

SECRETS HIDDEN IN THE MIRAGE: THE CINEMATIC CONSTRUCTIONS OF LAWRENCE OF ARABIA IN THE TURKISH MIND¹

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Abstract: Recent scholarly debates on British imperial historiography that call for an interdisciplinary study of “inter-imperial influences” in terms of their cultural and artistic expressions have strong implications for the field of adaptation studies. As an attempt to scrutinize the film adaptations of some specific “inter-imperial” historiographic material and literary non-fiction with historical value, this article offers readings of T.E. Lawrence’s *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph* (1926) that is his autobiographical account of the Arab revolt during World War I, Turkish director Lütfi Ömer Akad’s film *İngiliz Kemal Lawrens’e Karşı* (1952), and David Lean’s film *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962). Illustrating how negatively the legend of Lawrence of Arabia was constructed in the Turkish public imagination mainly through domestic and foreign film productions, and in complete disregard for the sympathy T.E. Lawrence felt for the nationalist Turks which he expressed in his own account of the Arab Revolt, the article proposes that the study of the selected texts provides an insight into the possible socio-cultural consequences of audiences encountering adaptations that chronologically precede their source texts in terms of their availability.

Key words: T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph* (1926), *İngiliz Kemal Lawrens’e Karşı* (1952), *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), cinematic narrative, non-fictional narrative, adaptation studies, historiography.

Serapta Saklı Sırlar: Arabistanlı Lawrence’ın Türk Hayalgücündeki Sinematik Yapılandırılmaları

Özet: Britanya İmparatorluğu tarihi yazınına ilişkin olarak, disiplinlerarası bir tarzda “imparatorluklar-arası etkilerin” kültürel ve sanatsal yansımaları bağlamında çalışmalar yapılması çağrısında bulunan ve yakın zamanda gündeme gelen akademik tartışmaların uyarılma çalışmaları alanı için de güçlü çağrışımları bulunmaktadır. “İmparatorluklar-arasılık” bağlamında tarih yazınına ilişkin materyal teşkil eden ve kurgusal olmayan edebiyat eseri olarak tarihsel değeri bulunan seçilmiş bir eserin film uyarlamalarının incelenmesini amaçlayan bu makalede, T.E. Lawrence’ın Birinci Dünya Savaşı’nda yaşanan Arap İsyanı’nı anlattığı otobiyografik eseri *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph* (1926), Türk direktör Lütfi Ömer Akad’ın *İngiliz Kemal Lawrens’e Karşı* (1952) adlı filmi ve David Lean’in *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) adlı film yapımı

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incelenmektedir. Arabistanlı Lawrence efsanesinin Türk toplumunun hayalgücünde nasıl esas olarak yerli ve yabancı film yapımları yoluyla ve T.E. Lawrence'ın kendisinin Arap İsyanı'na ilişkin eserinde de ifade ettiği Türk milliyetçilerine karşı duyduğu sempatiyi tamamen yok sayarak olumsuz bir şekilde yapılandırılmış olduğunun örnekendirildiği bu makalede, seçilen bu eserlerin incelenmesinin okuyucu/izleyici kitlelerinin uyarlama metinleri ile bu uyarlamaların kaynak metinlerinden kronolojik olarak daha önce karşılaşmış oldukları durumların muhtemel sosyo-kültürel sonuçları hakkında bir bakış açısı sağladığı öne sürülmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph* (1926), *İngiliz Kemal Lawrens'e Karşı* (1952), *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), sinematik anlatım, kurgusal olmayan anlatım, uyarlama çalışmaları, tarihçilik.

Recently, British imperial historian John MacKenzie dwelled on a specific challenge for British imperial historiography which has been running since the 1960s along the two strands of “the history of empire as a whole” and “the many histories of individual territories and regions of that empire” (2015, p. 100). As MacKenzie observed, this two-stranded writing of imperial history resulted in its separation at times from its own components such as “reciprocal effects” and “inter-imperial influences among empires” and also in the study of British imperial history “in isolation” (2015, p. 100). The challenge, according to him, is to “combine the view from above with that from below” (2015, p. 104), and “making connections across centuries and continents, as well as among disciplines, and theoretical and analytical positions” (2015, p. 106), which would also include writing “a cultural history of the British Empire [that] has never been written” (2015, p. 113). According to MacKenzie again, this particular history, when written, “should also deal with the material remains of empire, as well as in the visual, the musical, the arts in general, and the intellectual” (2015, p. 114). In his conclusion, MacKenzie asserted that a new history of empire should be accounting for, among other things, “a myriad of local consequences”, “comparative insights” and a reversed-gaze, which again can only be achieved by breaking down the boundaries among academic disciplines (2015, p. 116). These conclusions obviously have implications for adaptation studies, especially in the context of the study of film adaptations of historiographic material and literary non-fiction with historical value. Aligned with MacKenzie's reflections and as an attempt to pursue their implications for adaptation studies, this article focuses on an episode in British imperial history at its confluence with another imperial history (i.e. that of the Ottoman Empire) and on the long-lasting local consequences of this “inter-imperial influence” in the form of the cultural and cinematic constructions of a British imperial *agent* in the contemporary Turkish public imagination. Besides being a legend that is an outcome of British imperial history in the Middle East, which in turn has an enduring cultural impact on the peoples of the former Ottoman Empire, the

peculiar way in which the legend of Lawrence of Arabia was constructed in Turkey offers an insight into the possible socio-cultural consequences of audiences encountering adaptations that chronologically precede their source texts in terms of their availability. In the case of Lawrence of Arabia, the consequence was the creation of a biased, under-informed and unfair image of T.E. Lawrence among the Turkish public; a situation especially interesting given Lawrence's sympathetic attitude towards the nationalist Turks as he expressed it in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1926) and as they found resonance, though not as visibly, in David Lean's film *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962).

