



An Imperial Traveler: Mark Sykes and His Impressions in the Middle East through His Article and Notes in the Late 19th Century

Bir İmparatorluk Seyyahı: On Dokuzuncu Yüzyıl Sonlarına Ait Makaleleri ve Notları Işığında Mark Sykes'in Ortadoğu İzlenimleri

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore Mark Sykes's experiences as a traveler and how they shaped his attitude towards Britain and the Middle East. Renowned for his contribution to the partition of the Ottoman Empire via the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, this study examines his early observations of the Middle East and his relation to the political agenda of Ottoman-British relations. Sykes's private notes and his publications will be compared for differences enabling us to discern how his two texts reveal his Orientalist mindset and early impressions of the Middle East. With reference to archival sources, this study helps us to understand how Sykes's opinions developed and were formative in the political agenda of the Middle East.

Keywords: Mark Sykes, British-Ottoman relations, Travelling, Orientalism, Middle East

Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı Mark Sykes'in seyyah olarak deneyimlerini ve bunların Britanya ve Ortadoğu'ya yönelik tutumunu nasıl şekillendirdiğini incelemek, 1916 tarihli Sykes-Picot Antlaşması'yla Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun bölünmesindeki rolüyle bilinen Sykes'in Ortadoğu'ya dair ilk gözlemlerini ve Osmanlı-İngiliz ilişkileriyle bağı ortaya koymaktır. Bu amaçla Sykes'in kişisel notları ve yayınları içerdikleri farklar karşılaştırılacak, böylece farklı metinlerinde Sykes'in Oryantalist düşünce yapısı ve Ortadoğu'ya dair ilk izlenimlerini nasıl belirlediğini kavramak mümkün olacaktır. Arşiv kaynaklarından da yararlanan bu çalışma, Sykes'in fikirlerinin nasıl geliştiğini ve Ortadoğu'nun siyasi gündemini ne tür bir biçimlendirici rol oynadığını anlamamıza yardımcı olacaktır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Mark Sykes, İngiliz-Osmanlı ilişkileri, seyahat, Oryantalizm, Ortadoğu



Introduction

Too great a distance gives rise to indifference;
too great proximity may awaken compassion,
or provoke murderous rivalry.¹

There is a great deal of motivation for understanding why people travel, yet the most formidable urge is determining the process by which questions of ‘how’ and ‘why’ become mingled in the mind of the traveler dealing with the foreign and unfamiliar, with a handful of curiosity mixed in. Travelers who write aspire to give meaning to the world outside of their familiar habitat and, perhaps, to engage in self-discovery along the way. Travelers and travelogues vary, but travelogues reveal the observed society from the traveler’s own culture and perspective.² Traveling is a way of seeing and meeting the ‘other,’ but the impulse to travel takes different forms at different moments in history. In the modern era, travel has often been shaped by national economic and political interests in a quest for ways to extend territorial boundaries and protect lands where a cheap labor force was available. The world of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has been called the ‘age of empires,’ during which the ‘advanced’ dominated the ‘backward.’³ Eric Hobsbawm emphasizes how the period between 1880 and 1914 saw the rise of colonial empires, wherein nearly all of the world was divided among the political domination of mainly Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, the USA, and Japan.⁴ At the same time, the concepts of Orientalism came into prominence as a tool for the legitimization of the control over the ‘uncivilized East.’⁵ Various agents and diplomats were obviously important in this process since many

1 Carlo Ginzburg, *Wooden Eyes: Nine Reflections on Distance*, trans. Martin Ryle and Kate Soper, Columbia University Press, New York 2001, p. 160.

2 İbrahim Şirin, ‘Seyahatnamelerin Sosyal Bilimlerde Kullanım Değeri: Seyahatname Metodolojisi Geliştirme Zorunluluğu’, *Türk Yurdu Dergisi*, 33:310 (2013), p. 38.

3 Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empires: 1875-1914*, Vintage, New York 1989, p. 56.

4 Hobsbawm, *ibid.*, p. 57.

5 The term ‘Oriental’ is used here to describe a Western concept for denoting geographical places or the people living in regions east of Europe, while ‘Orientalist’ refers to the Western cultural mentality towards the Orient. On Orientalism and related concepts see: Albert Hourani, *Islam in European Thought*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1991; Ali Behdad, *Belated Travelers: Orientalism in the Age of Colonial Dissolution*, Duke University Press, Durham 1994; Anwar Abdel-Malek, ‘Orientalism in Crisis,’ *Diogenes*, 11: 44, 1963 pp. 103-140; Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Vintage, New York 1978; Robert Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing: The Orientalists and their Enemies*, Allen Lane, London 2006; Fuat Keyman, Mahmut Mutman and Meyda Yeğenoğlu, eds., *Oryantalizm, Hegemonya ve Kültürel Fark (Orientalism, Hegemony and Cultural Difference)*, İletişim, İstanbul 1996; Wael B. Hallaq, *Restating Orientalism: A Critique of Modern Knowledge*, Columbia University Press, New York 2018. For an important criticism of Said’s Orientalism, see Bernard Lewis, ‘The Question of Orientalism’, *New York Review of Books*, 29:11 (1982). On ‘Ottoman Orientalism,’ see Ethem Eldem, ‘Ottoman and Turkish Orientalism’, *Archit Design*, 80 (2010), pp. 26-31; Selim Deringil, ‘They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery: The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 45:2 (2003), pp. 311-342; Ussama Makdisi, ‘Ottoman Orientalism’, *The American Historical Review*, 107:3 (2002), pp. 768–796.

came Middle Eastern lands with a political agenda, not simply as travelers, and some came to direct colonial and imperial policies that they shaped according to their own attitudes towards the East. One of the most prominent of these agents was Mark Sykes, who frequently traveled to the Ottoman Middle East first as a tourist and later as a political agent of Britain. He published his observations in a number of formats, including travel books dealing with his travels in the Ottoman lands, notably *Through Five Turkish Provinces* (1900), *Dar-ul-Islam: A Record of a Journey Through Ten of the Asiatic Provinces of Turkey* (1904), and *The Caliphs' Last Heritage: A Short History of the Turkish Empire* (1915).⁶ It is historically crucial to discern what he observed and narrated, and why. The aim of this study is to reveal Sykes's early impressions of the Middle East, notably his travels of 1898, and to unveil the differences between his private notes and the article he published in the *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* in 1899.⁷ The study explores Sykes's attitudes as a traveler and how they were shaped by an Orientalist mindset that was influenced by the political agenda of Ottoman-British relations. Doing so enables us to understand how his perceptions and thoughts were formed and how the process contributed to his existence in the political milieu.

