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Araştırma makalesi/Research article

The Imaginary Orient: The British Traveller's Orientalist Gaze on Ottoman Aleppo

Muhayyel Şark: Britanyalı Gezginin Osmanlı Halep'ine Şarkiyatçı Bakışı

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Abstract

This article investigates the representation of Ottoman Aleppo through the orientalist perspective of British intelligence officer William John Childs, who journeyed across Asia Minor, reaching Aleppo in 1911. Against a backdrop of geopolitical unrest preceding the First World War and the Empire's eventual disintegration, Childs' travelogue frames Aleppo as a culturally distinct entity, diverging from Ottoman identity and history. Focusing on Ottoman Aleppo of the early twentieth century, a city positioned outside the borders of modern Turkey, this study explores the complex fascination and apprehension that the East inspired in Western travellers. Childs' depiction of Aleppo presents it as a land of mystery and unknowability, a characterization that reflects the Western observer's sense of both allure and cultural estrangement. This analysis reveals

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how Childs strategically portrays Aleppo as a non-Ottoman polity, distancing it from the Ottoman imperial framework. Through an orientalist lens, his narrative constructs an idealized, imagined East, shaped by preconceived notions and European stereotypes. Aleppo, already romanticized in the English imagination, is represented as an exotic and impenetrable landscape, embodying a mystique that symbolizes Western limitations in fully understanding the East. By casting Aleppo as the other, Childs also aligns with a European bourgeois mindset that defines itself by demarcating what it considers inferior—dirty, chaotic, and foreign. His portrayal thus reinforces both class and cultural hierarchies, with the East serving as a foil for European superiority. To conclude, this study examines how such orientalist representations of Aleppo contributed to sustaining colonial ideologies, presenting the East as a space that both fascinated and revolted the European imagination and reaffirming imperialist narratives of Western dominance.

Keywords: *travel writing, orientalism, Ottoman Empire, British Empire, Aleppo*

Öz

Bu makale, İngiliz istihbarat subayı William John Childs'ın Osmanlı Halep'ini oryantalist bir bakış açısıyla nasıl temsil ettiğini incelemektedir. Childs, 1911'de Küçük Asya boyunca ilerleyerek Halep'e ulaşmıştır. Birinci Dünya Savaşı öncesindeki jeopolitik huzursuzluklar ve imparatorluğun dağılmasının öncesinde yazılmış bu seyahatname, Halep'i Osmanlı kimliği ve tarihinden ayrışan, kültürel olarak farklı bir yapı olarak tanımlamaktadır. Modern Türkiye sınırlarının dışında kalan yirminci yüzyıl başlarındaki Osmanlı Halep'ine odaklanan bu çalışma, Doğu'nun Batılı gezginlerde uyandırdığı karmaşık hayranlık ve tedirginlik duygularını ele almaktadır. Childs'ın Halep tasviri, şehri bir gizem ve bilinmezlik diyarı olarak sunmakta ve Batılı gözlemcinin hem çekici hem de kültürel olarak yabancı bir alan algısını yansıtmaktadır. Bu çözümleme, Childs'ın Halep'i Osmanlı imparatorluk yapısından uzak, bağımsız bir siyasi yapı olarak stratejik biçimde tasvir edişini ortaya koymaktadır. Oryantalist bir mercekle ele alınan bu anlatı, önceden oluşmuş Avrupalı klişeler ve önyargılarla idealize edilmiş, hayali bir Doğu inşa eder. Halihazırda İngilizlerin imgeleminde romantize edilmiş olan Halep, Batı'nın Doğu'yu tam olarak anlamadaki sınırlılığını sembolize eden egzotik ve anlaşılmaz bir manzara olarak temsil edilmektedir. Childs, Halep'i öteki olarak tasvir ederek, kendini kirli, kaotik ve yabancı olarak gördüğü şeylerden sınırlarla ayıran bir Avrupa burjuva zihniyetiyle de örtüşmektedir. Bu tasvir, sınıfsal ve kültürel hiyerarşileri güçlendirir ve Doğu'yu Avrupa'nın üstünlüğünü yansıtan bir karşıtlık unsuru olarak kullanır. Sonuç olarak bu çalışma, Halep'in bu tür oryantalist temsillerinin sömürge ideolojilerini nasıl beslediğini, Doğu'yu Avrupa'nın hayal gücünü

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hem büyüleyen hem de tiksindiren bir alan olarak sunduğunu ve Batı'nın üstünlüğüne dair emperyalist anlatıları nasıl pekiştirdiğini incelemektedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: *seyahat yazını, şarkiyatçılık, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Britanya İmparatorluğu, Halep*

Introduction

Stories, whether passed down orally or written, have been long connected with travelling. The wanderer has told us tales since ancient times; the sailor has come back home with many adventures to recount and the merchant has taken stories with himself wherever he goes. The ancient epic hero Gilgamesh undertakes a perilous journey to discover the secret of eternal life and receives wisdom "at the ends of the earth from the survivor of the Deluge" (George, 2020: xvi). In the Middle Ages, figures like pilgrims and knights continued the tradition of journeying, following in the footsteps of ancient epic heroes.

