Looking East

English Writing and the Ottoman Empire before 1800

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Introduction: Islam, the Ottomans and Early Modern England

> Constantinople [is] in the forme of a Triangle in circule 15 myles, seated upon seaven hills, and therefore some would have it the seate of the Anti-christe.
>
> – 'Mr. Stamp,' 1609.[1]

Hostility to Islam was widespread in early modern Christian Europe. Throughout Christendom, knowing that the lands where Christianity had been born were now subjected to Islamic control combined with memories of the crusades to feed deeply rooted and persistent antagonisms. After the loss of Byzantine Constantinople in 1453 to the Ottoman forces of Mehmed II, Muslims generally became known as 'Turks' regardless of their racial or ethnic origins, while fears that the invincible Ottoman armies threatened to overwhelm Europe spread like the plague. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Ottoman incursions into continental Europe, the eastern Mediterranean and North Africa, gave substance to such fears. For Christians living in nations adjacent to the expanding Ottoman domains, identifying Islam with the Ottomans seemed naturally compelling, based though it was on a misunderstanding of both Islam and of Ottoman statecraft. But fear breeds superstition, and even as far away as England, hardly menaced by Ottoman armies, sixteenth-century churchmen encouraged the conviction that the Christian faith was under attack and the 'Turk' became synonymous with Islam. In 1565, the Bishop of Salisbury instituted a prayer for Wednesday and Friday services that opens as follows:

> O Almighty and everlasting God, our heavenly Father, we thy disobedient and rebellious children, now by thy just judgment sore afflicted, and in great danger to be oppressed, by thine and our sworn

> and most deadly enemies the Turks, Infidels, and Miscreants, do make humble suit to the throne of thy grace, for thy mercy, and aid against the same our mortal enemies; for though we do profess the name of thy only Son Christ our Saviour, yet through our manifold sins and wickedness we have most justly deserved so much of thy wrath and indignation, that we can not but say, O Lord correct us in they mercy and not in thy fury. Better it is for us to fall into thy hands, than into the hands of men, and especially into the hands of Turks and Infidels thy professed enemies, who now invade thine inheritance . . . The Turk goeth about to set up, to extol and to magnify that wicked monster and damned soul Mahumet above thy dearly beloved Son Jesus Christ, whom we in heart believe, and with mouth confess, to be our Saviour and Redeemer.[2]

By the middle of the sixteenth century, to be an English Christian no longer simply meant a daily life spent amongst family amidst a local community but had become profoundly a matter of being part of a greater world – one ruled over by an all-seeing and almighty judicial power who governed all things. One's very moral being, in this regime, would be subjected to judgements with direct and seemingly knowable repercussions on a global scale; the sins of the English became the very stuff of Ottoman military power. With such ideas on the liturgical agenda, it is hardly surprising that the English should have harboured strange and fearful fantasies about Muslims and Ottomans, including the superstitious notion that the triangular shape and seven hills of Constantinople were symbolic evidences for the diabolic nature of Ottoman rule.

Fear and fascination

During the course of the seventeenth century, while such hostile fears continued to be spread about, they became absorbed into and mitigated by a broader fascination with elements of Ottoman culture, and the English increasingly conceived of themselves and their own nation in terms that drew upon comparisons, contrasts and relationships with the great Muslim empire. Informed and accurate news about the Ottomans regularly entered public discourse. Everywhere seemed somehow to be connected with everywhere else, and no man, or island, could claim exception. Events at home became knowable only as parts of a larger scheme that involved, among other things, the dreaded spread of Islam. In the issue of his anti-government newsletter *The Man in the Moon* for

the last week of May 1649, John Crouch reported: 'There is a new Book imprinted by Authority of Parl. called the Turkish Alchoran worthy your most serious devotions.'[3] Crouch's casual irony here – 'worthy your most serious devotions' – suggests how the licensing for publication of Islam's holy text in English might have been no considerable surprise coming as it did from a regime that had, only four months previously, executed king Charles I. Great changes were in the air, and localized national events were part of larger, global schemes.

For the English and Europeans more generally, links between these two events, the publication of 'the Turkish Alcoran' and the judicial execution of a Christian monarch, were no idle coincidence. Within a short time, the connection appeared in Royalist rhetoric at home and abroad to damn the new republic for being anti-Christian. On St Valentine's Day 1650, Thomas Calegreo, the Resident of the King of Great Britain at the Venetian Court, presented letters to the Doge from the dead king of England's son, expressing friendship while pleading for assistance against the regime in London that had recently beheaded his father. In his own voice, Calegreo offered a brief account of how recent events in England threatened 'all the Princes of Christendom.'

> The danger to the Christian religion is shown by the sects which have sprung up in the new empire . . . and at the same time by the publication of the Alcoran, translated from the Turkish, so that the people may be imbued with Turkish manners, which have much in common with the actions of the rebels. The Church of St. Paul, comparable with St. Peters at Rome, remains desolate and is said to have been sold to the Jews as a synagogue.[4]

No matter that the English version of the Qur'ān had been translated from a well-known French version and not from 'Turkish'; for the purposes of pro-Stuart propaganda, the English Republic was a breeding ground for alien, anti-Christian elements that were currently running the government in league with anti-Christian foreigners, all of them busily spreading the seditious manners and beliefs of the 'Turks' and Jews.

