

Orientalism in the general cultural background of the 19th century Austria

Literary encounters Austria vs. Orient include

- 1/ translations of literary works, originally written in Oriental languages
- 2/ literary works inspired by Oriental environment, history, or Oriental literary works, paralleling what Byron and his contemporaries, etc. meant for Anglo-Saxon environment
- 3/ travelogues, travel accounts regarding Oriental countries.

The Orientalist scholars of Austrian origin contributed significantly in point 1/ – i.e. translations of original works of Oriental – Persian, Arab, Turkish, literature into a European language – in this case German. Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall {1774 – 1856} was himself inspired with the oriental themes, and as a person of personal literary ambitions, he left a high-profiled translation *Diwan des Hafis* – a short quotation can show us Hammer's interpreter's abilities:

Mohammed Schemsed-din Hafis

(Übersetzung: Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall)

Aus: Der Buchstabe Ja

LXIV. (64)

Meiner Sehnsucht Trauerkleid
Schrieb ich auf, die Thränen floßen,
Komm' denn, ohne dich bin ich
Ganz entseelt von Gram und Leiden.

Sehnsuchtsvoll nach dir entflammt
Sprach ich oft zum blut'gen Auge,

Stete meiner Selma sag',
Sage, wo ist deine Selma!

Aeüßerst wunderlich fürwahr,
Und ein nie gehörtes Ding wär's,
Wenn der Mörder selbst den Schmerz
Des Ermordeten beklagte.

Darf sich Einer unterstehn,
Deinen reinen Saum zu schmähen?
Rein bist du wie Tropfen Thau's,
Die auf Rosenblättern hängen.

Von dem Staube deines Gau's,
Gab der Herr der Ros' und Tulpe
Glanz, als Er am Schöpfungstag'
Erd' und Wasser formend mischte.

Ambra hauchend gieng vorbei
Jetzt der Ostwind, auf! o Schenke!
Bring' mir einen Becher Weins
Lauter und Gerüche duftend.

Sag' dich von der Trägheit los,
Nütz' die Zeit, es geht das Sprüchwort:
*List und Schlaueit suche du
Bei dem Wanderer des Weges.*

Ohne deine Milde bleibt
Einst von mir kein Denkmal über,
Meinen Thaten kannst nur du
Leben in die Zukunft geben.

Sieh' der Rose Wangenglanz,
Und der Fußstaub der Ceder,
Danken solchen Zauberreiz
Nicht dem Wasser, nicht dem Staube.

Wie vermöchte wohl Hafis
Deine Schönheit zu beschreiben,
Da die göttliche Natur
Unsre Hoffnung übersteiget?

Travelogues are a chapter, or in fact a couple of chapters, apart in this volume. The travelogues were most various, some of them preferring diary form, other letter form, or memoirs. They will be dealt separately – in respect to the authors of remarkable representatives of this genre. It seems that travelogues genre was in Austria a dominant one in respect of Orientalism in literature (Veronika Bernard). The travelogues and their authors certainly deserve comparison with their hitherto more known and popular French and British {Anglo-Saxon} counterparts. Some of them really do deserve even a question, whether the less “colonial” environment of Austria did not foster a more open personalities – compare famous comments of British travellers such as Florence Nightingale, and other examples that are cast-iron “colonial” viewpoints, i.e. they herald a superiority of the European visitor over the natives of the visited {Oriental} country.

On the other hand, however impressive the travelogues, and scholarly translations of Austrian stemming may have been, point 2/ shall not be neglected. At least not for its claim to contemporary audience. The Anglo-Saxon literary environment was affluent in themes and authors, and in its impact on the contemporary audience as well. The use of oriental and orientalisising themes by Moore, Southey, Byron and others was rich, and aroused, or contributed to, a whole wave of Orientalism in art and especially literature. The travelogues in Anglo Saxon milieu were, to a certain extent, just another response to this period social and cultural interest, and abounded. It remains then to be decided, whether the German-speaking world really possessed a less “Romantic” Orientalism, which disposed of the literary encounters, and focused on practical knowledge, scholarships and travel impressions chiefly. This opinion was glimpsed in E. Said’s controversial work *Orientalism* as well.

Some notions might well indeed have pointed that way. Still, these discussions on character of various “Orientalisms” are interesting in so far they contribute to clear the view on the European encounters with the Orient, which were both enhanced in research and denigrated by Said’s work. If we thus accept the word “Orientalism” as something that denotes various encounters with Orient in the eyes of the “West” {that is for period in question, chiefly Europe, and subsequently North America}, then we must adhere to as strict as possible historical explanation of any phenomena that can be grouped under such heading.

