

DANIŁA MAYER

TAFEL E 'ORIENT' IN ARCHDUKE FERDINAND'S PORTRAIT COLLECTION

A Participative Study
at Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien



HOLLITZER
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DON JUAN ARCHIV WIEN

OTTOMANIA

15

Reihenherausgeber
MICHAEL HÜTTLER · SUNA SUNER



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*Tafel E 'Orient' in Archduke Ferdinand's Portrait Collection:
A Participative Study at Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien.*

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(= Ottomania 15)

Reihenherausgeber Ottomania

MICHAEL HÜTTLER · SUNA SUNER

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The compilation for the cover was created by the internationally recognised graphic artist Andreas Orel, who was ever ready to understand the intricacies of thirty-four images, choosing from them and bringing out the edginess and lively presence in their gilded frames. Thank you, Andy!

This work could not have happened without the interlocutors, who gave their time and effort to the little portraits and freely let flow their associations, remarks and questions about Tafel E. Their interest, contributions and willingness to openly share their reflections established the direction the work went. It is *our* research, and I went about the task of pushing the analysis forward with responsibility. To you, the interlocutors, I dedicate this volume.

SOME PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS

Danila Mayer is a socio-cultural anthropologist with a wide spectrum of interests. As a student she specialised in Urban Anthropology and Migration, with a regional focus on Turkey and the Middle East. As a professional, Danila expanded her fields of research to youth in Viennese public spaces, and to the world of opera, with a particular focus on the opera in Graz.

Our respective trajectories crossed with regard to art biennial research and present-day challenges for ethnographic museums. Since then, I have valued our periodic exchanges of ideas and research interests highly. The present study grew out of her work for the guest service department of the Museum of Fine Arts in Vienna (KHM). Wandering through the various halls of the museum, in the *Münzkabinett* the author encountered a mass of miniature portraits, which Archduke Ferdinand II had commissioned in the late sixteenth century. Specifically, thirty-four works of art from the 'Balkan and Orient' attracted Danila's attention.

If one visits the halls of the *Münzkabinett*, one can truly observe that most of its visitors pay relatively little attention to these artworks, and rather turn towards the impressive collection of mints and medals. Danila's research questions whether the collection could have some emotional or historical meaning for the citizens of Vienna. For this purpose, she entered into dialogue with her interlocutors about what they see in each of these Balkan or Oriental miniature paintings, what they feel and what they think about them.

This is indeed a clear approach from the perspective of an anthropology of art, that seeks to examine the beholder's gaze in the encounter with a work of art by considering their bodily expressions. Danila selected a small number of interlocutors from among her friends and acquaintances, not a large number, as the goal was to elucidate varieties of responses to a specific visual complex, and not to formulate some statistically based generalities about looking at such paintings. In the chapters of this volume Danila demonstrates well the richness of these experiences. These concern the impressive palatial halls of the KHM, an environment that may influence her interlocutors in one way or another, together with the author's role as a moderator who draws the beholder's gaze towards some specific artifacts, or the absence of some explanatory text tables which would directly interfere with their act of seeing, etc. Hence, the reader is encouraged to follow the ensuing dialogues, which the visual interactions of the beholders with these portraits trigger as bodily and henceforth as verbal expressions.

Of course, the author also offers historical information about the collector, Archduke Ferdinand II, with explanations of his idea of collecting and information about

who these respective artists were. Danila thus opens another line of reflection, namely about the gaze of this member of the Habsburgs. Scholars from other disciplines have reflected about the archduke's personality, his humanistic collecting avidities – in opposition to his very conservative regency enactments (e. g. enforcing the catholic counter-reformation).

Throughout the volume, Danila draws further comparative thoughts to the collection of Paolo Giovio in Como, Lombardy. Nonetheless, her dialogues and analyses of the miniature paintings also open up considerations of the kinds of things of interest in the world of this Habsburg. Is there a system behind his strategy of collecting these particular portraits? What could the specific selection of rulers and dignitaries tell us today about preferential world regions and/or knowledge of other socio-political systems of the world?

