

Jakob Philipp Fallmerayer, *Fragments from the Orient* (1845)

Abstract

Jakob Philipp Fallmerayer (1790–1861) was a South Tyrolean and Bavarian historian, traveler, and political figure, perhaps best known today for his theories alleging the mostly non-Hellenic origins of modern Greeks, which sparked controversy among Philhellenes and Greeks in the 1830s and 1840s. At the time, he was noted as a scholar-traveler who explored post-classical Greeks and the Islamic world. His first major study, from 1827, examined the medieval history of the Empire of Trebizond (Trabzon). During his trip to the Ottoman Empire in 1840–1842, he also produced a series of travel sketches, with accompanying cultural and political commentary, for one of Germany's leading newspapers, the Augsburg *Allgemeine Zeitung*. Together with an added German nationalist preface calling for a strong unified Germany as a counterweight to France and above all to the Russian Empire, these articles served as the basis for Fallmerayer's 1845 travel account *Fragments from the Orient* [*Fragmente aus dem Orient*]. Volume 1, from which the following excerpts are taken, lays out his trip from Regensburg to Trebizond and gives the reader a sense of his travel conditions. The volume describes what it was to like be a German traveler and scholar in the Near East, and it captures the changing image of the Islamic "Orient" and the Ottoman Empire in an era of rising Orientalism.

Source

The departure for Trebizond of the splendid *Stamboul* was scheduled for Friday, August 7, at 1 o'clock in the afternoon. And after collecting the passports and letters of recommendation from the imperial and royal embassy in Bujukdere in the morning and admiring in passing the neo-Hellenic style "Πεπουχηρής τής νέας Μόδας" in Pera, I went on board with my belongings around 11 o'clock, to embark upon the last and, I feared, least restful part of my journey. After all, the Pontus Eurinis [Black Sea] has such an evil reputation among Westerners that even in the loveliest season one cannot entrust oneself to its waters without some secret horror. The *Stamboul*, however, is the company's largest and finest ship, measuring nearly 200 feet in length, relatively wide, sturdy, and yet equipped with luxuries that seem surprising to a foreigner coming from the interior. Only two passengers were registered for the first class, and one for the second, and 250 for the third or steerage, where at times more than 600 individuals must be accommodated with their baggage. In the corner to the left of the wheel, the harem of a distinguished Turk sat on carpets, with black eunuchs and black and white female slaves. Barriers and wooden bars separate the promenade for Europeans in first class, to which Asiatics are never admitted, even if they wished to pay. Pilgrims to Mecca, having arrived from Alexandria by steamer, Turkish officers bound for Diyarbekir in Mesopotamia via Samsun, civil servants, merchants, Persians, Armenians, Anatolian Greeks, ragged figures alongside perfumed Muscadins from Stamboul, sat peacefully waiting, each in his place, until the hour had come. Since Tuldsha in the Danube delta, where the first large mass of Turks came on board, one heard only the Osmanli language on the ship, which everyone here, down to the European sailors, understands and speaks more or less. Of the Muslims from Asia several performed their prayers with fervor on deck five times a day; of those who live in Europe not one exhibited this pious practice. Do they perhaps pray silently in their hearts or behind closed doors, like Christians, or does our proximity and contact with the civilized Occident perhaps kill the religious sentiments of Turks as well? The anchor was finally raised from the depths, the ship's horn sounded, the ladders were pulled up, and drawing a long, dark gray cloud of smoke behind it like a monster of the deep, the splendid palace swam out of the forest of masts from the Golden Horn into the Bosphorus. The gigantic city with its weathered towers, its

lead-covered temple cupolas, gilded minarets and cypress groves, poured in high waves over three mountainous shores—the golden bridge between two parts of the world—passed before our eyes in a long panorama. A deep silence lay over the seraglio of the Ottoman princes, its dark gardens and the Imperial Gate, and the noonday sun hung in the sky like a sparkling diamond.

