

A Look at Orientalism and the Turkish Image in 15th and 19th Century Travel Books

Aykut BALCI¹

Received:09.09.2025, Accepted: 08.11.2025
10.5281/zenodo.18166520

Abstract

In 15th and 19th century travelogues examining how the West perceived the East and how the image of Turks was shaped, Ottoman lands were generally depicted as a mystical, despotic, and exotic place. These travels are filled with narratives that reinforce Western prejudices, portraying Turks as cruel, barbaric, and despotic. The Turks and the Ottoman Empire have been both frightening and intriguing figures for the West. This negative perception has been reinforced, particularly by the Crusades and the Turks' proximity to Europe. Western views of the Turks have been influenced by cultural clashes and religious wars. The influence of the Turks in Europe has created a negative image over the years, and this perception continues today. Turkey's process of joining the European Union has been shaped by this historical perception and the image of the Turks. These writings have also reflected the imperialist perspective of the West, reinforcing the representation of the East as the "other." The aim of this study, prepared using the qualitative research method of literature review, is to examine the historical origins of the Western world's negative perceptions of Turks and Islam and to show how these perceptions have persisted and developed to the present day.

Keywords: Orientalism, Western World, Turks, 15th and 19th Century Travelogues, Turkish Image.

1. Introduction

We use recorded information to access knowledge about what happened in the past. Pre-literate inscriptions bear witness to socio-cultural and economic developments. Written records are important historical sources of information in this sense. All activities in the process of sustaining human life constitute its history. History introduces us to Aristotle and Graham Bell. Those who manufacture cell phones will also be recorded in history by the historians of that era or by someone living at that time, who will write history to pass it on to future generations.

¹ Tekirdag Namik Kemal University, Turkey, aykutbalci@nku.edu.tr, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8720-8984>

Therefore, both individuals and all societies, from the most primitive to the most well-known nations, whether they appear on the stage of history or not, have a history. However, while historians record events in their own societies, travelers have also observed and written about those living in other countries, i.e., the others (Bilici, 2011: 7).

However, it should be noted that historical texts must have a basis in reality, to a greater or lesser extent. Indeed, recording history necessitates a process of purification. History is recorded after being purified of ideology, affiliations, politics, and all other relationships (Bilici, 2011: 8). Regarding impartiality in historical writing, Hobsbawm describes the situation as follows:

"I used to think that the profession of history, unlike, say, nuclear physics, could at least do no harm. Now I know it can. Our work as historians can turn into bomb factories, like the workshops where the IRA learned to convert chemical fertilizer into explosives. This situation affects us in two ways. We have a responsibility towards historical facts in general, and we also have a duty to criticize the political and ideological exploitation of history in particular" (Hobsbawm 1999:10).

When we evaluate this in light of these explanations, Orientalists have always viewed the East as a mysterious place of despotism, authenticity, and mysticism, and have treated it in their travelogues as a world that is almost like a novel, with its cruelty, ostentation, emotionality, eroticism, and domesticated philosophy. (Bilici, 2011: 10). In this sense, the Western subject's desire to travel and see the other as positioned is an interesting situation. Indeed, rather than struggling to visit places referred to as the Third World in order to see the locals, it could be said that visiting the suburbs of Western cities to see those living there as immigrants is both less expensive and less troublesome (Yeğenoğlu, 2003: 55). However, despite everything, the desire to see those people in their original form, rather than through the lens of their past and history, has been more appealing to travelers. What has drawn tourists to the East in droves, what has driven travelers throughout history to travel thousands of miles on horseback or on foot, even at the risk of their lives, to explore the mysterious, strange, and bizarre East, is the desire to see those places for themselves, to discover them on behalf of others, and to represent and describe everything they encounter, including the people, as if they were there themselves (Bilici, 2011: 10).

It should also be noted that, as with all subjective works such as articles, books, or poems, the subject matter expressed in travelogues inevitably contains the writer's personal feelings, thoughts, and prejudices. In this sense, even though travelers wrote about what they saw and experienced, there is also the possibility that they conveyed their feelings. Indeed, when we examine the travelogues or other written works that have survived to the present day, we encounter biased and even harsh criticisms about both Turks and other nations or races (Kılınç, 2014: 28).

