

The Shaping of Turkey in the British Imagination,  
1776–1923



David S. Katz

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palgrave  
macmillan

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ISBN 978-3-319-41059-3      ISBN 978-3-319-41060-9 (eBook)  
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-41060-9

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016952495

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Printed on acid-free paper

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*In memory of Kevin Sharpe (1949–2011)*



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

How does an historian of early modern English religious and intellectual history come to write a book about Turkey? When asked that question over the past few years, I would reply by saying that I wrote three books about Jews in England, followed by three books about Christians in England, so maybe this is the first of a trilogy about Muslims. The real truth is that I finally followed the advice that I give to students who come to study history, already armed with a foreign language that they learned at home. Many of them flee from their kitchen Russian and begin to study, say, French. I tell them to improve their existing skills to a higher level first, instead of ending up with two poorly made tools.

Responding to a remark I made years ago about Turkish history in a faculty seminar, one of my colleagues joked that “David has Turkish from home”. By marrying the professor of Ottoman history, I had to learn Turkish, or be condemned to sitting smiling in the corner during our frequent visits to Istanbul and extended trips around Turkey. I soon noticed that little had been written about the shaping of Turkey in the British imagination during the ‘long early modern period’, between the Renaissance and the moment when Science became a separate discipline at the end of the nineteenth century, a key defining feature of the modern world. More scholarship had been published about British perceptions of Turkey in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but there wasn’t much about the later period. What had been published was mostly written without the benefit of Turkish, without which it is impossible to understand the numerous references in the texts to people, places, and culture in the Ottoman Empire. It was clear that there were a number of books about

Turkey that everyone reading English read from Gibbon onwards, and the picture presented therein was largely favourable, despite British classical education and philhellenism.

This research was begun while a Senior Fellow at the Research Center for Anatolian Civilizations of Koç University in Istanbul. I would like to thank Scott Redford (now of SOAS, and then Director of the Center) for his help and friendship during my time there, and the members of staff, especially the then-librarian Duygu Kızılaslan, and the then-administrator Esra Erol. Mr Ömer Koç was kind enough to give me the run of his incredible and extensive private library, a treasure store of unique materials. Many return visits to RCAC enabled me to complete the research and the writing, none of which would have been possible without the daily lunches at Ficcin, the local Ossetian restaurant.

A good portion of the reading was done while Visiting Professor at Boğaziçi University in 2011. The intellectual enthusiasm of my colleagues Edhem Eldem and Selim Deringil was both pleasurable and encouraging. The final draft was completed at the History Department of Princeton University, while a Visiting Fellow during the academic year 2014–2015. For this opportunity I thank Tony Grafton, William C. Jordan, and David Dobkin. The warm welcome that I received from everyone there (and the enormous office, lent by David Bell) formed a pleasant background while rewriting text and checking sources. So many new friends were made that year that I restrain myself from making a list. The Princeton History Department will remain for me a model of scholarship, dedication, and most of all, collegiality, that I hadn't thought really existed in academia.

Parts of the book were test run in public lectures at various institutions: Koç University (Istanbul), the American Research Institute in Turkey (Istanbul), Collège de France—CNRS—EHESS (Paris), University of St Andrews (Scotland), Orient-Institut (Istanbul), Bahçeşehir University (Istanbul), University of Mississippi (Oxford), Princeton University, University of Washington (Seattle), and the British Institute at Ankara. I should like to thank my hosts at these institutions—Tony Greenwood, the late Gilles Veinstein, Rob Bartlett, Chandrika Kaul, Richard Wittmann, Enver Yücel, Nicolas Trépanier, Max Weiss, Reşat Kasaba, and Stephen Mitchell—whose hospitality made each of these occasions both productive and enjoyable.

This book is dedicated to the memory of Kevin Sharpe (1949–2011), whose connection with Turkey stretched no further than Tommy Cooper imitations. Kevin was the hardest working, and hardest playing, historian

that I ever met. Our friendship began when we were in our early twenties, grubbing away in the Upper Reading Room of the Bodleian Library in Oxford, both of us pupils of Hugh Trevor-Roper (not yet Lord Dacre). History was a job for Kevin, and like the working-class lad he was, he put in his hours every day, five days a week, resulting in a flood of first-rate, deeply researched books. He made his name with ‘revisionist’ political history of seventeenth-century England, and by the time he was appointed to his last academic position it was as professor of Renaissance Studies at Queen Mary, University of London. Kevin was a great character, and a warm and loyal friend, greatly missed.

But back to the professor of Ottoman history. My greatest debt is to Professor Amy Singer, *en can dostum ve hayat arkadaşım*, which will come as no surprise to anyone.



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