

# Travellers in Ottoman Lands

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# TRAVELLERS IN OTTOMAN LANDS

The Botanical Legacy

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*Edited by*

Ines Aščerić-Todd, Sabina Knees,  
Janet Starkey and Paul Starkey

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*Çiçeklerin dâhisi* (The genius of flowers) by illustrator-artist Sema Yekeler Yurtseven.  
This is in the style of Kara Memi  
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Map no. 50 in Abraham Ortelius's atlas *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*. Anvers 1602, updated from the  
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Below

George Maw's study of *Crocus speciosus* in his magnum opus *The Genus Crocus* published  
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### **In memory of Irene Linning**

Irene Linning was born in al-Magwa, Kuwait, on 7 May 1951. She was involved in an accident in Hammersmith on Wednesday, 26 July 2017 and died as a result of her injuries at St Mary's Hospital in Paddington, on Friday, 4 August 2017.



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## Foreword

### *Semih Lütfü Turgut, Turkish Consul General in Edinburgh*

It gives me great pleasure to write a short preface to this volume, *Travellers in Ottoman Lands: The Botanical Legacy*, which brings together selected papers from the Seminar of the same name held in Edinburgh in May 2017. Although I am neither a historian nor an academic, I was delighted to be part of the Seminar Organising Committee and to be able to make a contribution to the success of this truly international event.

I was appointed to Edinburgh as Consul-General in June 2014. Part of my remit was to identify any cultural activities and links between this part of the United Kingdom and Turkey and the Ottoman Empire. At first, I thought this was not going to be an onerous task as there could hardly have been much cultural activity in this backwater of the country. How wrong I was; I soon hit the heritage of the Scottish Enlightenment with a crash.

The first of these 'unknown' contributions was that made by a Glaswegian, E.J.W. Gibb, who taught himself Ottoman Turkish in the second half of the nineteenth century and then went on to write the *History of Ottoman Poetry*. This came out in six volumes at the beginning of the twentieth century. Then I came across another voluminous work on Turkey, *The Flora of Turkey*, by Professor Peter Davis. It was in nine volumes with a further two supplementary volumes. These weighty tomes were, however, merely the tip of the iceberg. There has been a long history of educational interaction between Turkey and Edinburgh, with the RBGE being only the most prominent. Many Turkish students have come to Edinburgh not only to study botany and other sciences but also to do doctorates in such fields as Turkish history and literature.

I am very pleased that it has been possible to publish the present volume, which will ensure that at least some of the papers presented at the Seminar will be available to be enjoyed by others. I hope that the links established through this Seminar will be continued and that it will be possible to follow them up with similar events in the future.





# Travellers in Ottoman Lands

## Preface

*Sabina Knees*

The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) was established in 1670 and has been in its current location in Inverleith since 1820. Our collections of living and preserved material are of international importance and include over 13,000 species across our four gardens in Scotland and over 3 million herbarium specimens here in Edinburgh.

The earliest collection from the Ottoman Empire in the RBGE is that of Dr Adam Freer, collected in the Levant with and for Patrick Russell MD FRS and donated in 1768, although there were three earlier catalogued specimens donated in 1720 by William Sherrard, the consul of Smyrna from 1703 to 1716. There were several small collections by G. Glementi in 1850, Benedict Balansa in 1855, and others, but our interest in the plants of the Middle and Near East can essentially be traced back to 1880 when the ninth Regius Keeper, Sir Isaac Bailey Balfour, visited Socotra and subsequently published *Botany of Socotra* in 1888.

Expeditions to the region continued and several decades later a focus on Turkey resulted in the publication of the nine-volume *Flora of Turkey and the East Aegean Islands*, a monumental series published between 1965 and 1985 and edited by Peter Hadland Davis. Two supplementary volumes were published in 1988 and 2000, in total containing about 11,700 taxa. Davis first visited Turkey in 1947 and made his last visit to central Anatolia, mainly Yozgat and Sivas provinces, in 1982.