According to İlber Ortaylı, travel writers of the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, acting on their prejudices and driven by commercial concerns, exaggerated their subjects. He summarizes the process as follows:

"The 17th-century European, during the long years of war before and after the Second Siege of Vienna, knew the Turks from anti-propaganda pamphlets and leaflets; the Turk was a bloodthirsty creature who took people captive. The impact of this propaganda by the church and the state on the populace during the wars was not as profound as we might imagine. Depictions from the mid-17th century show the Turk as a turbaned, caftan-clad figure, whether Turkish or Greek. His religion is satanic, he is cunning. He dresses like blood, he is treacherous, but very intelligent and compassionate. His country is very beautiful. The type depicted is less a bloodthirsty barbarian and more a refined enemy and villain of formidable intelligence. The Turk or Greek shows that the European common man cannot distinguish between the Balkan peoples and is far removed from Hellenophilia (love of Greece), unlike the educated Western European. The 17th-18th century and especially the 19th century travel writer is, in a way, a prisoner of this prejudiced reader's preconceived notions. He invents things that will please this reader, exaggerates, whether it be about religion, the harem, or the state system." (Ortaylı, 2010: 80).

In this sense, this section of the study will address issues that can be conceptualized as good, bad, beautiful, ugly, justified, unjustified, etc., as used in travelogues in relation to Turks, but which are nevertheless left to the impartiality of the travelers in all cases. In this study, the literature review method, one of the qualitative research methods, was used. The literature on travelogues written between the 15th and 19th centuries was reviewed, and the findings were interpreted in line with the objectives of the study.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. The Image of Turks in Travelogues of the 15th and 19th Centuries

The Ottoman period, which holds an important place in Turkish-Islamic history, was a period that attracted the most interest from Europe, which approached the subject with the aim of exploring it both theoretically and practically. The Ottoman Empire's long historical existence, its establishment of sovereignty across three continents, its relations with European countries, and its domination of strategic and important regions of the world can be cited as historical, political, and geographical reasons for this. In particular, the Ottoman Empire's imperial nature and its advance into European cities increased Western curiosity about the Ottomans, prompted travelers to observe Ottoman lands, and ultimately contributed to the writing of travelogues (Kutlu, 2017:22).

In fact, the Ottoman Empire had attracted the interest of the Western world since its establishment, and this interest increased even more with the conquest of Istanbul in 1453. Indeed, during this period, the Turks were a cause for concern for

the West (Tekin, 2017: 27). Regarding the East, Göllner uses the following expressions:

“Unfamiliar customs opened the doors to a world with a very different political structure and a whole new world where commercial ties could be established” (Göllner, 2004: 264).

The purposes of travel to Ottoman territories appear to have changed over time. For example, in the Middle Ages, when travel was mentioned in the West, pilgrimages to Mecca, which could be undertaken by people of all walks of life, generally came to mind. In this regard, Kenneth Setton states that during this period, undertaking a journey to the holy lands was seen as a social ritual demonstrating knowledge, courage, and wealth (Tekin, 2017: 27). In his travelogue, Löschburg writes on this subject, *“In order to inspire and encourage the reader to travel, strange plants and animals, commercial life, the customs of foreigners, and all kinds of curiosities are described at length”* (Löschburg, 1999: 32).

In general, visits to Ottoman lands can be grouped into six categories. According to Faroqhi, this order is as follows: 1) Diplomats, 2) Those passing through for the Hajj pilgrimage, 3) Prisoners, 4) Merchants, 5) Missionaries, 6) Scientists and those traveling for scientific research (Faroqhi, 1999: 177-188).

Of course, there are other classes of travelers who travel for different purposes. These are adventurous travelers. In the 16th century, these new types of travelers made significant contributions to the process of the East becoming known to the West. These travelers went to the East because of failures in their lives and problems with their social status in Europe, hoping to achieve their goals in foreign lands and add excitement to their lives. After returning to their own countries, they aimed to gain respect in society by telling stories about unknown countries and peoples (Barthold, 2000, cited in Tekin, 2017:28).

Regardless of their motives, it can be said that people from all walks of life traveled to Ottoman lands as a result of the growing interest in the East. For example, Italian writer and traveler Giovanni Ricci, who was in Istanbul during its conquest and witnessed it, described the process from his perspective as follows:

“On May 29, 1453, when the Turkish army of three hundred thousand men, which had surrounded the city to besiege Constantinople, forcibly captured the city, the Great Turk oppressed the thirty thousand people there, and the Turks captured the castle (Pera) where the Genoese were located the next day. The Turk who took control of the castle demonstrated great cruelty by beheading the emperor of Constantinople and many other lords and knights and killing people. The capture of the main city of the East and the humiliation of the Italian naval forces stationed in the Bosphorus led many to believe that the end of Christianity was near. The red horse in the Book of Revelation, the angel of destruction, appeared in the minds of Europeans

dressed in Turkish clothing; the Turk was interpreted as the person taking God's revenge on sinful Christians." (Ricci, 2005: 13).