A Glance at the Nineteenth and the Early Twentieth Centuries

Traveling has been a valuable practice that takes shape according to the aims and attitudes of the traveler. Travel accounts can serve as auxiliary elements of official or archival documents since they included diverse cultural, social, and economic details. In this way, travelogues are rich sources of information together with subjective comments and impressions. The influence of traveling and the traveler's contribution to the understanding of the world has developed over the course of history. Travelers in different periods of human history contributed to the genre of travel writing and they became early representatives of a more serious art of generating information about the unknown.

By the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a great deal of travel occurred with political motives, wherein the effects of the industrial revolution combined with the advances in transportation and technical mastery helped bring a new dimension to traveling. The Western perception of the 'other' changed with modernity because the concepts of 'modern' and 'civilized' became crucial elements of the political agendas of imperial states. This 'Orientalist' perspective centralized the and became institutionalized with the need for knowledge about the East. As a field of knowledge, Orientalism gained interdisciplinary importance in diverse fields such as philology, history, and sociology. The ongoing interest

6 Mark Sykes, *Through Five Turkish Provinces*, Bickers, London 1900; *Dar-ul-Islam: A Record of a Journey Through Ten of the Asiatic Provinces of Turkey*, Bickers, London 1904; and *The Caliphs' Last Heritage: A Short History of the Turkish Empire*, Macmillan, London 1915.

7 Mark Sykes, 'Narrative of a Journey East of Jebel Ed-Druse', *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, 31:1 (1899), pp. 47-56.

in the Orient among European politicians, philologists, historians, and philosophers required serious exploration and observation in this process.⁸ Orientalism developed from a scholarly discipline through the formation of institutions and the production of translations from Oriental languages and publications. In France, the School of Living Oriental Languages was established in 1795, in England the Royal Asiatic Society of London was founded in 1821, and the American Oriental Society was established in 1840, all of them aiming to unite scholars and other people who were interested in Asiatic lands, languages and peoples. The first international congress of Orientalists met in Paris in 1873,⁹ with the object of bringing researchers from around the world together in order to exchange ideas and create an information repository.¹⁰

Inquiries about the East covered a wide range of impressions revealing themselves in different areas, such as in literature, where the Orient was often portrayed as deceptive. Such images were often not in line with reality but were rather intended to be alluring for Western readers who were curious about the ‘exotic and lustful’ East.¹¹ The nineteenth century also witnessed the intensification of the political and economic interests of Britain and other power in the East. Edward Said’s influential *Orientalism* (1978) argues that Orientalism ‘is a cultural and a political fact’ and that he studies Orientalism as ‘the large political concerns shaped by the three great empires - British, French, American - in whose intellectual and imaginative territory the writing was produced’.¹² He specifically criticizes the colonial bureaucracy and the stereotyped vision of ‘otherness’ in the Islamic world that fueled Western policies of colonialism. The growing access to the Orient and the knowledge about it were used to back up the argument that the Orient needed to be dominated.¹³ Such an idea made Orientalism a useful tool for imperialist policies and created a political discourse.

Before examining Sykes’s writings, it is useful to examine Ottoman-British relations. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Britain sought to help uphold the Ottoman Empire’s integrity and undertook the protection of Ottoman interests in order to preserve British interests against its rivals, France and Russia. Although British policy followed a different direction during Greek independence in 1829 and the ‘Churchill Affair’ of 1836, the Anglo-Ottoman Treaty of 1838 was a significant stage in the pro-Ottoman Middle Eastern policy

8 Ali Behdad, ‘Orientalism and Middle East Travel Writing’, in *Orientalism and Literature*, ed. Geoffrey P. Nash, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2019, p. 190.

9 Zachary Lockman, *The Contending Vision of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2010, p. 68.

10 R. N. Dandekar, ‘The Twenty-First International Congress of Orientalists, Paris 23rd to 31st of July 1948’, *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, 29: 1 (1948), p. v.

11 Zahia Smail Salhi, ‘The Maghreb and the Occident: Towards the Construction of an Occidental Discourse’, in *Orientalism Revisited Art, Land and Voyage*, ed. Ian Richard Netton, Routledge, Abingdon 2013, p. 264.

12 Said, *ibid.*, pp. 13, 15.

13 Andrew Wilcox, *Orientalism, and Imperialism from Nineteenth-century Missionary Imaginings to the Contemporary Middle East*, Bloomsbury, London 2018, p. 21.

of Britain.¹⁴ Ottoman international policy, meanwhile, depended on the balance of power and the development of the *kalemiye* class in the process of determining Ottoman policies and reforms.¹⁵ Significant advances such as the Anglo-Ottoman Treaty (1838), the Imperial Edict of Gülhane (1839), and the Royal Edict of Reform (1856) were in accordance with a pro-British policy. The second half of the nineteenth century, however, witnessed a change in the political and economic concerns of Britain, which endangered Ottoman territorial integrity.¹⁶ The changing policies of the British Empire included aspirations of protecting British commercial interests in the Mediterranean and Middle East by securing a land route to India. British policies were shaped around this goal, both domestically and internationally. The second half of the 19th century witnessed the inauguration of the Suez Canal (1869), the Bulgarian Revolt (1876), the Russo-Ottoman War (1877-78), and the British occupation of Egypt (1882), the latter signaling a clear end to Britain's protection of the Ottoman Empire's territorial integrity.¹⁷ In addition, internal turmoil of 1895-97, including the case of the occupation of the Ottoman Bank by the Armenian Dashnak Party, influenced British public opinion against the Ottomans.¹⁸ Britain's domestic policy oscillated between following the traditional policy of protecting the integrity of the Ottoman Empire, as advocated by the conservative Benjamin Disraeli, and the thoughts of the Liberal Party leader, the anti-Turkish William Gladstone, about dividing Ottoman lands according to the desires of powerful states. Gladstone represented a classical caricature of the Oriental mind with his ideas of British colonization, which revealed themselves in his policies towards the Ottoman state, wherein he regarded Turks as non-civilized people.¹⁹ He thought that if Britain helped the Balkan states achieve independence, he could tear them away from Russia, as well, and in that way, British interests would be well protected. Meanwhile Russia intensified its activities in the

