

## WESTERN TRAVELLERS AND THE IMAGE OF OTTOMAN, TURKS AND ORIENT IN THEIR ACCOUNTS

BATILI SEYYAHLAR VE ESERLERİNDEKİ OSMANLI, TÜRK VE DOĞU İZLENİMLERİ

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### ABSTRACT

The expeditions of Western travellers to the East and their travel writings, although they are biased and non-objective, are important texts in the shaping of Orientalism. In this context, most travellers head towards to the Ottomans and write down their own observations. Unfortunately, most of the western travellers preferred to romanticize the east and the Ottoman Empire and to express their experiences and the mystical impressions they use a marginalizing language. In this article, prominent western travellers in the 17th and 18th centuries, Richard Knolles, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Richard Chandler and their writings and letters on Eastern culture, Ottoman and Turkish identity have been examined and interpreted comparatively. It is emphasized that there are as much differences as similar points about Ottoman and Turkish identity in the works of travellers discussed in this article.

**Key words:** Orientalism, Travel Literature, Ottoman, Turkish Identity

### ÖZ

Batılı seyyahların doğuda gerçekleştirdikleri gezileri ve kaleme aldıkları gezi yazıları her ne kadar önyargılı ve taraflı olsa bile özellikle Oryantalizmin şekillenmesinde önem arz eden metinlerdir. Bu bağlamda çoğu seyyah yönünü Osmanlıya çevirmiş ve kendi gözlemlerini kayıt altına almıştır. Maalesef çoğu batılı gezgin doğuyu ve Osmanlıyı romantize edip, zihinlerinde oluşturdukları mistik izlenimleri ötekileştirici bir dille anlatmayı tercih etmişlerdir. Bu makalede 17. ve 18. yüzyıllarda öne çıkan batılı seyyahlardan Richard Knolles, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Richard Chandler ve onların doğu kültürü, Osmanlı ve Türk kimliğine ilişkin yazıları incelenmiş ve karşılaştırmalı şekilde yorumlanmıştır. Bu makalede ele alınan seyyahların eserlerinde Osmanlı ve Türk kimliğine dair benzer noktalar kadar farklılıklar da olduğu vurgulanmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Oryantalizm, Gezi Edebiyatı, Osmanlı, Türk Kimliği

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## INTRODUCTION

The marginalization process of mysterious and unseen has existed since the very beginning of the history. The mystery and attractiveness of the unknown has caused an indispensable search for further investigation. The source of the Oriental discourse was the mystery of East and its illusions on the minds of Western people. All of these dreams, fantasies and illusions are called as the Oriental discourse for a very long time.

As Edward Said (1978) clearly pointed out in his work, the concept of the Orient was nothing but an accumulation of all dreams, fantasies and illusions created by the Western people deliberately in order to make the East a very appropriate place for their own benefits. For the West, East means more than a continent near to them; it is also the place where they can start their colonial activities, as the Orient has tremendous underground sources and with its cultural richness it is a place beyond their imagination. And this charming atmosphere of East makes West more curious about it and all of these explorative activities have caused to the emergence of the “Orient” discourse.

The interaction between Turks and British people goes beyond the historical records, thus it would be logical to analyse this relationship firstly between the Muslims and Christians. The first confrontation of Muslims and Christians is believed to be the struggle for the conquest of Jerusalem between the armies of Richard I and Salahaddin-i Eyyubi which resulted in the victory of the Muslims. Then, when it comes to the first interaction between the Turks and British, it goes back to Crusade against the Ottoman Empire in Niğbolu. (Aksoy, 2004: 35)

Furthermore, we witness the usage of the word “Turk” in Chaucer’s Prologue part of *Canterbury Tales* for the first time. He mentioned the courageous knight as a brave man “going a crusade against the Turks”. While defining this knight as an honourable honest man, the word “infidels” ascribed to the Turks. As a result of these interactions, we see the Eastern stories were brought to West which will be very popular in time.

With the increasing popularity of Eastern stories, these narratives started to have a special influence on Christian culture and West. British people accounted these stories as reflections and real sources of the life in East which are generally based on the dreams and fantasies of its writers while only a

small part of these accounts represent the reality of East. When we turn the interaction between Turks and British, it can be said that especially with the increasing power of Ottoman Empire over the world, it became one of the frequent destinations for merchants, tradesmen, travellers, ambassadors and writers. As a result of these journeys, in addition to the Eastern stories, there started to be Ottoman literature in Britain. Notably after the conquest of Constantinople, interaction of two nationalities increased intensively. Especially after the foundation of the Levant companies (1581-1825) in Ottoman Empire, impressions of the merchants and their families have accounted for a significant part of these narratives.

