

Imperial Delegation in the Ottoman Empire (1665-66)

Abstract

The Jesuit priest Paul Tafferner (1608-1677) traveled to the Ottoman Empire in 1665 with the Imperial high delegation of Count Walter Leslie. The report published immediately after the delegation's trip was one of a series of popular and much-read delegation reports, which essentially shaped the image of the Ottoman Empire and the "Turks" in Europe, especially in Germany. Since Tafferner, as a travel escort, did not belong to the delegation in the actual sense, he was excluded from most of the negotiations. Therefore, his report focuses all the more emphatically on descriptions of Ottoman culture. The Jesuit priest was particularly interested in Muslim religious practices, which very tangibly affected the activities of the delegation: thus, the Imperial high envoy had to wait at the door of the mosque until the grand vizier had concluded his prayers. With words of approval, Tafferner conveys how, in his eyes, the Muslims practiced their religion in an exemplary fashion. At the same time, however, he regards the Muslim prayer practices as "superstitious worship service."

Source

[...]

The Turks exhibit great zeal and care in their religion. And although such attention is not worth imitating, it is without a doubt still useful enough at times in shaming Catholics. For our entire trip to our destination we observed that even in wartime, or at other inconvenient times, during long-lasting difficult activities they often, depending on the nature of the place, leapt from their horses onto a spread-out carpet, or lacking that, onto a handkerchief or even the corner of a piece of clothing, and thus creating the effect of a mosque with a covered floor, took a seat, and with a voice bright one minute and soft the next, called out to God. If water was available, they bathed their hands up to their elbows and their foreheads down to the chin, to cleanse themselves of misdeeds in mind and belief. But in cities they are called to prayer services three times a day without fail, at the break of day, at noon, and in the evening, by a cry emanating from the mosque tower, the men only in church, the women, who are not allowed in any church, at home, or both sexes in the said place. It happened more than once that at the time of the noonday devotions the high envoy was talking to the grand vizier, but the latter would not allow that he be withdrawn from this prayer time at all, remaining steadfastly at the site of their devotions in progress so that the entire delegation had to wait at the door for the end of such a superstitious religious service. While observing these prayer hours, no one is allowed to speak, no one may move his eyes in his head toward the person opposite, and no one may undertake anything but what the place, time, and occasion allow, nor behave any other way than he was resolved to. This strictness would be praiseworthy if the reasons and merits were not otherwise lacking.

Source: Paul Tafferner, *Keiserliche Botschafft an die Ottomannische Pforte, welche, auf Befehl Ihrer Röm. Keis. Maj. Leopoldus des I. der Hochgebohrne Herr Herr Walter Leßlie des H. R. Reichs Graf, Herr zu Pettau und Neustadt ob der Mettau, K. M. geh. und Hof-Kriigs-Raht, Feldmarschall, und über die Windisch- und*

Sclavonischen Gränzen General, glücklich verrichtet: Anfangs in Lateinischer Sprache von P. Paul Tafernern, Jesuitern, und Hoch-Gräflichen Reise-Kapellan aus eigener Erfahrung beschrieben, nunmehr aber Dem Teutschliebenden Leser zum besten verteutschet durch B. Z. v. W., [S.l.], 1672, pp. 278-80. Available online at: http://digital.onb.ac.at/OnbViewer/viewer.faces?doc=ABO_%2BZ114815607

Recommended Citation: Imperial Delegation in the Ottoman Empire (1665-66), published in: German History Intersections, <<https://germanhistory-intersections.org/en/migration/ghis:document-44>> [July 12, 2025].