Contemporary partisan accounts frequently accounted for the English Civil Wars in terms of 'Turks,' the Old Testament, millennial prophecies, Judaism, Islam, as well as that familiar archenemy, the Pope. In 1645, the parliamentary press reported how defeat of Charles' army at the battle of Naseby was a wondrous sign that the enemies of Protestant reform were everywhere in defeat. Reflecting on coincidental events in the Mediterranean, the writer of *The Scottish Dove* speculated: 'who

knowes, but that the *Turke* shall in these times be Gods instrument, to destroy the *Pope* and then God will trouble him and from heaven consume him by the fire of his indignation.'[5] Hopeful expectations that the 'Turk' and the Pope were about to defeat each other without English Protestant blood or money being spent were not uncommon among the writers of victorious parliamentarian newsletters. For 12 August, *The True Informer* reports Ottoman landings on Crete with great excitement: 'We cannot but have great expectations, of these remarkable concussions and combustions in divers parts of this world, but in an especiall manner of those risen between the two great opposites of Jesus Christ the Turke and the Pope.'[6] For Protestants in England and Scotland, the weeks following the king's defeat at Naseby were godly times indeed that attested to the impending overthrow of impious worldly tyrants in Rome and Istanbul. But for Royalist journalists like Crouch, the appearance of an English 'Alcoran' only weeks after the king's execution offered confirmatory evidence that all was no longer well in Britannia's bit of Christendom.

The turmoils of Civil War were by no means the first time that social, religious and political life in England and Scotland had been interpreted and described in terms of 'Turks,' Ottomans and Islam.[7] Indeed, during the first half of the seventeenth century, English writers became increasingly preoccupied with the Ottomans and the 'Turkish religion' – the most common way of referring to Islam at the time. Why should this have been so?

Sponsored by Elizabeth, Anglo-Ottoman trade and diplomacy flourished during the final decades of the sixteenth century. Yet commerce alone could hardly account for the widespread development of interest in the culture, history and religion of the Ottoman Empire. Published first in 1603, the year James VI of Scotland acceded to the throne of England, Richard Knolles' monumental compilation from foreign sources, *The Generall Historie of the Turkes*, would remain in print throughout the century, providing statesmen and courtiers and anyone else who was interested with useful information. His efforts also provided dramatists and poets with exotic characters, remarkable scenes, and ingenious plots, but poor Knolles himself seems to have profited little from the influential work. In 1609, he wrote to Robert Cotton pathetically pleading for financial help that would enable him to pursue 'the furtherment of the continuation of the Turkish historie,' but he died in poverty the next year.[8] Yet such was incipient curiosity in the lands ruled by the Ottomans that fame, if not fortune, awaited those prepared to undertake the arduous journey beyond the edge of Christian Europe simply in order to write about it. So successful were printed

travel accounts by Thomas Coryate (1611), William Lithgow (1614), and George Sandys (1615), that Fynes Moryson dusted off a Latin journal that he had kept during a journey made between 1595 and 1597, translated it into English, and published it in 1617.[9] By 1636, Henry Blount observed: 'I was of opinion, that hee who would behold these times in their greatest glory, could not find a better *Scene* then *Turky* these considerations sent me thither.'[10] Understanding what was going on in England, as in the world, meant knowing about the Ottoman Empire.

Misconceptions and continuing challenges

Islam and the Ottomans came to play no small part in the interests, imaginations and ambitions of the English throughout the early modern period. Yet, until very recently, only a few scholars of English history or literature have bothered very much about Islam or the Ottoman Empire, and very few historians have been interested in tracing, or admitting to the existence of, Eastern influences upon Renaissance Europe. With notable exceptions, scholars of the Renaissance have refused to recognize how Islamic ideas or cultural influences could have had any relevance to their great theme of European resurgence, and it has only been in very recent years that the study of Ottoman sources has begun to reveal how that sophisticated imperial state not only differed greatly from traditional accounts of military conquest followed by decline into luxurious indolence, but also how Ottoman cultural life was dynamically integrated with the European Renaissance right from the start.

In 1937, a Byron scholar named Samuel Chew published a very thorough survey of references to Islam in English writing of the Renaissance period. Few will need reminding how greatly the world has changed since Chew's study, *The Crescent and the Rose: Islam and England during the Renaissance* first appeared, price $5.00. Yet in terms of Anglophone scholarship on Chew's general topic, any impartial jury would surely conclude that a great deal of work is still waiting to be done. Following Chew's comprehensive survey of how English writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries represented the peoples and cultures of the Ottoman and Persian Empires, Clarence Dana Rouillard in 1940, Dorothy Vaughn in 1954 and Robert Schwoebel in 1969 produced general accounts of French, Italian and German writings about those they called 'Turks' that remain useful for their reach and coverage of the contemporary vernacular materials.[11] The limitation of this first wave of surveys, and it is one that continues to reappear in studies being produced in the field today, might be called the 'single-archive approach,' for none of these

scholars knew or cared very much about the peoples that their European sources purported to represent other than what they could deduce from those very sources.

In all fairness to Chew, Rouillard, Vaughn and Schwoebel, none of them ever claimed that they were doing more than investigate the ways that early European writers regarded those they called 'Turks' and the world of Islam they inhabited, but their indifference to whom and what they were representing marks a cautionary and stubborn absence. For the result of this single-archive analysis is that prejudiced misinformation all too often reappears as fact, past errors resurface as reliable judgments, and before very long fantasy returns as history. All four scholars, for instance, recycled the early modern European habit of using the term 'Turk' as though it were synonymous with both 'Muslim' and with 'Ottoman,' while to the Ottomans themselves, the word referred disparagingly to the Anatolian peasantry over whom they had come to rule. As L. Carl Brown observes, the matter is not a trivial one since it continues to perpetuate a number of very serious misconceptions about the nature and constitution of the Ottoman state. He writes:

> The West for its part has stubbornly refused to call the Ottoman Empire by its name, instead labelling this multireligious, multilingual, multiethnic polity as 'Turkey' and its ruler 'Turks.' That those ruling from the banks of the Bosphorus themselves used the word 'Turk' to mean 'rustic' or 'bumpkin' just did not penetrate Western perceptions. Ironically, the West since time out of mind has insisted that the Ottomans were 'not like us' even while imposing, however unconsciously, a strictly Western ethnolinguistic rubric upon the Ottoman Empire, which was the very opposite of a nation-state.[12]

Further, as Metin Kunt explains: 'Though in Europe the [Ottoman] empire was often referred to as "Turkey," such a term itself – either as a political or a geographical entity – was totally unknown in the Ottoman Turkish language or in any of the many other languages spoken by its subjects within its borders.'[13] There are many who continue in this habit of using misleading name-calling, and it is one that has been rendered even more confused and potentially perilous ever since 1923 when the Turkish Republic declared all inhabitants to be 'Turks' in order to erase Kurds, Armenians, Laz and other ethnicities from the national landscape.