It can be said that the impact of the Turkish name in the Christian world of Europe during the conquest of Istanbul was clearly and explicitly expressed through Giovanni Ricci's perspective.

In 1585, during a voyage in the Mediterranean, Michael Heberer of Bretten was captured by Ottoman pirates and subsequently worked as a slave for three years on Turkish galleys as a galley slave. After gaining his freedom and returning to his homeland of Germany, he wrote a book about this period of captivity entitled *Slavery in Egypt*. The fact that he titled the work, written in German in 1610, *Slavery in Egypt* stems from the fact that Heberer spent these three years in Ottoman territory in Egypt (Kutlu, 2017: 25).

In his work, Heberer likens the Turks to a barbaric, cruel, bloodthirsty tribe. It is possible to say that the book is generally filled with similar expressions. In fact, considering that he was a slave for many years and the treatment he received during his captivity may have contributed to this narrative. At one point in his work, Heberer recounts the following memory about the period he spent in captivity:

"We Christians, as far as we understood what the Turks were saying, thought they refused to board the ships because they were tired of sea voyages and preferred to travel by land. But that was not the case at all. The intention of those bloodthirsty people was to attack the poor Christians living in the Lebanon Mountains, known as Maronites or Druze, seize everything they had, and destroy them. The Turks had previously hidden many people in the mountains. With their help, they forced their way into the houses in the mountains at gunpoint and forced those poor people to abandon their possessions and property. The wretched people fled in fear to save their lives from those ruthless attackers, hiding in caves and thickets in the mountains. Just like a flock of sheep without a shepherd, attacked by ravenous wolves, scattered and torn apart." (Heberer, 2003: 131).

Heberer again refers to the capture of the island of Cyprus in another memory and states that he gives examples of the cruelty, barbarism, and despotism of the Turks throughout the book. Heberer recounts the story as follows:

"Famagusta [today Gazimağusa], Cyprus's most important trading city and port, was besieged for eleven months and subjected to constant attacks, leaving it severely weakened. Its people, receiving no help from anywhere, fell into deep despair. Finally, they surrendered after the Turkish commander Mustafa [Lala Mustafa Pasha] promised not to harm their lives or their religion. But the bloodthirsty commander broke his word, brutally killing many of them and torturing Marcus Antonius Bagadenus, who had heroically defended the city, to death after cutting off his nose and ears. He also condemned many other Christians to the galleys. I encountered some

of them in Constantinople and Rhodes, working in this harsh service." (Heberer, 2003: 128).

In the 16th century, German theologian Stephan Gerlach, who was sent to Istanbul on official business, also stated that the Ottomans based all their policies on cruelty and oppression, and that peasants left their homelands and migrated elsewhere due to Ottoman oppression. Going even further in this perspective, Gerlach reached the peak of his opposition to the Ottomans by stating, "Wherever the Ottomans set foot, no grass grows again." (Gerlach, 2007: 376).

Gerlach claims that he was in the city of Buda on June 23, 1573, for a sermon and, after talking about the city's beauty, said that the city was as beautiful as the city of Augsburg in its perfection, but that the Turks turned it into a pigsty after they took the city (Gerlach, 2007: 63). In another section of his work, Gerlach uses the following expressions about the Turks:

"Almost all Turks are strong, agile people, very successful at running and jumping, marksmanship, and swordplay, but apart from that, they are barbaric men like animals." (Gerlach, 2007: 61).

Gerlach, who also uses negative language regarding the Turkish language, states that Turkish is a crude and undeveloped language and that he added Persian and Arabic words to his language when he wanted to express his ideas in an elegant way (Gerlach, 2007: 422). Describing the Turks as barbarians, Gerlach also uses the following expressions to characterize them as helpless and weak people:

"If you give them something out of goodwill, they now see it as your debt and constantly demand more. These people are rude, shameless beggars. For the smallest service, they immediately demand a dress worth 25 talers." (Gerlach, 2007: 116).

Another traveler who came to Istanbul on official business was Salomon Schweiger, a clergyman who also lived in the 16th century and was known as the "Traveler of the East." Schweiger, who served as the preacher of the Austrian embassy in Istanbul between 1578 and 1581 and wrote about his thoughts on the Muslim-Turkish image, is one of those travelers who associated the Ottomans with tyranny and despotism. In his travelogue, he wrote about the Ottoman Empire: *"It is impossible not to be surprised that this tyrannical state has remained standing for so many years, that the powerful and influential people in the country have not rebelled and overthrown it."* (Schweiger, 2004: 157).

