

**Children of the Same God:
Unitarianism in Kinship with Judaism and Islam
Minns Lectures, 2009
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Lecture Two of the Series

Children of the Same God: European Unitarianism in Creative Cultural Exchange with Ottoman Islam¹

When Sultan Suleyman of the Ottoman Empire first learned of the birth of John Sigismund, the son of the King of Hungary, he felt it be such an important event that he sent a personal representative to stand in a corner of Queen Isabella's room to watch over her and the infant.² Sigismund's father, King John Zapolya, King of Hungary and Viovode of Transylvania, had died just two weeks after his son's birth that July of 1540. On his deathbed he had given instructions that his son be named heir to his titles, a violation of a previous agreement that promised Hungary after John's death to Ferdinand, the brother of the Hapsburg Emperor Charles. When it became clear after John's death that his successors had no intention of allowing Hungary to become a part of the Hapsburg Empire, Ferdinand responded by laying siege on Buda. In 1541, with Queen Isabella's forces nearing collapse, Sultan Suleyman appeared in Buda with a large army, successfully repulsing Ferdinand. Suleyman claimed the capital of Buda and much of lower Hungary for his control while granting Isabella and her infant son Transylvania to rule independently, but under the ultimate control of the Ottoman State. After some years of political contrivance and redefinition, Transylvania developed into its new identity as a border state. An odd slice of semi-independence between those areas directly controlled by the Hapsburgs and the Ottomans, Transylvania eventually became one of the safest places in Europe for the development of progressive Protestantism. In 1568, the now grown-up King and newly-minted Unitarian John Sigismund issued the Edit of Torda, a document which historians have celebrated as the first European policy of expansive religious toleration.³

Rather than compelling his people to adopt his faith by establishing it as the

national religion, Sigismund made it legal for his citizens to practice their own tradition, and he went further by explicitly honoring the right of congregations to choose their own preachers, and the right of preachers to teach their own understandings.

This much is well known. American Unitarian historians, however, have long been tantalized by the prospect of making a more specific connection between the Islamic Ottoman rule and the development of Unitarianism in Transylvania, especially as expressed in what has been described as its most “most striking and distinguished” achievement: the advocacy and practice of what Unitarian historian Earl Morse Wilbur named the most “perfect” principle of toleration.⁴ Actually, the Edict of Torda was not exactly perfect, extending toleration to only four state approved churches, and not to other Christian and non-Christian minorities. It was nonetheless an impressive achievement, and it was the first modern principle of religious toleration articulated by Europeans on the level of state rule. That such a statement should have been issued by Unitarians under the ultimate political rule of religious tolerant Ottomans seems too strong and obvious a connection to be mere coincidence. Yet there has also been despair over the possibility of ever finding direct evidence of mutual relation and influence.⁵ While every one agrees as to the presence of the Sultan’s representatives standing quietly in the corners of Transylvanian history, it has been harder to define what active role the Ottomans played in the earliest days of European Unitarianism.

I would like to suggest that uncovering the influence of Ottoman Islam on Unitarian development is not as hard a task as it once seemed. I believe that our inability to demonstrate the vital connection between Islam and Unitarian development is not appropriately attributable to the deplorable lack of 16th century Transylvanian governmental documents, the resistance of the contemporary Transylvanian church, or the shortage of Unitarian historians able to access documents written in both Hungarian and Turkish.⁶ All these things comprise genuine obstacles, but the most obvious evidences of influence have been overlooked, I believe, because we have been naïve about the relationship between East and West, here quite pointedly a

relationship between Islam and Christianity. We have imagined that the boundary between East and West has been relatively impermeable, a border crossed once at a time, by a few spectacular individuals or ideas. Yet the border between Europe and its Others has always been more impenetrable in theory than it has been in the lives of citizens of all manner of border states.

It is now widely recognized that the Christian and Muslim cultures were more in contact in the Middle Ages than had been assumed before. As I discussed in my first lecture, a fair amount of attention has been directed towards the Muslim ruled peninsula of what is now Spain—Al Andalus, where Christians, Jews, and Muslims lived in close and largely productive relationship from the 8th through the mid 15th century. But of course, Al-Andalus was notable partially because it was an exception to the rule, and only recently have we begun to imagine how different peoples in the early modern period interacted with each other in more complex ways than we have previously thought.