Lawrence of Arabia in the Turkish Mind

In the Turkish cultural memory, the name Lawrence of Arabia is the epitome of a foreign spy, the detestable agent of a wicked foreign power, who is also a hater of the Turkish people and nation. So much so that even today his name is frequently mentioned by Turkish politicians in similes when they complain about external, and even internal, entities that allegedly undermine Turkish interests while under cover. The reference in these statements is obviously to the role which the British Army officer Thomas Edward Lawrence, affiliated with the Arab Bureau in Cairo, played in the Arab Revolt of 1916 against the Ottoman government by organizing and leading the native insurgency in Arabia. The name Lawrence of Arabia is quite familiar for the Turkish public and the references by politicians are understood immediately. Almost after every dropping of his name by politicians, columnists of at least a couple of national newspapers take the opportunity to publish brief biographies and pictures of Lawrence of Arabia. These accounts introduce T.E. Lawrence first and foremost as a British spy, some also just mentioning in a phrase or two his career in archaeology and his official position in the British Army. The commentaries in these newspaper articles are usually also dominated by remarks about his alleged sado-masochistic tendencies, his latent homosexuality, his unreliability as a writer, and how he achieved undeserved fame and became a false legend. In other words, the knowledge about Lawrence of Arabia among the Turkish public is based on *stories*, stereotyping remarks by politicians, and whatever newspaper columnists know and prefer to write about him for the sake of sensationalism. In that sense, to the Turkish mind, Lawrence of Arabia is nothing more than a discursively constructed and sustained symbol of foreign evil. However, there is an irony in this situation: what would have normally been the most influential sources of the knowledge about T.E. Lawrence, namely his autobiographical account of the Arab Revolt *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* and the historical documents in the archives seem to suggest a significantly different T.E. Lawrence in terms of his attitude towards the Turks. Nonetheless, the construction of the image of Lawrence of Arabia in Turkish public imagination has relied on fiction rather than fact.

David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* – which is arguably the most influential source of the legend of Lawrence of Arabia, perhaps seconded only by the American journalist Lowell Thomas's famous slide show of the “romanticized” photographs and video clips of Lawrence seen by more than four million people in New York and London between 1919 and 1920 (Lowell Thomas) – and *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* were not accessible to the Turkish public for a very long time after their respective releases. When Lean's epic narrative was first released, the film was immediately banned from screening in Turkey by the state censorship authority on the grounds that it had scenes insulting and offending the Turkish nation. After being blacklisted for about thirty years, the film was shown in Turkey for the first time, though to a limited audience, on 6 April 1990 at the 9th İstanbul Film Festival's ‘Banned Scenes’ session (Yasak Görüntüler). About a year after the first screening, the larger Turkish public saw the film for the first time on 3 April 1991 on Star TV, Turkey's first privately-owned television channel (Olaylı Film). The first Turkish translation of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, upon which Lean's film was mostly based, however, was published as late as 2001. Intriguingly enough, the implication of this is that the larger Turkish public came to know about Lawrence of Arabia first through a cinematic adaptation essentially based on T.E. Lawrence's autobiographical account, but also artistically and ideologically constructed by the screenwriters of the film. Technically speaking, then, the non-fictional writings of the real historical character, that is the most influential source text of the film adaptation, became available to Turkish reading audiences exactly a decade after the cinematic narrative. In this way, the adaptation became the source text by preceding the source text, and fiction became fact by coming out before the non-fictional text, an order clearly observed in the cover illustration of the 2001 Turkish translation of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, *Bilgeliğin Yedi Sütunu* in Turkish, which depicted images of Lawrence (actor Peter O'Toole) from Lean's film.

As a matter of fact, the construction of the image of Lawrence of Arabia in the Turkish public imagination had an even earlier cinematic source, a domestic one which was arguably the text responsible for the mental construction and reinforcement of the evil British spy image of T.E. Lawrence. The 1952 black and white Turkish film *İngiliz Kemal Lawrens'e Karşı*, which would translate as “English Kemal against Lawrence” directed by Lütfi Ömer Akad seems to have capitalized on the patriotic socio-cultural atmosphere during the Korean War of 1950-53, to which Turkey sent troops as part of the United Nations forces, and glorified the Turkish patriot hero of his film İngiliz Kemal by pitting him against Lawrence of Arabia in the diegetic context of the occupation of İstanbul by British forces following the Armistice of Mudros of 1918. The plot of Akad's film is based on the rivalry between a woman agent of the French intelligence, the Turkish nationalist spy Esad Bey whose other name is İngiliz

Kemal, and Major Ward of the British Army (see Figure 1), who is eventually revealed to be Lawrence of Arabia deployed in İstanbul to collect intelligence about the designs of the French, *allies* of the British Empire, in southeastern Anatolia, the activities of Turkish nationalists following the lead of Mustafa Kemal, as well as to indirectly command the Greek invasion of western Anatolia (see Figure 2) to balance a possible occupation of the southeast by the French forces.



Figure 1. Major Ward at the British Army Headquarters in İstanbul, with his Britishness emphasized by the double Union Jacks in the background (*İngiliz Kemal*).



