

Corinna Dziudzia

Germany

Percolated Images of the 'Orient' in texts of the Early German Enlightenment

In the 19th century, as Andrea Polaschegg put it so fittingly in her 2012 book on orientalism, Germany did not have colonies in the 'Orient' but an elaborate science on it. Using Edward Saïd's study as a foundational text, this relation has been examined especially for the 19th century. But what about the 18th century, the early Enlightenment? In a letter Sidonia Hedwig Zäunemann (1711 – 1740) is asked to argue why a beautiful foreign woman is found to be more beautiful than a European one – and compares the beautiful "Mohrin" in her answer with rare manuscripts from the East. Moreover, she speaks of towns like Indonesian Batavia, of the Serail, Turks, Mussolmans as well as precious Persian carpets and fabrics (*tafta*). She parallels that to ancient times, referring to the towns of Tyrus and Zoar as well as sovereigns like Cambyses, Xerxes, the Parthians – gained knowledge, she must have drawn on, and it is this epistemological level my paper would like to address. Various texts from the late 17th and early 18th century, descriptions of journeys to faraway countries, but also poems – mostly translations from French literature – might have been known to Zäunemann, as well as contemporary newspaper articles. It is the time of the Russo – Turkish – War in 1736 which captivated not only her attention but probably triggered an overall broader interest in the Ottoman Empire. She herself states that the *Asiatische Banise*, referring to the contemporary bestseller, is by far judged as more readable than the stoic philosopher Seneca, not to forget the success Händel's opera *Xerxes* was in London in 1738. On closer inspection, in early Enlightenment, examples of cultural transfer seem to be everywhere – at least as percolated images of foreign cultures.