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- 14 Taha Niyazi Karaca, İngiltere'nin Osmanlı Devleti'ni Koruma Politikasını Terk Etmesi, *INOCTE Uluslararası Osmanlı Araştırmalarında Yeni Eğilimler Sempozyumu*, 2016, p. 3, and *Büyük Oyun: İngiltere Başbakanı Gladstone'un Osmanlı'yı Yıkma Planı, Timaş*, İstanbul 2018, pp. 21-22.
- 15 The split in opinion among Ottoman statesmen regarding international politics was so apparent that these groups were denoted such as English faction and Russian faction. Personal relations for eliciting and maintaining their positions determined Ottoman reform policies: see Ali Fuat Türkgeldi, *Maruf Simalar*, prepared by Mehmet Kalpaklı & Sina Akşin Somel, Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara 2013.
- 16 Roderic H. Davison, 'The Modernization of Ottoman Diplomacy in the Tanzimat Period,' *Ankara Üniversitesi Osmanlı Tarihi Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi Dergisi*, 11 (2000), pp. 862-874; Rory Bridges, 'Exploration and Travel Outside Europe, 1720-1914', in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, eds. Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002, p. 54.
- 17 James Barr, *A Line in the Sand: Britain, France and the Struggle for the Mastery of the Middle East*, Simon and Schuster, London 2011, p. 6.
- 18 M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2008, p. 131.
- 19 A glimpse of Gladstone's view of the Turks: 'They were, upon the whole, from the black day when they first entered Europe, the one great anti-human specimen of humanity. Wherever they went, a broad line of blood marked the track behind them; and, as far as their dominion reached, civilization disappeared from view. They represented everywhere government by force, as opposed to government by law,' William Ewart Gladstone, *Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East*, Lovell, Adam, Wesson, New York 1876, p. 10; Karaca, *Büyük Oyun*, p. 100.

Balkans by implementing a policy of pan-Slavism, aiming to isolate the Ottoman Empire. Russia incited the Bulgarian Revolution (1876) leading to the Russo-Ottoman War (1877-78). Britain's Foreign Minister, Lord Derby, sent a diplomatic note to Russia declaring that Britain would be impartial as long as its interests remained intact. However, upon recognizing that the Ottoman capital was in danger of falling into Russian hands, British intervention came.²⁰ The ramifications of the war impacted the Ottoman Empire direly. The Congress of Berlin (1878) caused the Ottomans to forfeit significant lands in the Balkans, while Russia, Britain, and France followed a policy of seeking the utmost benefits.²¹ As a result, the Ottoman Empire began building relations with a new rising power: Germany. Germany had no particular designs on the Ottoman Empire's territorial integrity and Gladstone's offensive policy disturbed Bismarck.²²

In this global context, wherein interests clashed and the balance of world powers was being reshaped, Ottoman-British relations were as Britain began focusing on the Middle Eastern lands of the Ottoman Empire for economic reasons. Before World War I and after, plans for dividing the Ottoman territories, engendering Arab nationalism, and bringing about the relative independence of former Ottoman subjects under the control of European powers were intensified. A group of British agents including Mark Sykes, T. E. Lawrence, and Gertrude Bell started travelling and collecting information in the Middle East with a view to establish political hegemony.²³

On Mark Sykes and His Travels

The observations of travelers are seldom a simple narration of events. Rather, they are often part of a project for advancing the interests of their own countries.²⁴ In this sense, some nineteenth- and twentieth-century travellers were agents of empire, including those pursuing Britain's interests in the Ottoman Empire and the Middle East. These agents set out to understand and describe the territory, its archeological remains and historical background, and to study the people by recording their customs, traditions, appearances and behavior. During the nineteenth century this systematized version of traveling for the purposes of the first steps of domination served the imperial agenda of countries such as Britain. One of the leading figures fitting into this mold of agent-traveler was Mark Sykes.

20 M. Hakan Yavuz, 'The Transformation of 'Empire' through Wars and Reforms: Integration vs. Oppression', in *War and Diplomacy The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 and the Treaty of Berlin*, eds. M. Hakan Yavuz with Peter Sluglett, University of Utah Press, Salt Lake City 2011, p. 24.

21 İlber Ortaylı, *İkinci Abdülhamit Döneminde Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Alman Nüfuzu*, Ankara Üniversitesi Basımevi, Ankara 1981, p. 22.

22 Ortaylı, *ibid*, p. 22; Otto Pflanze, *Bismarck and the Development of Germany*, Volume III: The Period of Fortification 1880-1898, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1990, p. 86.

23 See Priya Satia, *Spies in Arabia: The Great War and the Cultural Foundations of Britain's Covert Empire in the Middle East*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2008.

24 Şirin, *ibid*, p. 40.

As the partitioning of the Ottoman Empire became a point of increased interest during the First World War, Sykes emerged as one of the main actors involved breaking up the imperial domains. Born into a free-spirited family, his parents let him enjoy a largely independent childhood at Sledmere in Yorkshire while spending winters travelling with his father throughout the Middle East. The family originated in the early eighteenth century, eventuating in ennoblement to the baronetcy.²⁵ Family wealth enabled Mark Sykes to afford the expenses of his travels. Sykes had a strong imagination and curiosity, who inherited his passion for travel from his father, Sir Tatton Sykes. Together they travelled from Jerusalem to Brazil, though Sir Tatton left no records of his experiences.²⁶ While traveling, his wife and son often accompanied him. Mark's first trip abroad was to Egypt in 1888, when he was only nine years old.²⁷ His Roman Catholic mother was highly knowledgeable about literature, particularly French, and her knowledge of four languages contributed to her extensive grasp of the world, all of which were skills transferred to the young Mark.²⁸ Early in life he became interested in military history, perhaps inspired by the collections of uniforms and muskets in the family's house.²⁹

Mark's observations and assumptions about the Middle East were strongly influenced by *The Arabian Nights*, translated by Richard Francis Burton. While at Jesus College, Cambridge, he became influenced by Edward Granville Browne who was professor of Arabic. As Sykes's grandson wrote:

With time Mark tended towards Professor Browne's nationalist views, but as an undergraduate he was frankly Imperialist, and inclined to admire the fighting races like the Turks and Anglo-Saxons and to dislike the gentle Persians. It was the old-fashioned Turk he admired, while Jew and Armenian, Greek and Russian fell equally under the shadow of his youthful detestation.³⁰

Although Sykes failed to take a degree, he grew up to be an enlightened young man, having been tutored at home in his early years during which he visited India and the Arabian desert before going up to Cambridge.³¹ He stayed on at Cambridge until 1900, when he was summoned to join his volunteer militia battalion, the Princess of Wales's Yorkshire Regiment, and set out for South Africa in April 1901 to serve in the second Boer War.³² Returning the following year, his political network began to grow significantly. George Wyndham, the

25 Christopher Simon Sykes, *The Man Who Created the Middle East: A Story of Empire Conflict and the Sykes-Picot Agreement*, Collins, London 2017, p. 13.