Figure 2. Major Ward at the headquarters of Greek forces. The Greek flag and the map of Turkey in the background depicting him as an agent of the British-sponsored invasion of Turkey by the “evil” Greek (*İngiliz Kemal*).

Acted by Ayhan Işık, the famous beau of Turkish cinema in the 1950s, the Turkish spy İngiliz Kemal, is based, as explained by Laurence Raw, on the real historical figure Ahmet Esat Tomruk, “a British-educated spy who passed vital information about Allied plans on to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk – which proved vital in the subsequent campaign to expel all occupying forces from Turkish territory” (2005, p. 253). As Raw pointed out, after the publication of Tomruk’s

autobiography in 1946, he had become “a popular cultural icon – a Turkish version of James Bond” (2005, p. 253), and therefore the natural counterforce against the foreign spy. In accordance with the life of Tomruk, in Akad’s film *İngiliz Kemal* who is revealed to have spent his childhood and part of his later life in England, first penetrates into the British Headquarters in İstanbul working as an informer for Major Ward, while at the same time leaking information from the British Headquarters to the secret Turkish nationalist group in İstanbul. Given this scenario, it can be contended that the film played upon the patriotic sentiments of the Turkish audience in whose memory the anger for the Greek occupation of Anatolia was still fresh, not to mention the revival of Turkish patriotism in the context of the Korean War, Ahmet Esat Tomruk’s iconic status, and Ayhan Işık’s popularity as an actor in the Turkey of 1950s. More importantly, however, Lawrence’s role in this scenario, which has nothing to do with the historical facts of the British occupation of İstanbul, has created an image of Lawrence that is completely antagonistic to Turkish national consciousness. Not surprisingly, in a climactic scene in Akad’s film, Major Ward discloses his true identity to İngiliz Kemal as Lawrence, “the uncrowned king of Arabia” and “the arch spy of the Empire” thereby defining Lawrence of Arabia for the Turkish public in all the possible negative lights as the evil spy of the British Empire.

On the other hand, there is again a bitter irony in Akad’s film too, because the real arch spy in the film is İngiliz Kemal who is in fact in the role of a double agent, seemingly collaborating with Ward in the latter’s efforts to capture the Turkish nationalists but later saving the prisoners from execution in disguise of a lieutenant of the British Army. The character who comes out as Lawrence of Arabia, on the other hand, is an officer in full uniform of a formal army, executing the orders he receives from his superiors, the only cover or disguise on him being his name. In this respect, the film’s construction of the moral implications of spying seems to have double standards, even though the Turkish spy is morally justified in the eyes of the Turkish audience for working against an army of occupation invading his homeland: the spying of İngiliz Kemal is applauded and celebrated, but the acts of an army officer, who is simply executing orders, are received as the acts of the foreign, British evil. In fact, T.E. Lawrence’s official post in the British Army seems to have always been deliberately ignored in the perception of Lawrence of Arabia as a character by the Turkish public. After all, how could one be defined as a spy and be acknowledged as an officer in uniform deployed to collect military intelligence? Nonetheless, released ten years after Akad’s film, David Lean’s biopic, even though it remained banned from Turkish eyes for about 30 years, was to define the legend once and for all, but for the preconditioned Turkish perception, to affirm the hatred the fictional Lawrence felt for the Turks. As such, Lean’s film may be said to have buried deeper into the sand one *secret* about the real T.E.

Lawrence, a fact that has been invisible in the mirage created by the fictional cinematic narratives up to this day: the sympathy he felt for the Turks of Anatolia and his indirect collaboration with the Turkish nationalists who rallied around Mustafa Kemal and fought against a common enemy, the Ottoman government in İstanbul.

David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* as Mirage

In April 1960, reporting his observations of the desert terrain in Jordan where he was planning to shoot his next film, director David Lean sent a letter to Michael Wilson, the project's first screenwriter, and described the setting as follows: 'The mirage on the flats is very strong and it is impossible to tell the nature of distant objects. [...] You certainly can't tell a camel from a goat or a horse. If a walking man sits down on his haunches he disappears into the lake and you can't see him at all' (Dmohowski, 2012, p. 63). In describing this fascinating natural phenomenon, Lean was also plotting in his mind one of the signature scenes of the upcoming *Lawrence of Arabia*, in which Sherif Ali (Omar Sherif) approaches the well at which Lawrence and his Bedouin guide stop to refresh (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. David Lean's use of the optical effects in the desert to play upon the mirage metaphor in the film (*Lawrence of Arabia*).

More than half a century after its premiere, Lean's film is still considered as one of the most influential productions in film history, making the headlines most recently on 10 July 2015 with the passing away of Omar Sherif who was remembered as 'Lawrence of Arabia star' (Omar Sherif), just like Peter O'Toole's passing away on 15 December 2013 was given in the media almost as the death of Lawrence of Arabia himself. One of the reasons for this long-lasting influence of the film, of course besides its brilliant cinematography, is probably the fact that it carried Lowell Thomas's Anglo-American narrative of Lawrence of Arabia, which had been already well-known on both sides of the

Atlantic by the 1960s, into the order of legend by embodying the central source in that legend.