In the modern era, writing and travelling were deeply connected. European travellers in the sixteenth century began documenting their observations. Thus, early modern travellers produced an extensive body of knowledge about the world shaped by their individual experiences. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Ottomans captivated Europe. Queen Elizabeth of England sent William Harborne as a government spy to Constantinople in 1578. Harborne "must have experienced a combination of exhilaration and trepidation" when he arrived in Constantinople (Brotton, 2017: 89-90). This sense of fear intertwined with fascination gave rise to colonial narratives that reflected a complex mix of aversion and allure. By the seventeenth century, European anxieties had merged with an interest in elements of Ottoman culture, though underlying fears persisted (Maclean, 2007: 2).

Eighteenth-century abounds in real and imaginary travelogues. After the age of colonial expansion, an empiricist perspective viewed travelling as an opportunity to develop the mind and accumulate knowledge (Fussell, 1987: 129). Travelling was seen as a practice to broaden one's horizon and to know the world empirically in the Age of Reason. This empiricist point of view about travelling was accompanied by the paradigm of the Grand Tour whose primary objective was to expose young men of the wealthy classes to Europe's "treasured artifacts and ennobling society" (Buzard, 2002: 38). Thus, the commercial pursuits of the sixteenth century evolved into the imperial motives of the eighteenth century. Britain aimed to explore and demystify the *terra incognita* they were colonizing. As Said noted, the East "needed first to be known, then invaded and possessed" (1979: 101). Anatolia attracted many European travellers in the eighteenth century. For instance, Lady Montagu's Turcophile letters undermine the propensity of many Western travellers "to exoticize the Orient" (Bassnett, 2002: 229). Nineteenth-century travel narratives were similarly infused with impressions of the East. European travellers' writing reflected the imperialist agenda of the West. Their narratives embodied their fantasies of the beguiling Orient. For example, Nerval's *Voyage to the Orient* bears the marks of "the exotic oriental dreams" of the East (Pamuk, 2006: 281). Lord Byron visited Turkey in the nineteenth century and turned his observations into tales which show his interest in cultural, social, religious, and racial diversity and otherness (Sharafuddin, 1996:

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243). His oriental tales evince that the European imagination views the East as its other. In *The Giaour*, Byron contributes to the stereotypical image of the Turkish as both terrifying and fascinating in the Western imagination, as he pictures "Othman's sons" (2006: 606).

William John Childs travelled across Asia Minor in 1911 amid the unrest leading up to the First World War. The Ottoman Empire held exceptional importance for British foreign policy (Hamm, 2012: 1). As Hobsbawm points out, in the period between 1876 and 1915, the world's imperial powers colonised one-fourth of the world's land mass, the British Empire itself acquiring about four million square miles (1987: 59). Therefore, this period was marked by intense competition among imperial powers striving for influence in the East. During this turbulent period, Childs published his travel account. He embodies the political agenda of the Empire, maintaining an orientalist perspective typical of modern travel narratives. His writing reflects established representational themes about the Ottomans that emerged in early modern England.

Leaving Constantinople by ship, Childs arrived in Samsun, located on the coast of the Black Sea, began his journey towards inland Anatolia and ended his journey on the Mediterranean coast after having visited Aleppo. I have decided to concentrate on Ottoman Aleppo in this paper as it is a Mesopotamian city in the Levant, not Asia Minor, and as it is the only city in this narrative that stands today outside the borders of modern Turkey. It is also interesting to focus on Aleppo as the title of the travelogue exclusively refers to Asia Minor.

Ottoman Aleppo under western eyes

Childs travelled from Anatolia to Aleppo, a city situated "on the western fringe of Mesopotamia" (1917: 414-15). He defines Ottoman Aleppo as a Mesopotamian city, foregrounds its difference from the other Ottoman cities; he underscores that Aleppo does not share a common Ottoman identity and locates the city historically and culturally outside the boundaries of the Ottoman heritage in a critical period when the Empire was about to collapse, and the national states were expected to emerge after its fall. Childs describes Aleppo as a "densely peopled eastern city" and an enormously influential old city that scarcely has "the shabbiness and decay and makeshift" typical of other Ottoman cities (1917: 416-417). He claims that Aleppo was characterised by "a remarkable individuality", which he finds fascinating (417). This is his first attempt to detach Aleppo from the other Ottoman cities and to emphasize that its uniqueness distinguished the city from the Ottoman heritage.