As the author writes, Ferdinand II started his miniature portrait collection in 1578, when he was already reigning over Tyrol and neighbouring regions. His overall collecting activities, however, may be traced back to Prague, from where he was governing the Kingdom of Bohemia between 1547 and 1567. Prague is intriguing to me, as it seems (unlike Vienna) to stimulate some Habsburg rulers and dignitaries to enjoy and live out their pleasure with the arts. In this later context I draw a line to Emperor Rudolf II, who transferred the imperial court from Vienna to Prague in 1583. Among other things, he is famous for surrounding himself with artists (e. g. Arcimboldo) and scientists (e. g. Keppler) from various regions of Europe, and for actively invigorating their creative work. His clear valuing of art in opposition to military expenditures is well documented.

Regarding the archduke's 'world,' I would relate to the so-called world journey of Archduke (and heir to the throne) Franz Ferdinand between 1892 and 1893. Not only did he visit very selectively regions and places of the world, but he also was very selective in collecting art and material culture (these artefacts constitute nowadays an important part of the *Weltmuseum Wien* collection). Hence, I am tempted to advance that these objects tell us more about Archduke Franz-Ferdinand's own world of things than about the richness of cultural and social traditions in the world. One may, thereafter, wonder about Franz Ferdinand's gaze, and whether he laid out these encounters as truly relational, reciprocal interactions.

This brings me back to the miniature portraits of this volume. Besides their normed sizes, Danila describes specificities of the various representations. Nonetheless, the conceptualization of these miniature portraits reflects a style of representing rulers and dignitaries that corresponds to the occidental painting tradition of this epoch. As a matter of fact, the author does not proceed to explore this line, but she does not need to. Indeed, the various responses of the interlocutors demonstrate the multiple ways in which each of them experiences the archduke's intentions: the idea

of commissioning such portraits, the selection of the personalities, and how representational rules are determined beyond the artists' styles, and without paying attention to differing local cultural comprehensions of the meaning of a portrait. It is a pleasant reading experience to feel how Danila Mayer encourages the reader to stroll with her all along the visual encounters of her interlocutors, thereby entering into a relational network with these historical paintings of "Tafel E – Balkan und Orient".

Thomas Fillitz
Vienna, July 2025



Fig. 1: TAFEL E, Münzkabinett, Room I
© KHM-Museumsverband

INTRODUCTION

Once, in the *Münzkabinett*, I observed a visitor turn to the guest service on duty with obvious enthusiasm about the huge portraits collection – put together by Ferdinand II, Archduke of Tyrol –, exclaiming “This is marvellous!” The portraits, around a thousand of them arranged in nine panels, do catch people’s attention and fascinate visitors. One panel, called “Tafel E ‘Orient’”, shows thirty-four colour portraits, each about postcard-sized and covered by a glass plate. Guests might well be attracted by one or the other turban; others might notice Vlad as Count Dracula or be alerted to a specific portrait through social media. However, the explanatory sign does not give the information who the depicted persons really are, and the inscriptions in the paintings, which are quite difficult to read, might not be of much help. And maybe the guest attendant on duty can give some additional information, but all this makes the reception of the figures in the little portraits difficult.

A first article I penned about Tafel E found it, and its presentation in the KHM, to be almost an empty space due to the lack of information we get when looking at it.¹ This book tries to fill this empty space and puts the Tafel E into focus.

DESCRIPTION OF TAFEL E

Tafel E ‘Orient’ hangs in Room I in the *Münzkabinett* (coin cabinet) on the second floor of Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien (KHM) on the wall opposite the glass entrance door, to the right of the passage to Room II.

The Tafel is easy to approach as there are no coin showcases below;² it hangs alone. The small paintings are arranged in five rows on a dark background. Each row has seven such portraits except for the lowest, which has six. Tafel E is roughly a square about 125 cm by 115 cm in size, and the solid, rounded black frame is adorned with three narrow golden rims.

The portraits are quite colourful images of people in various picture details and positions. Some show almost the whole upper body, some only the head and shoulders, and most are bust portraits. Several look out at the viewer; others are in profile or in three-quarter poses. The colours are lively, showing the person in his or her

¹ Danila Mayer: “Panel E, ‘Orient’, in the Portrait Collection of Vienna’s Art History Museum”, in: *Anthropology of the Middle East* 19/2 (2024), pp. 53–63.