In what follows I would like to retell the story of the Edict of Torda's proclamation of religious toleration as a shared Islamic-Unitarian undertaking, as the result of a not only of mutual influence but as the result of a creative exchange between two cultures in close contact and in multiple relationships of mutual respect. My goal, then, is not to tell a story about Ottoman history that may or may not include footnotes about Unitarians, nor, for that matter, to tell a story about Unitarian history, which may or may not include a brief footnoted reference to the Ottomans. Rather the my hope it to visit at least for a brief while tonight, the place where two cultures creatively mix and mingle.

But first, let us briefly recount some of the existing stories about the Edict of Torda that are commonly told, but for our purposes, not so very helpful. The version of the story that we often share with Sunday School students is how the brilliant Unitarian court preacher Francis David, was the person responsible for the Edict. You may have seen the 19th century nationalist-style painting commemorating the Edict. It shows King Sigismund, his court, representatives from the different

religious traditions, and the nobility all listening intently to David while he presumably argues for toleration. While he speaks, arms upstretched, a single ray of sun is shines directly on David's head. The clear implication is that God is directly planting the principle of toleration into David's brain. I call this the Immaculate Conception theory of the Edict, and we shall see that this version of the story is not so helpful for us as we try to look beyond the lives of famous individuals, and instead, see into the murkier waters of the mutual influence of entire peoples.

When we expand upon this story for adult education and even for seminary students, there is, finally, an acknowledgement of the different cultural forces at work beyond personal genius. Into this story we insert Giorgio Biandrata, the court physician to Sigismund and most probably a member of the princely council that formally authored the Edit of Torda. Biandrata had been inspired by the Anti-Trinitarian thinking of Michael Servetus before his arrival in Transylvania, and he brought this influence to the Translyvanian court along with the rich traditions of Italian humanism. And perhaps more than anyone else, Biandrata was interested in developing an institutionally stable and international Unitarian church.

Those with a thoughtful eye for feminism might expand further on the story by restoring Queen Isabella to the story. She was herself a part of the very learned and liberal Polish royal court, and quite the dedicated humanist. When she left Buda to journey to Transylvania she carried with her a much thumbed copy of Erasmus, and that she subsequently insisted her son be educated in the values of classical humanism.⁷ Also, while ruling in the place of her underage son, it was she who had issued previous more limited declarations of toleration. It seems reasonable, then, to suggest that the development of the Edict of Torda was not just the result of David's personal genius, but the result of very real liberal cultural influences.

And yet, narratives of non-European and non-Christian influences are, interestingly, both non-existent, and hotly denied. I know these seems like an odd paradox, that something could be both non-existent and hotly denied, but we will

see more of this dynamic later, in instances where the trail of Muslim influence has been deliberately obscured. In these cases, it becomes clear that non-existent often simply means “erased.” Hungarian church historians, as well as the existing Hungarian Unitarian Church, often are the most vocal in denying Ottoman influence on the development of Unitarianism. Turkey is of course now a historic enemy of the Hungarian nation. Hence, many of the most nationalistic Hungarian historians even reject what has long been accepted elsewhere: that Protestant movements like Unitarianism would never have developed and matured in Hungary and Transylvania to the extent that it did if it were not for the political protection of the Ottoman Empire from the Counter-Reformation.⁸

Non-Hungarian histories are more likely to acknowledge Ottoman influence, but still often in very limited ways. George Huntson William’s famous work *The Radical Reformation* is an example here. William’s acknowledges in a footnote the possible impact of the Ottoman concern with religious tolerance on the development of Unitarianism in Transylvania, yet his model of influence is exclusively political, negative, and unidirectional. He suggests that the Ottoman policy of religious tolerance was simply a cynical political means of preserving and developing such local divisions as would enhance their own control.⁹ This is of course partially true; the success of Ottoman domination was directly connected to the famous Ottoman flexibility towards local custom. And yet there is more to the story: the policy of tolerance was more than a matter of military strategy, and it found its expression not only in political structure but everyday cultural life.