There are also further and important terminological difficulties presented by the numerous different ways that early English writers

employed the term 'Turk.' Who, or perhaps more accurately, what, was meant by 'Turk'? As Matthew Dimmock has recently argued, 'Turke' occupied 'a whole range of associations that fundamentally question critical assumptions of a single defining notion of otherness,'[14] and indeed ambiguity and inconstancy were central to many of the different ways the term was employed. The English version of Ortelius' map showing the Ottoman Empire appeared with the following gloss: 'The Turkes are of nature greate observatours of theyr false lawes, slaves unto theyr lorde, good souldieurs, boathe on foote and on horsebacke, patiente in labour, sparinge in theyre foode, and for the reste very inconstante.'[15] Like women, 'Turks' were self-divided and ever changeable, managing to represent for European men everything they imagined themselves not to be. In *The English Parnassus* (1654), a rhyming dictionary for use in schools that came complete with lists of approved epithets, Joshua Poole assembled the following list of suitable synonyms and epithets for 'Turke' from a comprehensive survey of usages in 'the best authors':

> Unbelieving, misbelieving, thrifty, abstemious, cruel, unpitying, mercilesse, unrelenting, inexorable, warlick, circumcized, superstitious, bloody, wine-forbearing, turban'd, avaritious, covetous, erring.[16]

What is most striking about Poole's list is that it omits any specific reference to Islam, even though the most commonly used term to describe Muslims was 'Turks,' regardless of national origin. The English translation of the Qur'ān, published in 1649, characteristically describes itself as 'newly Englished, for the satisfaction of all that desire to look into the *Turkish* vanities.'[17] Before the term 'Muhammetan' became general, Muslims were most often simply referred to as 'Turks' even when they were North Africans or European renegades. Thomas Dallam, returning from Istanbul in 1599, for example, introduces readers to 'our drugaman, or Intarpreater . . . an Inglishe man, borne in Chorlaye in Lancashier; his name Finche. He was also in religion a perfit Turke, but he was our trustie frende.'[18] For Poole, however, with literary horizons before him, 'Turk' was to be used for describing certain characteristics that often had little to do with the lands commonly referred to as 'Turkey.'

Indeed, early modern English culture had for so long defined itself in opposition to Islam that the very words 'Turk' and 'Turkish' could even be applied to the English themselves if they behaved in ways

deemed inappropriate. Anyone who betrayed certain qualities, acting haughtily or proud, *alla Turchesca*, for instance, was liable to be called a 'Turk.' What gave formal unity to the most persistent of those qualities was a principle of inner-contradiction, of inconstancy. A great observer of false laws, unbelieving, misbelieving and erring all at once, 'and for the reste very inconstante,' to be a 'Turk' entailed a whole series of self-contradictions. To be any of these, in Poole's analysis of early seventeenth-century poetic usage, was to be a 'Turk.' Simply put, 'Turk' referred to any Muslim but, in more general usage, the word could also be pejoratively applied to anyone who portrayed contradictory or violent or tyrannically patriarchal characteristics: Shakespeare's use of the term in *Othello* offers illuminating examples.

It is hardly surprising that the multiple attitudes towards the Ottomans circulated by writers who never left the British Isles most commonly reiterated a long tradition of Islamophobic fears, rhetoric and imagery in which the cruel figure of the 'terrible Turk' lusted and savaged his way across a menacingly large empire. At the head of a hugely powerful and resplendent military machine, the figure of the Ottoman sultan haunted Europe, terrorizing captive peoples into slavery, while tyrannizing over his subjects by spectacular displays of sudden, summary justice. Such is what we find in King James' poem celebrating the defeat of the Ottoman fleet at Lepanto. Scholars today clearly need to use the term with care and deliberation lest they simply reproduce the prejudiced fantasies of the past or the nationalist presumptions of the post-Kemalist present.

Yet a further complication arises if we take into account the fact that many of the figures – whether real historical people or literary characters – referred to as 'Turks' were not Turks in any sense, but rather Muslims, European converts, or characters from just about anywhere who behaved in certain ways. To avoid possible confusion, then, I shall refer to 'Ottomans' whenever subjects of that imperial state are at issue, and reserve 'Turk' for referring to those mutable figures haunting the early modern European imagination. Similarly, I have used 'English' throughout when referring generally to travellers, merchants, readers, writers and writings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – except when doing so would demonstrably include those who were not English – since a key concern here is with the place of these writers and their works upon the development of a national literature that has most commonly been referred to as 'English literature,' and I have reserved 'British' for emphasizing the imperial project of the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Examining how and why Europeans represented the Ottoman Empire, and the Muslim world more generally, during our period is arguably the most exciting and important scholarly endeavour on the agenda of early modern cultural studies today. But understanding what those representations or 'images' meant in the past, and what they might continue to mean today, necessarily requires a certain degree of reasonably accurate knowledge of the peoples and cultures being described if we are to grasp how, and to what ends, these early misrepresentations distorted the populous and complex world which they claimed to be portraying; as well as being able to recognize when and why they were accurate. How did the Ottoman Empire record and represent itself? How have modern Ottoman historians changed the ways we might best understand what was going on back then?