The next major flora to be written and published at RBGE was *Flora of the Arabian Peninsula and Socotra*, edited by Anthony G. Miller. Although containing fewer species (c.5000) than *Flora of Turkey*, the complexities of travel and the need for negotiation with seven countries meant that the task ahead was quite complex. To date, two volumes have been published (1996 and 2007) and the remainder will eventually be available online and published family by family. Other complementary research in the region, particularly in southern Arabia, has contributed to our knowledge of the area and resulted in the publication of *The Plants of Dhofar* (1988) and *Ethnoflora of the Soqatra Archipelago* (2004), again both authored and edited by Anthony Miller in conjunction with ethnographer Dr Miranda Morris. Many of the species described in these volumes also occur in south-west Arabia (Yemen), which, at its greatest extent in 1590, represented the southernmost limit of the Ottoman Empire in Arabia (The Ottoman Empire Maps 1 and 2).

Given this background, the request to host the Symposium for ASTENE in conjunction with *Cornucopia* and the Turkish Consulate General of Edinburgh was very timely. This gave us an opportunity to welcome fellow researchers from a wide variety of disciplines to share and exchange knowledge of travellers in the former Ottoman lands, the plants they encountered there, and to enjoy the deep overlap of arts and science in this rich multifaceted context.

# Introduction to *Travellers in Ottoman Lands: The Botanical Legacy*

*Paul Starkey*

Chairman, TIOL Organizing Committee

This volume had its origins in a two-day pioneering international seminar organized by the Association for the Study of Travel in Egypt and the Near East (ASTENE) in conjunction with the Centre for Middle Eastern Plants at the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh (RBGE), with additional support from *Cornucopia* magazine and the Turkish Consulate General, Edinburgh on 13 and 14 May 2017. It brought together experts and enthusiasts from many different parts of the world, including Turkey and other parts of the Middle East and North Africa, and was a truly interdisciplinary event, with experts ranging from botanists to historians, from archaeologists to conservationists. The seminar also formed part of the Ottoman Horizons festival held in Edinburgh that year. This present volume, which is extensively illustrated, contains a selection of papers presented at the seminar. It focuses on the botanical legacy of many parts of the former Ottoman Empire — including present-day Turkey, the Levant, Egypt, the Balkans, and the Arabian Peninsula — as seen and described by travellers both from within and from outside the region. The papers cover a wide variety of subjects, including Ottoman garden design and architecture; the flora of the region, especially bulbs and their cultural significance; literary, pictorial, and photographic depictions of the botany and horticulture of the Ottoman lands; floral and related motifs in Ottoman art; culinary and medicinal aspects of the botanical heritage; and efforts related to conservation.

In the first chapter of the book, Ines Aščerić-Todd provides some brief historical background and explains how the Ottoman Empire — which spanned more than six centuries and stretched across parts of three continents — changed the political, economic, religious, architectural, and cultural landscape of many of the modern countries of the Middle East and south-east Europe. The Ottoman Empire is today most readily associated with its imperial capital, Istanbul, with the grandeur of its royal palace, the Topkapı Sarayı, and with majestic mosques such as Ayasofya or the Süleymaniye, while the heritage of the rest of the Empire's vast territory is easily overlooked or forgotten. Ines Aščerić-Todd introduces the legacy of the Empire, paying particular attention to some of its lesser-known or neglected aspects, be they political, religious, or cultural in nature.

### *Presenting the Ottoman garden*

Following this introductory chapter, the remainder of the book is arranged in four main sections. The first section of the book presents facets of the representation of Ottoman gardens as seen through the eyes of travellers. Susan Scollay explores the case of an illustrated manuscript known as the Oxford *Dilsūznāmah*, dated Edirne 860/1455–46, composed by an itinerant Persian poet and merchant from Tabriz who travelled to Anatolia in 1391, spending time with Mevlevi dervishes in Konya. The manuscript's text and five illustrated folios provide valuable information about the Edirne imperial gardens planted by Mehmed II and the architectural structures within them that provided physical and metaphorical spaces for the unfolding of the tale recounted in the *Dilsūznāmah*.