The 16th century was a crucial period when Europe was rebuilding its identity and attempting to position itself vis-à-vis the East. Therefore, travelogues from the 16th and 17th centuries, when European paradigms were changing, have been an important guide for the West in discovering materials that could provide insight into the subject from a Muslim-Turkish perspective, both in terms of

securing cultural heritage and in terms of how the West should position itself in relation to the East or what it is not. (Kutlu, 2017: 24).

One of the 17th-century travelers, Frenchman Jean Baptiste Tavernier, wrote about his impressions of Turkey in the first volume of his travelogue, stating that Turkey did not have safe cities and that Iran was safer in this regard:

"In Asia, there are neither regular lodgings nor innkeepers who care about accommodating travelers and looking after them well. Your best shelter—especially in Turkey—is the tent you carry, and your innkeepers are the servants who prepare your meals with food purchased from good cities. Moreover, all of Turkey is full of bandits who roam in large gangs, waiting for merchants on the roads: When these gangs feel stronger than a caravan of travelers, they rob them and often take their lives; there is no such fear in Iran: Here, a good system has been established to ensure the comfort of travelers. Because of all these hardships and dangers they must endure, travelers are forced to join caravans going to Iran and India; these caravans also depart only at certain times, from certain places." (Tavernier, 2006: 43).

Tavernier states that, as a member of the modern and enlightened West, he embarked on his journey with the aim of seeing for himself the brilliant stories he had learned from the works of antiquity. Seeing the ruins where poor peasants lived in the places he visited, this enlightened traveler expressed his prejudices against both Turks and Eastern countries, stating, "If these places have fallen into this state, the culprits are the Barbarians, Turks, and Arabs" (Tavernier, 2006: 33). Later in the text, he concludes that these places, which were forcibly seized and poorly administered, rightfully belong to the West, the guardian of Ancient values, revealing the West's and Westerners' obsessive imperialist ideology, which remains unchanged even today.

Albertus Bobovius, a traveler of the 17th century, mentions the devşirme system in his travelogue and criticizes it in the context of Turkish barbarism:

"The Sultan occasionally sends devşirme aghas to collect a very cruel tax: they select one child out of every three to be taken into service. They always select the most beautiful and robust boys in the region, aged between ten and eighteen or twenty. You may think that when the devşirme aghas arrive, families hide their children very well so that they cannot be found; both nature and religion demand this, for just as it is heartbreaking for a father to have his son taken away with no hope of ever seeing him again, it is equally painful for a good Christian to watch innocent and pure souls being abducted to be defiled by the sins of Islam. These ruthless agents of tyranny indiscriminately gather the strongest and most handsome-looking children, regardless of whether the families have only one child or many." (Bobovious, 2013, quoted in Kutlu, 2017: 31).

Another traveler, Alexander William Kinglake, a member of the noble Mudcombe Park family from England who came to Istanbul in the late 19th century, traveled through Troy, Izmir, and Anatolia before visiting Ottoman territories such

as Damascus, Gaza, Nablus, and Jerusalem. Kinglake recounted this journey in his Greek work *Eothen*. Given the extremely difficult and limited transportation conditions, the fact that traveling meant more than just seeing and having fun, and the absence of widespread tourism at the time, it is truly difficult to imagine that these journeys, undertaken at the risk of one's life, had simple motives (Bilici, 2011: 10).

Kinglake states that he embarked on his journey with a vision of Europe in his mind and explains his purpose for traveling as follows:

"If a man, especially an Englishman, was not born with a silver spoon in his mouth, one day he will come to hate the tedious aspects of society, dislike civilized people, mock everything, and become angry. Civilization is waiting for an opportunity to throw its nose around your neck. It will surely catch you too, tame you, and make you useful. Something else will draw you away from this power; first, the desire for European tours, then the desire to travel in the East. Then the English plains and meadows will no longer hold you. You will leap away from these small, free patches of land with great strides. For you, this is a source of health, peace, and strength, like a charming, middle-aged, valuable, successful, ostentatious, meticulous nanny, someone writhing in the weariness of Europe." (Kinglake, quoted in Bilici, 2011: 11).

Kinglake's perspective can be seen as an important record of how an Englishman perceived the image of the East in his own time.

The travelers, thinkers, and clergymen generally expressed the view that the Turks were barbarians and bandits. However, it is also evident that some travelers who visited Anatolia held views that were almost the exact opposite of these statements. These travelers expressed positive opinions about the Turks in the travelogues in which they conveyed their thoughts. One such traveler is Pero Tafur, a 15th-century traveler. Pero Tafur expresses the following words of praise about the Turks:

"The Great Turk (Sultan Murad II) and his people live in tents on the steppes in summer and winter, even though their cities are right next to them. The Turks are noble people, devoted to truth, with no habit of lying, and there they live like nobles in their dress, their eating, and their playing; they are very fond of games, cheerful and pleasant conversationalists, so much so that when virtue is first mentioned, the Turks are the first to come to mind" (Tafur, quoted from 1929. Kılınç, 2014: 31).

