
This book examines a recently discovered manuscript containing drawings of sixteenth-century Istanbul (Qatar, Doha, The Orientalist Museum, OM.749), and its owner, Bartholomäus Schachman (1559-1614), a nobleman, traveller, and later Mayor of his hometown Danzig (modern Gdańsk in Poland). The book is divided into five sections: four essays which consider Schachman and his historical context, followed by lavish reproductions of the album's 105 watercolours. The drawings are the work of at least three different European artists and they depict various Ottoman characters, ranging from the sultan and his court to religious figures, merchants and farmers, while several scenes of religious customs and social practices are also included. The Schachman album (dated c. 1590) is an early and particularly extensive example of an Ottoman costume album, a genre of book of which more than a hundred examples spanning the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries survive. This particular manuscript was unknown until it appeared at auction (Sotheby's: Travel, Atlases, Maps and Natural History, London, 10 November 2009, Sale L09774 Lot 43), and it is an especially impressive and well-preserved addition. The speed with which this album has been published is to be praised.

The opening essay, “Culture and art in Danzig at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries” by Anna Frąckowska, gives a richly illustrated, albeit imprecise overview of Danzig's 'golden age' in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when the city prospered due to its lucrative mercantile networks. The following chapter, “The life and times of Bartholomäus Schachman (1559-1614)” by Olga Nefedova, provides a more detailed introduction to both Danzig and Schachman. Nefedova pays particular attention to his early education and travels to Kraków, Strasbourg, Basel and Siena, which are recounted through close analysis of his extant *Album amicorum*. There is unfortunately little documentary evidence regarding Schachman's travels in the eastern Mediterranean (c. 1588-90). By 1592 he was back in Danzig, where he steadily rose through the city's political ranks, becoming Mayor in 1605. He was never to return to the Orient. Contemporaries noted that Schachman was a great connoisseur and bibliophile, but little of his collection survives today. The account of Schachman's life leaves several issues unresolved: for instance, Frąckowska terms Schachman a merchant
but Nefedova notably refrains from describing him as such (pp. 13 and 41). Indeed, his journey to the Ottoman empire is labelled a Grand Tour (p. 60), which is a loaded and possibly misleading term; it remains uncertain whether Schachman’s voyage was one of business or diplomacy, education or adventure.

The third essay (“The travel album of Bartholomäus Schachman” by Nefedova, Sara Al Mana, and Fahad Al Faihani) considers the imagery of the album in detail, grouping the drawings under various headings (such as religion and charity, ceremonies and games, slaves, punishments, and agriculture) that reflect the range of European travellers’ interests in Ottoman culture and society. In the absence of a travel journal from Schachman’s pen the authors turn to a series of contemporary travel accounts as a means of explaining the artwork. This approach yields some successful comparisons and colourful vignettes of life in Ottoman Istanbul, but it is not without its limitations. Neither is the repeated claim that this album presents an accurate eyewitness account of Ottoman society (pp. 63, 88 and 91) and, more specifically, that Schachman’s journey and experiences can be reconstructed via these drawings, which, it is claimed, were made in situ (p. 65). There are indeed some unusual images that may reflect Schachman’s personal interests or itinerary: for instance, the scenes of agriculture (fols. 52r, 77r, and 82r) and the ceremonies at Jerusalem (fols. 56r and 66r) are all images with few parallels. However, there is no independent evidence to support this assertion. More telling still, the vast majority of images in the Schachman album are also to be found in dozens of other Ottoman costume albums dating from the 1570s to the 1600s. The notion that these watercolours represent a straightforwardly accurate and personal account of Schachman’s travels must be treated with caution.

The fourth essay, by Hyejung Yum, entitled “A study of the album paper”, examines the manuscript’s paper in order to date and locate its artistic origins. Yum tentatively concludes that the paper was probably produced in northern Italy. Interestingly, the marbled paper in the album predates the advent of marbling in western Europe and so it must be the work of a Turkish craftsman. Thus, we gain a fleeting insight into the collaborative nature of these albums. This essay is especially valuable since paper analysis provides an empirical means by which to examine and establish the artistic connections that undoubtedly exist between various costume albums.

At the heart of this book lie the beautiful and high quality reproductions of the watercolours. Each image is identified in old German (taken from the