



Guidance services and legal regulations aimed at interpreters and guides in the 19th century Ottoman Empire



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ABSTRACT

At the end of the 19th century, the Ottoman Empire viewed guidance services as being of great importance, and after some adjustments had been made, it came to regard 'guidance' as a profession. With the first regulation in 1890, it was agreed that certificates would be presented to people with certain qualifications, which meant that engaging in interpretation or guidance without a certificate was illegal. Because of the difficulties that appeared in the following years, various changes in the regulations had to be made. From the end of the century onwards, there were attempts to establish a guidance community. In this study, Turkey's first professional tourist guides, guidance services and legal regulations will be illustrated in the light of Ottoman Archive documents and the travel guides of the period.

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1. Introduction

From political, legal, governmental, military and economical viewpoints, and in comparison with large contemporary countries, by contrast, the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century can be evaluated as a weak region. However, there is evidence that the empire attempted to catch up with the developments of the West with regard to these areas, especially in the early part of the 19th century. In fact, the process of following the West, which accelerated with the reign of Sultan Mahmud II (1808–1839), lasted until the end of the Empire. With this transformation, whereby the West was taken as an example, modern processes such as legislation and bureaucratisation were exceptionally effective. In terms of the process of following the West, the Tanzimat (1839) and Islahat (1856) 'reforms' during the period of the reign of Sultan Abdulmecit (1839–1861) were the most influential. With these edicts, by guaranteeing human rights, it was emphasised that every individual (Muslims and non-Muslims alike) was equal in the eyes of the law. Such laws included fair taxation for all citizens. The reformation that began in 1839 and ended with the first constitutional era in 1876 is the period in which the efforts of the Ottomans to integrate with the West can be seen intensely, and it is also a time when liberal perceptions were dominant to the fullest extent possible. In terms of getting foreign capital into the country, during this period the Ottomans tried to

maintain an encouraging attitude. In fact, during this period, European investors directed their commercial interests towards the Ottomans. For instance, a massive increase in the number of merchants travelling in and out of Istanbul was noted in Tanzimat Era (Kayın, 2000: p.14). In addition, the Crimean War (1853–1856) deepened the Ottoman Empire's relationships with its allies, England and France. During this period, diplomats, military officials, journalists, paramedics and even spies for both England and France frequently visited Istanbul (Gülersoy, 1999: p.9).

It is necessary to comprehend the efforts that were made on the part of the Ottoman Empire to integrate with the West as a whole. To this end, one of the approaches that were taken by the Empire included tourism. Certain efforts in this regard stand out, especially those that were made by Levantines from 1840 onwards in terms of accommodation opportunities that were provided for tourists, primarily for diplomats and travellers who travelled to the Ottoman Empire from the West. Some hotels established in the 19th century are as follows: Hotel des Quatre Nations, Hotel d'Angleterre, Hotel de Byzance, Hotel d'Europe, Hotel d'Orient, Hotel de Paris, Hotel de Pesth, Hotel de Luxembourg, Pera Palas, Hotel de Londres, Tokatlıyan, Hotel Bristol, Hotel de France, Hotel de la Grece, Hotel de Vienne, Hotel St. Petersburg and Hotel de Constantinople. Besides, during this period, the Company of Ottoman Imperial Hotels (1865) was established by a highly regarded entrepreneur, James Misserie. Misserie sought to help Istanbul become a developed city with accommodation opportunities that were suitable to contemporary standards in areas such as Beyoğlu, Büyükdere, Uskudar, and Büyükağa, with the permission of Sultan

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Abdulaziz (1861–1865) (Arslan & Polat, 2015: p.103–111). We can thus assume that the Sultan also took the matter of improving accommodation opportunities very seriously at this time.

Towards the end of the 19th century one of the matters that the Ottoman officials dwelled upon with great importance was to make arrangements aimed at people who would offer interpreting/guidance services to diplomats, travellers and tourists coming into the country. This was because after the Industrial Revolution, through both railway transportation development and steamboat usage for sea transport, travelling conditions improved and therefore individual trips made from Europe to the East until the middle of the 19th century turned into pre-planned journeys (Guillot, 2007: p.97). Travellers also joined commercial voyages carried out by ships belonging to English, French and Austro-Hungarian companies because they were regular, frequent and economical (Germaner & Inankur, 2002: p.57).