Hans Dernschwam, a clergyman who came to the Ottoman Empire on official business in the 16th century, also used words of praise in his travelogue, despite making various criticisms of Ottoman society. For example, he honored the Turks by stating that the Ottoman sultan did not sit idly after winning victories and achieving fame but possessed tremendous military power. Elsewhere in his work, he states that if the Turks did not go to war and stayed at home, they would turn on each other. Indeed, he states that this nation is accustomed to war, is not accustomed to agricultural work, and is very attached to its independence and freedom (Dernschwam, 1987: 198-199).

In conclusion, it can be said that the West's interest in the East has continued throughout every period. Indeed, Bernard Lewis, a 20th-century thinker and historian who was a British and American citizen and belonged to a Jewish family, expressed his interest in the East as follows:

"I have always been interested in the relationship between Islam and the Middle East on the one hand, and Christianity and post-Christianity in the West on the other. Islam's advance into Europe, first from the southwest and then from the southeast, and the conquests and attacks organized by Christians in response; the impact of both Western actions and Western civilization on the peoples and societies of the Middle East; the Middle East's responses to this influence, spread over successive periods; the perceptions and studies, or lack thereof, that each side has of the other—these have always fascinated me" (Lewis, 2008: 12).

However, it should be noted that Lewis was pro-Turkish and pro-Turkey. Indeed, he made statements in favor of Turkey regarding the alleged Armenian genocide and was sued by the Armenian diaspora for this reason. However, as a historian, he did not renounce his pro-Turkish views (core.ac.uk, 26.04.2023).

It can be said that the East played a dominant role in the formation of the West. Nevertheless, we must take a critical approach to what European writers have written. It is also possible to think that a large number of these travelers carried out their duties within the framework of their own states' specific instructions regarding Eastern countries and distorted certain social institutions. Indeed, Westerners preserved their identity by viewing themselves as the opposite of the East and carried out the Crusades to maintain this unity. Pope Urban II's call at the Council of Clermont to establish a Crusader alliance and seize Anatolian lands from the Turks can be seen as an important manifestation of the West's efforts to unite against the East (Bilici, 2011: 12).

The Muslim-Turkish image is presented in a similar form and context in these travelogues, written at different times. Indeed, in the process of establishing its own identity, Europe generally coded the East, which it was trying to discover, in its mind based on the Muslim-Turkish concept, from the perspective of barbarism, despotism, weakness, and helplessness. It is clear that these travelogues, written at different times, address the Muslim-Turkish image in similar forms and contexts. Indeed, in its process of establishing its own identity, Europe has generally coded the East it sought to discover in its mind based on the Muslim-Turkish concept, from the perspective of barbarism, despotism, weakness, and helplessness. Travelogues played a significant role in establishing this coding in the minds of Europeans. Indeed, travelogues are functional writings that provide the most vivid and pure information in terms of showing Europe 'what it is not'. These functional qualities of travelogues regarding the Muslim-Turkish image are closely related to certain approaches that solidified Orientalism as a coherent intellectual structure and clearly concretized the duality between East and West, ensuring that this duality remained fixed in the European mind (Kutlu, 2017: 32).

2.2. Transformations in Europeans' Perception of Turks

The image of the Turk has varied according to political, cultural, and religious contexts throughout European history. Since the Middle Ages, the concept

of "Turk" in Europe has been largely identified with Islam, thus central to the perception of a religious "other." The Ottoman Empire's advance into Europe, particularly in the 15th and 16th centuries, made Turks a "threat" figure in the Western world (Çalışkan, 2022: 110). The term "fear of the Turks" was frequently used in the literature of this period. It can be said that the behavior of societies, peoples, or nations towards each other is based on ideological, religious, or social issues that arose many years ago. Indeed, events that have taken place throughout this historical course can also bring about intercultural conflicts. These past conflicts leave lasting impressions on the minds of individuals living in the society in question, and these deep impressions can persist for many years. It is even possible for these impressions to be passed down from generation to generation. This section of the study will focus on how the image that comes to mind when Europeans say "Turk" has changed historically. But first, the concept of culture will be addressed.

