

# The final century

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Cities can have as much impact as states. Much of what is called French culture could be called Paris culture. England without London, like Austria without Vienna, would be a body without a head. The magnetism of Constantinople, outside as well as within the Ottoman empire, is reflected in the roughly 900 books in volumes 3 and 4 of this superb catalogue written about the city by Western visitors, published between 1851 and 1938. Their number and variety, and the focus on one city, are unparalleled. Minds have been governed for so long by nations rather than cities that there are almost no other bibliographies, and few libraries, of books about one city.\*

Why were there so many books on Constantinople? Because it was the capital of a global empire, ruling swathes of Asia, Europe and Africa, from Bosnia to Yemen and from Algeria to Armenia. It had such magnetism that it was often called 'the city': the Turkish name Istanbul comes from the Greek phrase 'eis ten polin', 'into the city'.

Moreover, Constantinople was welcoming as well as imperial – provided there were no plagues or fires. Mehmed the Conqueror encouraged Greeks, Jews, Armenians and Italians to stay or settle in the city after he conquered it in 1453. Later, Ottoman Sultans were also keen to employ foreigners and minorities. Embassies were located near the seat of power, not kept at a distance from the capital, as they were in Iran and Morocco, in Tabriz and Tangier. Foreigners often watched, and described in their books, the Sultan's ceremonial Friday visit to a mosque in Constantinople.

Foreigners wanted to visit this famous imperial capital, not only to watch processions, but also to obtain, through their embassy, the permits necessary to travel in the rest of the empire. Chateaubriand, for example, visited Constantinople in 1806 partly to obtain a permit for his pilgrimage to Jerusalem, which he later described in *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem* (1811; see vol. 1, no. 194). Indeed, more than a tenth of the books listed in these two volumes were written by Christian pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem, often by annual or biannual pilgrimage boats from Marseille: *Les Saints-Lieux* by Léon Janel (1897; no. 953), for example, or *Lettres d'un pèlerin* (1924; no. 1239) by Alfred Baudrillart.

Since Constantinople was the political, military, naval, judicial, religious, diplomatic, commercial and, not least, entertainment capital of this vast empire, foreign diplomats, merchants and travellers, as well as the Sultan's subjects, had many reasons to visit it. Because the Ottoman Empire fell behind its European neighbours in some technical fields, after its rejection of the 15th-century printing revolution, it had more need than most states of outside experts. This was especially apparent in the years covered by these two volumes.

Even when politics was not explicitly the subject of a travel book on the Ottoman Empire, the impulse behind it was often indirectly political. Similarly, although most travellers went to Italy for the arts and the climate, most travel books about it were written between 1814 and 1861, when the *Risorgimento* made it politically topical. In Ömer Koç's library, there are twice as many Western books on Constantinople covering the final years 1851–1938, when its future was a subject of contention, than had been published in the preceding four centuries.

\* Another great Ottoman city, Aleppo, is a rare exception. The excellent three-volume *Alep dans la littérature de voyage européenne pendant la période ottomane 1516–1918* by Olivier Salmon, including analysis (showing how often travellers repeated each other), a bibliography and a repertory of around 400 individual travellers, was published in Aleppo in December 2011: the year before the civil war destroyed much of the heritage it described.

Most books in these two volumes were written in French (339) or English (372), followed by German (146) and Italian (33); nine are in Spanish, and a handful are in Danish, Greek, Hungarian, Russian or Swedish. The French and the English had the strongest traditions of travelling and writing accounts of their travels. Moreover, their countries maintained the greatest volume of trade with the Ottoman Empire, of which both were traditional allies.

Confirming the political background to travel writing, political crises triggered more travel books. In 1854–56 the Crimean War was fought against Russia by an alliance of the Ottoman Empire, France, Britain and Sardinia; thousands of foreign troops and advisers descended on Constantinople. That war is the topic of a forthcoming catalogue based on Ömer Koç's library; but in the present volumes those years are recorded in several excellent books, including Emelia Hornby's *Constantinople during the Crimean War* (1863; no. 605), the autobiography of her husband Edmund Hornby, a judge in the city's British Supreme Consular Court (1928; no. 1280), and superb volumes of illustrations by Amadeo Preziosi (*Stamboul. Recollections of Eastern Life*, 1858; no. 571), Jean Brindesi (*Souvenirs de Constantinople*, 1860; no. 581) and Joseph Schranz (*Le Bosphore*, 1855; no. 539).

