

*Edward S. Creasy*

**HISTORY OF THE OTTOMAN TURKS**

*With a new Introduction by ZEINE N. ZEINE*

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## INTRODUCTION

IN HIS *A Generall Historie of the Ottoman Empire*, which was first published in 1603, Richard Knolles wrote: "At this present if you consider the beginning, progress and perpetual felicity of this the Ottoman Empire, there is in this world nothing more admirable and strange; if the greatness and lustre thereof, nothing more magnificent and glorious; if the Power and Strength thereof, nothing more Dreadful and Dangerous, which... holdeth all the world in scorn thundering out nothing but Blood and War, with a full persuasion in time to Rule over all, prefixing unto itself no other limits than the uttermost bounds of the Earth, from the rising of the Sun unto the going down of the same".<sup>1</sup>

The Turks are the third Islamic peoples of the Middle East, the first two being the Arabs and the Persians. But they established the largest and strongest Muslim Empire, known as the Ottoman Empire, since the rise of Islam. A series of decisive victories in a

<sup>1</sup> *Paul Rycaut reissued Richard Knolles HISTORIE in 1679 with several continuations of his own which appeared in successive editions until 1700, when an additional volume appeared bringing the history up to 1699. Rycaut's editions were entitled: THE TURKISH HISTORY, FROM THE ORIGINAL OF THAT NATION TO THE GROWTH OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE and were published in London.*

long chain of conquests led the Turks to the zenith of their military power and glory. An unbroken succession of ten brilliant and great Sultans led the Ottomans to acquire in the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries a vast empire "embracing many of the richest and most beautiful regions of the world" and stretching from the gates of Vienna to the straits of Bab-el-Mandib, and from the Caucasus across North Africa, almost to the Atlantic Ocean.

It has been very difficult — and the difficulty continues to the present time — to write a satisfactory and comprehensive one-volume history of the Ottoman Turks. To begin with, a knowledge of the Turkish language and Turkish literature is necessary for any historian who aspires to write a history of the Ottoman Empire. Then, in the second place, a study of Turkish manners, customs, social institutions and religious beliefs becomes equally necessary and unavoidable. Even after a historian has fulfilled the above two conditions, he needs a stout heart and a steady hand when he approaches the problem of sources and documents needed for the writing of his history. For here, only the bravest of the brave can step over the threshold into the immense treasure-house of materials available for the building of the Turkish past. This treasure-house includes numerous Turkish records, accounts and books, and the vast quantity of state papers, despatches and memoranda in the National Archives of every European or neighbouring country with which the Ottoman Sultans had either friendly or hostile relations. Professor Bernard Lewis writes: "The Ottoman archives of Istanbul have for long been one

of the great unknowns of historical scholarship... A first classification of papers was made in 1918-1921 by a committee under the direction of Ali Emiri, which sorted about 180,000 documents in chronological order. In 1921 a second committee, under Ibnulemin Mahmud Kemal, sorted about 45,000 documents, from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries, into 23 subject groups with a rough chronological sequence in each group. A third team, under Muallim Cevdet, worked from 1932 to 1937 on much the same lines as Ibnulemin, and sorted some 185,000 documents into 16 subject categories".<sup>2</sup>

No historian has undertaken this formidable task ever since the famous Austrian author, Joseph Von Hammer-Purgstall laid down his pen on September 28, 1830 after having worked for thirty years painstakingly, meticulously and conscientiously at writing his *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches*<sup>3</sup>, a monumental and majestic work on the Ottoman Empire which still remains the standard European book on this subject.

In the third place, most of those who have written on Turkish history have not only been ignorant of the vast amount of sources that exist for such a task but have generally clung to one prejudice or another. The late and deeply lamented Harold Bowen, that quiet, modest and painstaking scholar of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, has written "For various obvious reasons, Turkey and the

<sup>2</sup> See "Archives" — *The Journal of the British Record Association*, Vol. IV, No. 24 Michaelmas 1960, p. 228.

