

ABSTRACT

Title of thesis: TRADERS AND NEW IDEAS ABOUT THE EAST: THE
 BRITISH LEVANT COMPANY AND THE DISCOURSE ON
 THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE, 1581-1774

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The purpose of this thesis is to identify some of the contributions made by members and associates of the British Levant Company to the discourse about Islam and the Ottoman Empire in Britain between 1581 and 1774. The members of the Levant Company were brought to the lands of the Ottoman Empire solely for the purpose of trade and profit. However, in order to succeed in their business pursuits they had to develop personal relationships with Ottoman Muslims. An unintended consequence of those close personal contacts was that these wealthy British merchants, raised to fear and condescend to the Muslim “Turk,” developed a greater respect and understanding for the peoples and culture of the Ottoman Empire. Upon return to England, their experiences served to counter, at least in part, the historical European animus that identified the Muslims of the Ottoman Empire as backwards and dangerous.

TRADERS AND NEW IDEAS ABOUT THE EAST
THE BRITISH LEVANT COMPANY AND THE DISCOURSE ON THE OTTOMAN
EMPIRE, 1581-1774

by

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Introduction

In his study on the feud between Prime Ministers Benjamin Disraeli and William Gladstone, *The Lion and the Unicorn: Gladstone vs. Disraeli*, Richard Aldous observes that their adjacent statues stand with their backs turned to one another along Westminster Abbey's Statesman's Aisle, seemingly in perpetual opposition. Disraeli and Gladstone, two giants of British political and imperial history, are forever linked as a result of their epic battles in Britain's Parliament during the middle of the nineteenth century. The two great politicians are famous not only for their parliamentary conflicts and their genuine personal animosity towards one another. They also represented a clash in ideology within Britain between the Liberal and Conservative Parties, and public opinion vacillated frequently between the two men, and their two parties, so that they traded the Prime Ministry twice, Disraeli losing the office to Gladstone in December 1868, regaining it in February 1874, and relinquishing it again to Gladstone in April of 1880. As Gladstone remarked after Disraeli's death, he had been "separated from Lord Beaconsfield by longer and larger differences than, perhaps, ever separated any two persons brought into constant contact in the transaction of Public Business."¹

Among their many ideological differences was their attitude toward the Ottoman Empire. Germane to this study was the conflict between them over what British policy should be towards an ailing—or at least increasingly threatened—empire, a debate commonly known as the Eastern Question. The two men's polemics concerning the Eastern Question during the Bulgarian Agitation of 1876 to 1878 highlight two historical trends in British attitudes and opinions towards the "Turks." One was based on doctrinal,

¹ Richard Aldous, *The Lion and the Unicorn: Gladstone vs. Disraeli* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006), 6-7.

theological, and moral religious opposition that saw the Ottomans as a continuation of the Islamic threat posed to Christian Europe during the middle ages. The other—while certainly still biased by many European ethnocentrism and cultural prejudices—was primarily concerned with diplomacy and commercial enterprise. Among those Britons in this latter category—those not focused on theological and cultural antagonism—many acquired a fondness for the culture of the Ottoman world even if they were still influenced by common misconceptions and stereotypes that led them to hold fantastic, romanticized, and exotic notions about it.²

This is an admittedly simplistic binary that Nabil Matar terms the “venues [that] governed Britain’s engagement with Islam,” the “secular venue...and the doctrinal venue.”³ These two “venues” will serve as a starting point for tracking the British discourse on the Levant or, more specifically, the contributions of the British Levant Company to that discourse from the end of the sixteenth century to the end of the eighteenth century. To be sure, based on Edward Said’s theories on “orientalism,” it is evident that even those Britons who were enamored of the “Turks” carried their cultural biases with them: biases based largely on Crusader and missionary religious antipathy towards the non-European and non-Christian “other,” and a lingering fear of Islamic expansion. There is no disagreement here with the idea that it is unlikely any Briton could ever entirely escape the prejudices and stereotypes pushed by religious ideologues and entrenched by centuries of inculcation. Indeed, it would have been truly remarkable

² The geographical description of the Levant used here includes all of the eastern Mediterranean under Ottoman control including modern day Greece, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Egypt. This was the way the British of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries used the term, and it therefore makes sense for it to be used in the same way here. See Philip Mansel, *Levant: Splendor and Catastrophe on the Mediterranean* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 1.

³ Nabil Matar, *Islam in Britain: 1558-1665* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 185.

for any Englishman to completely rise above the entrenched image of the “Saracen” that had dominated the discourse from the time of the Crusades.

Still, there was indeed some room for interaction and discourse on the Levantine world that was not driven by ideology and historical animus. The purpose of this study is to show that a significant source of such interaction, where religious, cultural, or racial conflict was not a primary concern—with alternative views of Islam and the Ottoman Empire being made possible as a byproduct of this lack of interest in theology and cultural difference—came from the Britons who traveled to the Ottoman Empire because of their association with the Levant Company. As the Levant Company’s interest was in the secular pursuit of trade and profit, all other concerns were secondary and even unacceptable if they were a hindrance to the company’s primary purpose. The argument is not that the members of the Levant Company did not also hold and confirm established notions of the Ottoman Empire, as it will be shown that they did, or that their influence on British attitudes about the “Turk” was the most influential. It is not possible to make such assertions. Rather, the goal here is simply to identify an admittedly small sample of the alternative ideas about the Ottoman Empire and Islam that emanated from individuals associated with the Levant Company.

It has to be acknowledged that, even driven by trade as the members of the Levant Company were, these young Britons could not have traveled to Istanbul or Aleppo free from prejudice. Most Britons were quite aware of the eastern Mediterranean Muslim world, at least at some level, through the images presented to them in the literature and theater of the day or from a sermon at their church.⁴ Still it is contended here that, despite their unavoidable biases, there developed among some British traders a seemingly

⁴ Linda Colley, *Captives* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), 76.

genuine respect and admiration for the Muslims with whom they interacted in the Ottoman cities of the eastern Mediterranean, and that their views would have been transmitted to the British back home by virtue of the social standing most members of the Levant Company enjoyed as well as the prominent position their “oriental” goods occupied in London markets.⁵

Tracing the Doctrinal and Secular Venues

What, then, were these ideological trends, or venues through which Britons experienced the Islamic world?⁶ The dominant meme, of which Gladstone—who had a great passion for theology—was heir, remained remarkably consistent. It was the longstanding religiously derived ideology transmitted through the stories and accounts of theologians, Crusaders, missionaries, and pilgrims from the eleventh century through to the Victorian era. Included in this discourse was the study of Islam by theologians who saw the study of Islam, Judaism, and the Semitic languages as a way of better understanding and defining what it meant to be Christian.⁷ This meme, highlighted in Gladstone’s famous pamphlet *The Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East*, saw Islam as a bloodthirsty, uncivilized, and expansionist threat to not only British morality and culture, but to Christendom as a whole. One particular passage is indicative of the

⁵ Gerald MacLean, *Looking East: English Writing and the Ottoman Empire Before 1800* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 34, 42. Even before the Levant Company’s founding “oriental” goods were popular among wealthy Englishmen. Henry VIII was known to wear “oriental” clothing at court. By the seventeenth century, “oriental” goods, and not just silk and currants, were becoming commonplace even among more modest households.

⁶ For most Britons of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, the Islamic world was monolithic in the sense that there was little differentiation between different Muslim populations. The term “Turk,” for example, was used to describe any Ottoman, and indeed any Muslim, regardless of their ethnicity or race. For an explanation of this see, among other sources, Gerald MacLean, *Looking East: English Writing and the Ottoman Empire Before 1800* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 6. Also Alexander Russell, *The Natural History of Aleppo and Parts Adjacent*, Vol. II (London: Gregg Publishing, 1969), 158.

⁷ Ian Richard Netton, “The Mysteries of Islam,” in *Exoticism in the Enlightenment*, ed. G.S. Rousseau and Roy Porter (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 24.

tone and direction of what Mackenzie labels “Gladstonian prejudice.”⁸ Gladstone wrote of the “Turk,”

“[t]hey were, upon the whole, from the black day when they first entered Europe, the one great anti-human specimen of humanity. Wherever they went, a broad line of blood marked the track behind them; and, as far as their dominion reached, civilization disappeared from view. They represented everywhere government by force, as opposed to Government by law. For the guide of this life they had a relentless fatalism: for its reward hereafter, a sensual paradise.”⁹

The second discourse on the Levant developed over time. When it began is not entirely clear, but what seems clear is that, as Billie Melman argues, “there emerged an alternative view of the Orient which developed, during the nineteenth century, alongside the dominant one.”¹⁰ Essentially, developments during the seventeenth and eighteenth century stimulated another side to the discourse on Islam and the Ottoman Empire, one that was less absolute and less driven by ideology. As a result, by the early nineteenth century Britons were more open to favorable views of the Ottoman Empire. As an indicator of this more open attitude when Disraeli went on a “grand tour” as a final piece to his education, visiting Istanbul and the Eastern Mediterranean in 1820, he was awed by what he saw and became an admirer of the culture and history of the great Ottoman capital and its people.¹¹ The purpose of Disraeli’s example is not to dispute Edward Said and others who have exposed the somewhat insidious nature to the British admiration of the exotic orient. Disraeli and other Britons of the nineteenth century who held

⁸ John MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History Theory and the Arts* (London: Manchester University Press, 1995), 2.

⁹ William E. Gladstone, *The Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East* (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1876): available from www.archive.org/details/bulgarianhorrors00_gladrich; Internet, 12-13.

¹⁰ Billie Melman, *Women’s Orients: English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 7.

¹¹ Benjamin Disraeli, *Home Letters Written by the Late Earl of Beaconsfield in 1830 and 1831* (New York: Krause Reprint Co, 1970), 101. He wrote of his first sight of Istanbul, “it baffles all description, though so often described. An immense mass of buildings, cupolas, cypress groves, and minarets. I feel an excitement which I thought was dead.”

somewhat favorable views of the Ottoman Empire were almost certainly still, above all else, believers in British greatness and in British power. In no way does this essay argue that even the most tolerant Englishmen viewed the Ottomans as equals. The example of Disraeli serves to show to what extent it was possible over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that many well-to-do Britons became enamored of the “East” and harbored a desire to study, learn about, and experience the Levant not only for its historical significance, its ties to early Christianity, the Bible, and Hellenic Greece, but also for its present cultural contribution.¹² These men made up the group of scholars, travelers, and politicians who have been grouped together with greater or lesser accuracy as “Orientalists.”

In this way, it might be said that this study also highlights the role played by members of the Levant Company in influencing the development of what became “orientalism.” There were, doubtlessly, many contributors to its development including—it cannot be avoided—the early eighteenth-century translation and subsequently widespread reading of the *Arabian Nights* as well as the oriental tales and poems of men of the nineteenth century like Lord Byron.¹³ However, the members of the British Levant Company, through the experiences of its traders, consuls, ambassadors, chaplains, surgeons, and those associated with the Company in other ways, undoubtedly played a role in shaping attitudes towards Islam and the Ottoman Empire held in the nineteenth century and beyond.

¹² Among other scholars, John MacKenzie has argued that many Europeans were admirers of certain aspects of Islamic and Ottoman culture and sought to learn from it as a way of complementing their own culture. See John MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History Theory and the Arts* (London: Manchester University Press, 1995), 209.

¹³ The influence of the *Arabian Nights* is examined in numerous studies about Islam’s relationship with the West. For a comprehensive study on its influence in Britain a good source is Peter Caracciolo’s, *The Arabian Nights in English Literature: Studies in the Reception of the Thousand and One Nights into British Culture* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1988).

The Importance of Trade

Until 1581, when Queen Elizabeth I gave the founders of the Levant Company its charter, English contact with the eastern Mediterranean consisted almost exclusively of pilgrims and missionaries who, understandably, did little to diverge from the established, theologically based, attitudes towards Muslims and the eastern Mediterranean. Because England was not yet the naval or imperial power it would become during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, trade with the Levant was accomplished through intermediaries as the sea routes were dominated primarily by the Venetians but also by the Genoese, Portuguese, and French.¹⁴ Therefore, from the end of the Crusades to the founding of the Levant Company, there was limited direct contact between the English and the Eastern Mediterranean.

This situation changed quickly after 1575 when the two founders of the Levant Company—Sir Edward Osborne and Richard Staper—sent William Harborne to Istanbul for the purpose of establishing trade with the Ottoman Empire.¹⁵ The history of the company and its organization will receive attention later but for now it should suffice to say that, through diplomatic acumen, and without any sanction or direction from the Crown, Harborne was able to obtain the outlines of what would later become England's first trade capitulation from Sultan Murad III.¹⁶ Harborne returned to England with this document establishing contact between the English Crown and Ottoman Porte for the first

¹⁴ Mortimer Epstein, *The English Levant Company: Its Foundation and Its History to 1640* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1968), 2-3

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

¹⁶ S.A. Skilliter, *William Harborne and the Trade with Turkey, 1578-1582: A Documentary Study of the First Anglo-Ottoman Relations* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), 4.

time and starting the correspondence between the two powers that would lead to the granting of the Levant Company's charter six years later.

The impact was quickly apparent. While it would be inaccurate to argue that the Levant Company was solely responsible for the explosion of contact with the Muslim world, it is clear that there was such an explosion. By the Caroline era (1624-1649), great numbers of Mediterranean Muslims visited and traded in English ports and a growing number of Englishmen traded with Muslims in Mediterranean harbors. According to Nabil Matar, as a result of this trade, "to numerous Britons, the Turks...were men and women they had known, not in fantasy and fiction, but with whom they had worked and lived, sometimes hating them yet sometimes accepting or admiring them."¹⁷ It is clear that trade and commerce played a primary role in Britain's burgeoning contact with the Muslim world and that, because Queen Elizabeth's charter granted a monopoly to the Levant Company over all English trade to the Eastern Mediterranean, the Levant Company would consequently have great influence over the circumstances of those interactions.¹⁸ It was trade and economic growth, the *raison d'être* of what would become a mercantilist British Empire, that brought England to the Levant and the Levant to England.

As an aside, the timing of England's engagement with the Ottoman Empire is also significant. While Said posits in *Orientalism* that the European (primarily British and French) discourse, or "system of ideas," regarding the "Orient" went largely unchanged

¹⁷ Nabil Matar, *Turks, Moors and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 5-6.

¹⁸ Elizabeth I, "The Letters Patents, or privileges granted by her Majestie to Sir Edward Osborne, Master Richard Staper, and certaine other Merchants of London for their trade into the dominions of the great Turke, in the yeere 1581," in *Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques, and Discoveries of the English Nation*, vol. 3, ed. Richard Hakluyt (London: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1927), 64-72.

from the middle of the nineteenth century to the present, several historians have compellingly argued more recently that attitudes towards the Levant and its inhabitants did not show this remarkable continuity in the two preceding centuries before the explosion of “Orientalist” scholarship and study that occurred in the nineteenth century.¹⁹ The travelers, scholars, theologians, and traders who experienced and wrote about the Levant during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries could, at best, be described as proto-Orientalists.²⁰ Indeed, as several scholars surveyed in this study argue, the interaction between Britain and the Levant may well have been the most plural, the most varied, and the least judgmental in the period before the great European incursions into the Middle East following Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt in 1798, and this was at least in part due to the influence of trade.²¹

With the importance of trade in bringing English and Ottoman cultures together established, a second aspect of the Levant Company’s charter is important. Because the Elizabethan government lacked both the desire and the means to fund a diplomatic presence in Istanbul, the Levant Company was charged with financing and filling all English diplomatic positions in the Ottoman Empire, including the ambassador at Istanbul, with Harborne being the first.²² While the Crown would begin appointing the

¹⁹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 5-6.

²⁰ Rober Irwin, *Dangerous Knowledge: Orientalism and Its Discontents* (Woodstock, NY: The Overlook Press, 2006), 5-6. The group of scholars and administrators who studied the Muslim and Hindu worlds called themselves “orientalists” and “orientalism” was their field of study. As an academic field of study, the discipline did not take shape until the nineteenth century and any negative connotation surrounding the terms only manifested itself after Edward Said’s 1979 study *Orientalism* examined how the “orientalists” contributed to Europe’s imperial domination of the Muslim world.

²¹ Daniel Vitkus, *Turning Turk: Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570-1630* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 16. Also see G.S. Rousseah and Gary Porter, *Exoticism in the Enlightenment* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 14.

²² Elizabeth I, “The Letters Patents, or privileges granted by her Majestie to Sir Edward Osborne, Master Richard Staper, and certaine other Merchants of London for their trade into the dominions of the great Turke, in the yeere 1581,” in *Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques, and Discoveries of the English Nation*, vol. 3, ed. Richard Hakluyt (London: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1927), 64-72.

ambassadors to Istanbul in the late seventeenth century, the Levant Company was still responsible for their salaries, and they were expected to represent both the Crown's interest as well as the interests of the traders.²³ The relationship between the factors and administrators of the Levant Company and the ambassadors appointed by the Crown waxed and waned over the 244-year history of the company, but even those ambassadors who never ventured out of Istanbul to the factories in Aleppo, Izmir, or elsewhere, were connected not only by their salary and their responsibility to represent the trade interests of the company, but also by regular correspondence and an expectation that they would advocate the furtherance of the Levant Company's commercial goals.²⁴ Additionally, the Levant Company retained direct control over all other diplomatic activity by maintaining the prerogative to appoint the consul in any city throughout the region where the British traded, including the major consulates in Izmir and Aleppo.²⁵ In these two ways, by holding monopoly over a very lucrative trade, and by providing Britain's diplomatic representation to the Porte, the Levant Company was in a unique position to dictate the terms of the interaction between Britain and the Ottoman Empire.

For these reasons, it is contended here that the Levant Company was involved, both directly and indirectly, with the bulk of the contacts between Britain and the Ottoman Empire. As a result, while it would be impossible to quantify the influence the members of the Levant Company had on how Britons perceived the "East," it would necessarily be great. Other individuals traveled to the Levant, and wrote about their

²³ Christine Laidlaw, *The British In The Levant: Trade and Perceptions of the Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2010), 29.

²⁴ TNA SP 110/72, f. 1, p. 100.

²⁵ Tom Rees, *Merchant Adventurers in the Levant* (Stawell: Talbot Publishing, 2003), 22-23.

experiences, and still others commented on the topic without ever leaving home.²⁶

However, no other single group of travelers, observers, or informants on the region could rival the impact of the Levant Company due to the overwhelming number of Britons who experienced the Levant through their involvement with the company. The impact of certain members and associates of the Levant Company has been well studied as a result of their known published works including Henry Maundrell's *A Journal from Aleppo to Jerusalem*, Paul Rycaut's *Present State of the Ottoman Empire*, Dr. Alexander Russell's *Natural History of Aleppo*, and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Embassy Letters*.

However, the company would have influenced attitudes in Britain in less overt ways as well through the stories and experiences of the company's traders, who made up the largest single group of Britons with personal experience of the Levant.²⁷ By facilitating most of the interaction between Britain and the Ottoman Empire, the Levant Company truly brought back more on their ships than silk and currants. They brought back stories, observations, and ideas that in turn could not have failed to influence British conceptions of that world.

A Word on Structure

To adequately examine all of the ways that the Levant Company affected thought about the "East" would require a study of much grander scope. The impact of the Levant Company on "Orientalist" art, architecture, literature, poetry, and theater could each constitute a separate study. Therefore, by necessity, this paper will focus more narrowly on some of the alternative ideas about the East that came from the Levant Company's

²⁶ Samuel Chew, *The Crescent and the Rose: Islam and England During the Renaissance* (New York: Octagon Books Inc., 1965), 22.

²⁷ James Mather, *Pashas: Traders and Travellers in the Islamic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 9.

members and associates and how they served to counter some of the inaccurate but prevailing ideas about Islam and the Ottoman Empire. The study cannot be all encompassing, and does not pretend to perfectly represent the attitudes or ideas of the literally thousands of Levant Company personnel who lived and worked in the Ottoman Empire over the two and a half centuries of its existence.²⁸ It only serves as a glimpse into what some of the ideas held by members of the Levant Company were and some of the ways they countered or contributed to the prevailing opinions of the day.

In order to properly analyze the ideas about Islam and the Ottoman Empire highlighted by those sources, the first task of this essay, chapter one, is an attempt at putting into context the relationship between England and the Ottoman Empire from the late sixteenth century through the middle of the eighteenth century as well as trying to place that relationship in its proper context within the post-Reformation European political landscape. Related to this endeavor, and covered in chapter two, is a survey of applicable scholarship written about Islam and the Ottoman Empire's relationship with Britain.

Chapter three follows this examination of the British relationship with Islam and the Levant by delving into pertinent aspects of the Levant Company's history. It would be impossible to explain how the Levant Company contributed to the discourse on Islam and the Levant without at least an overview of how its organization, its locations, its significant members, and their responsibilities facilitated the interaction between Britain and its Ottoman partners.

²⁸ Mortimer Epstein, *The English Levant Company: Its Foundation and its History to 1640* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1968), 55. Definitive numbers concerning how many Britons travelled to the Ottoman Empire as a part of the Levant Company are not available. However, over the course of its history, it had to have numbered in the thousands. Epstein puts the number as high as 40,000.

Chapter four examines three factors that would have influenced how members of the Levant Company experienced the Ottoman Empire. First, they would certainly have had in mind the accounts of previous scholars and travelers who had written on Islam and the empire, and this previous exposure would have inhibited their ability to be objective. Second, the role of class and social status, both their own and that of the Ottomans they interacted with, is briefly examined. Finally, the role played by Ottoman intermediaries in influencing attitudes about different demographic groups within the Ottoman Empire is accounted for.

Chapters five, six, and seven will examine some of the more prevalent stereotypes about Islam and the Ottoman Empire and how certain members of the Levant Company countered them. While there were certainly many other established preconceptions about Islam and the Ottoman Empire that Britons of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries would have held, these chapters will focus on the alternative ideas proffered by members of the Levant Company that countered three of the most common and pernicious; the untrustworthiness of the “Turk,” the capriciousness and despotism of the *qadi* and the Ottoman justice system, and the hedonism and oppressive nature of the harem.

Clarification of Terminology

While scholars of today should be loath to use the word “Turk” to describe the Ottomans, and “Levant” to describe the eastern Mediterranean, these were terms used by the British traders, scholars, statesman, soldiers, and politicians during the period at study and will therefore continue to be used occasionally when describing the Ottoman Middle East from the point of view of a member of the Levant Company, or of the company itself. They have not been deliberately avoided for a reason. In this case, terminology

highlights the unavoidable bias, or at least the lack of cultural sensibility, of the Britons studied here, even those with clear affinity for the culture and people of the eastern Mediterranean. Regardless of how pragmatic they were, none of them would be able to escape their own cultural bias completely, although I contend that they should not necessarily be condemned for it. The inaccurate, and sometimes offensive nature of the terms is acknowledged, and their use is not intended as a slight. Similarly, regarding the transliteration of names, the spelling used by the British observer or writer will be used rather than a cleaner, more correct, transliteration if it is specifically referenced that way in the source being cited.

Additionally, for the purpose of this essay the terms Britain, British, and Briton will be used to describe members of the Levant Company who were from anywhere in what is today Great Britain, recognizing that the terms are partially anachronistic since those terms were not commonly used until the unification of England and Scotland, which did not happen until 1707.²⁹ However, the term will be used when making general statements about the peoples of the British Isles for simplicity. When specifically referencing the period before 1707, the nationality of the individual will be specified.

²⁹ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 1.

Chapter I: Britain's Relationship with Islam and the Ottoman Empire

He who would behold these times in their greatest glory could not find a better scene than Turkey...Turks are the only modern people, great in action...whose Empire hath so suddenly invaded the world.³⁰

The above quotation from the prominent English traveler Henry Blount appears in his 1634 travel account *Voyage into the Levant* and it indicates a significant notion regarding the power dynamic between the Ottomans and the English. Before examining in chapter two the historiography of British relations with Islam, the Ottomans, and the Levant, it is important to put into context Britain's relative weakness on the international stage around the time of the founding of the Levant Company, particularly in relation to the Ottoman Empire. In order to do this, recognizing the power of post-colonial perspectives on history is imperative so that it does not taint the analysis of the pre-colonial. It is a common mistake to look at the power relationship between Britain and the Middle East from the middle of the eighteenth century forward and assume that the same relationships existed prior to the nineteenth century. In fact, the inverse was true at the founding of the Levant Company in 1581. The Ottoman Empire was, in almost every measurable way, the dominant European and Mediterranean power. Britain, by contrast had yet to acquire a single overseas colony, and had only recently lost its last possessions in continental Europe when Calais fell in 1558.³¹ Even among the European powers, England was a small presence in the Ottoman Empire. With the slowdown of pilgrim activity to the Holy Land, other European powers, mainly Venice, mediated the limited commercial and diplomatic contact between the British and the Eastern Mediterranean. In the words of Samuel Chew, before the turn of the seventeenth century "Venice was the

³⁰ Henry Blount, *A Voyage into the Levant* (London: Andrew Crooke, 1650), 4.

³¹ David Loades, *Mary Tudor: A Life* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1992), 295-297.

vestibule to Islam.”³² Britain was not the powerful empire it would become from the late eighteenth century onward, and therefore it is not possible to fit its pre-nineteenth century dealings with the Ottoman Empire neatly into the discourse on British imperialism established in the post-colonial era. The power dynamic as it existed in the preceding two and a half centuries is critical to understanding and properly contextualizing the attitudes of the British towards the Ottoman Empire and the Islamic world prior to the nineteenth century.

