



A Historical Context, Literary Analysis and Modern Relevance of Orientalism

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Abstract: This paper explores the historical background of Orientalism and then applies Edward Said's definition of Orientalism to several cases studies from French and British literature. Accordingly, the paper is divided into three parts. The first part documents Middle Eastern history and the region's interactions with Europe in order to show how Western lens on the region is biased because of three major events throughout Middle Eastern history: the rise of gunpowder empires, the commercial revolution and the protestant reformation. The second part of the paper focuses on an analysis of the literary work and travel documentations of Chateaubriand and Southey in order to show how the concept of Orientalism is rooted in academia and literature due to the power dynamics between the two regions. The last part uses Jerusalem as a case study for Orientalism to focus on how Orientalism shapes the history and culture of a city. These three sections together provide an overview of how Orientalism developed and traces its different manifestations in academic and literary realms as well as the contemporary perception of the Middle East, how it is more of an imaginary artificial world more than the objective reality and depiction of the region.

1. INTRODUCTION

In 1811, a French traveler named François-René de Chateaubriand published a work on his travels from Paris to Jerusalem between the years 1806-1807. Influenced by his journey in North America, from which he had recently returned, he expressed that “What most distinguishes the Arab peoples from those of the New World is that despite the coarseness of the former we nevertheless feel something delicate in their manners: one feels they were born in that Orient from which has emerged all the arts, all sciences and all religions.”¹ Chateaubriand compared his observations in the New World and the Middle East by expressing how there is a nuanced sophistication in the behaviors of the Arabs compared with the naturally crude North American natives. Engrossed in the imagination of the past glory and mentally constructed image of the oriental world, he continues the comparison by saying, “in the Americas, everything proclaims the savage who has not yet reached the state of civilization; amongst the Arabs all proclaims the civilized man fallen once more into a state of savagery.”² In the eyes of a conventional European author from this period, Chateaubriand does not hide his belief that the Orient is, in fact, a world that no longer shimmers with glory and gold but is rather desperate for Western assistance. He represents the image of the Middle East not from an objective or culturally analytical point of view but one consumed in Western cultural and political superiority as well as heavily Eurocentric.³

The European world also had a fantasy of Babylon in the 19th century. In 1801, the English poet Robert Southey wrote, “A labyrinth of ruins, Babylon. Spreads o'er the blasted plain: The wandering Arab never sets his tent within her walls; the shepherd eyes afar. Her evil towers, and devious drives his flock.”⁴ This might seem like a description of the Middle East, but in reality, it is one not of the

¹ François Rene de Chateaubriand, *Itineraire de Paris a Jerusalem*, trans. A S Kline (Paris: Poetry in Translation, 1811), 311.

² Chateaubriand, *Itineraire*, 311.

³ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 173.

⁴ Robert Southey, “Thalaba the Destroyer,” *The Project Gutenberg eBook of ThalabaThe Destroyer*, by Robert Southey., 1801, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/39804/39804-h/39804-h.htm>.

Orient but of the European imagination of the place. This opinion is amplified by Volney's *Les Ruines*, where he also characterizes Babylon as a "fallen" city. In both descriptions of Babylon, which use Baghdad as the modern equivalent to the once glorious civilization, Southey and Volney describe Babylon as a fallen polity, both culturally and politically. The implication is that the Middle East lost its position in the contemporary world as it has become subject to European intervention and dominance. Volney further expressed, "So one day may the Crescent from thy Mosques Be plucked by Wisdom, when the enlightened arm Of Europe conquers to redeem the East."⁵ These literary works evaluate the Middle East with a Eurocentric lens, as a damsel needing Western rescue. They represent the image of the Middle East not from an objective or culturally analytical point of view but one consumed in Western cultural and political superiority.⁶