<sup>3</sup> French translation by J. J. Hellert, *HISTOIRE DE L'EMPIRE OTTOMAN* (Paris, 1835-1841).

Turks have aroused passionate feelings in those who have written about them. Exaggerated denunciation has been answered by indignant defence. Those who have suffered from Turkish ruthlessness and prevarication have been contradicted by others subjected by Turkish magnificence, courtesy and charm. Misunderstandings have been countless ; and on any fact capable of being variously interpreted controversy has raged. In the realm of generalisation it is quite evident that many of the writers knew little of what they were talking about, or were blinded by prejudice of one kind or another".<sup>4</sup> Hence, the impossibility of finding in the English language, or, indeed, in any other language, a one-volume history of the Ottoman Empire completely satisfactory in all respects.

There is one important book, however, which may be placed in a class by itself. It is this present 1878 edition of Edward Shepherd Creasy's *History of the Ottoman Turks*.

Harold Bowen in his delightful and fascinating essay in a brochure entitled *British Contributions to Turkish Studies* and published in 1945 lists over one hundred works on Ottoman history, in English, from 1625 to the fall of that Empire at the end of the First World War in 1918. After referring to the fact that much interest in Turkish history was stimulated in Great Britain by the Crimean War, Bowen says that Creasy's *History of the Ottoman Turks* was the most important work which appeared at that time. "This", adds Bowen, completed by 1856, came quickly to be regarded

<sup>4</sup> Bowen, Harold, *BRITISH CONTRIBUTIONS TO TURKISH STUDIES* (London, 1945) p. 8.

as a standard work ; and the author, who at the time of its first appearance was Professor of Modern and Ancient History in the University of London, subsequently brought out several further editions in which he added to and modified the original text ; so that the edition of 1878 carries us on as far as the settlement arrived at in that year at Berlin. Creasy made good use of the authorities available, principally of course Von Hammer, and was well aware of the Turks' cultural achievements. He, therefore, presents a much fairer and more complete picture than any of his predecessors".

Creasy himself has stated in the Preface of his 1878 edition that while his book is "chiefly founded on Von Hammer" (who "does not bring the Turkish history lower down than to the treaty of Kainardji, 1774"), he has consulted and sought information from other sources. "I have not made a mere abridgment of Von Hammer" he writes ; "but I have sought to write an independent work, for which his volumes have supplied me with the largest store of materials".

Creasy's work stops with the Treaty of San Stefano of March 3, 1878, which ended the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-78. As he could not use the documents available now in the Ottoman archives, his treatment of Ottoman history is, obviously, incomplete and imperfect, and particularly since the Crimean War, is brief and rather fragmentary. However, we have a number of good works in English on the different phases of the latter period.

Actually, the history of the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century is one of increasing internal weak-

ness and deterioration in the machinery of Government and of sustained external pressure by the Great Powers, which ultimately led to the dissolution of that Empire. If the Empire was "on the edge of disruption and collapse" who would inherit its vast territories in Europe, Asia and Africa? The history of the Ottomans and their relations with Europe in this century were dominated by the major and vital question known generally as the Eastern Question. In a letter to *The Times* on September 9, 1876, Lord Stratford de Redcliffe wrote: "The Eastern Question has by degrees assumed such large proportions that no one can be surprised at the space it occupies in all public discussions whether of the tongue or of the pen". The following very brief summary of this period will help to bring to the attention of the reader its major events and outstanding features.

With the opening of the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire became subject to a series of political pressures and military blows from friends and foes alike among the European Powers. All these Powers tried to find in the vast dominions of Turkey an outlet for their territorial ambitions, commercial expansion, national prestige, jealousies and fears. The capital of that Empire became the focal point of a sinister game of power-politics played by the Ambassadors of the Great Powers with all the astuteness of nineteenth century diplomacy. To Great Britain, the maintenance of the "Balance of Power" in Europe became more vital than ever, and for the maintenance of this balance, it became imperative to preserve the integrity of the Ottoman Empire.