The immediate challenge facing scholars who would avoid the single-archive method arises from two distinct directions. The first is the enormous difficulty of access to, and interpretation of, sources in languages such as Farsi, Ottoman Turkish and the various Arabic dialects; a difficulty greatly compounded by the unfamiliar nature of such archives as do exist and are available. In the case of Ottoman sources, the problem has been further exacerbated by two complicating factors: the Ottomans themselves were generally uninterested in writing history of the kind known to European historians since the Enlightenment, while the study of the Ottoman past was deliberately ignored following the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923. It was not until the late 1940s that scholars such as Halil Inalcık set about recovering Ottoman history from archival sources in the modern style, and even today gaining access to primary sources continues to present obstacles to those capable of reading Ottoman Turkish.[19] A further problem is that a majority of modern Ottoman historians are based in the United States and Western Europe, and have consequently focused on Ottoman influences in the Mediterranean region and relations with the French, Spanish, Italians, Dutch and English. Yet the Ottoman Empire was so vast that while important revisionary advances in Ottoman historiography are being produced – and this is especially true for specialist studies of relations with Poland, Hungary, the Black Sea region, even Iran and Syria – there are few who can keep up with developments in the field as a whole.

The other general challenge facing scholars today has been caused by Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). Said's own insistence that he was concerned in that study only with Western representations of the Orient and not with any actually existing or ' "real" Orient' has, all too often,

been taken to be a licence to follow suit and simply to ignore entirely what might otherwise be known about the peoples and cultures of the Muslim world.[20] Perhaps the most regrettable effect of Said's important study has been that many scholars coming of age in the long shadow of *Orientalism* have felt free to dismiss the important historical studies produced by skilled and knowledgeable Orientalists, many of whom do not reproduce the imperializing gestures discerned and described by Said, while even those who can be so accused often have a great deal to teach us today.[21] For scholars without the languages and access to archival sources who nonetheless seek to work in the field, the best if not only solution to both these challenges is to look beyond the single-archive method by taking serious heed of works by those who, skilled in the necessary languages, are directly engaged in original, archival study.

Unfortunately, the dilemmas do not end there. During the late 1990s, a second wave of important studies of early modern East–West relations began appearing, partly in response to developments in colonial-discourse studies inspired by Said and others. Acknowledging that the winners write history and that the very instruments of knowledge production were complicit in structures of power and authority, scholars of the Renaissance and early modern period soon noticed how Said's analysis of imperial discourses was inappropriate for the era before the Europeans set out to rule over and colonize Eastern lands. After all, during the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the great imperial powers were the Ottomans, Safavids and Mughals, and not the Spanish, French, Dutch and English. Art historians such as Julian Raby and Deborah Howard seriously challenged the exclusively European bases of Renaissance art and architecture by disclosing the Eastern influences without which Dürer's genius might not have flourished and Venice might have remained a rather drab city built on a swamp.[22] Lisa Jardine and Jerry Brotton broadened and extended this critique of the Eurocentrism underlying the very notion of the Renaissance by examining how the exchange of material goods, styles and ideas between East and West sufficiently enriched some ambitious European merchants to claim noble status for their families and to display their wealth by patronizing talented artists.[23] Then, in the late 1990s, Nabil Matar produced two groundbreaking books, *Islam in Britain, 1558–1685* (1998), and *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (1999) which, combining intimate historical knowledge of the Muslim world with exhaustive coverage of Anglophone sources, effectively set the agenda for study of Anglo-Muslim relations in the sixteenth and seventeenth

centuries on a properly comparative basis that does not casually ignore the other sides.

The dilemmas that remain involve language, methodology and conceptualization: how are those relations, movements, exchanges, encounters and interactions between demonstrably different social, religious and political orders that constitute early modern culture as a whole to be analysed, contextualized and described? How useful and accurate are the very terms and chronological descriptors we are likely to employ? Not too long ago Malcolm Yapp pointed out that the geopolitical concept category of 'Europe' can raise more problems than it solves for describing the actual conditions obtaining four hundred years ago, a time when the very notion of 'Europe' was only starting to be deployed as a way of imagining a unified area that, before the Ottomans seized Constantinople and finally severed the Western from the Eastern Christian communities in 1453, could be considered part of 'Christendom.'[24] Without a great deal of reflection, it soon becomes clear that even words such as 'East' and 'West' can confuse and distort, predicating as they do an imaginary and ideological zero point of reference. Once we admit that 'the Renaissance' involved far more than a re-birthing of skills, knowledge and styles from Greek and Roman antiquity, and entailed importing a great deal of materials, skills and styles with Asiatic, African and indeed Islamic origins, periodization becomes blurry while notions of 'origin' and 'influence' dissolve into tendentious gestures. As for the Ottoman Empire, as Metin Kunt observes, 'the Ottoman term for it was *devlet-i âl-i Osman*, "the domains and rule of the House of Osman." '[25] Simply by calling it an 'empire', we are liable to continue the mistaken enterprise of measuring and assessing its history as if the Ottoman achievement were comparable with the *imperium* of Rome, and then to find it following a comparable trajectory entailing a rise to greatness and a fall into decadence.[26] Dangerously mistaken too is the persistent and propagandistic notion that Ottoman incursions into Southeastern Europe were inspired by Islamic hostility towards Christianity rather than by expansionist ambitions to extend dynastic domain and rule for economic and political ends.

If, even to scholars, these historical and theoretical dilemmas seem like picayune hair-splitting, let me insist that they are of considerable importance at a time when there are many who, occupying positions of considerable power and authority, would insist, not only that Turkey is East and Euro-America is West, and that the only possible connection between them is inevitable and unceasing conflict. What we can

learn from the past, and must teach if there is to be a future in which scholarship and teaching have any place, is that Christianity, Islam and Judaism were not and are not incompatible, that none has ever held an inviolable monopoly over the truth, and that none rests upon a theology requiring the elimination of the others despite the doctrinal fantasies of some evangelical ministers, bellicose rabbis, deluded self-appointed imams and belligerent secular nationalists.

