

European Nations and their “National” Characteristics: An Illustrated Comparison [*Völkertafel*] (18th Century)

Abstract

Written lists of national stereotypes and clichés have had their place in European ethnographic literature since the beginning of the sixteenth century. They were also expressed visually in works of art—as for instance in the following oil painting, entitled “Short Description of the People Living in Europe and their Characteristics.” The painting features ten male figures, each of whom represents a particular European nation or “people” [*Volk*] and is dressed accordingly in national and status-appropriate clothing (here: upper class). Represented are (from left to right) Spaniards, the French, Italians, Germans, English, Swedes, Poles, Hungarians, Russians, and Turks or Greeks (in the same category).

The alleged characteristics (e.g., “manners”) of the various figures/nations are described in catchword-form in the corresponding columns. The evaluation criteria are diverse—they include not only climate theory and stage theory [*Stufentheorie*] but also older, pre-modern classification systems, such as humoral theory. Religious ideas are incorporated, too. Thus, the seven deadly sins are listed in the table. Excessive drinking is listed as a vice of the Germans; imitation in matters of fashion is considered a typical German characteristic. Still, the Germans compare favorably in national comparison.

Source



Source: "Short Description of the People Living in Europe and their Characteristics" ["Kurze Beschreibung der

In Europa Befintlichen Völckern Und Ihren Aigenschafften"]. Also referred to as "Table of Peoples" ["Völkertafel"] or "Styrian Table of Peoples" ["Steirische Völkertafel"]. Volkskundemuseum Vienna, Signature: ÖMV/30.905. Available online at: <https://volkskundemuseum.at/linesammlungen/oemv30905>

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