Shielded from the sun's searing rays by the broad canopy on the deck and fanned by the moist Muscovite air musically breezing in from the waters of the Pontus to the serpentine Bosphorus, we calmly watched the laborious efforts of the Constantinopolitans on the shore as they groaned, hammered, built, and pitched tents beneath the pine woods for the wedding party of their late monarch's daughter on the eve of Ottoman splendor. Concern for the empire has been taken over by kindly neighbors, and Gog and Magog have been waiting for years, not without impatience, on the other side of the Eurinus, to discover whether their help might not be required to bolster the declining economy and pay the bills of the bankrupt Osmanli. "Oh, how valiant," says Haji Baba, "how we would love to fight this nasty Russian, if only we did not perish in the process!" But why do the air stream and waves flow from the Muscovite strand to Constantinople more than nine months out of the year to proclaim the Tsar's words like a trumpet marine? We, however, fought against this natural movement of the elements with the art of our machine, and passed Therapia, Büyükdere, the Russian camp, Amykus's old throne, batteries, castles, cliffs and the long sycamore forests through the surf of the wide gateway into the open sea. Now we moved quickly, defying wind and waves, towards the East, five or six Miglien from the shady coast of Anatolia. We took our midday meal around 4 o'clock in the dining room, with no ill effects, and some of us drank our tea on deck at 8 o'clock in the evening. For in the wide funnel between the Danube delta and Cape Karambe in Anatolia, the waves and surf are constant, and foreigners unaccustomed to the sea are often prevented from enjoying the wooded splendor of the coasts of Asia Minor with unclouded senses. Fortunately, the high mountains and dark forest begin only at Heraklea, which our ship passed in bright moonlight.

[...]

II. Landing and First Impressions of Trebizond

"Trabisonda!" someone cried from the deck of the splendid Stamboul at dawn on the 10th of August. I leapt from my bed, rushed upstairs and finally saw before me the longed-for city of the Komnenos with its lilting and melodic name. The flying keel, the uncertain daylight, the sea of houses poured with apparent chaos over cliff and canyon with their gray parapets peeping here and there over the jungle of trees, provided no clear picture; rather, there was at first sight something ghostly, melancholy, and uncanny about silent Trebizond, still hidden in its morning sleep. We navigated around a high, rocky promontory that now hid the city, its trees and gardens from us, and at 4 o'clock in the morning dropped anchor at the old landing known in imperial times and the era of Genoese trade as *Daphnus* but not deserving the name of port. Because it was still too early, and I considered it better to go ashore only after the entire crowd of Cappadocian, Armenian and Persian wanderers had disembarked, I remained on deck on my own until 8 o'clock, plagued by the greatest agitation of mind. Was I not without companions, indeed without servants, utterly alone with my travel accoutrements, my worries, and my memories, 600 German miles from home on the coast of the wooded, unfamiliar Cappadocia, inhabited by the inhospitable Laz and Turkmen people, facing a city where nobody speaks my language and the people do not even know the name of the country I come from? During the voyage, to be sure, one enjoys the rather costly honors and courtesies of a cabin passenger. But scarcely has the anchor been dropped and the bills paid, the bond is broken and one is suddenly a stranger again, before one has the chance to make new contacts and secure one's fate on unfamiliar ground. The excruciating feelings of such an intermediate period are unknown on journeys in fortunate Europe, where manners and discipline smooth all paths for the modestly wealthy, rendering the transition to the most foreign lands so fluid and unconstrained. The sight of the mean hovels of the waterfront, separated from the city by steep banks and a stony mountain range, only increased my dejection. The castle ruins to the right and the high