26 Shane Leslie, *Mark Sykes: His Life and Letters*, Cassell, London 1923, p. 8.

27 Christopher Sykes, *ibid*, pp. 28-29.

28 Leslie, *ibid*, p. 13.

29 Christopher Sykes, *ibid*, p. 127.

30 Leslie, *ibid*, p. 57.

31 Leslie, *ibid*, p. 8.

32 Leslie, *ibid*, p. 17; Christopher Sykes, *ibid*, p. 145

Chief Secretary for Ireland and a leading Conservative politician, was among those who recognized his potential, and he became friends with the Prime Minister, Arthur Balfour.³³ From 1904 till 1905 he served as Parliamentary Secretary to the Chief Secretary in Ireland, and was assigned honorary attaché to the British Embassy in Constantinople in 1905-6.³⁴ In 1907, the Conservative Unionists named Sykes candidate for his uncle's seat in East Riding and he dealt with public health and education.³⁵ The following year he married Edith Gorst, daughter of Conservative Party Manager, Eldon Gorst, and in 1911 he was elected MP for Central Hull, but his knowledge of the Middle East kept him travelling.³⁶ With the outbreak of war in 1914, Sykes was the commanding officer of the 5th Battalion of the Green Howards, but was seconded to the War Office by the Secretary of State, Lord Kitchener, later serving as advisor to the Foreign Office. In these roles, he established the Arab Bureau in Cairo and, in 1916, was appointed to frame an agreement with France regarding the future division of the Ottoman domains, the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement.

Sykes's earliest travelogue describes a journey made to the Middle East in 1898, when he was nineteen. It provides his first written impressions about the region, its people, and the archeological heritage in two versions: an extant notebook and a published article. He travelled from Jericho and toured that area, published his notes in 1899 as an article in the *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* entitled 'Narrative of a Journey East of Jebel Ed-Druze.' The original notes taken on the journey are available in the 'Papers of Mark Sykes' under the title of 'Journey from Jericho to Damascus,' along with some drawings. Sykes's travel notes consist of thirty-two pages in diary form recording observations and daily events. These notes also include Arabic numerals with their Ottoman Turkish equivalents as well as short notes recording local dialects. These notes are not identical to the text of the published article. Comparison of the two helps understand Sykes's developing thoughts and arguments.

The notes are shorter and names of the people with whom he stayed as a guest or otherwise encountered appear as abbreviations or not at all. In the article, however, the names of sheikhs and the relations between people were given in detail. Both texts start with an incident in Jericho. In his notes, Sykes states that an Armenian photographer was struck with terror 'when he saw Bedawin Arabs' and promptly fell over some tent ropes, dropping his

33 Christopher Sykes, *ibid*, p. 116.

34 Michael K. Beauchamp, 'Sir Mark Sykes', *The Encyclopedia of Middle East Wars: The United States in the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, and Iraq Conflicts*, ed. Spencer C. Tucker, III, ABC-CLIO, California 2010, p. 1191.

35 Karl Ernest Meyer and Shareen Blair Brysac, *Kingmakers: The Invention of the Modern Middle East*, Norton, New York 2009, p. 103.

36 Mark Sykes's notebooks on other travels to the Middle East in the years of 1904, 1908, 1909, and 1910 are available in DDSY2/4 Foreign Affairs and Travel (1888-1919). There are also undated documents in the same folder some of which were not available in The Caliphate's Last Heritage.

camera. The photographer ‘begged and begged for an escort, which was not given to him.’³⁷ The published article alters the incident: ‘They [the Bedouins] dug him [the photographer] in the ribs with a pistol, whereat he wept, upset his camera and he remembered he had pressing business at Jericho.’³⁸ Sykes seems to have changed the story to create an uncivilized image of the Arabs whose characteristics he otherwise found strange, writing some years later: ‘Their war songs and battle poetry would be a credit to the highest civilization for humanity, nobility, sentiment, and expression; their weapons, a disgrace to bushmen.’³⁹

There are numerous minor differences between the two texts. He mentions coming upon the ruins of a bath in his notes, but describes it as a spring in the published version. The notes add that he took a sample of the water with him to take home to analyze, observing that there is ‘no mention of any of this in guide book.’ His notes state that he found the foundations of a tower, but makes not mention in the article. Obviously he chose not to include everything he saw and found.

On another occasion he describes an invitation to lunch from Sheikh Ali, the nephew of Sheikh Fellah. In his notes he praises the meal of meat and rice: ‘I was invited by S. Ali to lunch, lunch very good, rice, lamb boiled in milk and sweet rice and coffee.’⁴⁰ He included notes of the small talk: ‘Sheikh Ali said he hoped someday I should become a Bedouin, I said “InshAllah” which is the right expression on these occasions.’⁴¹ For no apparent reason, he omitted the conversation from the published article, writing instead about how a holy dervish joined them: ‘The holy man showed no dislike to eating with so ill-omened a kafir as myself.’ This incident in his notes was short, but in the article he elaborated at length, reporting that, as the translators stated, the dervish ‘knew an Englishman with a beard who spoke Arabic, had read all Arabic books, and wrote night and day without eating or sleeping and whom he had nursed at Salt during an illness. His name was Richard Burton.’ Sykes promptly invited everyone to dinner in return for their hospitality. In his notes, Sykes states that Ali was puzzled by the use of knives and forks, whereas in the article it was written that Ali was puzzled by the ‘Frankish eating tools.’ Sykes then left the Bedouin camp and arrived at Arak-el Emir, the place of Hyrcanus, ‘whose history is unknown to Arabs.’⁴² His article also mentions the legend of an emir that was not recorded in his notes.

37 Türk Tarih Kurumu Microfilm Archive (from Hull University Archive), The papers of Sir Mark Sykes, 1879-1919 [mikroform]: with special reference to the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Middle East, Microfilm 2, DDSY2/4 Foreign Affairs and Travel (1888-1919), 4/1 10 March 1898-1 April 1898, Pre-war notebook, Journey from Jericho to Damascus, Contains some drawings, p. 7. From then on, the archival sources will be referred as DDSY2/4, 4/1.