One of the key sources of information on fruit and fruit-growing is the ten-volume *Seyahatname* (Book of Travels) by the seventeenth-century Ottoman traveller Evliya Çelebi. As Priscilla Mary Işın explains, growing fine varieties of fruit, particularly tree fruits and grapes, was a leisure pursuit for the Ottoman upper classes as well as a commercial activity. Evliya provides information about fruit cultivation and preservation techniques, and trade in fresh and dried fruits.

In her chapter, Güllü Yıldız explains how writing travelogues (*Safarnāmahs*) about general expeditions and hajj journeys became popular among Persian intellectuals and statesmen in the Qajar era (1795–1925). Her chapter focuses on Persian pilgrims who chose the Istanbul route for their journey, and on their impressions of the city's gardens, including palace gardens and those of private houses as well as public gardens and promenades. In so doing, Yıldız's aim is to demonstrate that Ottoman gardens were seen by Persian pilgrims as a sign of 'progress' during the second half of the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Fascination with Ottomans gardens as exotic novelties has been a common subject in travel literature, prints, and painting from Early Modern times. The final chapter in this section, by Radha Dalal, focuses on the Bakewell Ottoman Garden in the Missouri Botanical Garden in St. Louis, USA, which opened in 2006. Based on travellers' observations and seminal scholarship on Ottoman garden culture, Dalal explores the Bakewell garden's spatial dynamics as a facet of inventive cultural appropriation to suit its contemporary adoptive culture.

### *Botanical travellers*

Travelogues are a valuable source of information on pleasure gardens, plants, and landscapes, and the second section therefore focuses on travellers as botanists. It begins with a chapter by Alison Denham about the legacy of Dioscorides within the written and unwritten traditions of herbal medicine. Pedanius Dioscorides of Anazarbus, the author of *De Materia Medica*, was born in what is now south-eastern Turkey in the first century AD. His five-volume work on medicinal plants, animals, and minerals has been translated and retranslated over the ensuing 2000 years, and recent ethnobotanic studies in Turkey and former Ottoman Europe have identified the continuing use of some of the species described by Dioscorides.

Subsequent chapters in this section focus on botanical travellers during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries — a period when European readers were fascinated by the curious flora and fauna of the Ottoman Empire. Tobias Mörike analyses the accounts of botanical explorations of two of Linnaeus's Swedish 'apostles', Frederik Hasselquist (1749–1752), who searched for biblical plants in the Levant, and the naturalist Petr Forsskål (1732–1763). As a member of the Royal Danish Expedition to Arabia, Forsskål ventured into the Ottoman lands of south-western Arabia to look for useful plants, and his botanical work was posthumously published by Carsten Niebuhr, the sole survivor of the expedition. While their collected herbaria were often inaccessible, their travel accounts were quickly absorbed into a genre of Natural Histories of the Bible, published by theologians.

Continuing the theme of the impact of the Linnaean revolution that transformed plant classification in the mid-eighteenth century, Janet Starkey's chapter focuses on one of the earliest collections of plant specimens in the RBGE's herbarium. These were specimens donated by Adam Freer MD (1747–1811), having been collected around Aleppo at the behest of another Scot, Patrick Russell MD FRS (1726/7–1805), who in 1794 published the second edition of his brother Alexander's *The Natural History of Aleppo*. The two editions of this book not only demonstrate the influence of Linnaeus but also reflect Enlightenment motifs of good taste, as well as the elegance and beauty of Aleppine gardens.

The fourth and fifth chapters in this section focus on nineteenth-century plant collecting. Frank H. Hellwig and Kristin Victor outline the impact of the Herbarium Haussknecht, founded by the Thuringian botanist Carl Haussknecht (1838–1903) with thousands of specimens that Haussknecht gathered on his journeys to the Ottoman Empire and Persia in 1865 and 1866–1869. Haussknecht recorded his insights into many aspects of natural, social, and cultural conditions in the Ottoman Empire in still unpublished travel diaries.

