

## **THE AMERICAN PERCEPTION OF THE TURKS: AN HISTORICAL RECORD**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Turkish-American diplomatic relations, since its foundation in the first half of the nineteenth century, was conducted within a friendly atmosphere. Two countries never entered into wars with each other, or became members of opposing alliances. Trade relations, too, flourished during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; especially, Turkish traditional goods have been widely exported to the United States. In spite of fairly warm political and economic relations, Turkish image in the United States has not been able to keep up with this. Importing negative images about the Turks, Turkey and Islam from the European writers, the American people initially developed prejudicial Turkish image. These negative images further developed during the rebellions of the Ottoman Empire's non-Muslim subjects against the Turkish rule, and, despite the Turkish efforts to the contrary, carried over to the Republican period. This article evaluates the emergence of the Turkish image in the United States during the late eighteenth century onwards, in order to find underlining causes of negative American perception of the Turks.

### **KEYWORDS**

Turkey; the United States; Turkish Image; Ottoman Empire; Missionaries; Armenians.

### 1. Introduction

It is widely believed that the Turkish-American relations started after the Second World War, especially after the historic visit of *USS Missouri* to İstanbul in 1946. It is true that the dimensions of bilateral relations have increased and diversified after 1945; Truman Doctrine of 1947, Turkish participation of Korean War in 1950 and Turkey's admission to NATO as a member state in 1952 were gigantic steps which gave impetus to Turkish-American co-operation. But the period of 55 years since 1945 is just one fourth of the Turkish-American relations' history. If the first visit of *USS George Washington*, an American frigate, to the port of İstanbul and the first political negotiations between Ottoman and American officials in 1800 is taken as a starting point, in the year 2000, 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the inauguration of the Turkish-American relations is witnessed.

Historical events and phenomena follow each other in a dialectic course. Therefore one should look for roots and beginnings of today's values in the past. The agenda of the relations between the *Sublime Porte* and Washington includes the most aspects of the contemporary diplomatic agenda of the relations between Ankara and Washington. Today's subjects of high priority as arms sales, the situation in the Balkans, transfer of Caspian oil to the Western markets, conditions in Palestine (Israel) and the Armenian problem were also important issues of yesterday.

This paper basically targets to evaluate the evolution of American perception of Turks and Turkey during the Ottoman period and to reach clues, which might be helpful to better understand the formation of Turkish image in the modern United States.

### 2. Legacy of European Literature

Americans obtained their first knowledge about the Turks and Islam from European writers. English and French travelers' observations on the Ottoman Empire and Islamic world helped the formation of a negative image of Turks. Enlightenment writers created a picture of the Muslim world that served as "a sober

warning about the dangers of suppressing public debate, and about the twin evils of tyranny and anarchy".<sup>1</sup>

This interpretation found its repercussions in the New World: During the American Revolution, some patriots used the image of Turkish "janissaries" to warn their countrymen about the dangers of submitting to the British tyranny. During the debate over the constitution in 1787 and 1788, anti-Federalists critics, not surprisingly, used the image of "Turkish despotism" to attack the proposed government. For instance, Patrick Dollard a political leader from South Carolina said: "...your standing army like Turkish Janissaries enforcing despotic laws, must ram it down their throats with the points of bayonets."<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, Federalist leader Alexander Hamilton, saw a way to use the image of despotic Ottoman Empire to bolster the case for a stronger central government. Hamilton saw two sides of the idea of Turkish despotism. On one hand, the Sultan supported by his janissaries and Islam's absolutism, was all-powerful. But on the other, he could not restrain his people's avaricious violence or prevent any janissaries from killing him. Most important for Hamilton's purposes, the Sultan, who with a nod of his head could do away with his subjects' lives and property, "has no right to impose a new tax."<sup>3</sup>

In the last decade of the eighteenth century two basic books of European writers contributed negatively to Islamic and Turkish image in the US: *The True Nature of Imposture, Fully displayed in the Life of Mahomet* written by an English clergyman Humphrey Prideaux in 1697 was published two times in the US in 1796 and 1798 and widely circulated among intellectuals,<sup>4</sup> and a French writer's, Abbé Constantin François de Chasseboeuf Volney's book named *Travels through Egypt and Syria in the Years 1783, 1784 and 1785* was translated to English and printed New York in 1798. In his book, Volney criticized Turks with the following sentences:

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<sup>1</sup>Robert J. Allison, *The Crescent Obscured: The United States and the Muslim World 1776-1815*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>3</sup>Alexander Hamilton, *Federalist*, 28 December 1787, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup>Allison, *The Crescent Obscured*, p. 39.