Childs is intrigued by Aleppo, which he regards as "the true heart of the East" (1917: 415). Thanks to the "alluring and glamorous" city that was "already made familiar by imagination," the English had a popular "conception of the Mediterranean East" (415). Aleppo had already enthralled the imagination of the English even before they visited the city, and thus they had constructed an imaginary city in their minds. Hence, Childs' account reflects the Orient that is "almost a European invention" (Said, 1979: 1). His narrative affirms Hentsch's view that "[t]he Orient is in our minds" (1992: ix). Besides, he exercises a strategy of inversion as he forges the east as the oriental other: "it is no longer a matter of a and b, simply of a and the converse of a" (Hartog, 1988: 213). Therefore, the imagined Aleppo

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in the English conception has nothing to do with the real Aleppo at that time owing to this method of negation and the concomitant construction of otherness. The western gazer needs an inversion of himself not only to distinguish himself from his other and designate the East as unreal, therefore, liquid, elusive, and unintelligible, and the West as real, therefore, solid, definite, and intelligible, but also to reproduce an inverted copy of himself to be fascinated with and to admire himself through this inverted image on the mirror he is holding. Hence, travel writing is wonderfully ambiguous, "somewhere between fact and fiction" (Bufford, 1998: x). Accordingly, Childs is not drawn to the real, factual Aleppo grounded in its own reality, but to the unreal, fictional Aleppo.

Childs states that Aleppo aesthetically influenced him as its style generated "satisfying effects" in the viewer (1917: 417). He calls the style "Saracenic Gothic" owing to the masonry of "heavy, smooth, squared stones" (417). He takes the western style of Gothic as the point of reference to describe the architecture of the city even though the Gothic style had sprung from an entirely different cultural context and historical background and had nothing to do with Ottoman Aleppo in the early twentieth century. Childs' attitude is reminiscent of travel writing in the age of colonial expansion that generated "the rest of the world" and made it recognisable for the West (Pratt, 1992: p. 5). The architecture of Aleppo is made recognisable due to his reference to the Gothic style of European cultural heritage. He also calls this architectural style Saracenic, a culturally loaded word that historically refers to the Arabs and Muslims, especially during the time of the Crusades. He attempts to de-historicize the city, to delete its contemporary reality and take it out of its temporal context. The fact that he does not view the architecture of the city as part of the Ottoman culture is another attempt to severe Ottoman Aleppo from the Ottoman Empire and to impinge on the mind of the reader Aleppo as a non-Ottoman polity.

Childs' narrative is characterised by an orientalist perspective that views Aleppo as a city infused with impenetrable mysteries, inscrutable faces, and unfathomable minds. He believes that mystery permeates this ancient eastern city; he claims that this mystery appears only to the western traveller and in fact stands for his ineptitude to grasp the orient or "to think in its terms" (1917: 419). Childs' accentuation of his inability to comprehend the East may be viewed as a crystallisation of the western impulse to distinguish itself from its other, the East. Likewise, Childs' incapacity to understand the East stems from "the problem of the inexpressibility of the Other" or the hardship to imagine and represent the other (Campbell, 2002: 267). This orientalist discourse renders the East incomprehensible. Hourani (1980) observes that westerners saw the Muslim East as particularly threatening because it represented an alternative culture uncomfortably close to their own. Therefore, they wanted to stress the difference between the East and the West. Accordingly, Childs regards "the people's faces" as "inscrutable" so he is unable to read into their minds; he wonders how "these busy thronging crowds" earn their living in a city which is not industrialised; he is curious about what these people think about as they have "no politics and no newspapers" and how they entertain themselves as they have "no amusements" (1917: 419). Even though "people of almost every race" live in Aleppo, its inhabitants have "an Aleppo look of mystery

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and differ plainly from those of all other Ottoman cities" (419). Childs believes that Aleppo has stamped these people with itself. He contends that this sense of mystery is heightened by the city's alleys and courtyards: "The play of shadow and sunlight in black and white, the vistas of arcades in gloom, the small high-placed windows (…) the streams of silent people too preoccupied to notice you—all seem steeped in suggestion and mystery" (419). According to Childs, the dwellers of Aleppo are immersed in secrecy; their city basks in the twilight of obscurity. He mystifies Aleppo as a city of riddles where people do not enjoy the advantages of a modern industrial city such as newspapers and amusements. He depoliticises these people as he portrays them as having no interest in discussing politics and reading newspapers. He seems to be enthralled by the mystery of the city even though he fails to understand the East. This orientalist discourse represents the eastern peoples as "ignorant of self-government" and lacking agency (Said, 1979: 237).