In 1846 in Istanbul, the Hagia Eirene Church was transformed into a military museum. 1863 marked the inauguration of a national fair, Sergi-i Umumi-i Osmani, and the same year marked the establishment of a travel agency in Istanbul. These milestones have come to be accepted as the first important events of the period (Dinçer & Kızılırmak, 1997: p.143). Sergi-i Umumi-i Osmani aroused much interest in Europe, and groups consisting of journalists, businessmen and industrialists from European cities visited Istanbul to see the exhibition. These were also the first tourist parties that came as a whole to the Empire. A group of 142 people came to Istanbul at the beginning of April 1863; they were followed by another group of 450 people. The latter group continued to Izmir after staying in Istanbul for five days. Around the same time, a Viennese group, which came to Istanbul through Trieste, visited the exhibition on their first day and then stayed longer to see the Bosphorus. Furthermore, a party of 25 from England came to Istanbul at the end of April (Önsöy, 1988: p.92; Özdemir, 2011: p.90). In those years, the travel agency that was established by Misserie was regarded as the first travel agency to organise a package tour of 42 days in Europe for 75 Ottoman Liras (Demir and Demir, 2014: p.613). Also in the second half of the 19th century, approximately 1872–73, Thomas Cook, the name of that still exists in the tourism sector, organised the first world tour, which lasted eight months and included Istanbul. This world tour started in Leicester and continued to Cairo. While a large number of the group returned to London from Cairo, Thomas Cook (2014) himself lengthened the tour, covering Egypt, Palestine, Turkey, Greece, Italy and France (thomascook.com). During this period, there was a large increase in the number of persons who entered the country – Istanbul in particular – either for investment or for travel purposes. As a charming and ancient capital city, Istanbul motivated prosperous Europeans to travel there. Another factor that made travelling to the Ottoman Empire attractive was orientalist thought. Orientalism attracted the interest of many travellers to the Ottoman region (Toprak, 2003). In addition, from 1883 onwards, with the onset of train travel under the name of 'The Orient Express' between Paris and Istanbul, the need for guides to take foreign people to historical and cultural locales grew rapidly (Şahin, 2006: p.139).

2. Valet-de place, cicerone and dragoman

The readers were informed in various publications that upon arrival in Istanbul, the first thing to do was to hire a *valet-de-place*, *cicerone* or *dragoman*, and the steamship transportation companies and hotel administrators were able to recommend honest and smart people to serve as guides (Bradshaw, 1866: p.500). While the French *valet-de-place* and Italian *cicerone* were names that were given to those who guided travellers, the word *dragoman*, which was derived from the word 'tercüman' (interpreter) in Turkish, was often used for those who interpreted from Turkish, Arabic and Persian into European languages. All of these roles were mentioned frequently in many foreign sources of the period. The information that was provided about these people in a book that was published in 1802, in which Turkish clothes

were illustrated by coloured drawings, read, "the class of Dragomen, or interpreters, is very numerous in Turkey; but more particularly so in Pera, the great suburb of Constantinople. These men are absolutely necessary for the transactions of all business between foreigners and Turks. There are also a certain number, sometimes up to thirty, attached to the different ambassadors. It is astonishing with what facility some of these Dragomen have acquired and speak six or seven different languages. A great number of those who live at Pera are descendants from Venetians, who formerly came in the trains of ambassadors from that state" (Bensley, 1802: p.11). It can be shown that, at one time, interpreters who worked only to maintain diplomatic relations in the Ottoman Empire took the first steps towards developing a type of guidance service by helping visitors to Istanbul in later years. In a travel guide titled 'A Guide to Constantinople' (1895), Demetrius Coufopoulos said that while the title *dragoman* was given to people who worked as authorized interpreters at various European consulates and embassies in Levant (Eastern Mediterranean Countries), in time the term also referred to hotel employees who interpreted for foreigners during their journeys (Coufopoulos, 1895: p.34).

3. The first representatives of professional tourist guides

From a series of travel books that were prepared by John Murray Publisher on Turkey to help travellers as well as *The Times* (1853), it is possible to obtain information about both guidance services of the period and Misserie, who was most likely the first popular representative of this occupation.

In 1840, in a travel book that was published in London called 'A Handbook for Travellers in the Ionian Islands, Greece, Turkey, Asia Minor and Constantinople' it was advised that travellers should improve themselves in the languages of the countries that they visited and that they should hire a servant only if this wasn't possible. Mention of Misserie's name in this book as the most valuable guide of the East is an interesting detail: "The modern Greek and Turkish languages are so little studied that a traveller will in general be obliged to supply his own deficiencies by the superior knowledge of his servant. It is very difficult to find a servant in England capable of acting as interpreter in Eastern countries, though a few such may be found; one known as 'Misserie', has been found to be a most invaluable servant to travellers in the East. Guides and interpreters must be taken in each country, if the traveller be unprovided with a servant" (Murray, 1840: p.iii-iv). Misserie, who is mentioned here, was frequently spoken highly of in the travel book that was published in London in Kinglake (1845) by A. W. Kinglake with the title 'Eothen: Traces of Travel Brought Home from the East.' Moreover, the manager of Hotel d'Angleterre in Pera is also mentioned.

On 15 November 1853, a letter to the Illustrated London News editor titled 'Hotels at Constantinople,' which was sent by a traveller from the *Travellers' Club* in London, who was accompanied by Misserie in his Eastern travels, was important for including information about Misserie. This was written as a lampoon of the letter that was sent to the newspaper by a Constantinople correspondent who had criticized Misserie's hotel. In this letter, which appeared in *The Times*, (1853), apart from the characteristics of the hotel, there was also praise for Misserie. It was stated that Misserie could speak seven languages impeccably and also seemed more like a friend rather than an interpreter and servant, with his confident, calm, loyal and talented bearing against the difficulties that they faced while travelling to the East together. Moreover, it is stated that Lord Lindsay's travels with Misserie were more challenging and full of adventure than his own and that Lord Lindsay praised his features.

In his letters, Lindsay indicated that he felt happier with Misserie with each passing day in addition to his being attentive, cordial, careful and smart. He added that Misserie, who had visited many countries, had an extraordinary talent for learning a language (Lindsay, 1847: p.10).

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