² Most other panels are mounted above the coins.

garments and clothing, the headdresses elaborately painted. There are three women. Some of those portrayed carry symbols of their power and status or weapons, some are adorned with jewellery. The facial expressions are varied.

It is not easy to recognise the portraits' surfaces and details like brush strokes, colour application or the matter of the foundation due to their glass covers; and depending on the light, the reflections make it more difficult to see all of them without moving about in front of them or standing on a ladder.

On the viewer's upper left side of the frame is a little plaque which reads: 'Orient'. The museum description to the left of the Tafel informs: "Tafel E Balkan und Orient", with these subtitles: "Albanien", "Walachei", "Athen", "Jerusalem", "Ayyubiden", "Türkische Sultane", "Persien", "Afrikanische Reiche", "Mongolen". There are no dates, epochs or names.³

There is an encompassing information sign about the entire portraits collection of which Tafel E is part, around one thousand portraits of the same format, arranged in nine panels of differing size in Room I and II of the *Münzkabinett*. The visitor learns that the collection belonged to Ferdinand II, Archduke of Tyrol and was brought together from 1578 to 1590, in part modelled after Italian humanist Paolo Giovio's collection.

THE RESEARCH

The journey into this study of one multi-faced object started in the spring of 2019. As a member of the KHM guest service team, I was on duty in the *Münzkabinett* high above the Maria Theresia Platz, when Tafel E caught my attention. Looking at the thirty-four mini-portraits in the Tafel with confusion and curiosity, I pondered over the little plaque 'Orient' and the terms "Balkan und Orient" in the sign and felt intrigued as an anthropologist who has worked in and about these regions. After enquiring in-house and not finding much information, my interest grew.

The impression the Tafel E made and makes on me is one of equality and familiarity, of connection. The identical format connects each picture with all the others, and the variations in posture, colours, position and image detail give them fluctuation and animation. But Tafel E also seems like an object of many mysteries.

When I started to search for literature, Gerhart Ladner's guidebook was essential. "Meine letzten Jahre in Wien, [...], hatten gleichzeitig den Glanz und die Melancholie eines Sonnenuntergangs und einer Abenddämmerung. Ich arbeitete damals im Münz-

3 This is congruent with the portraits collection as a whole.

kabinett des Kunsthistorischen Museums”,⁴ he wrote in his *Erinnerungen*. His task was to catalogue the so-called Ambras portrait collection of Archduke Ferdinand of Tyrol (d. 1595), which was located in the *Münzkabinett*, with partly new iconographic commentary.⁵ Tafel E is the outcome and centre of tangled stories of people, where the biographies of the Tafel’s custodians become visible as well: Gerhart Ladner and August Loehr, both entrusted with the portraits collection. A. Loehr was forced to resign as director of the *Münzkabinett* in 1938, and Ladner had to emigrate in the same year.⁶ This work is also a respectful bow to them.

Art Historian Gerhart Ladner’s list from his guidebook (1932) will be used as a reference throughout this volume.⁷ It is, with some alterations, the template for the sign to Tafel E in its presentation 2023 and 2024, when the interviews and data collection took place.

Saal I, Tafel E, Orient⁸

Albanien

- 1 Castriota Skanderbeg, Fürst v. Albanien, † 1466.
- 2 Derselbe.

Walachei

- 3 Vlad IV. Zepelusch, † 1462.

4 “My last years in Vienna, [...] had the simultaneous splendour and melancholy of a sunset and a dusk. At that time, I was working in the Münzkabinett of the Kunsthistorisches Museum”. Gerhart B. Ladner: *Erinnerungen*, edited by Herwig Wolfram and Walter Pohl. Wien: Verlag der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften 1994, p. 47.

5 “Es war meine Aufgabe, die sogenannte Ambraser Porträtsammlung des Erzherzogs Ferdinand von Tirol, die sich im Münzkabinett befand, mit teilweise neuem ikonographischem Kommentar zu katalogisieren”, *ibid.*, p. 48.