These quotes from Chateaubriand and Southey capture much of what Edward Said characterized as "Orientalism" in his book *Orientalism* (1978). Said explained that such literary depictions embodied how the image of the Middle East has come to be modified through European perspectives and centuries of Western dominance. As a result, Orientalism is subjective, as it is the European's image and self-imposed definition of the Near East and how it connects to Europe as an exotic and inferior culture. As Professor Diana Lary explains, Orientalism is "a racial construct" of the East, mainly the Near East in regions of the modern-day Middle East, but also includes other regions in the Far East as well as other parts of the non-Western world.⁷ The impact of Orientalism is not only the cultural depreciation and painting of a self-created Western image of Near Eastern civilization but also the "distortion that power relations between the West and the Orient bring to scholarship."⁸ Because of this self-creation, Orientalism "has less to do with the Orient than it does with 'our world'", or the Western world, as Said implies.⁹

In order to understand Said's definition, we can explore the historical forces and ideologies that shaped Orientalism which have impacted contemporary descriptions of the Near East. Orientalism was born out of the foundation of the Crusades and refers to the horizon of the time between the 15th century and today. Historian Henry Glassie explains the definition of history as "not the past, but a map of the past drawn from a particular point of view to be useful to the modern traveler."¹⁰ Glassie's point captures how it is important to identify the significant historical events about European intervention in the Middle East and keystones in Middle Eastern history in order to understand how the concept of Orientalism was born. The following paper will show the connection between this history and several different literary representations of the Orient in French and British literature from the modern period in order to illustrate the main contours of Orientalism. The first part of the paper will describe the three major events that gave birth to the modern period in the Middle East: the foundation of the gunpowder regimes, the commercial revolution, the Protestant revolution, and other events led to the creation of these distorted dynamics, as well as a more sophisticated analysis of how the lens is Eurocentric in the context of Orientalism.¹¹ It is important to understand Middle Eastern history because since the world today is governed by a sphere of Western superiority, the perception of the Near East reflected in these sources is biased. The second part of the paper will examine in more detail the writings of Chateaubriand and Southey in order to show how they exhibit some of the main features of Orientalism's manifestations in academic and literary sources, with Chateaubriand presenting European superiority and geopolitical dominance through his writings while Southey traces his own Eurocentric imaginary Orient formed from a Western understanding of the Orient in order to

⁵ Wallace Cable Brown, "Robert Southey and English Interest in the Near East," *ELH* 5, no. 3 (1938): 218, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2871589>, 222.

⁶ Francis Lo, "Southey, Shelley and the Orientalist Quest: Geography and Genre," *European Journal of English Studies* 6 (2002), 143–158.

⁷ Diana Lary, "Edward Said: Orientalism and Occidentalism," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 17 (2006), 3–15.

⁸ Diana Lary, "Edward Said: Orientalism and Occidentalism," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 17, no. 2 (2007): 3–15, <https://doi.org/10.7202/016587ar>, 4.

⁹ Said, *Orientalism*, 12.

¹⁰ Kristy Smith, "Different Drum: Doing the Best Job Possible to Re-Tell History," *Coldwater Daily Reporter*, October 2, 2022, <https://www.thedailyreporter.com/story/opinion/columns/2022/10/01/different-drum-doing-the-best-job-possible-to-re-tell-history/69522055007/>.

¹¹ James L. Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East: A History*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

satisfy his own ideological fantasies about the region. Thereafter, the paper focuses more directly on Jerusalem as a case study in the ways in which Orientalism has shaped the image of one particular city in the modern era. These three parts of the paper work together in order to demonstrate that while some might read modern European descriptions of the Middle East in a simplistic manner a closer analysis of their thematic content reveals that they evoke more of an imaginary world about the power dynamics between European and the Orient than a purely realistic portrayal of the region.

2. THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE AND THE WEST: THE RISE OF ORIENTALISM

In order to understand how Orientalism developed, it is necessary first to review the historical events that led to the formation of Orientalism in the fifteenth century. It is also important to discuss the stream of events that made the Middle East host to some of the most powerful empires of this period. Surveying the major events that stood at the outset of the modern era not only allows us to trace the history of the rise of the modern era, but also paves the way for a more nuanced understanding of the different facets of power dynamics that would arise between Europe and the Middle East. These different facets include technology, economic mechanisms, and religious-political forces.

We can begin by looking at the significant role that “gunpowder regimes” played in the early modern period. The expression “gunpowder regimes” refers to a collection of military-patron empires, including the Ottoman Empire, the Safavid Empire and the Mughal Empire, that roamed the Middle East starting from the fourteenth century when the Ottoman Empire was founded.¹² Their formation shaped the Western perception of the Orient due to the sheer scale of empires created and the amount of land they conquered, as well as their relationship with Europe.