"...in Turkey, they destroy everything, and repair nothing...The spirit of the Turkish government is, to ruin the labours of past ages, and destroy the hopes of future times, because the barbarity of ignorant despotism never considers to-morrow".<sup>5</sup>

This negative perception during the first decades of the young US was strengthened by the reflections of the uneasy relations with the Barbary Powers between 1790s and 1810s. The North African powers of Algeria, Tripoli and Tunis ruled by the Turkish military leaders called *dayi*, were officially *vilayets* of the Ottoman Empire. But as İstanbul begun to loose its power to control the lands far from the capital, these entities became semi-independent regencies.<sup>6</sup> Their main source of revenue was piracy and in the last decade of the eighteenth century, Barbary pirates occasionally took hostage of American commercial vessels and sailors and demanded tribute from the US.<sup>7</sup> This attitude fostered anti-Turkish sentiments in the navigation centers like Boston and New York. New England newspapers published news about the conditions in the North Africa, criticized "barbaric" Turks and urged the government to solve the problem radically. The newspapers also published letters from American sailors taken hostage. In one of those letters the Barbary Coast and Turks described as follows:

Indeed J. L. C., You and Your Brother Sufferers Cannot Devine the Reason of this Neglect in Keeping You hear in this Wretched and Miserable situation so long, Without the People in the United States have Entirely Disavow'd You and Your Brother Sufferers, Otherwise they have forgot that 14 of Unfortunate American Subjects are Still in Life and Enslaved at Algiers, in the Singular, and inhuman Country Called Barbary, and their Tyrannical Masters is the Turks.<sup>8</sup>

After making of a series of tributary agreements between the US and the North African Regencies and military intervention of

<sup>5</sup>Abbe Constantin François de Chasseboeuf, *Travels through Egypt and Syria in the Years 1783, 1784 and 1785*, Vol. I, New York, 1798, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup>Aziz Sami İter, *Şimali Afrika'da Türkler*, İstanbul, 1937, p. 157.

<sup>7</sup>R. C. Anderson, *Naval Wars in the Levant, 1559-1883*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1952, p. 383.

<sup>8</sup>J. L. Catchcart, *The Diplomatic Journal and Letter Book of James Leander Cathycart 1778-1796*, Worchester, American Antiquarian Society, 1955, p. 314.

US Navy to Algerian and Tripolitan ports, the Barbary problem was solved.<sup>9</sup>

As the danger of piracy terminated in 1810s, more American vessels started to visit Mediterranean ports including Ottoman ones like İzmir (Smyrna), Alexandria and Beirut. Until the signing of a *Treaty of Commerce and Navigation* between the Ottoman Empire and the US in 1830, prudent but highly curious and enthusiastic Americans traveled to Turkish land and transferred their views on the Ottoman Empire, the Turks and Islamic world to their countrymen by publishing diaries or travel books. The discovery of the Ottoman Empire by Americans conducted by three groups: merchants, travelers and missionaries. All three reflected different aspects of the "discovered region", and those data contributed the evolution of American perception of the Turks.

### 3. American Discovery of the Ottoman Lands

In fact, the American trade in the Ottoman lands started soon after the American Revolution when the *Acts of Trade and Navigation*, which forbade direct trade by the Colonies were abolished. As early as 1785, a Boston merchant had advertised that he had "a few casks of Smyrna raisins for sale"<sup>10</sup> There is evidence that an American commercial ship had visited İstanbul in 1786 and the British Consul at İzmir reported in 1803 the arrival of the first American ship with a cargo from Bengal.<sup>11</sup>

When President Jefferson nominated William Steward to be American Consul in İzmir, Steward sent a report to the Secretary of State James Madison in 1803 and praised the commercial capacities of İzmir port:

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<sup>9</sup>Hunter Miller, *Treaties and Other International Acts of the United States of America*, Vol. I, Washington D.C., Governmental Printing Office, 1931, passim.

<sup>10</sup>Lealand J. Gordon, *American Relations with Turkey 1830-1930: An Economic Interpretation*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1932, p. 41.

<sup>11</sup>Üner A. Turgay, "Ottoman-American Trade Relations During the Nineteenth Century", *Osmanlı Araştırmaları*, Vol. III, 1982, p. 192.

...The most important importations to Smyrna are East and West India sugars, Mocha, Java and West India coffee, indigoes of all sorts, pepper, pimento, cloves...Since the Smyrna merchant purchases this articles in Europe...it is evident that how much greater would be the benefit of the Americans in shipping them direct to Smyrna...Among the productions of Turkey and Egypt, there are many that would answer well for the internal consumption of the United States, of for their foreign expeditions, red Tokat copper, opium, and Russian iron bars might be shipped to India...The fruits of Smyrna are well known in the United States, particularly the figs and raisins.<sup>12</sup>

Since the Barbary problem prevented American ships to make trade with the Ottoman ports, these commercial alternatives could not be used until the problem was finally solved by the second decade of the nineteenth century.

When an American merchant Captain Henry D. S. Dearborn traveled to İzmir, İstanbul and Black Sea coasts and published the book *Memoir on the Commerce and Navigation of the Black Sea and the Trade and Maritime Geography of Turkey and Egypt* in Boston, in 1819, Levantine trade route's attraction increased among American merchants. Dearborn's book was important in two ways: First, it was a *vade mecum* for sailors, which described every geographical formation, coastal facilities and hinterlands and trade capacities in the region. Secondly, it gave first hand information depending on observation of the Ottoman peoples and the text was written mostly free from prejudice. Therefore it was the first book by an American on Turks that positively contributed to the Turkish image in the United States. Dearborn presented some information on the Ottoman land and peoples as follows:

The country around Smyrna is fertile and well peopled. The lands are in the highest state of cultivation, producing in many instances two crops in a season, and in the neighbouring mountains are stocked with game, of almost every description. Those grounds owned by Armenians and Greeks are guarded during the harvest, by persons who prevent both men and dogs from entering, when the former are not better armed than themselves, while the Turks are more liberal in permitting all strangers to partake of their fruits...