As Ottoman scholar Victoria Holbrook reminds us, “The Ottomans are perhaps most unique for including and synthesizing the cultural elements of the land through which they passed. They are known for creating structures by which the people who had lived there before could carry on their lives and their beliefs in the way that they chose.”¹⁰ The Ottoman practice of both religious and cultural toleration was a partially matter of bureaucratic expediency as the borders of the empire expanded, but the practice was also deeply rooted in legal, cultural, and religious tradition.

Any monotheist who was willing to accept the political rule of the Ottomans was given protection and legal rights by and within the empire.¹¹ The Ottomans generally observed the established Islamic tradition with respect to religious minorities, the dhimma, or “protected persons” law. Non-Muslims were expected to pay a tax in return for which the state would assume the same responsibilities for them as they did for Muslim subjects.¹² There were some mild restrictions placed on religious minorities mainly intended to mark them as socially inferior to Muslims. Even these restrictions, however, were widely ignored.¹³

A climate hospitable to toleration had also grown out of the cultural conditions surrounding the rule of the sultan. It benefited the ultimate ruler to protect those, especially travelers likely to be minorities, who might convey information and goods from one part of the empire to the other, just so long as allegiance to the highest authority was made.¹⁴

Toleration, then, was a matter of Ottoman policy, Ottoman bureaucratic structure, and also an expression of the Ottoman interpretation of Islam, which was in most instances stunningly liberal, cosmopolitan, and pluralistic. Jews found the Ottoman Empire an enormously hospitable place, and a large Diaspora developed within its borders as anti-Semitism grew elsewhere in Europe. Salo Baron described the thriving, learned Jewish communities of the 16th century Ottoman Empire as one of Judaism’s great golden ages.¹⁵ Christians, as the other “people of the book,” enjoyed a similar welcome of the Ottoman society, especially non-orthodox Christians fleeing persecution.¹⁶ Ottoman flexibility had other advantages for religious radicals. We know, for example, that Unitarians published some of their more radical literature in Turkey, and then had it smuggled into Transylvania.¹⁷

With such an obvious legacy, why, then, the resistance to the Ottoman dimension of the story? As I have already suggested, we should not miss in all of this anxiety about Eastern influence the lingering effects of Hungarian nationalism. One of the political results of the Reformation was a certain identification of Hungarian

patriotism with liberal Protestantism, an association which has motivated the representation in some quarters as a national religion, as something sprung fresh and whole from uniquely Hungarian soil.¹⁸ It remains threatening not only in theological but in an ethnic way to credit the inspirations of Unitarianism to the influence of the historical enemy and ethnic other. Indeed, because of this political climate, those who have dared to suggest a connection between Islam and Unitarianism have done so precisely in order to discredit Unitarianism as un-Hungarian. Alexander Sándor Unghváry's *The Hungarian Protestant Reformation in the Sixteenth Century under the Ottoman Impact* provides an especially remarkable example of this. In an attempt to dismiss Unitarianism as a form of Islam (and therefore discount it as Hungarian), Unghváry suggests that Dávid was actually more Islamic than Christian, quoting Mohammed with more relish and frequency than the Bible. Oddly, he sites as his source for Servetus' reliance on the Quran a page in Wilbur that in fact praises Servetus' familiarity with and sophisticated use of the Bible, and which makes no mention of the Quran. Servetus was very much interested Christianity, Islam, and Judaism remaining in close relationship, and he knew a great deal about each tradition. The fact that Unghváry was both so wrong and so right suggest to me the tantalizing possibility that it might be easier to read for tracks of Unitarian-Islamic influence in anti-Unitarian propaganda than it is in the seemingly more sympathetic histories.

Indeed, the only literature that has consistently documented a connection between Transylvanian Unitarianism and Ottoman Islamic influence is that of the anti-Unitarian movements of seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe. The French historian de la Croze, for example, spoke of an explicit connection between Islamic theology, the Quran, and the development of Unitarianism in Transylvania, claiming that the Transylvanian Unitarians themselves saw a complete correspondence between their non-Trinitarian theology and the unity of God as taught in the Quran.¹⁹ Writers such as de la Croze were generally writing out of the alarmed conviction that Unitarianism might represent a stage towards conversion to Islam. This a belief dates to the earliest days of Protestantism, when the spread of Islam was seen as both an extension of anti-Trinitarian heresies and as a

consequence of divine wrath. In this complex point of view, Islam was both just a new form of Unitarianism, and at the same time, a punishment for Unitarianism. Martin Luther himself believed this, and the notion stuck because it appealed to people who were seriously worried about Islam in both a religious and a political way.