After Ottoman became a place of wanderers, all of their writings, accounts and records paved the way for the improvement of Orientalist works. As the readers of the coffee houses in Britain were really eager to read these stories, nearly every person went to Ottoman started to share their observations and experiences with a fusion of their own foresight. When they return to their own country, they started to publish their experiences in books. Thus, Ottoman and Turks became the most popular theme of the day. In this paper I will try to make a comparison of those famous books of that time and in the core of the study there will be Lady Montagu who is famous for her challenge to the male writers before her, Richard Knolles' *General History of Turks* which is known as the first British chronicle about Turks, Ottoman Sultans and lastly Richard Chandler's ideas about Turks and Ottoman.

## **WESTERN TRAVELLERS AND THE IMAGE OF OTTOMAN, TURK AND ORIENT IN THEIR ACCOUNTS**

Travel writings have presented a prejudiced documents related to the writers' own perceptions about Orient and the country that is mentioned. And when the Ottoman and Turks are the points, the same prejudiced approach is valid in travel writings, as they generally hold a self-centred thought in their accounts. Especially in 16<sup>th</sup> century, most of the travel writings are based on the assumptions of European statesman and ambassadors. Thus, there are numerous travel documents related to the observation of those politics about Ottoman and its culture. Before going into further investigation of Lady Montagu's and other travel writings, we can follow a chronicle of how Ottoman and Turks are mentioned in travel writings and accounts.

The first translated work in Britain about the Turks was *The Order of the Great Turckes Courte* by Antonie Geoffroy and it was translated by Grafon in a distorted way. In a great contrast to Geoffroy's moderate commentaries about Turks, Grafon reflected Turks as a "lustful, arrogant and tyrannical" society. Especially in the late Medieval and the beginning of Renaissance, Turks and Ottoman started to have a significant role directly proportional to the emergence of Ottoman through the Europe (Baktır, 2014: 68). As Baktır stated in his study, there were two popular ideas about the Turks in those times; admiration and hatred. The source of the admiration is the political and military success of the Ottoman and at the heart of the hatred there lays the enmity against the Islam and the prophet Mohammad. In addition to these two ideas, there started to be different definitions used for Turks in Venice sources. The most common one is that; Turks are the "scourge of God" and one another define Turks as "great Terror of the World" (Baktır, 2014). Fear of Ottoman and Turk reached such a point that "Turning Turk" started to be used in order to define someone who seems like Turk as the many Christian merchants, tradesmen and adventurers converted into Islam. And Turks are mentioned in works of many famous writers of the age like Shakespeare and Marlowe. Even in their works incompatible references to Turks are obvious. Images that are attributed the Turks are same, with reference to the works that are written before them; "almighty and terrifying Turks" (Baktır, 2014: 69). Furthermore, in some cases written documents of captives are rendered as trustworthy sources by West. To exemplify, Bartholomaeus Gergovic, captured by Ottoman during the Mohac war for 9 years, wrote his observations as dairy. Gergovic frequently made mention of the difficult conditions of the captives living in Ottoman. Most of the time his claims are beyond reality as he suggested that during the snowy winter nights they were compelled to sleep on the ground outdoor. However, these claims do not reflect the reality as the masters of those captives are expected to obey the Islamic law and to act fairly. (Çolak, 2017; 197). One another travel book by Curipeschitz, an interpreter of Magyar, committed their İstanbul journey to paper. Along with the previous documents, Curipeschitz adopted a highly prejudiced way of expressing his ideas. In *Narrative of Journey*, Curipeschitz defined Ottoman as "tyrant, terrifying and the greatest enemy of the Christians" (1530). Most of his claims are hearsay evidences, as they distort the truth. As an instance, in devshirmeh system family's status is taken into consideration and if a person is the only child of the family, he is not adopted into devshirmeh.

However, Curipeschitz asserted that regardless of considering the conditions of the families, their children are deforced into the devshirmeh.