To illustrate this dynamic, the history of the Middle East since the end of the eighteenth century is illuminating. Much has been made in post-colonial discourse about the self-perceived backwardness within the Ottoman Empire that was used as an impetus for Ottoman modernization efforts in the nineteenth century, and modernization efforts in the greater Middle East in the twentieth century. It is not generally contested that the Europeans saw the Ottomans and Levantine Muslims as backward during this period. However, it is also posited by many scholars of the Middle East that many Ottomans and Arabs saw themselves in the same way.³³ How had the Christian West surpassed them militarily and economically despite the superiority of Islam? How had the Islamic community, the *umma*, fallen from the highs of the golden age of Islam in the ninth century, and what had happened to the great Ottoman Empire that knocked on the gates of Vienna under Suleiman the Magnificent in 1529. These questions drove many of the efforts at theological reforms attempted by pan-Islamic thinkers like Jamal al-Din al-

³² Samuel Chew, *The Crescent and the Rose: Islam and England During the Renaissance* (New York: Octagon Books Inc., 1965), 55.

³³ M. Sukru Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 42. For a good synopsis of the Muslim reaction to European power in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries see Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1798-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), iv.

Afghani and Muhammad Abduh as well as the attempts at institutional and military reforms started by Sultan Selim III that continued through the *Tanzimat* Era and World War I.³⁴ These introspective questions had many answers that, for simplicity's sake, will be distilled into two. One answer was that modern Muslims had wandered from the righteous path, and the current state of affairs was a result of deviation from the foundations of Islam. This vision was espoused by the more conservative elements of the Ottoman government, including the Janissaries and most Muslim religious scholars, the *Ulama*, who resisted reforms on the European model.³⁵ The second answer assumed the opposite. By being stuck in the past, Islam and the Ottoman Empire had failed to keep pace with the changing, modern world. This was the belief of reformist theologians like Jamal al-Din Afghani, Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida, as well the reform-minded Sultans Selim III, Mahmud II, and Abdulmecid I.³⁶ These two explanations are a highly simplified overview of this complex intellectual conundrum, but are important because Tudor England faced many of the same questions under Elizabeth I.

British views of Muslims and the Ottoman Empire came from both a standpoint of historical religious animosity as well as a standpoint of awe and envy. The strength of the Ottoman Empire truly was the source of a crisis of confidence in England—and the rest of Western Europe for that matter.³⁷ Perhaps the most read scholarly work on the Levant of the early seventeenth century was Richard Knolles' *A Generall Historie of the Turkes*, although the label of scholarly is certainly debatable considering he never left

³⁴ Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1798-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 42.

³⁵ Caroline Finkel, *Osman's Dream: The History of the Ottoman Empire 1300-1923* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 370.

³⁶ Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1991), 263.

³⁷ Linda Colley, *Captives* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), 110.

England.³⁸ Nevertheless, this work highlights the very real power of, and the perceived threat posed by, the Ottomans with its opening line that reads, “the glorious Empire of the Turks, the present Terror of the World.”³⁹ It was clear to the English at the turn of the seventeenth century that the Ottoman Empire was in an overwhelming position of power relative to their small archipelago, and that the military threat posed by the Ottomans to Europe was real. Like the Ottomans and Arabs of the nineteenth century, Britons, too, looked for ways to explain their obvious weakness, and their answers were remarkably similar to those of Muslims in the nineteenth century. First, there was the assumption that British culture and Protestant Christianity were superior to that of the Ottomans and to Islam, despite England’s obvious weakness.⁴⁰ By accepting that, then the reason for their weakness compared to the godless Muslims was their own deviation from their core Christian values. The losses experienced by Catholic Europe at the hands of the Ottomans were punishment for their impiety, a sentiment especially appealing to the newly Protestant British looking for ways to discredit Catholic Europe.⁴¹ Second, the relatively weak position of Western Christendom in relation to Islam caused many theologians to dedicate their lives to a greater understanding of the Bible with a concomitant devotion to studying the languages of biblical times, primarily Hebrew, but also Arabic.⁴² This quest to unlock the secrets of Christianity was a driving force behind

³⁸ Samuel Chew, *The Crescent and the Rose: Islam and England During the Renaissance* (New York: Octagon Books Inc., 1965), 111.

³⁹ Richard Knolles, *The Generall Historie of the Turkes* (London: Adam Islip, 1610), 1.

⁴⁰ Linda Colley, *Captives* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), 10. Also see Daniel Vitkus: “The Traveler’s Religion: Travel, Trade and Conversion in Early Modern English Culture,” in *Remapping the Mediterranean World in Early Modern English Writings*, ed. Goran V. Stanivukovic (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 52.

⁴¹ Gerald MacLean, *Looking East: English Writing and the Ottoman Empire Before 1800* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 4.

⁴² Ian Richard Netton, “The Mysteries of Islam,” in *Exoticism in the Enlightenment*, ed. G.S. Rousseau and Roy Porter (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 24.

many of the early students of Islamic cultures and the Arabic language.⁴³ This certainly was a driving force behind the work and study of men like Edward Pococke and other chaplains of the Levant Company. These scholars and clergymen make up the core of those who experienced Islam and the Ottoman Empire through Matar's "doctrinal venue."⁴⁴

It is those who contributed to the second "secular venue" who are of greater importance to the subject at hand. Much as the Ottoman world of the nineteenth century focused on catching up with Europe regarding military technology and economic success, the answer for many British of the early seventeenth century for how to grow Britain's influence, worldwide and in the eastern Mediterranean, was to focus on trade, diplomacy, and military technology. Being relatively weak diplomatically and militarily, focus on commercial growth was their only option for increased prestige outside of the Americas, which they began to colonize shortly after the Levant Company was established in 1584, when Sir Walter Raleigh set out to establish the first British settlement in Roanoke, Virginia.⁴⁵

As an aside, the tie between England's initial foray into the Levant and the founding of its first colonies in the Americas is more than incidental. It is indicative of the small island nation taking its first steps toward becoming a world power, a world power unique in modern history to that point, a world power based on commercialism and trade not on territorial gain, although that would come as well in later centuries. The changing nature of Britain's power relative to the Ottoman Empire mirrored Britain's rise

⁴³ Christine Laidlaw, *The British in the Levant: Trade and Perceptions of the Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2010), 220.

⁴⁴ Nabil Matar, *Islam in Britain: 1558-1665* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 185.

⁴⁵ Nabil Matar, *Turks, Moors and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), x.

as a dominant world power in the Americas and Europe. It was a progression that culminated in the English, and European, discursive and military domination of the Ottoman world, but it did not happen overnight.

It is clear that the Ottomans began the early modern period in a position of strength, cultural confidence, and military superiority that, over time, was reversed. Importantly, while in hindsight it may have been apparent that Ottoman power was waning after the final Ottoman withdrawal from Vienna in 1683, this was not readily apparent to European observers. As G.S. Rousseau writes in *Exoticism in the Enlightenment*, “arguably...there was a moment of equilibrium in the eighteenth century. Europe and Asia were still finely balanced; the West was not yet exercising assured imperial sway over the great empires of the East.”⁴⁶ It was probably not until the Ottoman defeat in the Russo-Ottoman War in 1774 or, if not then, certainly by Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt in 1798, that it was clear to contemporaries that the power dynamic had decisively shifted.⁴⁷

To further British troubles, during most of the seventeenth century, Britain was also weak relative to its European neighbors, and the other European powers were a hindrance to the expansion of British trade in the Ottoman Empire.⁴⁸ Neither was religious antipathy reserved for the Muslim Ottomans. The English were at war with Catholicism as well after Elizabeth’s excommunication in 1570, and there was plenty of

⁴⁶ G.S. Rousseau and Roy Porter, ed, *Exoticism in the Enlightenment* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1990), 14.

⁴⁷ Exactly when it was obvious to Europeans that the Ottoman Empire had been eclipsed is impossible to know, but the Ottoman defeat in the first Russo-Ottoman War in 1774 certainly highlighted the shift in power to Europe. The importance of this loss is surveyed well in Caroline Finkel’s *Osman’s Dream: The Story of the Ottoman Empire 1300-1923* (New York: Basic Books, 2005).

⁴⁸ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 79.

anti-Catholic religious polemic among the English.⁴⁹ This was no small issue, as the mutual position of being opposed, at least rhetorically, to the Catholic Church was a bridge between the Ottoman Sultan Murad II and Elizabeth I when Elizabeth determined that she would pursue an official trade relationship with a formal capitulation.⁵⁰

Recognizing the mutual benefit that direct trade with the British could bring in the way of tin, broadcloth, and other material useful to him in his war against Habsburg Austria, and in part aided by England's break with Catholicism as represented by the Pope and the Habsburg Holy Roman Empire, the Ottomans welcomed British trade in their realm despite French and Venetian protest.⁵¹

The English were in a position of weakness on all fronts and, while this weakness was a source of embarrassment for the British just beginning to acquire colonial ambition, it was a reality. Those who experienced the Ottoman Empire through the "secular venue," being less contaminated by ideological prejudice, were thus more open to developing alternative views on Levantine and Ottoman culture. Just as many of the modernizers in the nineteenth-century Levant developed admiration for the technological and administrative talents of the Europeans, so too did the British develop true admiration for the strengths of the Ottomans. It was, however, a jealous admiration.⁵² Gerald MacLean terms the concept "imperial envy" in *Looking East: English Writing in the*

⁴⁹ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 22-23.

⁵⁰ Richard Hakluyt, "The Answer of her Majestie to the Aforesaid Letters of the Great Turke, sent the 25 of October 1579, in the Prudence of London by Master Richard Stanley," in *Principal Navigations Voyages Traffiques & Discoveries of the English Nation*, Vol 3 (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Limited, 1927), 54.

⁵¹ Gerald MacLean and Nabil Matar, *Britain and the Islamic World 1558-1715* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, E-book Kindle Edition), Location 1510-1520.

⁵² Naji Queijan, *A Compendium of Eastern Elements in Lord Byron's Oriental Tales* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 36.

Ottoman Empire Before 1800.⁵³ Therefore, while the British subjects experiencing the Ottoman world for the first time likely believed Britain was an exceptional nation, it was difficult for them to reconcile their belief in their own greatness with the obvious splendor and progress of the Ottomans. Therefore, it is understandable that there would develop in England a confusing mix of emotions regarding the Levant. True, there was fear, lust for the perceived exotic, religious antagonism, and a belief in their own cultural superiority.⁵⁴ On the other hand, there was true admiration—although the more accurate term might be envy—and respect for Ottoman might because, while in hindsight it is easy to say that the Ottomans were in decline after their defeat at Lepanto in 1571, to contemporaries they were still heir to a proud and powerful empire.⁵⁵

⁵³ Gerald MacLean, *Looking East: English Writing and the Ottoman Empire Before 1800* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 20.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Jack Breeching, *The Galleys of Lepanto* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1983), 229. While Lepanto was a loss, sixteenth-century Europeans did not recognize its full significance immediately, even while celebrating it widely. After all, also in 1571 the Ottomans had conquered Cyprus from Venice and by May 1572, just seven months after Lepanto, they had built more than one hundred new galleys to replace many of those lost in the battle. Certainly, the Ottomans did not consider themselves to be in decline. Exercising some bravado, Sultan Selim II said, "When the Venetians sank my fleet they only singed my beard. But when I captured Cyprus I cut off one of their arms."

Chapter II: How the British Experienced Islam and the “Turk”

As this study deals with the cultural impact of the British who travelled to the Ottoman Empire as a part of the British Levant Company on Britain’s relationship with the Ottoman Empire and Islam it is necessarily important to survey what has been written about this relationship. What are the themes? What beliefs did Britons hold regarding Islam and the Ottoman Empire in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century and where did these attitudes come from? What did Britons know of the Levant, and through what media did they gain this knowledge, however inaccurate and biased they might have been?

As a prelude, it is not original to say that there were genuine and real encounters between the Muslims of the Ottoman Empire and the British. It will be apparent that several authors surveyed here, and plenty more, make this assertion convincingly, differing primarily over how prevalent the more positive discourses on the Levant were, what the sources of these discourses were, and just how plural and tolerant English thought toward Islam and the Ottoman Empire was. This study agrees with their contentions, especially that it was in the realm of secular pursuits like trade that many such encounters occurred.

Regarding England’s relationship to Islam before Britain’s rise to dominance, Samuel Chew’s *The Crescent and the Rose: Islam and England during the Renaissance* is generally accepted to be the foundational work on the subject. Written in 1937, for decades it was the only major work that examined Britain’s relationship with Islam. That it remains salient is a testament to its breadth and detail even though *The Crescent and the Rose* does not comment, specifically, on the cultural implications of the many ways in

which Britain encountered Islam. However, some of those implications can be gleaned from his work because what Chew does brilliantly is survey, in great detail, the many interactions that did occur between Britain and the Islamic world as well as the media that facilitated that interaction. His study is all encompassing, starting with the tales of the Crusaders and the pilgrims, progressing to the experiences of travelers and traders, and examining the works of the Renaissance authors and playwrights. From that detailed analysis he has some insights that are taken up by later historians.

Writing during the height of European domination of the former Ottoman world, Chew warns the reader about the dangers of projecting British power to the period before the eighteenth century or looking at the Battle of Lepanto as an obvious sign of Ottoman decay, saying that “[t]o contemporaries, however, and the generation that followed, Lepanto appeared to be but a temporary repulse of the Ottoman onset.”⁵⁶ It is also clear that Chew believes that the English were quite aware of the Islamic, that is to say Ottoman, world at the turn of the seventeenth century. He believes that there was common awareness of Ottoman history, albeit one in which Islam and the Ottoman Empire are quite menacing, one heavily influenced by polemic and dramatic portrayal saying “it appears that a man of average education and intelligence had in mind the conquests of Tamburlaine and his humiliation of Sultan Bajezet...the fall of Constantinople...the alternatively advancing and retreating tides of Turkish forces...the victory of Lepanto,” and dozens of other important events.⁵⁷ Chew also comments on the unease and alarm felt by the English about the power of the Ottoman Empire, even as they began to engage with it economically and culturally, and on the many interactions

⁵⁶ Samuel Chew, *The Crescent and the Rose: Islam and England During the Renaissance* (New York: Octagon Books Inc., 1965), 100.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 103-104.

between the two worlds that were real and meaningful. Without it being a focus, Chew makes it apparent that there was a plurality of attitudes about the Ottoman Empire, and Islam, in Renaissance England, and that they came from many sources both real and imagined, including the tales of pilgrims, travelers, and traders, but also scholars, theologians, artists and dramatists who never left the British Isles. These are themes that John M. MacKenzie resurrects in his response to *Orientalism* aptly titled *Orientalism: History, Theory, and the Arts*.

MacKenzie leads a group of scholars who approach the relationship between Islam and Britain from the standpoint of the arts. His comprehensive study examines literature, drama, architecture, art, and music as a window into the ways that Islam influenced Britons in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is true that he focuses on a later period than this study, but his insights are nonetheless relevant. He argues that even during this later time, by stepping away from the art and literature of the elite, there was a “multiplicity of voices, differentiated by gender, ideology and religious standpoint.”⁵⁸ For MacKenzie, there were always multiple voices, and there was always a give and take between the British and the East when it came to cultural perceptions as seen through the arts. In fact, far from trying to steel themselves against the corrupting influence of Eastern cultures for the purpose of preserving their Britishness, artists of all kinds “sought contamination at every turn” from the East as a way of progressing their art.⁵⁹ For MacKenzie, regardless of the power dynamic, traffic between two cultures can never be one way. For him, “Orientalism was endlessly protean, as often consumed by

⁵⁸ John MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History Theory and the Arts* (London: Manchester University Press, 1995), 21.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 209.

admiration and reverence as by denigration and deprecation.”⁶⁰ This is important as A.C. Wood and other early historians of the Levant Company tried to argue that the members of the Levant Company successfully avoided cultural contamination from the Ottoman Empire, that they walled themselves off from the world around them.⁶¹ MacKenzie is correct in arguing that such isolation would be very difficult.

However, the analysis of Britain’s attitudes about the East cannot end with art, literature, and drama, and several scholars have taken the mantle from MacKenzie and Chew and expanded the scope to include the multitude of other interactions between Islam and Britain that served to shape the discourse and British identity. Therefore, with MacKenzie and Chew as a starting point, perhaps the best way to approach such a large topic is to establish the first literary evidence of a discourse about Islam in England. In *Saracens and the Making of English Identity: The Auchinleck Manuscript*, Siobhain Calkin finds literary reference to Islam, in the form of the “Saracen,” in the Auchinleck Manuscript, one of the oldest existing documents in the English language. She argues that the images of the “Saracen” found there served a purpose of helping to create an English identity in medieval England by serving as an example of what Englishmen were not.⁶²

An interesting but important corollary question that bears on this study, then, is whether or not an English national identity existed centuries before the explosion of nationalism in the rest of Europe. Calkin believes that there was at least some English

⁶⁰ John MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History Theory and the Arts* (London: Manchester University Press, 1995), 215.

⁶¹ Alfred C. Wood, *A History of the Levant Company* (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1964), 235-236. Also Alexander Russell, *The Natural History of Aleppo and Parts Adjacent*, Vol II (London: Gregg Publishing, 1969), 226.

⁶² Siobhain Bly Calkin, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity: The Auchinleck Manuscript* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 12.

national identity as early as the 1340s, when it is believed that the Auchinleck Manuscript was written, and that fostering this identity—in part through the use of “Saracen” imagery—was a primary purpose of the document.⁶³

Further, according to Calkin the genesis of the two ways of thinking about Islam highlighted in the study were established by then as well, as she argues that there were two basic depictions of the “Saracen” found in the manuscript, the romantic and the religious, both serving a clear purpose regarding English identity, with the romantic being something worthy of emulation, and the religious being something to collectively fight against.⁶⁴

There is a connection between the development of the English national identity and how later generations of Briton’s experienced Islam. Based on Calkin’s position, by the time of Elizabeth I the English had defined themselves as members of a cohesive nation for more than two centuries. This is something the Levant Company records and correspondences support, with the nationhood of England being spoken of frequently.⁶⁵ Correspondingly, it is also clear that notions about Islam were also entrenched by centuries of iteration by the end of the sixteenth century, and were intertwined with how the English defined themselves.⁶⁶ This contributed to the interesting combination of

⁶³ Siobhain Bly Calkin, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity: The Auchinleck Manuscript* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 12.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶⁵ TNA SP 110/72, f. 2, p. 94. In this example, a letter written on 28 May 1742 to the consul at the Aleppo from the ambassador in Istanbul is addressed to “the Consul of the Nation, Aleppo.” In a Letter dated 23 August 1756, a factor wrote of his dismay “to see our nation so very complacent to the French and to the Turks.” TNA SP 110/74.

⁶⁶ The role-played by Islam in helping to forge the British sense of Nation, its sense of “self,” is a common theme found in numerous studies concerning Britain’s relationship with Islam, especially after *Orientalism* was published. However, while it is a fascinating topic, with many wonderful works that cover the topic, it is not covered in depth here because it has limited relevance to this study.

great national pride juxtaposed to its “imperial envy” regarding the Ottoman Empire.⁶⁷ At the time the Levant Company was founded, the English were proud of their heritage and culture but were sensitive about their current place in the world order.

This concept of “imperial envy” is a central concept in MacLean’s *Looking East: English Writing and the Ottoman Empire Before 1800*. For him, the Ottoman and Islamic impact on English life was both pervasive and complex, and it was shaped by more than just the personal interactions with Muslims, highlighted earlier, that were increasing by the end of the sixteenth century. As a result of the explosion of trade, something that the Levant Company would obviously have been heavily involved with, Britons developed an insatiable desire for Turkish rugs, silk, currants, and other luxury items that became commonplace in England.⁶⁸ Wearing “Turkish” clothing and even turbans became fashionable, and the coffee house, one of the great cultural artifacts of Britain from the mid-seventeenth century onward, was a transplant from the Ottoman Empire.⁶⁹ So, while “during the course of the seventeenth century...hostile fears continued to be spread about, they became absorbed into and mitigated by a broader fascination with elements of Ottoman culture, and the English increasingly conceived of themselves and their own nation in terms that drew upon comparisons, contrasts and relationships with the great Muslim empire.”⁷⁰ For MacLean, one of the causative factors for British growth over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was, without doubt, Britain’s multifaceted interaction with the Ottoman Empire.

⁶⁷ Gerald MacLean, *Looking East: English Writing and the Ottoman Empire Before 1800* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 20.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 58-59.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

MacLean's study also highlights that the pragmatic nature of Britain's relationship with Islam and the Ottoman Empire was critical to the dynamic exchange between the cultures that occurred. For him "[i]nterest in Islam was invariably opportunistic."⁷¹ By this, he means that the British, from the end of the sixteenth century, were more than willing to use Islam as a way of solidifying their own national identity as well as undermining England's Catholic enemies. The English were ready to move past ideology as long as the Ottoman Empire continued to provide opportunities to further their progress. In the time of Elizabeth I, developing a strong relationship with the Ottoman Empire was a way of countering the threat of Catholic Europe after her excommunication, and during the English Civil Wars, "the Ottoman Empire offered the model of a religious state that would have pre-empted the possibility of sectarian uprisings by its multi-cultural tolerance."⁷² In other words, while never leaving behind their animus towards the terrible "Turk" the British were more concerned with how the relationship with the Ottomans could help them.

It is argued here that this pragmatism was obviously present in the mindset of the Britons who experienced the Ottoman Empire as part of the Levant Company. Further, as MacLean argues, the British relationship with Islam was a rapidly changing set of contradictions. The members of the Levant Company, like their countrymen, would have held both disapproving notions of licentiousness and barbarism, overlaid with fantasy and lust, in seeming opposition to clear admiration and envy for Ottoman might, wealth, and cultural dominance. He argues that

⁷¹ Gerald MacLean, *Looking East: English Writing and the Ottoman Empire Before 1800* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 14.

⁷² *Ibid.*

the English regarded the Ottomans from a positions of relative weakness. Their view took shape within a series of contradictions...varying from fantasies about ‘Turks’ wanting to be English, to admiration for specific features of the great empire: its power, potency, military might, opulence and wealth.⁷³

Perhaps the most cited scholar on the topic of the relationship between Islam, the Ottoman Empire, and the British is Nabil Matar. Covering his many studies on the topic would be impossible but there is one very important concept that he highlights that is critical to understanding the world in which the Levant Company operated. Matar is very keen on preventing the post-colonial discourse from twisting the reality of the relationship between the Ottoman Empire and Britain during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He believes that Britain’s position of weakness relative to the Ottoman Empire during that period is often overlooked because of how Britain dominated the Muslim world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁷⁴ For him, the power of the Ottomans, and their threat to the British, were very real and should not be discounted.

This real threat posed by the Muslim peoples of the Mediterranean is a significant theme in Matar’s *Islam in Britain: 1558-1685*. While Matar agrees that the generally offensive tone to British dealings with the Levant remained, even among Britons experiencing the East through the “secular venue,” many of those perceptions came from direct encounters and were not just based on unfounded historical bias.⁷⁵ Since many interactions with the “Turks” were real, it is easier to understand that, from their perspective, the threat posed to the English by the Ottomans and Islam was also not entirely fabricated. True, the greatest threat to the English came from North African

⁷³ Gerald MacLean, *Looking East: English Writing and the Ottoman Empire Before 1800* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 20.

⁷⁴ Nabil Matar, *Islam in Britain: 1558-1665* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 11-12.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 185.

Barbary in the way of piracy, but he argues that it has to be understood that the English did not differentiate Turk from Moor, or Turk and Moor from Muslim, as an unfortunate byproduct of Ottoman strength was that any and all Muslims were considered “Turks.”⁷⁶ Therefore, the English often condemned the Ottomans for the actions of the Barbary pirates over whom they had minimal control, and those actions erroneously colored British opinion on all Muslims.

Thus, he argues that there was reason for concern, however misdirected. While not sanctioned by the Ottoman government, there was a direct threat to England from the Muslims of North Africa. Matar demonstrates that thousands of Britons were taken captive and forced into slavery.⁷⁷ To add to the concern over these abductions, being made a slave often involved conversion to Islam because, while it was not common practice to force conversion to Islam it was not easily avoided if one desired to gain freedom, as the only way out of slavery was often conversion.⁷⁸

The impact of this threat was significant. Piracy associated with the “Turks” was a constant threat through much of the early seventeenth century with men, women, and children being captured.⁷⁹ These were indeed real and direct encounters, and the public was very aware of the problem, and in the powerlessness of their position. To demonstrate the awareness of Englishmen, he cites two examples, one in 1584 and another in 1624, when family members of captured Englishmen held public money

⁷⁶ Alexander Russell also argues that “Turk” meant any Muslim. See Alexander Russell, *The Natural History of Aleppo and Parts Adjacent*, Vol II (London: Gregg Publishing, 1969), 158.

⁷⁷ Nabil Matar, *Islam in Britain: 1558-1665* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1. This was also likely important to the merchants of the Levant Company as most of these captives were sailors and traders taken on the Mediterranean.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 2. Forced conversion was not, and is not, allowed under Islamic law, although evidently freedom from slavery was a strong enough incentive for many Europeans to convert voluntarily.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

collections to free English captives.⁸⁰ Further, the threat made it to the island, with the coastal towns of Cornwall and Baltimore being attacked by Muslim pirates at the turn of the century.⁸¹

The British historian Linda Colley, who is well known for her work on how the English nation developed, confirms the importance of captives on English psyche during this period. Her estimates are even greater, arguing that

[b]etween 1600 and the early 1640s, corsairs operating from these North African territories seized more than 800 English, Scottish, Welsh, and Irish trading vessels in the Mediterranean and Atlantic...Some 12,000 English subjects may have been captured over these decades...between 1660 and the 1730s, at least another 6000 Britons fell foul of the Barbary corsairs.⁸²

Unsurprisingly, this contributed to feelings of hostility and fear concerning Islam, but it also contributed to the feelings of insecurity, and an awareness of England's small size and relative weakness. Further, at nearly sixty pounds per captive to redeem them, and with the churches, particularly the Church of England, left to raise most of the money, there was an obvious utility to sensationalizing the threat of Islam as a way to fundraise.⁸³ Further, she argues that, "[b]ecause of how they were organized, virtually every man, woman, and child in Britain and Ireland, within reach of some kind of church, was exposed to arguments, assertions and rudimentary information about Muslim North Africa, the Ottoman Empire more generally, and commercial and naval activity in the Mediterranean."⁸⁴ As Colley confirms the fear of captivity at the hands of Muslim pirates was widespread, real—albeit overblown—and it had a profound effect on a fragile, but proud, national psyche. She argues that any condescension in English

⁸⁰ Nabil Matar, *Islam in Britain: 1558-1665* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 6.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁸² Linda Colley, *Captives* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), 44.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 75-76.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 76.

literature and drama should be evaluated in this light, as they were the only settings where England could challenge the current Islamic powers, the Ottoman Empire being the greatest.⁸⁵

Therefore, the negative vision of Islam that persisted despite the many favorable interactions that occurred over the course of the seventeenth century was sustained by a real fear. Even if the chances of being captured, or converting to Islam, were never terribly high, the widespread perception in England held that it was, and perception is very powerful. The negative polemic about the Ottomans that continued through to the twentieth century had its genesis in this awareness of very real dangers, concerns, and insecurities.