6 August Loehr was director of the *Münzkabinett* until 1938 and again from 1945 to 1948. See Michael Alram: “Das Münzkabinett des Kunsthistorischen Museums” in *Meisterwerke des Münzkabinetts*, edited by Sabine Haag and Michael Alram. Wien: Kunsthistorisches Museum 2009, p.18. – A. Loehr and G. Ladner are remembered in rolls of honour at the University of Vienna, Institut für Geschichtsforschung, and G. Ladner is included in the honorary monument in front of the university’s Institute of Art History.

7 Ladner’s dates for the “Türkische Sultane” will be of their rulership and are not further specified. See also the up-dated compilation of birth and death dates (as far as known) in the manual of this publication.

8 Gerhart B. Ladner: *Die Porträtsammlung des Erzherzogs Ferdinand von Tirol*. Wien: Verein der Museumsfreunde, 1932 (= Führer durch die kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien 17), pp. 40–41.

Athen

- 4 Walter, Hg. v. Athen, Feldherr d. 14. Jahrh.

Jerusalem

- 5 Gottfried v. Bouillon, Kg., † um 1100.

Arabischer Sultan

- 6 Saladin, † 1193.

Türkische Sultane

- 7 Orchan, Padischah, 1326–1359.
- 8 Murad I., 1359–1389.
- 9 Bajazid I., 1389–1402.
- 10 Derselbe.
- 11 Mohammed I., 1413–1422.
- 12 Murad II., 1422–1451.
- 13 Mohammed II., 1451–1481.
- 14 Gln. Irene.
- 15 Selim I., 1512–1520.
- 16 Suleiman d. Große, 1520–1566.⁹
- 17 Gln. Rossa (Roxelane), † 1558.
- 18 Dumelia, To. Suleimans II.¹⁰
- 19 Mehemed Sokolowitsch, Großvezier, † 1579.
- 20 Derselbe.

Persien

- 21 Artaxerxes, 465–424 v. Chr.
- 22 Ismali [sic] I. Sophi, Schah, † 1524.
- 23 Tahmasp, dessen So., † 1576.

Afrikanische Reiche

- 24 Kait Bey, cirkassischer Mameluke, Sultan in Aegypten, † 1495.
- 25 Kanssu Guru, Nachfolger Kaitbeys, um 1500.
- 26 Mulei Hassan, Sultan v. Tunis, † 1550.
- 27 Chaireddin I. Barbarossa, griechischer Seeräuber, † 1518.

9 In several portraits' descriptions and also in a variety of lists, this ruler is wrongly indicated as "II".

10 This is a first example of the sultan being wrongly described as "II".

- 28 Ajax, Aga.
- 29 Muleamethes, Beherrscher v. Fez u. Marokko.
- 30 Derselbe.
- 31 David gen. Atanadi Dinghil, Kg. v. Aethiopien, † 1540.
- 32 Alchitrof, Kg. v. Aethiopien.

Mongolen

- 33 Timur Lenk, † 1415.
- 34 Derselbe.

Some portraits from Tafel E were presented in KHM exhibitions and catalogues in the context of Turkica and Ottomanica,¹¹ and in the anniversary exhibition and catalogue: *Ferdinand II.: 450 Jahre Tiroler Landesfürst*.¹² The background to Ferdinand's relations with Ottomans and his "alla Turca" leanings can be found in Pierre Terjanian;¹³ the archduke and his tournaments are also referred to in Joaneath Spicer.¹⁴ The inventory after Ferdinand's demise from 1596 is accessible in facsimile and transcript at the KHM website.¹⁵

Guido Messling, the curator of the portraits collection, has presented the Ottoman series in Tafel E in the catalogue *Abendland und Halbmond* (in German, English and Turkish).¹⁶ One exhibition with catalogue was dedicated to a prominent figure of

11 Veronika Sandbichler: *Türkische Kostbarkeiten aus dem Kunsthistorischen Museum: Schloss Ambras Innsbruck*. Wien: Kunsthistorisches Museum 1997.