When we come to the sixteenth century England, there were numerous books, accounts and records about Turks and Ottoman. Richard Knolles' *The General History of the Turks* (1603) is the first ever known compiled work written in English even if its source goes back to Italy. There are many important reasons for considering this work as the most significant work of the Renaissance. First of all, it is the first account written in English not in Latin and this can be accepted as an indicator of military and political success of Ottoman and increasing demand of England for obtaining much more knowledge about Turks. The West considers Ottoman and Turks as the source of the terror of the World. That's why they want to convey their messages to general public through English. There were three main sections about the lives of Ottoman Sultans and their military success and general history of Turks. Another important point is that, as Knolles' masterpiece is a kind of compilation he translated many travel writings, accounts in Latin, Italian, German into English and all of these works are written in Europe. Thus, the book presents us a wide range of ideas, comments about Western attitude toward the increasing power of Ottoman and Turkish life style. Knolles described his own work as; "Faithfully collected out of the best Histories, both ancient and moderne, and digested into one continual Historie". (Knolles, 1610, title page) And Knolles succeed to be known as the first English composing such a work, and the book was published six times after its first publication.

Richard Knolles consulted to the studies of noteworthy Orientalists of the age while forming his work and as a result, we see a process of marginalization of Eastern people in a great contrast to the superiority of the Western people over them. In spite of the power and military superiority of Ottoman over the European countries, in most of the studies about the Ottoman, Turks and Orient the discourse of their studies were hatred-centred and despising. The reason behind this antipathy is definitely the crusades and the fast prevailing of Islam against Christianity. And we cannot underestimate the expectations of Christian reader of Knolles' book and as a result his *The General History of the Turks* (1603) is also propagandist and full of Turkish description in a prejudiced and biased way. In the description of the conquest of Constantinople by Ottoman, Turks were described as "barbaric, bloodthirsty and uncivilized";

In this fury of the Barbarians, perished many thousands of men, women, and children, without respect of age, sex, or condition. Many for safeguard of their lives, fled into the Temple of Sophia, where they were all without pity slain, except some few reserved by the barbarous victors, to purposes more grivous than death itself. The rich and beautiful ornaments and jewels[...]of the magnificent Church of that most sumptuous and pluckt down and carried away by the Turks. (Knolles, 1610: 347)

As a result of this conquest, the threatening image of Ottoman and fear of Turks increased and the struggle between East and West comes to the peak point as both sides sees their missions as “divine”. While Ottoman considers their progress as a necessity of their Gaza-Jihad politic in Islam, West thinks that all of the Holy Land must be taken back from the hands of these infidels and enemies of God. Religion appeared as an obvious reason for Knolles to attack on Ottoman and Turks in his work. In a great parallel to the common view of his age, he welcomed his Christian readers by calling Ottoman as “infidels”, “barbarous”, “cruel” and “treacherous” (Knolles, introduction). And he justifies all of their activities under the name of Crusade and war against Ottomans as they are not only their enemies, but the “enemies of all Christianity”. The Muslim identity of Ottomans also causes a great hatred, Knolles called Prophet Mohammad as “false Prophet”, “imposter” and for Islam “superstition”. Knolles’ biased approach to Ottoman and Turks arrived such a point that he mentions all of other countries and their actions as “honourable” as “Turks are the great enemy of Christians”, he appraised the deeds of Timur and Mamluk against Ottoman and accused Turks for not fighting manly, “if the battaile might have been tried by true valour” Memluks won the victory. As Ottoman Turks are mortal enemies of all Christians, every other country and their enterprises against them are honourable deeds. With all of these specialities, Knolles historical chronic can be called as an “anti- Turkish propaganda”.

Common point among the sources that Knolles used while forming *The General History of the Turks* (1603) was that all of them were heavily influenced by Giovi’s ideas about considering Turks as the “scourge of God” in addition to the effects of Crusades and captivation of Constantinople by Ottoman Turks (Baktır, 2014: 79). Furthermore, in some circumstances they evaluate the presence of Ottoman as a punishment of God. Knolles mentions this situation in his dedication to King James;

... the greatest , is just and secret judgement of the Almighty [God], who in justice delivereth into the hands of these merciless miscreates [Ottomans], nation after nation, and Kingdome upon Kingdom, as unto the most terrible executioner of his [God] dreadful wrath, to be punished for their [Christians] sin.

As Şenlen states: “Accordingly, Turks success was not connected to their military power, but instead, was God’s judgement on the wicked generation of Christian everywhere” (p.379). In spite of all the negative commentaries about Ottoman Turks and their deeds, there is an indisputable fact about Turk’s success, power and growth of their land. As a requirement of the Britain “admiration” and “hatred” politic about Ottoman Turks, Knolles also mention some positive qualities of them in his chronicle. In introduction part, Knolles especially seems to be fascinated by the military power and unity of Ottoman in a great contrast to the untrained Christian soldiers, and summarizes the reasons behind the military success of Ottoman;

First, in them is to be noted an ardent and infinite desire of sovereignty [sovereignty], where with they have long since promised unto themselves the monarchie [monarchy] of the whole world[...]; their carefull observing of their ancient Military Discipline, their cheerfull and almost credible obedience unto their Princes and Sultans; such, as in that point no Nation in the world was to be worthily compared unto them[...] whereunto may be added the two strongest finewes of every well governed Commonwealth; Reward propounded to the good, and punishment threatened unto the offender (Knolles, Introduction).

