


Introduction to and Selected Bibliography of English-language Books about Turks and Turkey

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**Elmas Şahin,**  
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**Abstract:** In her article "Introduction to and Selected Bibliography of English-language Books about Turks and Turkey" Elmas Şahin presents a selected bibliography of work by Western travelers, writers, scholars, and journalists. Fictional works — owing to the large corpus of such texts — are excluded. Focus of the Bibliography is on texts published from the sixteenth to the late nineteenth century although seminal works published later also included. From earliest times Western writers, travelers, and scholars were interested in the East and their "gaze" resulted in writing about it as exotic and mysterious and often negative in the context of Edward W. Said's concept of Orientalism. In particular, perceptions about Turkish history, culture, customs, and traditions are reflected in negative images in the works of most English-language authors.

## Elmas ŞAHİN

### Introduction to and Selected Bibliography of English-language Books about Turks and Turkey

In the following I present a selected bibliography of books in English about Turks and Turkey by Western travelers, writers, scholars, and journalists. In my selection I focus on texts published from the sixteenth to the late nineteenth century, although seminal works published later are also included. Not included in the Bibliography, but of note is that there is a significant corpus of scholarship about Turkish foreign workers in Germany — including English-language publications — and the construction of their image in literature and in culture in general (see, e.g., Rankin <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1318>>) and about the similar situation in US-American culture (see, e.g., McCarthy) or in Western culture in general (see, e.g., Aydin) and there has been written much on the image of the Turk in Shakespeare's plays (see, e.g., Bevington; Vitkus). I exclude fictional works owing to the large corpus of such texts. From earliest times Western writers, travelers, and scholars were interested in the East and their "gaze" resulted in writing about it as exotic and mysterious and often negative in the context of Edward W. Said's concept of Orientalism. In particular Turkish history and culture, customs, and traditions are reflected in negative imagery in the works of most English-language authors (on imagology and travel, see, e.g., Andraş). Thus, the image of the Turk and Turkey appeared and often appears as a negative Other. One matter of exotism, the harem, was of particular interest to Westerners in the nineteenth to the twentieth century, for example James E.P. Boulden's 1855 *An American among the Orientals: Including an Audience with the Sultan, and a Visit to the Interior of a Turkish Harem*, Gordon O.L. Trener's 1855 *The City of the Crescent, with Pictures of Harem Life; or, the Turks in 1854*, Caroline Paine's 1859 *Tent and Harem: Notes of an Oriental Trip*, Cristina Belgiojoso's 1862 *Oriental Harems and Scenery*, Andrée Harvey Hope's and Annie Jane Tennant Harvey's 1871 *Turkish Harems & Circassian Homes*, Demetra Vaka's 1909 *Haremlik: Some Pages from the Life of Turkish Women*, Anne Van Sommer's Samuel M. Zwemer's 1911 *Daylight in the Harem: A New Era for Moslem Women*, Vahan Cardashian's 1914 *Actual Life in the Turkish Harem* are texts in which the harem and Turkish women are narrated in imaginary ways and as late as in Philip Glazebrook's 1984 *Journey to Kars*, we read about the harem as a place of exoticism.

Often, Turkish women are considered to have a lack of "philosophic minds," to have no notion of even the simplest items of knowledge. For example, in Hester Donaldson Jenkins's 1911 *Behind Turkish Lattices* we read that "a Turkish lady's conversation is largely made up of exclamations such as 'Vai, vai, vai!' or 'Allah, Allah!' which she will mutter perhaps twenty times in lieu of reasonable discourse" (21). Jenkins also writes that no education was considered necessary for woman and that her greatest work in life was to be a housewife or, if some work, than that of a nurse: "women were considered to be much lower than men in everything. They were supposed to stay at home, deprived of every advantage in life, while their fathers, brothers, and husbands enjoyed themselves in every way; they were excused for ignorance when there were no schools to develop their minds" (Jenkins 24). What Jenkins forgets to mention is that in Western culture women have been blamed for Eve's "original sin" for many centuries and that the female gender has been considered secondary to the male one, "a womb, an ovary" (Beauvoir 33). Penzer observes correctly that "most of [Westerners] still imagine that the Sultan is — or, rather, was — a vicious old reprobate, spending all his time in the harem surrounded by hundreds of semi-naked women, in an atmosphere of heavy perfume, cool fountains, soft music, and over-indulgence in every conceivable kind of vice that the united brains of jealous, sex starved women could invent for the pleasure of their lord" (13).

In particular in the eighteenth century the Turk is imagined as negative. For example, in Joseph Pitton de Tournefort's, Honoré Maria Lauthier's, and John Senex's *A Voyage into the Levant* about their travels to Istanbul, the Aegean islands, the Black Sea, Armenia, Georgia, Anatolia, and Persia the Ottoman life style, customs and manners, traditions, social, political, and religious life are distorted and/or exaggerated: "the Turks hate Dogs, and never fusser them in their Houses; and in a time of Pestilence they kill as many as they find, thinking these unclean Creatures infest the Air" (62). In the nineteenth century we find similar negative imagery. For example, the above referred to Boulden

describes in 1855 Turkish women as "ghosts": "The ferigee and yashmak impart a very singular and sepulchral appearance to the Turkish women, making them look as though they had just arisen from beneath the marble slabs that adorn their own cypress-shaded cemeteries" (56) or for Edward Frederic Benson in *Crescent and Iron Cross* as late as 1918 Turks are a tumor: "we can make a far truer phrase than Lord Aberdeen's. For Turkey is not a sick man: Turkey is a sickness. He is not sick, nor ever has been, for he is the cancer itself, the devouring tumour that for centuries has fed on having tissue, absorbing it and killing it" (3).

Although in the eighteenth century Mary Wortley Montagu described Turkish culture contemptuously, she also interprets women's position in Ottoman Turkey in some ways "enviable" at least implicitly: "this perpetual masquerade gives them entire liberty of following their inclinations without danger of discovery. The most usual method of intrigue is to send an appointment to the lover to meet the lady ... the great ladies seldom let their gallants know who they are and it is so difficult to find it out that they can very seldom guess her name they have corresponded with above half a year together. You may easily imagine the number of faithful wives very small in a country where they have nothing to fear from a lover's indiscretion" (116). Two books of note which do not have a necessarily negative view of women and the harem are Norman Mosley Penzer's 1902 *The Harēm: An Account of the Institution as It Existed in the Palace of the Turkish Sultans, with a History of the Grand Seraglio from Its Foundation to the Present Time* and Alev Lytle Croutier's 1989 *Harem: The World behind the Veil*, the latter a woman author which may explain her less "othering" views.

For a bibliography on Turks and Turkey in English, see Berna Moran, *A Bibliography of English Publications about the Turks from the 15th Century to the 18th Century* (Istanbul: Istanbul UP, 1964) and for a bibliography of works about travel in general, see Carlo Salzani and Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek, "Bibliography for Work in Travel Studies." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture (Library)* (2010): <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweblibrary/travelstudiesbibliography>>.

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