Both T.E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* and David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* are polyvalent texts accommodating multiple consciousnesses, an aspect of these works that has been overlooked so far. Even up until our decade, innumerable critical readings of both works employing monological perspectives tended to dig for the single consciousness either of an imperialist/Orientalist British hero or of an anti-imperialist scholar who had *gone native* or was torn between his allegiance to both Britain and Arabia. Some others chose to trace the more marginal consciousnesses such as that of the self-aggrandizing liar, the masochist or the homosexual, aspects of the myth that are more commonly exploited by Turkish newspaper columnists for reasons explained previously. Such multiplicity of images is in fact a definitive quality of the legend of Lawrence of Arabia. After all, as Alexander Macfie states, Lawrence was "capable of being represented variously as a modern romantic hero, an inveterate dreamer, a great writer, an anti-imperialist, a surrogate woman and even a god" (2007, p. 77). Accordingly, in the two early scenes of *Lawrence of Arabia* set in and outside of St. Paul's Cathedral after T.E. Lawrence's funeral, the polyvalence of the legend of Lawrence of Arabia is expressed through the dialog of the characters who reflect that "He was the most extraordinary man" but cannot be sure if "he really deserve[s] a place in [St. Paul's];" or that "He was a poet, a scholar, and a mighty warrior" but "also the most shameless exhibitionist since Barnum and Bailey". However, Macfie's comment seems to be based on a study of several individual texts which represent Lawrence as those figures in isolation from one another. In contrast to such monological perspectives, I argue that, as polyvalent texts, T.E. Lawrence's autobiography and Lean's film adaptation accommodate these multiple images all at the same time, and embed them in the metaphor of the mirage, which, however, blurs the narrative embodiments of these images.

As a matter of fact, the entire legend of Lawrence of Arabia itself can be described as a mirage. In the first place, Thomas Edward Lawrence, to use his longest-lasting full name (the other names he used were John Hume Ross and T.E. Shaw), seems to be one of those rare people in history about whom so much has been said, written and produced, but who remain unknown or indefinite nonetheless. During and after his lifetime he was so much visible in various media that eventually the real T.E. Lawrence became invisible. Therefore, the blurring of material figure, as suggested in David Lean's description of the mirage in his letter to Michael Wilson, was very well fitting for a biopic which was about a man who was described by one of the most-cited of his many biographers as "this strange creature who combined in a single character enough complexities and contradictions for a thousand other men"

(Nutting, 1961, p. 237). It follows that the film's play with the phenomenon of mirage is not simply restricted to the effects used in the scene showing Sherif Ali's approach in the desert. In the same scene, after seeing the silhouette in the distance Lawrence utters the question "Turks?" to ask his guide if it is a Turk who is approaching, to which his guide replies "Bedu". This monosyllabic dialog is very significant, because it immediately creates an understanding of the diegetic world of the entire film, which is set during the Arab Revolt of 1916 against the Ottoman Empire, as being mirage-like in which even supposedly clear binary oppositions like friend/enemy are indistinct. This also means that in this diegetic world, anyone can be everyone and vice versa. In other words, with this scene the film metaphorically asserts its capacity to represent multiple images and consciousnesses and definitely fulfills that capacity as the play on mirage permeates the entire film.

The mirage metaphor prevails on Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* and David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* to such a degree that both texts explicitly point to this conceptual relationship. For instance, in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, while on his way to attack the Turkish fortification at Akaba, Lawrence describes the Nefudh desert as "the great sand desert of Northern Arabia, close by us over there, but invisible through the haze" (1935, p. 216). Lawrence is fascinated by the Nefudh because "Palgrave, the Blunts, and Gertrude Bell amongst the storied travellers had crossed it" (1935, p. 219). But the great desert is not really on their route to Akaba so Lawrence asks to his companions to take a detour: "I begged Auda to bear off a little and let us enter it, and their company: but he growled that men went to the Nefudh only of necessity, when raiding, and that the son of his father did not raid on a tottering, mangy camel" (1935, pp. 219-220). He probably also wanted to see more of the wonderful optical effects of the mirage, which sometimes provides over-visibility and at other times invisibility. For instance, thanks to the "magnification of the mirage" hunting oryx in the desert becomes easier for them (1935, p. 221). At another instance, Lawrence explains how "in the haze and mirage [even] caravan[s] [can] not be seen for two miles" (1935, p. 222); how "the shifting mirage disguise[s] height or distance" (1935, p. 224); and how they can "trust [...] to the mirage" for concealment when attacking railways (1935, p. 337) and for making themselves "invisible" (1935, p. 340). Whatever Lawrence's motivations for wishing to enter the Nefudh are, historically the party does not do so. However, both Michael Wilson and Robert Bolt, as screenwriters, and Lean as the director must have understood the centrality of the mirage metaphor in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, because, almost in compensation of Lawrence's disappointment about not entering the Nefud Desert, in the film the crossing of the Nefudh Desert, or the "Sun's Anvil" as it is referred to by Sherif Ali, is presented as one of the most central and most memorable episodes in the film. Both Lawrence and Lean were fascinated with the mirage, but what the Turkish

audiences saw in 1991 in the haze of Lean's film was only the evil British spy who hated the Turks, a perception that had already been shaped by Akad's film about forty years earlier.

The Turks in the Mind of T.E. Lawrence

To return to the discussion of the multiple images wrapped in this mirage metaphor, in this section I will deal with an unacknowledged and neglected image in both texts, namely, the positive Turkish image, presumably considered as being very unlikely at a first glance. For I believe that it is in fact the perceived unlikeliness of the existence, let alone the affirmation, of the Turkish consciousness in the texts in question which comes as the strongest evidence for the polyvalence that characterizes these texts. It must also be noted at this point that the positive Turkish image in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* is significantly more visible than the one in the film adaptation, as the selection and adaptation of material from the non-fictional source text by the two screenwriters seem to have been influenced by their own left-wing and anti-imperialist political views which would not encourage a more developed treatment of an antagonistic imperial entity such as the Ottoman Empire and its subjects. This selectivity of the screenwriters, combined with the fact that the fictional narrative of the film adaptation was available to the Turkish public long before the account in the non-fictional source text was, is perhaps another important reason for the invisibility of the positive image T.E. Lawrence had of the Turks, especially of the Turkish nationalist factions pursuing a similar goal with the Arab subjects of the Ottoman Empire.

