

ANGLO-TURKISH RELATIONS IN THE 20TH CENTURY

Pioneering a new research agenda on the history of UK-Turkey relations, the British Institute at Ankara introduced this strategic research initiative in 2015 in combination with the undertaking of a major research project entitled 'Turkey and Britain 1914–1952: From Enemies to Allies' that ran until 2019. This strategic research initiative aims to build on this project in order to create an active and sustainable network of scholars from Turkey, the UK and other countries that will promote diverse approaches to the study of the early Turkish Republic, especially its foreign policy, its relationship with Britain and its place in the world order. Research and funding administered under this initiative will support diversity and collaboration across different historiographic traditions (for example, diplomatic and military history, oral history and microhistory) with the aim of unearthing and accessing a full range of archival and other source material in the UK, Turkey and elsewhere. The objective is to promote the exploration of new themes significant for the understanding of bilateral relations in the past, as well as their development in the present and future.

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Occupied Istanbul

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At 9.40am on 16 March 1920, Andrew Ryan of the British High Commission presented the Ottoman Prime Minister, Salih Hulusi Paşa, with a note informing him that the Allies had declared martial law and occupied Istanbul. Earlier in the morning, British, French and Italian troops, present in the city since November 1918 under the terms of the armistice that had taken the Ottoman Empire out of the First World War, had conducted a series of arrests of high-profile former and serving Ottoman officials and officers, and taken control of multiple government ministries. With official occupation came a greatly expanded Allied presence within the Ottoman administration. Everything from tax rates, to driving regulations, to bar closing times was subject to inter-Allied committees which frequently overran their authority and clashed both among themselves and with their Ottoman partners. The Allied forces would not depart from Istanbul until 6 October 1923, giving way to the arrival of Turkish forces loyal to the Grand National Assembly at Ankara, the centre of authority in the new Turkish Republic.

The centenary of the official occupation presents a useful moment at which to promote a more comprehensive study of the politics, culture and society of Istanbul during the period. Despite the wealth of relevant multi-national archival holdings available, the occupation has been largely overlooked in public memory and ignored by academic writings in the former occupying powers, and it is often marginalised in the Anatolian-focused history of the War of

Independence in Turkey. The few English-language publications to date have focused on international diplomacy around the status of Istanbul, while Turkish literature has concentrated on nationalist responses to the occupation, leaving developments in the city itself largely unexplored. The work of several early-career scholars is now making up for this historiographical neglect, and it is hoped that the centenary of the occupation will prompt academics with expertise in the adjacent periods of late Ottoman and early Republican history to extend their research to the years 1918–1923.

The British Institute at Ankara's current research project on armistice-era Istanbul aims to build on this effervescent interest in the period. My own PhD thesis, titled *Britain's Levantine Empire 1914–1923*, which I have edited into book form and which is due to be published by Oxford University Press next year, examines the occupation of Istanbul in comparison with Britain's military governance of Thessaloniki and Alexandria over the same period. It focuses in particular on the image and experience of the city as documented in the testimony of British soldiers, some 100 of whose letters, diaries and memoirs I consulted at libraries and archives across the UK. More recently, I have expanded my research on the civilian population of Istanbul to contentious social issues, such as alcohol, narcotics and prostitution, in both the armistice period and the later 1920s and 1930s. I am currently working on this research with Gizem Tongo, who, after completing a two-year

postdoctoral fellowship at the Institute, has now joined the project on a six-month research fellowship. Her forthcoming monograph, *War, Art and the End of the Ottoman Empire*, explores how the Balkan Wars, the First World War and the War of Independence changed the conditions of art production, its agents and the art itself between 1913 and 1923.

One of the unique features of armistice-era Istanbul was the diversity of forces and peoples that congregated in the occupied city. Arriving British, French and Italian forces were composed of European troops but also colonial detachments from India, North Africa and Southeast Asia. The Allies brought with them labour battalions from their previous bases of operations in Macedonia and Egypt. Large numbers of refugees, from ongoing conflicts in southern Russia, the Caucasus and eastern Anatolia, joined earlier waves of exiles from the Balkans in the imperial capital. Ottoman prisoners of war returning from Egypt and Russia added to the traffic through Istanbul's ports and on its roadways.



A British soldier looking down a street in Istanbul.



British soldiers smoke a nargile in Çanakkale.

This diversity of actors is reflected in a multiplicity of sources available for the study of the city, something that makes the work for researchers on this period particularly demanding. Anyone working on Istanbul in these years will encounter newspapers, memoirs and official documents written in Ottoman Turkish, Greek, Armenian, Ladino, English, French, Italian, Russian and more, and such sources may be housed in an equally geographically wide-ranging set of libraries and archives. During the preparation of my book, I worked in archives in the UK, US, France, Turkey and Greece, but am well aware that the field of research is still far from complete, with Italian and Armenian archives obvious omissions. The period not only generated a vast quantity of texts in different languages but also a variety of material objects, such as photographs, paintings, postcards and souvenirs. In order to help future researchers navigate this maze of sources, the research project is preparing an online bibliography for the multi-national primary and secondary sources available on Istanbul from the period.

Discussions with institutions in Istanbul are ongoing regarding the organisation of an exhibition on the occupied city. The project also organised a conference that was to be held at Boğaziçi University with the cooperation of the history department there, as well as the support of the American Research Institute in Turkey and the Institut français d'études anatoliennes. Some 40 leading Turkish and international historians of the city were due to speak over three days on 'Occupied Istanbul: Urban Politics, Culture and Society, 1918–1923', with panels covering a diverse range of subjects, from arts to policing and labour to diplomacy. Due to the ongoing pandemic, the conference was postponed from its intended date in September 2020 and a new date will be announced in the near future. Alongside events organised by the University of Michigan and Inalco Centre de Recherches Moyen-Orient Méditerranée, the



British observation post at the Galata Tower.

conference will contribute to the delivery of major new works on the occupation period, including an edited collection of selected papers.

We hope that the work we have carried out on occupied Istanbul will be a basis for a larger project grant application. This new research avenue will compare Istanbul with other major eastern Mediterranean cities in the period 1918–1923, as they moved from Ottoman sovereignty to the new nation states and mandates that were established in the wake of the First World War. It was not until 1922–1923 that the positions of cities like Istanbul, Izmir, Beirut and Alexandria were concretised in the post-war state system, as marked by the Greek defeat in Asia Minor, the recognition of the Turkish Republic by the Treaty of Lausanne, the establishment of the Kingdom of Egypt and the creation of British and French Mandates for Syria, Lebanon and Palestine. During the preceding period of uncertainty, projects from a broad ideological spectrum competed for the attention of the multi-ethnic populations of Istanbul and other cities in the region, and an array of political, cultural and social movements emerged, many of them marginalised in later history writing

that has been centred on the contest between imperialism and nationalism. This comparative-connective research agenda is particularly suitable for a group of cities that had long-standing commercial, cultural, political and migratory ties between them, but whose shared histories have been divided too often by the national frameworks that have bound history writing about the post-Ottoman states of Turkey, Syria, Egypt, Greece, Lebanon and Palestine/Israel.

Funding will allow the British Institute at Ankara to create a website for the project, housing not only the digital bibliography, with links to major holdings at global archives, but also a wiki of short articles written by academics on people and places in the occupied city, modelled on the excellent <https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net>. We also plan to add a cartographic component to this bibliography and wiki, so that events, institutions and images from the period can be geolocated on the streets of historical Istanbul and contemporary maps of the city. It is hoped that such academically rigorous yet accessible work will further engage researchers and the public in this overshadowed period of Istanbul's history.