This brings us also back to the question of how many “Orientalisms” there may have existed, and why it can be of interest and importance to study “their” varieties.

They appear in German speaking poetry and prose – the most famous Goethe’s work of “West-Ost” Diwan, is by no means the only one.

In the studied period of ours, i.e. the time of Prokesch, the literary circles of Vienna knew Oriental inspiration e.g. by Franz Grillparzer {1791 – 1872}, a voyage to Constantinople may have inspired him, Grillparzer chose some motives of classical Antiquity {Sappho, Medea}, with touches of Mediterranean environment {full of flowers, scents, and passions}.

This was only a very short view on the literary panorama. The visual arts offered in usually a classical source for following of Orientalism, and on visual arts some of the clichés that are commonly ascribed to the European modern stereotypes of Orient can be best illustrated. The Austrian material {that is the artists born or educated and active in the Hapsburg monarchy} is no less interesting than any classical example of French, Italian or British origin, that is often quoted in this regard.

Austrian Painters and Oriental (+ Orientalising) motives

There is now a couple of books and a number of catalogues devoted to Austrian Orientalising painting (Lynne Thornton, *Les Orientalistes I. Peintres voyageurs 1828 – 1908*. Paris 1983; See Frodl, Gerbert, „Wiener Orientalerei im 19. Jahrhundert“, *Alte und Moderne Kunst* 26 (1981) no. 178 – 179; s. 19 – 25; *Orient. Österreichische Malerei zwischen 1848 und 1914*. Ausstellungskatalog, hrsg. von Erika Mayr-Oehring, Residenzgalerie Salzburg 1997; Haja, Martina – Wimmer, Günther, *Les Orientalistes des ecoles allemande et autrichienne*. Paris 2000).

The problem is, however, that this denomination is not so easy to grasp and fill in with specific material. For an Austrian, who painted Orientalising themes, because he was living for a time in an Oriental environment, did not always sell these pictures in his homeland as a successful author of demanded produce in favourable circumstances of period Orientalism. Often such works finished their way in Europe in French or English collectors' hands. Some Austrians, who were interested in Oriental world, however, did become famous in their place of origin – or in Vienna, the residential city. The Austrian authors of paintings with Oriental themes are conspicuous in the 2nd half of the 19th century, and often they are connected with a stay in a specific Oriental country – Egypt. There are, however, earlier cases of orientalisising themes. We may thus classify the periods, the authors, and, of course, the themes they were interested in.

The Austrian Orientalism is then considered a little lagging behind the first 19th century wave of Orientalising painting, that one which was connected even to previous 18th developments, and followed the Napoleonic expedition to Egypt. The gap amounts according to some authors to 20 years. The themes were at first influenced by the Biedermeier as a period style. The intimate scenes of daily life and other themes could be enriched by a presence of Oriental themes, and especially monuments and landscapes could have gained attention. In this period, approximately the 1st half of the 19th century, the painters were interested in Orient as a part of their broader interest, such as was the case of Norbert Bittner, K. L. Libay . They left e.g. sets of sketches and paintings devoted to Oriental landscapes – sometimes based on their personal experience {K. L. Libay}.

Time setting

Thus we come to the time setting of Austrian Orientalism in visual arts, and possible changes perceptible in the development of Austrian painting of Oriental themes. Periodisation shall start with the “Biedermeier Orientalism” (definitions and variations of Austrian Orientalism pointed out by Martina Haja, Günther Wimmer and Angela Blaschek).

Special feature in the Orientalist paintings of that period were the *Cosmoramas*, in fact dioramas for which the landscape painting was of use. A painter who was involved in this sort of use of Orientalist painting was Hubert Sattler {1817-1904}.

Orient entered an artist's repertoire often after an oriental journey, i.e. personal experience. Sometimes maybe accessible illustrated volumes, even photography may have played its role. *Description de l'Égypte*, present in the Hofbibliothek in Vienna, led possibly

Norbert Bittner (1786-1851,) to make aquarelles with motives of ruins of Egyptian antiquities and buildings. He usually took a motif from Description, and surrounded it then with landscape details.

The mainstream of Austrian Orientalist painting,, however, is connected with stays in the Orient and is to be dated chiefly in the 2nd half of the 19th century. Thus falling out of the period of Prokesch's first travels to the Orient, but fully corresponding to the period of mass travel development, and successively tourism.

