

FRONTIERS OF THE OTTOMAN WORLD

The British Institute at Ankara has begun to engage systematically in research on the Ottomans only in recent years, although earlier British scholars, notably its first director Seton Lloyd, made important pioneer contributions to the study of Ottoman architecture. A major landmark was a conference on the Frontiers of the Ottoman Empire, involving the collaboration of several other British schools and institutes, which was published by Oxford University Press and the British Academy in 2009: A. Peacock (ed.), *The Frontiers of the Ottoman World*.

Andrew Peacock, Assistant Director of the Institute from 2007–2011, built up the library's Ottoman holdings, conducted his own research in Turkey and Georgia, and also directed another project that demonstrates the reach of Ottoman power and Ottoman trade to Indonesia and southeast Asia between the 16th and 20th centuries.

The Institute has also recently provided financial backing for the study, directed by Caroline Finkel in collaboration with Ukrainian colleagues, of a major Ottoman frontier fortress, at Akkerman in the Ukraine (photo right). The project combines fieldwork with the study of Ottoman archival material. By supporting these initiatives, the Institute can draw on its experience and networks to develop aspects of Ottoman studies that have been relatively neglected elsewhere.



The literature of travel, exploration and empire: a comparative analysis of English travels to the Ottoman empire and the South Pacific in the long 18th century, 1636–1863

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My thesis argues that cross-cultural encounters in the period 1636–1863 were much more complex and multi-layered than dichotomously structured post-colonial frameworks often suggest. Both the Ottoman empire and the South Pacific were regions in which ‘travel could be extremely uncomfortable and estranging’ (Landry 2004: 447). Consequently, these two sites of British travel and exploration were governed by what Donna Landry has called ‘extreme travel’. However, they differed considerably in their ‘relations to knowledge’ (Landry 2004: 447): Middle Eastern travel has always been caught up in ‘perpetual reenactment’ (Landry 2004: 447) because of real or imagined Oriental precedents, whilst explorers in the South Pacific hardly ever knew what they were about to find or endure.

The six case-studies in this thesis attempt to undo the cultural layers of the age of high imperialism, which have governed Western concepts of cultural alterity down to the present day, by carefully reading and historicising travel accounts by seven travellers in the regions in question. Whilst my research on the South Pacific has developed out of my MA dissertation, I became intrigued by Gerald

MacLean’s work on Anglo-Ottoman encounters and decided to investigate the similarities and differences of these distinct, yet intimately connected, areas of British interest. Post-colonial theory provides a good point of departure for tackling this project, but ultimately fails to do justice to the complexities, vicissitudes and idiosyncrasies of cross-cultural encounters.

The study grant I was awarded by the British Institute at Ankara has enabled me to spend two months in Ankara to consolidate my research on the Ottomans, as well as providing an opportunity to map out further research on Anglo-Ottoman, or, more generally, European-Ottoman, interaction. Europeans experiencing the great eastern empire, which straddled three continents in its heyday, returned to their homelands with a plethora of impressions of its cities, landscapes and peoples. Accordingly, the Islamic Mediterranean, the desert as transnational contact zone, and both commercial and cultural traffic are essential ingredients in this research project. Further research on Europeans travelling in Ottoman lands may bring to the fore how the histories of Europe and the Middle East are inextricably intertwined, especially in an age in which many politicians and public intellectuals seem to believe the contrary.

Bibliography

Landry, D. 2004: ‘Saddle time’ *Criticism. A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts* 46.3: 441–58