The next chapter, by Necmi Aksoy, is dedicated to the memory of the distinguished Turkish botanist, plant collector, and pharmacist, Prof. Asuman Baytop (1920–2015). Aksoy discusses the work of Georges Vincent Aznavour (Jorj Vensan Aznavur; 1861–1920), an amateur botanist with a rich herbarium from the Istanbul area, which was said to have originally comprised between 15,000 and 25,000 specimens. Reflecting on the importance of conservation and preservation, Aksoy notes that by the time these collections were moved from the Robert College Herbarium (Istanbul) to the Natural Museum of Saint Joseph's French High School in 2006, these historical herbarium collections contained only 1215 specimens.

The final chapter in this section, by Irene Linning, focuses on an amateur botanist, traveller, and long-term resident of Kuwait, Dame Violet Dickson DBE (1896–1991), who sent almost 600 botanical specimens from Arabia to the Kew Herbarium and published *The Wild Flowers of Kuwait and Bahrain* in 1955. In this important study, Dickson outlined the basis of the Bedouin system of plant classification and provided a historic environmental record of north-west Arabia.

### *Bulbs and conifers*

The third section of the book focuses on two specific botanical topics from differing viewpoints, bringing together scientific, historical, and literary approaches. The first two chapters discuss aspects of bulb collecting and conservation, while the second two discuss the conifers of the region, with particular reference to the cedars of Lebanon.

Although the acclimatization, cultivation, and commercialization of foreign plants in European gardens was a central aspect of European bio-colonialism, the presence of Levantine flower bulbs, including crocuses and irises, in these gardens is mostly overlooked by the historiography of botany. Ori Fragman-Sapir provides an overview of the rich bulbous flora of Israel, Palestine, and Jordan. Several bulbous species are now endangered, and Fragman-Sapir addresses local conservation, recultivation, and cultural issues, proposing 'bulb treasure sites' as pilgrimage sites for nature lovers.

By contrast, Alison Rix takes a historical approach to her subject, focusing on the travels of the British businessman George Maw (1832–1912), who developed a passion for bulbs while travelling abroad for his family's tile manufacturing business. He is recognized today largely for his remarkable *Monograph of the Genus Crocus*, illustrated with his own paintings and published in 1886. As Rix explains, however, although he grew many bulbs himself it is unlikely that he could ever have seen all the species illustrated in his book without an extensive network of correspondents, which included adventurers, army officers, botanists, businessmen, diplomats, and medical missionaries.

The two succeeding chapters deal with different aspects of conifers growing in the lands of the former Ottoman Empire. In their chapter, Martin Gardner and Sabina Knees outline how economic use of the conifers of the region has led to unprecedented levels of over-exploitation. As a result, although the Mediterranean and associated continental species of the former Ottoman Lands can form extensive areas, many are in steep decline. Species such as the cedar of Lebanon (*Cedrus libani*) are red-listed and have a very uncertain future unless steps can be taken to arrest their demise.

Paul Starkey then outlines the historical, artistic, and cultural significance of the cedars of Lebanon. From the time of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (c.2100 BC) onwards, the cedars of Lebanon have served as a distinctive artistic and cultural icon recognizable far beyond the Middle East itself. Described in the nineteenth century by prominent Western travellers like J.L. Burckhardt and painted by, among others, Edward Lear, they make a frequent appearance in the literature of so-called 'Orientalist' travellers during the Ottoman period, and, despite their dwindling numbers and precarious status, remain a popular tourist attraction today.

### *Art and botany*

The fourth section of the book, entitled 'Art and Botany', focuses on floral and related motifs in Ottoman art, including textiles and ceramics. Ottoman styles

and techniques are aesthetically pleasing – full of emotional power, imaginative expression, and technical skill – and many traditional Turkish traditional arts, including marbling, calligraphy, miniatures, and tiles, are rich in plant motifs.

From the sixteenth century, naturalists accompanied by botanical artists travelled from Europe to visit Ottoman lands in the eastern Mediterranean, including Anatolia. Islamic art was admired by European designers and artists and Ottoman floral patterns were used as a source of inspiration. These connections continued in parallel with developments in botany. As Gülnur Ekşi demonstrates, botanical illustration in Turkey continued to develop through the twentieth century and does so today, as the illustrations by Sema Yekeler Yurtseven, featured on the cover of this volume, show.