It is easy for us to forget how realistically frightened Europeans were that the Ottoman Empire might one day extend to dominate even Western Europe. At its height, the Ottomans were knocking on the gates of Vienna, and European fear from that time gave birth to many of the forms of Islamaphobia that still plague us today.

Although, as a brief aside, I have to say that the Ottoman near invasion of Vienna involves two of my favorite stories about a creative relationship between the two cultures. It is sad that these legends are most likely not true! But according to one tradition, during the height of the siege of Vienna in the late 17th century, curious foodies slipped out of town and into the Ottoman camps not in order not to spy on their military situation, but in order to see what they were eating and drinking. They were fascinated by the dark beans they found in camp, and took some back to town, originating Vienna's long obsession with lovely coffee. Alas, Vienna's bakers supposedly had a more negative response. According to this tall tale, bakers working early one morning heard a strange rumble that upon investigation proved to be Ottoman soldiers attempting to dig under the city walls. After giving alarm, they took to making pastries into the form of the crescent that symbolizes Islam. These became croissants, and eating them was supposedly intended to be an act of defamation against Islam. Food historians rightfully doubt the authenticity of the story of both the coffee and the croissants, but I appreciate the ability to at least imagine creative culture exchange!

For in times of change and fear cultural exchange is usually not understood in positive ways. This was certainly the case at the height of Ottoman expansion. Europeans feared that the Unitarians' cultural and theological interest in Islam might lead them to make political alliances with the Ottoman Empire, a concern

that was actually quite justifiable.

Adam Neuser is a case in point of a Unitarian whose theology led him not only to an attraction to Islam but to actually propose an alliance with the Ottomans. He was imprisoned after the interception of a letter he had written to the Sultan suggesting that other well born educated anti-Trinitarian Christian might well bring a lot of Europe over to the Ottomans on the Sultan's invitation. Neuser eventually escaped prison, and moved to Turkey, and embraced Islam. There is also the case of the London Unitarians in 1682, who intended to approach the Moroccan ambassador Mohammad ben Hadou with a letter proposing a Unitarian-Ottoman alliance. While this letter was largely respectful of Islam, it is notable in that it rather insensitively suggested that Islam could be bettered with Unitarian guidance. Specifically, the letter proposes that the remnant "repugnancies" in the Quran could easily be disregarded if the Muslims would only begin to read scripture in a historical and critical way, just as the Unitarians had come to read the Bible. It seems as if the letter were never delivered, but it is interesting that the only trace of its existence was preserved not by the Unitarians but by the active anti-Unitarian C. Leslie as evidence of the political untrustworthiness of Unitarians, whom he understood as "scouts among us for Mohamet."

And so as we return to Transylvania, we might do so wondering now if we might not find the firmest traces of Ottoman-Unitarian interaction not in the standard histories, but in anti-Islamic and/or anti-Unitarian propaganda.

If there was one form of anti-Islamic propaganda that dominated Hungary contemporary to the Edict of Torda, it was the lurid and often quite popular accounts of alleged Turkish atrocities. Most of these accounts were specifically intended to enflame ethnic hatred against the Turks, and many were even explicitly written for the liberal Protestants who were living in conditions of serious oppression in the Hapsburg lands bordering Hungary, and who otherwise might in their distress be tempted to see the Ottomans as most tolerant friends.²⁰ Indeed, interesting new work on the European literature of this same time has shown that

the European characterization of Muslim women as gender oppressed was a stereotype deliberately constructed to offend liberal Christians who might otherwise have been attracted to Islam.²¹ Hence the express point of much of the ideological literature of this time and place was to deny any mutual toleration between Turks and Hungarians, but as is so often the case, such a denial of influence actually betrays a considerable anxiety over the extent of a great and actual influence.