Still, in spite of the power of the established stereotypes, and the real fear of the “Turk” highlighted above, in her 1992 book *Women’s Orients: English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918*, Billie Melman argues—in line with MacKenzie and others—that “in the eighteenth century there emerged an alternative view of the Orient which developed, during the nineteenth century, alongside the dominant one.”⁸⁶ In particular, she examines how British women contributed to this alternative view. Importantly, she examines how female travelers like Lady Mary Wortley Montagu countered established views of Islam and the Middle East, particularly the unfavorable stereotypes of the harem and Ottoman treatment of women. Further, she examines how these stereotypes contributed to fears of Englishmen “turning Turk.”⁸⁷ As Melman argues, portraying the

⁸⁵ Linda Colley, *Captives* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), 66.

⁸⁶ Billie Melman, *Women’s Orients: English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 7.

⁸⁷ Generally speaking, the concept of “Turning Turk” was, by the Elizabethan era, the common way of saying that a Christian had converted to Islam. See Jonathan Burton, *Traffic and Turning: Islam and English Drama, 1579-1624* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Press), 18.

harem in an immoral light was a major component of European and British attempts to undermine the undeniable attraction of Islam and the Ottoman Empire in literature, drama, and evangelical polemic. As a result of the power of the Ottoman Empire, its tolerance of different populations, and assumed exoticism, Islam and the Ottoman Empire were a truly attractive and viable alternative to Western Christianity.⁸⁸ Exaggerated tales of the East were, therefore, at least partially a defense mechanism intended to combat the allure of Islam. Britons afraid of their compatriots voluntarily converting to Islam had to demonize Muslims or, they feared, the irresistible force of Islam would spread, voluntarily, through their land.⁸⁹

What is missing among these studies of Britain's relationship with Islam and the Ottoman Empire is the specific analysis of how traders of the Levant Company were involved. Virtually all of these authors address the role of trade in bringing the two cultures together, and even briefly examine the Levant Company. For example, Matar and MacLean's joint study *Britain and the Islamic World, 1558-1715* does delve into the role of trade in defining the Britain's relations with the Ottoman world but it does not specifically address what experiences concerning Ottoman religion and culture the Levant Company traders had, the ways their experience was transmitted, and does not make the connection between the Levant Company and the impressions developed by travelers and spouses not employed by the Company but caught in its sphere of influence like Lady Mary and the doctors Alexander and Patrick Russell. The older histories of the Levant Company, A.C. Wood's *A History of the Levant Company*, Mortimer Epstein's *The Early History of the Levant Company*, and Ralph Davis' *Aleppo and Devonshire*

⁸⁸ Billie Melman, *Women's Orient: English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 61.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Square, while detailed concerning company organization, politics, and the nuances of Levantine trade, are scant in analysis of cultural contribution and interaction.

Two recent studies on the Levant Company do address cultural interaction, but still not to an adequate degree. James Mather's 2009 study *Pashas: Traders and Travellers in the Islamic World* addresses the cultural exchange between Levant Company personnel and Ottomans, but the references are in passing, and not done in great detail, as his focus is on economic consequences of trade.⁹⁰ The most detailed, and perhaps the only, study of the Levant Company's impact on perceptions of the Ottoman Empire is Christine Laidlaw's 2010 book *The British in the Levant: Trade and Perceptions of the Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth Century*. This book does involve analysis of certain members' interaction with local Ottomans, and posits that, "with the many thousands of individuals who served the company" the Levant Company's members could not have failed to impact perceptions of the Ottoman Empire, saying that they "paved the way for the increased political interest in the Ottoman Empire of the nineteenth century."⁹¹ Despite these statements, the book is focused more on the interactions between members of the Company, and the dynamics and organization of the trading communities they established, than their interactions with local Ottomans. Further, when she does cover cultural exchange, she focuses on how close personal relationships between members of the Levant Company and the Ottomans introduced them to alternative views on Islam and the "Turk," but does not focus on what some of those alternative ideas were, or how they served to counter established opinion.

⁹⁰ James Mather, *Pashas: Traders and Travellers in the Islamic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 8-10.

⁹¹ Christine Laidlaw, *The British in the Levant: Trade and Perceptions of the Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2010), 1.

Therefore, between the histories of Britain's general contact with the Ottoman Empire, and the histories of the Levant Company itself, there is room for study. The general studies on British relations with Islam like those of Matar and MacKenzie address the Levant Company, but only as a piece of a larger British discourse on the Levant. Further, the histories of the Levant Company are focused more on the structure of the Company, aspects of trade, and on the internal dynamics of the trading communities, than on the ideas that members of the Levant Company developed about the Ottoman people and communities of Istanbul, Aleppo, and Izmir.

The endeavor then is this: to place the Levant Company in its proper place as a source of cultural knowledge about the Ottoman Empire in the era before Britain became a dominant military power in the eastern Mediterranean. This was the era before the Ottoman defeat in the Russo-Turkish war in 1774 and subsequent treaty of Küçük Kaynarca illustrated how weak the empire had become relative to the European powers.⁹² It was an era when the Ottoman Empire held the upper hand—or was at least on an equal footing—in its dealings with the West.

⁹² Kahraman Sakul, "Küçük Kaynarca" in *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire*, Gabor Agoston and Bruce Masters, eds. (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2009), 317-318.

Chapter III: The Levant Company

In order to determine how, and why, the Levant Company made a substantial contribution to Britain's understanding of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Ottoman Levant, a brief history and outline of the company's structure are important here. As stated before, the Levant Company was founded in 1581 when Queen Elizabeth I gave Sir Edward Osbourne and Richard Staper the charter to form what was originally called the Company of Merchants of the Levant. In its original form it was a joint stock company, not unlike the British East India Company that splintered from the Levant Company in 1600, although as James Mather observes, they never "built forts, planted flags, [or] fired rifles and laid claim to patches of earth" as the East India Company did.⁹³ As a joint stock company members of the Levant Company pooled capital, thus sharing risk, but were also limited to only the authorized maximum of members granted by the charter. Additionally, the members of the company would have to share profits.⁹⁴

These perceived limitations of a joint stock company led the leaders of the company to change the nature of the company to a regulated company by the time its original charter expired in 1588.⁹⁵ Additionally, around the same time, during the renegotiation of the Charter that was re-signed in 1592, the Levant Company also merged with the Venice Company, giving the new company even greater scope, monopolizing trade to all of the Eastern Mediterranean.⁹⁶ These two events were significant for several reasons. The merger with the Venice Company, which also led to a change in the official

⁹³ James Mather, *Pashas: Traders and Travellers in the Islamic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 3.

⁹⁴ Mortimer Epstein, *The English Levant Company: Its Foundation and its History to 1640* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1968), 16.

⁹⁵ Alfred C. Wood, *A History of the Levant Company* (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc, 1964), 22.

⁹⁶ Epstein, 36.

title of the company to The Governor and Company of Merchants of England Trading to the Levant Seas, truly made the Levant Company the master of trade to the Eastern Mediterranean. As a regulated company, the Levant Company could expand its operations by allowing other merchants with the means to buy into the company if they agreed to abide by the terms and regulations set by the company, and were willing to pay an imposition on all imports and exports to the company for the purpose of funding its operation. Once a member, each factor was given an equal vote in the company, and in determining the company's regulations when the factors met for regular meetings called general courts.⁹⁷

These London-based factors, or principal factors as Ralph Davis calls them, would then send representatives to the factories in the Levant to run their business.⁹⁸ These factors made up the bulk of the overseas company community and, while representing their principal factor in London and receiving a commission on goods bought and sold on their principal's behalf, also traded in their own right when, or if, they acquired enough personal capital to do so, paying a certain percentage of their trade in consulage to the treasurer of their factory for the privilege of trading there.⁹⁹ As a regulated company, or a "regulatory body" as Laidlaw calls it, at every level the company truly consisted of individual merchants, trading independently with their own resources,

⁹⁷ Christine Laidlaw, *The British in the Levant: Trade and Perceptions of the Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2010), 30.

⁹⁸ To alleviate confusion, the factors in London will be referred to as principals, or principal factors, from here on to contrast them from the factors stationed abroad.

⁹⁹ Laidlaw, 30.

who paid for their right to trade in the Levant and had great independence as long as they abided by the common terms of the regulating body in London.¹⁰⁰

Another side effect of the regulated nature of the company involved the cost and risk of business, salient because it limited membership in the company to only wealthy, and thus influential, Britons. As a regulated company each of the merchants who joined the company would have to be of sufficient means not only to purchase their membership but also to provide shipping—and protection for that shipping—to and from the factories and port cities in the Levant, as well as provide enough capital to purchase, up-front, English broadcloth, tin, and other goods with which to trade for silk, currants, and other goods in the Levant.¹⁰¹ Further, they had to have the means to handle losses due to weather, piracy, war, or poor trade circumstance.¹⁰² Unlike members of joint-stock companies, the members of the Levant Company did not share these costs and liabilities after the company became a regulated company in the 1580s. In other words, members did not pool their resources. This was expensive and risky, especially before England's naval might began to develop later in the seventeenth century, and only merchants of significant wealth had access to the funds necessary. Fewer still were willing to take such risk. The reward for their risk was, for more than two hundred years, a very lucrative trade.

¹⁰⁰ The members of the communities in the Ottoman Empire were certainly expected to follow the edicts of the Levant Company. However, it is also clear based on a series of letters in TNA SP 110/23, that when certain edicts were unpopular they were often not followed. Also, see Mather, 127 and Wood, 214.

¹⁰¹ For a description of the specifics of trade, particularly the trade of broadcloth for silk, see Ralph Davis, *Aleppo to Devonshire Square: English Traders in the Levant in the Eighteenth Century* (London: MacMillan, 1967).

¹⁰² Ralph Davis, *Aleppo to Devonshire Square: English Traders in the Levant in the Eighteenth Century* (London: MacMillan, 1967), 11. James Mather, *Pashas: Traders and Travellers in the Islamic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 60.

It is worth mentioning an important aspect of the wealth and status enjoyed by Levant Company members. Apart from being wealthy, or perhaps because they were wealthy, these Britons were members of the highest levels of British society after the nobility.¹⁰³ They were members of the landed gentry, or aspiring members of the landed gentry. Importantly, they travelled in the most elite and influential cultural circles. Their presence would have been known in the coffee houses, at the exchanges of London, and other social gathering spaces of London, and their opinions and stories would have been heard.¹⁰⁴ This is critical because this would have been a primary way in which the ideas acquired by the Levant Company merchants about Islam and the Ottoman Empire would have been transmitted to British society as a whole. Regarding the Ottoman Middle East, as these men of the Levant Company made up the largest group of Britons who had lived amongst the Muslims of the Ottoman Empire for significant periods of time, one might imagine the great lure of their tales and the weight that their opinions would have had.

An important question regarding the company is whether or not the members of the Levant Company had a collective influence on perceptions of the Ottoman Empire developed by its members or whether their experience abroad was a purely individual endeavor unencumbered by any collective will or imposition from the Levant Company. In other words, how much did the organization, social structure, and regulation of the Levant Company affect the experience of the members of the company and those who, like Lady Mary and Dr. Alexander Russell, were in the Levant in support of it? If the

¹⁰³ Ralph Davis, *Aleppo to Devonshire Square: English Traders in the Levant in the Eighteenth Century* (London: MacMillan, 1967), 73. James Mather goes as far as to say that the “Turkey Merchants formed the most opulent and respected body of men in the city [London].” Mather, 53.

¹⁰⁴ Roger North, *The Lives of the Norths*, Vol. II, ed. Augustus Jessopp (London: Gregg International Publishers Limited, 1969), 176. As an example, it is well known that Dudley North was a prominent social figure in London after his return from the Ottoman Empire and frequented several London coffee houses.

company had little oversight, and the social structure of company communities were not influential, then it would be more likely that Britons would have experienced the Ottoman Empire primarily as individuals. However, it is clear from voluminous nature of the company records that the company was in regular correspondence with its overseas representatives, and was heavily involved in regulating not only trade but also the social lives and conduct of the overseas communities of Englishmen.¹⁰⁵

While there is only so much control these London factors could have had over the daily operations of the factories in the Levant from more than 2,000 miles away, it is very clear from the volumes upon volumes of correspondence between the company officials in London and the ambassador, consuls, and factors at Istanbul, Izmir, and Aleppo, Iskenderun, Cyprus, and anywhere else the company had a footprint, that the company in London was very much involved in the decision making of the company overseas, was involved in arbitrating disputes between merchants, and set the policies for both trade and the personal conduct of members of the company abroad.¹⁰⁶ The members of the company clearly corresponded frequently—even daily during times of heavy trade, war, or if a crisis arose between the company and Ottoman officials or locals. The governor, the court, and the principal factors in London regulated everything from the duty imposed on ships trading in the region to whether or not, and to whom, members of the company could marry while abroad.¹⁰⁷ This regular correspondence and tight control by the court in London is also significant because these regular correspondences with London were a

¹⁰⁵ TNA SP 105, TNA SP 110. The company's influence was quite detailed. In a letter to Mr. Eleazar Edwards of the Aleppo factory from the consul Jasper Shaw, found in TNA SP110/74, dated 10 June 1763, the consul gave Mr. Edwards instructions on how he was to have his wife dress when hosting guests.

¹⁰⁶ TNA SP 105/110, p. 49. This is an example of one of the hundreds of orders from the court of the company in London to the factory in Aleppo, dated 26 October 1610, with instructions on new trade regulations and behavior expected of them.

¹⁰⁷ TNA SP 110/23, p. 164.

direct way that ideas about the Levant could be transmitted, even if most of the correspondence was related to tedious details of trade. As Laidlaw points out, not all of the British serving in the Levant were necessarily there on behalf of the company, but they were present because of the Levant Company, and the company absolutely drove and regulated their activities.¹⁰⁸

The social structure of the factory communities was also important. Apart from simple correspondence and regulation, the communal nature of the Levant Company communities that existed in the cities of the Ottoman Empire would have exerted their own influence. These communities had an elaborate social structure, and provided the venue through which virtually all Britons experienced life in the cities of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁰⁹ Like any community, it can be assumed that they would have developed their own norms. Further, these men could not have spent ten years of their lives discussing nothing but the tedious nuances of trade. They lived together year round, in relatively confined spaces.¹¹⁰ They ate together, hunted together, rode horses together, and took excursions to the mountains in the summer to avoid the heat or the plague.¹¹¹ It is hard to imagine that they would not have developed collective views of the Ottomans with whom they traded. If one member of the company trusted a certain Ottoman merchant, it is reasonable to believe that this would have influenced his compatriots.

¹⁰⁸ Christine Laidlaw, *The British in the Levant: Trade and Perceptions of the Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2010), 4.

¹⁰⁹ James Mather, *Pashas: Traders and Travellers in the Islamic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 5. Russell also notes on the role of the *khan* as a place where travelers were hosted. See Alexander Russell, *The Natural History of Aleppo and Parts Adjacent*, Vol II (London: Gregg Publishing, 1969), 18-20.

¹¹⁰ Roger North, *The Lives of the Norths*, Vol. II, ed. Augustus Jessopp (London: Gregg International Publishers Limited, 1969), 38-39

¹¹¹ Mather, 74-78.

It has to be noted here that the desire of family members in England, the principal factors and the court of the company in London, the chaplains, and even the consuls, to enforce a quintessentially English existence in the factories, free from “contamination” of Muslim and Ottoman culture, could only have been moderately successful. It would be impossible for them to account for the desires, urges, and penchant for rebellion that undoubtedly would have been present among these communities of young men. As evidence, it is clear from the records of the company that there were certainly members of the company who ran afoul of Ottoman law for carousing in the local communities.¹¹²

Further, as Elyse Semerdjian has wonderfully argued, at least in Aleppo, there was a vibrant, and largely sanctioned, underground culture that included prostitution and the distilling of spirits.¹¹³ Not only were prostitution and the consumption of alcohol present in Aleppo, but it was also condoned to some degree by the customary practice of the law, or *urf*.¹¹⁴ While prostitution, as a *zina* crime, was obviously illegal, the traditionally harsh punishments for such crimes were bypassed in favor of light punishments that amounted to what Semerdjian calls “a slap on the wrist,” thus giving purveyors of these services a “green light.”¹¹⁵

What is important about her findings is that this underground culture catered to the high-level government officials and janissaries with whom the members of the Levant

¹¹² TNA SP 110/23, p. 154. This order from the court in London to the consul in Aleppo, its date illegible, provides an example of a factor who had to be recalled for “gaming, and drinking, he had so far intrigued himself with women, that it was not safe for him to stay longer.”

¹¹³ Elyse Semerdjian, “Sinful Professions: Illegal Occupations of Women in Ottoman Aleppo, Syria,” in *Hawwa* (Ingentaconnect.com, 2001), 62-63.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 83.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 63, 83. While this is a simplistic definition, *Zina* is the crime of a man and a woman having sexual intercourse outside of marriage. Traditionally, this was considered a capital offense, but in Aleppo there is not one documented case of capital punishment for prostitution, leading to Semerdjian’s conclusion that the *urf*, or the customary law, of Aleppo took precedence.

Company primarily interacted.¹¹⁶ As a result, it is highly likely that the members of the factory community would have been aware of its existence. Further, she argues that in other Muslim cities, her example being Safavid Isfahan, European merchant communities were known to frequent “red-light districts” which indicates that “the flesh trade may have catered to the international trading community,” and that these industries in Aleppo “would have benefited from the influx of foreign merchants.”¹¹⁷ Therefore it is safe to say that the members of the Levant Company’s factory communities, while appearing dull on the surface, were likely quite complex and vibrant.

Another important aspect of these communities is how they would have influenced the way in which knowledge about the Ottoman Empire was transmitted to other Britons, as British travelers and diplomats were hosted at the Levant Company factories and consular houses during their visits to the Ottoman Empire. For Britons travelling abroad, the world they experienced was the Levant Company’s world. As Mather notes, “no Briton voyaging in the Middle East could avoid being drawn into [the Levant Company’s] orbit. Even the emerging breed of travelers.”¹¹⁸ Therefore, even apart from the official attempts at regulation by the company in London, the influence of this community, its ideas about its host cities, and the pressure to be a part of the English community could not have failed to impact the experience of not only its members, but also other British travelers, family members like Lady Mary, and ancillary employees like Alexander Russell.

¹¹⁶ Elyse Semerdjian, *Off the Straight Path: Illicit Sex, Law, and Community in Ottoman Aleppo* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 48.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹¹⁸ James Mather, *Pashas: Traders and Travellers in the Islamic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 5.

After establishing that the Levant Company truly did influence the activities of most Britons operating in the Ottoman Empire, it is then important to recognize that the court of the company, and the principal factors, did not participate directly in the trade. That was left to the overseas factors—apprentices in all but name. These factors were generally young men either related to one of the principal factors, who were given their post in the company through the family connection, or members of wealthy or aristocratic families that could afford to purchase their apprenticeship with a principal of the company.¹¹⁹ These young men joined the company for many reasons. For many, as second or third sons, they would not inherit their family's title or property. For them, if they were skilled enough in trade, the Levant offered a way to make their fortune and establish themselves back in England with property and enough money to fund their own mercantile business, often becoming factors of the Levant Company themselves.¹²⁰ It also provided the opportunity to travel and experience Europe and the "East," as most of the factors spent time in European cities on the trip to and from England.¹²¹ The "grand tour" was emerging during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a rite of passage into manhood expected of upper-class Englishmen whereby they would travel abroad in order to complete their education.¹²² Whether it was as a "grand tour," or simply as a means for acquiring fortune, or both, the young merchants who ran the Levant

¹¹⁹ Ralph Davis, *Aleppo to Devonshire Square: English Traders in the Levant in the Eighteenth Century* (London: MacMillan, 1967), 66-73.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 66. According to Davis, two thirds of all the men who joined the Levant Company had served in a factory abroad beforehand, learning the skills of trade and acquiring the capital to allow entry into one of the trade houses.

¹²¹ Roger North, *The Lives of the Norths*, Vol. II, ed. Augustus Jessopp (London: Gregg International Publishers Limited, 1969), 8-30. Dudley North stayed in Leghorn, Pisa, and Florence, among other places, on his journey to Smyrna.

¹²² Michael G. Brennan, *The Origins of the Grand Tour: The Travels of Robert Montagu, Lord Mandeville (1649-1654), William Hammond (1655-1658), Banaster Maynard (1660-1663)* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 2004), 9.

Company's operations in the Mediterranean did so as a way of transitioning into adulthood. For most, it was a transitory and temporary phase, usually lasting between seven and ten years.¹²³

Whether through family connection to a company principal, or by purchase, the young men who entered into Levant trade initially spent two or three years working at English ports or the Royal Exchange in London where goods from the Levant were sold and English goods were purchased for sale in the Levant.¹²⁴ This time was their initial indoctrination into the business of trade. Once they were sufficiently schooled in the basics, they embarked for the Levant, where they served as the representatives of the company's principal factors. While serving there, they tracked incoming and outgoing shipments to and from England, tracked caravans coming from Mesopotamia, and bartered English broadcloth and other goods for silk and currants. If barter prices were not advantageous, or shipments of broadcloth were lost or delayed, they were sometimes forced to purchase silk directly, making a reserve of currency necessary, necessitating a large reserve of currency.¹²⁵

As Alexander Russell noted, during the peak trade seasons, when silk arrived from Persia and broadcloth arrived from England, they were extraordinarily busy. However, during the slow trading seasons, especially the summer, their "time was given over almost entirely to relaxation," as they had significant leisure time that was spent largely amongst their British comrades and other Europeans, but also working with locals

¹²³ Alfred C. Wood, *A History of the Levant Company* (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc, 1964), 247. The average tour abroad appears to have been around seven years. However, several members of the company including Dudley North and Nathaniel Harley, stayed decades with North staying nineteen years and Harley thirty-five.

¹²⁴ Roger North, *The Lives of the Norths*, Vol. II, ed. Augustus Jessopp (London: Gregg International Publishers Limited, 1969), 3-7.

¹²⁵ Ralph Davis, *Aleppo to Devonshire Square: English Traders in the Levant in the Eighteenth Century* (London: MacMillan, 1967), 35.

to plan for the upcoming trade season.¹²⁶ Therefore, even for those traders who wished to stay isolated, this was not always possible if they were to be successful in trade. The experiences that these young merchants had in dealing with local merchants, administrators, and officials is critical to the argument of this essay, that it was trade, and the professional nature of their time in Aleppo, that gave the factors and company employees a unique perspective on the Ottoman communities of the cities where they traded.

Therefore, while the Levant Company did attempt to keep their overseas representatives separated from local populations, and this was happily complied with by many of the factors abroad who had little desire to venture into the unknown of another culture, it is clear that even with the regulation of the court in London, which attempted to control the desires of the young men stationed abroad, control could only be so successful. As an example, a chaplain's log from the mid 1750s shows that it was not uncommon for factors and administrators of the Levant Company to marry during their time abroad.¹²⁷ Further, for those who did marry, it was not uncommon for them to stay for dozens of years, often until their death, creating some turmoil with the Porte if the Englishmen were married to an Ottoman subject, as happened with Samuel Pentlow, who married a Greek Christian and whose family's inheritance was denied to them after his death because he was determined to be an Ottoman subject by marriage.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ TNA SP 100/21, "Letter Dated 30 May, 1699."

¹²⁷ TNA SP 110/70.

¹²⁸ Roger North, *The Lives of the Norths*, Vol. II, ed. Augustus Jessopp (London: Gregg International Publishers Limited, 1969), 99-105. By order of the Grand Vizier, Kara Mustafa Pasha, Pentlow's marriage to an Ottoman subject made him an Ottoman subject as well. As an Ottoman Subject, his estate was divided according to Islamic Law despite the protestation of the English ambassador. In this case, at least according to North, Pentlow's entire estate was forfeit as the Ottoman government believed Pentlow had a considerably larger fortune than he actually had, and therefore demanded payment of more money than he was worth in taxes.

Company Organization

Apart from the merchants, the structure of the Levant Company, both geographically and organizationally, is also relevant. In return for the right to monopoly and regulation of Levantine trade one of the paramount duties of the Levant Company, and one of the primary reasons it was useful for the Crown to grant the company its charter, was its funding of diplomatic activity in the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, the most important company position was the ambassador at Istanbul. Again, it is important to establish, beyond simple financial responsibility, the connection between the ambassador, as the Crown's representative, and the Levant Company. To be sure, on occasion it was not easy for many of the ambassadors to reconcile the desires of their two masters. While they worked for the Crown, they maintained an obvious tie to the company that paid their salary. They were, truly, beholden both to the Crown and to the interests of the Levant Company and the company facilitated their diplomatic missions.¹²⁹ This remained so even after Charles I took the authority to appoint the ambassador away from the company in 1626.¹³⁰ Even then, the choice of ambassador was, with few exceptions, the result of a dialogue between the governor and general court of the company and the Crown whereby the Levant Company was consulted when the Crown

¹²⁹ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1869), 115. As an example of how the company facilitated the mission of the ambassador, when Lady Mary and her husband Edward traveled to Tunis they were housed and guided by the Levant Company's consul.