Journeying artist are in a majority travelling to the Orient in the 2nd half of the 19th century, . and are bringing a rich harvest of Orientalist painting. Their motives of travel, and thus also motives of their works are differing widely. Thomas Ender {1793 – 1875} travelled in 1837 with the Archduke Johann through the South of Russia ad the Orient, and left a wide array of vedutas and landscape paintings.

Ludwig Karl Libay (1814-1888) set out in 1855/56 to Egypt and Asia Minor, and as soon as in 1857 published his „Reisebilder aus dem Orient “. **Adolf Schreyer** (1828 – 1899) served as a court painter of the Prince Thurn Taxis, and as such was with his master when the Prince took command of Austrian troops waiting for an intervention in the Crimean war in 1850s. **Hans Canon** (1829 – 1885) accompanied the count Hans Wilczek on his Afrcan and Oriental journey.

The tradition of accompanying artist was very long, in 1901 **Alphons Leopold Mielich** (1863-1929) accompanied even the Orientalist scholar and foremost linguist Alois Musil and documented his journey. The documentary character of these artistic travels fitted also by the landscape painting those authors left.

Later Orientalism, mainly of the 2nd half of the 19th century has a lot in common with L. C. Müller and his pupils. The painters originated in various parts of the monarchy, passed often through schooling in Vienna, Paris, and were involved in travelling. Although even in this period a comparison of Austrian and other European “Orientalisms” is at hand, and one cannot fail to notice that the Austrian wawe of this sort of vogue among the artits was not of exactly the same intensity as in Britain, Frande or even Italy. However, it was connected with similar phenomena of historicism and of other moments proper to the 19th century Europe. A connection to political developments is presumed for artistic Orientalism, and in the case of Austria this argument may be of interest.

„Comme les autres européens des pays qui n'avaient pas de possessions outre-mer, les Autrichiens voyagèrent considérablement moins en Orient qu'Anglais et Français. Cependant, un certain nombre de peitres viennois allèrent au Caire, tant en raison de la

liaison maritime Trieste-Alexandrie, qu'en raison de l'exemple donné par Leopold Carl Müller“ (Lynne Thornton, *Les Orientalistes I. Peintres voyageurs 1828 – 1908*. Paris 1983. P. 193, and see further below).

Themes

The thematic choice of mature Austrian Orientalism, was more realistic, suggests M. Haja and Gunther Wimmer, than that e.g. of French escapist scenes and voyeuristic portrayals of half-imagined Oriental life. The Austrians were more interested in landscape, cities and people, than by legends and fanciful settings ascribed to the Oriental stage. That was in spite of some of them studying in the environment of French schools and masters of Orientalism, such as J. L. Gerome. Of course this statement is not absolute – since e.g. Ludwig Deutsch excelled in his paintings of Oriental men and women in both exterior and interior scenes. Still, these paintings are rather glimpses into the daily life {often that which was visible on the streets, not imagined settings of a harem, which was obviously not accessible to European male visitor}. Still, Rudolf Ernst, for example, was interested in the applied arts of the Orient, and in colourful settings in Oriental interiors {including the harem}, and as one of the few Austrian Orientalist painters he did include such themes in his repertoire.

This all is true especially in respect of richly coloured Austrian Orientalism of the 2nd half of the 19th century. However, it must be pointed out that the previous development of interest especially in landscape and thus in landscape painting as a special branch was clear in the “Beidermeier Orientalism” too.

Although Austrians did visit Palestine and Maghreb, the most often present setting was Egypt. Ancient Egyptian ruins and monuments are in this sense a part of Orientalising pictorial scheme, and sometimes such paintings are even ruled out of concept of „Egyptomania“, and ascribed to „Orientalism“ exclusively. This is, however, a matter of taxonomic discussion.

Leopold Carl Müller (1834-1892) can be named a sort of creator of an Austrian school of Orientalist painting. Although we have already seen a number of artists preceding his career, he was interested in Oriental environment for its special artistic merits it possessed in his eyes, he introduced Austrian painters to this topic, and he inspired a generation of his pupils.