Consider one story offered up in these narratives about a Lutheran minister, who, while entertaining Turkish guests for dinner, was supposedly tricked into replacing his hat with a turban. In the somewhat illogical progress of the story, the donning of the turban is considered as sign of a full if forced conversion to Islam, subsequent to which his guests force him undergo an immediate circumcision. This dinner-table operation is all the more hideous, the text informs us, for its supposed exclusion of the man forever from Christian ministry.²²

It is not difficult to read such stories as originating in a fear about the loss of ethnic identity through conversion, assimilation, and the increasing cultural enmeshment of the Other, especially, when the stories take the form, as they often do, of narrations of the “execrable Turkish custom of seducing Christian women.”²³ Surprisingly, these incredible stories still make appearances in modern Hungarian histories, more often than not cited as evidence against the claim that Ottoman rule was helpful to the development of Protestantism.²⁴ But the irony is that in their eagerness to demonstrate supposed religious intolerance and generally beastly behavior on the part of the Muslims, these accounts actually preserve interesting evidence of considerable cultural enmeshment: Turkish guests at traditional dinners, Lutheran clergy converting to Islam, Turks and Hungarians marrying and having children together, and Europeans relocating to the heart of the Ottoman Empire.²⁵

Regarding marriage, there is considerable evidence of intermarriage in 16th and 17th century Hungary, both between Turks and Hungarians and also between the members of different religious confessions. Early 16th century Hungarian

Reformed canon law devotes enough energy to the prohibition of Islamic-Christian intermarriages to indicate the prevalence of the practice at least on the level of common law. Meanwhile, the degree of intermarriage between members of the different churches of Transylvania seems to have been both great, and interestingly enough, most likely predate the edict of Torda. Intermarriages were so accepted by the late 16th century that it was simply commonly understood that sons would follow the tradition of their father and daughters that of their mothers. For example, the contemporary (early 17th century) historian Kozma Petrityvity described the rather complicated religious mix of his family as non unusual. His grandfather was Unitarian, his grandmother Catholic; his mother was raised Catholic although many of her siblings became Reformed; his mother then married a Unitarian, who raised his sons including the historian to be Unitarians, even as the daughters attended mass with their mother.²⁶

Consider as well stories of the supposed forced relocation of Christian Europeans by the Ottomans. Just as with the stories of forced conversions and marriages, we might learn to read there mutual influence where we have been asked to see only unidirectional oppression.

Niyazi Berkes in his excellent study of Turkish secularism has already pointed out the case of Ibrahim Müteferrika. Multefferrika is described in 18th century European sources as a young Hungarian Calvinist studying for the ministry who was captured by the Turks, only to be enslaved by them and condemned to a life of misery in Ottoman lands. According to these same sources, this young Hungarian man was eventually forced to convert to Islam only in order to escape slavery. Now we know that Ibrahim was in fact a young Unitarian raised in Kolozsvár, a man whose anti-Trinitarian convictions attracted him of his own free will towards Islam. He was also someone who thrived rather than suffered in the heart of the Ottoman Empire, eventually establishing there the first modern printing press in a Muslim land. One of his own books published on his own press in 1710 had been dismissed by the 18th century historians as a pro-Islamic tract, but in fact it is a far more complicated and more Unitarian a tome than that. According to Berkes,

“Risale-I Islamiye” was not only the clear work of an anti-Trinitarian Christian, it reflect Ibrahim’s attraction to Islam as predating his removal from Transylvania. Berkes concludes, “if we go back one century and trace the development of religious and political conditions in Transylvania, we shall not fail to appreciate that neither Transylvanian Unitarianism nor Ibrahim’s folk were unfamiliar with or too distant from Islam.”²⁷

We are also told in the traditional literature of M. Péter Pérenyi, a 16th century Protestant Hungarian noble with a reputation for the advocacy of religious tolerance who “left” his son Ferenc “in Turkish hands as a hostage only himself to endure detention some years later.”²⁸ Upon further investigation this interesting man proved to be an unorthodox Christian neither unfamiliar with nor distant from Islam, a minor noble sought refuge with the Ottomans when his early advocacy of religious tolerance made him the target of his more orthodox neighbors.