Nabil Matar's *Islam in Britain* and *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen*

Since the late 1990s, the serious study of early modern England and the Islamic world has been on the scholarly agenda and the field continues to grow, spawning innumerable international conferences and scholarly publications. In large part, this interest can be attributed to Nabil Matar's first two books which were conceived and written with a thoroughness and care born of many years devoted to tracking literary, historical and archival materials in Arabic as well as English sources to illustrate the topics involved. As suggested by the title, *Islam In Britain, 1558–1685* focused principally on religious issues: on the historical record and literary representation of the many Christians who converted to Islam, and of the few Muslims who converted to Christianity; on the place of Arabic scholarship in Renaissance and Reformation theology; and on the development of specifically racist attitudes towards Islamic peoples by the second half of the seventeenth century. *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* focused more closely on attitudes towards those Muslims who found themselves in Britain where, according to Matar, they were quickly deracinated from their own cultural and historical backgrounds in order to be rendered colonizable – no longer representatives of powerful and historically complex cultures but primitive savages to be conquered, dominated and enslaved. While the scope of these two studies differed, between them they effectively set the agenda for much of the work that has appeared since, including Matar's own subsequent translations of Arabic travel writings, *In the Lands of the Christians* (2003) and *Britain and Barbary, 1589–1689* (2005).

The scholarly impact of Matar's first two books can hardly be overestimated. *Islam in Britain* challenged previous understanding of the non-European origins of early modern Anglo-British identities and imperial ambitions. It examined the nature and range of attitudes towards Islam and the Ottoman Empire to be found in accounts by travel writers, historians, theologians, playwrights and poets between the accession of

Elizabeth in 1558 and the death of Charles II in 1685. Literary evidence of English fascination with the Near East during this period was previously documented by Samuel Chew (1937), Hamit Dereli (1951), Orhan Burian (1952) and Brendon Beck (1987), but Matar's contribution moved beyond the mere cataloguing and summarizing of literary texts in order to offer a profoundly original argument concerning the emergence and development of anti-Islamic prejudice in Protestant Britain.[27] Matar began by pointing out that the English, Scots and Irish were far more likely to meet a Muslim than a native American or sub-Saharan African. Thousands of Britons – not only mariners but also women and children – were taken captive and sold in the slave markets of North Africa. Moreover, many converted to Islam, either from perceived necessity – having become slaves they thought it was in their best interests to do so in order to improve their conditions and escape captive servitude – or from a desire to improve their social status and material circumstances. Tales of renegades, Christians who had 'turned Turk' by converting to Islam, and had subsequently prospered, were numerous throughout the period; many were not fantasies, but accounts of actual events.

According to Matar, the allure of Islam was so great that considerable efforts had to be made to demonize Islam and those who converted to it. Surveying this process of demonization in seventeenth-century plays by Thomas Kyd, Thomas Heywood, Robert Daborne, John Mason, Philip Massinger and John Dryden before turning to sermons concerning historical British renegades who came home in hopes of re-converting to Christianity, Matar showed it to be largely a process of systematic mystification in which otherwise knowable facts were commonly ignored if they proved inconvenient. After all, eyewitness reports of renegades invariably indicated that they were successful in their new lives, not the miserable wretches commonly portrayed by preachers and playwrights. On the contrary, many renegades were respected and accepted by Christian travellers, traders and diplomats. At home, however, dramatists and churchmen cast the renegade in an entirely different light as 'a type of generic evil.'[28]

In subsequent chapters of *Islam in Britain*, Matar reversed the direction of his enquiry by examining the ways that early modern Anglo-British culture and society attempted to incorporate elements of Islam – its wisdom, knowledge and people. Investigating the state of knowledge about Islam, Matar pointed out that while accurate information about Islam in medieval Britain had lagged behind that in the rest of Europe, for those living during the middle decades of the seventeenth century, Islam had become 'an intellectual and social matter at home,'[29]

especially following the appearance of the English-language *Alcoran* in 1649. Knowledge of, and misinformation about, the history, society and religion of the Near East and North Africa provided material that was regularly used to describe, represent and even criticize what was going on at home. An increasing sense of Islamic culture began influencing the imagery and perceptions of poets as varied as John Milton, Andrew Marvell, Edmund Waller and Thomas Traherne. Scholarly debates at the time concerning the status of Arabic science and Islamic theology fed into and reinforced the political debates of mid-century, providing global contexts for local and national crises. During the English Civil Wars, the Ottoman Empire offered the model of a religious state that would have pre-empted the possibility of sectarian uprisings by its multicultural tolerance. Among the pious, Islam posed a problem since it encouraged far greater piety among its adherents than Christianity. For Protestant reformers, allusions to Islam were especially useful as anti-Catholic propaganda. Unlike Catholicism, Islam permitted liberty of conscience, and there were persistent hopes that the 'Turks' would eventually destroy the Pope.

One of Matar's major contentions throughout this study is that interest in Islam during the period was invariably opportunistic: either a means for sorting out domestic problems or a way for partisan writers to promote their own cause. He argued that, knowing they could not conquer the Ottoman Empire, 'English writers turned to the only option left for them in confronting Islam: to fantasize in drama and sermon about Christian victory and Muslim defeat.'[30] Yet as Matar himself had already argued, the situation was never quite as simple as preachers and playwrights would have had people believe. Many expatriates allied themselves to the winning side and gained the respect of Muslims. For many English writers, the victory and expansion of Islamic-Ottoman armies in the Mediterranean and Southeast Europe offered a chance to advocate capturing trade from Catholic Venice and Spain; for others, it offered evidence that divine providence was about to bring about the defeat of the Pope. Mutual hostility towards icon-worshipping Catholics, as Matar demonstrated, was a key in Elizabeth's early diplomatic attempts to capture from the Venetian, French and Spanish, the profitable Eastern trade out of Ottoman ports for English shipping.[31] Fantasies of Islam in defeat were powerful, but only part of the story.