Culture is the knowledge, achievements, and experiences that have been passed down from the earliest periods of human history to the present day and are accepted. Humans are creators of culture and, by adding their own achievements to the legacy of the past, implement culture as a way of thinking and living. It is not the individual but the society that created that culture that can change or shape it over many years. It is difficult to change in a short time certain judgments, achievements, experiences, preconceptions, and ways of living and thinking that have developed in a society over many years. Culture has positive aspects that aim to bring out harmony and beauty between individuals and nations, but it also has negative aspects that can perpetuate hostility, discord, and mistrust between different societies for years. In this sense, culture cannot prevent aggression, bigotry, vandalism, and intolerance; on the contrary, it can preserve them. Therefore, conflicts between cultures and mutual prejudices are possible. Consequently, it is normal for there to be such conflicts and preconceptions between Christian European nations and Islamic culture, and between the Turks, who first introduced this culture to Europeans (Atalay, 2008: 39-40).

Of course, there are other factors besides culture involved in this process. For example, the conquest of Istanbul, which had been besieged by many nations throughout history, by Muslim Turks created a negative image of Turks and Muslims in Western societies. The West could not stomach this conquest and, faced with the presence of Turks in the Mediterranean and the Balkans and their advance to the gates of Europe, reacted with hostility towards the Turks and towards Islam, to which they belonged. Reactions towards Turks began with the migration of tribes and continued with Attila, but as the fear of Attila began to fade from European memory, the rapid spread of Islam from the Arabian Peninsula to European cities and the presence of the Muslim Umayyads in Spain became a source of serious prejudice against Islam. The Turks' acceptance of Islam, their Turkification of Anatolia, their struggle against the Crusaders, and their advance to the gates of Vienna revived the obsession with fear of the Turks in Europe. For this reason, many statesmen, travelers, merchants, and scientists conducted studies in Ottoman territories to get to know the enemy closely and wrote works on the Turks and Islam (Balci, 2019: 352).

It can be said that Turks have left a deep mark on European culture in this sense. Indeed, exaggerated statements, fairy tales, and clichés about Turks in European culture have not disappeared even in the twentieth century and beyond. In this sense, for example, preconceived notions and legends passed down from generation to generation about the European Huns are still found in school textbooks, even centuries later:

"Before long, other barbarians wanted to take over the country (Gaul). These were the Huns. They were disgusting and terrifying people with huge heads, long thin legs, yellow skin, and flat noses. They fed on half-raw meat. Their warriors were almost always on horseback, and the women and children followed behind in carts." (Atalay, 2008: 41).

Today in the Western world, this negative perception of Turks and Islam, which has found its place as Islamophobia, can be said to have its roots in these periods. Although this perception has diminished somewhat in Europe, particularly in Spain and Italy, it has been painfully felt in the past. The phrase "Mama li Turchi - Mommy, the Turks are coming!" uttered by frightened Italian children is an interesting example of the perception of Turks in the Western world. Going further back in time, the internal turmoil in Europe caused by the migration of tribes and the subsequent establishment of the European Hun Empire after Attila's successful conquests, which defeated Europe, can be counted among the first reasons for the emergence of a negative image of Turks, as Europeans saw Attila as God's Scourge as punishment for their sins (Balci, 2019: 353).

When the above-mentioned points are examined together, it can be seen that the perception of Turks in the eyes of Westerners has been largely negative from very early periods of history to the present day. In this sense, we have observed that the image of Turks is portrayed negatively in a large part of the travelogues. Not only travelers, but also scientists, clergymen, politicians, and government officials visiting Ottoman lands, representing many different segments of society, have produced works in this vein. Not only those who came to Ottoman lands, but also those who did not, painted a negative image of the Ottomans and Turks in their comments. One of these was the French writer and statesman Joseph Reinach.

When evaluating the 19th-century Ottoman Empire, Joseph Reinach stated, "*Whatever is bad in society, in administration, in the state, comes from the Turks. I have concluded that only the Greeks can revive the East*" (Servantie, 2005: 57).

Chateaubriand, a French writer and diplomat, wrote the following while serving as France's Minister of Foreign Affairs between 1822 and 1824:

"By giving Turkey steamships and railways to organize its armies, while at the same time teaching it how to operate its navy, we appear to be civilizing it, but this will end not with the spread of civilization to the East, but with the West's encounter with cruelty... The Ibrahims of the future may take us back to the era of Charles Martel... A people whose social structure is based on slavery and polygamy should be sent back to the Mongol steppes... The collapse of the Ottoman Empire is, if anything, a gain for the human race... All elements of the moral values of political society are rooted in Christianity; all the seeds of social destruction are in Islam. It is said that the current sultan is taking steps towards civilization: The reason for this is

that he is trying to put his fanatical mob through regular military training with the help of French converts and some British and Austrian officers. Since when does training with mechanical weapons mean civilization? Informing the Turks of our own scientific tactics is a huge mistake, even a crime. If we do not intend to deliberately train the gravediggers of our society, the soldiers to be disciplined must be baptized" (Servantie, 2005: 60-61).

