

THEATRE AND CULTURAL MEMORY: THE SIEGE OF BELGRADE ON STAGE

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Abstract: *This contribution considers the historical image of Belgrade created by European playwrights and librettists of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Istanbul has been for a long time the symbol of an oriental city and lifestyle in the Western European mind – an image that was transmitted especially in poetry and dramatic texts. Belgrade seems to be present in a different way in the European cultural memory. Analysis of the representation of history related to Belgrade in the medium of theatre is based on the four selected historical theatre texts: Hannah Brand’s Huniades, or The Siege of Belgrade (Norwich, 1791/1798); Carl Kischaludy’s Ilka oder die Einnahme von Griechisch-Weissenburg (Pest, 1814); James Cobb’s The Siege of Belgrade (London 1791/1828); und Friedrich Kaiser’s General Laudon (Vienna, 1875).*

In this article I would like to investigate the historical image of Belgrade created by European playwrights and librettists of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. What are the contents transported in the dramatic texts about Belgrade? Is a certain historical-political context present, which dominates the entertainment factor? Istanbul has been for a long time *the* symbol of an oriental city and lifestyle in the Western European mind – an image that was transmitted especially in poetry and dramatic texts. Belgrade seems to be present in a different way in the European cultural memory.

In his 1963 essay *Sur Racine* (“On Racine”) Roland Barthes already posed the question of how to deal academically with the challenge of the relation between history and a work of art, be it music or a dramatic text. There are “on one side, the raw materials – historical, biographical, and traditional (sources) – and on the other (for it is obvious that there remains an abyss between these raw materials and the work), a *je ne sais quoi* with vague and noble names: the *generative impulse*, the *mystery of the soul*, the *synthesis*, in short *Life*.”¹

Barthes was referring to the gap between positivistic and normative science. That gap still exists today but has been narrowed down, especially in cultural studies, with the notion of “cultural memory”.

1 Roland Barthes: “History or literature?”, in: *On Racine*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1964 (orig. 1963/60), p. 167.

Cultural memory (orig. “kulturelles Gedächtnis”), a concept coined by the German scholar Jan Assmann, “draws our attention to the role of the past in constituting our world through dialogue and intercommunication, and it investigates the forms in which the past represents itself to us as well as the motives that prompt our recourse to it”.² Theatre plays an important role insofar as it can be perfectly used as an external storage medium.³

The power which today is generally attributed to media such as newspapers and TV, or the various new social media tools such as blogs, Twitter or Facebook, was until the nineteenth century particularly connected with theatre. The significance of theatre, both for entertainment and education, was considerable and, at least at the court and within the bourgeois class in the cities, undoubted. Hilde Haider-Pregler called the theatre of the eighteenth century with regard to its educational function “des sittlichen Bürgers Abendschule” (‘evening school of a moral citizen’) in her book of the same name.⁴

The repeated re-presentation of a subject or a certain group of people, and the way in which they are portrayed, can introduce a specific image to the cultural memory of the recipients. This function of theatre could be politically directed with ease by the ruling elite, and state-controlled theatre censorship was active in the Habsburg Empire until the end of the empire in 1918; it even survived in the Republic of Austria – under different circumstances – until 1955.⁵ The ideological function of theatre continued in twentieth-century theatre with, for example, Agitprop theatre groups; the pedagogical is also still widely in use, e.g. in the Theatre of the Oppressed and various similar methods. Dramatic texts and libretti serve perfectly as storage media for traditional experiences and memories.

I will analyse the representation of history related to Belgrade in the medium of theatre, using the example of four selected historical theatre texts: Hannah Brand’s *Huniades, or The Siege of Belgrade, a tragedy*, Norwich, 1791/1798;⁶ Carl Kisfaludy’s *Ilka oder die Einnahme von Griechisch-Weissenburg, Vaterländisches Original-Schauspiel in 4 Akten*, Pest, 1814;⁷ James Cobb’s *The Siege of Belgrade, a*

2 Jan Assmann: Preface to *Religion and cultural memory*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006, p. IX.

3 For questions of cultural memory and media cf. Aleida Assmann: *Erinnerungsräume. Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses*. München: C. H. Beck, 1999.