There were of course, actual instances of the capture of Eastern European Christian boys, under the process of *devshirme*, or the “collection.” Their presence in Constantinople as wards of the sultan, made them technically, slaves, an illegality in a system that supposed gave Christians the same rights as Muslims.²⁹ As horrible as it sounds, the boys chosen for imperial service received what many describe as the best care and education available anywhere in the world at that time, and the desirability of being so “captured” is also reflected in the numerous instances of Turkish parents attempting to disguise themselves as Christians so that their children might be afforded this honor.³⁰ These boys, grown into men with powerful administrative positions, did much to ease relations between the empire and their hometowns.³¹ Indeed, the Ottomans specifically groomed these and other Europeans for positions of power within its administration, finding it safer to place Europeans in the Empire’s highest posts than Muslims who might belong to families with rival dynastic claims to those of the Ottomans. Given that the Hungarian boys raised as Unitarians often did the best with their Islamic educations, it is tempting to speculate on the presence of these Hungarian Muslim-Unitarians in the highest of Ottoman places. We know that of the twenty-one

Grand Viziers most credited with Ottoman success (those who directed the imperial administration between 1453 and 1623), eleven are described as South Slavs. As for the eight viziers who constituted the royal Divan of Sultan Suleyman himself, one two are described as Moslems at birth, three being Croatian, two Albanian, and one Hungarian.³² “Most” of the viziers after 1521 are described as having come from the Western part of the Balkans.³³ And hence I embarrassed to find myself suggesting, in our rather dubious tradition of claiming illustrious ancestors, that perhaps, some of the Grand Viziers of the Ottoman Empire were in fact, famous Unitarians.

Prepared, then, to find more cultural enmeshment in our story than we might have otherwise expected, let us return to tell again the tale of the Edict of Torda, begging now with events two decades previous to it.

On August 24, 1548, the Sultan’s representative in Buda (in what is now Budapest) was requested by local authorities in Tolna to take action against the Hungarian Protestant pastor there, Imre Szigeti. Specifically, the Catholic authorities in Tolna, offended by Pastor Szigeti’s unapologetic and public advocacy of reformed ideas, asked that he either be killed or driven from the city for heresy. The Chief Intendant of the Pasha of Buda communicated to the authorities in Tolna that not only had the Pasha denied their request, but that he had also issued an edict of toleration which states in part that “preachers of the faith invented by Luther should be allowed to preach the Gospel everywhere to everybody, whoever wants to hear, freely and without fear, and that all Hungarians and Slavs (who indeed wish to do so) should be able to listen to and receive the word of God without any danger. Because—he said—this is the true Christian faith and religion.”³⁴

The Pasha’s edict is not mentioned in any of the Unitarian histories. In fairness, many of the records and memories of the Ottoman governors of Buda of the time have been lost or destroyed, although their reputation for establishing fair and equitable relations between Christendom and Islam lives on even in the Hungarian chronicles.³⁵ And yet it bears so much in common in both terms of imagery and

intention with the later edicts of toleration to come from John Sigismund's court. We have been taught that the radicalism of the 1568 Edict of Torda over previous tolerations lies not merely in its extension of tolerance, but in its unique assertion of freedom of conscience, "because faith is a gift of God, it springs from listening, which listening forwards the word of God."³⁶ And yet this 1548 edict by the Pasha of Buda establishes an even earlier connection between true faith and free listening.

And while no direct textual trail exists, it is hard to imagine that Francis David himself could have been unfamiliar with the Pasha's 1548 edict when he laid the groundwork for the Edict of Torda two decades later. Like David, Imre Szigeti had been a Hungarian student at Wittenberg, and indeed, the record we have of the Pasha's edict comes to us from a letter written by Szigeti to former classmate, Matthias Flacius, a man also known to David. In 1548, while Szigeti was serving the Lutheran church in Tolna, David in was serving the Lutheran church in Bistrita (Beszterce), placing him in closer geographical range to Buda than Szigeti. Recall also that the Magyar Lutherans elected Francis David as their superintendent in 1557, and the authority for the toleration of the churches which David administered would have emanated directly from this particular edict.