Even though they embodied the major counterforce in the context of the Arab Revolt, both historically and in the texts scrutinized here, the representation of the Turks in these texts has hardly ever been studied. Presumably, their role as the enemy and oppressor of Arabs was so much taken for granted that it seemed out of the question that neither *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* nor *Lawrence of Arabia* would include any affirmation of the Turks' consciousness. Accordingly, what little has so far been written about the representation of the Turks in these texts is a repetition of the monologic approach. Even Steven Caton's "dialectical critique" (1999, p. 5) of the film, which otherwise presents a new and unbiased overall approach, seems to be very superficial in dealing with the representations of the Turks in the film. Caton argues the matter away by stating that "the movie constructs the malevolence of the Turks" whose representations in the film are "more Other than those of the Arabs" (1999, p. 195). With similar arguments, Raw states by implication that in his account of the revolt Lawrence "orientalized the Ottomans" (2005, p. 253) in an effort to avoid Orientalizing the Arabs. While representing a new and original approach that expands the discussion of Orientalism in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* far beyond what Edward Said (1994, p. 241) set and many others readily followed, these

claims too seem to be neglecting the many instances and even affirmations of the Turkish consciousness in the non-fictional source text that also sieved through into the film adaptation.

In *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, the Turkish consciousness and thus the Turkish position in the context of the Arab Revolt are affirmed by Lawrence first through the depiction of the Turks as a *civilized* nation with an imperial system, in which ethnic difference was not a barrier for social mobility. Accordingly, so many local leaders of the Arab Revolt were already high-ranking officers in the Turkish political structure and in the Turkish army. “Aziz, the Arab-Circassian ex-colonel in the Turkish Army, now general in the Sherifian Army” is one of the examples (Lawrence, 1934, p. 39). Sherif Hussein’s own son Abdulla, who would be the King of Transjordan in 1921, was “Vice-President *in partibus* of the Turkish Chamber and now Foreign Minister of the rebel Arab State” (Lawrence, 1935, p. 49). In affirmation of the Turkish position, Lawrence even reports expressions of regret on the part of some powerful Arabs, to whom “Turkish government was often not unkind” for the rebellion against Turkish administration and “the coming of a native ruler [Sherif Hussein of Mecca]” (1935, p. 42). The revolt against the Turks had also resulted, as reported by Lawrence and to the regret of urban Arabs populating the towns, in the abolishing of the modern legal code of the Turks and the reinstatement of old systems based on religion which serve the ways and interests of the rural population of Arabia: “what townsmen lost by the abolition of the civil law, the Beduins gained” (1935, p. 42). Lawrence’s narrative continues with the implicit description of the Turkish Empire as having modern institutions which are integrated into the European system. For instance, Sherif Feisal, the leader of the Arab Revolt, is described as follows: “His training in Abdul Hamid’s entourage had made him past-master in diplomacy. His military service with the Turks had given him a working knowledge of tactics. His life in Constantinople and in the Turkish Parliament had made him familiar with European questions and manners” (1935, p. 70). Likewise, in an age when education was seen as the foremost sign of civilization, Sherif Hussein made sure that his sons benefited from a Turkish education, as Lawrence reports: “One instance of his worldly wisdom was the upbringing of his sons. The Sultan had made them live in Constantinople to receive a Turkish education. Sherif Hussein saw to it that the education was general and good. [His sons] they came back to Hejaz as young effendis in European clothes with Turkish manners ...” (1935, p. 72). The reference to European clothes and what it signifies in this remark leads to another point about the representation of the Turks in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* and *Lawrence of Arabia*.

As explained by Alison Patterson, T.E. Lawrence believed that national identity, and therefore displays of cultural allegiance, is performative in the sense that it

was “a matter of custom and costume as well” (2008, p. 144). Accordingly, the moment of his wearing of the white Arab robes was considered, both by Lawrence himself and by critics, a major milestone in the transformation of a European into an Arab. In his own narrative Lawrence wrote:

Suddenly Feisal asked me if I would wear Arab clothes like his own while in the camp. I should find it better for my own part, since it was a comfortable dress in which to live Arab-fashion as we must do. Besides, the tribesmen would then understand how to take me. [...] If I wore Meccan clothes, they would behave to me as though I were really one of the leaders ... (1935, p. 99).

Besides the practical convenience, the symbolic function of the Arab garment as perceived by Lawrence is to make himself one of the Arabs, and not a European anymore. To achieve that, however, he has to get rid of the khaki uniform which represents Europeanness. By the same token, in this passage Turks are also associated with Europeanness because of their khaki uniforms and in Lean’s film too the Turkish soldiers and officers, being the representatives of the formal army of an empire with an increasingly westernized civilization, are depicted in their regulation khaki uniforms, and not as Orientalized others in robes and turbans.