4 Cf. Hilde Haider-Pregler: *Des sittlichen Bürgers Abendschule. Bildungsanspruch und Bildungsauftrag des Berufstheaters im 18. Jahrhundert*. Wien: Jugend und Volk, 1980.

5 Cf. Norbert Bachleitner: “Die Theaterzensur in der Habsburgermonarchie”, in: *LiThes Zeitschrift für Literatur und Theatersoziologie* 5 (2010), http://lithes.uni-graz.at/lithes/beitraege10_05/heft_5_bachleitner.pdf

6 Hannah Brand: “Huniades, or The Siege of Belgrade, a tragedy”, in: *Plays, and poems; by miss Hannah Brand*. Norwich: Beatniffe and Payne, 1798. (Premiere Norwich 1791).

7 Carl von Kisfaludy von Kisfalud: *Ilka oder die Einnahme von Griechisch-Weissenburg, Vaterländisches*

comic opera, in three acts with music by Stephen Storace, London, 1791/1828;⁸ and Friedrich Kaiser's *General Laudon*, *Geschichtliches Volksstück mit Gesang und Tanz in fünf Bildern*, Wien, 1875.⁹

A lot of dramatic texts refer to a certain siege or battle of Belgrade in their titles without specifying it further. The authors obviously expected their contemporary audience to allocate the events historically, or else they intended to give the audience a certain understanding of the historical events in a pedagogical manner. *The Siege of Belgrade*, a title used by both Hannah Brand in 1791 and James Cobb in 1828 for their respective texts, may concern incidents which at a first glance cannot be associated with a specific historical event. Even a short consultation of a lexicon reveals at least eighteen sieges, from the year AD 488 until 1828.¹⁰

The following events were used by the authors of the dramatic texts selected for this paper: Carl von Kiszfaludy depicted in *Ilka oder die Einnahme von Griechisch-Weissenburg* a certain battle of 1073 between Hungary and the Byzantine Empire,¹¹ which does not exist in encyclopedia entries. Hannah Brand's *Huniades, or The Siege of Belgrade* uses as background the battle of 1456 between the Hungarians and

Original-Schauspiel n 4 Akten, s.l.: s.a. (handwritten addendum in the volume used for this article: Pest, 1814). There are different ways to spell his name: Carl or Karl in German, Károly in Hungarian and on the title page of *Ilka* he appears as Carl von Kiszfaludy von Kiszfalud.

8 James Cobb: *The Siege of Belgrade, a comic opera, in three acts, as it is performed at the Theatres Royal, London and Dublin*. Dublin: Booksellers, s.a. [1791?] and James Cobb: *The Siege of Belgrade, a comic opera in three acts. Printed from the acting copy, with remarks, biographical and critical [...]*, London: John Cumberland, 1828 (Cumberland's British Theatre, with remarks, biographical and critical. Vol. XX).

9 Friedrich Kaiser: *General Laudon, Geschichtliches Volksstück mit Gesang und Tanz in fünf Bildern*. Wien: Wallishausser, 1875 (Don Juan Archiv Wien, Komplex Mauerbach, KMB 2888).

10 If we understand Wikipedia as the true product of today's public cultural memory, it is noteworthy to list all the entries titled as Siege of Belgrade in different national editions of the online encyclopedia: Siege of Singidunum (488), Siege of Singidunum (504), Siege of Singidunum (584), Siege of Singidunum (630), Siege of Belgrade (827), Siege of Belgrade (971), Siege of Belgrade (1316), Siege of Belgrade (1382), Siege of Belgrade (1440), Siege of Belgrade (1456), Siege of Belgrade (1521), Siege of Belgrade (1688), Siege of Belgrade (1690), Siege of Belgrade (1717), Siege of Belgrade (1739), Siege of Belgrade (1789), Siege of Belgrade (1804), Siege of Belgrade (1806).