The Ottoman Empire formed one of the three gunpowder empires with the longest-lasting effects and it was the one that had the strongest influences upon European perceptions of the Middle East.¹³ It lasted for over six centuries and at its peak its territory covered Northern Africa and even Southern and Eastern Europe. A few centuries later in the sixteenth century, the Safavids also emerged as the largest second gunpowder empire. Their territory spread over eastern Iraq as far as the western portion of Russia and centered in Persia, or what is now Iran. This empire strengthened the importance of the religion of Islam as well as added to the European impression of the Middle East¹⁴. Although not in the immediate scope of this paper due to the limited focus of this essay and this empire’s geographical location, another empire was the Mughal Empire, which ran over modern-day India. Its imperial domain spread across five centuries, from its founding in the sixteenth century and ended by the British Empire in the nineteenth century.

In his book *The Modern Middle East*, James Gelvin quotes the famous Austrian politician and statesman Klemens von Metternich, who commented that “Asia begins at the Eastern gate of Vienna.”¹⁵ This statement by Metternich captures a sense of the amount of land and power that the Ottoman Empire as well as other gunpowder empires held during that period of time. This power became frightening to the Europeans of the period because of the presence of such a strongly centralized power on their eastern front. Although such an empire deemed to conquer large territories in the world began to deteriorate in the seventeenth century, their endings were not expected at the moment when Metternich was speaking.

What then made the gunpowder empires so frightening to the Europeans at the beginning? As its name suggests, *gunpowder*. The Ottomans, Safavids and Mughals ruled as a military patronage empire. This form of government was no longer news to the Europeans because it has been the way in which the Mongols and past empires ruled the Middle East. However, the difference was that the older empires that ruled were unstable because of their military focus. This caused little loyalty among the local rulers who divided the regions and often ended up in constant warfare and territorial changes as well as unstable bureaucracy. With this form, it was hard to maintain a stable empire under a central government. However, the introduction of gunpowder solved the problem. As Gelvin suggests, gunpowder was able to make tribal leaders and non-Turkish people succumb to their

¹² Gelvin, *The Modern*, 25.

¹³ William L. Cleveland and Martin Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East* (New York, N.Y: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2019), 37.

¹⁴ Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern*, 37.

¹⁵ Gelvin, *The Modern*, 10.

rulers.¹⁶ This would cause the stability of a central bureaucracy to be felt and influenced throughout the empire, and with a more stable government and bureaucracy, they would be able to protect agriculture, which was the key to wealth, as well as commerce. This would also come to play an important role in wealth foundation and redistributing the wealth.

The Ottomans utilized gunpowder first when they used it in the siege of Constantinople in the year 1453. When the Ottomans used it against the Safavids and defeated them in the Battle of Chaldiran later in 1514, the Safavids adopted gunpowder and used it to their strength. Both empires used gunpowder to solve a key problem, but a major problem remained: one cannot use gunpowder without sufficient manpower. As a result, slaves came to play a key role in state-building in the Ottoman and Safavid empires. In his book *The Middle East in the World Economy*, Roger Owens describes the role that slaves played in the development of warfare during this period.¹⁷ Owens notes that stability was necessary, and that there were two ways to keep that stability: either by local tribesmen or “Turks or slaves like the kaJakulan in Anatolia or the Mamluks in Egypt and the Fertile Crescent.”¹⁸

A major aspect of this form of labor was the requirement that all of them would need to be trained in warfare. For example, the Ottomans utilized Balkan war prisoners as their soldiers, and the Safavids did the same with the slaves from Central Asia like Georgia. With these slaves in place with firearms attached to them, the central governments of both empires could solve the problem of limited loyalty of local landlords with a strong army that could defend or scare the enemies or other components of bureaucracy in the empire. This feature made the gunpowder empires more powerful and intimidating to their European neighbors. All these factors kept the land in check for the empire, and since land was the most important resource an empire could have together with gunpowder and slaves, empires were able to keep their land and the agricultural products that came out of this land profitable.