In support his Orientalization of the Turks argument, Raw has mentioned that in the film *Lawrence of Arabia* Ottomans are “represented as inefficient, ruthless, or perverted,” because, as he believed, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* itself represented the Turks as such (2005, p. 252). This claim can be partly supported by textual evidence in view of Lawrence’s references to some Turkish officers as being incompetent, especially in diplomacy and military tactics. However, his insults in these terms are not restricted to the Turks, and he uses the same adjectives for British politicians and generals too: “I weighed the English army in my mind, and could not honestly assure myself of them. The men were often gallant fighters, but their generals as often gave away in stupidity what they had gained in ignorance” (1935, p. 346). Moreover, there is textual evidence which suggests that Lawrence describes the military structures in Turkey and England as being similar to each other, and in common contrast to the structure in the Arab Army:

In Turkey the men were, in theory, equally the officers’: body and soul [...] In England the voluntary recruit served as utterly as any Turk, except that the growth of civil decency had taken away from authority the resource of inflicting direct physical pain: but in practice, upon our less obtuse population, the effects of pack-drill or fatigues fell little short of an Oriental system. In the regular Arab Army there was no power of punishment whatever [...] They had no formality of discipline; there was no subordination (1935, p. 464).

As this comparison also suggests, Lawrence perceived of the Turks very much on the same register as he did the British. For him, both Turkey and Britain were imperial powers with modern political structures and technologically advanced and disciplined military orders. Therefore, to claim that Lawrence hated and Orientalized the Turks on the basis of the derogatory words he uses to criticize the Turkish politicians and the Turkish military and its commanding officers would be almost the same thing as claiming that Lawrence was Orientalizing the British. Clearly, T.E. Lawrence did not Orientalize the Turks. In fact, historical and documentary evidence makes visible an entirely different aspect of T.E. Lawrence.

Lawrence of Turkey? Almost...

Textual evidence in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* and some archival records point to Lawrence's aligning, and even sympathizing, with the Turks of Anatolia, especially with the nationalist movement brewing in the Turkish heartland under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal, as opposed to the pan-Turanian Neo-Ottomanists like "Enver, Talaat and Jemal [Pashas] - who were at once the most ambitious of the Young Turks" (Lawrence, 1935, p. 21) and "descendents of Greeks, Albanians, Circassians, Bulgars, Armenians, Jews - anything but Seljuks or Ottomans" (Lawrence, 1935, p. 28). Lawrence describes the historical period as one in which "Western Europe was just beginning to climb out of nationality into internationality [while] Western Asia began to climb out of catholicism into nationalist politics, and to dream of wars for self-government and self-sovereignty, instead of for faith or dogma" (1935, p. 18). In this historical context, Lawrence understands that "the Anatolian remained a beast of burden in his village and an uncomplaining soldier abroad, when the subject races of the [Ottoman] Empire, who formed nearly seven-tenths of its population, grew daily in strength and knowledge" (1935, p. 28). So he felt "sorry always for the men of the Turkish Army [who he knew were mostly Anatolian peasants]. The officers, volunteer and professional, had caused the war by their ambition [...] but all that the conscripts had to suffer through their fault" (1935, p. 257). Moreover, he observed that the peasants of Anatolia "ceased to feel in tune with their governors, whose culture was Levantine, and whose political theory was French" and so "Turkey was decaying; and only the knife might keep health in her" (1935, p. 28). These remarks by Lawrence were in fact quite similar with the discourse of the Turkish nationalist movement, which eventually resulted in the convening of the Turkish Grand National Assembly in Ankara in April 1920 against the Ottoman government in İstanbul, and eventually the foundation of the Republic of Turkey as a nation-state in October 1923. As explained below, Lawrence even collaborated, though indirectly, with the Turkish nationalists and had reason to wish for the achievement of their goals. Thus, it would be a totalizing statement to make the

generalization that Lawrence hated the Turks. Even after the alleged Dera incident, about which Lawrence wrote in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* by implying his being raped by the Turkish governor of the town (1935, pp. 397-399), and after which whatever hatred he had would have been unleashed, he spares the life of a Turkish soldier, which kindness the Turkish soldier returns: “Turk was man enough to shoot me in the back, as I rode away, feeling warm towards him, as ever towards a life one has saved” (1935, p. 466).

With reference to the highly possible sympathy Lawrence felt for the nationalist Turks of Anatolia, even those parts of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* which have been interpreted by critics as being related with Lawrence’s sado-masochist and homosexual tendencies, can be linked to a subconscious sense of guilt caused by his knowledge of the effects of his military operations on the Turks. For instance, Luciana Bohne claims that “the taking of Akaba from the rear” was a climactic moment both in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* and in *Lawrence of Arabia*, and this was the point at which Lawrence’s “sodomasochistic longing [...] reached fulfillment” and that the rest of the narrative, in both texts, is dominated by a “punishment for the symbolic transgression of the manner of the act [because] Akaba could have been taken frontally and had been twice before in the war” (1990, p. 8). Bohne’s imagining of the Gulf of Akaba and its hinterland as the genital area of a male body makes even more sense when one remembers that the rationale for the attack from the rear was the threat posed by the huge and powerful Turkish guns, quite undoubtedly phallic images, facing the Gulf. Even though in Lean’s film the attack on Akaba comes as a surprise raid on the Turkish garrison and is depicted as a relatively bloodless victory, the account in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* explains how Lawrence’s army had to pass through four or five defense posts formed by the Turks to get to Akaba from the rear. In other words, during the attack many Turkish soldiers, most probably Anatolian peasants whom Lawrence felt for and even pitied, were killed. It follows that, in view of recent research about the fictiveness of the Dera incident, it is not difficult to argue that it was this sense of guilt which made Lawrence make up the story of his being flogged and sodomized by the Turks in Dera on November 20, 1917.