English version, The Siege of Belgrade – http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege_of_Belgrade (accessed on May 20, 2012): 488, 504, 548, 630, 827, 971, 1316, 1382, 1440, 1456, 1521, 1688, 1690, 1717, 1739, 1789, 1804, 1806, 1944. Italian version, Assedio di Belgrado – http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assedio_di_Belgrado (accessed on May 20, 2012): 1456, 1521, 1688, 1717. French version, Siège de Belgrade – http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Si%C3%A8ge_de_Belgrade (accessed on May 20, 2012): 1414, 1456, 1521, 1688, 1690, 1717, 1739, 1789. German version, Schlacht um Belgrad – http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schlacht_um_Belgrad (accessed on May 20, 2012): 1440, 1456, 1521, 1688, 1690, 1717, 1739, 1789, 1805 – 1807, 1944. The Serbian version actually designates seventeen "sieges", one "liberation", two "battles" and three "bombings". Serbian version, Опсада Београда – http://sr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Опсада_Београда (accessed on June 23, 2013).

11 Kiszfaludy: *Ilka*, Personen, s.p.

Ottomans.¹² Scholars are divided about the dating of the setting of James Cobb and *The Siege of Belgrade*, as the author does not indicate anything himself: both dates 1456 and 1789 can be found in literature. There is no doubt that, when he wrote *General Laudon*, Friedrich Kaiser had in mind the historic battle of Belgrade between the Habsburgs and the Ottomans in 1789.

HANNAH BRAND: *HUNIADES, OR THE SIEGE OF BELGRADE*,
A TRAGEDY¹³

Hannah Brand's (1754–1821) five-act tragedy, a monumental 142-page-long dramatic text, was first performed in 1791. Its focus is the battle and siege of Belgrade in 1456, fought between the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II, the Conqueror (b.1432, r.1444–1446 and 1451–1481), here called Mahomet II and the Hungarian John Hunyadi (1387–1456), here John Corvin Huniades. Sultan Mehmed II, who conquered Constantinople in 1453 and ended Byzantine rule, now advances towards Hungary with an army of 150,000 men aiming to lay siege to the stronghold Belgrade. The Hungarian hero Huniades and a small troupe bravely fight against this superior number of soldiers. With the help of the Franciscan Giovanni da Capistrano, Huniades and his crusaders succeed in fighting off the Ottomans. Not only Hungary but also the whole of Christendom are gloriously saved from the Turks.

Author Hannah Brand – one of the very few female dramatists of the eighteenth century – added a historical introduction to her 1798 publication of the text, explaining Hungary's historical and political situation in 1456 – the rivalry between Ulrick, Count of Cilley, and the Huniades (John Corvin and his son Ladislaus Corvinus) – as well as details about Sultan Mehmed II known in Brand's time. In her introduction she tries to add historical value and authenticity to her dramatic text by giving as sources for these details quotations from various history books of her time, including the *New universal history* or "D'Ohssons Hist. gen. of the Othoman Empire".¹⁴

Brand's distribution of roles is immediately clear in the *Dramatis Personae*, visually parted into two political-religious camps on two different pages of the book: "Christians" and "Turks". From the beginning, she leaves no doubt about the frontline and where her sympathy lies. Her introduction labels the Ottoman

12 Brand: "Huniades", p. 10.

13 Ibidem.

14 Brand: Introduction to *Plays, and poems*, p. 8. Brand refers to Ignatius Mouradgea d'Ohsson: *Tableau général de l'Empire othoman, divisé en deux parties, dont l'une comprend la législation mahométane, l'autre, l'histoire de l'Empire othoman*, 3 vols., Paris, 1787–1820, also published as 7 vols., Paris, 1788–1824.

Sultan Mahomet II as the “terror of all Christendom”,¹⁵ whereas the Hungarians, especially father and son Huniades, are brave heroes. Unfortunately their heroic fight is betrayed within their own ranks by Ulrick.