Aleppo fascinates Childs with its ancient bazaars, too. He presents an almost ethnographic account of Aleppo through his observations about bazaars. His anthropological impulse to analyse the people of the East accords well with the western travel writing in the modern age. Rubies argues that the European traveller's penchant for describing peoples, their culture, language, and politics is so entrenched in travel narratives written in Europe in the modern age that one expects "ethnography to be essential to the genre" (2002: 242). Turning the people of the orient into objects of investigation is an imperialist impulse, as it provides the westerner with a superior position as the holder of produced knowledge and the executer of the research, and thereby reduces the (eastern) peoples to the status of objects. In that regard, Campbell contends that both "the geographical surveying of the globe" and "the anthropological investigation" of peoples and their cultures led to the accumulation of power and wealth (2002: 269). This desire for power may be seen in Childs who is beguiled by the ancient bazaars teeming "with people, and even animals" which make Aleppo unique and provide the "most Eastern and surprising and interesting spectacle" (1917: 420). Aleppo is reduced to an enchanting object of spectacle devoured by the western viewer. He is intrigued by the bazaars thronged with not only people but also animals as if he were wandering in a circus that is wildly active, disordered and sensational. He employs the language of the colonialist that utilises "the tropes of degeneration, savagery, and monstrosity" (Youngs, 2002: 158). Like western travellers who employed animal imagery to depict "savage others" (Carr, 2002: 83), Childs deploys images of animals and their intimacy with the people to identify the oriental other. He further states that the bazaar represents "the unchanging East" and has "an unspoilt Eastern flavour" (1917: 420-423). He defines the immutable essence of the city as an oriental flavour, alluding to the spices, odours, tastes, and aromas that he finds bewildering. The essence of the city is described by the traveller who uses his gustatory, olfactory and tactile senses; a city where people have no politics would be embodied by means of bodily sensations as the European whose mindset is determined by the metaphysical dichotomy between mind and body would associate the East with the body and the West with the mind. This is in accordance with the orientalist discourse that portrays the East as the land of people whose lives are marked by the pleasures of the body, including "the excess of

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libidinous passions" (Said, 1979: 171). In an eastern city which is not rationally designed but haphazardly formed in time, one might roam in it for several hours and never "go over the same ground twice" since one stumbles upon new ramifications that lead to "fresh turnings to be taken" (Childs, 1917: 420). Those ramifications and turnings intrigue the traveller whose sense of mystery is aroused. His sense of curiosity is titillated as he views the bazaar so packed with people "of every blood" that one comes across "unfamiliar" races in addition to "the better-known races" (420). He is ravished to see those unknown people in this oriental circus where grotesque human beings and animals put on puzzling performances. This imperialist discourse forges the East as a "quasi-monstrous" other (Said, 1979: 154). The difference between the familiar races and the unfamiliar races would surely correspond to the divide between the civilised and the uncivilised in the psyche of the European traveller. These people blend, creating a vibrant and diverse tapestry of humanity, which is more vivid, striking, and intriguingly focused on their pursuits than anything an ordinary imagination could conjure (Childs, 1917: 420). Childs is spellbound by the variety of colours in Aleppo:

> Gold and silver embroidery, and lace and garments of white and scarlet and blue and brown and green and orange, are the daily style of these people, and the colours are always pleasing and never crude. The bazaars are in gloom except where bars of sunlight enter from small windows, and these white shafts strike through a blue haze of smoke which fills the vault. The bazaar smell is a compound of tobacco and spice, new carpets and merchandise, animals, human beings, fruit, vegetables — of everything which moves, of everything which can be bought or sold or used. (420-421)

Childs' narrative is filled with such intoxicating images which romanticise the city that Aleppo morphs into an oriental paradise in the minds of the readers who would be enchanted by the oriental tales such as the Arabian Nights. He is charmed by "the Aleppo smell" which he believes is "peculiar" to the city (421). One may buy silver work from India, Chinese porcelain and silk, unique fabrics and intricate needlework from Asia Minor, Japanese bowls, African beadwork, photographic films from France, sewing machines from America and other goods from England. The stall of one shop extends into "dim caverns of its own behind" (421). It seems as if Childs were talking about an enchanting castle with its hidden traps, twisted staircase, hidden rooms and dungeons that the readers come across in a nineteenth-century Gothic novel which would be expected to arouse a sense of mystery. This shows that travel writing features "marvellous monstrosity" that makes the East enchanting for the western travellers (Whitehead, 2002: 122).

Childs' feeling of enchantment is intertwined with a foreboding sense of uncertainty and uncanniness about the city. He believes that Aleppo's winding narrow alleys, open courtyards, and accessible doorways seem well-suited for conspiracy and acts of assassination (1917: 419). He feels that these people are engaged in intrigues, scheming and plotting; they seem to be uncanny and sinister because they carry out their business in illegal ways; they do not live in a modern city where the rule of law applies; one could be stabbed in those menacing dark alleys. He states that assassination is not a far-fetched idea because he recollects, as though the thought was prompted by a subconscious memory, that assassins are from this region,

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and adds that "a hill tribe" known as the assassins practiced customs that have imbued the term with its current ominous connotation (419). He remembers unconsciously the story of the assassins, yet his orientalist narrative is designed to portray Aleppo as uncanny and its inhabitants as dubious. He also recalls that the assassins had strongholds in Aleppo, where they carried out acts of vengeance both for their own causes and for hire, causing relentless problems for the Crusader rulers (419-420). The assassins introduced to the western world by the famous traveller Marco Polo (Daftary, 1990: 12) have been a source of fear for the Europeans. The old stone walls of Aleppo, "black with age, and polished by the brushing of passengers" for ages, and the doorways, which undoubtedly witnessed the original assassins, naturally compel one to pause and examine the potential this location offers for acts of assassination (Childs, 1917: 420). Childs asserts that in Aleppo, traditional methods of crime such as the knife from behind, the thin cord, and the silken strangling sash are still commonly used alongside modern bullets, as though the legacy of the past continues to exert its influence (420). He portrays Aleppo as an uncanny place. In an imaginary region fabricated by the western mind, Aleppo as an oriental city is an unsafe, threatening and intimidating city, and its dwellers are distrusted.