The Bazars, occupied by the Turks, are in that part of the city called Turk town. Riches in equal profusion are displayed in their shops,

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 193-194.

which are frequently unattended by their owners, and exposed to the multitude without any dread of robbery. On benches covered with carpets and cushions, the proprietors sit cross-legged, amusing themselves, when not asleep, by smoking, drinking coffee or sherbet, and playing with their long beards, or the furs with which their dresses are ornamented...

The inhabitants of Smyrna being composed of individuals from almost every part of the world, present, from their various costumes, a spectacle extremely pleasing to the stranger. The Turks of the first class appear in long robes trimmed with furs, richly embroidered vests, large trousers, drawn around the ankle, exposing a part of their yellow morocco boots, with cinctures round their vests.<sup>13</sup>

It is impossible to scientifically measure the contribution of Dearborn's writings on American's interest towards the Ottoman Empire. But in 1823 the number of American firms in Izmir reached four, and in 1823, 1824 and 1825, respectively 18, 20 and 22 American ships visited the İzmir port.<sup>14</sup>

Parallel to the merchants, another group of Americans, in today's terminology the "tourists" started their travels to Ottoman Empire. The earliest American travelers left little record. Joseph Allen Smith and Joel Roberts Poinsett seems the first American "tourists" in the Levant. Smith spent a winter in İstanbul and visited İzmir in 1806. An American yacht named *Cleopatra's Barge* toured the Mediterranean in 1817 and reached Dardanelles. In 1819 Edward Everett and Theodore Lyman, Jr. traveled through İstanbul on their way from Greece to Rumania. In the same year Stephen Grellet, a Quaker leader, came through from the other direction, visited prisons and asylums and distributed Greek testaments. None of those travelers wrote any books on their observations.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Henry Dearborn, *Memoir on the Commerce and Navigation of the Black Sea and the Trade and Maritime Geography of Turkey and Egypt*, Boston, Wells and Lilly, 1819, pp. 62-63 and 82-83.

<sup>14</sup>Turgay, "Ottoman-American Trade Relations", p. 199.

<sup>15</sup>David H. Finnie, *Pioneers East: The Early American Experience in the Middle East*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1967, p. 14.

#### 4. An Unprecedented Break and Creation of More Negative Sentiments

The period between 1825 and 1829 saw a sharp decline in unofficial Ottoman-American connections. The Greek Rebellion started in 1821 gradually turned into a Greek War of Independence by military and political aids from big European powers like Britain, France and Russia during the second half of 1820s. Along with European romantics who dedicated themselves to resurrect the antiquarian Greece by destroying the Turkish rule over the Greeks, some American citizens also participated to the "holy alliance" against the "barbarians" from the beginning.

American contribution to the Greek issue caused three important results on Ottoman-American relations: First, Sublime Porte assumed a cold attitude towards American citizens and rejected to make a diplomatic agreement with the US until 1830. Second, a wave of Phil-Hellenism spread over American towns and a Philhellen public was created. Strengthening with the immigration from Greece during the rest of the nineteenth century, this public would constitute the core of anti-Turkish sentiments in the US. Third, American participants to the war reflected their observations to their towns, by sending letters to local newspapers and by writing their memoirs. Their efforts provoked a "Greek Fever" and it shadowed the promising future of Ottoman-American relations. Among those Philhellens, Edward Everett, Thomas L. Winthrop, Charles King, William Bayard, Matthew Carey and Nicholas Biddle were outstanding figures. They saw in the Greek struggle, a war between Cross and Crescent: "Had not the Turks assassinated the Patriarch of Constantinople on the very doorsteps of his cathedral? Had not Turkish swords beheaded countless Greek patriots? Had not Americans on scene themselves reported that it was not uncommon to run into whole baskets full of the ears of men, women and children ruthlessly cut from helpless heads?"<sup>16</sup>

Effected by the "Greek Fever", President James Monroe touched upon the condition in Greece in his annual address to the Congress on 3 December 1822:

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<sup>16</sup>Merle Curti, *American Philanthropy Abroad: A History*, New Brunswick, Transaction Books, 1963, p. 25.



The mention of Greece fills the mind with the most exalted sentiments and arouses in our bosoms the best feelings of which our nature is susceptible. Superior skill and refinement in the arts, heroic gallantry in action, disinterested patriotism, enthusiastic zeal and devotion in favor of public and personal liberty are associated with our recollections of ancient Greece. That such a country should have been overwhelmed and so long hidden, as it were, from the world under a gloomy despotism has been a cause of unceasing and deep regret for ages past. It was natural, therefore, that the reappearance of those people in their original character, contending in favor of their liberties, should produce that great excitement and sympathy in their favor which have been so signally displayed throughout the United States.<sup>17</sup>

After destruction of the joint Ottoman-Egyptian fleet in Navarino in 1827 by British-French-Russian fleet, another US President, John Adams praised the success of the operation:

...the friends of freedom and humanity may indulge the hope that the Greeks will obtain relief from most unequal of conflicts which they have so long and so gallantly sustained; that they will enjoy the blessings of self-government, which by their sufferings in the cause of liberty they have richly earned, and that their independence will be secured by those liberal institutions of their country furnished the earliest examples in the history of mankind, and which have consecrated to immortal remembrance the very soil for which they are now again profusely pouring forth their blood.<sup>18</sup>

Henry A. V. Post who visited the Levant during the war and wrote a book, *A Visit to Greece and Constantinople in the Year 1827-1828* in 1830, used the suitable medium of American public to strengthen the anti-Turkish sentiments. When writing on Turkish ignorance, Post claimed that the "Turks never troubled themselves much with any other sciences but those of medicine, alchemy, and astrology which they had borrowed from Arabians; and being naturally of an intellectual temperament, and exceedingly averse to study, they soon neglected even these, and leaving medicine to the

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<sup>17</sup>Edward Meale Earle, "Early American Policy Concerning Ottoman Minorities", *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. XLII (3), 1927, p. 338; Harris Booras, *Hellenic Independence and America's Contribution to the Cause*, Rutland, Tuttle, 1934, p. 162.