During the first half of the nineteenth century, two major events greatly affected the Eastern Question. The first was the invasion of Egypt and Syria by Napoleon (1798-1801) and, the second, the occupation of Syria by Muhammad Ali Pasha's troops (1830-1840). Both brought French, Russian and British intervention in the Near East. The advance of Muhammad 'Ali Pasha's forces in Anatolia, as far as Kutahia, forced Sultan Mahmud to accept Russian aid for the defence of Constantinople (Istanbul); hence, the signing of the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi (July 8, 1833). Napoleon and Muhammad Ali Pasha were both defeated. Turkey was saved, albeit it had grown weaker. Indeed, in 1827, as a result of the war of Greek independence Turkey lost Greece and the latter became a self-governing nation.

The events leading up to the Protocol of London in 1841 convinced Tsar Nicholas that Turkey was dying and he made no secret of his views. In 1843, he visited Vienna and Berlin and in 1844, London. In all these capitals, he told the responsible Governments that the downfall of Turkey was imminent. All that he wanted was to "come to an understanding" over the property of the dying man, particularly Constantinople, "before it is too late". In England, he told the Aberdeen Government: "In my Cabinet there are two opinions about Turkey: one is that she is dying; the other is that she is already dead".

Tsar Nicholas waited for nine years hoping that Britain would change her policy towards Turkey, *l'homme malade*, — the "sick man" of Europe. Exasperated by the attitude of the British Government and tired

of waiting, the Tsar finally took the matter into his own hands. The result was the Crimean War of 1854-1856.

The Treaty of Paris which ended the Crimean War in 1856 guaranteed "the Independence and the Territorial Integrity of the Ottoman Empire". Russia was once more prevented from achieving her favourite object of conquering Istanbul. "This declaration of the independence of Turkey", wrote the Duke of Argyll "was the best form in which they (the Powers) could repel and condemn the attempt of Russia to establish the special dependence of Turkey upon herself..."

The twenty years which followed the Crimean War were a period of comparative calm in the field of international rivalry in the Ottoman Empire, with two exceptions: the civil war of 1860 in Lebanon and the sanguinary insurrections of 1866-1868 in Crete, an island with a Christian majority of Greeks and a privileged Muslim minority. The events in Lebanon led to the intervention of five Powers in Istanbul. These Powers, Great Britain, Russia, France, Austria and Prussia submitted a "Protocole" to the Porte which was accepted by the latter. According to this "Protocole", Mount Lebanon was detached from the vilayet of Syria and became an autonomous Province (*Sanjak*) ruled over by a Christian Governor (*Mutasarrif*) and an Administrative Council of twelve members. This led to the further weakening of the government machinery of the Ottoman Empire.

Meanwhile, an outstanding event took place in the Near East, which probably more than any other decided the fate of the Arab world as far as West European

imperialism was concerned, namely, the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. This 101-mile waterway brought London nearer to Bombay by 4500 miles and to Abadan by 4800 miles. When in November 1875, Khedive Isma'il wanted to sell his 176,602 shares for £ 4,000,000, Lord Derby, the Foreign Secretary, and Disraeli acted quickly and bought them. Meanwhile, Russia was preparing herself to make one more attempt to solve the Eastern Question in her favour. In July of that same year, the spark of rebellion set Bosnia and Herzegovina on fire. The revolt spread to Bulgaria.

The Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878 which followed brought the Russians dangerously close to Istanbul — at San Stefano. But the firm attitude of the British Government and the presence of the British fleet in the sea of Marmara, near Istanbul, led to the signing of the peace treaty of San Stefano in March 1878. This treaty was shortly afterwards modified at the Congress of Berlin in favour of Turkey and a new treaty, the Treaty of Berlin, was signed in July 1878. The Ottoman Empire in Europe was saved from utter destruction and Istanbul continued to remain in Turkish hands.