¹³⁰ TNA SP 105/109 contains a series of correspondence between the Foreign Secretary, who represented the monarchy, and the Levant Company discussing appointments of the ambassador as well as the prominent consul positions, with the Levant Company seeking approval for their consul appointments, and the Crown seeking approval for their ambassador appointments.

designated a new ambassador or recalled a current one.¹³¹ It was clear from the letters between the King's representatives and the company, and the appointment orders officially sanctioning ambassadors and consuls as representatives for the Crown, that there was a two-way dialogue over these appointments.¹³²

Further, the ambassador was responsible for the welfare of the British communities in the Ottoman Empire, both by mediating disputes with the Porte, by mediating disputes between merchants, and by ruling on grievances between merchants and company officials over fees.¹³³ It is clear from the company records that there was regular correspondence between the consuls around the Eastern Mediterranean and the ambassador at Istanbul, and that the ambassador was very clearly involved in the operation of the Levant Company, in addition to his responsibilities as the diplomatic representative of the Crown.¹³⁴ This should not be surprising as, during the seventeenth and most of the eighteenth century, trade was Britain's primary—really only—reason for contact with the Porte at all. This is the critical aspect of the Ambassador's relationship with the company. The Ambassador was the diplomatic representative of the Crown, but his purpose in dealing with the Porte was primarily related to protecting British commercial interests, the exclusive realm of the Levant Company. The *raison d'être* of the British ambassadors was, above all else, to preserve Britain's trading foothold in the Ottoman Empire by protecting the capitulations and maintaining amicable relations with the Porte. To highlight the primacy of trade for the ambassador, the letter of James Porter

¹³¹ TNA SP 105/109, p. 292, 336. These are examples of orders from the king's representative, one from July 1698 and the other from August 1729, discussing the decision to recall the current ambassadors and who the Crown wishes to replace them with.

¹³² TNA SP 105/109, p. 287, 292, 312.

¹³³ TNA SP 110/72, f. 1.

¹³⁴ TNA SP 105/103, p. 87, 92. These two letters from Sir Sackville Crowe, the ambassador, in 1639 show that he was quite involved in ensuring that all merchants were following procedure, even inquiring about cargoes, profits, and trade troubles.

to the Court of the Levant Company is a perfect example. Written upon his appointment to the ambassadorship in 1746 he wrote, “I pledge my life to the commerce of my country, and consequently to you, who as the constituent part, must make one of my principal objects...my support and assistance will at all times be ready for that end.”¹³⁵

While Istanbul was an important trade center, its primary significance to the Levant Company was diplomatic, as that is where the ambassador resided, but the factories at Izmir and Aleppo were the English trade centers in the Ottoman Empire. There were other smaller factories, at Cyprus, Iskenderun, Tripoli, and other port cities around the Levant, and these had honorary consuls who were appointed by the company, with the consent and backing of the ambassador, to represent Britain’s interests there.¹³⁶ However, the primary hubs of trade were Aleppo and Izmir, with Aleppo being the largest and most important as the nexus of the caravan routes—the silk roads—from Persia, Mesopotamia, Africa, and Asia.¹³⁷ The consuls in these cities were of greater importance, being elected by the general court in London, albeit with approval and oversight by the Crown and the ambassador.¹³⁸ The consuls at these factories held significant responsibility and were paid handsomely. They generally served three to five years but in some cases, particularly successful consuls might remain in the position for decades especially in the eighteenth century when it became common for consuls to bring their families with them.¹³⁹ The consul was also not a merchant, although often he came from among the ranks of the merchants who had traded at the city where they were

¹³⁵ TNA SP 110/72, f. 1, p. 100.

¹³⁶ TNA SP 105/109, p. 312.

¹³⁷ Christine Laidlaw, *The British in the Levant: Trade and Perceptions of the Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2010), 20. For a good overview of why these three cities were so critical for trade see Edhem Eldem, Daniel Goffman, and Bruce Masters, *The Ottoman City Between East and West: Aleppo, Izmir, and Istanbul* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 165.

appointed, and he served as the company's primary representative, ensuring order at the factories and implementing company regulations and policies both related to trade and social life at the factory.¹⁴⁰ Further, they were given appointments, or licenses of extraterritoriality, by the ambassador, through the Porte, and were expected to be his extension in protecting the Crown's interests and enforcing the terms of the capitulations.¹⁴¹ The consuls reported to both the ambassador and the general court of the company. More importantly for purposes here, they were the social and ceremonial leaders of the English communities and were expected to represent the English community to European travelers, Ottoman dignitaries, and members of their local trading communities.¹⁴² Therefore, the consuls had to negotiate with locals, meet with Ottoman administrators and Janissaries, and even present cases to Ottoman judges, *qadis*, when the capitulation did not cover a dispute.

While the factors, the ambassador, and the consuls were the most prominent members of the Levant Company, there were other salaried officials appointed by the court in London who rounded out the expatriate communities in the Levant. The chancellor, as a "notary and an archivist," kept the company's records and sent reports to Istanbul and London.¹⁴³ In the absence of the ambassador or consul, the chancellor would assume his duties. The Treasurer, generally chosen from among the factors at a given factory, was responsible for the company's finances. Finally, at the larger

¹⁴⁰ One of the roles of the consul was to ensure none of his subjects embraced the Muslim faith. See Sir Harry Luke, *Cyprus Under the Turks, 1571-1878* (London: C. Hurst and Company, 1969), 100. As a means of enforcement, the consul had the power to fine factory members or even have them ordered home in severe cases. See Bruce Masters, *The Origins of Western Economic Dominance of the Middle East: Mercantilism and the Islamic Economy in Aleppo, 1600-1750* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 78.

¹⁴¹ TNA SP 110/87, "Letter dated 8 July 1766." SP 105/109, p 312.

¹⁴² Christine Laidlaw, *The British in the Levant: Trade and Perceptions of the Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2010), 32.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

factories, a chaplain was generally provided and paid by the company in order to provide for the spiritual wellbeing of the factors and company employees, as well as to ensure, to whatever extent was possible, that the moral standards expected of British gentlemen were upheld.¹⁴⁴

There were two other groups of Britons that were associated with the Levant Company and present in the English communities of the Eastern Mediterranean that are of great significance to the evolving attitudes about Islam, the Ottomans, and the Arabs: the physicians and the family members. They were not employed by the Levant Company, and they were not factors, but they were part of its encompassing influence and footprint and fell under its regulations and codes of conduct.

The physicians were significant regarding attitudes about the Ottoman Empire and Islam primarily because they were sometimes granted a unique window into Ottoman life in their capacity as doctors. For example, Alexander and Patrick Russell often helped members of the local population, including women, during times of sickness or plague, learned Arabic, and had large amounts of leisure time to mingle and observe their surroundings.¹⁴⁵ They contributed greatly to the emerging plurality of knowledge and views on the Levant through their famous book *The Natural History of Aleppo and Parts Adjacent*, which Alexander published in 1756 and his brother Patrick updated in 1794.

¹⁴⁴ James Mather, *Pashas: Traders and Travellers in the Islamic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 84. Several of the chaplains became well-known “experts” on Islam, Arabic, and the Levant including Edward Pococke, who became the first chair of Arabic and Hebrew studies at Oxford, and Henry Maundrell who wrote *Journey From Aleppo to Jerusalem*, an influential travel account. It should not be surprising that the chaplains were also likely to be critical of Islam and the “Turks,” although the chaplain Robert Frampton, who was in Aleppo from 1655 to 1666, became close with the *qadi* there and wrote positive accounts that betrayed a grudging admiration for some aspects of Ottoman life. See Thomas Simpson Evans, *The Life of Robert Frampton, Bishop of Gloucester: Deprived as a Non-Juror* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1876), 51-52.

¹⁴⁵ Alexander Russell, *The Natural History of Aleppo and Parts Adjacent*, Vol II (London: Gregg Publishing, 1969), 245-249.

Regarding family members, it was generally frowned upon for factors and employees to bring families with them, although in the company's later years it happened, and a chaplain's log found in the company records indicates that it was not uncommon for factors to marry while in Aleppo, as long as they were not Ottoman or Muslim.¹⁴⁶ However, for the consuls, and especially the ambassadors, family accompaniment was not uncommon. These women, if so inclined, were able to gain a unique perspective on the culture of the cities where their husbands were posted. The most influential Levant Company family member was undoubtedly Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, who accompanied her husband Edward Wortley Montagu during his brief tenure as the ambassador from 1716 to 1718. She is widely regarded as the first Briton, and likely the first non-Ottoman European, to experience the Ottoman harem first hand, and her letters from Istanbul, published years after her death but in part circulated around London while she was still alive, became some of the most widely read accounts of life in the Ottoman Empire.¹⁴⁷

Geographically, while there were other factories with consuls throughout the Levant, these two primary factories, Izmir and Aleppo, were the hubs through which the bulk of trade passed, and for very pragmatic reasons. While there were dozens of other

¹⁴⁶ TNA SP 110/70.

¹⁴⁷ It is important to recognize a significant aspect of Lady Mary's letters. It has been argued convincingly that her letters were written and edited with the intention of being published. As an indication of this, while they were not published until after her death, they were circulated in manuscript form around London's elite society and made an impact on London's intellectual circles well before being published. Alexander Russell alludes to her letters when he wrote *A Natural History of Aleppo* in 1756, as does Alexander Drummond in his 1754 book *Travels Through Different Cities of Germany, Italy, Greece and Several Parts of Asia, as the Far as the Banks of the Euphrates*. In this way, her letters might be seen more as literature written for the clear purpose of furthering an agenda that wished to challenge traditional Protestant morality. For a good examination of the debate over the publication of Lady Mary's letters, see Billie Melman, *Women's Orients, English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918: Sexuality, Religion, and Work* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 79. For a brief overview of Lady Mary's ties to deism, the Whig party, and feminism, movements that sought to counter traditional Protestant morality and patriarchy, see Humberto Garcia, *Islam and the English Enlightenment 1670-1840* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 10, 65, 68, 113, 191.

goods that Englishmen purchased in the Levant for sale in England—carpets, cotton, coffee, and spices, among other things—the primary goods traded for by the English were currants in Izmir and Persian silk from Aleppo, with silk surpassing currants by the middle of the seventeenth century.¹⁴⁸ Ships entering the Levant would stop in the other ports and trade for the multitude of other items in demand at the markets in London, but it was ancillary to the primary trade whereby English wares, primarily England's high quality woolen broadcloth, but also tin and other manufactured goods, were bartered directly for currants and silk. Purchasing these goods with money was done using Dutch Lion dollars when necessary—if, for example, the value of broadcloth fell or if a shipment was lost—but was primarily avoided because of the instability of currency compared to direct barter.¹⁴⁹ In the case of Aleppo some of the smaller port cities, Iskenderun and Tripoli for example, served as port cities that supported the trade that occurred there.¹⁵⁰ Therefore, while trade did happen elsewhere, the trade headquarters for the company were the two great factories at Izmir and Aleppo.

There are a couple of other aspects of the Levant Company that bear on how the Britons under its influence experienced the Ottoman Empire. First, it is important to remember that, particularly in the first century after it was founded, trade for the Levantine merchants was hazardous. However, the hazards did not come in any major way from a confrontation with the Ottoman Empire, or from religious conflict. A survey of the Levant Company records indicates that piracy, European conflict, competition

¹⁴⁸ Ralph Davis, *Aleppo and Devonshire Square: English Traders in the Levant in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Macmillan Press, 1967), 27. While the British of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries labeled dried grapes from the eastern Mediterranean as currants they likely were what are today call sultanas or raisins.

¹⁴⁹ Bruce Masters, *The Origins of Western Economic Dominance of the Middle East: Mercantilism and the Islamic Economy in Aleppo, 1600-1750* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 148.

¹⁵⁰ James Mather, *Pashas: Traders and Travellers in the Islamic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 17.

from the East India Company, and political uncertainty during the civil wars of the seventeenth century in England were of much greater concern to the members of the Levant Company than ideological difference with the Ottoman Empire.¹⁵¹

As mentioned above, piracy from the Barbary States was a major concern for the British. As highlighted in chapter two, the British populace often conflated the “Turks” with all Muslims, including the Moors of North Africa, and fears of the Barbary Pirates were projected onto the Ottomans, but it is clear from the company records and the letters of its members that the factors of the Levant Company generally did not fear their Ottoman partners.¹⁵² However, war with European rivals, particularly the French, was an almost constant concern as conflicts between Britain and other European powers often involved naval and privateer obstruction of company shipping.¹⁵³ Considering the number of conflicts Britain involved itself with on the continent during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, including the Thirty Years War and the War of Spanish Succession, conflict with European rivals was, unsurprisingly, an almost constant concern for the factors of the Levant Company. Considering these threats, there was often more animosity directed at the French, Spanish, and other rivals in the Levant Company’s records, reports, and letters, than there was aimed at Muslim Ottoman populations. The letter book of Samuel Harvey, detailed more in chapter five, highlights this concern about Britain’s European rivals. Covering the years between 1701 and 1703,

¹⁵¹ The English Civil War of 1688 nearly brought the end of the Levant Company. The Company had been connected to the deposed Stuart monarchy, opening it up to attack from the East India Company and other competitors who lobbied for the revocation of the company’s charter. See Wood, 114.

¹⁵² Alexander Russell, *The Natural History of Aleppo and Parts Adjacent*, Vol. II (London: Gregg Publishing, 1969), 158.

¹⁵³ According to a letter in TNA SP 110/72, f. 2, dated 11 November 1758, it is clear that the company was forbidden from trading with any French merchants during the Seven Years War, costing the company money. For recognition of European “corsairing,” see Linda Colley, *Captives* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), 45.

at the beginning of the War of Spanish Succession, many of the correspondences contain an inquiry or concern about the war and how it will affect business.¹⁵⁴

The second aspect of the Levant Company that impacted how it interacted with and perceived Ottoman administrators and locals whom they dealt with was related to their mission in being there. It might seem obvious but it bears repeating that, for the members of the Levant Company, with the exception of some of the chaplains, ideological differences between the Ottoman Empire and Protestant England were of little consequence. They would not allow differences, if or when they existed, to affect their bottom line. While it may be impossible to know how most of the factors of the Levant Company felt, personally, about the local culture in Izmir, Aleppo, and elsewhere, it is important to recognize that, even assuming most carried prejudice, it was a secondary concern when compared to their desire for profit.

Correspondingly, a critical observation about the Levant Company Records is the professional nature of the archive. The correspondence between factors, consuls, the ambassador, and the governor and officials of the company in London is, almost incredibly, void of personal judgments about the Ottomans with whom they traded. Finding any commentary, one way or the other, positive or negative, in the thousands of pages of company records is actually quite difficult. This may seem like a problem, and it of course presents challenges, but it also tells a useful story. While such paucity of direct commentary limits how much can be gleaned about attitudes towards the people of the Levant, it serves to highlight the mindset of a group of young men who were not interested in polemic or ideological confirmation. As established earlier, they were

¹⁵⁴ TNA SP 110/22. "Letter to Edward Bouey, 4 November 1701." This letter contains a detailed explanation about why the War of Spanish Succession would be such a problem for trade.

almost certainly aware of the stereotypes of the “Turk,” just as most Englishmen would be, but they were clearly undeterred by it. They were interested in making their fortune, and that meant working within the Ottoman system and with the local administrators and merchants of Aleppo and the other cities of the Levant.

In fact, based on their lack of commentary it would appear as though for the most of the Levant Company factors the culture of the cities in which they traded was an ancillary concern. Of course, it is certainly possible that they just never penned any thoughts on the subject. Another indicator of the company’s lack of interest in local culture was the attempt by company administrators to enforce a sequestered life on its traders, operating as they did from the walled compound of *Khan al-Gumruk*, where the gates were shut from sundown to sunup.¹⁵⁵

Certainly, it may seem problematic that the records and letters of Levant Company contain relatively scant commentary on the local population—positive or negative—but it actually serves to highlight the potential for the members of the Levant Company to have an open mind about those they traded with, or at least indicates the presence of a pragmatic approach to intra-cultural interaction. The task here would certainly be easier if there were volumes of Levant Company records highlighting positive cultural interaction between Englishmen and Muslims but it is certainly still significant that, of the hundreds of volumes of company records, letters, bills of lading, and diplomatic correspondence, there are very few negative comments regarding the

¹⁵⁵ James Mather, *Pashas: Traders and Travellers in the Islamic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 74. For a scale drawing of *Khan al-Gumruk* see SP 110/74, f. 2. It truly was fortress-like, complete with parapets on top of its thick walls and gated access points. See also Russell, 19. *Khan al-Gumruk*, roughly translated as the Customs Caravansary, was one of the largest of dozens of *khans* in Aleppo.

“Turks,” Arabs, or Muslims in general.¹⁵⁶ The bulk of the commentary focused almost solely on the business of trade, and when there was commentary, as seen by the letters and commentary of the Levant Company members analyzed in succeeding chapters, it was generally favorable.

This is the critical aspect of the Levant Company as it pertains to this study. The men, and at least one woman, in the Levant in support of the Levant Company’s business were not ideologues. The members of the company, with the exception of some of the chaplains, were not in the Levant to clash with Islam or proselytize. They were generally not there to write travel diaries for publication, and they were not interested in writing oriental tales. They had a job to do, and that job was to work with the Ottoman Turks, Arabs, local Greek Christians, and Jews for the purpose of maximizing profit. The bottom line guided them and the bottom line cared not whether the local merchants and Ottoman administrators were Muslim. This allowed members of the Levant Company, who represented the most numerically significant of Briton’s encounters with any Islamic civilization—at least until the British East India Company encountered the Moghuls—to engage with the Muslims of the Levant with less ideological baggage than other British commentators.¹⁵⁷ As James Mather mentions in passing, “[t]he business of trading inside [the Ottoman Empire] inevitably revealed to Britons the sophistication of its civilization. However grudgingly, it required the bitter religious rhetoric about the ‘infidels’ to be

¹⁵⁶ There were, doubtless, a small number of exceptions. One example is a letter found in SP 110/74, written from Basra on 15 October 1769, where the unnamed author writes, “The present obstinacy of the Turks can only be equaled by their own stupidity.” It should be noted that virtually every derogatory mention of “Turks,” found in the volumes examined for this study, including the preceding quote, was commenting on Muslims from peripheral areas of the empire, mainly Mesopotamia, rural Syria, and Arabia.

¹⁵⁷ James Mather, *Pashas: Traders and Travellers in the Islamic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 9.

modified.”¹⁵⁸ As stated earlier, this was not the imperial era of Kipling’s *White Man’s Burden* where Britons abroad felt a duty to spread their superior culture to the “less fortunate” people of the East and Africa. The men who prospered in the Levant during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries did so “by learning to live with, rather than by trying to recast, the civilization with which they had to treat.”¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ James Mather, *Pashas: Traders and Travellers in the Islamic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 9.

¹⁵⁹ Gerald MacLean, Nabil Matar, *Britain and the Islamic World 1558-1715* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, E-Book Kindle Edition), Location 1559.

Chapter IV: Factors That Shaped The Experience

There are always external factors that bear on how people experience life, and in this context, how they experience and perceive a foreign culture. While it is not possible to account for all of these external factors, there are three, in particular, that affected the way those Britons who traveled to the Ottoman Empire as a part of the Levant Company experienced that world. First, there was a likely tendency for British travelers to search for confirmation of what they had already read or heard about Islamic and Ottoman culture. In this case, the Britons at study in chapters five through seven had to overcome the perceptions of the Ottoman Empire propagated by those who had written about Islam and the Ottoman Empire before them, whether or not they had even left England, whether or not they had ever even seen what they were describing, and without taking into account what religious or cultural biases would have influenced their observations. Second, the Britons who lived in the Ottoman Empire had much of their experience filtered through intermediaries. Most of them were never familiar enough with Arabic or Turkish to communicate without the aid of *dragomans*, and their perceptions of certain segments of the Ottoman population whom they never met in person were colored by the descriptions given them by the Ottomans whom they did know, most often urban elites and wealthy merchants.¹⁶⁰ Lastly, the Britons who travelled to the Ottoman Empire as a part of the Levant Company's retinue were members of the British upper class, and

¹⁶⁰ Bruce Masters, "The Levant Company," in *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Bruce Masters and Gabor Agoston (New York: Facts on File, Inc, 2009), 333. The most important intermediary was almost certainly the company's assigned *dragoman* as most factors lacked the necessary language skills. The *dragoman* was an Ottoman, usually a Christian or Jew, who was many things, among them an interpreter and advisor for all business with the community outside of the factory. The company's *dragoman* was so important that the court in London was involved in their hiring. TNA SP 110/87, 15 July 1766. Also SP 110/73, f. 3, 23 August 1757.

therefore their own class, and class perspective, affected how they experienced the different populations of the Ottoman Empire.

Confirmation Bias and Its Effect on British Travelers.

Lady Mary and Alexander Russell condemned many of the travelers and scholars who went before them because it was clear that they had not experienced much of what they wrote about first hand, and yet had the audacity to write as authorities on the topic. Samuel Chew and a multitude of other scholars have noted this flaw in the observations made by many of those who wrote on Islam and the Ottoman Empire, including some of the most famous and influential names like Richard Burton, whom he calls an “arm-chair traveler.”¹⁶¹

Even after the Levant Company brought such Englishmen as Paul Rycaut, Alexander Drummond, and Thomas Dallam into contact with the Ottoman world, the “observations” they passed off as fact about aspects of the Ottoman Empire and the “East” outside their immediate experience were likely simply reiteration of what they had read or heard from previous accounts.¹⁶² This confirmation bias perpetuated many pernicious views of the “Turk,” especially those concerning the Ottoman justice system discussed in chapter six, and the harem discussed in chapter seven.¹⁶³ Such attitudes

¹⁶¹ Samuel Chew, *The Crescent and the Rose: Islam and England During the Renaissance* (New York: Octagon Books Inc., 1965), 22.

¹⁶² Alexander Drummond, *Travels Through Different Cities of Germany, Italy, Greece and Several Parts of Asia as far as the Banks of the Euphrates* (London: W. Strahan, 1754), 199. Alexander Drummond admitted that he carried and referenced Henry Maundrell’s *A Journey From Aleppo to Jerusalem* while on his own travels.

¹⁶³ The term “Confirmation bias,” was coined by the psychologist Peter Wason and is, simply, the idea that people tend to favor information that confirms their existing beliefs. See Linden J. Ball and Maggie Gale, “Does Positivity Bias Explain Patterns of Performance on Wason’s 2-4-6 task?,” in *Proceedings of the Twenty-Fourth Annual Conference of the Cognitive Science Society*, ed. Wayne D. Gray and Christian D. Schunn (Mahwah, New Jersey: Cognitive Science Society, 2002), 340.

persisted and were only gradually, and to this day incompletely, supplanted by more informed and enlightened accounts and understanding.

The Role of Intermediaries

One interesting aspect of the records from Aleppo that deserves mention is the commentary made about Arabs. While the observations regarding local Aleppines are largely positive, or at least not negative based on ethnicity, the commentary found in the Levant Company records about the Arabs of Greater Syria, Arabia, and Mesopotamia is the opposite, conforming to the more common historical animus of the Christian West regarding Islam and the East.¹⁶⁴ At the same time that positive accounts of Ottomans and Arabs were regularly passed to London from Aleppo by the Levant Company, negative reports that reinforced the barbarous image of the “Saracen” were making their way to London as well.

What is interesting is the manner in which this information was transferred to, or confirmed in, these young British traders. The answer is more complex than simply seeing validation in their preconceived beliefs. It seems clear that when British traders dealt directly with an individual they developed opinions largely free from these preconceived expectations but, when commenting on Muslims from other parts of the Levant, where the description came mostly in the way of reports from other Muslims or non-European intermediaries, the reports to London fit much more closely with a barbarian narrative. As an example, in a letter dated 15 October 1769 to Mr. Hammond and Mr. Abbot, a Mr. Edward Galley wrote, “I am informed that barbarians are frequent

¹⁶⁴ SP 110/74, 15 October 1769. In this letter, the “Turks” of Basra are called “Obstinate” and “Rascals.”

between Baghdad and Aleppo.”¹⁶⁵ The informant was undoubtedly one of the intermediaries that the Levant Company used to facilitate trade, either the caravan leader, perhaps the factory *dragoman*, or one of the Aleppine merchants. Another account from 1769 claims that all of the tribes around Basra, in Mesopotamia, are bandits and dangerous, again based on the information provided by an Aleppine intermediary.¹⁶⁶ What is critical is that, at least in part, these descriptions of Arabs came from other Ottomans, not from Europeans. Therefore, negative reports about Arabs coming from elsewhere in the Levant were second-hand and some of the culpability in the negative stereotypes lies with the intermediaries who propagated them.

While there is some speculation involved in asserting that much of the commentary about the Arabs is second hand, there is evidence to back this assertion up beyond the inference that the Levant Company merchants were undoubtedly influenced by the opinions of their *dragoman* and their Aleppine acquaintances. Within the records of the Levant Company is a portion of a journal written by a company factor who accompanied one of the caravans that set out from Aleppo en route to Basra in 1744. Unfortunately, the journal is incomplete and the author is unknown. However, the portion remaining contains twenty-nine pages of commentary on the geography and peoples along the route that included Mosul, Baghdad, Urfa, and Basra. The journal could be a study in itself, but there are two parts in particular that are salient.

First, when the author comments about certain populations that he does not actually meet, he repeats what his guide in the caravan tells him about the population.