<sup>18</sup>Earle, *ibid.*, p. 364.

Greeks, and alchemy to the Africans, confined their attention solely to judicial astrology."<sup>19</sup>

The war ended in 1829, an independent Greek Kingdom was founded in 1830, and the *Treaty of Commerce and Navigation* put Ottoman-American relations on a political foundation, but the legacy of negative sentiments created during the Greek issue survived till today.

### 5. Continuation of "Discovery": Oriental Reflections

As the pacific conditions reestablished in the Mediterranean, American vessels restarted their routes to Ottoman ports and more American travelers made visits to Levant. Differing from the former travelers, "tourists" after 1830 had the will to write their remarks on the region. Starting with 1830, those travelers' detailed observations contributed the creation of an "oriental" image of the Ottoman Empire in the US. With descriptions of paradise-like "harems", relief-giving "hamams", "kahvehanes" full of coffee and opium addicts, "strange" customs of Muslims, Greeks and Armenians, Ottoman lands were described in a mystic and legendary style.

E. C. Wines, who published the book *Two Years and Half in the Navy* in 1832, gave the first examples of this style. When telling about the "the great diversity and entire distinctness of national character, costume and physiognomy" in İzmir, he was like describing a fantastic land rather than a commercial port:

...the Moslem is known by his dignity, his arms and high red flannel cap,-the Armenian by his huge calpec, his regular features, and his good-natured, merchant-like air, -the Jew by his close-folded, checkered calico turban, his sharp physiognomy, his arch, sparkling black eye, and his fawn-like activity,-the Greek by his large rich eye, his symmetrical form, and his everlasting restlessness,--whilst all, of

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<sup>19</sup>Henry Post, *A Visit to Greece and Constantinople in the Year 1827*, New York, 1830, p. 239.

every nation and from every clime, who mount the European hat, are ranged under general, heterogeneous, nondescript class of Franks.<sup>20</sup>

While depending his writing mostly on exaggerated description of geography, buildings and people, Wines also sprinkled among the pages, his interpretations on Turks which were in many cases in contradiction with the "data" submitted by Philhellen Americans. After comparing all merchant classes, Wines reached the result that "there [was] more honesty among the Turks than any other class of Smyrniot merchants."<sup>21</sup>

Two other travelers, John Lloyd Stephens and James De Kay paved the way of latter writers on the subject in 1830s. Stephens who was praised by Herman Melville as a "wonderful Arabian traveler" published *Incidents of Travel in Egypt, Arabia Patrea, and the Holy Land* in 1837 and *Incidents of Travel in the Russian and Turkish Empires* in 1839. His first book was sold over 21,000 copies in two years. Edgar Allen Poe found the book "highly agreeable, interesting and instructive" with "claims to public attention possessed by no other book of its kind."<sup>22</sup>

Although visiting the Levant earlier than Stephens and publishing his book *Sketches of Turkey in 1831 and 1832 by an American* in 1833, James De Kay never became a best-seller author as his successor. Nevertheless, he made an important step to eliminate some prejudices in Americans' minds about the Turks. He frankly admitted that the Turks were not rude, barbarian and ignorant people as they were described in many European's books. De Kay told the story of his first meeting with a Turk as follows:

...on the following day we received a visit from the aid[e] of the Pasha of Dardanelles. The aid[e], whose rank was that of a colonel was extremely gay and frank in his manners, laughed heartily and tossed off our cider with great freedom, but objected to campaign, not, as he declared, from any religious scruples, but on account of the example to his attendants...As the jest and laugh freely circulated, some one observed, that in America we had been led to believe that a Turk never

<sup>20</sup>Enoch Wines, *Two Years and a Half in the Navy or Journal of a Cruise in the Mediterranean and Levant 1829-1831*, Vol. II, Philadelphia, Carey & Lea, 1832, p. 138.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 138-139.

<sup>22</sup>Finnie, *Pioneers East*, pp. 5-6.

smiled, that they regarded slightest jest with aversion; but that from what we had already seen, we were agreeably surprised to find them a set of jolly dogs...<sup>23</sup>

In the following pages of his book the author in many cases tried to substitute the facts about the Turks with the myths. De Kay rejected American belief of ignorant Turk:

The Turks can not be charged with inattention to public instruction. Each of sixteen royal mosques has a maydresay or college attached to it, and the number of students in each varies from three to five hundred. I need hardly remark that elementary schools may be found in every street of Stamboul; indeed their loud recitations compel your attention, and the see-saw motions and sing-song spelling of the little urchins remind me one of our own village schools.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, De Kay criticized American contributors to the Greek War and their activities in the US, which helped the emergence of negative stereotypes. He described the "Philhellenists" as "comprise raving enthusiasts, who are ready to explode in the name of liberty; adventurer, tired of the dull pursuits of civil life, or desirous of earning bread and renown by cutting the throats of the Turks." De Kay went forward and proclaimed them as "...dull, heavy spirits, who are fearful of quitting the beaten track of panegyric, who cuckoo-like, repeat the catchwords of Grecian glory, Grecian heroism, Grecian eloquence, the divine art, etc. etc., and fancy raptures which they never knew."<sup>25</sup>

Between 1840 and 1850, almost every year, one or two books of American travelers or residents in the Levant such as missionaries or consular officers, on the Ottoman Empire were published.