3. Findings

One of the most significant characteristics of this negative image of Turks in Western societies is undoubtedly the inhumane conflicts carried out under the name of religious wars, with the aim of maintaining religious, cultural, and existing economic hegemony. Similar conflicts, which are an extension of the Crusades, continue today in countries such as Lebanon, where people of different cultures and religions live together. Here, a struggle for dominance over society is being waged through incitement and provocation. Following Fatih's conquest of Istanbul, the Ottoman armies' easier and faster advance in the Balkans also increased the threat to Christianity. Considering the settlement of Muslim populations in the region as a result of these conquests and the advance of the Ottoman armies, along with the oppressive practices imposed on people under despotic and feudal European regimes, the increase in the number of people who voluntarily converted to Islam in the region disturbed the Church (Atalay, 2008: 42).

Francis Fukuyama considered the darling of American liberals, in his book announcing the end of history, views Islam as intolerant and anti-democratic, similar to European fascism, in opposition to freedom of conscience, while also defining Islamic countries as 'authoritarian Asian states'. He states that Turkey is the only Muslim country that has succeeded in developing a form of democracy among Islamic countries as a result of efforts to break away from Islam. In this sense, a similar statement can be seen in Huntington's thesis on the clash of civilizations (Servantie, 2005: 60).

Western writers such as Abbot Michon argue that Western education cannot change the Turks. As is well known, during the Ottoman modernization process, particularly during the Tanzimat period, students were sent to the West to receive education in various fields. The author expresses this as follows:

"The Young Turks who returned to their country from foreign countries, London, Paris, and Vienna, had gained sophistication; they no longer wore babuch [mes] and could speak English, French, or German extremely fluently; they drank wine, smoked cigarettes during Ramadan, had become bad citizens, and had lost their faith... They are called infidels and are ostracized from society. When this disorder began to weigh heavily on them, you would see that they had returned to the customs of their own country; the false European veneer they carried with them gradually wore off, and once again, this time even more intensely than before, they became Turks and generally approached European ideas with more hostility than others." (Servantie, 2005: 62).

This situation is still accepted as fact today. Indeed, when Turkey's accession to the European Union was discussed in the European Parliament on April 1, 2004, newspapers shared similar views. These views declared that Turkey did not belong to Europe in terms of its geography, history, or culture. According to Westerners, Turkey is 'heterogeneous' and it is not believed that Turkey can implement the Copenhagen criteria (Servantie, 2005: 63).

However, despite everything, since its establishment, Turkey has always turned its face towards the West in its journey of modernization. In this context, 60 years have passed since the beginning of our EU membership process. As a result of Turkey's long-standing efforts, the EU accession process, which gained momentum with the Customs Union agreement, has brought many issues to the country's agenda. Turkey is still struggling to pass Europe's democracy test with reforms that accelerate the EU harmonization process, while also fighting to overcome the effects of growing suspicions about Muslims worldwide. Turkey's failure to join the European Union over such a long period of time cannot be explained without considering the "image of Turkey" in the eyes of the West, as described above. It is well known that countries with less legislation on EU harmonization than Turkey have been granted EU membership in a much shorter period.

4. Conclusion

Travelogues are an important source in terms of describing the experiences of Western writers who visited the East, which they perceived as mysterious and chaotic and viewed as a world of objects that needed to be known or explained. When travelogues are examined, it is very clear how the East and Easterners are portrayed through an Orientalist lens. In this context, Easterners are positioned in travelogues as passive, barbaric, savage, backward, Bedouin, and dangerous beings. In contrast, Western writers tend to see themselves as enlightened, knowledgeable, and cultured in relation to Easterners. Perceiving Eastern culture as unknown and different, Western writers generally adopt a psychology of condescension toward the East within this unknown framework in their travelogues. Of course, there are historical, cultural, and political reasons for this tendency to belittle. This perspective is a very common view in Western societies. This image of the East in the Western mind, whose influence continues to this day, continues to be debated and criticized today. Indeed, the essential thing is to evaluate a society or culture in a fair and more understanding manner.

As a result, the negative perceptions held by the Western world regarding Turks and Islamic culture have deepened throughout history and continue to exert their influence to this day. Events such as the Crusades and the Conquest of Istanbul, coupled with the Ottoman Empire's influence in Europe, fostered prejudices against Turks and Islam in the West, and these prejudices have been passed down from generation to generation. Travelogues and writings by Western thinkers contributed to the strengthening of these perceptions and led to the West positioning itself against the East. All these perceptions laid the foundations for cultural conflicts and religious wars and are still responsible for the persistence of phenomena such as Islamophobia and anti-Turkish sentiment in the West today. Turkey's relations with the West, especially during important stages such as the

European Union accession process, have been shaped by these deep-rooted perceptions. The difficulties encountered during the EU accession process have demonstrated how the image of Turkey in the West has transformed Turkey's domestic and foreign policies and how this image still persists among Western societies.