¹⁶⁵ TNA SP 110/74, “Letter to Mr. Hammond and Mr. Abbot from Mr. Edward Galley, 15 October 1769.” It is important to note that these negative comments describe rural and nomadic populations of the Ottoman Empire, mainly the *Bedouin*, and not the urban Ottomans. This differentiation between urban and rural Ottomans gets greater attention later in this chapter.

¹⁶⁶ TNA SP 110/74, “Letter to Mr. Hammond and Mr. Abbot from Mr. Edward Galley, 15 October 1769.”

The most illustrative example is his description of the Kurds living around Mosul. Based on the information given him by the other members of the caravan he writes,

the mountains of Sanjar...are inhabited by a clan of Khourds who are all Robbers. They are a very fierce Barbarous set of people and are a terrour to all their neighbours and passengers who are constrained to pass near them. They are numerous and are equipt with fire arms and they frequently carry away whole caravans¹⁶⁷

He makes similar comments about other tribes around Baghdad and Basra. However, in line with the idea that when personal contact occurs ideas are different, when writing about tribes that he actually meets, his observations are quite different. He describes his time with the tribes in towns and cities along the way as “agreeable” and “pleasant.”¹⁶⁸

These observations are not dissimilar from those of Samuel Harvey, whose letter book is examined in more detail in chapter five. Harvey clearly spent plenty of time with the Ottomans of Aleppo, he dined with them, he learned their family structures, and he traded with them. His observations about them, while not all glowing, are objective and not guided by ethnic stereotype. In fact, Harvey only mentions ethnicity when commenting on the Arab tribes that raided caravans like the one returning from Mecca in 1701, where he also refers to them as “barbarous Arabs.”¹⁶⁹ Like the author of the journal four decades later, his account of the Arabs was almost entirely second hand. As a result, it would appear that Harvey’s negative opinions about certain Ottoman groups were based not as much on racial preconceptions as they were on the counsel of intermediaries and experience with actual acts of banditry that were detrimental to company business.

¹⁶⁷ TNA SP 110/73, Vol. 4, f. 2.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ TNA SP 110/22, “Letter from Samuel Harvey to Mr. Charles Frye, Aleppo, 22 July 1701.”

In order to explain the difference between the British ideas about the Ottomans of Aleppo, Izmir, and Istanbul and those of the Arabs, the second hand nature of their experience and the information given to them by their Ottoman interlocutors are only one explanation. Class and social status also played a role.

Class Bias and Divisions Between Urban and Rural Ottomans

If one believes the postulations of Bruce Masters and numerous other scholars of the region, the urban culture of the Ottoman Empire was distinct from the rural, and there were clear antagonisms between them.¹⁷⁰ As the British travelers lived almost exclusively in the urban population centers of the empire, this dynamic would certainly have influenced their experience. There was, in effect, an urban-rural divide whereby the city elites, who were the cultural interlocutors for the British, passed on their prejudice against the poor and rural populations to the English traders. Alexander Russell noted this divide by commenting on the differences in dress between the “Arabs of the desert,” and the “inhabitants of the cities,” as well as noting “a considerable number of Arabs dwell within the city and suburbs...these are called the bidoweens, as are the Arabs of the desert.”¹⁷¹ Therefore, when Britons like Harvey and the author of the travel journal examined above comment negatively on the an Arab tribe or on the danger of the Kurds, they are, in effect, commenting on the Bedouin who not only posed a threat to their caravan but also were denigrated by the elites within the Ottoman social hierarchy.¹⁷² It is entirely likely that, as aristocratic elites themselves, part of their disrespect for certain

¹⁷⁰ Bruce Masters, “Aleppo: The Ottoman Empire’s Caravan City,” in *The Ottoman City Between East and West: Aleppo, Izmir, and Istanbul*, ed. Ethem Eldem, Daniel Goffman, and Bruce Masters (New York: Cambridge University press, 1999), 23.

¹⁷¹ Alexander Russell, *The Natural History of Aleppo and Parts Adjacent*, Vol II (London: Gregg Publishing, 1969), 108, 159-160.

¹⁷² Abraham Marcus, *The Middle East on the Eve of Modernity: Aleppo in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 19.

segments of Levantine society was, at least in part, based on class and not purely ethnicity or religion. In fact, Alexander Russell commented on the deficiencies of the accounts of Lady Mary and other travelers for intimating that their experience with Ottoman elites was representative of Ottoman culture as a whole.¹⁷³ He recognized that experiences varied greatly by class, writing “[t]hus, women above a certain rank, are, in proportion to the extent of their connections, more or less engaged, while those of the lower class are often obliged to [work at] the market.”¹⁷⁴

It is clear that the individuals the Levant Company traders and officials interacted with were primarily urban Ottoman elites of various religious and ethnic backgrounds. The Britons of the Levant Company seemed entirely capable of overlooking difference and finding ground for respect and friendship when dealing with the upper classes. However, the same was clearly not true for the rural populations of the Ottoman Empire. The salient takeaway is that when the members of the Levant Company were personally involved with Ottomans their cultural biases were less apparent and those Ottomans tended to be urban members of the upper class.

This was not only the case among traders. Lady Mary also provides a good example of how class might have influenced British perceptions. As subsequent chapters will show, she was obviously willing to take on established convention and yet she makes terribly off color remarks about the Muslims she encountered when she and her husband traveled away from the upper class society in Edirne or Istanbul that are out of line with her general tolerance of the Ottomans. During her trip to Tripoli she wrote, “[w]e saw under the trees companies of the country people, eating, singing, and dancing to their

¹⁷³ Alexander Russell, *The Natural History of Aleppo and Parts Adjacent*, Vol II (London: Gregg Publishing, 1969), 254.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

wild music. They are not quite black, but all mulattoes, and the most frightful creatures that can appear in human figure.”¹⁷⁵ This comment has obvious racist dimensions, and Lady Mary clearly recognized these racial differences between Muslim populations of the Ottoman world even if those distinctions were muddled or lost in the common discourse in England, but it is also likely that her apparent bigotry was as much class based as it was based on religion or race as she makes similar comments about the peoples of Russia, Circassia, and Georgia, who made up a bulk of the Ottoman slaves, writing they are “such miserable, poor wretches, you would not think any of them worthy to be your house-maids.”¹⁷⁶ It would seem, then, that her tolerance, lack of prejudice, and affinity was reserved for the elites of the Ottoman world with whom she spent most of her time.¹⁷⁷

Nevertheless, the remarkable nature of the observations and ideas proffered by the upper class Britons examined in this study are not lessened because they did not shun conformity to their cultural prejudices in all things. This was the world of the eighteenth century where class, position, and race were unlikely to be overlooked even by the most tolerant Britons. Regardless of these flaws, Lady Mary still provided novel notions about the harem, Ottoman woman, and on Islam in general. For their part, Alexander Russell and Dudley North also offered some of the most enlightened remarks on the tolerance of Muslims toward other religious groups and the fairness of the Ottoman justice system.

¹⁷⁵ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1869), 116.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁷⁷ In fact, Alexander Russell commented on Lady Mary’s lack of distinction between classes, accusing her of “the fault of blending the different orders of Society, in the description of Eastern Manners.” See *The Natural History of Aleppo*, xi.

Their views were certainly some of the most tolerant yet to be written on any of these topics.

Chapter V: Illusions of Isolation and Modified Images of the Untrustworthy “Turk”

It is interesting that Lady Mary, in her criticisms of other British travelers highlighted in chapter seven, includes the merchants of the Levant Company among those she believes to be unreliable sources about Ottoman culture, and does not hold a high opinion of the way the factors of the Levant Company interacted with local Muslims. She wrote.

It is certain we have but very imperfect accounts of the manners and religion of these people; this part of the world being seldom visited, but by merchants, who mind little but their own affairs; or travelers, who make too short a stay to be able to report anything exactly of their own knowledge. The Turks are too proud to converse familiarly with merchants, who can only pick up some confused informations, which are generally false.¹⁷⁸

This observation is not entirely incorrect as most factors did try to avoid immersion in Ottoman culture and some, like Alexander Drummond and Paul Rycaut, published their opinions on aspects of Ottoman culture that they likely never fully experienced.¹⁷⁹ However, the quotation actually highlights two important themes of this study. First, Lady Mary acknowledges that the factors were in the Levant for a single purpose, trade. Second, in her observations about the traders’ relationships with the Ottomans she is likely guilty of the same misinformation she criticizes others for regarding the harem. It is clear based on the records of the Levant Company that several factors did, indeed, delve into the world in which they traded, and developed personal relationships with Ottoman Muslims, even if it was only out of business necessity. However, there is another interesting aspect to her criticism of the merchants. Lady Mary and the members of the Levant Company shared an important commonality in that neither she nor the

¹⁷⁸ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1869), 72.

¹⁷⁹ Sir Paul Rycaut, *The History of the Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (London: C. Brome, 1686), 69. Rycaut admits that his account of the harem and *Seraglio* was given without personal experience.

members of the Levant Company were resident in the Levant for the purpose of cultural observation and, while it would never occur to her to recognize it, she fails to acknowledge that this makes them as likely as she to see the culture of the cities where they traded with less bias. Therefore, contrary to Lady Mary's assertion, the factors of the Levant Company did make connections with their hosts in the Levant, and they contributed, in less known and unpublicized ways, to the emerging alternative views on the Ottoman Empire. This contribution is the subject of this chapter.

As established earlier, Alexander and Patrick Russell, as well as some other company members like the chaplain Robert Frampton, often ventured out of the Khan to interact with the Ottoman Muslims, Christians, and Jews of Aleppo. However, there is a common impression among the historians who have studied the Levant Company, everyone from Bruce Masters to A.C. Wood, as well as Alexander Russell himself, that interaction between the members of the factory and the local community was undesirable both for the administrators of the company as well as the traders themselves.¹⁸⁰ There is no doubt that this was likely true for many of the traders. It is also likely true that even among the ones who did interact with the community of Aleppo, it was done out of necessity not desire. However, nothing is ever so clear-cut. Chapter three highlighted that the traders in Aleppo were part of a vibrant community and, more importantly, they had to interact with the local Ottomans in order to succeed in their business.

Considering how long these members of the Levant Company were abroad, and considering that life at the factory, according to many company members, was often exceedingly boring and lonely, it seems almost impossible that these young men would

¹⁸⁰ Alfred C. Wood, *A History of the Levant Company* (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1964), 235-236. Also Alexander Russell, *The Natural History of Aleppo and Parts Adjacent*, Vol II (London: Gregg Publishing, 1969), 226.

have remained entirely isolated, even if they could have. They would therefore have acquired ideas about the world in which they lived. Those ideas would have travelled from Istanbul, Aleppo, and Izmir via letters and returning factors to London, and would presumably have been told and retold to other Londoners at the exchanges and other social gathering places.

As stated before, the company records were not overflowing with references to local Aleppines or Ottoman officials. The Levant Company was a trade organization and, as such, the correspondences of the Aleppo merchants and administrators focus almost entirely on trade and contain little on the relationships and interaction between the local Aleppines and the British traders. Further, even when commenting on the locals, as Samuel Harvey does frequently, it is almost always in the context of trade. For example, when Harvey writes that Omar Chelibee or Usuph Effendi is an honorable, trustworthy, individual, he most likely meant it in the business sense.¹⁸¹ Harvey means that he and the other factors at Aleppo can trust him with their business. Even friendships were made under the pretext of commerce and mutual self-interest.

As Samuel Harvey's letters, written from Aleppo between 1701 and 1703, provide the central commentary for this section the factory at Aleppo will also be the primary setting and the local Aleppines, Arab and Ottoman traders, and the members of the Levant Company, the actors. Further, Aleppo provides the best insight into the operations of the Levant Company as, with the exception of letters between the London court and the administrators around the region found in the State Papers Foreign, series 105 (TNA SP 105), the records of the Levant Company's Aleppo factory found in TNA SP 110 provide the largest compilation of company records available at the British

¹⁸¹ TNA SP 110/22, "Letter from Samuel Harvey to Mr. John Woolley, Aleppo, 18 June 1701."

Archives. Still, even among the records pertaining to the Aleppo factory the commentary is still overwhelmingly data and business oriented with most of commentary regarding local Aleppine merchants being solely related to the costs of business, money owed, and the value of certain individuals as partners in trade. There are many possible reasons for this lack of commentary, but it should not be surprising considering the pragmatic reasons the men of the Levant Company took leave of their homeland to trade in Aleppo. For context, then, it is useful to delve into more detail about the factory at Aleppo, the habits and social lives of the company members stationed there, than was covered in the general overview of the Levant Company.

As one of the three primary factories in the Levant, with its primary commodity, silk, the factory at Aleppo was the most important hub of Levantine trade by the mid seventeenth century. It is significant that the Aleppo factory was also the only factory not located in a port city, relying on Iskenderun, and to some extent Tripoli, for support.¹⁸² This is important because the factors at Aleppo were truly more isolated than their compatriots throughout the region. Further, because of the nature of Aleppo, as the destination for the caravans from the rest of the Empire, they relied on contact with the leaders of these caravans for their business, for negotiating barter rates and prices, and for escorting their goods to and from the port cities.¹⁸³ Not insignificantly, since Aleppo was not a port city, the members of the Levant Company relied on the caravan for transportation to and from Aleppo—a journey not devoid of peril. Truly, from the

¹⁸² Bruce Masters, “Aleppo: The Ottoman Empire’s Caravan City,” in *The Ottoman City Between East and West: Aleppo, Izmir, and Istanbul*, ed. Edhem Eldem, Daniel Goffman, and Bruce Masters (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 29.

¹⁸³ TNA SP 110/22, f. 114. For a description of the caravan from Iskenderun to Aleppo see Alexander Drummond, *Travels Through Different Cities of Germany, Italy, Greece and Several Parts of Asia as far as the Banks of the Euphrates* (London: W. Strahan, 1754), 181.

moment the factors of the Aleppo factory arrived at the port, they would have had to rely on relationships with locals to facilitate their trade, and secure not only their goods but also their persons. Fundamentally, the traders at Aleppo had to interact with more intermediaries to succeed in their business than their brethren in Izmir and Istanbul. They were truly a part of the commercial life of Aleppo.

Still, as established in chapter three, while business at Aleppo necessitated contact with many Ottoman officials, Arabs, and local religious minorities, as a general rule the company members there preferred to remain separate and, while the forced separation between the locals and the members of the company did not always work out the way both parties involved might have liked, it was certainly significant for the intentions it represented. It serves as a possible explanation for the factors' infrequent commentary about local Muslims. Fundamentally, most of the factors in Aleppo were not particularly interested in the world outside their walls if it did not involve trade.¹⁸⁴ Further, while impossible to know it is also quite likely that, with the company's singular focus on trade, comments about locals in official correspondence may simply have been unimportant to the promotion or analysis of trade. It is likely a combination of both the desire to stay isolated, and thus avoid the lures of Islam, and the single-minded focus of the Levant Company personnel on trade that led to the scarcity of cultural observation. However, despite these reasons, the lack of judgment concerning the Muslims they encountered is also significant in that literally hundreds of letters and reports travelled to and from London without negative, religiously tainted, or spectacular statements about the locals.

¹⁸⁴ Alexander Russell, *A Natural History of Aleppo*, Vol. II (London: Gregg International Publishers, 1969), 226-227.

Along with the significance of this lack of negative commentary, the interaction between the Aleppines and the members of the Levant Company does not lose significance because it was focused on trade. In fact, it might be argued that the nature of trade itself, especially when it involved the lending of money, would serve to counter one of the worst common stereotypes about Muslims, that of the untrustworthy “Turk.”¹⁸⁵

Countering the Image of the Untrustworthy “Turk”

The meme of the untrustworthy “Turk” is common in the “doctrinal venue” and throughout the dramas and oriental tales involving Muslims the “Turk” is derided constantly as being untrustworthy, a conception that, sadly, remained true through to Gladstone’s era and beyond.¹⁸⁶ However, it is clear from the records of some Levant Company factors that the Englishmen in Aleppo trusted at least some of the local Aleppines a great deal, certainly enough to comment on it, and enough to trust them with large loans of money. Further, that the correspondences of the company factors were focused on trade is truly telling for another reason. Reporting that local Aleppines were trustworthy might cost company factors significant profit, or at least difficulty, if it were not actually the case. Therefore, it can be inferred that if Samuel Harvey is reporting to the court at London about the trustworthiness of several business associates in Aleppo, then he believed that judgment to be true. Further, it indicates that, until his own reputation declined when he failed to pay his own debts, his principals trusted his

¹⁸⁵ Money lending would have required significant amounts of trust. If a debtor failed to pay their debts, the company could blacklist them or resort to the courts but these recourses yielded mixed results. North highlighted the importance of trust when he told one of his debtors, who had been exonerated by the *qadi*, “you have thought fit to deny my debt before the judge knowing I had trusted you without witness.” See Roger North, *The Lives of the Norths*, Vol. II, ed. A Jessopp (London: Gregg International Publishers Limited, 1969), 58.

¹⁸⁶ Shahin Kuli Khan Khattak, *Islam and the Victorians: Nineteenth-Century Perceptions of Muslim Practices and Beliefs* (New York: Taurus Academic Studies, 2008), 20.

judgment and likely held similar opinions of Harvey's trade partners. The example of Samuel Harvey's letter book shows that genuine, mutually respectful, relationships were possible and that word of these relationships made it back to London. It is clear based on Harvey's experiences that some of the company members in the Levant developed close personal relationships, even friendships, with local contacts, businessmen, and administrators, and that they were not afraid to trust them.

What follows seeks to highlight some of those relationships. It is worth noting that there is one overwhelming commonality in Harvey's letters regarding what circumstances warranted comment on the character of local associates. His Aleppine associates were not mentioned in passing. They were only mentioned when the character and actions of an individual or group of people affected trade, primarily if they owed money to an Englishman or if an Englishman owed money to them. This was the first, and undoubtedly most common, circumstance. It involved commentary on trade partnerships, and usually a report on the status of a loan or was part of an explanation, or justification, for a decision regarding trade.

Samuel Harvey

Before examining these circumstances, a little background on Samuel Harvey is useful. That very little is known about Samuel Harvey is actually important to the significance of his letters because he truly represents the unpublished voice of the Levant Company, the voice of the trader. In fact, it was a matter of deduction to determine that the letters used for this study, found in the State Papers Foreign, series 110, volume 22 (TNA SP 110/22) were even written by Samuel Harvey. That determination was made by considering that the letters to John Harvey in London always began with the phrase

“Dear Brother,” and that there is concurrent record of Samuel Harvey being at Aleppo between 1701 and 1703 found in TNA SP 110/23 and TNA SP 34/8, folder 36.

Additionally, on several of the letters the initials SH are present in the margins.¹⁸⁷ Based on these pieces of information it is inferred here that the letter book that comprises TNA SP 110/22 was, in fact, that of Samuel Harvey. It is possible that this letter book was not Samuel Harvey’s, or that it was a compilation of letters from different factory members, although the references to other traders in the third person, and to John Harvey as the author’s brother and namesake in letters not addressed to him, indicate that this was, more than likely, Samuel Harvey’s letter book.

That said, as Harvey here is used to represent the likelihood that the everyman trader made intimate contacts with local Aleppines, and commented on them and their character, it does not hinder the analysis to accept that these assessments and comments might not have been exclusively those of Samuel Harvey. In fact, if these comments were to represent a larger sampling of Levant Company merchants at Aleppo, it would make any conclusions made more representative. Unfortunately, the evidence found in this letter book cannot back making that leap, even recognizing how useful it would be in supporting the idea a large sampling of traders, not just Samuel Harvey, engaged with the Aleppine business community and were therefore a potentially significant source of ideas about the Levant. Therefore, based on what can be gleaned from this material, the assumption made is that these are the observations of Samuel Harvey.

Determining the nature of Harvey’s station in the company was also an exercise in inference. While he was a prolific recorder of events, and sent letters describing the

¹⁸⁷ TNA SP 110/22, “Letter from Samuel Harvey to Mr. Thomas Vernon and Mr. John Goodman, 18 July 1701.”

same events to multiple members of the company in London, Istanbul, and other factories, within days of one another, he signs none of his letters found in TNA SP 110/22, and they do not indicate his position. This is perhaps due to the volume consisting of what are clearly copies of the letters, not the originals. The volume of his outgoing letters and the duplicate nature of many of them, being sent as they were to multiple company members, might indicate that he filled a role with the company, perhaps as the company chancellor. It is impossible to determine if this was the case. However, it is also clear from his letters, from the descriptions of the grievances against him found in TNA SP 110/23 and TNA SP 34/8, folder number 36, and from the petition made to the court of the company by the Aleppine merchant Hadgi Mahmet Ebyr Ishmael in 1706 requesting that they cover Harvey's considerable debts to him, that he was primarily a factor and traded on his own as well as on behalf of his principal factors in London.¹⁸⁸ What else is known of Samuel Harvey is also significant. A significant number of his letters are written to his brother, John Harvey, who was a member of the company in London, indicating that the family was, like most of the families involved with the Levant Company, one of means if not status.

It is also interesting that there is such a shortage of information about Samuel Harvey considering his role in one of the Aleppo Factories' great crises. The above-mentioned grievance of Hadgi Mahmet was part of a larger scandal involving Harvey, who had been trading on credit, a practice called "trusting," as well as running an elaborate money lending business.¹⁸⁹ While the company technically frowned upon

¹⁸⁸ TNA SP 34/8, f. 36.

¹⁸⁹ James Mather, *Pashas: Traders and Travellers in the Islamic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 127-128. It seems clear in TNA SP 110/22 that the principals in London were aware of Harvey's "trusting."

money lending and “trusting,” it was clearly accepted, as Harvey records much of this business in his letters to London. It is important to note that Harvey was not alone in using money lending as a source of income, as it was quite common among factors.¹⁹⁰ This should not be surprising considering the profit margins possible with the twenty percent interest British traders often charged their debtors.¹⁹¹ Additionally, Ottoman law, in accordance with the *Sharia*’s proscription on usury, made it complicated for Muslims to make loans if interest was involved and, while there were several ways that Ottomans could work around that proscription, especially the non-Muslims of the Empire, as Bruce Masters argues in his book *The Origins of Western Economic Dominance in the Middle East: Mercantilism and the Islamic Economy in Aleppo, 1600-1750*, Europeans had several advantages that made them a significant source of credit for local businessmen.¹⁹²

In the case of Harvey, however, for whatever reason his business went terribly wrong and he accrued massive debts by 1705, 5,262 Lion Dollars to Hadgi Mahmet alone, and was forced to defend himself in front of the *qadi* and an angry mob of local businessmen.¹⁹³ He was thrown in jail when the consul was unable to come to an agreement with the governor and it was not until his principal presumably reached an

¹⁹⁰ Roger North, *The Lives of the Norths*, ed. Augustus Jessopp, DD, Vol. II (London: George Bell and Sons, 1890), 73. The practice of “trusting” is also covered in depth in Ralph Davis, *Aleppo to Devonshire Square: English Traders in the Levant in the Eighteenth Century* (London: MacMillan, 1967) 207-222.

¹⁹¹ Bruce Masters, *The Origins of Western Economic Dominance of the Middle East: Mercantilism and the Islamic Economy in Aleppo, 1600-1750* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 160.

¹⁹² Ottoman Jews and Christians were undoubtedly the largest sources of money lending in Ottoman cities. However, Bruce Masters argues that, as a result of the capitulations that allowed the consul to petition Ottoman officials, and the ability of the company to collectively boycott the use of a merchant who failed to pay his debts, the European lenders enjoyed some significant advantages over their Ottoman competitors that made money lending particularly profitable for them. Further, while the European communities were small the wealth of the English merchants, in terms of bullion on hand, was considerable. See Bruce Masters, *The Origins of Western Economic Dominance of the Middle East: Mercantilism and the Islamic Economy in Aleppo, 1600-1750* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 26, 67, 149, 160.

¹⁹³ TNA SP 34/8, f. 36 and TNA SP 105/155

agreement with Hadgi Mahmet and his creditors that he was released from prison.¹⁹⁴

James Mather gives a brief description of Harvey's troubles and argues that his reckless business practices "nearly brought down the Aleppo factory altogether."¹⁹⁵

With that in mind, there are a couple of interesting observations about this incident. This event was a prime example of the type of situation the Court in London tried to avoid by attempting to forbid business based on credit in 1672, even forcing the factors to sign an oath promising to avoid the practice. However, the order was ultimately resisted successfully by the factors abroad because it made trade impossible when there was a shortage of currency, something that happened frequently.¹⁹⁶ The second interesting aspect of this incident is the description of Hadgi Mahmet. Mahmet had been a partner in trade with Harvey and the factors at Aleppo, and had never been disparaged in any remarks but, when Harvey encountered trouble and realized that he could not pay his debts, he claimed that a "guileful Muslim" had wronged him, apparently playing on the stereotypes of the "Turk" in an attempt to avoid his debts.¹⁹⁷ It also seems significant that, while his countrymen initially backed Harvey in this claim, when it became clear that he had been deceiving them, and had not been as forthcoming about the debts he was accruing at their expense, they showed no preference for him over his Muslim accusers, determining that he should be dealt with by the local courts.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴ TNA SP 34/8, f. 36 and TNA SP 105/155.

¹⁹⁵ James Mather, *Pashas: Traders and Travellers in the Islamic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 128.

¹⁹⁶ TNA SP 110/23, p. 32-33, 17 December 1703. This letter provides only an example. Contained in this series are several letters between the consul at Aleppo, George Brandon, and the court of the company in London contesting the order proscribing "trusting" or trading on credit and money lending. This conflict is also covered briefly in Mather, 127 and Wood, 214.