American missionaries, who started to visit Ottoman Empire in 1820s, have conducted two types of publication activity: First, they established a printing house in Malta in 1822 and then moved it to İzmir in 1826, where they printed religious books in Turkish,

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<sup>23</sup>James De Kay, *Sketches of Turkey in 1831 and 1832 by an American*, New York, Harper, 1833, pp. 62-63.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 167.

Arabic, Greek and Armeno-Turkish, and distributed them among the population to evangelize them. Second, they wrote and published books on the Ottoman Empire. Some examples of the latter kind are, Eli Smith and Gray Otis Dwight's *Christian Researches in Armenia* of 1830,<sup>26</sup> Horatio Southgate's *Narrative of a Tour through Armenia, Kurdistan, Persia and Mesopotamia* of 1840,<sup>27</sup> John P. Durbin's *Observations in the East* of 1845,<sup>28</sup> and H. G. O. Dwight's *Christianity Revived in the East* of 1850.<sup>29</sup> Until 1870s, missionaries' works on Ottoman Empire were narrative books of their tours. But as the tension between the missionaries and the Sublime Porte increased in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Americans wrote some books in which they accused Turks of being "barbarians" etc.

First American woman writer on Turkey, Eliza Clemency Abbott Schneider, wife of a missionary served in Bursa, chose an interesting technique to telling about the Turks, and made comparison between Turkish and American habits, in her book *Letters from Broosa Asia Minor* of 1846. Targeting her "sisters" as reader domain, she mostly touched upon certain aspects of social life of Muslims and non-Muslims. She claimed that many things in the Ottoman Empire indicating habits and tastes exactly reverse of those of Americans and gave highly exciting examples:

In America, females receive much attention and respect from their husbands and brothers. Here males receive double amount of attention and respect than the females do...When sumptuous entertainments made in America, the table furniture is expected to be clean and tasteful, in short, respectable, if not splendid. Here, when great dinners are given, the tables are filled with luxurious food and the courses are numerous. But table furniture is as ordinary as possible. The stool is placed upon the floor. Instead of silver spoons are seen wooden or iron ones. Salt is taken out of the dish with fingers. In case a dish of pilav is brought on, each one, sitting around the table on the floor, takes

<sup>26</sup>William E. Strong, *The Story of the American Board*, Boston, The Pilgrim Press, 1910, pp. 81-89.

<sup>27</sup>Horatio Southgate, *Narrative of a Tour through Armenia, Kurdistan, Persia and Mesopotamia*, New York, D. Appleton & Co., 1910, passim.

<sup>28</sup>John P. Durbin, *Observations in the East*, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1845, passim.

<sup>29</sup>Harrison Gray Dwight, *Christianity Revived in the East*, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1850, passim.

his spoon and helps himself directly from the dish in the center of the table, to his mouth. This course is not very agreeable for an American to participate...In America, when a gentleman and a lady contemplate entering the marriage relation; they generally leave the house of their fathers and live by themselves. Here, they remain under the paternal roof on one side or the other, and frequently combine four or five generations in one family...In America, a man on entering a neighbor's house, takes off his hat, but keeps his shoes. Here, he takes off shoes, but keeps on his headdress...In America, if a party of ladies wishes to spend an afternoon together; they meet or are invited to the house of one of them. Here they go to a public bath (hammam)- to some running stream, or to some shady grove and carry their food with them. This is what they call making "kaif". It is to them the *summum bonum* of earthly felicity...<sup>30</sup>

Another interesting book, *Lands of the Moslem, A Narrative of Oriental Travel* was written by Howard Crosby under the nickname *El-Mukattem* in 1851. After telling his story, Crosby attached an Appendix to his work, which is the first of its kind, and presented some "*Hints for Travelers on the Nile*" and "*Hints for Travelers on the Desert*." Crosby gave practical knowledge for ordinary "tourist" as management of crew, provision and utensils for Nile voyage, general directions, expenses of journey in the Sinai desert, and temperatures in the shade.<sup>31</sup>

Starting with 1850s, American newspapers published some articles about the oriental mysteries of the Ottoman Empire. "A Turkish Wedding", "Bastinado: Terrible Punishments", "The Turkish Bath", "Turkish Cafes", "Harem", "Ramazan and Bairam-Turkish Fete days in Constantinople" are titles of articles from *New York Times*.<sup>32</sup> But sometimes, realistic interpretations were also published. "Condition and Prospects of Turkey" published in *New York Daily Times* on 11 October 1851, gave an objective analysis of the situation in the Ottoman Empire: "If we were to believe the Turkish Press, that country is a state of general prosperity, and progress in a manner unequalled in history, but unfortunately this is

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<sup>30</sup>E. C. A., Schenieder, *Letters from Broosa Asia Minor*, Pennsylvania, 1846, pp. 75-85.