Charmed by commercials *khans*, Childs claims that these stone buildings so exceptional in "workmanship and restrained use of ornament" are not appreciated since they are not known beyond the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire (1917: 421-422). He asserts that if such a building were in Europe, it would be widely recognized through illustrations and celebrated as a remarkable example of ancient art. However, being in Aleppo, it remains "unknown to the outer world and unappreciated" (422). This surely communicates the idea that the Europeans would be able to appreciate the wonderful workmanship of those buildings, yet they are not appreciated enough by the people of Aleppo. He goes on to observe the people dressed "in gay-coloured garments," camels and asses kneeling under shady walls of the khans, "some curious process of trade in full swing" under an arch and "the cleaning of hair or wool, or the making of woollen felt" (422). He notes that the process of cleaning wool or hair "seems to have something of conjuring about it, so immediate are the results and so unexpected compared with the rude implement used" (422). As he writes down his impressions, he utilises certain words that demonstrate his orientalist agenda that represents Aleppo as eerie; his curiosity is aroused by the process of trade, and he is enchanted by the magical process of cleaning wool. He cannot believe that the "man seated cross-legged on the stone paving is the unlikely-looking conjurer" because he is "small, thin, dirty, dark, and unmistakably unhealthy, but his movements of hand are those of a master in his calling" (422). Childs' presentation of the grimy and sickly body of the conjurer is another concrete manifestation of the western traveller's gaze. Childs incarnates the European "bourgeois subject" that constantly shaped and reshaped his identity by excluding what it classified as inferior, deeming it "dirty, repulsive, noisy, contaminating" (Stallybrass & White, 1986: 191). Teltscher also argues that one of the anxieties of colonial rule is "the fear of contamination and corruption through contact" (2002: 199). Dirt constitutes a boundary between the western traveller and the local; this boundary allows the western subject to objectify the East and define the eastern peoples

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as its other. Childs further notes that the conjurer's "instrument is a heavy wooden bow" and he places on the floor "a small heap of goat's hair, clotted into lumps by dirt and mud" (1917: 422). He cannot help but watch the man spin wool and he is fascinated: "With a wooden mallet he strikes the strings lightly and sets them twanging harmoniously, his other hand rocks the bow, and allows its back to strike the wall. Between the tap of bow on wall comes a tap of strings with mallet" (423). His fascination with the conjurer demonstrates that "disgust always bears the imprint of desire" as these marginalized realms, seemingly cast out as the other, resurface as objects of "nostalgia, longing and fascination" (Stallybrass & White, 1986: 191). Childs is so impressed by the conjurer that he likens him to a musician and the sounding strings sound like "the distant sound of a drum and harps" (1917: 423). As he gets into stride with the bow, he starts humming a song, too. He is bewitched by the process of the dirty hair turning into a soft and clean heap of wool. The strings are vibrating, the man is twanging, tapping, rocking or stirring the bow; he is singing "in the cool shade of his cloister" while the cloud of dust is filling the room (423). Childs is entranced by the pre-modern, pre-industrial process of wool spinning and the embodied labour of the man who is attuned to the music of the bow as if it were an instrument and whose body works harmoniously with his mind. This picture of the integrity of the mind and the body strikes a deep chord, yet the British officer does not surrender himself to the rhythm of the dancing body, the singing tongue, the rocking hands, the twanging fingers and the beating heart which all resonate harmoniously with the mind; he cannot help but realise that he is also shortening his life by inhaling the dust generated by his own labour (423). The rational voice of western modernity speaks though him and summons him back as he has fallen prey to the romantic image of the Eastern man whose mind and body are interpenetrated. Childs employs the orientalist discourse to designate the East as "irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike" as opposed to the "rational, virtuous, mature" West (Said, 1979: 49).

Childs is also fascinated by the citadel of Aleppo, which he describes as "history made visible" (1917: 423). The citadel is traditionally believed to have been constructed "in the time of Abraham" (423). Since then, it has seen the Christian Crusaders, the caliphs of Baghdad, Byzantines, Syrian Seljuks, Egyptians and Mongols (423). Aligned with the British imperialist agenda, Childs conspicuously omits the Ottoman Empire, which governed Aleppo for nearly four centuries, from his narrative. This exclusion subtly reinforces an imperialist perspective, diminishing the significance of Ottoman rule and legacy in Aleppo's history.