As James Barr explains, the page in Lawrence’s pocket diary for the period covering the incident, 15-21 November 1917, is missing and was probably torn out by Lawrence himself before he gave them to his confidante, Charlotte Shaw, in 1926 (2006, p. 65). This page also happens to be “the only missing page in either of his diaries in 1917 and 1918” (Barr, 2006, p. 65), which is quite suspicious and therefore has been “the subject of much speculation over the years” (Day, 2006, n.p.). In 2006 the mystery was solved by Barr, who proved, relying on evidence from forensic analysis of Lawrence’s diary, that Lawrence was not in Dera but in Azrak on the dates when he was allegedly held up as

prisoner (2006, p. 66) and concluded that “Lawrence removed the page from his diary because its contents did not correlate with the tale he would subsequently tell the world” (2006, p. 66). In the light especially of Barr’s finding, it may just as well be that at the time of his writing of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Lawrence probably imagined a punishment for himself for inflicting damage on the Turks in the past, especially at Akaba, and if he was to inflict equal damage, an act matching the taking of Akaba from the rear would have been in order, and that was the Dera episode.

As a matter of fact, some critics, and the biased perception of the Turkish audience, have foregrounded a scene in the film, again after the Dera incident, which shows Lawrence mercilessly shooting a Turkish soldier who is trying to surrender, as the culmination of his hatred of the Turks. The setting of the scene is off the village of Tafas all of the inhabitants of which, according to the film script, were massacred by a retreating Turkish column. However, the scene seems to be an alteration of the narrative in the source text by the screenwriters, whose intention was most probably to develop Lawrence as a tragic character with a growingly disturbed and complex psychology: In his fury, Lawrence orders his Beduin militia to attack the Turkish column and “take no prisoners”. The scene is in fact an adaptation of the events as told by Lawrence in a chapter of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, yet Lawrence’s account gives the number of villagers who were killed as “perhaps twenty in all” (1935, p. 580). On the basis of the narrative in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, in his anger Lawrence does give the order “the best of you brings me the most Turkish dead” (1935, p. 580), but it is not he but an Abdulla who is the shooter in the only part in the chapter that narrates the shooting of an individual Turkish soldier who surrenders and begs mercy. In view of these textual contradictions, it would again be very simplistic to argue that Lawrence hated the Turks. On the contrary, and interestingly enough, he even had political and strategic reasons to feel not hatred but sympathy towards the Turks of Anatolia.

Recently Isaiah Friedman has clearly shown that there was, during the Arab Revolt, an agreement of mutual assistance between the nationalist Turks and Arab subjects of the Ottoman Empire. As Friedman reports, Mustafa Kemal Pasha, the leader of the nationalist Turks, had established a formal agreement with Feisal on June 16, 1919, that is only three days before the declaration of the Amasya Protocol, the first written declaration of the Turkish independence movement, to form a political and military alliance (2012, p. xiii) and “end the ‘regrettable discord’ between the Turkish and Arabic peoples” (2012, p. 50). The most striking clause of this reported agreement was that “[i]n order to guarantee the mutual assistance ... the Turks will be allowed to organize the Arab Army and furnish officers to look after the training of the Arab and Syrian troops. The Turks will also supply the Arab and Syrian armies with arms and

ammunition as far as it is in their power to do so” (FO 882/24, p. 210). Historically, the suspicion about a Turco-Arab agreement was already in place as early as 28 November 1919 when Field Marshall Viscount Allenby sent a telegram to Lord Curzon informing him “that people North-West of Aleppo are in negotiations with Kemal Pasha” (Allenby, 1919, n.p.). Soon after Allenby’s message, “early in 1920 the Arab Bureau reproduced verbatim the June 16, 1919 Feisal-Kemal agreement in the original French version” (Friedman, 2012, p. 55), containing nine clauses that were undersigned by Mustafa Kemal’s prefect “Essad Bey (Mutassarrıf)” and Sherif Faisal in Aleppo (FO 882/24, pp. 351-52). After much correspondence between the Arab Bureau and the War Office, “late in September 1920, the Foreign Office confirmed that there was some evidence that Feisal had entered into an understanding with Mustafa Kemal” (Friedman, 2012, p. 55). Accordingly, a telegram message dated September 7, 1920 from one Mr. Fontana in Beirut referred to the “influence of Mustapha Kemal in promoting Mesopotamian risings” (FO 371/5040, p. 16) and Major Mars wrote on September 10, 1920 that they have “evidence of coquetting on the part of Feisal with mischievous elements like Mustapha Kemal” (FO 371/5040, p. 52). Even though his name is not mentioned in these documents, and he most probably did not have any direct contact with Mustafa Kemal and the leaders of the Turkish nationalist movement, the key words of Mesopotamian risings and Feisal’s strategic affairs with non-Arab entities easily make T.E. Lawrence visible in the mirage of this picture bringing together anti-Ottoman entities.

As a matter of fact, in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Lawrence implies having information about the efforts of nationalist Anatolian Turks towards establishing cooperation with the Arab leaders and their cause to undermine their common enemy, Enver and Jemal Pashas. So, as Lawrence reports, upon learning about a possible agreement between Feisal and Jemal Pasha, which was offered by the latter in April-June 1918 (Friedman, 2012, p. 51):

Mustafa Kemal, alarmed, begged Feisal not to play into Jemal’s hands, promising that when the Arabs were installed in their capital, the disaffected Turkey would rally to them, and use their territory as a base from which to attack Enver and his German allies in Anatolia. Mustafa hoped that the adhesion of all Turkish forces east of the Taurus would enable him to march direct on Constantinople (Lawrence, 1935, p. 508).