<sup>31</sup>Howard Crosby, *Lands of the Moslem, A Narrative of Oriental Travel*, New York, Robert Carter & Brothers, 1851, pp. 339-377.

<sup>32</sup>*New York Times*, 14 May 1874, 14 April 1872, 11 July 1875, 1 October 1876, and 12 November 1876.

far from real case, and the newspapers are but spreading a coat of varnish over the outside of this civilization where all is, in fact decrepit and hollow. At this present moment Turkey is tormented in all hands."<sup>33</sup>

An important contribution of *New York Daily Times* in Ottoman Empire's promotion in the US came in 1852. When Ottoman Sultan Abdulmecid decided to make a contribution to the National Washington Monument by sending a block of marble for insertion in the shaft, *Daily Times* published an article on the issue and John Porter Brown's letter, who was the Secretary of American Legation in İstanbul to Secretary of the Washington National Monument Association, Elisha Whittlesey. Brown wrote in the letter,

This marble is from Byzantium, the most ancient of Republics and from the city of Constantine, as an offering from the successor of the Mohamedan caliphs and Ottoman sultans-from the most illustrious sovereign of the race of eastern princes, illustrious both for the great nobleness and magnanimity of his character, and for the exertions which he is making to promote the prosperity of his country and his subjects; it will, I am confident, give satisfaction to American People.<sup>34</sup>

The number of this kind of reflections from Turkey, which were relatively free of prejudices, started to decrease in the last years of 1860s, and by 1870 a new period of raising anti-Turkish sentiments was opened.

## 6. Increasing Problems and the Making of the "Terrible Turk"

Three internal problems of the Ottoman Empire, the Cretan Insurrection of 1866, Bulgarian Rebellion of 1875 and Armenian Incidents of 1890s and their consequences affected Ottoman-American diplomatic relations negatively. American contribution to these three cases, on one hand shook Turkish confidence to Americans who were friendly in manner to the Turks since 1830s

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<sup>33</sup>*New York Daily Times*, 11 October 1851.

<sup>34</sup>*New York Daily Times*, 15 October 1852.

when compared to Europeans, and on the other helped the revival of negative perception of Turks in the US.

American Consul in Crete, William J. Stillman, played an active role during the rebellion of Greeks against Turkish rule in 1867-1868, by helping rebel leaders to hide themselves, by using consular capabilities to carry communication between different rebel groups, by agitating US government to make a military intervention to island and by provoking American public in favor of "miserable Christians under ruthless Turkish rulers".<sup>35</sup> Stillman sent at least 7 letters to *New York Times* on Cretan issue. In one of them, he transferred a copy of Cretans' appeal to the US President, therefore he provided an equal opportunity with the President, for American public to hear "what was happening" on the island:

Mr. President, the Greek island of Crete, the native country of Jupiter and Minos, glorious in the ancient times and happy, insignificant today and unhappy, sighs before the Christian world under the heavy yoke of Mussulman...Inexorable policy had delivered us a new to the Ottoman yoke, first under the viceroy of Egypt and than under the Sultan...Heavy taxes are disproportionate to our poor gains...tribunals we have only in name, and justice is a thing unknown to us...our children from the lack of schools, are reared in the darkness of ignorance...By origin and religion, by language and tradition we belong to the Greek race, and our proper place is a part of the Kingdom of Greece.<sup>36</sup>

Even after the insurrection was ended, Stillman wrote articles in American newspapers and proposed that the US should become a part of the "Eastern Question" by pursuing policies "in perfect accord with that of Christianity and human liberty."<sup>37</sup> Next 50 years after Stillman's affirmation, the US gradually became an indirect party to the "Eastern Question".

In 1870s, tensions in the Balkan regions of the Ottoman Empire increased. Bulgarian rebels revolted against the Ottoman rule in 1876, and this subject, as the Cretan one, communicated to the American public by Americans, including missionaries and

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<sup>35</sup>William J. Stillman, *The Cretan Insurrection of 1866-7-8*, New York, Henry Holt & Co., 1874, passim.

<sup>36</sup>*New York Times*, 29 September 1866.

<sup>37</sup>*New York Times*, 6 December 1869.



diplomats in the Ottoman Empire. Philip Shasko gave a comprehensive collection of news, editorials and articles published in the American press during the Bulgarian rebellion, in his article "*The Eastern Question: An American Response to the Bulgarian Massacres of 1876*".<sup>38</sup> *The New York Times*, as before was the main source of information where the American public learnt about the incidents in the Balkans. In 20 May 1876 edition, the *New York Times* correspondent in İstanbul reported as follows: "...we should not be surprised to hear by any telegram of a massacre of Christians throughout Turkey. But the ignorant masses and rabble are capable of the utmost excitement and fanaticism for their religion."<sup>39</sup>

*Times* had a correspondent in the region and some American missionaries sent letters about the incidents. In addition, the paper cited from English newspapers such as *London Daily News* in which American missionaries Long and Washburn and US Consul General in İstanbul, Eugene Schuyler, frequently wrote their observations on Bulgaria.<sup>40</sup> In August and September 1876, *New York Times* published news about the events in Bulgaria almost every day. Some headlines read as follows: "The Turkish Barbarities", "The Slaughter in Bulgaria", "Turkish Outrages in Bulgaria", "Massacres in Bulgaria", "Atrocities in the East", "Turkish Murders in Bulgaria" and "Thousands of People Brutally Murdered".