38 Sykes, ‘Narrative,’ p. 47.

39 Sykes, *Caliphs’ Last Heritage*, p. 72 note 2.

40 DDSY2/4, p. 7.

41 DDSY2/4, p. 7.

42 Sykes, ‘Narrative,’ p. 48.

He next travelled on to ‘Wady es Sir,’ a valley with a Circassian village at the top. In both texts, he describes a house cut into the rocks recording in his notes that it was not mentioned in his guidebook – the 1892 revised edition of John Murray’s *Handbook for Travellers in Syria and Palestine*⁴³ – and that he was told that no outsiders had seen it before. He frequently wrote about how the places he passed were not visited before and not referred to in the guidebook. He appears to have enjoyed flattering himself and showing himself as an experienced traveler, not a mere tourist. James Barr ironically states that just like many other travel writers, Sykes loved to visit places as if it no one had been there before him.⁴⁴

On 13 March – three days before his twentieth birthday – Sykes reached Amman where he finds a flourishing Circassian colony. In his notes, he identified people who had ‘improved living but not in manners,’ which was not stated in his article.⁴⁵ His general opinion of the Circassian people was that they were ‘discontented and rapacious,’ adding: ‘Like the Yezidis and Armenians, the Circassians are another race with whom I cannot sympathize.’⁴⁶ He also found the place to be troublesome. In the article, he noted that two Circassian soldiers had asked for his travel documents even though they were not literate, but after catching a glimpse of the document, the soldiers left the place satisfied. However, two Circassians military officers then arrived on the scene: ‘The elder was the rudest Oriental I have ever met; he clattered about with his sword, cursed the Bedawin, smoked my narghileh, and drank my coffee.’⁴⁷ He was also warned that the rain would cause fevers and the road would be bad, and that Sykes should not leave the tents. Then an ‘evil-looking’ sentry came to Sykes’s tent saying that his travel permission was not satisfactory and needed to be renewed, which required a day’s journey to the Vali of Damascus. Eventually, ‘Mustapha Aghah, the senior officer,’ told him that he might proceed to Jerash if he took with him a sentry who knew the way. As he was leaving, he informed the sheikh of the village that he needed to see Mustapha Agha to ask who was in charge of the police at Jerash. In turn, he was told that the senior officer had already left, uttering his regret about not being able to say good-bye, but Sykes saw Mustapha Agha sitting on his porch. The officer told him that that the sheikh had informed him that Sykes had left earlier in the morning. Sykes remarked that the situation remained a mystery. Oddly, Sykes’s notes do not refer to this peculiar incident, narrating the problem of travel permits and Mustapha Agha as follows:

Two soldiers turned up demanded passports, neither could read, both left, a Circassian Efendi called Mustapha came said we must not move without soldiers, he is rude but honest,

43 Written by Josias Leslie Porter, the *Handbook for Travellers in Syria and Palestine* was first published in 1858 (rpt. 1875, Murray, London), and republished in a revised edition prepared by Haskett Smith in 1892; Sykes seems to have been carrying the 1892 revised edition.

44 Barr, *ibid.*, p. 21.

45 DDSY2/4, p. 8.

46 Sykes, *Last Heritage*, p. 391.

47 Sykes, ‘Narrative,’ p. 49.

(refused bakhshish!!!) I admire him, he has a Turkish Sub. with him. Mustapha Efendi called here with Amman/Sub. had lunch, smoked my narghili, cursed the Bedouin have bought some interesting things. Circass. Rifle-dagger, silver coins and extraordinary R. Brunges Box. Suspect me of going to rouse the Druzes who thrashed them last year[sic].⁴⁸

Comparing the two texts, the article observes that Mustapha Agha, or 'Efendi,' is a senior officer; however, in the notes, his duty or even his identity is not clear. In addition, Sykes mentions two soldiers, one of whom was 'the rudest Oriental' with a threatening manner. However, in his notes the one who is smoking his water pipe and cursing the Bedouin was Mustapha Efendi. His published version seems to exaggerate the events in order to emphasize the threat toward himself, which he attributes to the manners of Orientals.

As the journey continued, the article notes some interesting caves at Jazuz. After looking around the cave, in which there was a Roman burial ground, the sentry suddenly stated that he had lost the way. Losing the way was also included in his notes. But they found their way to Jerash, a Circassian colony, thanks to 'a stalwart gentleman with a club,' and spend the night at the house of the local Sheikh, one Hamid Bey.⁴⁹ In his notes, Sykes records how the Sheikh remembered his father from a journey that they had made with his father some years before. In the article, he simply notes that he had met the Sheikh five years earlier, not mentioning his father.⁵⁰ He thus gives the impression of not wanting to involve an intermediary when it came to meeting with people. The night was an eventful one: the mules fell down and broke the muleteers' canteen box. The accompanying scene comprised the barking of dogs, the waking of half the village, and the muleteers shivering and yelling. For the next two days, he copied antique inscriptions and also took twenty-four photographs of Jerash, recording in his notebook that he was told that one of the four inscriptions had never been seen before by a European.⁵¹ The next day, Sykes was arrested and remained under guard in his camp because of issues with his travel permission. The problem was solved with both the arrival of new permission from Sheikh Fellah and Sheikh Hamid's testimony that he had known Sykes for six years and that Sykes was not doing any harm. Sheikh Hamid was hospitable towards Sykes and his travelling companions. While it was raining severely, the Sheikh opened up his house to them, giving them beds and meals, which Sykes described as Oriental hospitality. The meal was much better than 'Bedawin fare,' and Sykes noted that, in his presence, 'each person was provided with spoon.'⁵²

48 DDSY2/4, pp. 8-9.

49 Sykes, 'Narrative,' p. 49.

50 Sykes, 'Narrative,' p. 50. Since childhood, he traveled to different regions of the Middle East with his father: 'When I was a little boy of ten, I was taken by my father to their mountain, again when I was eleven, again when I was thirteen, and lastly, five years later, I visited them alone.' Leslie, *ibid.*, p. 9. This can be the reason why he was acquainted with the people there.

51 DDSY2/4, p. 9.

52 Sykes, 'Narrative,' p. 50.

One of the interesting experiences for Sykes was the Hajj pilgrimage setting out from Damascus for Mecca that he saw while riding to Ed Der'aah. The article vividly depicts the people, identifying the tents of people with different shapes and colors, as well as offering his impressions about the pilgrims. Stating that 'the gathering of people would be almost impossible to describe,' he nevertheless gave examples of wealthy Turkish people 'in frock coats' who spoke in French, a 'green-turbaned dervish reading the Koran,' and 'the Pasha of the Hajj, in a fur-trimmed overcoat.' Also interesting for him was the observation that a large section of the pilgrimage was 'encamped in a graveyard, tombstones being used for picketing horses, whilst here and there a skull or bone stuck out of the ground.' He seems to have been amazed by the scenery, declaring that 'an account of the variety and strangeness of the whole concourse would fill a volume.' He adds that there were at least 10,000 civilians, including the families of the hajjis, with children and women from every class in the Ottoman Empire, and they were guarded by 500 mounted infantry soldiers and a mountain battery. He stated that they departed the next morning, but not as an orderly and organized group of people. He noted that even the revised version of his guidebook repeated the claim of 1858 that the Hajj was decreasing in numbers and importance, but Sykes was not convinced since the pilgrimage that he was watching was 'at least four miles long.'⁵³ In his notes, the scene of the pilgrimage was not explained in such detail, and some of the statistics are not in line with those in the article. For example, he mentions that there was an 'extraordinary sight of 10,000 people and 500 soldiers,' and that the line of the pilgrimage was about three miles long with about 200 mounted infantrymen to protect the pilgrims, while the article states there were 500. His notes say he was forbidden to take photos or duplicate any inscriptions, and that he was told how professional thieves followed behind the pilgrimage caravan when it entered the desert, and at night, the thieves would chase the people at the end of the caravan, murder them, and steal their belongings.⁵⁴ None of these details appear in the article. Sykes seemed to embellish the scene of Hajj pilgrimage with over excitement although his travel notes did not match with this excitement. Perhaps he omitted the detail about the thieves because it might prove disturbing.