If the gunpowder empires were so powerful, why would Orientalism be about a Eurocentric view of a less powerful Middle East? The peak of the gunpowder empires did worry many European empires, however, starting from the sixteenth century and until the early twentieth century, the Middle Eastern empires underwent a decline. During this decline, they would slowly lose their central powers and become a peripheral force in a Eurocentric world.¹⁹ What were the different mechanisms and events that led to this decline? A major part of the answer to this question would be the arrival of the commercial revolution. The commercial revolution is period of increase in “new technologies of direct benefit to trade were invented and applied”²⁰. This event would shift the power from the image of the Ottoman Empire at the gates of Vienna to creating a periphery in the Eastern Mediterranean. The commercial revolution reshaped the dynamics between the Middle East, especially the Ottoman Empire, and the Europeans into a system of core and periphery systems.²¹

In order to talk about how the commercial revolution contributed to the downfall of the Ottoman Empire and other gunpowder empires, it is important to add further context. The “decline”²² of the Middle East, as Roger Owens calls it, occurred when the gunpowder empires started to lose their power from the 1500s into the 1800s due to many events, one of them being the inflation of prices, also called the “great inflation”.²³ Because of this inflation and the cash-dependent economy upon which the Ottoman Empire was founded, the government always lacked money. There are a number of theories for this. One of the more prominent of such theories holds that it was the result of expansion due to the rise of populations in Egypt and Anatolia from the natural recovery of population from the black death. The increase in population could have been one of the reasons that put more pressure on the Ottoman economy. As Gelvin explains, “Debasement would induce price increases, which, in turn, would encourage shortsighted governments to undertake further debasement.”²⁴

¹⁶ Gelvin, *The Modern*, 26.

¹⁷ Roger Owen, *The Middle East in the World Economy, 1800-1914* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002).

¹⁸ Owen, *The Middle East*, 10.

¹⁹ Gelvin, *The Modern*, 38.

²⁰ Gelvin, *The Modern*, 39.

²¹ Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern*, 50.

²² Owen, *The Middle East*, 1.

²³ Gelvin, *The Modern*, 33.

²⁴ Gelvin, *The Modern*, 35.

The commercial revolution was triggered by technological advancements in the fifteenth century by Spanish and Portuguese powers which affected trade and the entire economic system. Ships came to have adjustable sails and better compasses which enabled Europeans to navigate across the Atlantic Ocean. This also stimulated the exploration of the New World by Spanish and Portuguese powers and enabled them to gain more influence in Europe.²⁵ This was important partially because, before the exploration, the majority of trading across empires happened in the Mediterranean, with goods such as silk, which was controlled by the Italians and the Ottomans. However, when more routes were discovered, the scope of trade expanded to the entirety of Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Before the exploration and the commercial revolution, the Middle East controlled the spice trade, and spice was priceless.²⁶ These explorations allowed the Europeans to find a route that bypassed the Middle East, around the Cape of Good Hope, allowing them to be able to trade directly between the East Indies and Europe. This was one of the major setbacks to the Middle Eastern economy during this period.

However, the key with these newly gained territories was the gold and silver that they were able to extract from the precious metals. These precious metals, accompanied with a reviving European population recovering from the black death and new technological advancements, allowed them to flow back across the world into Europe and Asia.²⁷ Here one sees an example of what happens when more money is introduced into the economic system. Inflation occurs and prices increase. Inflation began to weaken the Ottoman economic system and economic guilds that formed during this period.²⁸ Because of their geographic location, European countries were able to use their economic and technological advancements to become the core of the new economic system they developed, one that ran on empires and trading across the oceans.²⁹ More financial advancements developed, such as joint stock companies, insurance, and banking that allowed profits to increase. The empires also encouraged self-sufficiency with the concept of mercantilism.³⁰ With the establishment of new colonies and slaves from West Africa, the Europeans created triangular trade and systems of self-sufficiency. At that point, the world revolved around a system of world empires that had a few characteristics. One allowed different empire systems to exist simultaneously, and so was the case with the British, French, Dutch, Spanish, and Portuguese, as well as the Chinese and the Safavids or Ottomans.³¹