In September and October 1876, the *New York Times* published items, which related to the activities of the American missionaries in the Ottoman Empire in general and in Bulgaria in particular. Newspaper's correspondent in İstanbul wrote:

A paragraph lately appeared in a London paper to the effect that the missionaries of Robert College had prevailed on Mr. Maynard, the American Minister in Constantinople, to send Mr. Schuyler, the Consul General, into Bulgaria to investigate the atrocities committed

<sup>38</sup>Philip Shasko, "The Eastern Question: An American Response to the Bulgarian Massacres of 1876", *Bulgarian Historical Review*, Vol. XX 1992, passim.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>40</sup>Keith Greenwood, "American Efforts in Bulgaria-1876", *Actes Du III Congress Internationale Des Etudes Du sud Est Européen*, Vol. III, 1978, p. 220.

there by Bashi-Bazouks and Circassians on Christian population...Mr. Schuyler's mission was strongly desired by people of the all classes in Constantinople, always excepting the Turk.<sup>41</sup>

As exaggerated news from American missionaries, Schuyler and British newspapers increased, the *New York Times* editorials became more and more anti-Turkish. In 9 September 1876 issue, the editor wrote:

*No event in Europe during the past half-century has touched so deep a chord of feeling among the humane as the Turkish atrocities in Bulgaria. In fact, nothing equal to them in savageness and ferocity on a gigantic scale has occurred since Bajazet on those same plains, piled his hills of human skulls. The accounts of the remains of babies and little children, slaughtered by the hundreds, or immense heaps of bodies of maidens-first violated then murdered-of families stripped of every member, the old and the young, of churches packed full of corpses, not of the men and the youth, but of those whose long blood-stained hair and torn garments. Showed that there had been an orgy of cruelty and lust such as modern history has seldom known.*<sup>42</sup>

This kind of anti-Turkish and anti-Islamic line of the *New York Times* was repeated in many editorials. In "The Eastern War" of 23 October 1876, the editor argued that the fanaticism of the Mohammedans made the Turks "the terror of Europe for so many centuries". At present the "old fires" have "burned out" and the Turks have "degenerated" and are not capable "of any great or sustained passion". "However", the editor wrote: "...The Mohammedan spirit when aroused is that of a tiger; it thirsts for blood. The massacres in Bulgaria are only a foretaste of what the Ottoman Moslems would present to the world if this fanaticism broke loose...this fate has been an almost unimpinged curse to the world".<sup>43</sup>

In 1890s, the Bulgarian problem was replaced with the Armenian one. Since the Armenians were a population on which American missionaries sustained systematic evangelization efforts beginning in 1830s and a great number of American schools and missions were opened in the regions where Armenians lived,

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<sup>41</sup>Shasko, "The Eastern Question", p.64.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 66.

American missionaries more actively participated to an anti-Turkish campaign when Ottoman government enforced some measures to suppress Armenian revolts in various parts of the Empire.

During the Ottoman military operations against the Armenian rebels, some American missionary buildings, including the colleges in *Marsovan* (Merzifon) and *Kharput* (Harput) were damaged. These events gave an impetus to missionary activities to initiate a US government policy against the Ottoman Empire, and the missionaries founded the National Armenian Relief Committee in 1895.<sup>44</sup>

In the meantime, as during the Greek issue in 1820s, but this time the Phil-Armenians not the Philhellenes called on Congress to intercede. Senator Wilkinson Call of Florida introduced a concurrent resolution in December 1895 calling on the American government to end the disorders in eastern Ottoman Empire by negotiation if possible, by force if necessary. The resolution went on to urge creation of an independent Armenian state guaranteed by the major powers. Rejecting Call's resolution as too sweeping, Senator Shelby Moore Cullom of Illinois, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, proposed a more restrained substitute. The Cullom resolution invited the President to ask European powers to "stay the hand of fanaticism and lawless violence" against unoffending Armenians, and promised congressional support for the President "in the most vigorous action he may take for the protections and security of American citizens in the Turkey, and to obtain redress for injuries committed upon the persons or property of such citizens."<sup>45</sup>

Persuading the Senate to approve his measure, Cullom helped to start what became overly pro-Armenian sentiment in public consideration of the Ottoman Empire. His opinion on the issue was published in *New York Times* in January 1896,

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<sup>44</sup>Joseph L. Grabill, *Protestant Diplomacy and the Near East: Missionary Influence on American Policy 1810-1927*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1971, p. 42.

<sup>45</sup>Robert Daniel, "The Armenian Question and American-Turkish Relations 1919-1927", *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. XLVI, September 1959, pp.119-120.

...at the brief accounts which I have had of the awful carnival of havoc, destruction and blood which has prevailed for a time in Turkey...There has been no war, no conflict between two contending powers, but a merciless, pitiless tornado of bloody ruin...Through hundreds of Eastern villages, towns blessed with schools and colleges, with churches and missionaries, the demon of damnable and fanatical hate has spread ruin, desolation and death...The heart of all Christendom is stirred to its very depths as it witnesses the piteous pleas of the suffering Armenians beseeching the Christian world to give them protection.<sup>46</sup>

Outside the halls of Congress, clergymen were quick to affirm that the American Government should act "promptly and effectively". The Methodist *Western Christian Advocate* suggested that the Turkish rule must be overthrown by force. On the other hand, funds collected by the missionaries as a part of relief efforts, reached a major magnitude. To the 73,000 dollars raised by the *Christian Herald* were added other large sums including 107,000 dollars from the Red Cross. American groups collectively provided at least 300,000 dollars. A new generation of Americans had been introduced to the "Eastern Question" in terms describing Turks as barbaric oppressors and Armenians as "hapless victims".<sup>47</sup>

Parallel to their fund raising activities, some American clergymen wrote books on the Ottoman Empire and tried to enlarge the anti-Turkish public in the US. Among those, it is possible to count on *The Rule of the Turk-The Armenian Crisis* written by Frederick Davis Greene (published in 1896) and *Turkey and the Armenian Atrocities-A Reign of Terror-From Tartar Huts to Constantinople Palaces* written by Edwin Munsell Bliss (published in 1896).