In return for sparing Belgrade, Sultan Mahomet II asks for princess Agmunda to be his bride – otherwise the city will be destroyed. Agmunda is in love with John Huniades’s son Ladislaus Corvinus, and he quickly marries her to protect her from this fate. Ulrick abducts her and hands her over to the sultan, but Agmunda remains steadfast. Zilago, governor of Belgrade, kills the villain Ulrick and the Hungarians under the Huniades defeat the Turks. But this is a tragedy, and in the end Agmunda still will be poisoned by Sultan Mahomet II. A good part of the play resembles the typical abduction plot found in many libretti and dramatic texts of the late eighteenth century. Its happy ending, however, is political rather than personal.

The tragedy discusses if one single noble person should be sacrificed for the good of a whole people – in this case, the marriage of Agmunda to Mahomet II in exchange for the retreat of the Ottoman troupes from Belgrade. David Chandler identifies in this idea an early mirroring of the events in the French Revolution which led to Marie Antoniette being beheaded in 1793 for the good of the people.¹⁶ In Hannah Brand’s tragedy, written in 1791, both classes, people and nobility, reject that deal.

Huniades, or The Siege of Belgrade is a political play with didactic, historical-critical aspirations. To support that claim, the author quotes from trustworthy sources in her introduction. The camps are divided by religion rather than by nationality: it is Christians versus Turks, with the latter being synonymous for the Islamic faith. The Christians are heroic and steady, the Turks are gruesome and superstitious – rationality versus irrationality.

JAMES COBB: *THE SIEGE OF BELGRADE*, A COMIC OPERA

In James Cobb’s libretto of 1791¹⁷ the dramatis personae are divided simply into men and women. The setting is in a “Village of Servia, with the Danube; on one side the Turkish camp, on the other the Austrian”,¹⁸ later inside the “Seraskier’s tent” and also in Belgrade.

15 Brand, *ibidem*.

16 David Chandler: “The conflict: Hannah Brand and theatre politics in the 1790s”, in: *Romanticism on the net* 12 (1998), <http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/005819ar> (accessed on May 20, 2012)

17 James Cobb: *The Siege of Belgrade*, [1791?].

18 *Ibidem*, p. 3. Interestingly enough, in the later version of the libretto, printed in London 1828, there is no Austrian camp anymore. cf. James Cobb: *The Siege of Belgrade, a comic opera, in three acts. Printed from the acting copy, with remarks, biographical and critical [...]*. London: John Cumberland, 1828.

Which historical battle the text is about remains unclear. The Turkish commander is called “Seraskier”, which actually is not a name but a title, similar to general or general field marshal. No sultan or other historical person who might give a hint to the period of the setting appears or is referenced.

The composer of the comic opera, Stephen Storace (1762–1796) borrowed the music generously from Vicente Martin y Soler’s drama giocoso *Una Cosa Rara* (Vienna, 1786): nine out of twenty-nine pieces are taken from Martin y Soler’s composition.

Unlike Brand, Cobb does not add a historical introduction. In literature attributions can be found to the battle of 1456¹⁹ – which is rather implausible as there are “Austrian soldiers” and not Hungarians – and also to the battle of 1789. The latter would suggest that the author used contemporary events, which is rather unusual but of course possible.

Luckily we have for this opera a rare instance of reports about performances from various sides, which gives us an idea of its contemporary reception. One of the singers, Michael Kelly (1762–1826), commented in his biography about the performances in London. Kelly sang the part of Seraskier and was also a singer in the premiere of *Una cosa rara* in Vienna, 1786, and he described his rather positive memories in his *Reminiscences*: “The opera was received with great applause, and was performed the first season sixty nights to overflowing houses. The acting of Mrs. Crouch, in the ‘Letter Duett,’ with the Seraskier, was beyond all praise, and Palmer’s bye-play was excellent.”²⁰

The sister of the composer, Nancy Storace (1765–1817), had already been a star in Vienna – in 1786 her roles included Susanna in the premiere of *Le nozze di Figaro* and Lilly in the premiere of *Una cosa rara* – and she also appeared prominently in this opera, singing the role of Lilla.

