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Edward Said claimed in his seminal work on ‘Orientalism’ that, “European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient.”¹ This particular theory obscures our understanding of cultural exchange between Europe and the East because it inevitably leads to generalisations about Europe itself. Like Said’s notion of the ‘East’, Europe has never been a monolithic concept, and it is misleading to suppose that all European countries responded in uniform fashion to external influences.

Significantly, in studies of ‘Orientalism’ which have long focused upon those European nations that maintained international empires, Central and Eastern Europe have been particularly neglected, and are therefore easily misrepresented by existing generic theories about Europe’s relationship with the ‘East’. The complexity of Europe’s cultural dialogue with Islamic countries is shown dramatically in eighteenth century society portraits from Britain and Poland-Lithuania in which the sitters wear Near and Middle Eastern-style dress, thus adopting widely recognised signifiers of non-Christian cultures. By considering the influence of the Orient both on an imperial nation and a largely overlooked European power, the diversity of interaction between East and West becomes clear, a diversity which is in sharp contrast to the traditional focus upon Western Europe alone.

Despite their superficial similarity, the eighteenth century portraits from Britain and Poland-Lithuania are the product of very distinct circumstances and contain a plethora of varied references to contact

¹ Said, Orientalism, p. 3. This book was first published in 1978 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978). Said establishes the “very roughly defined starting point [of] Orientalism” as the late eighteenth century, but his study, in fact, also makes reference to comparable European attitudes to the ‘Orient’ during previous centuries. Said, Orientalism, p. 3.
with the Near East in particular.\textsuperscript{2} It is incorrect to infer, as Said often implies, that Europeans unequivocally portrayed the ‘Orient’ to its detriment, in order to place themselves in a position of comparative power. British travellers to the Ottoman Empire, rather than distinguishing themselves as ‘European’, frequently adopted indigenous styles of dress as a means of assimilating into Islamic society. Polish-Lithuanian noblemen, meanwhile, actually incorporated Turkish and Persian elements into the most representative form of Polish male dress. The portraits discussed below, depicting British and Polish-Lithuanian sitters dressed in Near and Middle Eastern-inspired fashions, demonstrate how, instead of acting as a polarising influence, costume formed a bridge between the visual culture of Christian and Islamic countries.

As Aileen Ribeiro has shown, “more than any other non-European country, Turkey in the eighteenth century was one of the most important influences on the arts and culture of Europe.”\textsuperscript{3} This is in large degree due to the reduced military threat posed by the Ottoman Empire from the end of the seventeenth century, which encouraged more travel to this region. Diplomatic embassies provided a particularly important means of contact, as they allowed people of one country direct access to the highest social spheres of another. However, one of the single most important accounts of the Ottoman Empire in the eighteenth century comes not from a diplomat himself, but from the wife of a diplomat. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu travelled to Turkey with her husband, who was British ambassador there between 1716 and 1718. Rather than being a passive companion, she took an avid interest in the country in which she was staying, particularly in terms of the customs of Turkish women. She gained entry to the women’s quarters, or harems, in residences in Istanbul (Constantinople) and so, although a foreigner, she had the privilege of going where even a Turkish man could be denied access.\textsuperscript{4} Lady Mary recorded her impressions in her letters to family and acquaintances in

\textsuperscript{2} The analysis of Polish-Lithuanian portraiture in this study is a continuation of research begun during the Certificate of Postgraduate Study in History of Art at Cambridge University. I am grateful to Cambridge University and Pembroke College, Cambridge, for their generous funding of my research for the Certificate of Postgraduate Study, and to the Arts and Humanities Research Council for their subsequent funding of my doctoral work.

\textsuperscript{3} Ribeiro, “Turquerie,” p. 17. For the impact of Turkish dress upon European fashions, see also Pape, “Turquerie im 18,” pp. 305–23. For a broader study of the influence of Islamic culture upon Britain, Sweetman, The Oriental Obsession.

\textsuperscript{4} Yeazell, Harems of the Mind, pp. 16–21.