Those books were filled with anti-Turkish and anti-Islam interpretations, but the most extreme example of such literature was Everett P. Wheeler's *The Duty of the United States of America to American Citizens in Turkey*. In fact Wheeler's sentences were depicted during an address delivered before the *American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions* on October 7, 1896. The Board published the speech as a book in the same year and distributed it widely. Wheeler spoke as follows:

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<sup>46</sup>Grabill, *Protestant Diplomacy*, pp. 43-44.

<sup>47</sup>Daniel, "The Armenian Question", p. 120.

In the position which Turkey has placed us, is there any course consistent with honor or duty but to support our demands by an adequate armed force? The American government should send a powerful fleet to the Mediterranean, accompanied by a sufficient number of regular troops, and should demand at the cannon's mouth what has been refused to milder requests. In no other way can either redress or security be obtained. Unless we do this, we expose our citizens to further outrages and their property to destruction.

By this I do not mean that we should engage in war or bombard Turkish cities. I do mean that, unless redress and security were both assured, we should take possession of Smyrna [İzmir] and other ports to collect their revenues until indemnity for the past is obtained and the cost of our occupation is reimbursed."<sup>48</sup>

Fortunately, Turkey and the US did not enter to an armed conflict against each other, even during the First World War in which they were in opposite camps. But, the "Terrible Turk" stereotype created in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, shadowed the Turkish-American relations for a long time.

A Turkish woman writer, Mrs. Selma Ekrem, described what she encountered on a trip to the US in 1910s in her book *Unveiled: The Autobiography of a Turkish Girl*:

Here in America lived a legend made of blood and thunder. The "Terrible Turk" ruled the minds of the Americans. A huge person with fierce black eyes and bushy eyebrows, carrying daggers covered with blood. I did not fit into the legend of the "Terrible Turk" so I was not one. In fact many people were disappointed to meet a real true Turk who turns out to be fair, meek and not very unlike an American.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>Everett P. Wheeler, *The Duty of the United States of America to American Citizens in Turkey*, New York, Flemming H. Revell Company, 1896, pp. 20-21.

<sup>49</sup>From Roger Trask, "The Terrible Turk and Turkish-American Relations", *The Historian*, Vol. XXXIII, November, 1970; Selma Ekrem, *Unveiled: the Autobiography of a Turkish Girl*, 1930, p. 302.

### 7. Conclusion: Changing Perceptions under Heavy Legacy

When Turkish-American diplomatic relations were resumed in 1927 after a suspension of 10 years, American ambassadors to Turkey initiated to work hardly to persuade American public about Turkey's changing face and reforms started by Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk), founder of the Republic.

One of them, Joseph Grew always disturbed when anti-Turkish statement appeared in the American press, urged the Turkish Government to undertake a public relations program in the US. He tried to get articles by Turkish officials published in the US and promoted the filming of a movie of Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) at his model farm outside Ankara. Another US Ambassador, Charles Sherill, devoted much effort to informing Americans about Turkey. He spoke widely about Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) and Turkish progress during a leave in the US in 1932. His literary effort, *A Year's Embassy to Mustapha Kemal*, while portraying the great leader as a knight in shining armor who alone saved Turkey, helped to dispel the "Terrible Turk" idea.<sup>50</sup>

On the other hand, American visitors to Turkey also provided an important outlet in publicizing Turkey in the US and means of promoting closer ties between the two countries. Russell Broadmann and John Polando, who in July 1931 flew non-stop from New York to İstanbul in 49 hours to set a new world record, were sensational and effective visitors. Received as heroes by the Turks, they were subjects of adoration during their 9-day stay in İstanbul. The visit was well publicized in the US.<sup>51</sup> Although combined Turkish-American efforts during Atatürk's presidency to eliminate the "Terrible Turk" stereotype and improve the reputation of Turkey in the US revealed a profound change in American public opinion, some traces of the old prejudice remained.<sup>52</sup>

Those remnants are frequently brought into limelight by anti-Turkish groups before the American public; as so called "Armenian genocide" accusations, as Turkish troops' "illegal"

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., pp. 46-47.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

presence in Cyprus or as so called "pressures over Protestants" in Turkey, and multidimensional sphere of Turkey's relations with the US is still under pressure of negative campaigns which take their power from the heavy legacy of the nineteenth century. When an American politician backed by anti-Turkish groups initiates a resolution condemning Turkey for anything, he never pursues a different way than senators Call and Cullom or Reverend Wheeler had followed more than hundred years ago. Most of today's statements, ideas or claims against, and contemporary American perception of, Turkey have roots in the history that is not possible to change. Nothing but constructive interpretations of the past and impartial glances on today might help to shape the glittering future of Turkish-American relations.