin. German and Italian texts were also gradually published but their numbers could never compete with the Latin documents. The Turkish issue was one primarily treated in Latin, the language of church and science.
The War Against the Turks and the Media Change in the 15th Century

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Interpreting Statistical Data and Putting Flesh on the Bony Figures:

I further interpreted the statistical results on the basis of elaborate text and transmission studies. After an introduction to the earliest Türkendrucke – mainly broadsides that were used in the service of war propaganda – I focus on the three topics oratory, politics and the printing press, war and the media and knowledge and the media. My examination of the Türkendrucke centre around the history of their dissemination, transmission and reception. I follow the war against the Turks as a “media event” over the first 50 years after the invention of the printing press. The individual studies aim to put writings on the Turks and letterpress printing in a mutual relationship. They are about contextualising the early products of the printing press in the historical and social history of the late middle ages, about their interrelation with war preparations and war propaganda and about the media change embracing an European perspective. As with Heraclitus the war is the father of all things, I perform a critical inspection of the war against the Turks as driving force behind processes of technological innovation and cultural communication.

Oratory, Politics and the Printing Press The humanists’ rediscovery of antique rhetoric and the universal revaluation of oratory during the 15th century had brought about a general increase of public addresses. The politically explosive Turkish issue gave professional rhetoricians an excellent opportunity to display their talents. Either at the great German Reichstage 1454/55 or in front of the papal see in Rome there were plenty of occasions to speak of – or better against the Turks. The prominent subject-matter of many orations was the question, if one should undertake a war in favour of the Christian religion. A question that was virtually pure rhetoric with regard to the deep-felt anxiety described in Western sources. Indeed, public opinion and popular politics openly advocated a collective crusade against the enemy of faith and the menace of the Western states. In both the political and rhetorical context a pragmatic, anti-Turkish attitude was dominant. Proceedings in the Turkish issue were never unbiased or open-minded. So, the basic questions of this section were: What function and scope had these public orations, if not to convince a politically influential audience of the need to take up arms against the Turks? What perception and impact did these speeches have, considering their wide dissemination in early printing, surely some way off the original communicative situation.
I have collected a dozen orations against the Turks that often appeared in several print editions during the second half of the 15th century. The sum of extant copies adds up to a total of around 1500. Next to ecclesiastical texts and treatises orations amount to the greatest group of printed texts concerning the Turks. On the basis of two examples I illustrated the poles between which this abundance of printed texts unfold their effects. Enea Silvio Piccolomini's famous orations are an example for anti-Turkish propaganda as quasi “byproduct” of humanistic interests in collecting texts. Long before they were first published within the print edition of Piccolomini's *Epistulae* in 1478 they circulated widely in handwritten manuscripts and manuscript collections. Piccolomini's most famous *De Clade Constantinopolitana* was never printed as stand alone text. However, it was prototypical and acted as a model to many orators. Considering the transmission it is still front-runner of all orations against the Turks in both handwritten and printed records. The print editions of the *Epistulae* seem to rather systematically cover the demand for rhetorical-epistolographical teaching material in the 15th century. Partly elaborate marginal notes testify to an intensive reception in an academic context and it has to be heavily suspected that this was the main concern of most of the recipients, and rather not Piccolomini’s 25-year-old insights into the Turkish issue.

Unlike Piccolomini’s orations Bessarion's wake-up call to the Italian princes, his *Exhortationes contra Turcos*, were very deliberately printed and positioned within the debate of the Turkish issue after the conquest of Negroponte (1470). Together with a translation of Demosthenes' Olynthic speech– “an oration against the Turks without the Turks”; the two orations were published during spring 1471 and were the earliest orations to appear in print at all. Author of this edition was the French humanist and university professor Guillaume Fichet, who had close ties to the evolving printing industry. By using the print medium and personally distributing the copies, Fichet procured swiftly and purposefully a selected audience that was politically capable of acting. The orations were probably designed by Bessarion as both a textual coming to terms with the ultimate terror of the Turkish expansion and a private memorandum of the precarious political situation in Europe facing Turkish power. Very likely, the cardinal never had the opportunity to

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properly stage his orations. Thanks to Fichet’s extraordinary commitment Bessarion's formerly private concerns were brought to greater public attention. Normally, it would work the opposite way: The passing for press of many orations against the Turks generally deferred their impact from a present and manifest listenership onto an absent and anonymised readership. In Bessarion’s case it lay from the beginning in writing – or better: in printing.