Sykes next visited the biblical village of Bozrah (Busaira), where an infantry battalion and a group of cavalymen were located. He met the commander of the garrison and the local governor, or *Mudir*, with his son. Without recording their conversation, he simply mentioned that he hoped the encounter would be civil one and offered them cigarettes, which he then realized was a mistake, since 'it is not etiquette to offer a son tobacco in his father's presence without first asking the latter's permission.' He also described a Druze coming up to him and showing him three cartridges that Sykes had given him five years earlier. Continuing on the road east of Jabal al-Druze, he had doubts about going there and worried that his journey might be stopped. Nonetheless, he continued towards Sweda (as-Suwayda) hoping to acquire

53 Sykes, 'Narrative,' p. 51.

54 DDSY2/4, p. 10.

a permanent escort for the journey but was stopped by a Turkish officer and the *Mudir* who flourished some papers to halt his departure. In Sweda, he was taken to Djevad Pasha, whom Sykes found to be ‘an exceedingly nice man,’ who presented him with fifty cigarettes and his photo. The pasha also provided a Kurdish officer named ‘Ahmed Aghah ... an excellent man,’ and three soldiers for his escort.⁵⁵ Oddly, Sykes’ notes ignore the attempt to stop him and only briefly touch on his meeting with Djevad Pasha. He explains his visit to Sweda as an attempt to see if any telegrams had arrived for him.⁵⁶ Both texts report that he saw traces of bones, buttons, and rags on his travels, and that Ahmed explained how approximately 1,000 Turks had been captured but only 200 escaped. Sykes later described the castle at Salchad, ‘which for so many years defied first the freebooting Templar and then the plundering Bedawin.’⁵⁷ He observes that Josias Porter, the author of his guidebook, proposed that the castle should be reinstated as an Ottoman fortress ‘which shows that he most probably never saw the place,’ since, as his notes comment: ‘the Turks raided this place one night and wrecked the whole place, this was the cause of insurrection and seems whenever a people begin to improve themselves the Turkish government attack them.’⁵⁸ Since the published version does not mention that it was Turks who wrecked the place, it seems he censored himself in the article in order to maintain a pro-Ottoman stance.

His notes describe his chatting with Druze men and boys, using signs and Arabic words. One of the older men tried to amuse him as he drew signs on the stones. Sykes said ‘Suleiman’ to the first and ‘Davud’ to the second, which were approved. Sykes then drew a sign with a broad arrow to indicate the English government. The man showed it to the others while pointing his three middle fingers and saying something that Sykes could not understand causing other people to approach to see and hear more.⁵⁹ Sykes described this as a curious incident in his notes, but left it out of his article, specifying in his notes that he had drawn the sign for an Ordnance Survey Benchmark.⁶⁰ He might have thought that putting this detail into the article might be irrelevant, or he might not have wanted to reveal all of his interactions with the locals. He also mentioned his search for ‘an engine for raising great weights,’ which was described in *Murray’s Handbook*, but nobody seemed to know about it. He argued that he saw a machine at Damascus similar to the one described in his guidebook, and suggested that some Druzes might have seen the machine at Damascus and described it to the writer of the handbook, or that perhaps the sheikh, schoolmaster, children, and soldiers came together to tell him a lie. He did not describe what kind of machine it was or its intended purpose. In his notes, he seemed to be furious and critical:

55 Sykes, ‘Narrative,’ p. 52.

56 DDSY2/4, p. 10.

57 Sykes, ‘Narrative,’ p. 52.

58 Sykes, ‘Narrative,’ p. 52; DDSY2/4, p. 10.

59 DDSY2/4, p. 11.

60 The benchmark belongs to the national mapping agency for Britain to generate geographical data.

It seems to be one of the most colossal lies ever fabricated, it is a pity that such model of truthfulness and enlightenment showed trifle in this manner especially when continually interlarding its pages with such expressions as ‘Having now explained what we believe to be the true sites of Calvary and the Tomb of Christ we are free to take the visitor to the Church of the Holy sculptor’ I think it would be as well if WE were to visit the oculist and perform that painful operation of extracting a bean from our eyes before attaching [evidence of] mere ecclesial tradition and miraculous vision.

His notes also mention that he visited the castle hoping to explore it thoroughly and to find interesting things. He did manage to find a large, intact vase at the top of the castle, but did not reveal that in the article.⁶¹

Sykes continued his journey travelling to the east of the Jabal al-Druze. On his way to the next destination, however, at a village he calls Saleh, his group encountered angry Druze villagers trying to chase away their mules. The reason for the angry crowd was that one of the Sykes’s escorts was a native of the village had murdered the sheikh, and the villagers wanted revenge.⁶² Putting aside the calmness of the officer, in his notes Sykes said that it had all been an exciting performance that he referred to as a man-hunt. En route to a village he calls Radeimeh, he stopped along the way hoping to see inscriptions and ruins. In his notes, he describes an interesting ruined town enclosing a Druze village he found three inscriptions, and the *Mudir* of Ashemaf informed him of thirteen further inscriptions, all of which he copied.⁶³ The article mentions only one inscription, though both texts express his admiration for the Druze being obliging and refusing tips, which he contrasted to the Circassians, who ‘either sit or cover up anything in the shape of writing until the usual “gift” is forthcoming.’⁶⁴ Arriving at Radeimeh, the sheikh provides dinner and feeds the muleteers and servants. That evening the village bard entertained them singing a verse-letter from a former sheikh who was a prisoner in Smyrna, accompanying himself on ‘the usual Bedawin violin with its horsehair bow and strings.’⁶⁵ The notes ignore this event. The next account described in both texts is his visit to a village he calls Heberieh which is not mentioned in the *Handbook* where he hoped to make a new discovery. His group encountered huge, black walls of lava, and upon close examination, they saw bones of men, camels, and pigs. However, he did not describe the importance of the findings, only writing ‘I can say on excellent authority that I am the first European who has visited this place.’⁶⁶ At Shahbah, he recorded the conversation between his escort and the *Mudir*:

61 DDSY2/4, p. 11.

62 Sykes, ‘Narrative,’ p. 53.

63 DDSY2/4, p. 12.

64 DDSY2/4, p. 13.

65 Sykes, ‘Narrative,’ p. 54.

66 Sykes, ‘Narrative,’ p. 55; DDSY2/4, p. 13.

There were a good many Druses there, also the officer of my escort's (Ahmet Ahrah) conversation drifted to the Shia's in India, I told them that the Hindus often threw pork into the Mosques and that the Mohammedans threw cows blood into the Temples, thereupon the Mudir laughing, told me that Ahmet Azrah had been in command of the Bedouins during the late Revolutions and had stolen many of his cattle, Ahmet Azrah laughed a good deal and admitted this, the Mudir who told me that it was like India because they [?] the cow too. I said I did not believe it, he laughed at this and looked very knowing, he said he hoped I should come next year and that I should bring a wife with me (this is the usual complement). He asked for my photograph I gave him one.⁶⁷

He did not allude to this conversation in the article. Some of his conversations with the locals, including local government representatives of the government, also do not appear in the article. He might not have wanted to give details about everything he observed or experienced; he might have chosen just to mention enough to show his closeness and integration with the Middle Eastern people and he might have considered that certain anecdotes might be inappropriate.

At the end of the journey, he witnessed the evening parade at 'Shaabah' (Shahbah), at which the men were all armed while their uniforms were old and torn. The appearance of the gypsies created an atmosphere of 'down-trodden peasantry,' as Sykes put it, but they were dancing and enjoying themselves. Women and children came to the barracks and got food. Sykes learned that this had been a common custom, adding:

everywhere Druses, Bedawin, Circassians, Fellahin, Christians, alike praised the Sultan as the best and most charitable of men. Some of the Druses added that when they revolted they were not aware of how a good governor they were attacking, and that now they blessed the Sultan every hour of the day.⁶⁸

He did not include these comments in his notebook where he depicted the scene as follows:

This afternoon some gypsies appeared with musical instruments, the whole battalion turned out and a general dance commenced, and more simple good-mannered tatterdemalion crew I never saw, the down-trodden peasantry, (who loathe and despise the effeminate Turk) joined in the dancing lasted about half hour.

He further stated that no outsiders had been there for three years. In his published article, Sykes emphasized Turkish hospitality, along with that of other Orientals and officers, for helping him with his travel permission. This appraisal reflected his sense that the British and Ottoman Empire were on the same side, a view that would change drastically when it became clear that the Ottoman Empire sided with Germany.⁶⁹ When he was travelling, he needed to maintain

67 DDSY2/4, p. 14.

68 Sykes, 'Narrative,' p. 55.

69 Ü. Gülsüm Polat, 'Türk-Alman Propagandası Karşısında Arap Bürosu'nun Kuruluşu', *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi*, 26/76, p. 105.

good relations with the government to obtain permission for further journeys by emphasizing archeological research. His notes end on 3 April when he left Musmieh and said farewell to the governor of Hauran.⁷⁰ He ended the article, on the other hand, with his return to London, hoping to 'revisit my Bedawy, Druse, and Circassian friends at the earliest opportunity.'⁷¹

While the article seems to be an extended version of his notes, the sequence of events was sometimes changed, perhaps to generate a consistent narration. Omissions and additions to the article seem to have been made in order to fit the article for publication. The *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, which accepted his piece, was linked to the Palestine Exploration Fund which had been established in 1865 under the patronage of Queen Victoria with the aim of promoting research in the fields of the archaeology and history, manners and customs, culture, topography, geology, and natural sciences of biblical Palestine and the Levant. The Fund's associated peer-reviewed journal was concerned not only with Palestine and the land of Israel, but with the wider region of the Levant and its history, archaeology (including biblical aspects), art, languages, ethnology, geography, and natural and earth sciences. It published reports on archaeological work, especially that supported by the Fund, studies of pottery and other artifacts, examinations and interpretations of archaeological sites, publications and studies of inscriptions or ancient texts, archival material relating to the exploration of the Levant, and reviews of books.⁷² The Fund was clearly a product of British interest in the lands where the Suez Canal, the Sinai, and other surrounding areas all converged upon Palestine. The Palestine Exploration Fund embodied British interest not only in archeology, but also the military's need for local intelligence of all aspects of the area.⁷³ Not only engaging in academic publishing and examinations, the Fund contributed to the production of maps of the related areas. The analysis of Palestine and surrounding areas helped shape the future political formation of the region and supported its analysis.⁷⁴ A glance at some executive members of the Fund provides further clues about the covert purpose of this British institution: Field Marshall Horatio Herbert Kitchener the Secretary of State for War at the beginning of World War I and annexed Sudan; T. E. Lawrence was a British archaeological scholar, a military strategist, and instigator of the Great Arab Revolt in 1916; Major-General Charles William Wilson was an army officer, archaeologist and topographer. They all served Britain's imperial agenda, as did Mark Sykes. His observations made during his journey would aid him in the future. His grandson, Christopher Sykes, mentioned this trip briefly, concluding that:

70 DDSY2/4, p. 14.

71 Sykes, 'Narrative,' p 56.

72 'The Palestine Exploration Fund,' retrieved 7 May 2020 from <https://www.pef.org.uk/publications/palestine-exploration-quarterly/>

73 John James Moscrop, *Measuring Jerusalem: The Palestine Exploration Fund and the British Interests in the Holy Land*, Leicester University Press, Leicester 2000, p. 64.

74 Lorenzo Kamel, 'Artificial nations? The Sykes-Picot and the Islamic State's narratives in a historical perspective', *Diacronie*, 25/1 (2016), pp. 5-6.

When Mark eventually submitted his findings to the Palestine Exploration Fund, they concluded that the bones were probably the remains of a herd of domestic animals that had been caught in a volcanic eruption. To have travelled to places where few Westerners have ever set foot and to have made a ‘discovery’ must have seemed the greatest of excitements for a young man of twenty, and it was undoubtedly one of the catalysts that gave Mark a life-long fascination with what would come to be generally known as the Middle East. [...] He lectured to the Fisher Society, and to the Cambridge Society of Antiquaries, as well as writing up an account of his travels for the Palestine Exploration Fund.⁷⁵

He then states that Sykes learned that his discovery was found important by the Royal Geographical Society.