This was the first disastrous event to mark the long reign of Sultan Abdu'l Hamid's thirty-three years which began in August 1876. During this time, the interests and rivalries of the various great Powers in the Ottoman Empire became sharper and more clearly defined. It now became evident that the "sick man" was, indeed, very dangerously sick and could not be saved. The downfall of "the Ottoman ramshackle and worm-eaten state" was no more a remote contingency.

The Ottomans had practically lost the greater part of their European Empire. The new and crucial question of the day was how were they going to keep their Asiatic Empire, i. e. mainly the Arab lands of the Near East. This question became one of the main preoccupations of British foreign policy after 1878. Hence, the secret Convention which Disraeli concluded with Turkey on June 4, 1878 as a result of which Great Britain was "to occupy and administer" the island of Cyprus — to defend and protect the Asiatic possessions of the Sultan against Russia. Cyprus was an island which strategically commanded at once "the coast of Syria and Egypt".

A little over four years later, in September 1882, Britain occupied Egypt, an event which was closely related to the acquisition of Cyprus and the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, the possession of which as "the Key of India", was essential for the protection of that sub-continent.

The occupation of Cyprus and Egypt transformed the situation in the Near East. As a Power ruling over India and as a Mediterranean Power, it was necessary for Great Britain to have a secure position in the Asiatic possessions of the Ottoman Empire.

Before the end of the century, another turning point in the history of the Eastern Question was marked by the growth of German influence in the Ottoman Empire. The German policy of penetration and of "Drang nach osten" was viewed with alarm by England, France and Russia. The visit of Emperor William II to Palestine, Lebanon and Syria at the end of October and beginning of November, 1898, inspired Professor

Hasse, the Chief of the 'Pan-Germanic Union' to write: "Full steam ahead! Forward to the Euphrates and to the Tigris and to the Persian Gulf! And let us have the land route to India in the hands of those to whom alone it ought to belong — in the hands of Germans who rejoice in battle and in toil".<sup>5</sup>

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the ever growing fear of Germany produced a number of *marriages de convenance* among the Powers. The menace to British interests of the aggressive policy of the new German Empire led Great Britain, in the words of Harold Bowen, "to seek the friendship of Russia and, consequently, to modify the long-standing British policy of opposing Russia's designs of expansion at the expense of the Ottoman Empire". Actually, the conflicting interests of Great Britain, France and Russia were temporarily reconciled by various accords and alliances, such as the Entente Cordiale of 1904 between France and Britain and the Anglo-Russian Entente of 1907.

Meanwhile, towards the end of the nineteenth century, the internal situation of the Ottoman Empire had been deteriorating rapidly. Discontent, corruption and anarchy were spreading with alarming speed. It had been known for sometime that both Arab and Turkish reformers were planning and plotting to curb the autocratic powers of Abd'ul Hamid. After the deposition of Sultan Abdu'l Aziz on May 30, 1876 and of Sultan Murad on August 31, 1876, Abdu'l Hamid was proclaimed Sultan, having given a prior pledge to Midhat Pasha, a most enlightened and courageous

<sup>5</sup> THE TIMES, London, Friday November 11, 1898.

reformer, that he would support the Pasha's Constitution and promulgate it. And so it was that on December 23, 1876, in an imposing ceremony held at Istanbul, the Imperial Rescript (Hatti Humayun) of Abdu'l Hamid addressed to the grand vezir Midhat Pasha, followed by the text of the Constitution, were read.

Actually, the Constitution of 1876 was itself the outcome of the many attempts made at reforming or "westernizing" the institutions of the Ottoman Empire since the beginning of the 19th century. It was in a sense a child of the *Tanzimat* and the third in a series of Imperial Rescripts, the first being the Hatti Sherif of Gulhane of November 3, 1839 which promised to procure for the provinces of the Ottoman Empire the benefits of a good administration by means of new institutions.