**War and the Media: The Siege of Rhodes 1480 as (Part of) a Media Event** A crucial point in the relationship between the war against the Turks and the new print medium was the year 1480. It was not only an all-time low in Europe’s dealings with the Ottoman expansion, it was at the same time a peak point of print production. Thanks to the unique “news coverage” provided by the Knights of the Order of the Hospital of St John in Jerusalem the siege attracted a great deal of media attention. It became something close to a medieval media event. Hence in this section I aimed to show the public relations management and image branding of a medieval institution at a moment of dire crisis.

Since the beginning of the Ottoman expansion and even more after the fall of Constantinople the little island of Rhodes, lying directly opposite the South Anatolian coast and being the Grand Master's seat of the Knights of St John, was an important military base in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. As Europe confirmed apprehensions of an imminent Ottoman aggression against Rhodes, Pope Sixtus IV. issued an indulgence in support of the Knights of St John on 12th December 1479. This papal bull and two summaries appeared in several print editions. Papal commissaries, among them members of the Order, began to sell indulgences immediately. Their efforts were striking: From the year 1480 alone date around 45 editions of indulgences, accompanied by around 30 other publications concerning the Rhodes indulgence (papal letters, bulls, summaries, instructions etc.). On the 23rd of May 1480 Rhodes' power was indeed challenged by a strong Turkish fleet and army that laid siege to Rhodes. The Order's vice chancellor and historiographer Guillaume Caoursin provided direct and immediate information about the 8 week siege and the Knights' successful resistance. Caoursin witnessed the siege in a leading position, was able to make precise observations and put them down later with a great understanding of military technology and tactics. During the siege the chancery's
regular work was suspended. Neither official records nor other documents were written. Caoursin's work *De obsidionis Urbis Rhodiae descriptio* was the first piece of official historiography, that precisely documented the events for the Order itself and for outsiders. By doing so Caoursin created not only an authorized version of the events but also a portrait of Grand Master Pierre d'Aubusson that shaped the perception of the events of 1480 within the Order and beyond. The first edition of the *Descriptio* appeared only a few weeks after the siege in Venice, many followed soon. Today, not less than 13 editions and reprints exist, around 190 copies of the text survive altogether. The vice chancellor's account was translated into German, Italian and English and widely distributed. It is one of the most popular Anti-Turkish texts that was printed in the 15th century.

In sum there are roughly 20 extant editions of narratives, that focus on the siege, accompanied by some 130 editions of documents produced by the church administration in order to organize the war against the Turks and help the Knights to defend Rhodes. Indulgences, papal bulls, letters were heavily printed and distributed in the years between 1479 and 1482. Comparing this figure to the total of all documents that were printed by the church administration for the war against the Turks in the 15th century – 600 editions – the siege of Rhodes amounts to nearly 25%. Altogether 150 print editions deal with the siege of Rhodes – a clear sign of the topic's strong media attention. It is rather obvious why the church administration had so many documents printed. The printing press offered a pragmatic solution to face the extensive demand for an efficient propagation of the war against the Turks. Generally, such small publications and broadsides could be printed speedily and in high print runs. Meaning that larger amounts of money could be raised for the funding of the defense of Rhodes and a crusade against the Turks. For the year 1480 indulgences form 75% of this year's total print production. Rhodos as a media event clearly depended on the commitment of the pope and his commissaries.

The Knights' vice chancellor certainly pursued similar aims as the pope. To attract financial, material and personnel support he created a clear picture of the Turkish threat. Not without good reason did he firmly stress the Order's achievements by publishing the *Descriptio*. The Knights of St John were the last bulwark of Christendom in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea and they have just proved so. However, this demonstration of power
and the ability to defend Christendom had been actually poor and nearly ended in catastrophe. With his *Descriptio* Caoursin managed a balancing act: On the one hand he described the Turkish threat as close and nearly overpowering. On the other hand he justified any hopes that pope, emperor and Christendom have put on the Knights by portraying especially the Grand Master as man of action. Pope, emperor and Christian princes should now be insistently made aware of their responsibilities. So, the *Descriptio* was not only an apology but also an instrument to inspire and incite crusade will in the minds of both the languid European princes and the fellow brethren in the Order to support Rhodes' war against the Turks. It can be read as an urgent call to arms. Providing his brethren in Europe with detailed reports about the events on the island the vice chancellor helped to justify the costly presence of the Grand Master's seat on Rhodes and loosen wallets for further support. The success of Rhodes and its publicist treatment countered any suspicions who might see the Knights as a relic of a long lost crusading time and question their necessity. Indeed, time was pressing for actions. For once, the Turkish retreat from Rhodes was seen as being only temporarily. In addition to it managed the Turks to secure a beachhead in Southern Italy by capturing the coastal town of Otranto in summer 1480. Only when sultan Mehmed II. died in May 1481 and his two sons Bayazid and Djem entered into a grave struggle for the Ottoman throne the Turkish threat for Rhodes temporarily subsided. In fact, the Knights were soon presented with an unique opportunity to actively influence the Turkish issue: Mehmed's younger son Djem, who was threatened to be defeated by his brother, flew to Rhodes in 1482, his splendid reception being the beginning of his long exile in Europe until his death in Naples in 1494. This famous Ottoman captive was used as a pawn to keep his brother at bay. For several years the Knights of St John were not only bulwark but active outpost against the Ottoman empire and a centre around which new crusade plans formed. Believing Caoursin, who wrote down Djem's story in his second historiographical achievement, the *Historiae Rhodiorum* (publ. 1496), it had been the glory of the siege that had the Ottoman Prince ask help from his Christian enemies rather than from his Muslim supporters to claim the Ottoman throne.