Mark Sykes’s contribution to the *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* was a significant attempt in his growing involvement in British politics. First, it helped him make a name for himself. His positive comments about the Ottoman government and its local representatives could be related to the dependence he shared with other travelers on the need for permission to travel in Ottoman lands.⁷⁶ He might have thought that his future travels through the Middle East would prove unproblematic thanks to his published comments and his connections to the Fund. Secondly, he did not refrain from expressing his views about the people he encountered during his journey in the article while maintaining his old-fashioned sympathy towards the Turks.⁷⁷

The differences in style and information between the article and his notes are not dramatically large, but show that he kept some personal comments to himself from time to time and strove to indicate how he developed and created a network of contacts in the East by interacting with minority groups there. Perhaps he anticipated a future of becoming an effective agent with his skill at integrating with the local people winning their approval. Moreover, it can be said that his notes and the article were complementary to each other. In the article, he used a mild but still clearly Orientalist language, whereas in his notes, he revealed his thoughts more directly. He was not strictly consistent in his opinions and expressed a comic view of the world. When writing to his fiancée, he sometimes signed off as ‘The Terrible Turk,’ alluding to Gladstone who had used that phrase while describing Turkish activities during the Bulgarian Revolution.⁷⁸ Gladstone had died in 1898, but Sykes continued to disapprove of the Gladstonian foreign policy, preferring the Conservative party policy of supporting Ottoman territorial integrity right up until the eve of the First World War.

75 Christopher Sykes, *ibid.*, p. 57.

76 Ashley M. Irizaary, ‘Possessing the Holy Land: The Palestine Exploration Fund and the American Palestine Exploration Society’ (2014). Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects. Paper 1539626767. <https://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21220/s2-k1ww-7g39>, p. 31; p. 33.

77 Doğan Gürpınar, ‘The Rise and Fall of Turcophilism in Nineteenth-Century British Discourses: Visions of the Turk, ‘Young’ and ‘Old’’, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 39/3 (2012), p. 369.

78 Christopher Sykes, *ibid.*, p. 66.

There emerges a double perspective of Mark Sykes; he supported the long-standing foreign policy aim of preserving the integrity of the Ottoman state until 1914 when Abdul Hamid's government sided with Germany.⁷⁹ Representing Lord Kitchener, from 1915 he served on the De Bunsen Committee, which was designed to establish British policy towards the Ottoman Empire during and after the war. The main reason for his participation in the Committee was his reputation as a traveler and writer who knew the Ottoman Empire from first-hand observation.⁸⁰ In 1916, he became more visible with the settling of the secretive Sykes-Picot Agreement which planned to divide the Middle East into spheres of influence governed by the Great Powers.⁸¹ Yet Sykes 'was acting not as a principal but as an agent, bound by the views and decisions of ministers,' indicting that he followed the policy of the period, namely, getting most of the share.⁸²

His earliest impressions help show us his perspectives and the changes in his thoughts in line with politics. They help us to understand and contextualize his subsequent thoughts about the Middle Eastern people, and how his knowledge about them and their characteristics led him to have a place in British policy. His enthusiasm and desire of integration into the politics as a man of action had already started with his travels and insatiable quest for knowledge of the Middle East and its people.⁸³ Although his actions yielded beleaguered ramifications for the Middle East, he left a mark on history.

Conclusion

Mark Sykes was an effective diplomat, national agent, and traveler, qualities that helped him to collect information about the nineteenth-century Middle East, especially with regard to how the eventual breakup of the Ottoman Empire could be utilized for the benefit of Britain. Since childhood he was interested in the East, making trips to those lands which served to prepare him to participate in advancing Britain's imperial agenda. He travelled east to observe, identify, and communicate with the people living in Ottoman lands with an aim of recognizing people's weakness and strengths, understanding their words, and finding ways to establish further British interests by becoming more familiar with the people. He proved his mastery and significance in the Middle East from an early age, shuttling between home and Ottoman lands and later producing articles, books,

79 David Fromkin, 'Britain, France, and the Diplomatic Agreements' in *The Creation of Iraq, 1914-1921*, eds. Reeva Spector Simon and Eleanor H. Tejirian, Cambridge University Press, New York 2004, pp. 134-145, p. 136.

80 Elie Kedourie, *In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth: The McMahon-Husayn Correspondence and its Interpretations 1914-1939*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2010, p. 58.

81 The Sykes-Picot Agreement is beyond the sphere of this article, however maps of the area were an important reference for him during the De Bunsen Committee and in designing the Sykes-Picot Agreement.

82 Elie Kedourie, 'Sir Mark Sykes and Palestine 1915-16', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 6/3 (1970), p. 340.

83 Michael Berdine, *Redrawing the Middle East: Sir Mark Sykes, Imperialism and the Sykes-Picot Agreement*, Tauris, London 2018, p. 24.

reports, and maps that provided accurate data about the region; his knowledge gathering was perhaps why he tried to ensure that people would not take excessive notice of him during his travels.⁸⁴ The outcome was a very firm place in Middle Eastern policy and he stamped his name on history with the Sykes-Picot agreement, one of the pivotal secret agreements on the division of both the Middle East.

As is clear from his records of travelling in 1898, his impressions and observations sprouted at a very young age. He explored the lives of Middle Eastern people in diverse ways. He observed the region with a careful eye, conducted research of ancient ruins, sat at the tables of sheiks, and saw the tensions among the people. His close relations with the people were shaped by his Orientalist mindset. While he enjoyed the Oriental lifestyle, listening to the legends of local people and being fascinated by their puzzlement about Western ways of life, he fundamentally saw them as a part of an uncivilized world. His closeness to and efforts to show affinity with the people of the Middle East proved to be an investment for his future life in politics, when he became an influential figure who shaped policy based on his first-hand and frequent experiences in these lands.

Sykes's initial interest in the Middle East and its people arose largely from curiosity, but as he entered the political sphere his perspective changed as he became engaged in shaping British policy. His early Turcophile attitude arose from his early travels and was in line with the traditional Conservative policy of supporting Ottoman integrity. Once the Ottoman Empire entered the war on the side of Germany, he recognized supporting the Ottoman state was no longer in line with British interests, advising Kitchener that 'Turkey must cease to be.'⁸⁵ His knowledge and expertise in the Middle East made him an ideal member of the De Bunsen Committee and shaped his negotiating with France in settling the terms of the Sykes-Picot agreement which, though later abandoned, set the initial terms for redrawing the political map of the Middle East. But in 1916, his knowledge and travels made him a desired man for pursuing British interests.

Although further details about how his ideas changed deserve further scrutiny, Sykes's conversation with one of his oldest friends toward the end of his life illustrates his attitudes. Taunting him about having ended up as the protector of Armenians and father of the Jewish state, his friend asked if Sykes was ever challenged because of statements in his early books. Sykes's answer was witty, as might be expected from both a diplomat and a policy-maker: 'That is quite simple. I have got them all suppressed by the censorship!'⁸⁶

84 Berdine, *ibid.*, p 1.

85 Cited by Jonathan Schneer, *The Balfour Declaration: The Origins of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, Random House, New York 2010, p. 383.

86 Leslie, *ibid.*, p. 284.

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