British life in the city in the decades after the war is described in other works such as the history of the Turkish Compassionate Fund, established in London to help Turkish refugees from the Russian invasion of the Balkans in 1877 (1883; no. 787), or Sir Henry Woods Pasha's *Spun yarn [...] Forty-seven Years under the Ensigns of Britain and Turkey* (1924; no. 1247). Woods, both an aide-de-camp to the Sultan and an admiral in the Ottoman navy, was also one of the founders of the Constantinople Golf Club (1895), as other British residents would help found the city's first polo and football clubs.

Like the Crimean War, the Young Turk revolution of 1908, when constitutional monarchy succeeded 30 years of Abdülhamid's autocracy, generated a surge of interest in the Ottoman Empire. The grip of the government weakened, and some people briefly felt free to express their opinions in demonstrations and elections. Among this catalogue's 42 books covering this period are *Ben Kendim* (1924; no. 1242) by Aubrey Herbert; William Ramsay's *The Revolution in Constantinople and Turkey* (1909; no. 1097); and Charles Roden Buxton's *Turkey in Revolution* (1909; no. 1086). Constantinople, according to Herbert, glowed with hope – until 1913 when defeat in the Balkan wars led to the Young Turks' imposition of a semi-dictatorship. In its last years as an imperial capital Constantinople became even more multinational, welcoming more Arabs, Indians eager to save the Ottoman caliphate, and Persians, whose *Muharrem* ceremonies, unthinkable today, are described in John Punnett Peters' *Nippur or Explorations and Adventures on the Euphrates* (1897; no. 956).

Two unusual Austrian books record the city during other political crises. *Constantinopel*, published in 1895 in Vienna by the official imperial press (no. 929) provides detailed photographs, plans and descriptions of military and naval bases on both sides of the Bosphorus, as well as of the arsenals inside the city, troop numbers, artillery emplacements, telegraph lines, naval mines, local

communications, sources of drinking water and anchorages. Formerly in the library of the Imperial Marine Registry Office in the Austrian naval base in Pola in Istria, and updated manually in 1896 and 1910, it provides proof of Austrian plans to send an expeditionary force to the city – either to attack it, or more probably to help defend it against Russia, which was known to have designs on the city. Many Austrians, like Anton von Prokesch-Osten, the Austrian ambassador in Constantinople in 1855–71, believed that the two multinational empires would survive together or fall together.

Indeed, despite Austria's fatal annexation of the former Ottoman province of Bosnia in 1908, the two empires fought on the same side in the First World War. In 1916, the Austrian Ministry of War published *Die Türkei im Weltkrieg*: a series of eloquent watercolour portraits of the Ottoman elite of the time, including Enver, Kemal and Sultan Mehmed V, by the artist Wilhelm Victor Krausz: 'the great war quickly united us, and now this city that we used to love like a fairy tale is as real and concrete as iron', wrote Krausz (no. 1188). Within a few years, however, both empires had been destroyed by the war which, when the book was published, many of their leaders thought they were winning.

In the forest of books that appeared in the years 1851–1938, some tower over the others. Some foreign writers contributed to the Turkish as well as the international image of Constantinople. A few, like the architect Fossati (1852; no. 477) and the painter Zonaro (1908; no. 1079), crossed the barriers of nationality, stayed for years in the city and learnt Turkish. Théophile Gautier, the Romantic poet, visited the city in the prelude to the Crimean war. He wrote like the Orientalist painters he admired: 'Cette vue est si étrangement belle, que l'on doute de sa réalité. On croirait avoir devant soi une de ces toiles d'opéra faites pour la décoration de quelque féerie d'Orient et baignées, par la fantaisie du peintre et le rayonnement des rampes de gaz, des impossibles lueurs de l'apothéose [... Ses bâtiments] se dessinent en traits de lumière sur un fond de teintes bleuâtres, nacrées, opalines d'une inconcevable finesse, et forment un tableau qui semble plutôt appartenir aux mirages de la Fata Morgana qu'à la prosaïque réalité. L'eau argentée de la Corne-d'Or reflète ces splendeurs dans son miroir tremblant, et ajoute encore à la magie du spectacle' (*Constantinople*, 1853, pp. 84–85; no. 486). He would be much quoted later by Turkish writers such as Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar and Yahya Kemal, as would Edmondo de Amicis, author of another glowing evocation of Constantinople (1878; no. 744), which Orhan Pamuk has called the best book on the city.