Moreover, the Pasha's action corresponds with what might be anticipated on the basis of other, more frequently recounted events. We know, for example, that in 1574, in Lower Hungary, two preachers championing the Unitarian cause were persecuted for heresy by local authorities under outdated, pre-toleration laws. Lukas Tolnai managed to escape, but George Alvinczi was put to death on order of a church court presided over by the Calvinist Bishop. Influential Unitarians knew to turn to the Pasha at Buda for assistance. Eager to assist the Unitarians, the Pasha declared the execution of Alvinczi "inhumane" and ordered that the Bishop and his two fellow judges to be killed. Only when the Unitarian preacher at Pécs interceded, saying that Unitarians did not want such dramatic revenge, did the Pasha remit the sentence in lieu of it a heavy annual tribute imposed on the entire locale.³⁷ Additionally, we know that we have previously underestimated the influence of the Ottoman legal system on the development of the reformation.

During 1550's, 1560's and 1570's, the Protestants in Hungarian lands directly ruled by the Ottomans managed to hold their doctrinal debates with the Catholics and issue their subsequent edicts under the direction of a presiding Turkish official who assured the Protestant triumph either through overt ruling or indirect tampering.³⁸ It was also commonplace for non-Muslims to seek out the rulings of the Muslim courts accessible to them, under the common understanding regarding the liberality of the Muslim courts.³⁹

But I would like to leave the story of direct influence there, for it would not do to have once again the allure of a direct trail detract from what I hope instead gradually begins to emerge as a portrait of two cultures more greatly enmeshed in patterns of creative engagement, mutual attraction, and circular patterns of influence that we have imagined before. There are of course, many pieces of the portrait yet to be assembled, but when we assemble them, let us do so with an eye not towards telling an ethnically distinct cultural history, but with an eye to the many ways in which the borders between the Ottoman and Hungarian cultures were in this period crossed, renegotiated, and re-crossed. The basis for the Edict of Torda was established not only in Francis David's mind, not only in European humanist influence, not even through the direct political and legal influence of the Ottoman Empire. The grounds for religious toleration were prepared for in the everyday lives of actual persons, who experienced the negotiations of intermarriage before any legal proclamation of toleration, and who knew the attractions of Islam and the safety it accorded progressive Protestants before the publication of any theological treatise.

Could it be that toleration, that most precious inheritance of the European Enlightenment, was instead a shared liberal Christian/Muslim undertaking? It is especially ironic that while we praise the progressive, diversity-promoting character of our earliest Unitarian statements of religious toleration, we have also defined them heartily as products of liberal European genius. It is well past the time to live the paradigm of shared understanding that we have already heralded.

ENDNOTES

¹ Portions of this work have appeared previously in the *Journal of Unitarian Universalist History* and *Zaytuna: Journal of Advanced Islamic Study*.

² Jason, Goodman, *Lords of the Horizons: A History of the Ottoman Empire* (NY: Henry Holt, 1996): 86.

³ John F. Cadzow, Andrew Ludanyi,, and Louis J. Elteto, *Transylvania—The Roots of Ethnic Conflict* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press. 1983).

⁴ Earl Morse Wilbur, *A History of Unitarianism in Transylvania, England, and America*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952): 164-165.

⁵ Naná Kratochvil, “The Influence of Islam in Transylvania: A Speculative Reconstruction,” presented to the Ohio River Study Group of Unitarian Universalist Ministers, Akron, Ohio, Oct.5, 1999.

⁶On the lack of governmental documents, see Katalin Péter, “Tolerance and Intolerance in Sixteenth Century Hungary,” Ole Peter Grelle and Bob Scribner, eds. *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) on the denial of influence, see Kratochvil, “The Influence of Islam in Transylvania.”

⁷Anges R. Várkonyi , “Pro quiete regni—For the Peace of the Realm: The 1568 Law on Religious Tolerance in the Principality of Transylvania,” *Hungarian Quarterly* 34 (1993): 99-112; 100.

⁸ See for example Alexander Sándor Unghváry, *The Hungarian Protestant Reformation in the Sixteenth Century under the Ottoman Impact* (Lewiston/Lampeter/Queenston: The Edwin Mellen Press, Texts and Studies in Religion Volume 48, 1989).

⁹ George Huntson Williams, *The Radical Reformation, 3rd edition* (Kirksville, Missouri: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1992): 1105.