Ottoman gardens and images of nature had indeed been illustrated in miniature paintings as early as the fourteenth century AD. Gürsan Ergil's chapter focuses on three illustrated albums from different periods, to illustrate the evolution of garden art in Ottoman/Turkish culture: an 'Anthology of Persian Poems' (1399), the *Surname-i Hümayun* (1582), and the *Surname-i Vehbi* (1720). His analysis supports the idea that the general characteristics of Ottoman/Turkish gardens gradually shifted from an informal, natural look to more formal layouts.

According to Ottoman tradition, flowers were a highly prized and decorative commodity, displayed in highly formalized settings and depicted in floral decoration in art. European travellers and artists, both amateur and professional, responded enthusiastically to the richness of Ottoman textiles and dress. Jennifer Scarce describes how Sultan Süleyman I supervised the production of luxurious textiles to support a court dress code that would visually proclaim the dignity of the Ottoman state. The impact of the stylized decorative vocabulary in which botanical forms played such a major role has continued to this day in Turkish fashion and fabric design.

Continuing the focus on flowers, Lara Mehling traces four of the most widely planted and pictured flowers in the Levant – rose, tulip, hyacinth, and carnation – through their common colour, red, in a verdant landscape. When Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq (1522–1592) brought the red tulip back from the Levant to Leiden, a horticultural revolution took place alongside a rapid expansion of the European textile industry. Envoys were sent to the Ottoman Empire to search for Busbecq's famed 'red lily' but also for recipes for a uniquely long-lasting cotton dye made from the root of the *Rubia* plant: Turkey red.

The final chapter in the volume describes how roses, red or pink tulips, reddish hyacinths, and red and pink carnations were celebrated in the *quatre fleurs* decorative style which flourished in the Ottoman court. Gérard Maizou and Kathrin Müller discuss how Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689–1762), who lived in Constantinople between 1716 and 1718, discovered the Turkish 'language of flowers' during her stay there and was probably instrumental in giving new impulse to this language in Western Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Turkish 'language of flowers' lives on today in Turkish *Oya* needle lace.

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Since its foundation in 1997, ASTENE has promoted research and publication on many aspects of travel and travellers to and from the Near East and Egypt. The present volume builds on previous publications in this area by bringing together contributions from specialists in ASTENE's traditional fields of history and travel with others from experts in scientific disciplines such as botany and conservation. In so doing, it is hoped that we have made at least a small contribution to the study of the rich botanical heritage of the lands of the former Ottoman Empire, and that others may be inspired to carry forward work in this area.



# Acknowledgements

*Paul Starkey*

It has been a great pleasure to work with the various organisations — ASTENE, the RBGE, *Cornucopia* and the Turkish Consulate General in Edinburgh — involved in arranging the Seminar on Travellers in Ottoman Lands held in Edinburgh on 13 and 14 May 2017, and in producing this follow-up volume. We are most grateful to all these organisations for their support (both financial and otherwise) for the Seminar and the subsequent publication. The roughly one hundred Seminar participants a day came from many different parts of the world, including several from Turkey, as well as from Qatar, Israel, Algeria, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Great Britain, Australia and America. It was a truly multidisciplinary event, and the 35 papers presented ranged widely, from botany to garden history, from archaeology to textiles and conservation. Edited versions of around twenty of those papers are included in the present volume.

We especially valued the support of those Turkish colleagues who in turn encouraged their own colleagues to participate in the Seminar, particularly Professors Necmi Aksoy, Tuna Ekim and Adil Güner, Consul Uğur Yılmaz and Dr Mehmet Bona. I have also greatly appreciated the continuing support of my colleagues on the TIOL organising committee, with their associated hospitality, before, during and after the Seminar: Dr Sabina Knees, Ms Jennifer Scarce, Dr Janet Starkey, Julie Witford, John Clifford (formerly Honorary Consul of Austria for Scotland), and especially Semih Lütfü Turgut, Turkish Consul General in Edinburgh. Participants at the Seminar commented that the atmosphere was very happy and almost party-like!