¹⁹⁷ TNA SP 34/8, f. 36.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

This serves as a useful case study. While, as will be shown during the rest of this section, Samuel Harvey professes to have developed genuine relationships with the Aleppines he did business with, proudly advertised his connection to some of the more powerful men in Aleppo, and described several of them as trustworthy friends, when his own actions put him in a bind he was quite willing to make disparaging remarks about his Muslim acquaintances.¹⁹⁹ Therefore, while what follows highlights the many positive relationships Harvey made and the positive commentary about many of his Muslims colleagues, the old doctrinal stereotypes were still present and manifested themselves when it suited Harvey, in this case as an attempt to deflect responsibility away from himself for poor business practice.

Harvey's Trade Partnerships

The most voluminous of Samuel Harvey's commentary about local Aleppines comes when commenting on the trade partners and administrators with whom he worked during his time at the Aleppo factory. While he diligently logs incoming and outgoing caravans and shipments from London and reports on the business of the primary trade in woolen broadcloth and silk, his letters that comment on the local business associates were primarily focused on keeping track of debts owed to him and his principals when trading was done through "trusting," which he reported on frequently to his principals in London and other members of his company located at other consulates and factories around the Levant.²⁰⁰ This business was prolific, and at what point the business went from profitable, and acceptable to his principal and the Court in London, to putting him in an

¹⁹⁹ TNA SP 34/8, f. 36.

²⁰⁰ TNA SP 110/22, "Letter to John Woolley, 26 March 1701." This serves as an example. This letter was to another factor in Galata. Letters are also sent to Iskenderun and other factory cities.

Ottoman prison for his large debts is not entirely clear. However, it is clear that he individually, and as a proxy for his principals, participated in “trusting” with no fewer than twenty-six Aleppine Ottomans.²⁰¹ Harvey’s letters make it clear that with most of the capital he used for this business came from his principal factors it was obviously necessary to keep them involved, and sending more money, through regular reporting.

It is, perhaps, useful to recognize that it is not always possible to say what the ethnicity of these Aleppines were. Even Ottoman administrators or janissaries, distinguished by their title of aga, pasha, or bey, were often local Aleppines recruited by the government to fill key positions.²⁰² However, it is worth noting that since the British generally differentiated little between different Muslim populations, it is both unsurprising that the ethnic background of their associates is not explicitly stated and relatively unimportant for the purposes of this study. If the British were commenting on a “Turk,” they were undoubtedly commenting on a Muslim, regardless of background, and that is significant enough for analysis.²⁰³ While it would be wonderful to be able to distinguish between British ideas about Muslims of different ethnicities, commenting on their ideas about the Muslim people of the Levant, without differentiating among different ethnicities, is still relevant. Further, it is important to recognize that local Aleppines would not have made great distinctions between different ethnicities apart

²⁰¹ TNA SP 110/22.

²⁰² Bruce Masters, *The Origins of Western Economic Dominance of the Middle East: Mercantilism and the Islamic Economy in Aleppo, 1600-1750* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 46. Members of the company did recognize some distinctions. Russell notes that effendis were religious scholars, or members of the *Ulama*, although they could have been of any ethnicity. However, it is also clear that when members of the Levant Company traded with them they were often mentioned as business subordinates of higher-ranking Ottoman officials or even as employees of the factory. Members of the company also recognized which members of the community were *ashraf*, who they called “Greenheads,” who were almost certainly local Arabs. See Alexander Russell, *The Natural History of Aleppo and Parts Adjacent*, Vol II (London: Gregg Publishing, 1969), 144.

²⁰³ Alexander Russell, *The Natural History of Aleppo and Parts Adjacent*, Vol. II (London: Gregg Publishing, 1969), 158. Alexander Russell makes this argument compellingly. By way of explanation of the term “Turk” he wrote that they were “a denomination comprehending all Mohammedans whatever.”

from the colloquial use of Arabic over Ottoman Turkish.²⁰⁴ The British did recognize that religion was the most important distinction made among Ottoman subjects and the British were not necessarily bigoted for recognized the same distinctions as their Ottoman hosts and not recognizing others.²⁰⁵ Besides, generalizing about a foreign population was not, and is not, a purely European trait and it is relevant to note that the Ottomans often categorized all non-Orthodox Christians as Franks. Nevertheless, it is true that for most Britons “Turk” meant Muslim, regardless of ethnicity, and therefore if the endeavor here is to identify some ideas about Islam and the Ottoman Empire that came from the Levant Company personnel, the ethnicity of the “Turks” commented on is not crucial.²⁰⁶

That said Harvey determined that it was worth commenting on some of the personal qualities of the individuals he worked with in his correspondences with his principals, the court of the company in London, and other members of his trade house throughout the Levant. While never stated specifically, there is a distinct sense that Harvey’s commentary has at least one self-serving purpose. Commenting on the positive qualities of the Aleppines he worked with could serve, in part to justify certain trade decisions and assure his principal factor in London that their investments were safe, especially when loans and credit were concerned. Considering the amount of debt it was discovered that he accrued by 1705, assuring his principal factor of the quality of his trade associates, as well as the sheer volume of reports he sent between 1701 and 1703—

²⁰⁴ Bruce Masters, “Aleppo: The Ottoman Empire’s Caravan City,” in *The Ottoman City Between East and West: Aleppo, Izmir, and Istanbul*, ed. Edhem Eldem, Daniel Goffman, and Bruce Masters (New York: Cambridge University press, 1999), 24-25. Also see Abraham Marcus, *The Middle East on the Eve of Modernity: Aleppo in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 19. Also Russell, 158.

²⁰⁵ Alexander Russell, *The Natural History of Aleppo and Parts Adjacent*, Vol. II (London: Gregg Publishing, 1969), 158. Also see Masters, *The Origins of Western Economic Dominance of the Middle East*, 45.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

numbering easily in the hundreds—makes sense for another reason.²⁰⁷ If Harvey was trying to hide irresponsible business practices, a deluge of data on money lent and collected and positive information on other trade questions might be a useful form of obfuscation. His prolific reporting would make him appear motivated, useful, and trustworthy, keeping his principals from digging into his trade decisions. For obvious reasons, the principal factors in London would have desired that their representatives abroad entered into trade with men of good character and dependability, making his assurances of the character of those he did business with salient.

What follows is an analysis of Harvey's trade contacts, his descriptions of them, how he describes his relationship to them, and how that indicates certain attitudes about the people of the Levant, or at least the Ottoman elites of Aleppo with whom Harvey dealt. There are four particular observations about his letters that are important. First, it is abundantly clear that the factors in Aleppo were keenly aware of the Ottoman power structures in Aleppo. They understood who was important, who held power, who could influence other Aleppines to work with the Levant Company on more favorable terms or, most often, pressure individuals into paying their debts. Second, it is clear from these letters that the recipients in London, and throughout the Mediterranean, understood the basic structures of the Ottoman system, that they were versed in the meaning of Ottoman titles, and that they were also knowledgeable about the trading milieu in Aleppo. Third, it is clear that all of these individuals were people that Samuel Harvey was involved with not only as a trader, but also as a creditor and—as it turns out—as a debtor who purchased goods on credit and then failed to pay his own debts. What is pertinent about the business of “trusting” is that it was not clean. It involved having to track down

²⁰⁷ TNA SP 110/22.

debtors and influence them to make their good on their debt.²⁰⁸ Unsurprisingly, emotions frequently were involved that led to some negative commentary on certain individuals. The critical aspect of this observation is that the nature of any impugnation was not necessarily an attack on those individuals as “Turks” or Muslims. Rather it was likely more indicative of frustrations aimed at a business associate who, at the moment, was behind on a payment or making business difficult. This is no different than the tensions between any business associates of the same nationality, who experience disagreements or have to resort to mediation. Finally, while Harvey’s letters are focused almost exclusively on business and trade relationships, there is also evidence that he did develop true friendships, or at least respect that he labels friendship, with these “Turks” and even a compassion for their personal circumstances.

These observations lead to one ultimate conclusion, that an intimate knowledge of the local business scene was essential for these traders. Contrary to Lady Mary’s assessment that the elite Ottomans would see it as beneath them to allow merchants to participate in their lives, it seems clear that Samuel Harvey and his Levant Company compatriots were keenly aware of the details of life in Aleppo and were a part of the trading community of Aleppo.²⁰⁹

Harvey’s letters are full of explanations regarding the social and political structures of the Aleppine business community. Most importantly, he was keenly aware not only of the perceived character, as it related to trustworthiness in business, of his Aleppine associates, but was also aware of which Ottoman administrators were the most influential, and which ones of their agents, or subordinates, could be relied on to put

²⁰⁸ TNA SP 110/22, “Letter from Samuel Harvey to Mr. John Woolley, Aleppo, 29 August 1701.”

²⁰⁹ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1869), 72.

pressure on an aga, pasha, or bey if a debt proved difficult to collect. For example, he comments on Omar Chellibee, who is a local merchant, but also the agent of Usuph Effendi, saying “Omar Chellibee is very much tried, you may infallibly rest assured I will treat him with all imaginable kindness and civility, and assist what possible [missing section] towards recovering your money [from] his patrone, Usuph Effendi [*sic*].”²¹⁰ In order to make this assessment, he clearly spent quite some time with Omar Chellibee. He wrote, “Omar Chellibee is now with mee and shall continue soe long as pleases who finds himselffe any wayes uneasie with our way of living will lodge him [and] his cousin aga in a pleasant Seraglia and good entertainment.”²¹¹ Harvey makes comments like this about several others as well, including an aga, Mustafa Effendi, saying “[I] in the maine take him to be a good tempered aga,”²¹² and a more influential aga referred to in dozens of his letters, Optarraman Aga [*sic*], and with whom he obviously dealt with frequently, “[I] am glad to hear you like Opterraman Aga’s management of affaires. His engenuity is without exception and those as act for him here are very well experienced in bussiness [*sic*].”²¹³ It is clear from his commentary on these Aleppines that Samuel Harvey believed himself to have a keen understanding of which Ottoman elites could be trusted. It is impossible to know how accurate his assessments were.

²¹⁰ TNA SP 110/22, “Letter from Samuel Harvey to Mr. John Woolley, Aleppo, 18 June 1701.” Also, the term *çelebi* was often used to represent somebody of the merchant elite. See Bruce Masters, *The Origins of Western Economic Dominance of the Middle East: Mercantilism and the Islamic Economy in Aleppo, 1600-1750* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 1.

²¹¹ TNA SP 110/22, “Letter from Samuel Harvey to Mr. John Woolley, Aleppo, 18 June 1701.”

²¹² TNA SP 110/22, “Letter from Samuel Harvey to Mr. John Woolley, Aleppo, 26 March 1701.” It is clear here that the Harvey and his compatriots often combine or confuse honorifics. When he labels Mustafa Effendi as an aga it is likely that he is confusing his terminology. As Alexander Russell observed, the term effendi, in Aleppo as it did in the rest of the empire, usually denoted a member of the *ulema*. See Alexander Russell, *The Natural History of Aleppo and Parts Adjacent*, Vol II (London: Gregg Publishing, 1969), 144.

²¹³ TNA SP 110/22, “Letter from Samuel Harvey to Mr. John Woolley, Aleppo, 26 March 1701.”

Further, it is clear from the examples of Omar Chellibee, Mustafa Effendi, and Opterraman Aga [*sic*], that he understood which Ottomans were influential and which could be used to influence others. To further illustrate this ability to understand, and use, the Ottoman hierarchy and legal system, at another time, a year after his first comment on Mustafa Effendi (referred to here as Mustafa Aga), Harvey is clearly having difficulty collecting a debt. In order to pressure Mustafa Aga into paying his debt, he sent a request to a Raisa Effendi to “influence Mustafa Aga to command him to cleare your account,”²¹⁴ and tried to enlist “the great Muftee to [send a message to] the Caddee...which may have a very beneficial influence if rightly applied, for this Caddee makes great and Small fear him and may be a great wish for such consideration if gathers the mony [*sic*].”²¹⁵ The Levant Company’s use of the *qadi* gets more attention in chapter six, but what is clear is that Samuel Harvey professed to know the intricacies of Ottoman life and power structures in Aleppo.

An important observation about this is that the principal factors in London, and other factors around the Mediterranean, were also aware of the Aleppine and Ottoman structures, even if they were not as connected as the factors in the city. Throughout Samuel Harvey’s letter books, including letters to other factories, and to the principal factors and the court in London, there is great detail about these Ottoman businessmen, and about their trade. However, it is abundantly clear that they already had a familiarity with these individuals, as well as with the general structures of the Ottoman system in Aleppo. This is gleaned from an observation that none of Harvey’s letters explain what certain titles mean, or who an individual is. He uses their names and their title without

²¹⁴ TNA SP 110/22, “Letter from Samuel Harvey to Mr. John Woolley, Aleppo, 29 August 1701.”

²¹⁵ Ibid.

any other explanatory information.²¹⁶ There are no descriptions of what the aga is, or what the term *effendi* references, or the role of the *qadi*. It is obviously assumed that these titles, and their importance and function, are understood.

This is important because it lends credence to the position of this study that there was a regular flow of information about local Ottomans from the cities of the Levant to London, including positive notions of business acumen and trustworthiness. The traders in London, when discussing business at the Royal Exchange, or in the coffee house, would almost certainly have repeated these descriptions to other Londoners.

That said, it is also clear that, as with all of the Britons examined in this study, Samuel Harvey's observations were not all positive. However, even when voicing concerns about collecting on debts owed, the language is businesslike, and no different from what you might expect to hear two colleagues talking about another Englishman with whom they were doing business and were voicing concerns. For example, after having a good relationship with Omar Chellibee throughout 1701, he comments the following year that he has become unreliable, saying "having before a great respect for him, but ... I thought it much [better] for my reputation to remove him to other quarters" quietly so as not to "slight Opterraman Aga [*sic*]."²¹⁷ Further, when commenting on the business worthiness of another Ottoman official, he warned Mr. John Woolley against him writing, "[y]ou now have a true notion of Ozman Aga which discovering in time may save you money and trouble, Mr Boylston, who was his great friend and mighty

²¹⁶ TNA SP 110/22, "Letter from Samuel Harvey to Mr. John Woolley, Aleppo, 29 August 1701." For example, in the passage above, there is no description or introduction to who "Mustafa Aga," or what the honorifics of aga or *effendi* mean.

²¹⁷ TNA SP 110/22, "Letter from Samuel Harvey to Mr. John Woolley, Aleppo, 6 March 1702."

serviceable here, confesses to mee that hee is a very base fellow and adds further that Misters Clutterbacke and Lombard complain mightily of him about money lent.”²¹⁸

Therefore, it is clear that the factors at Aleppo held different opinions of their Ottoman business associates, and that these opinions were malleable. What is important is that these examples, and the others mentioned in Samuel Harvey’s letters, remain focused on trade. None of the Aleppine businessmen they criticize or deem untrustworthy are described that way because they are “Turks.” In truth, even the negative comments do not seem out of line with standard business frustrations. It is clear that trusting was stressful, and not an ideal method of doing business. As was shown earlier, Harvey had to know how to apply pressure to debtors by using other officials or even the *qadi*, in order to ensure debts were paid to his principal and to himself. Therefore, when Harvey speaks poorly of an associate in one letter and then highly of him in another, Omar Chellibee being an example, it is as much a commentary on the nature of the business as it is on that individual.²¹⁹

In light of the above examples of Harvey’s observations about his local Aleppine associates, it is clear that Samuel Harvey made many contacts with local merchants, Janissaries, and Ottoman officials and that he knew a great deal about their personalities and business skills. Further, until his ordeal of 1705, his commentary on these contacts is positive, or at least agnostic to their morality as Muslims. There are brief glimpses of frustration and even animosity towards some of his trading partners but on the whole, he seems to have made genuine business partnerships that inevitably included the vicissitudes typical of such relationships regardless of religion, race, or ethnicity.

²¹⁸ TNA SP 110/22, “Letter from Samuel Harvey to Mr. John Woolley, Aleppo, 29 August 1701.”

²¹⁹ TNA SP 110/22, “Letter from Samuel Harvey to Mr. John Woolley, 19 July 1701” and “Letter to Mr. John Woolley, 29 August 1701.”

Whatever his personal beliefs, he is clearly comfortable doing business with these Muslims, and makes no indication that their being “Turks” bears on their worthiness for business. True, there are some associates whom he impugns for failure to pay a debt on time, or to take adequate precautions to protect trade, or any number of other criticisms, but they are criticisms of that person’s business acumen, not of their inherent backwardness based on their being “Turks.” Harvey’s opinions, positive and negative, about his trade associates makes sense when it is realized that he is not commenting on their character as much as he is commenting on their trustworthiness as a business associate.

However, not all of his relationships were limited by a strict business relationship. He openly declared that some of these men were friends. While it may be doubtful that by “friend” he meant they were socially close, that he deemed Muslims friends is not insignificant. A few examples of these statements indicate a genuine concern for his associates, and not just as they related to business. For example, in July 1701, one of the caravans that brought goods to Aleppo from Mecca was robbed, and all of the goods expected lost.²²⁰ These goods were not intended for purchase by the Levant Company, at least not in bulk as a part of the Silk trade, but were expected by the local Aleppines who had taken loans from Harvey to pay for them. Without the goods, they would be unable to sell them at the local markets, and could, therefore, not be able to repay their debts to Harvey’s principal. Harvey recognizes this and shows compassion, urging his principal in London to allow them more time to repay the debt, arguing at it would put “our aleppeenes to run considerably in debt to pay next voyage,” and that it would lead to the

²²⁰ TNA SP 110/22, “Letter from Samuel Harvey to Mr. Charles Frye, Aleppo, 22 July 1701.”

“ruin of a great many families.”²²¹ There is probably some business-motivated pragmatism here, since he recognizes putting these men out of business and harming their families eliminates them as future trade partners, but there is also an undeniable tone of compassion.

In another situation, he writes to his brother, John Harvey, requesting a pump to aid one of the outlying villages in getting access to more water. He writes, “a particular friend of mine and eminent Turke merchant has asked me to write you for a pompe to fling up abundance of water...some of Sir Sam Morland’s inventions wilbe best if I am not mistaken [*sic*].”²²² Again, it is likely that he is asking for this pump as a favor not solely as a kindness. He almost certainly is doing it as a way of building a business relationship. Nonetheless, he is obviously not only aware of the circumstances of life in the villages of his trade partners, but that he is willing to help.

That these comments contain an element of pragmatism does not make them less significant. Harvey’s letters are all written to the principal factors in London, and other Levant Company colleagues residing at other factories around the eastern Mediterranean, so by calling his Aleppine associates friends he is indicating how well he knows them in the business sense. He is putting his judgment and reputation on the line, and his assessments therefore might be considered more important than if they were simply comments of a purely personal nature. Further, when he wrote these letters between 1701 and 1703, this likely meant a great deal as his own poor business practices had not yet thrown him into massive debt and threatened the prosperity of the company. Therefore,

²²¹ TNA SP 110/22, “Letter from Samuel Harvey to Mr. Charles Frye, Aleppo, 22 July 1701.”

²²² TNA SP 110/22, “Letter from Samuel Harvey to Mr. John Harvey, Aleppo, 19 July 1701.”

his later troubles do not diminish the significance of his commentary between 1701 and 1703.

As a final point, Harvey's letters indicate that there was a critical utility in developing personal trade relationships, something Christine Laidlaw and James Mather mentioned in passing. Getting to know the local merchants, often learning the language and legal codes, was critical to the Levant Company factors' success as businessmen.²²³ One important side effect of this close cooperation and relationship with local Ottomans meant that the members of the Levant Company were sometimes forced to use, and rely on, the Ottoman justice system when they could not mediate a dispute through the ambassador under the terms of the capitulations.²²⁴ As a result, while Britons remained wary of the Ottoman justice system and the power of the *qadi*, their personal experience with the system led some members of the Levant to develop and record ideas about Ottoman justice that ran contrary to the established narrative of capriciousness and despotism.²²⁵ How members of the Levant Company perceived the Ottoman justice system is the subject of the next chapter.

²²³ Roger North, *The Lives of the Norths*, Vol. II, ed. A Jessopp (London: Gregg International Publishers Limited, 1969), 51.

²²⁴ Bruce Masters, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World: The Roots of Sectarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 69.

²²⁵ Bruce Masters, *The Origins of Western Economic Dominance of the Middle East: Mercantilism and the Islamic Economy in Aleppo, 1600-1750* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 65. Also, Elyse Semerdjian, *Off the Straight Path: Illicit Sex, Law, and Community in Ottoman Aleppo* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), xxi-xxii.

Chapter VI: The Levant Company and the *Qadi*

If the bulk of Harvey's commentary about the Aleppines involved trade relationships, perhaps the most interesting involved his commentary on the factory's use of the Ottoman legal system for mediating disputes and putting pressure on delinquent debtors. It is clear from Harvey's records, and Roger North's compilation of his brother Dudley North's letters and conversations, that the Levant Company dealt a great deal with the Ottoman justice system and local *qadis*. As a result, North and Harvey recorded ideas about Islamic and Ottoman law that countered contemporary conventional wisdom.

Dudley North, as recounted by his brother Roger in *The Lives of the Norths*, recounted his experience with Ottoman law, noting that he disagreed with the "common opinion that Turkey hath no law nor property...that one single judge sitting upon his legs determines every man's right."²²⁶ This is important because criticism of Islamic Law, and *qadi* courts in particular, for being capricious and subject to the whim of an all powerful *qadi*, or judge, is a long-standing stereotype of "Orientalist" thought.²²⁷ As Semerdjian points out, under the traditional Western interpretation of Islamic, and by extension Ottoman, law "the court of law is a microcosm of the despotic state, in which the judge (*qadi*) sits as the patriarch of his courthouse," and "the judge arbitrarily meted out punishment as he saw fit, without rhyme or reason."²²⁸ To the present day, scholars of Islam and the Middle East struggle to clear up the common misconceptions about

²²⁶ Roger North, *The Lives of the Norths*, Vol. II, ed. A Jessopp (London: Gregg International Publishers Limited, 1969), 64. An important aspect of this source is that much of it, including Dudley North's observations about Ottoman justice, is based not on Dudley North's actual letters, but rather on what Roger North describes as a "long series of conversations after [Dudley North's] return home."

²²⁷ Ezel Kural Shaw, *English and Continental Views of the Ottoman Empire, 1500-1800* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972), 23. It is also clear based on *The Lives of the Norths* that the stereotypes of Islamic justice were certainly present in the seventeenth century. See North, 64.

²²⁸ Elyse Semerdjian, *Off the Straight Path: Illicit Sex, Law, and Community in Ottoman Aleppo* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), xxi-xxii.

Islamic law, and the role of the *qadi*, already so entrenched during the time of the Levant Company. It is, therefore, interesting to see that Dudley North, Samuel Harvey, and other Englishmen who experienced the *qadi* courts in Aleppo first hand, were willing to acknowledge the virtues of the Ottoman system.

Closed Minds

There were, not surprisingly, some members of the Levant Company who confirmed the stereotypes of the *qadi* and the injustice of the Ottoman government. While there were undoubtedly others, one member of the Levant Company who published an influential work on the Ottoman Empire with stereotypical depictions of the *qadi* and Islamic law was Alexander Drummond.

Alexander Drummond was the British consul in Aleppo from 1754-1756 but, more importantly, he had traveled extensively throughout Europe and the Ottoman Empire from 1745-1750 as a member of the Levant Company. In 1754 he left a record of his travels in a collection of his letters published under the title, *Travels Through Different Cities of Germany, Italy, Greece and Several Parts of Asia, as Far as the Banks of the Euphrates*.²²⁹ The ideas presented in this book did little if anything to contribute anything new to the discourse about Islam or the Ottomans. There are a couple of explanations for why that is, but it should be noted that one of them might be that he did not, in fact, write much of it. Maurits H. van den Boogert argues compellingly that Drummond's letters were heavily edited, perhaps even ghost written by the Scottish

²²⁹Maurits H. van den Boogert, "Freemasonry in Eighteenth-Century Izmir? A Critical Analysis of Alexander Drummond's Travels (1754), in *Ottoman Izmir: Studies in Honour of Alexander H. de Groot* (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 2007), 120.

novelist Tobias Smollett, which might explain why they appear out of line with the realities of Ottoman life.²³⁰

Another explanation is confirmation bias. In this way, the opinions in Drummond's book on the Ottoman justice system, and on the "Turks" in general, are important because they highlight another side of the Levant Company's story. For some Britons who travelled to the Ottoman Empire it is clear that their time abroad would do little, if anything, to amend previously held opinions. There are many explanations for why some Britons were able to alter their opinions while others were not. Perhaps some members of the company were more theologically minded or, perhaps, some of the more educated members could not move past their understanding of the Ottoman Empire acquired by reading the existing works on the subject, leading them to look for confirmation of what they learned from those books.

This idea that confirmation bias would have been a barrier to the cultural open-mindedness of members of the Levant Company is highlighted by one of the concepts Timothy Mitchell puts forward in *Colonising Egypt*, his 1991 study of the nineteenth-century European encroachment on Egyptian culture and sovereignty. One of the arguments Mitchell makes is that European visitors to Egypt, instead of seeing the country as it was, looked to confirm the visions of Egyptian life they had read about or seen at the great world exhibitions that were popular in Europe during the late nineteenth century.²³¹ He argues that Europeans would view the Cairo of the exhibition as more real than the Cairo they found when they visited. As an example Mitchell examines the

²³⁰ Maurits H. van den Boogert, "Freemasonry in Eighteenth-Century Izmir? A Critical Analysis of Alexander Drummond's Travels (1754), in *Ottoman Izmir: Studies in Honour of Alexander H. de Groot* (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 2007), 120.

²³¹ Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 31.

personal letters of the famous “orientalist” Gerard de Nerval who upon arrival in Egypt wrote to his father of his disappointment in the difference between the Cairo he found and the Cairo he expected to find. Instead of concluding that what he had read might have been wrong or incomplete, he wrote “I have no desire to see any place until after I have adequately informed myself from the books and memoirs.”²³² Nerval then proceeded to spend the entire six weeks of his trip reading about Egypt without stepping outside to actually experience it. It is impossible to know how applicable this theory would have been to Drummond but it seems likely that it was since, even though Mitchell’s study covered the nineteenth century, many Britons of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries would have been influenced by the same desire to confirm what they already knew about Islam and the Ottoman Empire.

