

Caricatures as a Sphere of Communication in the Late- and Post-Ottoman Context (workshop in Istanbul, 25-26 March 2024)



The workshop, held in Istanbul at the end of March 2024, was more like a full conference in terms of the depth and quality of papers, the rich discussion, the scientific infrastructure of the event and the organisation of the workshop. The location was ideal. The workshop on caricature was held at the Karikatür Evi Caricature

Centre in the Kadıköy district, which is also home to the Municipal Museum of Caricature. This geographical context made the discussion of the results of cartoon research not just appropriate but necessary. The scientific event, organised by Dr Veruschka Wagner (University of Bonn/Bilgi University Istanbul) and Professor Dr Anna Kollatz (University of Heidelberg) brought much needed theoretical content to this ‘caricature region’, making caricature a serious and interdisciplinary matter.

The concretisation of subject and object allowed for the creation of an intellectual tension around the research problem and a common discussion field. The papers were organised into panels for ease of reference and in order to construct a particularly sensitive scholarly optic: Ottoman Humour and Caricatures (Chair: Oliver Reisner), The Global and the Local (Chair: Juho Korhonen), Sound and Science Fiction (Chair: Mariia Guleva), Women, Femininity and Misogyny (Chair: Valentina Marcella), Caricatures, Media,

Societies and Upheavals (Chair: Anna Kollatz). The second day started with the roundtable discussion Do Caricatures Have Agency?

Elif Kiraz, in his presentation Laughter and Morality in the Early Ottoman Humour Press: The Earliest Ottoman Caricatures Published in Istanbul in the Nineteenth Century, discussed the 19th century history of Turkish humour publishing and the appearance of Turkish caricature in magazines. An important theme of the caricature was criticism of so-called French fopperies and cultural trends in London, called 'alafranga'. However, as the speaker showed, it was not simply a criticism of Western trends in favour of Eastern traditions, as is believed in the research literature, because similar trends existed in European journalism at the same time. It was rather a struggle for the preservation of traditional morality, i.e. a struggle between tradition and innovation. Alafanga, then, should not be seen in terms of national identity, but in terms of ethics or history of ethics.

Anil Küçüktaka made a detailed analysis of the relationship between political economy and humour in publication. His presentation The Humour of Economy: National Economy (*Milli İktisad*) Caricatures in the Ottoman Press contained a witty philosophical analysis of the economic aspects of culture, analysing the influence of humour on the economy and of the economy on humour. The presentation titled National Stereotypes of the Ottoman Empire in Russian Geographical Textbooks as a Basis for the Caricaturistic Visualisation of Spatial Concepts at the Turn of the 20th Century, by Sergey Troitskiy, was about the late Ottoman Empire as an object of ridicule. The speaker showed how humourists saw the Turks and their state, and what stereotypical images were formed about them. To explain the sources of such national stereotypes, excerpts from school textbooks describing the qualities of Turks and their appearance were presented and analysed.

The theme of the perception of the Other was continued with The 'New Woman' As a Global Phenomenon: Ottoman Caricatures in the 1920s by **Veruschka Wagner**. Dr Wagner showed the development of stereotypes of women within Turkish caricature. The 'New Woman' image and its criticism was not only an intra-Turkish phenomenon. The association of this image with Western culture was certainly present in the Turkish consciousness, but it was not the only reason for ridicule. Rather, it was also common to 1920s satire in Europe, the United States and Soviet Russia. It was, as in the case of 'alafranga',

a struggle between tradition and innovation, between protective tendencies and cultural renewal.

Uğur Zekeriya Peçe, in his study *Loud and Funny: In Quest of Sound in Ottoman Satirical Journals*, used an original approach to the material, focusing on the sounds of the late empire. Sounds, according to the author, were present in almost all texts. Drawing on Alain Corbin's study of sensory history, Peçe showed how sounds were present in Turkish satire and what these sounds communicate to the viewer about the Turkey contemporary to the cartoonist.

The 1920s were particularly rich in various futuristic dreams in published writing. The rapid development of technical devices stimulated science fiction. This vision of the future was embodied both in serious and in humorous literature. **Anna Kollatz**, in her presentation *Egyptian Science Fiction from the 1920s: Satirical Visions of the Future?* refers to a series of cartoons by the Ottoman-Egyptian artist 'Alī Rifqī, published in the satirical magazine *al-Fukāha* in Cairo in 1926-1927. The cartoonist shows different aspects of the future through the lens of satire. It was not a satire on the future, but rather on modernity: the future appears in these cartoons as a hypertrophied and absurd present.

Following Prof Kollatz, **Eberhard Dziobek** also turned to 'Alī Rifqī cartoons. In his presentation *Women and Cars: 'Alī Rifqī's Cairo of the Twenties* Dziobek showed that technological progress was perceived as an object of ridicule from the point of view of tradition. In this sense, new trends, be they technological progress or new mores, become the object of attack.

Erdem Çolak, in his paper *The Representation of Femininity in Erotic Humour Magazines of the 1930s in Turkey*, showed how magazines circumvented censorship, particularly on erotica, by publishing images of naked women in a satirical magazine. The content ensured the magazine's commercial success, but labelling it as satirical allowed it to claim at any time that the pictures of naked women were a satire on new/Western mores.

The logical conclusion of the academic part of the workshop was a report titled *Between Censorship and the Subversive Power of Humour: Caricatures in the Beirut Newspaper al-Ma'raḡ (1921-1936)*. Speaker **Katrin Köster** used the example of the *al-Ma'raḡ* newspaper to show the role of classical media, in particular newspapers and magazines, in the everyday culture of post-Ottoman regions, and the importance and place of editors in the political space.

The workshop aroused keen interest not only among scholars, but also among practicing Turkish cartoonists themselves, who listened to the presentations and participated in the discussion. Often there was nowhere to sit in the hall and listeners even stood on the stairs leading to the hall.

The organisers promised more academic events on Turkish cartoons in the future.

Sergey Troitskiy (Estonian Literary Museum)