However, it is not this story of wars and armies that really fascinates Childs; he is rather mesmerised by a secondary narrative about the city's life and governance, detailing the conflicts between rulers and the governed over centuries of unrest (1917: 423-424). As he digs deep into this hidden story of Aleppo, his perspective shows us how he embodies the modern, industrial and capitalist modern Europe. Like the citadel of Aleppo that is history made visible, he becomes history incarnate as he emerges as the European capitalist. The gaze of the European capitalist is striking; he knows why rich men's houses were like "stone-walled, iron-barred" fortresses in this city; he understands that "the shop-keeping class" had to herd together in "strong bazaars" for the safety of themselves and their goods, that

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merchants and travellers had to lodge "themselves in massive khans" for the same reasons (424). He notes that the citadel was necessary for those people and that the rulers of Aleppo needed a fortress that matched their extensive possessions and heightened dangers (424). He thinks that the citadel was not built to protect the citizens of Aleppo, but it was rather built "against the citizens" (424). He notes that the citadel could never repel foreign invaders, adding that it could not save the citizens from massacre by the Egyptians or the Mongols. Childs claims that the citadel of Aleppo was like the Bastille of Paris (424), suggesting that it served to imprison the very inhabitants of the city it was supposed to protect. The citadel was enclosed by the towering walls; its immense height and mass only becomes apparent when one completes the outer circuit by walking along the plaza that encircles it beyond the moat (424). The giant edifice with its massive bridges, mighty towers and majestic portals towered over the dwellers of the city living within those walls and intimidated them without their knowledge. The defensive ditch of the fortification conjures up the image of a medieval city with its moat. Childs' descriptions of the city not only disclose his capitalistic, modern gaze, but also suggest that capitalism is not unique to modern Europe. All the same, Childs is delighted to realise that his "Protestant thrift, resourcefulness, and willingness to work hard" was also found in the merchants of Aleppo (Hooper, 2002: 184).

The Bastille of Paris is not the only thing that reminds Childs of Europe in Ottoman Aleppo. Looking up at the towering steps and cavernous archway, Childs reflects on how much of it has been influenced by western invaders, how much ultimately traces back to "the universal Normans" and concludes that the Crusaders left a lasting imprint on this region of the East while he also acknowledges that the Saracens surpassed those from whom they learned the techniques of castle construction (1917: 425). He contends that the cultural heritage of Aleppo can be traced back to the Normans that he views as universal. He regards the universal Normans as the source from which Aleppo's architecture has been derived and presents their sweeping influence as an indelible mark that the Europeans left in the city hundreds of years ago. Thus, he reminds the reader of the historical presence of the Europeans in Aleppo. Childs' narrative is reminiscent of travel writing that in the centuries of imperial expansion reflected the European desire to position the non-European world in a way that allowed it to be influenced, exploited, or, in certain instances, directly governed (Bridges, 2002: 53). The fact that he particularly emphasises the influence of the Normans and the Gothic style in Aleppo could be seen as a concrete manifestation of this colonialist desire to subjugate the East and to position it as the land that is under the influence of the West.

Besides the structures reminiscent of Europe, Childs puts forward that Aleppo especially intrigues an English visitor as it has had extensive connections with England dating back to the Tudor reigns. He concedes that their "popular ideas of the East" were introduced by the merchants and seafarers involved in Levantine trade when Aleppo was regarded as "the eastern metropolis of that early and romantic commerce" (1917: 425). He argues that Aleppo was more familiar than Constantinople in England for almost three hundred years. Aleppo represented the whole East for the English in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Childs goes on to emphasise the significance of Aleppo for the English as follows:

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> An open eye for evidence of how much the city figured in English life for three centuries collects many allusions to the great centre of the Levant trade. Shakespeare, for instance, makes one of the witches in Macbeth say, "Her husband's to Aleppo gone, master o' the Tiger." And into Othello's mouth he puts a reference which bears significant marks of truth and sounds like the echo of an old tale of the Levant heard in a London tavern of the day "That in Aleppo once, / Where a malignant and turban'd Turk / Beat a Venetian and traduced the state." A beating is still the Turkish process in such quarrels where the opponent is a person of beatable size and not under the protection of a Great Power. It is still the favourite public expression of displeasure in circumstances which do not call for the taking of life. Many times you may hear some Turkish anecdote closed with the statement " gave him a beating." (425-426)

Childs seeks to demonstrate how much Aleppo figured in the imagination of England and how strong the historical ties between England and Aleppo had been by means of quoting directly from Shakespeare, the national bard of the English. It is very striking that Childs refers to the Turks only once and renders them malignant and violent in this paragraph in this chapter about Aleppo in which he accentuates the relationship between Aleppo and England. This is surely in tandem with the imperialist agenda of the British intelligence officer who strives to nullify the presence of the Ottoman Empire in Aleppo.