Müller kept a studio in Cairo and spent there considerable time – he had even to haggle his duties as an Academy teacher in Vienna and his stays there in 1880s. Moreover he

kept a circle of his friends and pupils in Cairo and Vienna. For example, among his friends we can count Franz Schmoranz, and other Austrian {or in Austria trained} architects that were in 1870s to 1890s active at the Khedivial court. Franz Schmoranz and his brother Gustav Schmoranz were both interested in Near Eastern Islamic Art, and brought its influence to Bohemia, where Orientalist architecture and paintings were considerably rare {though not non-existent}, in spite of the fact that Bohemia was part of the Hapsburg monarchy, and the cultural milieu of the monarchy was a sort of continuum.

Back to Müller himself – he was visiting Egypt during 1870s and afterwards, only after his own position as an artist started to be more established, for he was of no rich origin, and in difference to e.g. Hans Makart, his contemporary {and a remarkable painter of Austrian historicism} started from modest beginnings. After 1875-1876, when he spent a winter in Egypt together with Hans Makart and German Orientalist painter Franz Lenbach, his career slowly turned up toward better establishment, and even academic career. Müller was prolific in production, and original in his treatment of Oriental themes, with respect to the particular light and colouring of the landscape and scenery. His pictures convey an atmosphere of the souq, or Cairo street with the bright, blazing shine, reflected on walls and sand, and disappearing into hazed horizons.

Leopold Carl Müller had interesting pupils, as said. These devoted their skills to Orientalist painting, often inspired by Egypt, a tourist stop, easily accessible from Vienna herself. . One of these was **Rudolf Swoboda**, Jr (1859 – 1914), working with Müller in Cairo.

Charles Wilda (1854 – 1907) and **Franz Xaver Kosler** (1864 – 1905) too can be numbered among Müller's pupils, however, they often sold their works outside Austria, Carl {Charles} Wilda did well in Paris.

Not all Austrian orientalist painters of the 2nd half of the 19th century were necessarily connected with Müller. Ludwig Deutsch {1855–1935} was even refused an acceptance in Müller's classes, but made his way into the world, especially in Paris. Deutsch excelled in portrayals of various – esp. Cairene, social classes, showing mastery in colour and painting of rich textures of robes and clothing of his objects. Similar works are to be found by Rudolf Weiss {b. in Aussig/Elbe 1859 –?} and others. Rudolf Weiss was one of a few „Orientalising“ artists born in Bohemia, thence part of Austria-Hungary. In respect of art history of Bohemia these artists are scarcely mentioned since they made their way into the world elsewhere, and their Orientalist painting was not a requested successful article on the art market in Prague, in fact they did not present there their work. Beside Rudolf Weiss, these were Otto Pilny, or Raphael von Ambros. (*Allgemeines Künstler-Lexikon*. Bd 3, München-Leipzig 1992. S. 149,

de Meulenaere, Herman, P. & V. Besko, *Ancient Egypt in 19th Century Painting*. Brussels 1992; p. 132).

The Orientalist painting included moreover another figure, although this particular painter was not exclusively, nor even chiefly interested in this field. **Hans Makart** (1840 – 1884), companion of Müller on his visit in 1875-76, was a famous painter of historicising themes, revered as a pompous representation of period historicism style. Oriental themes he used composed together with ancient {often ancient Egyptian} decorations. His favourite topic in this respect was Cleopatra. Makart was, however, a real painter of rich and decorative historicism. Even though he was in Cairo, he did not use the possibilities of painting in open air, and his compositions remained faithful to rich decorative descriptivism, using no advantages of light and scenery of contemporary Cairo, as Müller did.

The Oriental inspiration did not cease with the slow decline of decorative historicism, and even classical Orientalist painting as such. Oriental ornamentation passed into the repertoire of Art Nouveau as well, as can be seen on the example of Gustav Klimt.

Eventually there was not only Orientalist painting, but Orientalist photography as well. Moreover, a photograph may have been of help to a painter. On the other hand, a documentary photograph, and a postcard photograph slowly pushed away from the stage the painting as a manner of documenting a journey or voyage, and the painters who earned their living, e.g. in Egypt by selling their work there were by the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century slowly defeated by the photographers' workshops, such as brothers Bonfils and others, although for quite a period they co-existed well.

To sum up, Austrian Orientalist painting is not exceptional in European context of Orientalism. Austrian painters were the same painters – travellers as their colleagues in France and Britain , and some of them chose similar themes. The social and cultural response of the monarchy was however somewhat different – not all of them were fully successful in their own homeland, which is, on the other hand, not to say that the Austrian public was disinterested in the topic. Still, the Austrian wave of Orientalism is less strong than the British one, although no less lively.