The Order's attempt to exploit the siege gains momentum when comparing it to the treatment of the Turkish capture of Otranto in the same year. Here again, pope Sixtus IV.
acted as clever propagator of crusade and the recapture of the city, yet an extensive news coverage like the one the Knights provided, or any other printed documents except indulgence material are practically non-existent. Only one account written in verse by the Augustinian monk Adam de Montaldo survives. I closely examined these Carmina contra Teucros and came to the conclusion that they, if anything, are much closer to the highly rhetorical orations against the Turks than to a lamento, as the title would suggest, and far away from news coverage. A reason for the lack of material could certainly be that the city’s elite utterly perished and simply no one was left to report. Anyway, the swift recapture of the city by crusade forces under the command of the Aragonese could have offered sufficient reason to rejoice beyond Otranto. Yet, it is striking how overwhelmingly the topic Rhodes has been discussed. Beyond the time of the actual siege and although the theatre of war had changed to Southern Italy it remained up to date in print. This leads to another important observation: Lobbies are essential for the printing of texts, networks are essential for their dissemination. The Knights of St John could rely on Caoursin who presented the order in an important phase of its history and use a wide network of convents and priories for the distribution of this image. Consequently, Jürgen Wilke observed that “media shapes the perception of war and war, that is medially communicated, creates its own realities.”

3 Although feeble and nearly catastrophic the siege of Rhodes and the affair of the Ottoman prince gave the Knights of St John an extra 40 years on Rhodes, before they were finally expelled in 1522 by Süleyman the Magnificent.

Knowledge and the Media: The Printing Press as Multiplier and Storehouse of Knowledge

Historical discourse studies claim that at a certain time there is only a limited amount of comments on a certain topic although linguistically speaking there exists a greater diversity. What controls the discussion of a topic is the discourse. Since on the one side plans for a crusade against the Turks dragged on slowly, and on the other the Ottoman expansion gathered momentum, the enemy became an object of increased clinical interest. Printed treatises on various aspects of Turkish life and power form as nearly as large a group as orations and reports on the Ottoman expansion. They met an obvious demand for factual knowledge concerning the Turks. As such publications were

still a product of Europe's constant preoccupation with the Turkish threat, it seemed fitting to question the quality of knowledge they imparted. Seeing the historical discourse as an agent of control and assuming that the printing press was its main instrument the vital question of the last section was: Did the new communication medium discipline the perception of the Ottoman Turks?