Kelly obviously had quite good memories about the piece – although he might have been biased, having sung the leading role. The commentator with the initials D.G., however, had quite a critical opinion about the text in the introduction of the print edition, London 1828: “the plot is singularly unimportant and trivial”.²¹ During the siege of Belgrade, a young woman (Katharine) gets abducted by Turks and is brought to the Seraskier, the Turkish general field marshal. Her husband,

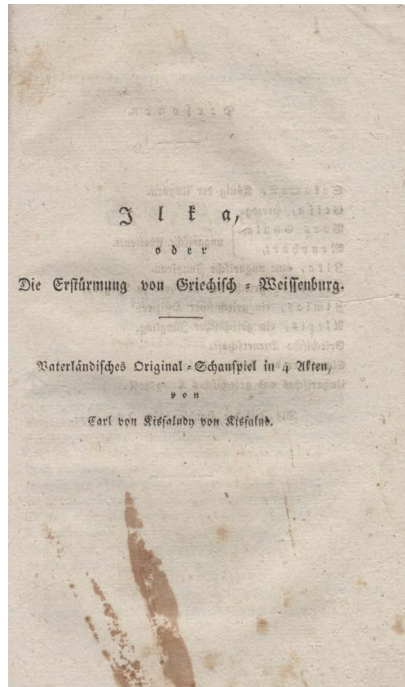
19 Cf. Centre for Performance History / RCM London: *Virtual exhibition – pantomime and the Orient; 6. The Siege of Belgrade (1791)* (accessed on May 20, 2012) <http://www.cph.rcm.ac.uk/Virtual%20Exhibitions/Music%20in%20English%20Theatre/Pages/Caption6.htm>

20 Michael Kelly: *Reminiscences of Michael Kelly*, vol. 2. Second edition, London: Henry Colburn, 1826, p. 1.

21 D. G.: “Remarks”, in: James Cobb: *The Siege of Belgrad*, 1828, p. 3.

the Austrian Colonel Cohenberg, is also arrested while trying to rescue her. What follows is a typical abduction plot: the Turkish leader Seraskier would like to have the captured Christian woman as his bride, but she stays firm; as revenge her husband is sentenced to death. In the end the Austrians prevail over the Turks and all of them are freed. Colonel Cohenberg now shows clemency and keeps the captured Seraskier alive: “Rise and learn from this how Christians treat a captive foe.”²²

The historico-political message is meagre, with the whole plot centering around a standard captivity-story like so many others. The only difference is that the setting is not in the Levante but in Belgrade. Here the author might have been influenced by the real historical battle of Belgrade in 1789, which happened two years before the London premiere of the piece in 1791. As comic-opera the main aim of Cobb’s *The Siege of Belgrade* was to entertain the audience rather than to provide historically correct information or to encourage the recipients to reflect upon their own situation.



Ill. 1: Frontispiz, in: Carl von Kiszaludy von Kiszalud: *Ilka oder die Einnahme von Griechisch-Weissenburg, Vaterländisches Original-Schauspiel in 4 Akten*. s.l: s.a. (handwritten addendum in the volume used for this article: Pest, 1814)

22 Cobb: *ibidem*, p. 45.

CARL (KÁROLY) KISFALUDY:
ILKA ODER DIE EINNAHME VON GRIECHISCH-WEISSENBURG,
*EIN VATERLÄNDISCHES ORIGINAL-SCHAUSPIEL IN 4 AKTEN*²³

The chosen genre title “vaterländisches Original-Schauspiel” (‘patriotic original-play’) provides the first hint that the content of the play is written in a patriotic manner. The Hungarian author Carl (Károly) Kisfaludy (1788–1830) is one of the founders of Hungarian romanticism. His dramatic plays deal mostly with subjects from Hungarian history.²⁴

The plot is about a siege of Belgrade in the year 1073. In this case the rival camps are not the Ottomans and Austrians, but the Hungarians and the “Griechen” (‘Greeks’ or Byzantines). The Greeks have captured the fortress “Griechisch Weissenburg” (the German name of Belgrade) with the help of the Bulgarians, and now the Hungarians are trying to liberate it.