¹⁰ Victoria Holbrook, *Islam: Empire of Faith* (BBS Documentary, 2003).

¹¹ Peter F. Sugar, *Southeastern Europe Under Ottoman Rule, 1354-1804* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1989): 5.

¹² For an account of how *dhimma* law was incorporated and practiced by the Ottomans see H. A. R. Gibb and Harold Bowen, *Islamic Society and the West* (London: Oxford University Press, 1950, part 2); esp. 211-212.

¹³ See See Halil Inalcik, “Foundations of Ottoman-Jewish Cooperation in Avigdor Levy, *Jews Turks and Ottomans: A Shared History, Fifteenth Through the Twentieth Century* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002): 3-14.

¹⁴ Ibid., 7.

¹⁵ Salo Wittmayer Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews: Vol. 18, The Ottoman Empire, Persia, Ethiopia, India and China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

¹⁶ Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, eds., *Christian and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society* (New York: Hokmes and Meirer, 1982).

¹⁷ Mester Bela, "The Connection Between Unitarian Thought and Early Modern Political Philosophy," *Journal of the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 3 (Winter 2002): 142.

¹⁸ Unitarianism, for example, is often referred to in the nationalistic literature as being uniquely suited to the spirit of the Hungarian people. While this association occurs most frequently in the literature of Hungarian Unitarians, it is interesting to note the degree to which many modern American Unitarians maintain the connection. See Stephen Sisa, *The Spirit of Hungary* (New Jersey: Vista Books, 1990): 86.

¹⁹ Ahmad Gunny, *Images of Islam in Eighteenth Century Writing* (London: Grey Seal, 1996): 78.

²⁰ Leslie C. Tihany, "Islam and the Eastern Frontiers of Reformed Protestantism," *The Reformed Review: A Journal of the Seminaries of the Reformed Church in America* (Holland Michigan Western Theological School) Vol. 29 (1975): 52-71.

²¹ Margaret R. Hunt, "Were Western European Women the Luckiest Women in the World? Comparing the Status of Women in the Law Courts of Early Modern Western Europe and the Ottoman Empire," *Proceedings of the Women in Early Modern Europe Annual Conference in Amherst 2004*, forthcoming, page 28.

²² Ibid.

²³ Both the quotation and the story about the turban are from Paul Thuri-Farkas' 1613 "Idea Christianorum Hungarorum." Farkas was a Lutheran clergyman, a rector the reformed theological school in Tolna. His specific aim was to stir up anti-Ottoman and pro-Habsburg sentiment amongst Protestants living in areas controlled by the Habsburgs. Quoted in Tihany, "Islam and the Eastern Frontiers of Reformed Protestantism," 58.

²⁴ For example, Tihany and also Unghváry, *The Hungarian Protestant Reformation*.

³¹ The fascinating dynamic of "turning Turk" is explored in Daniel J. Vitkus, *Turning Turk* (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2003).

²⁶ Graeme Murdock, *Calvinism on the Frontier: 1600-1660* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000): 112.

²⁷ Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1964): 39.

²⁸ Katalin Péter, "Tolerance and Intolerance in Sixteenth Century Hungary," in Ole Peter Grell and Bob

Scribner, eds., *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 360.

²⁹ Colin Imber, *The Ottoman Empire, 1300-1650: The Structure of Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002): 134-135.

³⁰ Holbrook, "Islam."

³¹ Imber, 136.

³² Statistics from C.D. Darlington, *The Evolution of Man and Society* (NY 1971), as cited in Tihany 382-3.

³³ Imber, 164.

³⁴ Tihany 55. Tihany takes letter from Imre Szigedi from Geza Kathona, *Fejezetek a török Hódoltsági reformáció történetéből* (Budapest, 1974).

³⁵ Gustav Bayerle, ed., *The Hungarian Letters of Ali Pasha Buda 1604-1616* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiado, 1991): Vii-ix.

³⁶ Anges R. Várkonyi, "Pro quiete regni—For the Peace of the Realm: The 1568 Law on Religious Tolerance in the Principality of Transylvania," 106.

³⁷ Earl Morse Wilbur, *A History of Unitarianism in Transylvania, England, and America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952): 84-85.

³⁸ Tihany.

³⁹ Imber, 217.