In his follow-up study, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery*, Matar turned westwards and posited a 'Renaissance triangle' in which Anglo-Protestant attitudes to Islam and the Muslims become confused with emergent attitudes towards Caribbeans and native-

Americans. Matar pointed out that Barbary pirates threatened British fishing fleets taking Newfoundland cod to market in Mediterranean ports; that several British merchants sought their fortunes in the trade of the Mediterranean as well as the West Atlantic. Meanwhile, religious polemicists in England and Scotland regularly vilified Muslims and 'Indians' in similarly grotesque terms for being exemplary of un-Christian vices and perversions. Matar instances Sir Thomas Smythe, who turned his winnings playing the Levant trade into another fortune in the colonial New World. In describing this 'Renaissance triangle,' Matar castigated Braudel and others for ignoring links between Britain, the Mediterranean and the New World, but held back from a more fully engaged dialogue with Robert Brenner's analysis in *Merchants and Revolution*, from which he acknowledged his information about Smythe.[32]

Nevertheless, Matar's investigation of the roots of Orientalist attitudes represented truly groundbreaking work that has inspired numerous subsequent studies by literary and cultural historians of the period. And the ground being broken was, and still is, situated in a political and ideological minefield. In the closing chapters of *Islam in Britain*, Matar unearthed some compelling evidence that suggests ways that modern 'anti-Semitism' has important roots in late seventeenth-century Anglo-Protestantism, but in presenting it, he remarkably managed to avoid polemic. On the contrary, Matar quietly set about analysing, summarizing, and discussing his materials without even hinting at the acrimonious disputes that continue to divide the world today.

In his final chapter, Matar observed how millenarian theology in England and Scotland turned to the prophecies of Daniel and Revelations in order to explain the twin threats of Ottoman sea power and the Counter-Reformation, while at the same time accounting for the historical failure of the Christian crusaders to recapture the sacred lands of the Near East. Viewing both Catholic and Muslim nations as hostile, reforming Britons began reviling their enemies not only in dogmatic terms but also as racial others. Thus, according to Matar, arose the 'demonization of the Muslims – both the Turks and the Arab "Saracens" who had given rise to Islam.'[33] By distinguishing Muslim 'Turks' from Arab Saracens, seventeenth-century eschatologists separated the achievements of medieval Arab civilization from the militarized dissemination of Islam. Although scholarly Arabists such as William Bedwell knew it to be nonsense, this distinction was supported by various etymological and ethnographic myths of origin: the Saracens were variously held to be the sons of Sarah, or of Hagar, or simply a group of unpaid

soldiers whose leader, Muhammad, founded a new religion based on military aggression and expansionism.

Matar describes how several historical accounts of the 'Saracens' systematically de-historicize the knowable past by moving directly from Muhammad to the Ottomans, 'deleting thereby over 700 years' of Arab history.[34] Millenarian expositors of Daniel had little difficulty seeing the Saracens as the 'Kings of the South,' who began driving Christianity from the East – a process they believed was simply continued by the Ottomans.[35] Having thus reduced the history of Arabic civilization to militarized aggression, some Protestant writers claimed that Muhammad himself had prophesied that Islam would only last 1,000 years, a period that was about to end: 'Muslim eschatology secured the victory of Christ over Mohammad.'[36] Implicit in this historical scheme, according to Matar, is an emergent ideology of progress in which the story of the past merely confirms Anglo-Protestants in their own superiority over all other nations and races: pro-Israelite but anti-Jewish, pro-Arab but anti-Saracen, pro-Roman but anti-Catholic. Belief in the decay of other nations and races provided the emerging conditions for increasingly powerful fantasies of divinely ordained Anglo-Protestant superiority.

Yet, while uniformly condemning Saracens and 'Turks' 'to military destruction and spiritual damnation,' there were some Anglo-Protestant eschatologists who encouraged praying for the Jews since Paul (Rom. 11:24) had written of the Jewish conversion to Christianity. From here, according to Matar, arose the notion of the Restoration of the Jews to Palestine where they would dispel the Saracens and 'Turks,' convert to Christianity, and establish 'in Palestine the Protestant English Kingdom of Christ.' Although 'Restorationism' was condemned as heretical by most theologians, Matar describes works by several writers who were keen to promote it – including Joseph Mede, Thomas Goodwin, Henry Finch and Thomas Brightman. While some modern scholars describe this position as philo-Semitism, Matar argued that it is, rather, profoundly anti-Jewish. After all, he pointed out, the belief that the Jews would complete the crusades by driving the Saracens and Turks from the Holy Land as a prelude to their own inevitable conversion to Christianity held the further advantage – to Protestant Britons – of expelling the Jews from Britain once again. In this period, 'Restorationism was the hallmark of an anti-Jewish position; calling for the expulsion of the Jews (again) from England and for their conversion out of their religion to Christianity did not constitute philo-Semitic measures.'[37] Allowing that not all Protestant expressions of philo-Semitism were Restorationist, Matar observed that Restorationists had a hard time finding any evidence at

all that Jews wanted to fight Muslims or live in Palestine: 'not a single Renaissance Jewish writer in England expressed the desire to destroy the Muslims.' Moreover, travellers often reported how 'Jews who had been badly treated in Christendom were supporting their Muslim protectors against their former persecutors.' Nevertheless, the logics of popular millenarian Protestant eschatology apparently led many at the time to believe, despite evidence to the contrary, that 'the Jews were hostile to the Muslims.' 'Once the Muslims were destroyed by the Jews,' Matar explains, 'then the Jews would renounce their faith, occupy ("restore to") the land of Palestine, and hand the land and themselves over to England. Then the millennium would begin which Protestant Britons (and converted Jews) alone would live to celebrate.'[38]

By adopting a balanced and scholarly approach, Matar was clearly hedging his bets – without doubt a wise strategy given the personal threats that were regularly directed at Edward Said during the 1990s. The implications of his study, however, direct themselves to one of the great unanswered problems of *Orientalism* without seeking to solve it: How did the discourse of Orientalism materialize into political agency and action? In addressing this question historically, Matar's study pointed to dangerous revisions of received historical wisdom. His examination of English thought about the East during the mercantile era – the period immediately before the post-Napoleonic shift at the core of Said's study – points directly to the Anglo-Protestant origins of a 'Restorationist' discourse within millenarian thought that would resurface after the First World War as British Zionism and take on new and alarming energy in the fanatical Christian Zionism of the present day.