Again there is a brave maiden, Ilka, the Hungarian heroine. She has been captured by Niketas, the Greek field marshal and new commander of Belgrade. He is in love with her and ready to release her if she agrees to become his wife. Ilka however is in love with a Hungarian commander and stays firm. Niketas’s Hungarian foster-son is also in love with Ilka but tries to stay loyal to Niketas. This constellation leads to various entanglements.

Throughout the play, the Greeks and their Bulgarian allies are painted as unreliable and morally weak. Niketas, their commander, laments about his own soldiers:

Nicht fürchte ich des Feindes Macht so sehr,
Wie meine eig’ne Schaar. – Die Griechen sind
Ein ausgeartet Volk.
[...]
...Gold ist nun sein einz’ger Götze,
Und drum erröthet er nicht mehr, auch vor
Dem Fremdling selbst im Stau zu kriechen.²⁵

(‘I am less afraid of the enemy
than of my own regiment. – The Greeks are
a degenerate people.
[...]

23 Kisfaludy: *Ilka*.

24 E.g. *Die Tataren in Ungarn* (Pest, 1814), *Stibor* (Brünn, 1820).

25 Kisfaludy: *Ilka*, Dritter Akt, p. 139.

Gold is their only idol,
they don't even blush, when
licking the boots of a foreigner.')

Zimias, his officer, agrees with him:

Schnell griffen die
Bulgaren wieder zu den Waffen, da
Du ihren Sold erhöht; [...]²⁶

('The Bulgarians quickly
took up arms, when
you raised the pay;')

As opposed to the Greeks, the Hungarians are generous. They promise to protect the citizens of Belgrade if they surrender. Menyhart, a Hungarian nobleman, philosophises: "Herrlich ist und wünschenswerth der Sieg, wenn Großmuth ihn Begleitet: er verewiget den Helden. Doch höher ziert und adelt noch Erbarmen und Milde ihn."²⁷

Basically the story has a genre-typical captivity plot. What is remarkable is its exceptional, strong, female Christian hero Ilka – neglecting all dangers she remains steadfast and rejects all promises and the love of the Greek occupier of Belgrade. She frees herself from captivity without any male help: she outsmarts the guards and sets the fortress of Belgrade on fire, enabling the Hungarian soldiers to invade the city and achieve victory. Only through her heroic deeds is Belgrade made Hungarian again.

The author's intention is to show that the Greeks are so weak that they can be defeated even by a woman. Ilka acknowledges before the Hungarian king: "Ilka ist Mein Nahm', Ungarn mein Vaterland – ein Held, Den meine Seele liebt, mein Reichthum; und Mein schönster Ruhm ist meines Königs Gnade und Vaterlandsliebe."²⁸ ('Ilka is my name, Hungary my fatherland – my soul loves a hero, he is my wealth; my greatest glory is the grace of my king and the love of my fatherland.')