After arranging the reasons of Ottoman military, Knolles starts to propagate Christians against Ottoman Turks by blaming the Christian soldier fighting among themselves instead of fighting against Turks in a unity. Knolles appraises the military unity and obedience of Turks to their head that we cannot see in Christian armies. Knolles may also criticizes the disintegration in Christianity and the conflicts between the Catholics and Protestants. And while defining the Ottoman Empire he says

beginning, progresse, and perperuall felicitie of Ottoman Empire, there is in this world nothing more admirable or strange; if the greatnesse and Iustre thereof, nothing more magnificent or glorious; if the power and strength thereof, nothing more dreadfull or dangerous (Parry,1603: 84).

In addition to all of the unfavourable characteristics of Ottoman Turks, most commonly referred as “barbaric”, “treacherous” and “cruel”, now positive characteristics like “splendour”, “fonnidable”, “greatness”, “infinite desire of sovereigntie” are all ascribed to Ottoman Turks. (Özbaran, 2004: 318)

Richard Knolles’ *The General History of the Turks* (1603) can be evaluated as a reference book for the Oriental studies even today. In this chronicle, Knolles adopted an attitude between hatred and admiration against Ottoman Turks. We have to take into consideration the social, political and cultural background of the age in order to comprehend the general approach adopted by Knolles.

We cannot ignore the expectation of Christian reader of the age and the political struggle between Britain and Ottoman Empire and neither Knolles did while collecting his works. Especially religion was one of the non-negligible reasons behind the prejudiced and biased approach hold by Knolles and in order to gather all of Christians against the increasing power of Ottomans Knolles had to provoke them. With this Christian chronicle, he aims to accelerate the antipathy against Turks which appeared since the beginning of first Crusade and conquest of Constantinople.

In the following part of this article, a detailed picture of the Orient and Turks will be given as it reflected in the works of Lady Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters* and Richard Chandler's *Travels in Asia Minor*. These two works are especially significant for the Oriental studies as they represent totally different images about Orient and Turks. Lady Montagu constitutes a really outstanding figure in the history of Oriental study particularly from the perspective of a female. Lady Montagu's unbiased and fantastic approach to Turks in contrast to the solipsistic and prejudiced expression holds by Chandler present radically two different pictures of Orient. Additionally, it is necessary to underline that Montague is believed to reflect the reality of Ottoman Turks as she accompanied her husband. As a female, she is believed to witness much more Ottoman court than her contemporary male travellers.

In sixteenth century interest towards Ottoman Empire and Turks increased seriously. The geographical position and political power of Ottoman offers an attractive mystical Orient for the European travellers of the age. When the rich background of Ottoman and its boundaries are considered, it offers a great variety of cultures, and most notably with its Holy Land it constituted a great centre for the European and Christian travellers. As a result of scientific and technological development, desire for seeing "other" increased a lot among Westerner travellers. And their observations and experiences in the East take their place in travel writings. While some of these accounts reflect the reality of Orient, most of them present distorted images of East and Eastern people.

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762) and Richard Chandler (1738-1810) are two important figures of their age with their travel writings. Although both of them had a close observation of Ottoman, they had drastically different views on Turks. Lady Montagu was an actual traveller of

Ottoman as the wife of the British Ambassador Edward Montagu and she had the chance of observing the Turkish female life in Ottoman and thus her observations present a feministic perspective while Chandler holds a totally “alienating” and “othering” attitude towards Ottoman (Kutlu, 2007). This dichotomy in their view related to the same land is spectacular. And it is unignorable that those writings contributed to the eighteenth-century studies of Orient considerably.