plateau-like hilltop to the left of the anchorage, with the dome of a Byzantine church rising on the smallest scale out of the bushes, could also not console me, although in some places I could see the lushest vegetation with thick-leaved trees completely embraced by vine tendrils. A veneer of wildness and ruin seemed to have laid itself over this secluded segment of the Cappadocian strand, and I could not help but say to myself: So these were the splendors of Trebizond so picturesquely praised by Clavigo, Eugenius, and Bessarion! In my uneasiness, I scarcely noticed that on the hilltop and behind the rocky shore there might be still grander and more splendid views; the presentiment that in the end, disappointed hopes and empty trays might be the whole fruit of the long journey and the not insignificant effort weighed upon my breast. Who in the Turkmen and fanatically intolerant Mohammedan city of Trebizond will be able to give me news of the Christian era of the Komnenos? Amidst all these painful reflections, the letters of introduction from Vienna and Constantinople to the Austrian vice-consul, Herr Cavaliere G h e r s i , were the only consolation. No Westerner travels to Trebizond without taking this precaution of an official recommendation, where possible, to a European consulate; he would find neither lodging nor protection in the half-barbaric city, which has been cut off from civilized intercourse for nearly 400 years, where in the early days of steamships even the Christian inhabitants fled before Europeans. Today they are tamer, but there exist as yet no decent hostelries such as one finds in the other emporia of the Levant. My worries over how Herr Gher si would receive me were needless, indeed foolish; and yet I finally disembarked with trepidation at 9 o'clock, and carried my letters to the consulate, preceded by a guide. Perhaps—I thought, ascending the crooked coastal path in the morning damp—the consul will be away, perhaps ailing, perhaps ill-tempered and unfriendly, perhaps an enemy of the Germans and a despiser of literary men. Herr Gher si was quite the opposite in every respect. He is a noble Genoese, a man full of humanity, intelligence, and kindness, who speaks fluent French, Russian, and Turkish in addition to his Italian mother tongue, and who is not unacquainted with literature despite the pressures of business. Such characteristics are doubly valuable in Trebizond, and Gher si understood more readily than others what I was actually doing in Cappadocia and which services and assistance I needed most from him, in light of the stupid fanaticism of the Turkish inhabitants. It was at Galati that I had first noticed the degree of intimacy and fraternity between the Turkish authorities and the Austrian consular officials everywhere. Anyone who stops in the street of an arch-Turkish city like Trebizond to inspect a building, an inscription or a wall already insults public sentiment and is considered suspect. And if a Christian wearing his national costume, a spyglass in his hand, moves about this hotbed of fanatical Ottomans, visiting the most remote corners, everywhere copying, painting, and collecting notes, without being insulted, and even gains access to all the mosques previously closed to infidels [Giaur],^[1] he may count himself lucky, but must not fail to recognize the powerful shield that an imperial Austrian consul can provide.

My lodgings were in the neighborhood with the Catholic Armenian merchant Marim-Oglu, who, against the temperament of his race and without understanding any Western language, is yet a warm friend of the Europeans and their manners. After taking possession of my room, I went down to the harbor with an Armenian manservant who was also provided for me, and brought my things on shore, and long before noon I was happily and comfortably ensconced in the spacious room with books, maps, papers and implements of all kinds. I took lunch after sundown at the consulate. And so all of my worries were at an end.

Gher si adopted my interests as his own, and if there was anything in the city or environs, whether it was an inscription, a document, a coin, a painted or sculpted work from the age of the Great Komnenos, it was brought to light and delivered to the stranger without restraint. Mosques, citadels, fortress towers and the most hidden corners of the garden city were opened to me on the vizier's orders. Under the present circumstances, there is no more powerful and vigorous protection than the Austrian, because the emperor, it seems, selects his representatives and servants abroad with care and great good fortune, and then because Turkey in its plight deems the Austrians alone to be at once strong, just, and selfless friends. Other advisors, it is feared, are liable to present rather extensive invoices afterwards.

NOTES

[1] Arabic-Islamic term for “nonbeliever.”

Source: Jakob Fallmerayer, *Fragmente aus dem Orient*, vol. 1. Stuttgart und Tübingen: J. G. Cotta’scher Verlag, 1845, pp. 31–35, 39–44.

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