REFERENCES

Atalay, İ. (2008), The Historical Development of Prejudices Against Turks in Europe and Their Reflection in Literary Works, *Atatürk University Journal of Social Sciences Institute*, 11(1), 39-48.

Balcı, E. (2019), On the Western Perception of Turks, *Hars Academy International Peer-Reviewed Journal of Culture, Art, and Architecture*, 2(4), 351-373.

Bilici, İ. E. (2011), An Examination of the Image of Turks in Orientalist Travelogues: The Example of Alexander William Kinglake's Travelogue Eothen. *Gümüşhane University Faculty of Communication Electronic Journal*, 1(2), 1-21.

Çalışkan, S. (2022), Fear of the Turks as Memory Transfer, *Journal of National Culture Studies*, Volume 6, Issue 2, 108-126.

Faroqhi, S. (1999), How to Study Ottoman History? (Trans. Zeynep Altok), 2nd Edition, Istanbul: History Foundation Yurt Publications.

Gerlach, S. (2007), Turkey Diary (Trans. Türkis Noyan), Istanbul: Kitap Publications.

Heberer, M. (2003), A Slave in the Ottoman Empire, Memoirs of Michael Heberer of Bretten, 1585-1588 (Trans. Türkis Noyan), Istanbul: Heberer, M. (2003), A Slave in the Ottoman Empire, Memoirs of Michael Heberer of Bretten, 1585-1588 (Trans. Türkis Noyan), Istanbul: Kitap Yayın

Hobsbaw, E. (1999), On History (Trans. Osman Akınhay), Ankara: Science and Art Publications.

Kılınç, A. (2014), Western Travelers Who Went to Jerusalem via Anatolia Between the 15th and 17th Centuries and Their Impressions of Anatolia, *İnönü University Institute of Social Sciences Master's Thesis*, Malatya.

Servantie, A. (2005), The Image of Turks in the World: Changes in the Western Image of Turks (Ed. Özlem Kumrular), Istanbul: Kitap Publishing House.

Kutlu, H. İ. (2017), The Ottoman Image in 16th and 17th Century Western Travelogues and the Footsteps of Orientalism. *Journal of Ottoman Heritage Studies (OMAD)*, 4(8), 17-36.

Lewis, B. (2008), From Babylon to Dragomans (Trans. Ebru Kılıç), Istanbul: Kapı Publications.

Hobsbaw, E. (1999), On History (Trans. Osman Akınhay), Ankara: Science and Art Publications.

Kılınç, A. (2014), Western Travelers Who Went to Jerusalem via Anatolia Between the 15th and 17th Centuries and Their Impressions of Anatolia, İnönü University Institute of Social Sciences Master's Thesis, Malatya.

Servantie, A. (2005), The Image of Turks in the World: Changes in the Western Image of Turks (Ed. Özlem Kumrular), Istanbul: Kitap Publishing House.

Kutlu, H. İ. (2017), The Ottoman Image in 16th and 17th Century Western Travelogues and the Footsteps of Orientalism. *Journal of Ottoman Heritage Studies* (OMAD), 4(8), 17-36.

Lewis, B. (2008), From Babylon to Dragomans (Trans. Ebru Kılıç), Istanbul: Kapı Publications.

Ortaylı, İ. (2010), The Ottoman World of Thought and Historiography. Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Publications.

Ricci, G. (2005), The Turkish Obsession: Fear, Hatred, and Love in Early Modern Europe (Trans. Kemal Atakay), Istanbul: Kitap Publishing House.

Schweiger, S. (2004), Journey to the City of Sultans (Trans. Türkis Noyan), Istanbul: Kitap Publishing House.

Tavernier, J.B. (2006), Tavernier's Travelogue, (Ed. Stefanos Yerasimos, Trans. Teoman Tunçdoğan), Kitap Publishing House: Istanbul.

Tekin, E.C. (2017), Books and Cultural Libraries in the Ottoman Empire from the Perspective of European Travelers (1453-1699), Hacettepe University Institute of Social Sciences Department of Information and Documentation Management Doctoral Thesis.

Yeğenoğlu, M. (2003), 'Being in Another Place: Migration and Tourism in the Postcolonial World', *Culture and Communication*, Issue: 6/2.

Internet Sources

<https://core.ac.uk/reader/38321230>, Access Date: 04/26/2025