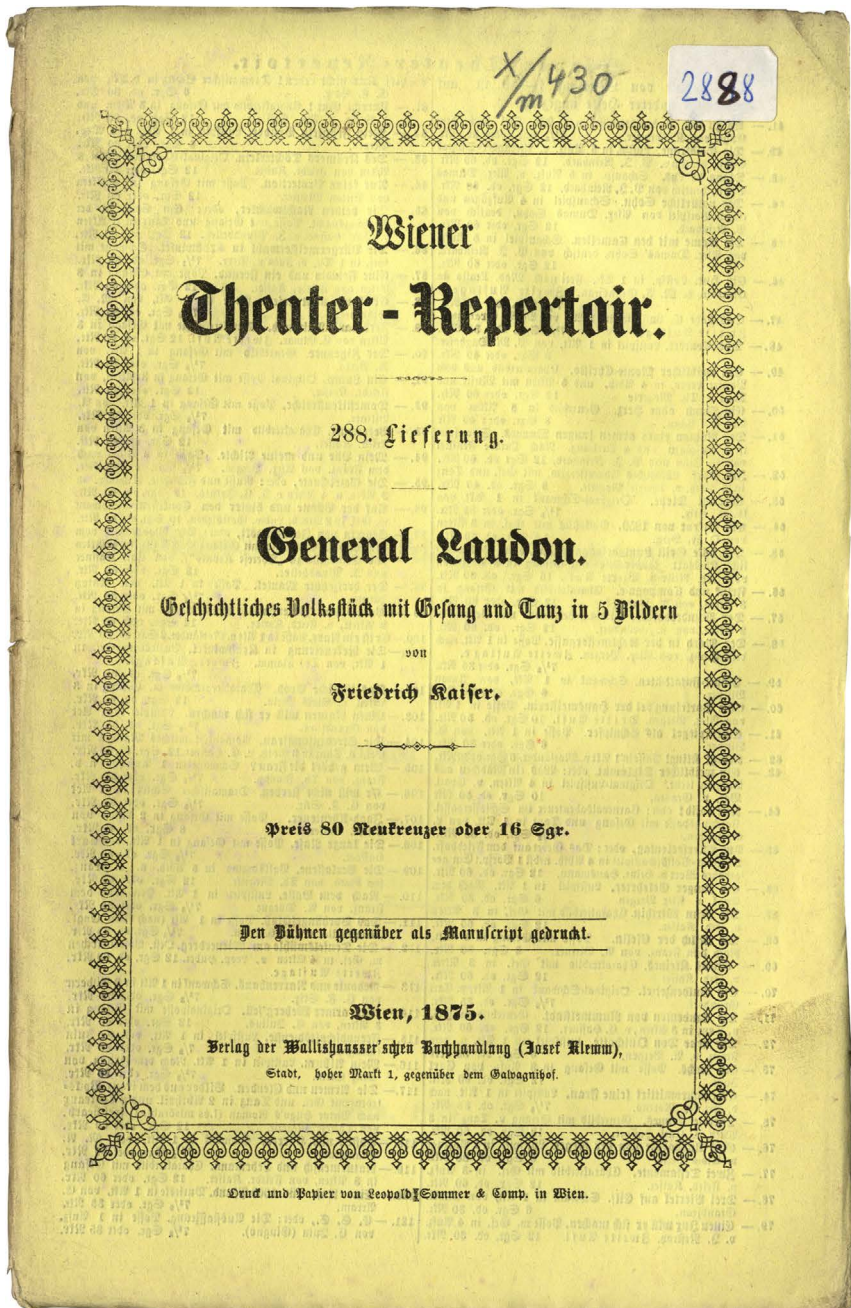
The heroic deeds of a woman have to be rewarded: There is a happy ending in the final scene when Ilka is reunited with her beloved hero Gyula before the Hungarian king and gets married.

Kisfaludy's play is openly patriotic. Its political and religious opponents are the Hungarians (the Roman Catholic Christians) and the Byzantine Empire (the Orthodox Christians). Greeks and Bulgarians are depicted as morally weak and greedy. For them, gold is more important than patriotism and faith. The Hungarians, on the other hand, are noble, brave and generous.

26 Ibidem, p. 140.

27 Kisfaludy: *Ilka*, p. 165.

28 Kisfaludy: *Ilka*, p. 168.



Ill. 2. Frontispiz, in: Friedrich Kaiser: *General Laudon. Geschichtliches Volksstück mit Gesang und Tanz in fünf Bildern*. Wien: Wallishauser, 1875.

FRIEDRICH KAISER: *GENERAL LAUDON*,
GESCHICHTLICHES VOLKSSTÜCK
MIT GESANG UND TANZ IN FÜNF BILDERN²⁹

The dramatist Friedrich Kaiser (1814–1874) was employed as a playwright in Vienna at the Carltheater and later on at the Josefstädtertheater. One of the most frequently performed authors of his time, Kaiser wrote at least 143 pieces, most of them comedies or Wiener Possen, but also “historische Volksstücke”, so called Lebensbilder, apart from *General Laudon* also a play about *Sonnenfels* and *Abraham a Santa Clara*.³⁰ He was a contemporary of Johann Nestroy, for whom he worked after the death of Carl Carl, the director of the Carltheater, in 1854. Kaiser was a professing liberal, and in the revolutionary year of 1848 he became famous when he was chosen to proclaim publicly the new constitution to the people in Vienna. Yet his plays were heavily loaded with patriotism and heroism.