Elections were held on the basis of a Provisional Electoral Law and the inauguration of the first historic Ottoman Parliament took place on March 19, 1877. On February 14, 1878, it was dissolved *sine die* by the Sultan's command. All anti-Hamidian opposition and reform movements were driven either underground in the form of secret societies or beyond the boundaries of the Empire, particularly to Paris, London, Geneva and Cairo.

At the turn of the century, when Abdu'l Hamid celebrated on August 31, 1900, the twenty-fifth anniversary of his accession to the throne, Turkey's cup of misfortunes was already overflowing. The "Young Turks", successors to the "New Ottomans" were stirred to action to save Turkey from decay and ruin. The Young Turks' movement had branches in different parts

of the Ottoman Empire but its nerve-centre was at Salonika, in Macedonia. The eventful years of 1905-08 gave this revolutionary movement a tremendous impetus. The Young Turks' Revolution of July 1908 restored the Constitution of 1876. Abdu'l Hamid, temporarily, gained much popularity. Elections were held for a new Parliament and the latter held its first meeting on Thursday, December 17, 1908 in the presence of the Sultan and the Ottoman princes. But while the democratic machinery had been introduced in the Empire of the Ottoman sultans, democracy itself with all its implications and philosophy of life, had few roots in that Empire. The masses were in almost complete ignorance of what a constitution meant. The sultan and the ruling class whether civilian or the religious hierarchy were, at heart, opposed to any system of Government that would curtail their powers and abolish their privileges. On April 13, 1909, there was an attempt at a counter-revolution in Istanbul. However, the Turkish army in Macedonia was ready. It marched on the capital and laid siege to the Sultan's palace at Yildiz. On April 27, Abdu'l Hamid was deposed in favour of his brother Muhammad Rashad, as Muhammad V, and was immediately exiled that evening to Salonika, where he has interned in Villa Alatini.

When the First World War burst forth upon Europe on August 1, 1914, the Young Turks, in the grip of William II's Germany, could not keep a helpless and practically disintegrating Ottoman Empire out of the conflict. On November 5, 1914, Turkey entered the war on the side of the Central Powers. Almost exactly four years later, on October 30, 1918, Turkey signed an

armistice with the Allied Powers on board the British battleship *Agamemnon*, in the harbour of Mudros at Lemnos, in the Aegean Sea.

With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the Eastern Question, as far as it concerned the question of which Power or Powers would inherit the vast and rich possessions of the "Sick man" upon its dissolution, i. e. which Power or Powers would take the place of the Ottoman Empire and fill the "vacuum" created by its disappearance — in this specific sense, the Eastern Question ceased to exist. On the other hand, in its broadest sense, as an international question which dealt with the conflicting interests and rivalries of the Great Powers in the political and economic fields, in the Near and Middle East, the Eastern Question had by no means been settled. It had, in reality, become a western question and, indeed, a world question.

The subsequent history of the Near East after the defeat and dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire, was the miraculous birth of modern Turkey, the Turkish Republic of Mustafa Kemal Pasha, or Ataturk, and the gradual emergence of the independent Arab states in this area. But this is not, obviously, within the scope of Ottoman history, which is the subject-matter of this work.

Until a new and sound presentation of the Ottoman past is undertaken, Creasy's *History of the Ottoman Turks* will remain the standard work and the best general account of Ottoman history yet composed in English. The publishing firm of Khayat has rendered a signal service in the field of Middle Eastern studies



**INTRODUCTION**

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by making this valuable book available to students and specialists in Turkish history.

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*October 1961*

HISTORY  
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THE OTTOMAN TURKS:

FROM THE BEGINNING OF THEIR EMPIRE TO  
THE PRESENT TIME.

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OF THE ENGLISH CONSTITUTION," ETC.

LONDON:

1878.

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