Childs refers to the sixteenth century in which the British participation in the Age of Discovery gained a momentum when Francis Drake circumnavigated the globe in 1580 and his voyage led to "new markets in remote locations" and narrative "accounts of global travel" (Sherman, 2022: 18). Thus, Britain's geographical horizons expanded dramatically. Major trading companies were commissioned to open new markets all over the world; for instance, the Levant Company was created in 1592 for Turkey and Italy (21). Childs mentions that the British Levant Company appointed a British Agent in Aleppo in 1586. He goes on to talk about the importance of this company. He points out that the stone khan, which the British Levant Company used as their factory, offices and residence could still be seen in Ottoman Aleppo. This company had a British Consul and a British chaplain. Childs believes that the history and impact of the British Levant Company is a topic deserving of careful study. He reckons that such a history would hold as much intrigue and romance as the narrative of any prominent Chartered Company that has ever represented the British name (1917: 426). He states that the history of the company dates to the most enchanting and romantic era of English trade (426). The "Smyrna Voyage" and the ""Levant Voyage" make this period interesting according to Childs, who contends that the merchant ships that fought with the pirates across the entire Mediterranean experienced numerous adventures that inspired countless chronicles (426). Such a land was imagined as a romantic and beguiling place of "exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes" (Said, 1979: 1). Childs seems to be enthused about the interesting and romantic experiences of the British in the Levant as if he were reading a novel that filled his imagination with exotic stories about the orient. His enthusiasm about romantic adventures of the British travellers also evokes the Romantic spirit. By the late eighteenth century, the neo-classical attributes of the Grand Tour were undercut by the Romantic Movement that challenged rationalist thinking of the Augustan

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Age; as a result, the picturesque and the sublime became an object of pursuit for British travellers (Buzard, 2002: 42-46). Majestic mountains, picturesque scenery, adventures at sea and beguiling Mediterranean ports profoundly influenced the Romantic British travellers; similarly, the same Romantic propensity for the unknown may been seen in Childs.

Childs speaks of "little-known books of the eighteenth century" that refer to the important English post at Aleppo (1917: 427). He mentions Alexander Drummond, Consul at Aleppo, who wrote *Travels in Various Parts of Asia as far as the Euphrates*. He thinks that it is very interesting to read about the British and their experience in the British post at Aleppo almost two hundred years ago (427). He is intrigued by their social intercourse with the French and Dutch in the region, how they suffered because of the heat, "the fever of this cursed place" (427). He reads about "the Library of the Most Worshipful the British Levant Company" and Drummond's discovery of an ancient Greek sculpture, bearing an inscription, casually incorporated into the wall (427). He states that the sculpture had been taken from a dismantled Greek structure (427). He further notes that the exiled British "gentlemen of Aleppo" perused books supplied by a thoughtful company for their education and entertainment (427). He envisions an imagined community of British gentlemen in Aleppo, a socially constructed group shaped by the shared perception of those who identify themselves as members. He prides himself on being part of such an imagined community. His portrayal of such a community of British gentlemen in Aleppo also reveals his nationalistic inclinations. His depiction of such a community is also reminiscent of Benedict Anderson's definition of nationalism as "an imagined political community" that is envisioned "as both inherently limited and sovereign" (1991: 6). Childs exercises his orientalist gaze even when he refers to a British travelogue that he had read about Aleppo; while the local inhabitants of Aleppo had neither politics nor newspapers, the exiled British gentlemen in accursed Aleppo were learned, intellectually vigorous and sophisticated. His remarks are reminiscent of the chorus in T. S. Eliot's *The Rock*: The British "set about imperial expansion / Accompanied by industrial development" and they exported "iron, coal and cotton goods / And intellectual enlightenment / And everything, including capital" (1963:153). Besides Drummond's discovery of the ancient Greek sculpture, these British gentlemen also "discovered or rediscovered" the ruins of Palmyra when they went on excursions in the nearby mountains (Childs, 1917: 428). Childs is obsessed with the relics of the ancient Greek civilisation in Asia Minor and Mesopotamia. His obsession is in tune with the established frame of British travel writing as the primary function of the Grand Tour in the eighteenth century was, for instance, to expose the traveller to the classical civilisations of ancient Greece and of the ancient Roman Empire, which the British Augustans sought to emulate in the eighteenth century (Buzard, 2002: 39-40). Yet, this interest in ancient relics surely has a political undercurrent. Childs gathers that the company had a massive impact in the region, concludes that the company's policy was ambitious, its operations exceptionally well-managed, and that its success and prosperity were well-deserved (1917: 428). He feels that the company was guided by a keen instinct in its effort to expand "British influence from the Gulf of Alexandretta to the Persian Gulf and so to India" (428).

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Considering Aleppo's position on the map, Childs wonders why this ancient city has had such vitality; he marvels at Aleppo's prosperity. Childs argues that another powerful influence which has always allowed Aleppo to flourish is "the attraction of Asia Minor" where a significant portion of the trade between East and West began (430). He asserts that Aleppo is likely to experience greater prosperity in the forthcoming age of railways, predicting that Aleppo will be at "the junction of intercontinental railroads" (431). He believes that people will change for Mecca, Cairo, Bagdad, Persia, Bombay, Calcutta and Singapore at Aleppo's railway station (431).