The monumental play *General Laudon* has thirty-eight roles, among them a good deal of Habsburg dignitaries and politicians of every kind, starting with the highest ranking in the empire, Kaiserin Maria Theresia and Franz der Erste, followed by the main hero Gideon Ernst Freiherr von Laudon, k. k. Feldmarschall-Lieutenant, as well as such roles as Woitic, croatischer Feldpater and generals, adjutants, volunteers, soldiers and further folk.

The whole combination makes for quite an overblown, drippingly patriotic five-act “Geschichtliches Volksstück” (‘historical piece’) as it was named by the author. Kaiser’s aim was to celebrate the heroic deeds of the Austrian field marshal Ernst Freiherr von Laudon. To make the play more interesting for the audience, Kaiser also included a half-hearted love story about a tailor’s son who, despite his love, goes to war full of patriotic pride for his leader Laudon.

Most of the play – acts two and three – are about the historic siege of the Prussian fortress Schweidnitz in 1761 by Laudon and his famous victory. Act five, years later, shows Laudon retired at his castle in Hadersdorf near Vienna, lonely and grumpy because nobody needs his service when peace prevails. He comes to joyful life again only when he learns that he will receive the command of an expedition to free Belgrade from the Turks. He and his loyal soldiers march enthusiastically towards Belgrade and are immediately victorious.

The plot relates to the historic Eighth Austro-Turkish War of 1788–1789, in which the real Laudon received supreme command of the main army – after Field

29 Kaiser: *General Laudon*.

30 Roswitha Woytek: “Kaiser, Friedrich”, in: *Neue Deutsche Biographie* 11 (1977), <http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd118874748.html>

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Marshal Hadik von Futak fell ill – and on 8 October 1789 recaptured Belgrade from the Ottoman army.

The piece ends with the Laudon Lied³¹ and a tableau showing “Laudon in dem Momente [...], in welchem ihm der besiegte Commandant von Belgrad die Schlüssel überreicht”.³²

The heroes are without doubt the Habsburg field marshal Laudon and his unconditionally loyal officers. There is no single enemy – Laudon fights wherever his fatherland needs him, be it against Prussia or against the Ottomans.

CONCLUSION

While other Eastern cities such as Istanbul usually serve in theatre as a background for exotic fantasies, Belgrade appears only in a political and war-like context. In the presented dramatic texts and libretti about Belgrade, the plot concerns the struggle between two empires and at the same time two religious confessions. It is either Christians against Muslims or Roman Catholic Christians against Orthodox Christians. The texts are loaded with examples of faithfulness, loyalty and patriotism. The enemy always comes from the East and has a different faith. The winner of the struggle not only liberates or defends the city from an occupying force but also saves Europe as a whole from the threat of conquest by the Other. Here the fortress and city of Belgrade stands for the European/Christian defense and symbolises a bulwark of freedom. If Belgrade is falling, the Christian Western world is in danger.

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31 “[...] Der Name imponiert dem Feind, | Der siegessicher sich gemeint, | Ein Schreckenswort wird jetzt ihm kund, | Und bebend geht’s von Mund zu Mund’ |, Wird Der uns gegenübersteh’n, | Dann müsen wir zu Grunde geh’n! | Der Türk’ fangt da zu zittern an | Denn der Laudon – der Laudon rückt an!” (“The enemy is impressed by his name alone, who was confident until now, a cruel word comes to light, trembling it is passed on from person to person, “he will face us, we will perish”. The Turk starts trembling, Laudon – Laudon is approaching’) cf. Kaiser: *General Laudon*, p. 64.

32 Ibidem.

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- http://lithes.uni-graz.at/lithes/beitraege10_05/heft_5_bachleitner.pdf (accessed on May 20, 2012)
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