12 Edited by Sabine Haag and Veronika Sandbichler. Innsbruck, Wien: Haymon 2017. On the archduke, see also Josef Hirn: *Erzherzog Ferdinand II. von Tirol: Geschichte seiner Regierung und seiner Länder*, 2 vols. Innsbruck: Verlag Wagner. Vol. 1 1885, Vol. 2 1888. More about Ferdinand's cultural envoy and his support of arts and sciences in: *Archduke Ferdinand II of Austria: A Second-Born Son in Renaissance Europe*, edited by Sylva Dobalová and Jaroslava Hausenblasová. Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences 2021; contributor Elisabeth Reitter worked extensively about artists at Ferdinand's courts in her dissertation *Allerlay Diener. Künstler und Handwerker am Hof Erzherzog Ferdinands II. (1567–1595)*. Universität Innsbruck 2024.

13 "Alla turca: Turkish Fashion in the Arms and Armour of Western Renaissance Europe", in: *Iron Men: Mode in Stahl – Fashion in Steel*. Exhibition catalogue of Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, edited by Stefan Krause, Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König 2022, pp. 139–154.

14 "European Perceptions of Blackness as Reflected in the Visual Arts", in: *Revealing the African Presence in Renaissance Europe*, edited by Joaneath Spicer, 3rd ed. Baltimore: The Walters Art Museum 2013, pp. 35–60, here pp. 39–40.

15 <https://www.khm.at/erfahren/forschung/forschungsprojekte/historische-projekte/das-nachlassinventar-erzherzog-ferdinands-ii-1529-1595-von-1596-inv-nr-kk-6652/>, accessed February 27th, 2025.

16 "Portraits of celebrated Ottomans", in: *Abendland und Halbmond – Occident and Crescent Moon – Batı Dünyası ve Hilal*, edited by Sabine Haag and Guido Messling. KHM Museumsverband. Wien: Walla Druck 2015, pp. 63–65.

Tafel E: *Dracula. Woiwode und Vampir*,¹⁷ which featured several Tafel E portraits. – A large exhibition at the big exhibition space Schallaburg about the crusades had a sample of portraits from Tafel E.¹⁸

Tafel E as one object has not been taken into account; the way it is presented raises more questions than answers. I wondered if those in the paintings would have historical or emotional meaning for people in Vienna today, many Viennese citizens having family relations and origins in the Tafel E regions, from ‘Orient’ or ‘Balkan’ background? It seemed necessary to bring it to the knowledge of people and to collect their feedback. I wanted to ask about their impressions: What does Tafel E say to us today?

PARTICIPATIVE STUDY AND EXPERT INTERLOCUTORS

What is a participative study? The principal research method – to work with people who interpret their impressions of Tafel E from their various backgrounds – is a variant of participant observation in social and cultural anthropology. It is an experiment, a labour of love and an *amour fou*, and the joint adventure of doing research together.

I wanted to look at Tafel E together with people for whom living multiculturally¹⁹ is self-evident. To represent contemporary social and cultural processes better, we will use Steven Vertovec’s approach of superdiversity: “Superdiversity and diversification are notions pointing to the ongoing creation of ever more complex societies.”²⁰

While interviews form the backbone of this study, a literature research provided context to round out the results, especially regarding the questions that were formulated in the interviews.

This participative study about Tafel E ‘Orient’ is a small-scale and in-depth exploration of one multi-faced object in non-structured interviews with the interview partners: Viennese citizens from various professional, cultural, and social backgrounds.

¹⁷ Schloss Ambras, exhibition catalogue, edited by Wilfried Seipel et al. Wien: Kunsthistorisches Museum 2008. Dracula is presented in his historical and pop-cultural context.

¹⁸ *Kreuzritter: Pilger, Krieger, Abenteurer*. Exhibition catalogue, edited by Barbara Sternthal. Schallaburg: Schallaburg Kulturbetriebgesellschaft 2007.

¹⁹ See also the discussion of “multiculturalism”, e. g. in an extensive analysis by Giuliana Prato and contributors in *Beyond Multiculturalism. Views from Anthropology*. Farnham: Ashgate 2009. Especially Prato’s “Introduction: Beyond Multiculturalism. Anthropology at the Intersections Between the Local, the National and the Global”, pp. 1–19.

²⁰ Steven Vertovec: *Superdiversity. Migration and Social Complexity*. Oxon, New York: Routledge 2023. Online version: Milton: Taylor & Francis 2023, p. 2. It should be noted though that these processes are moulded and formed by all people, irrespective of their origins or migration histories.