However, this imperial system also meant that all the empires in this political orbit were technologically or economically more or less equivalent, and as a result one of them could quickly overtake or come to control another. Therefore, because Eastern European polities were technologically and economically less advanced, they began to increase their wealth by producing cheaper wheat and grain than Western Europe and selling their agricultural products to their neighbors. This interaction formed a scenario similar to the previous eras of serfdom, so it came to be called the “second serfdom”.³² Similarly, in this case, the Ottomans and Safavids lagged behind compared to the Europeans, their technology, although having gunpowder, was not comparable and their economies did not develop as quickly. This scenario caused them to fall from the world stage and eventually into the periphery region that the Europeans developed.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Europe underwent one of the most significant political reorderings. The Protestant Reformation, initiated by Martin Luther in the Holy Roman Empire in 1517, divided Catholic Christians and Protestant Christians and ended a unified Christian Europe. While most people focus on the theology or the religious differences associated with the Protestant Reformation, this movement resulted in major political changes in a direction that perhaps few

²⁵ Gelvin, *The Modern*, 36.

²⁶ Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern*, 9.

²⁷ Gelvin, *The Modern*, 36.

²⁸ Daniel Goffman, *The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 199.

²⁹ Goffman, *The Ottoman Empire*, 197.

³⁰ Gelvin, *The Modern*, 38.

³¹ Goffman, *The Ottoman Empire*, 197.

³² Gelvin, *The Modern*, 39.

expected.³³ Instead, empires in Europe fought for their own benefits against each other, switching from a system of unity under religion, or Roman Catholicism, to nation-states, with each empire or kingdom fighting for their own nation and definition of their independence.

This situation was further strengthened by the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, which established the sovereignty of different empires and, more importantly, gave each kingdom in the Holy Roman Empire its own right to determine its own religion. This also led to further fragmentation of unity in Europe.³⁴ Because each European nation was fighting for itself, they tried to get other countries on their side, and the Middle East fell prey to the periphery of the Eurocentric economic system. Being described as the “Eastern Question”, the Middle East became a battleground of interest between Britain, France, and later, Russia and Germany. By the eighteenth century, the Ottomans were no longer “on the steps of the Europeans” because they no longer possessed the threat they once had.³⁵ By the turn of the eighteenth century, the Austrian Habsburgs forced the Ottomans out of former Ottoman territories in East Europe, including Hungary, Croatia and Romania. The Ottomans left the stage of the center of the world, leaving a power vacuum in Europe.

All of this meant that the main effect of the Protestant Reformation on the Ottoman Empire in the eighteenth century was the anti-catholic alliance between the Ottoman Empire and the Protestant states such as Britain, the Catholic Habsburgs in Austria and the Orthodox Russians.³⁶ This meant that the balance of power dynamics shifted from Europeans against the Asians, to the Catholics against the non-Catholics, or the Western Europeans against the Eastern Europeans. Because the Ottomans left Eastern Europe in a vacuum, this left the European countries fighting for authority in the region and the invention of the Eastern question.

A key event in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that confronted the Eastern question was the British and French rivalry. Britain and France fought for control of Western Europe, and this affected regions outside of their own territory, specifically the Middle East. They were both major powers after the Age of Exploration and profited immensely from their colonies in the Americas. As a result, both sides and their allies engaged in a long period of wars, the most famous of which was the Seven Years War or the French and Indian War. Being fought in North America and won by the British, this war consolidated Britain’s sovereignty in Western Europe and left both forces in heavy debt. Losing control of the European continent, the French tried to gain control of Egypt under Napoleon Bonaparte in 1798. This was important because the French could threaten the British by gaining control of the British route to India while also gaining resources such as Egyptian grain since Egypt was the main producer of grain for Europe for centuries in the past. The British forced the French out of Egypt, but Mehmet Ali, a member of the Ottoman army that fought against the French, stayed and ruled as the governor and later king of Egypt until the twentieth century. The invasions of Egypt also reminded the British of the importance of the Mediterranean and the Middle East in European strategies, and it became something on the British radar until World War I in the early twentieth century.