Less famous authors were also enraptured by the city. Here are three extracts from the many books which are quoted in these two volumes, which show the impact of the city on its visitors: 'I know nothing to compare with the first view of Constantinople. Any thing like description seems tame and out of place [...] it is purely a matter of feeling [...] to me it seems a renewal of the unalloyed pleasures of youth; a return after mingling with the world and its realities, to the first pure, joyous sense of the beautiful [...] for a moment reality itself becomes a dream too bright and beautiful for comprehension' (John Ross Browne, *Yusef: or, The Journey of the Frangi*, 1853, p. 120; no. 483). 'Constantinople is by all odds the most fascinating

city I ever lived in,— fascinating by its strange mixture of squalor and magnificence, ugliness and glorious beauty, misery and merriment, by all the paradoxes and anachronisms [...] in which it abounds; fascinating also because of the romantic possibilities of each minute you live [...] who knows what may happen any moment, and what share you may have in it?’ (John Punnett Peters, *Nippur*, 1897, p. 44; no. 956). ‘When a man possessed by the genius of the place quits the city to reside elsewhere, the horizon of his life contracts and dwindles, as when a man descends from the wide views of a mountain peak to the life pent within the walls of a valley. For nowhere else is the mind not only confronted, but [...] assailed by so many varied subjects demanding consideration, or the heart appealed to by so many interests for its sympathy’ (Alexander van Millingen, *Constantinople*, 1906, pp. 262–63; no. 1045).

Other books evoke the years 1918–23, when British, French, Italian and Greek troops were stationed in and around Constantinople, and thousands of Russian refugees passed through the city their Tsars had hoped to conquer. The artist Alexis Gritchenko arrived with little more than the coat on his back and recorded his love for Istanbul (and hatred of Pera) in *Deux ans à Constantinople* (1930; no. 1298) and a series of striking paintings. Two Russians, Alexandre Pankoff (1922–29; no. 1228 and no. 1246) and A. Kozmin, were book illustrators at a time when, as evoked in *Constantinople Cameos* (1921; no. 1218), written by E. W. Brigg and Alfred Hessenstein for the British Chamber of Commerce, ‘Constantinople has greatly benefitted by their [Russian refugees’] artistic ability’ – as some Turkish wives, whose husbands had been seduced by Russians, knew only too well. Brigg and Hessenstein hoped that the city would soon revive its pre-1914 ‘glory as a centre of world commerce’. In reality, mainly due to the imposition of trading restrictions under Mustafa Kemal, the revival of Istanbul’s global commercial role would not take place until 70 years later.

Other great book collections on the Ottoman Empire, such as those of Henry Blackmer or Şefik Atabey, survive only in their sale catalogues, from 1989 and 2002, respectively. In his life-long quest for books on the Ottoman Empire, Ömer Koç was in part inspired by the legendary Mr Atabey, a collector whom he called ‘the greatest Turkish bibliophile of his age’. When he visited Atabey’s paradise of books on the Ottoman Empire in Paris, Koç found that it ‘surpassed anything I had imagined’. The library of Ömer Koç will hopefully be more enduring than its predecessors. It is already considerably larger.

Moreover, these two volumes, a triumph of erudition by the rare books expert and bibliographer Sven Becker, cover only a fraction of the library’s contents. Other catalogues dedicated to the Ottoman provinces, the Ottoman periphery, and to literature set in Constantinople, are in preparation, in addition to a supplement recording further acquisitions relating to Constantinople. Yet more catalogues will list Ömer Koç’s paintings, drawings, photographs, maps and manuscripts related to the Ottoman Empire.

This library is both a personal passion and an imperial project, with no equivalent in other former imperial capitals. Its purpose is to commemorate the entire Ottoman Empire, both in time and space. Thus, Constantinople has lost a great empire, but, thanks to Ömer Koç, gained a great library.