In Matar's account, the desire of European Jews during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was not to militarize into an armed nation that would fight the Muslims out of Palestine, not to reclaim – in the name of a Christian millennial eschatology – the Biblical lands of Israel. Yet this is the very structure of desire, according to Matar's evidence, that some elements of the Anglo-Protestant imperial imaginary of the mercantile era constructed for them. In Matar's account, no European Jew wanted to live in Near Eastern deserts, to take up arms against one of the most efficient and bloody imperial armies the world had ever known. But apparently, this is what some Christians in Britain and the colonies of the New World were beginning to want to have happen. A crusade against the Ottoman Empire was as unaffordable and unthinkable in Elizabethan England as it was beside the point. Armed with the knowledge that wealth was the new form of power, mercantile agents of all sorts – speculators, tradesmen, merchant adventurers, stock-holders

in the trading companies and their overseas agents – understood only too well that English interests in the Levant had nothing to do with military conquest or the planting of colonialists abroad. On the contrary, those interests had everything to do with cheaper goods from further East – the Indian sub-continent, Southeast Asia and China – and bigger export markets for English goods. Therefore, a diplomatic approach to Anglo-Ottoman relations was called for.

Matar's argument may sound rather like the received historical wisdom once taught in English schools: Britain needed good relations with the Ottomans in order to have minimal interference from the Ottomans when reaching further into Asia to make certain of capturing the jewel in the crown of empire – the Indian subcontinent. Yet Matar's revisionary spin was to disclose how the early agents of what would eventually become British Zionism were already hovering in place during the mercantile era, imagining the British Empire into being. By amassing literary, historical and archival evidence concerning attitudes towards Islam and Muslims – both native-born and converts – during the early mercantile era, Matar exposed how the roots of Orientalism – the construction and domination of the East by the West – were entangled with those of 'Restorationist' ideology in the British imperial imaginary right from the start.

Before orientalism

Matar's work made clear how there are several ways in which the representation of the Ottoman Empire, religion, and peoples in early modern English writing will necessarily differ from some of the more general notions of Orientalism developed by Edward Said. Unlike 'the Orient,' the Ottoman Empire really existed. The Ottomans were well aware of the fact, and were quite capable of representing themselves. Said himself is perfectly clear that although 'there were – and are – cultures and nations whose location is in the East,' these are not to be confused with the ways they have been represented.[39] Orientalism describes the ways that 'Westerners' understood and eventually sought control over those cultures and nations by designating them the 'Orient.' When early European visitors set about understanding, misunderstanding, overlooking or ignoring the self-representations of the Ottomans, the reports they left behind may often owe rather more to their own imperial fantasies and personal ambitions than to really existing conditions.[40] But no one ever doubted that the Ottoman Empire existed. Said is also almost entirely concerned with the period following the defeat of Islamic

imperialism – the post-Napoleonic period of Enlightenment. For him, the previous era was dominated by 'Christian supernaturalism,'[41] but as we will see, this generalization proves only partly useful.

How else might these early modern English writings about the Ottomans fail to fit into Orientalist paradigms? Said defines Orientalism in three interconnected ways: it is at once an academic discipline, a dialectical 'style of thought' for distinguishing the East from the West, and the historical development of a 'corporate institution for dealing with the Orient'[42] that is at once grounded in that dialectic and authorized by the academic discipline. What is clearly of interest here – since the case of the Ottomans simply does not fit – is the moment at which European knowledge about the Orient is presumed to have become institutionalized power, when the West began acting in and upon those really existing places and peoples, forcing them into conformity with their own ideas. In Said's account, and for many who have followed him, Orientalism is not of much interest or even fully in place in the third sense, as an achieved operation of power and knowledge, until after the French Enlightenment, when the great European nations were building Eastern empires.

Yet even in the face of such basic historical differences, early modern English accounts of the Ottomans developed certain representational themes that would feed directly into the Orientalist mind set: these include such notions as backwardness, licentious eroticism, 'different sexualities,' barbaric cruelty, despotic absolutism. And as Said insists, when reading such representations: 'The things to look at are style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances, *not* the correctness of the representation, nor its fidelity to some great original.'[43] And so it is when reading early English accounts of the Ottomans. More importantly, English writing about the Ottomans shared with Orientalism the habit of citationality, of moving ahead by the re-writing and sometimes correcting of what earlier writers had said. Like Orientalism, the early writing about the Ottomans was 'after all a system for citing works and authors.'[44] In this, as in other crucial respects, English writing about the Ottomans resembles Orientalism because they are both discourses, and one of the things discourses do is constitute subjects. Moreover, since they are both imperial discourses, they seek to construct subjects in terms of national identities, legitimate authority and power over others.

For Said, Orientalism situates the generalized European subject 'in a position of strength,'[45] while the English regarded the Ottomans from a position of relative weakness. Their view took shape within a series

of contradictions that I will describe as 'imperial envy,' varying from fantasies about 'Turks' wanting to be English, to admiration for specific features of the great empire: its power, potency, military might, opulence and wealth. During the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, at least, English writers, and especially the visitors who wrote about their experiences in the lands ruled by the Ottomans, never forgot that they were dealing with an empire that controlled a great deal of Eastern Europe and a third of the known world, not a backward, vulnerable and somehow 'orientalized' space waiting to be conquered and controlled. Where imperial discourses might be expected to produce empowered imperial subjects constituting themselves at the expense of colonized subalterns, the situation proves to be more complex in the case of English views of the Ottomans. Instead of any simple desire for domination, we will find instead a restructuring of desire, knowledge and power: imperial envy.