Therefore, Alexander Drummond’s descriptions of the *qadi* should be seen in the light of these biases. Importantly they provide examples of some of the notions about the Ottoman justice system that Dudley North and Samuel Harvey refute later in this chapter. His observations followed closely the established notions of the caprice of the *qadi*, the unreliability of Islam as the basis for the law, and the unfairness of the system saying, “the text of the Turkish law is the Khoran; a foil so fruitful of chicanery and deceit, that it may be expounded a thousand different ways, according to caprice.”²³³ Further, regarding the prevalence of bribery and the inherent injustice of the system Drummond wrote, “in law-suits, the party who tips the judge highest, will certainly obtain the decree in his favour... Indeed nothing can be so absurd than to expect justice in this country.”²³⁴

²³² Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 31.

²³³ Alexander Drummond, *Travels Through Different Cities of Germany, Italy, Greece and Several Parts of Asia as far as the Banks of the Euphrates* (London: W. Strahan, 1754), 215.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 149.

All of the notions that Drummond condemns the Ottoman justice system for are directly refuted by some of the company members who regularly experienced it first hand like Dudley North and, to some extent Samuel Harvey.

Reformed Views of the *Qadi*

Before delving into how members of the Levant Company countered some of the erroneous stereotypes concerning the Ottoman justice system, it is important to establish who Dudley North was and why he is important to the study of both the Levant Company and the Ottoman justice system. The details of his personal life are not particularly important. However, it is important that he served the Levant Company in several capacities. He apprenticed at the Royal Exchange in London and took a “grand tour” of Europe on the way to his first posting as a factor in Izmir beginning in 1661 where, after several years, he moved to Istanbul and established his own trade account, eventually becoming the company treasurer before returning to London in 1680.²³⁵ Following his return to London, he became a well-known economist, was knighted in 1683, and elected to parliament in 1685 before dying in 1691.²³⁶ This timeline is relevant for a couple of reasons. First, he obviously experienced both Izmir and Istanbul in a variety of different capacities. Further, and importantly, as a knight and Member of Parliament, he was also a known figure in the coffee houses and social gathering spots of London.²³⁷ It is therefore highly likely that his stories about the time he spent in the Ottoman Empire, which were so often complimentary of Ottoman culture, would have been influential.

²³⁵ Robert Walsh, *Account of the Levant Company; with some notices of the benefits conferred upon society by its officers* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1825), 41-42.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

²³⁷ Roger North, *The Lives of the Norths*, Vol. II, ed. A Jessopp (London: Gregg International Publishers Limited, 1969), 176.

Perhaps most importantly, relating to the topic of Ottoman justice, North's brother alleged that Dudley participated in more than five hundred cases in the court of the *qadi*, making it likely that he understood in depth how the system really worked.²³⁸ After gaining such an extensive knowledge, he was openly complimentary of the system, specifically mentioning nine of its virtues, in addition to several other general observations, of which several will be examined below.²³⁹

However, before examining the positive aspects of Ottoman law that Dudley North and Samuel Harvey chronicle, it is important to remember that, whenever possible, disputes involving legitimate trade were covered by the capitulation and that, as a rule, most Europeans were still wary of having to resort to the *qadi*.²⁴⁰ As stated earlier, it was generally the responsibility of the company's resident consul or, if needed, the ambassador in Istanbul to negotiate trade disputes or conflicts with Ottoman administrators over proper trade practices and enforcement of the capitulation.²⁴¹ However, when a Levant Company member found trouble when dealing with an Ottoman subject, the authority of the consul and ambassador was often not enough to address the problem. As Bruce Masters notes in his book *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World: The Roots of Sectarianism*, European traders were "enjoined by the earliest treaties...to take all commercial cases involving Ottoman subjects, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, to the *sharia* courts."²⁴² As a result, Levant Company members often

²³⁸ Roger North, *The Lives of the Norths*, Vol. II, ed. A Jessopp (London: Gregg International Publishers Limited, 1969), 51.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 57-64,

²⁴⁰ Bruce Masters, *The Origins of Western Economic Dominance of the Middle East: Mercantilism and the Islamic Economy in Aleppo, 1600-1750* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 65.

²⁴¹ Christine Laidlaw, *The British in the Levant: Trade and Perceptions of the Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2010), 32.

²⁴² Bruce Masters, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World: The Roots of Sectarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 69

found themselves in front of the local *qadi* for the arbitration of disputes. When this happened, it is clear from the records that at least some members of the Levant Company developed different ideas about Ottoman justice and the fairness of the *qadi*.

The first myth of the Ottoman justice system that North and Harvey realized was incorrect was that the *qadi* was an all powerful figure in the Ottoman justice system who meted out punishments, or exonerated individuals, based on his own whims with no oversight or grounding in a legal code. Harvey debunks the idea that there was no oversight by recording the removal of a *qadi* by the vizier for accepting a large bribe and then ruling inappropriately as a result. How Dudley North addresses the allegations of corruption that stemmed from the fact that *qadis* often received gifts is covered shortly, but in this instance the *qadi*'s removal for accepting a bribe was error enough to be removed from his post.²⁴³ In this case, Mustafa Aga and his brother, two Ottoman trading partners, “gave a great deal of trouble to Masters Harley, Vernon and Sherman by bribing the Caddee with about five in six purses” to invalidate a debt of £21,000 “as confessed before the vizier, but with false witness.”²⁴⁴ When the vizier found out he removed the *qadi* in question, leading the “substitute Caddee to free him selfe from danger.”²⁴⁵ Despite the impropriety of one *qadi*, the system ultimately worked.

If there was obvious oversight of the *qadi* then it is also implied that there was in fact an established expectation for how a *qadi* should act, that there were guidelines for how he should rule, and that the Ottoman administrators, and even Ottoman citizens, knew enough about the law to hold him accountable. Dudley North certainly believed this was the case. While the common wisdom highlighted by Drummond suggested that

²⁴³ TNA SP 110/22, “Letter from Samuel Harvey to Mr. John Woolley, Aleppo, 6 March 1702.”

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

the Islamic foundation of Ottoman law led to inconsistency and caprice in its application North refutes this, telling his brother that the opposite was true. The *qadi*'s adherence to the centuries of Islamic jurisprudence known as *fiqh*, was a virtue. He said, "the virtue of this institution is that the law of the country, whatever it is taken to be, is unalterable by human power."²⁴⁶ While the unalterable nature of Islamic law is exaggerated here, it is important that he recognizes the connection between how a *qadi* ruled and *fiqh*, and that this was based on centuries of established precedent, not entirely unlike English common-law.²⁴⁷ This made the *qadi* anything but capricious, as there were very clear guidelines that he used to guide his decisions, guidelines he would have been well versed in after spending a lifetime studying *fiqh*.²⁴⁸ As a result of the reliability of the *qadi*'s reliance on *fiqh*, North and Harvey countered another prevalent notion about the Ottoman system, that of its inherent unfairness, both toward foreigners and non-Muslim Ottomans as well as Muslim members of the lower social strata.

Regarding the fairness of the courts towards foreigners, it is clear that Harvey and North both believed that they were, in general, treated quite fairly by the Ottoman courts. North points out that, as often as he did not, the *qadi* ruled in their favor, noting that when he did lose a just cause it was usually "for want of proof," not an unfairness of the system.²⁴⁹ Additionally, when commenting on the virtue of Islamic law's requirement for the testimony of at least two witnesses before the *qadi* could rule on any matter, North noted that the requirement applied as equally to foreigners and non-Muslims as it did to

²⁴⁶ Roger North, *The Lives of the Norths*, Vol. II, ed. A Jessopp (London: Gregg International Publishers Limited, 1969), 58.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 59.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 58. North is clearly aware of how a *qadi* achieved his position. He describes the process thus. "they have colleges where students are taught and trained up in it [*fiqh*] as we have for divinity and law; and, when those students are grown up to be professors, they are sent about to be cadis in cities all over the empire."

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 56-57.

Muslims, as long as the witnesses were Muslim. He further recognized that, while the requirement sometimes worked against the “right” party if that party was unable to find witnesses, or if witnesses lied, that it was a generally favorable institution.²⁵⁰ It is clear, therefore, that North believes that, regarding foreigners, the system is, on the whole fair.

Harvey highlights two additional indicators of the trust many Levant Company members had in the fairness of the system regarding foreigners. First, he highlights instances where the members of the Levant Company used the *qadi* system to help them with their business troubles, and not in reaction to a charge brought against them, but proactively. In a case where a debt was owed by Opterraman Aga [*sic*] to a deceased member of the company, Mr. Curzon, “Masters Harley and Vernon in Ramadan called him before the Caddee about having dues to the deceased Mr. Curzon, hee confessed to the debt... the Caddee condemned [deferred] payment till after the feast gave him time to make ready the mony.”²⁵¹ The proactive use of the *qadi* to mediate disputes indicates a certain level of trust in the system even if there are times where the *qadi* system is not favorable to them.

The second indicator found in Harvey’s letters is how members of the Levant Company used the *qadi*, along with other Ottoman officials, to assist in the gathering of debts. In one instance, when two Ottoman subjects, Mahomet Bey and Kanoen Bey, are delinquent in a debt, the members of the Levant Company sent a request for assistance to “the Bassa [Pasha]...and Caddee alsoe, to assist in gathering in that Debt, alsoe [a request] to Mahomet Abbass Prince of the Arabs, to bring Mahomet Bey and Kanoen Bey hither by force if [they] refuse payment...in such case Mahomet Abbas can easily

²⁵⁰ Roger North, *The Lives of the Norths*, Vol. II, ed. A Jessopp (London: Gregg International Publishers Limited, 1969), 55-56.

²⁵¹ TNA SP 110/22, “Letter from Samuel Harvey to Mr. John Woolley, Aleppo, 6 March 1702.”

compel them [*sic*].”²⁵² Again, there is a comfort level, and trust, in the *qadi* and in the Ottoman system that is apparent by their familiarity with it and their willingness to resort to it regarding matters of business.

Finally, regarding the equality of all Ottoman subjects under the law, North is at his most complimentary. He commented that, “in the whole of empire, of right there is neither prerogative nor privilege; the least person may take the greatest basha below the girdle.”²⁵³ As a result of this fairness, the Ottoman people “have an extreme veneration for the law and will compel every man that is required to go before a judge.”²⁵⁴ Further, unlike the system in England, he argues, “another virtue, and a singular one, is that no man answers by an attorney but in proper person only.”²⁵⁵ In other words, wealthy Ottomans could not gain an advantage in the courts because of their ability to afford a more capable lawyer. Conversely, poor Ottomans were not hampered by their inability to hire a lawyer as somebody of a similar station in Europe might be.²⁵⁶ Additionally, when ordering parties to pay debts “all equity is comprehended...if a contract prove very unequal, the judge takes notice of the reasonableness and gives relief,” a fairness that “goes farther than our courts in equity.”²⁵⁷ This is a strong statement. He is arguing that the *qadi* ensures that fairness is taken into account concerning debts. Even in the case of a contract, if the *qadi* believed the contract was unfair, or would present an undue hardship on the debtor, he would give them relief.

²⁵² TNA SP 110/22, “Letter from Samuel Harvey to Mr. John Woolley, Aleppo, 29 August 1701.”

²⁵³ Roger North, *The Lives of the Norths*, Vol. II, ed. A Jessopp (London: Gregg International Publishers Limited, 1969), 58.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 60.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 59-60

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 61.

However, perhaps the most interesting comment regarding fairness is North's argument that the common practice of the *qadi* receiving gifts or bribes did not lead to unfairness as common wisdom, highlighted by Drummond (and Rycout) earlier, would suggest. While the notion that *qadis* would take bribes might seem on the surface to be an automatic accusation of corruption and unfairness, it was not. This might seem impossible, but North provides an explanation. First, North commented that the size of the expected gift, or bribe, took into account the means available to the person giving it.²⁵⁸ Second, he likens this gift to the fees charged by English courts and makes a clear statement that the integrity of the system was maintained despite the practice: "the judges in Turkey will not ordinarily do flat injustice for any present; and if neither side slights them, however unequal soever the presents are, they will determine according to right."²⁵⁹ This is significant as, while he acknowledges that not all *qadis* have that integrity, he is arguing that, despite the prevalence of bribery in the Ottoman courts, the system remained fair and equitable.

It appears, then, that Dudley North, and to some extent Samuel Harvey, believed that the Ottoman justice system, including the *qadi*, was nowhere near as unfair, corrupt, or despotic as Europeans believed it to be. North went as far as to argue that "there is no sight in the comparison whether their methods or ours are best," showing that he believed that the Ottoman system was, if not completely, very near to the equivalent of the English legal system.²⁶⁰ As was shown in his biography, Dudley North was an important person in London. He was also a well known person in the coffee houses and social scenes

²⁵⁸ Roger North, *The Lives of the Norths*, Vol. II, ed. A Jessopp (London: Gregg International Publishers Limited, 1969), 53.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

where other Britons would have heard these ideas. Therefore, how members of the Levant Company countered incorrect ideas about Ottoman justice and the *qadi* was undoubtedly important. However, there was, and unfortunately still is, another stereotype about Islam and the Ottoman Empire that was just as common and insidious as those of the untrustworthy “Turk” and the capricious *qadi*, and that was the image of the Ottoman harem as nothing but a hedonistic and licentious institution that restricted the rights of Ottoman women. How the Levant Company, through the observations of Lady Mary and Alexander Russell combated this view is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter VII: The Levant Company and the Harem

From the earliest encounters between Christians and Muslims till the present, the harem as the *locus* of an exotic and abnormal sexuality fascinated Westerners.²⁶¹

The preceding quote, from Billie Melman's *Women's Orient: English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918* indicates the centrality of the harem in British thought concerning the Ottoman Empire. Despite its long history, originating well before the rise of Islam, let alone the Ottoman Empire, the harem as an organization was, and unfortunately still is, assumed by most Europeans to be a religious, rather than cultural artifact, forgetting that it was present in various manifestations in the Byzantine Empire and even in Classical Greece.²⁶² For most Britons, based on erroneous accounts that came from men who had obviously never seen it first hand, the harem came to represent more than just the place where Ottoman women lived, to embody what was increasingly seen as an exotic, and profoundly different, East.²⁶³ Further, its representation was versatile, equally useful for those who wished to deride the "Turks" through the doctrinal discourse as it was for those who exoticized and romanticized the Ottoman Empire and wished to increase cooperation and ties between the two countries. However, both visions were harmful to a balanced and unbiased interpretation of the Ottoman and Muslim culture. As Khatak argues, whether derided from the Gladstonian theological angle for its dangerously desirable, but sinful, hedonism, or glorified by those with a romantic image of the Ottoman Empire, the image of the harem was harmful to a more nuanced and enlightened vision of the Ottoman Empire and of Islam, never mind that the

²⁶¹ Billie Melman, *Women's Orient, English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918 : Sexuality, Religion, and Work* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 60.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Ibid.

harem has little to do with Islam.²⁶⁴ The truth of the matter is that the harem was a primary basis for the exotic, fantastic, romantic, and hedonistic images of the Ottoman Empire.

Remember that throughout the period at study the Ottoman Empire, while retrospectively in a long and irreversible decline, was still a powerful military and economic force and still seen by many as a threat to Christendom not only for its potential for territorial expansion but for its allure. Apprehension that Englishmen abroad, and even at home, might be tempted to “turn Turk” was perhaps overblown, but it was a real fear, and the harem was a particularly threatening image. The danger was that Islam and the harem presented an attractive and viable alternative to Christianity, not a vestige of a dead civilization. Melman writes of this phenomenon saying, “the harem was appealing and, at the same time, threatening *because* it seemed an alternative to the Western, Pauline-Augustinian model of sexuality.”²⁶⁵ It provided a primary basis for a “mixed attitude of attraction and repulsion” that has lasted through to the present day and was a basis for much of the nineteenth-century “Orientalist” discourse.²⁶⁶ Through its perceived appeal to the repressed sexuality of British men, and its perceived injustice against women, the harem became central to the emerging “Orientalist” narrative, a great icon of Western moral judgment. It became a “metaphor for injustice in civil society and the state and arbitrary government.”²⁶⁷ This is a reason why the harem plays such an essential role in the recent revisionist explosion of women’s studies among scholars of

²⁶⁴ Shahin Kuli Khan Khattak, *Islam and the Victorians: Nineteenth-Century Perceptions of Muslim Practices and Beliefs*. New York: Taurus Academic Studies, 2008), 6.

²⁶⁵ Billie Melman, *Women’s Orients, English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918: Sexuality, Religion, and Work* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 61.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 60.

the Ottoman Empire and the Middle East. It is, therefore, interesting to examine the ways in which the Levant Company contributed to the discourse about the harem and women in the Ottoman Empire. Obviously, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Embassy Letters* provide a start point for any serious study on Western attitudes about the harem, but other members of the Levant Company contributed as well. By examining the accounts of Lady Mary, with her derivative relationship to the company, Alexander Russell, Paul Rycaut, Alexander Drummond and Thomas Dallam, it is clear that the Levant Company contributed in a multitude of ways, positive and negative, to British ideas about the harem and women's place in the Ottoman Empire.

The Levant Company, Male Travelers, and False Accounts of the Harem

In arguing that during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Levant Company was involved in virtually all of the interaction between the English and the Ottoman Empire, it is no surprise that it contributed in some way to both the continued inaccurate and polemical perceptions of the harem and new, more accurate and complete, ones. Therefore, before analyzing how Lady Mary and Alexander Russell challenged convention and proffered alternative ideas about the harem and gender relations in the Ottoman Empire, it is relevant to examine the iterative and second hand nature of most of what had been written about the harem, Islam, and the Ottoman Empire in general, prior to their commentary. Much of this material that served to reify conventional conceptions about the harem came from members of the Levant Company and men who traveled to the Levant on behalf of it. Among those whose accounts reinforced established notions of the harem were Thomas Dallam, Alexander Drummond, and Paul Rycaut.

Dallam was a famed organ maker who travelled to Istanbul on behalf of Queen Elizabeth and the Levant Company to present a grand organ to Mehmet III in 1599 as a token of friendship between the new partners in trade.²⁶⁸ His travel diary includes his description of the harem. According to his story, Dallam was given access to the harem by the Sultan, who was trying to entice him into staying as his organ master.²⁶⁹ His description was quite lurid and fantastic. He describes many woman, “verrie prettie in deede [*sic*],” in various states of undress, remarking that he almost angered his host because he “stood so longe loukinge upon them [*sic*].”²⁷⁰ His account was published by Richard Hakluyt and was widely read. On one level at least, Dallam was actually present in Istanbul, something many of the other Europeans who commented on the harem could not say. Further, Dallam’s observations, while certainly confirming the sexually voyeuristic stereotypes of the harem, at least are not intentionally condemnatory. The same is not true for Rycaut and Drummond.

Paul Rycaut was the secretary to the ambassador Heneage Finch in Istanbul from 1660-1668, and served as the Levant Company’s consul in Izmir from 1689-1700.²⁷¹ He was also a well-known historian who wrote the influential book *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire* in 1665 as well as a continuation of Richard Knolles’ *General Historie of the Turks* in 1687.²⁷² It is almost certain that he never encountered the harem personally, and yet he felt qualified to write authoritatively on the topic. Oddly, he even

²⁶⁸ Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 172.

²⁶⁹ James Theodore Bent ed., *Early Voyages and Travels in the Levant: I. The Diary of Master Thomas Dallam, 1599-1600. II. Extracts from the Diaries of Dr. John Covel, 1670-1679. With Some Account of the Levant Company of Turkey Merchants, Issue 87* (Burt Franklin, 1893), 74-75.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 74-75.

²⁷¹ Robert Walsh, *Account of the Levant Company; with some notices of the benefits conferred upon society by its officers* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1825), 38.

²⁷² *Ibid.*

admits that he had no personal experience saying, “though I ingenuously confess my acquaintance there (as all my conversation with Women in Turkey) is but strange and unfamiliar; yet not to be guilty of this discourtesie, I shall to the best of my information write a short Account of these Captivated Ladies.”²⁷³ He gives an unembellished description of the physical structure of the harem, but as the “captivated lady” comment shows, he was not above personal comment. Further, he promotes the allegedly hedonistic aspects of the harem, and by association Ottoman society in general. He wrote, “this libidinous flame of depraved Nature is so common a disease among the Turks, and so ancient a Vice, that both for state and prevention of this unnatural crime, it hath not been esteemed safe or orderly in the Courts of Eastern Princes to constitute others for the Principal Officers of their Household than Eunuchs:”²⁷⁴ This comment may seem out of line in a well respected history, but this was clearly a common understanding of “Turkish” culture.

Almost unbelievably, Drummond is more specific in his criticisms. At least Drummond claims to have experienced the treatment of Ottoman women first hand while traveling on a ship with the harem of the “Vizier Pasha of Aleppo.”²⁷⁵ He wrote.

Notwithstanding the excess of care, we frequently procured a sight of these pretty prisoners; for the dear, little, playful creatures, were, at least, as curious to see us, as we were eager to look upon them. They generally diverted themselves in the gallery, skipping, frisking, and dancing like so many wanton kittens: and when the black animal [the eunuch] was out of the way, the owl-faced deputy allowed our door to stand a-jar; so that we sometimes enjoyed a peep; and, at other times they would gaze at us.²⁷⁶

²⁷³ Sir Paul Rycout, *The History of the Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (London: C. Brome, 1686), 69.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

²⁷⁵ Alexander Drummond, *Travels Through Different Cities of Germany, Italy, Greece and Several Parts of Asia as far as the Banks of the Euphrates* (London: W. Strahan, 1754), 179.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

In this passage he clearly is attempting to establish both his credentials to comment on the harem, as well as highlight his obvious congruence with the established notions of its erotic nature.

Importantly, he is clearly writing his account, published in 1754, with the specific purpose of refuting Lady Mary's accounts, which he had obviously either read or heard mention of. He wrote,

As for the Turks, every body knows how their women are cooped up, and what propensity they have to engage in an intrigue, if they knew how to manage it with discretion...However, dissimulation is so natural to the sex, that...a Turkish lady will pretend that she is happy in her lot; that her joys are complete, are inexpressible; and, that she looks upon the freedom of our women with horror and detestation. Such, at least, Lady Mary Wortley Montague tells us, were the professions of a Turkish lady with whom she cultivated an acquaintance and friendship at Constantinople; though I am so uncharitable as to believe that her tongue was at variance with her heart: for numberless instances might be produced to prove, that these eastern ladies envy that freedom which they affect to decry; and that were they possessed of such liberty, they would use it to the best advantage.²⁷⁷

That he singles out Montagu's account of the harem as being inaccurate is important to remember going forward, as it lends credence to the argument, of which more will be said shortly, that there was a desire among many Britons to discredit her and prevent her ideas from gaining traction. Drummond, or his ghostwriter, is obviously keen on highlighting two things from this passage. First, Ottoman women are captives, and second, that they were desirous, or should be desirous, of the freedoms granted to British women. Drummond and Rycout serve as good examples to highlight the stereotypes about the harem that Lady Mary, and to a lesser extent Alexander Russell, countered.

Fighting the Legacy of the Arm-chair Travelers

²⁷⁷ Alexander Drummond, *Travels Through Different Cities of Germany, Italy, Greece and Several Parts of Asia as far as the Banks of the Euphrates* (London: W. Strahan, 1754), 144.

One of Lady Mary's great contributions to the discourse on the Ottoman Empire was her refutation of those who wrote about Ottoman culture, and the harem in particular, but had never actually experienced first hand what they were writing about. She unapologetically exposes the inaccuracy of previous European accounts of the harem like those of Dallam and Rycaut. For example, Lady Mary is almost certainly correct in her assessment that earlier male writers were disingenuous in their assertions of experiencing the harem personally, considering that the harem was closed to all men outside of the immediate family. As noted in chapter four, commenting on aspects of Islam and the Ottoman Empire that they had never personally experienced was a glaring flaw in the observations made by most of those who had written on the subject before.²⁷⁸ Until the Levant Company brought English men and women into real contact with the Ottoman world, the "knowledge" about the Ottoman Empire, and the "East," was all too often simply regurgitation or translation of previous writers' accounts.²⁷⁹ This was true for most cultural commentary on the Ottoman Empire, but especially true when it came to the harem where, even those who traveled to the Ottoman Empire, if male, would have had no access to the harem without risking death as women were "hermetically sealed to adult males other than the Sultan [or head of the household] himself."²⁸⁰ Lady Mary's distaste for these charlatans was obvious. She wrote of those who commented on Ottoman gender relations: "now that I am acquainted with their [Ottoman] ways, I cannot

²⁷⁸ Samuel Chew, *The Crescent and the Rose: Islam and England During the Renaissance* (New York: Octagon Books Inc., 1965), 22.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Billie Melman, *Women's Orient, English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918: Sexuality, Religion, and Work* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 72.

forbear admiring either the exemplary discretion or the extreme stupidity of all the writers that have given accounts of them.”²⁸¹

Even considering this, however, perhaps because of her gender, and perhaps because of how divergent her views were from convention, her observations and ideas about women in the Ottoman Empire were widely rejected, not just by her ideological naysayers like Alexander Drummond and others who attacked her for “pernicious invention” and “disagreeable truth,” but also by her own family.²⁸² Perhaps those who questioned her should not be treated too harshly. Accepting Lady Mary’s accounts would have required a complete re-thinking of their worldview, even though that world view was based on unreliable and old information, something even her closest relatives had trouble achieving. It is telling that she was highly aware that her ideas would be controversial. She fully understood that they ran entirely counter to the established wisdom of the day, and that as such few people would immediately accept their veracity. She wrote to her sister, after a long description of particular aspects of Islam and Ottoman culture, “I am afraid that you will doubt the truth of this account, which I own is very different from our common notions in England; but it is no less truth for all that.”¹ This was obviously not a comment on the accuracy of her observations, but rather an indictment of the inaccuracy of all the men who went before her. Still, it seems clear that even her sister disbelieved and challenged her observations. She wrote in response to an unpublished letter from her sister,

[y]our whole letter is full of mistakes from one end to the other. I see you have taken your ideas of Turkey from that worthy author Dumont, who has wrote with

²⁸¹ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1869), 104.