The publication of treatises on the Turks corresponded with the histo-political context. Europe's crisis of 1480 brought not only an increase of war propaganda but also a rising demand for factual knowledge about the Turks. In the printed treatises basically two types of knowledge were processed. First, knowledge that originated from book-learning. Hence one group are academic treatises written by medieval scholars, mainly humanists and theologians, who subdued Holy Scripture, chronicles, encyclopedic knowledge, older text collections and other sources to a close examination. This scientific method had its precursors in the 12th and 13th century within the framework of crusades to the Holy Land and the Spanish reconquista when scholars essentially shaped the medieval image of Islam. Second, knowledge that derived from autobiographical experience. Therefore another group of treatises are eyewitness accounts by pilgrims, captives or soldiers, who wrote down their adventures under Ottoman rule and gave a vivid insight into private Turkish life. While medieval scholars could draw upon a long exegetical tradition, the authority of eyewitnesses was a relatively new concept. When curiositas constantly lost its ill reputation and when especially the 15th century saw a revaluation of experientia the eyewitness gained importance, also in matters of the perception of the Other. Thus, a basic distinction becomes clear: experience vs. scholarship. On the one hand, there wrote a group of people who had lived a certain time under Ottoman rule, who intimately knew Turkish life and who took down their adventures, not surprisingly, in the vernacular. On the other hand, there appeared texts by well-learned, academic circles, often influential in public and politics, who rarely knew their object of research from own experience but approached it from an academic point of view and often took up public responsibility, too, when it came to propagating the war against the Turks. Such conformers of anti-Turkish policy could easily write along high medieval textual and intellectual traditions of Christian polemic – of course in Latin, the unchallenged lingua franca of scholarship and the Church.
As the Turkish threat was not exclusively conceived as a political, but religious conflict between Christian and Muslim the main topic of the academic treatises was naturally Islam, its origin, founder, laws and doctrine. Medieval scholars tried to prove Islam as heresy, Mohammed as pseudo-prophet and debauchee, the Koran as mesh of lies. They either drummed up support for the crusade or sought to provide a spiritual armament against the so-called mental onslaughts of Islam. Only where religion was less affected, a more sincere insight into Turkish affairs was possible. The eyewitness accounts offered a new access to Ottoman history, religious practice, customs, everyday life, also government, military and society. I closely examined a good dozen treatises and their dissemination. It became evident that the new medium helped to multiply and store knowledge about the Ottoman Turks. From the synopsis of the extant material it is obvious that authors and editors were incessantly replicating, recycling and reinterpreting texts and ideas. Not uncommonly, old treatises were published in new or revised print editions. All such publications contributed to a combined pool of knowledge on what readers, writers, editors and publishers could fall back on. That this pool incorporated only one inherent, anti-Turkish mind-set and not a plurality that commonly forms modern public opinion, is not the result of some official censorship but a consequence of the controlling powers of discourse. It was not the new communication medium that disciplined the perception of the Ottoman Turks, but the well-established anti-Turkish discourse that was propagated through the medium. Not an official censorship regulated publishing and governed the discussion of the Turkish issue but a discourse that was considerably older, its protagonists considerably more expert in what was say-able and printable concerning the Turks.

The Conclusion: Between technical innovations and old discourses
Considering Falk Eisermann's judgement again, I draw the conclusion from my research, that it was not only the 1450ies and 1460ies that were particularly characterised by the Turkish threat. They are, if anything, only the beginning of the public discourse that was greatly shaped by the new emerging medium. The variety of extant material, I examined, showed that contemporary statements about the Turks in the 15th century were limited to the prevalent anti-Turkish discourse, that is, the firm claim to a European wide threat posed by the Ottoman Turks since 1453. Thus, the printed texts naturally centred on war
propaganda. Indulgences, crusade exhortations, anti-Islamic treatises, graphic narrations of war crimes, letters and orations against the Turks were the early print shops' main products in Europe until 1500. Positive approaches by “turkophile” authors such as Giovanni Mario Filelfo's heroic epic about sultan Mehmed II, or more “enlightened” strategies like the ambitious project of the Spanish cardinal Juan de Segovia, who initiated a translation of the Koran, and Nicolai de Cusa's attempt of inter-religious dialogue De pace fidei never made it into print then. Likewise, producers, texts and users made it clear that the discourse about the Ottoman Turks was defined by much older religious dynamics that traced back to the high medieval crusading movement, to the image of Islam provided by academic scholasticism and to the age-old war against heterodoxy.

Although (or maybe because?) toughly negotiated but never translated into action the great European war against the Turks in the 15th century not only kept solid as political topic, but also remained popular in print. While the buying interest in other political topics easily flagged when friction subsided, the Turkish problem bestowed a nearly permanent demand upon the print shops. Two factors seem to be liable: First, the advancing Ottoman expansion challenged Europe at regular intervals and consequently lead to the feverish production of anti-Turkish texts. Second, since the great crisis of 1480 more and more texts about the Turks were edited and printed that have not been stimulated by an on-going military event. In other words, the Turks became the object of a more clinical concern. Next to incessant lamentations, dreadful news coverage and administrative documents writers and readers of that time began to fancy a deeper insight into Turkish life.

My work has furthermore shown that the war against the Turks and the invention of the printing press cannot be separated any longer from the lines of development after 1453 that lead the way to the constitution of a new religious-political public sphere. The printing press was at the same time general condition for and driving promoter in an European debate about the Turks. It was not – as often suggested – Luther's reformation or the Peasants' War of the 16th century that suddenly extended and perpetuated the familiar forms of a medieval public sphere, but the war against the Turks that originated in the events of 1453. Following Rainer Wohlfeil who postulated a public sphere of the
Reformation era (“reformatorische Öffentlichkeit”) I suggest that a similar process took place 50 years earlier, when a new decidedly anti-Turkish public sphere began to emerge in a complex balance of political conditions, religious structures and cultural innovations at the end of the middle ages.