The ascendance of Germany and its growing imperial influence in the Ottoman Empire deeply unsettled the British Empire. From 1880 to 1914, amid escalating international rivalries, the British increasingly sought to frame travel writing as a tool for enhancing national prestige (Bridges, 2002: 53-54). The construction of the Baghdad Railway under German auspices signalled that the eastern lands were beginning to lose their exotic otherness (Carr, 2002: 82). Troubled by Germany's expanding presence in the Middle East, Childs deliberately reimagined the Ottoman Empire in the early twentieth century as a mysterious and exotic landscape, echoing earlier romanticized travel accounts that had cast the unknown as a space ripe for colonial exploration. By transforming the East into an unfamiliar, uncharted territory, he contributed to the imperial narrative that justified western exploration and domination. This imperial gaze relied on the construction of an exotic other, which served to reinforce the colonizer's political interests and perpetuate notions of European superiority in the Middle East. Carr argues that, toward the end of the nineteenth century, travel writers became increasingly anxious that the world's distinctive otherness was eroding, and with it, the boundaries that traditionally separated Europe from the rest of the world were dangerously dissolving (2002: 81). This blurring of cultural lines led travel writers to realize that they were now documenting "hybridized cultures" (82). In response, they sought to underscore the Orient's perceived strangeness and exotic sensuality, employing orientalist discourse to delineate cultural boundaries and reinforce the dichotomy between their own civilized society and the uncivilized East (Said, 1979: 81). Maintaining these boundaries became essential for colonial powers, as the distinction allowed them to self-define as the bearers of civilization, juxtaposed against an East deemed in need of western guidance. The erasure of the boundary between the rational West and the irrational East would have undermined the ideological foundation of colonialism, complicating the justification for intervention in the region. Moreover, the modernization of the East threatened to dismantle Europeans' self-perception as the sole harbingers of modernity and progress. Consequently, colonial travel writing emphasized the cultural and moral gulf between European civilization and its perceived oppositional counterpart, the Orient, thus preserving an ideological divide crucial to justifying colonial endeavours.

Conclusion

This study examines the representation of Ottoman Aleppo through the orientalist lens of British intelligence officer William John Childs, who journeyed across Asia Minor, reaching Aleppo in 1911. His observations emerge within the context of the geopolitical

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unrest that foreshadowed the First World War and the impending disintegration of the Ottoman state in 1918, followed by the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923. Departing from Constantinople by sea, Childs reached Samsun on the Black Sea coast, marking the start of his journey into the heart of Anatolia, which ultimately concluded on the Mediterranean coast after his visit to Aleppo. This paper focuses specifically on Ottoman Aleppo, a prominent Mesopotamian city within the Levant rather than Asia Minor, and notably the only city in this account situated outside the present-day borders of Turkey. Aleppo offers a compelling focal point for analysis, as its inclusion contrasts with the title of the travelogue, which exclusively references Asia Minor. This article explores the ways in which the East simultaneously instil fear and fascination in the western traveller, and it sheds light on how Childs represents the inhabitants of Aleppo through an imperialist perspective, highlighting the dual forces of allure and apprehension that shape such depictions. Childs characterizes Aleppo as distinctly Mesopotamian, emphasizing the unique identity of Aleppo and its divergence from other Ottoman cities. He argues that Aleppo lacks a shared Ottoman identity, situating the city culturally and historically beyond the boundaries of Ottoman heritage. He seeks to impress upon the reader an image of Aleppo as a distinct, non-Ottoman polity, underscoring its cultural and historical separateness from the Ottoman imperial framework. This perspective is particularly significant given the critical period in which Childs writes on the cusp of the Ottoman Empire's collapse and the anticipated emergence of nation-states in its aftermath. The allure and splendour of Aleppo, already entrenched in the English imagination, contributed significantly to a popular perception of the Mediterranean East. Ottoman Aleppo had captivated English minds long before their physical encounters with the city, leading to the construction of an imaginary Aleppo. In this vein, Childs's narrative reflects an Orient that is, in many respects, a construct of European invention, shaped by preconceived notions and orientalist perspectives. Childs' narrative portrays Aleppo as a city shrouded in impenetrable mysteries, with enigmatic faces and minds beyond comprehension. This perception is rooted in the western traveller's conviction that a pervasive sense of mystery uniquely reveals itself to him, symbolizing his own limitations in grasping the complexities of the East or engaging with its worldview. This mystique, thus, reflects less about Aleppo itself and more about his inability to transcend his cultural biases. Childs also embodies the European bourgeois subject, one that persistently defined and redefined its identity by distancing itself from what it categorized as inferior, perceived as filthy, contagious, revolting and boisterous. His narrative constructs a self-identity through the delineation of the other, positioning the East as a foil against which European superiority is asserted and reaffirmed, thereby reinforcing class and cultural hierarchies integral to the bourgeois worldview.

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