²⁸² Billie Melman, *Women’s Orients, English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918 : Sexuality, Religion, and Work* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 98.

equal ignorance and confidence. 'Tis a particular pleasure to me here to read the voyages to the Levant, which are generally so far removed from truth, and so full of absurdities, I am very well diverted with them. They never fail giving you an account of the women, whom, 'tis certain, they never saw.²⁸³

Strong words indeed for a respected authority on the Levant but she was entirely justified in her criticism.

As her ideas about the harem were the most influential, and because she travelled to the Ottoman Empire first, Montagu is the focus of this chapter. However, Alexander Russell will play a significant part because as a doctor he was given access to the harem and he corroborates many of Lady Mary's observations. The new ideas about the harem initiated by Lady Mary, and largely corroborated by Dr. Russell, are important because they would be developed more fully by other female travelers and "Orientalists" in the nineteenth century and undoubtedly began the slow, and still incomplete, evolution in Western attitudes about the harem and gender relations in Islam.²⁸⁴

New Ideas About the Harem and the Liberty of Muslim Women

There is no doubt that, specifically related to the harem and ideas about Ottoman women, the Levant Company's greatest contribution to the discourse came not from one of its members, but rather from one of its ambassador's wives Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. Her letters were so influential that some historians, including Melman and Daniel Vitkus, point to Lady Mary's letters as a starting point for the later robust study of women's place in Islam and in the former Ottoman lands of the Middle East.

²⁸³ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1869), 97. In addition, the reference to Dumont is almost certainly to Jean Dumont's *A New Voyage to the Levant* that was an influential source for Europeans on the Ottoman Empire.

²⁸⁴ Billie Melman, *Women's Orient, English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918: Sexuality, Religion, and Work* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 7.

Connecting the Levant Company to the works and insights of Lady Mary, and even Alexander Russell, might seem tenuous and it is certainly not argued here that the company in any way influenced their observations intentionally. Rather, it facilitated them. Dr. Russell was in Aleppo as a physician serving the company community, and Lady Mary did not travel to Istanbul, Belgrade, and Adrianople (Edirne) for her own pleasure. She traveled there because her husband was on official business. Both she and Russell were in the Ottoman Empire for no other reason than their connections to the Levant Company. While Russell's education and scientific curiosity makes his detailed observations about the Ottoman Empire somewhat unsurprising, Montagu was perhaps an unlikely source for novel interpretations of the Ottoman Empire and Islam, but that is exactly what she became. Despite her reluctance to travel, she was given unprecedented access to the elite of Ottoman society, including the harem, because of her husband's position. She was afforded audiences with the Emperor Charles VI and the Empress, the Grand Vizier's wife Hafitén and other notable Ottoman women—and given access to the *hammam* and the harem of notable Ottoman houses—because of her husband's standing and social position as the ambassador of the Ottoman Empire's greatest trading partner.²⁸⁵

Therefore, since the purpose of this study is to show how the Levant Company, both its members and its associates, exposed London to alternative views of Islam and the Ottoman Empire, then Lady Mary and Alexander Russell simply cannot be excluded, even though they were not directly involved in the company's business. It was her letters written while in the Levant at the company's behest, largely corroborated later by

²⁸⁵ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1869), 80-82. Also, Lady Mary refers to the *hammam* as a bagnio, or public bath, as does Alexander Russell.

Russell, that served more than any other sources from the eighteenth century to dispel some of the most common and most insidious of the stereotypes about the Ottoman Empire, those of the repressive and hedonistic harem that, in turn, came to represent the perceived hedonism of the “Turk.”

Lady Mary’s counter-narrative also highlights one of her other remarkable attributes, the ability to turn the lens of judgment on her own people. Russell should also be recognized for his contribution to a more positive discourse about the treatment of Ottoman women, and his corroboration of much of what Lady Mary wrote, but his impact, as the second person to make these observations, is not as significant.

Lady Mary believed that she was the first European ever to experience, first hand, life inside the harem.²⁸⁶ Further, it is almost certain that no European Christian male had ever set foot in one of the most eroticized of “Turkish” institutions, the female *hammam* or “Turkish bath.” When Lady Mary visited a *hammam* during her stay at Edirne, she openly contradicted the standard vision of the *hammam* as a place where the women of the Ottoman Empire engaged in all manner of hedonism—with the exception of admitting that the women there were nude and were, in her opinion, the most beautiful collection of women to be found in the world.²⁸⁷ For her this visit, which took place on her journey to Istanbul, was the beginning of her questioning of the harem and women’s place in the Ottoman Empire. Her conclusion was that the *hammam* was not a place of sexual excess or a place where Ottoman women were forced to congregate for the purpose of keeping them separated from the lives of men, although she tacitly admits that

²⁸⁶ Billie Melman, *Women’s Orients, English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918: Sexuality, Religion, and Work* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 2. Also see Pierce, 114.

²⁸⁷ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1869), 70-79.

women were separated from men and prevented from participation in the public sphere of life.²⁸⁸ Instead she views the *hammam*, where women would gather roughly once a week, as a place where the women could meet and converse about life and society, a place of their own. Contrary to the image presented by the men who commented on the harem and the *hammam*, she notes that she knew “no European court where the ladies would have behaved themselves in so polite a manner to such a stranger,” and that, despite being stark naked, “there was not the least wanton smile or immodest gesture among them. They walked with the same majestic grace which Milton describes our general mother with.”²⁸⁹ Further, in one of her most famous observations, by way of useful comparison, she argues that the *hammam* was more akin to the English and European institution of the coffee house, which served as a place for people to meet, discuss politics, business, and gossip. She wrote, “[i]n short, it is the women’s coffee-house, where all the news of the town is told, scandals invented, etc. They generally take this diversion once a week, and stay there at least four or five hours.”²⁹⁰

Russell corroborates her account. He agrees that the *hammam*’s most important role was as a social gathering place for women. In Russell’s opinion it was “almost the only public female assembly; it affords the opportunity of meeting their acquaintances, and of learning domestic history of various kinds.”²⁹¹ Additionally, while he does have a slight disagreement with Montagu, he confirms her assessment that the *hammam* was not

²⁸⁸ As Melman points out, Lady Mary recognized that the men and women were also separated in London, and women largely excluded from the public sphere of life. Melman argues that the harem, according to Lady Mary, was “in fact not dissimilar to the aristocratic household in Britain. In other words: the harem is neither different nor foreign.” Melman, 97.

²⁸⁹ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1869), 69.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 70.

²⁹¹ Alexander Russell, *The Natural History of Aleppo and Parts Adjacent*, Vol II (London: Gregg Publishing, 1969), 137.

the location of some fantastic sexual excess, and goes even further by refuting Montagu's description of rampant nakedness.

A Turkish lady of distinction from Constantinople, in the Cady's Harem at Aleppo, who was long my patient and to whom I took an opportunity of mentioning certain passages relative to the Bagnio, from letters written from Turkey which had been published a few years before, assured me that as soon as the ladies undressed in the outer room, they immediately put on the Bagnio habit, and never quitted it till they dressed again. She said that some of the girls might possibly by accident have dropped the Fouta, but that she had never seen or even heard of a procession in which the women walked naked, through the rooms of the Bagnio. She remarked further, that the letter must have been written in sport. For if the lady was such as I had described her, it was impossible she should not have distinguished the accidental frolic of some giddy headed girls, from an established custom, approved by decency, and good breeding.²⁹²

While this passage does contradict Montagu's account of the nudity of the *hammam*, and it also highlights another possible criticism of Montagu, that her letters were intended to provoke, the most important aspect is that Russell agrees that the *hammam* and the harem were not places of sexual excess in contravention of the more established beliefs of the day.

Lady Mary's observations were not confined to the *hammam*. She made some general comments about Ottoman women, too, that were equally important. Apart from the image of the *hammam* and the harem as being licentious in nature, another prevalent image of Muslim, and by extension Ottoman, women was that they were treated as virtual slaves, without any free will, and were morally corrupt. She ardently refutes this notion and, in some cases, famously argues that the women of the Ottoman Empire had, in some critical ways, more freedom than English women. In this way, her commentary on the general status of women was probably the most introspective regarding a comparison with Britain. Along with her commentary about Ottoman women, she was clearly

²⁹² Alexander Russell, *The Natural History of Aleppo and Parts Adjacent*, Vol II (London: Gregg Publishing, 1969), 380-381.

questioning aspects of British gender relations and it is likely, based on her background, that Lady Mary was commenting as much on her own culture as she was enamored with the Ottoman treatment of women.²⁹³

For example, Montagu certainly believes the property rights granted to Muslim women were admirable, as such rights were not guaranteed to the same extent to women in England. Her commentary that follows is admittedly generalized, but since she only spent a year in the region she should not be condemned for it. Still, it is important for the tolerant view, and open mind, it represents. Of the property rights afforded to women by their *mahr*, dowry or bridegift, and by the Islamic laws of inheritance, and the freedom and security it provided them, she wrote the following:

[n]either have they much to apprehend from the resentment of their husbands; those ladies that are rich having all their money in their own hands. Upon the whole, I look upon the Turkish women as the only free people in the empire: the very divan pays respect to them; and the Grand-Seignior himself, when a pasha is executed, never violates the privilege of the *harem* (or women's apartment), which remains unsearched and entire to the widow... 'Tis true their law permits them four wives; but there is no instance of a man of quality that makes use of this liberty, or of a woman of rank that would suffer it."²⁹⁴

Here, even accounting for polygamy, it is clear that she believes Ottoman women, at least those of status as they are the ones she met, were given a great deal of independence as a result of their guaranteed rights to property, something women's historians of the Middle East have been arguing ever since.²⁹⁵ She was not arguing that there are no constraints

²⁹³ Humberto Garcia, *Islam and the English Enlightenment 1670-1840* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 67-75, 113, 143, 191. Lady Mary was well known for having what Garcia calls "radical Enlightenment" positions on gender relations, patriarchy, and religion, which should be accounted for in understanding her "letters."

²⁹⁴ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1869), 80.

²⁹⁵ Russell agrees with her assessment of the strength of women's property rights, noting that a Muslim woman's fine clothes and jewels were "the absolute property of the wife, not legally alienable but with her formal consent, and often prove the sole provision for the widow and her children." See Alexander Russell, *The Natural History of Aleppo and Parts Adjacent*, Vol. II (London: Gregg Publishing, 1969), 290.

on women, but it is clear when she wrote, “[n]either have they much to apprehend from the resentment of their husbands; those ladies that are rich having all their money in their own hands,” that their Islamic rights to property gave them a significant amount of independence.²⁹⁶

She also refutes the notion that Ottoman men treat their women as though they are morally corrupt or soulless, arguing that it was a “vulgar [European] notion... a mistake” that derives from European judgment.²⁹⁷ European Christians assumed that Muslim women were forced into marriage and immorality because they could not accept that a Muslim woman’s desire to marry might derive from her wish to bear and raise children, something Muslim Ottoman women believed was their ultimate religious duty. By way of contrast, the value of a European woman’s soul was judged by her chastity, not her role in childbearing.²⁹⁸ Thus, no European wedded to Christian morality would believe that the worth of a woman’s soul was determined by her critical role in bearing and raising children. While it was true, she wrote, that many superstitious women would not remain unmarried for any length of time after one marriage ended, out of fear of dying in a “reprobate state” for not being married as prescribed by their religion, this did not mean that Ottoman men and women did not value the women’s role in society or believe that it gave their soul real worth.²⁹⁹

Her great insight was in recognizing that this was fundamentally a matter of theological perspective. The morality of the Ottoman woman, and her worth, could not be evaluated properly without accounting for differing belief systems. She wrote, “[t]his

²⁹⁶ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1869), 80

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 94.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

is a piece of theology very different from that which teaches nothing to be more acceptable to God than a vow of perpetual virginity; which divinity is most rational, I leave you to determine.”³⁰⁰ The Christian paragon of feminine virtue was the virgin, while Muslims believed a woman’s value came from her sexuality, her ability and willingness to bear and raise children. Therefore, while her defense of the Muslim woman’s morality was admirable, her openness to alternative theology was also remarkable. Imagine, Lady Mary was arguing that the sexual nature of Ottoman woman was a virtue, if ethnocentric bias was overlooked, when it was a principal source of European condemnation of Islam. Her awareness of the European penchant for projecting their own morality on other cultures, judging their own to be superior with no basis for that distinction, is quite remarkable. Further, she does this while questioning whether European propriety is nobler than the expectation that women should marry and bear children, something that necessarily requires sexual activity.³⁰¹ It is safe to say that this awareness was centuries ahead of her time.

Perhaps because of Montagu’s observations about Muslim women’s virtue, Russell is so condemnatory of the idea that women would be excluded from paradise for a lack of virtue that he would not even deign to address it. According to Russell, specifically condemning Rycout, but also other male European travelers who wrote on the harem, “it does not seem necessary to enter upon the argument concerning the exclusion of the Mohammedan women from paradise, with other innumerable errors and misrepresentations relating to them, which are to be found in the works of [these]

³⁰⁰ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1869), 94.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*

travelers.”³⁰² While it is impossible to say for certain, this is an indicator, along with Drummond’s comments, that Montagu’s ideas about the harem may already have become highly influential by the middle of the eighteenth century when Drummond and Russell published their works.

Lady Mary also evaluated other objects of Western judgment in a new light, including hijab and other Islamic customs that were—and sadly still are—targeted for criticism on the grounds that they were evidence of Islamic mistreatment of women. She argues that traditional “Turkish” dress (including the veil as part of conforming to *hijab*) was not an imposition on Ottoman women.³⁰³ Further, she posits that in some important ways hijab was liberating, anticipating arguments made in later generations by scholars of the Middle East trying to counter the still entrenched Western stereotypes regarding Islam that assume systemic oppression of women. Scholars like Billie Melman and Anita Damiani have argued that Lady Mary’s letters might be seen as starting this movement that, albeit slowly, has brought to light a more enlightened and tolerant view on the traditional dress of Muslim women, and their liberty in general.

Lady Mary observed several positive aspects of the traditional Islamic dress that conventional wisdom held as oppressive. For example, she argued that conforming to *hijab* was liberating because it allowed Ottoman women to go unnoticed, it being difficult to differentiate between women. She wrote, “there is no distinguishing the great lady [even] from her slave. ‘Tis impossible for the most jealous husband to know his wife when he meets her; and no man dare touch or follow a woman in the street. This

³⁰² Alexander Russell, *The Natural History of Aleppo and Parts Adjacent*, Vol II (London: Gregg Publishing, 1969), 424-425.

³⁰³ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1869), 79-80.

perpetual masquerade gives them entire liberty of following their inclinations without danger of discovery.”³⁰⁴ As a result of this and their personal ownership of property, “[t]he women here are not, indeed so closely confined as many have related; they enjoy a high degree of liberty.”³⁰⁵

Oddly, however, Lady Mary sees another angle to traditional dress that might seem to reify—unwittingly considering when she lived—the scandalous image of Ottoman woman by arguing that one of the freedoms granted her by her anonymity was the ability to secretly find lovers. “As to [Ottoman women’s] morality and good conduct, I can say, like Harlequin, that ‘tis just as it is with you; and the Turkish ladies don’t commit one sin less for not being Christian.”³⁰⁶ Of course, it is also clear that she does not view this as negative or necessarily immoral. Within the statement is the tacit recognition of the prevalence of “sin” in Europe and England as well. All societies, it would seem, experience sin and infidelity, but it is remarkable that an English Lady would openly recognize and praise it as an indicator of liberty. Lady Mary truly seems to envy the power this anonymity provided women to find happiness in sin, praising it as evidence of women’s freedom by arguing that it was “very easy to see that they have in reality more liberty than we have” as a result of it.³⁰⁷

Considering how important the harem and the oppressive treatment of women were to the negative images of Islam and the Ottoman empire, Montagu and Alexander

³⁰⁴ Alexander Russell, *The Natural History of Aleppo and Parts Adjacent*, Vol II (London: Gregg Publishing, 1969), 79.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 158. There is also a fascinating passage in Lady Mary’s letters where she comments that the women she encountered thought that she was the one without freedom as a result of her corset. She wrote, “I was at last forced to open my shirt and show them my stays...for I saw they believed I was locked up in that machine, and that it was not in my own power to open it, which contrivance they attributed to my husband.” Montagu, 70-71.

³⁰⁶ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1869), 79.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

Russell contributed more perhaps than any other sources to presenting an alternative vision of the “Turk” in London and Europe. It is true that Lady Mary likely had a multitude of ulterior motives in mind when she wrote and edited her letters, and she certainly seemed to relish controversy. However, this does not lessen the impact of her observations, especially when a doctor of renown like Alexander Russell corroborated much of her account. Both Lady Mary and Alexander Russell are, therefore, key pieces to emerging secular and more tolerant views about the Ottoman Empire, and they were facilitated in their observations, if not influenced, by their tie to the Levant Company.

Conclusion:
Reflections on the Levant Company and Britain's Relationship with the Middle East

That there was a profusion of ideas about Islam and the Ottoman Empire in London between 1581, when the Levant Company was founded, and 1774, when the Ottoman Empire ceased to be a viable threat to European Christianity, is nothing new. This essay does not claim to be novel in making that claim. Its scope is, rather, much more limited and less grand. It is intended simply to highlight that one of the many sources of that multifaceted discourse on Islam and the Ottoman Empire was the Levant Company and that, because of the company's focus on business, its members were in an advantageous position to observe the Ottoman Empire free from the constraints of ideology because it was necessary to overlook historical animus for the sake of profit.

The members of the Levant Company had to be an influential source of information about the Ottoman Empire as most of the Britons who experienced it firsthand were involved in some way with the company. By examining the letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, the letter book of Samuel Harvey, and the accounts of Dudley North and Alexander Russell, it is clear that many members of the Levant Company, and those who lived in the Ottoman Empire under its influence, viewed the Ottoman Empire and Islam as less threatening, less licentious, and less backward than the common wisdom in Britain would suggest. The Ottomans with whom they interacted were certainly of high enough moral and cultural fiber to warrant trust when it concerned business. This is actually quite a statement. The Levant Company traders trusted their Ottoman associates enough to lend them money, trusting that they would be repaid.

Considering that Britain was not in the position of power it would acquire in the nineteenth century, and that the Ottoman Empire was viewed with respect and awe even

when it was feared and loathed, this should not be entirely surprising. The diplomats, Levant Company administrators, traders, and other associates were entering the Ottoman world where they had to operate within the system if they were to succeed in their business. Whatever their personal opinions of Islam and the “Turk,” there was little room for them if they were to develop the relationships necessary for trade. The Levant Company traders and associates studied here, including Lady Mary, would have recognized that England’s position, and by extension their position, was not dominant. They recognized that they had to work within the Ottoman system as England was not yet able to dictate the terms of its relationship with the Ottoman Empire, as it would be during the succeeding centuries.

The British traders kept to themselves, even locking themselves in the pseudo fortresses of the *khan*, in part, because they were not in a position to dictate their treatment. If they operated outside of the terms of the capitulation, or in a grey area, they put themselves at the mercy of the Ottoman legal system. While not necessarily condemnatory towards the legal system, this was a precarious position. Members of the Levant Company spent time in Ottoman prison, whether warranted or not, and no diplomatic effort could force their release without payment agreed upon by the Ottoman government. A good example already mentioned in this study is Samuel Harvey in 1705, who likely deserved his prison time. Another is the case of Samuel Pentlow’s estate, whose executors, Mr. John Ashby and Mr. Gabriel Smith, were imprisoned for being unwilling and unable to give Mr. Pentlow’s considerable fortune to the Ottoman government after he died married to a Greek Ottoman subject, thus making him an

Ottoman by decree of the Grand Vizier, Kara Mustafa Pasha.³⁰⁸ Therefore, while the members of the Levant Company participated willingly in the Ottoman legal system when it might prove advantageous to them, or if it was necessary because diplomatic efforts were unsuccessful, the British living in Ottoman cities were still uncomfortable being at the mercy of the Ottoman law when they were the ones at risk of punishment. That unease came, in part, because England was not influential enough to have them released through diplomatic pressure.

This ambivalence regarding the Ottoman justice system is illuminating because, it has to be acknowledged, the Levant Company contributed to the common negative and prejudiced discourse as well as the positive and more tolerant one. Their tolerance, whether it was Lady Mary Wortley Montagu or Samuel Harvey, was not intended. It happened based on their experience, and their experience would never have countered all of their pre-conceived notions about Islam and the Ottoman Empire. Further, while on the whole more open-minded and even positive regarding the Ottomans, Lady Mary, Samuel Harvey, and the other members of the Levant Company upheld or reinforced many of the old stereotypes. Further, when writing in personal journals or letters about the rural populations, Arabs or Bedouin, Kurds, and other Muslims from remote areas of the Ottoman Empire, the more common doctrinal rhetoric also emerges, as Lady Mary's observations about the Tripolitanians highlight. This is important, as it is a reminder that the members of the Levant Company were still Europeans who were products of an upbringing that told them to distrust and condescend to Muslims. Further, the Levant Company members were not negatively judged if they held prejudice, as they might be

³⁰⁸ Roger North, *The Lives of the Norths*, Vol. II, ed. A Jessopp (London: Gregg International Publishers Limited, 1969), 102-104.

today, especially when theological views were the predominantly held opinions in England. As long as they were profiting, cultural interaction and judgment were relatively unimportant, whether they conformed to the prevailing attitudes or not.

Whether the accounts promoted the old, ideological, ideas about Islam and the Ottoman Empire or contributed new ones, the contention that the Levant Company contributed to the discourse not only through the well-known associates like Lady Mary and Alexander and Patrick Russell, but also through the experiences of the lesser known traders like Samuel Harvey, is the critical take-away. The Levant Company has long been seen as important through the works of the better known Levant Company associates like Lady Mary, Edward Pococke, Henry Maundrell, Dudley North, Robert Bargaive, and Alexander and Patrick Russell, whose written works and scholarship contributed greatly to the “Orientalist” scholarship of the nineteenth century. A prime example, although it is not a focus of this paper because it post-dates the period studied, is Lord George Gordon Byron, the famous nineteenth-century poet. Lord Byron’s influence on attitudes about the East was enormous through his “Oriental Tales,” *The Giaour*, *The Bride of Abydos*, *The Corsair*, and *Lara*, which feature prominently in several studies on “Orientalist” literature. Edward Said uses Byron several times as a primary example of an “Orientalist” author. Byron was widely read, saying himself that he had read every work on the subject of the East by the time he was ten years old.³⁰⁹ Among the many books he is known to have read there are at least six memoirs or

³⁰⁹ Naji Queijan, *A Compendium of Eastern Elements in Lord Byron’s Oriental Tales* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 20.

collection of letters by members of the Levant Company, including the works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Alexander Russell.³¹⁰

However, the members who wrote about, and published, their experience in the Levant made up a tiny fraction of the thousands of Levant Company members who visited the Ottoman Empire during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The purpose here was to identify what some of the ideas about the Ottoman Empire were that came from other members of the company, men like Samuel Harvey and the author of the journal recounting the caravan to Basra.

That said, while the ideas about the Ottoman Empire that came from the young factors are represented by the small sampling of company traders highlighted here, it is an acknowledged shortcoming that there is no definitive evidence that the ideas from the average Levant Company trader influenced general British conceptions of Islam and the Ottoman Empire. Even though the members of the Levant Company were members of British elite society, and would almost certainly have relayed their experiences at the social gatherings, coffee houses, and exchanges of London, there is no documentation that provides a direct link. Still, it is contended here that it is safe to argue that their ideas about the Ottoman Empire likely did make it from the pages of their letters home to the streets of London, considering their abundant numbers and the status in British society they held by virtue of the wealth that allowed them to join the Levant Company.

An additional shortcoming, and what could be a fascinating study in its own right, is a lack of sources from the Aleppine or Ottoman perspective. They likely exist, but none are readily available in English, Ottoman Turkish, or Arabic. This was a hindrance

³¹⁰ Naji Queijan, *A Compendium of Eastern Elements in Lord Byron's Oriental Tales* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 20.

for this project, as it was intended to examine, in part, how the Levant Company enclaves in the Ottoman Empire would almost certainly have influenced Ottoman perceptions of Europeans and of Britons. Further, while this study examined hundreds of volumes of documents at the British National Archives, because of time constraints countless other volumes were either skipped entirely or not given a sufficiently detailed examination. Therefore, there are undoubtedly ideas about the Ottoman Empire, and the Levant Company's role there and in London, that were not unearthed.

Nevertheless, the examples of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Dudley North, Alexander Russell, and Samuel Harvey help to illustrate the primary message of this essay. It is a message that remains useful today and it is this: when personal relationships developed, so too did favorable opinions, even if the old prejudices remained. A general characteristic of negative stereotypes about Islam, then and now, was that they were based on second hand information and historical bias. However, when the Europeans of the Levant Company were forced to develop close relationships with the Ottoman Muslims with whom they traded, some of their prejudices began to break down. With literally thousands of young upper class Britons traveling to, and returning from, the Ottoman Empire as part of the Levant Company, their stories could not have failed to fuel a dynamic conversation about the Ottoman Empire in the coffee houses and social gathering spots of London. Even though they retained many of their prejudices, and regardless of their motivations, driven by profit as they were, it is significant that these Britons were able to move past their upbringing, at least in part, and contribute alternative ideas and understanding about a culture portrayed for so long as dangerous, immoral, and incomprehensible.

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