With the removal of the French from the balance of power, Britain’s largest enemy in Europe was Russia. Russia emerged to the surface of European power dynamics as it became powerful under Peter and Catherine the Great in the 17th century. Coincidentally, it was also the Ottoman Empire’s greatest enemy beginning from the 18th century. On the surface, the reason was because of the religious status of Russia as the protector of orthodox Christianity and successor to the Byzantine Empire. Many orthodox Christians also lived within the Ottoman Empire. The other reason related to resources and power motives was because Russia was a landlocked country during the winter as their northern harbors were frozen, and they wanted the control of the black sea and the Turkish straits to the Mediterranean, which were under Ottoman control. After a series of wars between both forces in the eighteenth century, Russia won and eventually gained access to the Turkish straits and ownership of the Caspian Sea.³⁷ This was not as big of a concern to the British until the French confrontation forced them to reconsider the importance of the East. This also forced them to reface Russia and the “eastern question”, which caused the alliance of the British and the Ottomans against the Russians.

³³ Gelvin, *The Modern*, 45.

³⁴ Gelvin, *The Modern*, 45.

³⁵ Gelvin, *The Modern*, 45.

³⁶ Gelvin, *The Modern*, 46.

³⁷ Gelvin, *The Modern*, 48.

The British-Ottoman alliance in the 18th century faced the problem of Russia together and benefitted for both sides in their political goals. This resulted in further entrapping of the Middle East in an European designated power circle. For the British, it was important to work with the Ottomans to face the Russians and the French, but it was equally important for the Ottomans to work with an exterior force, and this was because of an internally weakened Ottoman Empire.³⁸ As previously mentioned, the Middle East entered a period of economic decline starting from the 16th century due to economic inflation and the influx of rare materials from the new colonies. However, a major threat to the unity of the Ottoman Empire came after the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt in the 19th century: the rise of Balkan nationalism. The Ottomans possessed control of regions in the Balkan peninsula, namely modern-day Serbia, Greece, and Bulgaria. These regions are situated on the boundary of Russia, the Habsburgs, or by this time, the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, and the Ottoman Empire. The three empires fought for authority over the region, but in the 1800s, states in the region started aspiring for independence. The concept of nationalism and the definition of states by nation-states replaced states' definitions by religion, but nationalism did not form anywhere. In other words, the Balkans coincidentally met a series of precise restrictions that allowed for the formation of nationalism in this period of time when the rivalry between empires was intense.

There were three reasons for the development of Balkan nationalism that caused the weakening of foreign powers and threatened Ottoman rule in the region. The first was the emergence of a group of intellectuals who could identify and point out nationalism to the public and begin a series of movements related to nationalism. The second was “the spread of market relations”³⁹ among the public, which also emerged after the Napoleonic movements. Lastly, perhaps the most important aspect of nationalism was the existence of an “us” against the “others.” This phenomenon that “we” are different from “them” was used multiple times in nationalist strategies, as Otto von Bismarck also used this mentality to unite the Germans under Prussian rule against the Habsburgs.⁴⁰ In the Balkans, they were the Turkish Muslims (or Ottomans). Of course, the ammunition of nationalism was already present, but there needed to be a match that ignited the bomb. In this case, it was the intervention of outside forces or the nemesis of the Ottomans, namely the Russians, along with some other European individuals such as groups of Romantics that want to see the demise of the Ottoman Empire and/or the romanticism of nationalism.

This rise of nationalism in the Balkan area threatened Ottoman rule and directly caused the instability within the Ottoman Empire. This also sparked a series of independence movements, the most important of which was the Greek War of Independence in 1821. In order to deal with the Greek revolt, the Ottomans utilized many troops, including the force of Mehmet Ali. When they supposedly conducted ethnic cleansing, however, the Europeans eradicated the Ottomans and forced them to accept Greek independence. Mehmet Ali, a governor of Egypt, was promised by the government that he could control Syria if the Ottomans won over the Greeks, so when he did not get what he wanted, he invaded Syria. Because failure in Syria might represent the Ottomans losing to the Russians, in order to keep the alliance against the Russians, the British protected the Ottomans and chased Ali out of Syria.⁴¹ This was why by the mid-19th century Britain was working with the Ottomans against the Russians. This alliance was an attempt to compensate for the loss the Ottomans had during the independence movement as well as the religious unity between the British and the Ottomans against the non-protestant Christians.⁴² The relationship defined European power dynamics in other ways and also marked the Ottomans' status as European puppets in power politics due to their internal fragmentation. It seemed clearer that by the turn of the century the Ottomans no longer had control of the vast region they used to have, nor did they have the power to shape European dynamics⁴³. Instead, the Europeans had managed to change the balance of international power and use the Middle East for their own political and economic benefits.