Obviously, Lawrence was supportive of the nationalist movement brewing in Anatolia, because he knew that a strike from the Turkish heartland would bring down the Ottoman Empire and put her ally Germany in a very difficult situation, after which the victory of the British and their Arab allies would be very close. So he was also worried about the possibility of the opposite scenario and “had always the lurking fear that Great Britain might forestall Feisal and

conclude its own separate peace, not with the Nationalist, but with the Conservative Turks” (Lawrence, 1935, p. 509). In fact, Lawrence was so much given to the cause of Arab independence that when he asked permission from British authorities to join Faisal to the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, where the Sykes-Picot agreement that would give France the control of Syria would become officially honored, his request created worries among the British diplomats. Writing on July 17, 1919 Lord Curzon asked Foreign Secretary Mr. Balfour who was in the British delegation in Paris if “would it not be advisable to refuse permission to him to proceed to Paris?” because he “consider[ed] that further co-operation between these two [Lawrence and Faisal] in Paris is likely to cause us serious embarrassment with the French” and even notified Balfour that “[m]eanwhile War Office are making enquiries as to his military status in order to determine whether he is still amenable to military orders. It seems that he claims to have been demobilized but no trace of this can be found” (Curzon, 1919, n.p.). Similarly, Mr. Clark-Kerr of the Foreign Office wrote the following on 21 August 1919 to Lord Vansittart, a member of the British delegation in Paris:

While fully appreciating the value of Lawrence as a technical adviser on Arab affairs, we regard the prospect of his return to Paris in any capacity with grave misgivings. [...] Hirtzel goes as far as to say that the India Office hope that Lawrence will never be employed in the Middle East again in any capacity. If Feisal comes to Paris later on in the autumn and Lawrence is allowed to bear lead him there is sure to be a recrudescence of all the past bitterness. I understand that Lawrence has already been in Paris since he came back from Egypt, but neither we nor the War Office ever know where he is. In any case we think that he should be definitely under the orders either of the War Office or of the Peace Delegation. [...] Will you bring the matter up again privately and let me know what happens? (Clark-Kerr, 1919, n.p.).

After consulting with the authorities in Paris, Lord Vansittart replied to the message on September 3, 1919 as follows:

Colonel Lawrence should be considered to be under the Foreign Office, and that we do not share the apprehensions as to the effect of his presence in Paris at the proper time. It is considered, on the contrary, that there is little hope of a settlement except in an agreement between Feisal and the French, and that such an agreement would hardly be possible except with Colonel Lawrence’s assistance. If he is properly handled, he may be able to get Feisal into a reasonable frame of mind, and if he cannot or will not, probably no one else can (Vansittart, 1919, n.p.).

In a political environment when the British diplomats were struggling both to maintain their agreement with the French and also protect their own interests in Syria, they were always aware of the sensitivity of the situation. Any bold

French aggression in Syria would further upset whatever was left of Faisal's trust in the British and make him to turn to other allies such as the Turkish nationalists. Therefore, May 18, 1920 Lord Curzon sent a note to the French Ambassador "suggesting joint Anglo-French communication to [Feisal who had left the Paris Conference] giving final invitation to come to Europe" and also warning him about the undesirability of "the immediate occupation of the Homs-Aleppo railway [by the French]" because "[s]uch a step, with its consequent added discontent and disorder, might well result in the Emir Feisal definitely and finally throwing in his lot with the Turkish Nationalists ..." (Curzon, 1920, n.p.). Having grown so much absorbed into the ideal of Arab independence as to be disappointed with the British political maneuverings, Lawrence too knew that the nationalist Turks of Anatolia, though definitely not the Ottoman government in İstanbul, were the potential allies of Feisal, and thus of himself.

Just like the mirage in the desert from which it was born, the legend of Lawrence of Arabia, a part of the cultural history of the British Empire in its intersection with the political history of the Ottoman state – but more importantly with both the political and cultural history of the Republic of Turkey – is full of deceptive visions. Constructed in the Turkish public imagination mainly through Akad's *İngiliz Kemal Lawrens'e Karşı* but most effectively by David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* – and without being informed in any way by what is probably the most influential textual source of the legend – the image of T.E. Lawrence as an archenemy of Turks prevailed to our day. This particular case may be a good example in approaching film adaptations that take history and historical figures as their subjects, especially the ones that court controversy because of having political and cultural implications for more than one society and more than one historical period, and because these implications may be surprisingly misleading especially when adaptations become the source texts by defining the narratives. In this sense, perhaps the most intriguing and the most misleading result of the Turkish public's encountering the cinematic narratives about Lawrence of Arabia before they could have access to T.E. Lawrence's autobiography has been that they came to detest a man whose opinions and activities during the First World War were largely aligned with those of the leaders of the Turkish national independence movement. Not only Lawrence's own writing, but also other historical and archival evidence suggests that, at least in the context of the Republican discourse in Turkey, the antagonistic perception of T.E. Lawrence among the Turkish public as Lawrence of Arabia is an unfair and misinformed cultural construct. After all, had history developed otherwise, T.E. Lawrence may have easily joined Mustafa Kemal's nationalists, and may have even become known thereafter as Lawrence of Turkey.

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