Imperial envy

The essays that make up *Looking East* explore how the English came to know and think about the Ottomans during the early modern period, and seek to trace the influence of that knowledge and thought on the English themselves as they set about imagining and then establishing their own Eastern empire: a cultural process that Richmond Barbour recently termed England's 'Eastern initiative.'[46] I shall argue that the emerging national imagination was greatly stimulated and challenged by everything that was coming to be known about the Ottomans, their social and cultural life, their religion and manners. And I shall argue that early modern English writers framed an imaginary Anglo-Ottoman relation that complicates our understanding of both Orientalism and the emergent culture of British imperialism. Where Said was concerned with the period during which European powers could be said to be 'in a position of strength,' for the pre-colonial period English attitudes towards the Ottoman Empire can better be characterized by a dominant discursive formation that I call 'imperial envy.'

By imperial envy, I intend something similar to an instance of what Raymond Williams called a 'structure of feeling.' It helps make sense of the often contradictory and sometimes difficult kinds of evidence that enable us to understand how the English thought and felt about the Ottomans during their earliest encounters with a great and powerful Muslim empire, and suggests how those thoughts and feelings may have helped to shape the English into imperial Britons. When Queen

Elizabeth ascended the throne, the English were a weak and relatively insignificant nation seeking to compete with the Spanish for the wealth of the New World. To the pious among the English, the Ottoman Empire was at once the great enemy and scourge of Christendom, yet to the commercially minded it was also the fabulously wealthy and magnificent court from which the sultan ruled over three continents with his great and powerful army. 'The Turkes,' wrote Henry Blount in 1636, 'are the only moderne people, great in action, and whose Empire hath so suddenly invaded the world.'[47] How could they not be objects of envy? Describing early modern English knowledge of and attitudes towards the Ottomans in terms of imperial envy provides a useful strategy for understanding the growth of imperial fantasies and ambitions that would help to energize and transform an insular people into an imperial nation. By the end of the seventeenth century, however, once mastery of the seas made ambitions for an empire of their own seem imminent, British attitudes began to shift and the dominance of imperial envy started to gave way to an emergent imperiousness.

When early modern English writers represented Ottoman civilization, they did so in ways that complicate our understanding of both Orientalism and the cultural history of British imperialism. In this book, I have attempted to identify and describe some of the dominant tropes, structures and fantasies by means of which English writers and readers came to know the Ottoman Empire. Such knowledge and fantasies will be found to be both strategic and interested. The need to produce reliable information about the Ottomans at this time, like all systems of knowledge production, arose from both lack and desire, and in this sense tells us perhaps rather more about those desiring knowledge than about the objects of knowledge. European desire for the 'worldly goods' of Asia saturates Renaissance art, literature, political thought and commercial practice – as Lisa Jardine and Jerry Brotton have amply demonstrated. Most often, what represented, but also stood in the way of, that desire was the Islamic Ottoman Empire. From the late sixteenth to the early eighteenth centuries, a period roughly corresponding to the Ottoman's greatest territorial reach into Europe, knowledge about the imperial dynasty and the vast maritime and territorial areas that they governed, proved essential to the English, not only for competing with other European nations equally keen to capture Eastern markets, but also for developing a new, and indeed international, sense of national self-importance.

The ideas, images and clichés produced by early English writers about 'the terrible Turks,' their religion, culture, society and empire, illustrate

the inseparability of commercial interests from cultural change. In the Renaissance and early modern periods, personal and national identities were busily re-making themselves in accordance with what was newly becoming known of the world through a wide variety of different kinds of exchange and encounter. For the insular English, personal and national desires and identities could no longer be simply constructed from the local, the familiar and the traditional, but increasingly became inseparably related to notions about the global, the strange and the alien. When, in *The Way of the World* (1700), William Congreve's Mirabel announces he will permit Millimant to serve only 'native' drinks once they are married, and then specifies 'tea, chocolate, and coffee,' the dramatist's irony exposes how something very strange has occurred in the concept of what could be considered native to England. In the same play, Sir Wilfull Witwoud's desires to become a traveller also suggest how, by the end of the seventeenth century, the attractions of overseas travel were no longer restricted to intelligencers, diplomats, merchants, antiquarians or would-be travel writers, but had become an activity that even a country-bred gentleman could imagine himself undertaking. A self-styled 'Christian,' however, Sir Wilfull liked to drink, and he knew from his 'Map' that it was better not to visit Muslim lands since 'your Turks are infidels, and believe not in the grape.'[48]

Unlike accounts of how Western Europeans viewed Asian peoples and cultures in terms of radical 'otherness,' however useful they may be for thinking about later periods of Western imperialism, the notion of imperial envy better suits the pre-colonial period. It involves identification as well as differentiation, of sameness as well as otherness, of desire and attraction as well as revulsion. While the English clearly envied the Spanish and their empire, and sought to compete directly with them for the wealth of the New World, their envy of the Ottomans was a different matter. While attacking Spanish shipping proved a profitable way of acquiring gold and silver, there was never any question of taking on the mighty Ottoman armies: it was sea power that provided the key to British imperial might. Further, commercial and strategic alliances with the Ottomans proved a sensible and effective way of undermining Spanish power. For the English, this admiration and envy of the Ottoman state lasted from the earliest mercantile and diplomatic encounters in the late sixteenth century until the end of the seventeenth century – by which time they began restyling themselves British while establishing the grounds for an Eastern empire of their own. Once we take the imaginative, literary and poetic writing about the Ottomans and put it alongside contemporary historical documents, it

becomes clear how fascination with Ottoman culture and society helped shape how the English thought about, and represented themselves, as a nation with increasing imperial ambitions of their own. With the realization of those ambitions during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, envy gives way to an amicable indifference born from a presumed superiority that had, perhaps, always been present.