In Lady Montagu’s *Turkish Embassy Letters* we see a detailed picture of Ottoman daily life from perspective of a female observer. In this context, Montagu’s accounts are unique in comparison to what was previously written about Ottoman and Turks because of her objective approach to East. In contrast to the cultural solipsistic adopted by European travellers in Ottoman, Lady Montagu adopted an unprejudiced and unbiased approach to Ottoman. Even sporadically she criticizes this prejudiced approach hold by West about East (Umunç, 2013: 304). In one of her letters to Abbé Antoni Conti, she criticized Sir Paul Rycaut’s view of Islam as a kind of disbelief and says; “The Alcoran ...is the purest morality, delivered in the very best language” (1992, 109). In her letters we see a kind of comparison of East and West on several accounts; beauty of Turkish women, richness of Ottoman poetry and their unique kind of music that we cannot see in West. Montagu especially appreciates Ottoman for their invention of smallpox vaccines which she later brings to her own country (1992, 124). She absolutely refutes discourse of Ottoman and Turkish women uttered by male travel writers of her age;

The Turks are very proud and will not converse with a Stranger they are not assur'd is considerable in his own Country. I speak of the Men of Distinction, for as to the Ordinary Fellows, you may imagine what Ideas their Conversation can give of the general Genius of the people.'(104, 1717).

She accused the previous narrative of travel writings as not being able to reflect the reality Ottoman and Turks, as she was an actual traveller as the wife of ambassador in Ottoman; she had the access into the seraglio and harem life. Thus she could see the reality that was distorted before by the one-sided view of the Western travellers, she does not despise Turks. Furthermore, in one of her letters she compliments Turks; “Thus you see, Sir, these people are not so unpolished as we represent them, Tis true their Magnificence is of a different taste from ours, and perhaps of a better”

(1717, 58). As Seccor (1999) stated in her article, Montagu mention good characteristics of Turks and their moderate life in Ottoman and praises the value of Oriental culture and discredit negative Orientalist stereotypes adopted by the Western people (394). As Lady Montagu is an educated and aristocratic woman of her age, she appears as an important figure with her exceptional views and commentaries related to Orient and Turks.

Richard Chandler, another important Orientalist with his rigid and biased approach against Turks and Ottoman Empire actively took part in the archaeological studies in the Aegean (1764-65) was an actual traveller in Ottoman, too. But their approaches are so dissimilar with Lady Montagu's that while Montagu appreciates Turks, Chandler humiliates Turks, their way of life and even their religion. As Umunç (2013) stated in his study, at the very basic of these different perceptions about the same country and same nationality there lays intricate imagining of East and the Orient. Richard Chandler compiled his experiences and observations about Ottoman Empire and Turks under the title of "*Travels in Asia Minor, or an Account of a Tour made at the Expense of the Society of Dilettani*" (Chandler, 1971). In his account he adopted a hate filled discourse against Turks; he judged Turks as the "other", appraises Europe, their Christian ethnicity and scorn Orient and Turk because of their Islamic origin and called Turks as "uncivilized", "savage" and "terrifying" (Umunç, 2013: 306). In spite of his education and aristocratic background, he cannot break the traditional framework of Orient thus he embraced conventional views of Orient and Turks. At the very centre of his hatred against Ottoman Turks there may be his own branch of archaeology and his love of ancient civilizations which are now occupied by Muslim Turks. From the beginning of encounter with Turks, he had a kind of "othering" attitude. When Chandler and his team first arrived at the excavation site, they all welcomed by Turks and Chandler called these dark coloured people as "savage figures" (1971, 16). While speak of Turkish and Greek women, he said "the muffled other" for Turkish women; "curious to see us, glided as ghosts across the glades, in white, with their faces muffled" (Chandler, 189). In contrast to the strangeness of Turkish Women, we see beauty and stature of Greek women. All in all, for the attitude of Chandler it can be said he adopted a self-centred, antagonistic and solipsistic approach. He always evaluates Turks as the other, all of their activities are defines "savagely" and they are the occupier of the ancient civilizations.

## CONCLUSION

All things considered, travel literature is one of the important sources of Oriental works and as we can see there were plenty of different ideas related Ottoman and Turks. While Knolles' and Chandler's approaches were alienating and solipsistic, Lady Montagu's approach was more realistic, that it to say, objective. As a female, her letters and accounts have importance when we take into consideration of the conditions of her age. All of these voyagers shared their observations depending on the conflict of East and West in their inside. Unfortunately, most of the western travellers failed to reflect their experiences and observations objectively. Essentially, behind the prejudiced attitude of those westerners, there lies the accumulation of historical and political developments of East and West. In addition to the crusades and conquest of Constantinople, especially with the emergence of Ottoman Empire as the power of the world, the hatred against the East and Muslims has reached to the peak points. Thus, most of the travellers to Ottoman are unable to express their thoughts and ideas impartially as a result of the hatred for centuries.

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