The Seminar benefited from sponsorship from a number of organisations. ASTENE provided two bursaries, in addition to sponsoring the plenary speaker, and three young Turkish scholars were sponsored by the Turkish Government. *Cornucopia* kindly sponsored Lauren Nicole Davis, Koç University, Istanbul, for her exhibition ‘Scent and the City’, a scent-scape of Anatolian fragrances, with special emphasis on the floral and horticultural heritage. We are greatly indebted to Berrin Torolsan and John Scott of *Cornucopia* for their kindness and support in making this possible.

Thanks are also due to those who arranged exhibitions during the Seminar. *Cornucopia* organised a display of posters entitled ‘Gardens and Flowers of Istanbul’, selected from the pages of the Nezahat Gökyiğit Botanic Garden book *Gardens and Flowers of Istanbul*. John Thompson, Yaşar University, Izmir, displayed a selection

from his collection of Turkish embroidered textiles, and his 'Ottoman Bouquet' was much appreciated. Dr Elisabeth French organised a poster for the Seminar about the Mathew/Tomlinson expedition to Turkey in 1965 based on the personal diary and photographs of Helen Tomlinson. The continuing encouragement from Andrew Haughton of Nomad's Tent and support from the ASTENE Trustees was much appreciated.

We are grateful to many staff at the RBGE for help during the Seminar itself, including those who worked in Reception and behind the scenes, especially Carolann Alexander, Nicolas Grüter and Scott McGregor; those who enabled us to use its Fletcher Building, especially Mrs Jacqui Pestell and Mrs Susie Kelpie; and to Drs Henry Noltie, Sabina Knees, Martin Gardner and Mrs Christine Page for help in organisation. We were especially grateful to the hard-working stewards: Mahir Akbalik, who helped with audio-visual aids during the Seminar; to Dr Peter Cherry for his stewarding and support throughout the event; to Joanne Maclean for her work on the registration desk, along with Dr Gülnur Ekşi and Dr Annick Born; to Mrs Christine Page, Hatem Taifour, John Cowham, Peta Rée and all others who helped in various ways throughout the event; and to Dr David Harris, the Herbarium Curator and Deputy Director of Science; Richard Brown, responsible for Bulbs and Alpines in the RBGE Garden at Inverleith, and Robert Unwin, for organising tours of its living and preserved collections. We were pleased to see Mrs Jennifer Woods, née Lamond, who had worked on the *Flora of Turkey*, at the event. Carey Cowham, the ASTENE Membership Secretary, provided a delightful display of ASTENE activities; and Teddi Dols of Brill and Julie Witford of *Cornucopia* manned publishers' stands at the event. Michael Barnett of Shiel & Morrison Printers, Berwick-upon-Tweed, provided excellent publicity material for the Seminar.

I am most grateful for their hard work to the authors of the papers included in this volume, to my fellow editors, Drs Ines Aščerić-Todd, Sabina Knees, and Janet Starkey; to our copy-editor, Helen Knox, for her attention to detail; to Lesley Scott of the Herbarium for her advice on referencing herbarium images; to Jacqui Pestell, Head of Botanical Art, for her research of possible suitable images; and to Vanezza Morales for producing the map of the Ottoman Empire, as well as those used in the chapter on the decline of the conifers. Particular thanks go to Clive Crook, who designed both the original poster for the event and also the magnificent cover of this book, which is based on work by illustrator-artist Sema Yekeler Yurtseven; we are grateful to Dr Gülnur Ekşi for making this possible. Finally, thanks are due to all the staff at Archaeopress, and especially to Dr Rajka Makjanic, for their support and encouragement in the successful production of this volume.

Every effort has been made to trace the copyright owners of images, maps and figures included in this book, but if any have been inadvertently overlooked, the publishers would be pleased to make the necessary arrangements at the first opportunity.

### Note on Transliteration

Given the variety of subject matter of this volume — not to mention the linguistic complexity of the Ottoman world — complete consistency in transliteration is impossible to achieve. Generally speaking, Arabic and Persian names and other terms have been transliterated in accordance with the *IJMES* (*International Journal of Middle East Studies*) system, except where there is an English form in common use. For most Ottoman Turkish terms, modern Turkish orthography has been used, except where there is some reason to do otherwise.