³⁸ Gelvin, *The Modern*, 53.

³⁹ Gelvin, *The Modern*, 54.

⁴⁰ Josef Becker, “The Franco-Prussian Conflict of 1870 and Bismarck’s Concept of a ‘Provoked Defensive War’: A Response to David Wetzel,” *Central European History* 41, no. 1 (2008): 93–109, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0008938908000058>.

⁴¹ Gelvin, *The Modern*, 57.

⁴² Reşat Kasaba, *The Ottoman Empire and the World Economy: The Nineteenth Century* (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 1988), 34.

⁴³ Kasaba, *The Ottoman Empire*, 33.

3. THE ORIENT IN MODERN EUROPEAN LITERATURE

The historical overview offered above provides the foundation for understanding the context of the power dynamics that are reflected in the European literary sources from the Modern Period. Before turning to a critical analysis of two of these sources, it is necessary to present a more substantial definition of Orientalism as Edward Said defined and explained it. According to Said, Orientalism is “a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical and philological texts”, not simply constructing the power dynamics but maintains an “intention to understand...control, manipulate even to incorporate” the reconstruction of the Oriental world in scholarly and other seemingly non-political realms.⁴⁴ Said also defines this concept by qualifying it in three main directions. First, he argues that Orientalism is not merely an idea but rather a set of creations and realities depending on the Orient's representation instead of the truth. The second is that academia and other realms that are often deemed to be detached from power and politics can not be studied without their relationship to power and politics.

Due to the power dynamics that were formulated within this historical context, Orientalism was not just a set of stories about the East but a sign of Western cultural and political dominance over the East. Orientalism is a symbol of power and hegemony of Western powers, so it is not simply a *representation* of Eastern culture but a set of power dynamics. The key is the power the Western world has had and has exerted in order to create this concept of the East rather than the concept itself.⁴⁵ It is cultural, academic, literary as well as geopolitical and relates to the Eurocentric power dynamics that exists since the modern era. However, in order to understand the concept of Orientalism and how it exists in history, it is crucial to explain Orientalism through the context it was presented from and explain how these primary sources add to and shape the concept of Orientalism. Toward this end, the following section will offer an analysis of several works of literature from the period described above in order to show how western perceptions of the Middle East impacted academia and how the region was viewed through a biased lens.

In 1811, François-René de Chateaubriand incorporated French romanticism and Napoleonic ambitions into his account of the Middle East and demonstrated a European lens and its interference in a cultural image of the Middle East in his book *Record of a Journey from Paris to Jerusalem and Back*.⁴⁶ Chateaubriand joined the French loyalist army, which fought against the revolutionary force in the French Revolutionary War in 1792 and fought against the revolutionary force. Before initiating his journey to North America, Chateaubriand was initially sympathetic to the French revolution, which had spread all over France since the late 18th century. However, the violence caused him to become sick of the new ideals and as a result it brought him all the way to North America, where he recorded his journeys in his book *Voyage in America*. This book was published in 1826 and it served as inspiration for his later novels, which described Native American life in the South. The descriptions of cultural customs through a romantic lens of native Americans served as a basis for Chateaubriand's record of the Middle East, which he visited after visiting the Americas. This resulted in a description of the nature of the locals through a Eurocentric lens and casted opinions with strong western romantic influence.

The arrival of French romanticism during the second half of the 19th century was mainly expressed through a literary genre called *travelogue*. This genre was made famous by Chateaubriand's writings as well as Nerval's *Voyage en Orient* (1851). Both of these works described travels in the Orient together with some retelling of famous Orient tales and myths. Myths and tales already shadow their account with a romantic, perhaps mystic and literary veil, and this subjective perspective adds to the story-telling component in the *travelogue*, which makes the objectivity decrease and subjectivity increase. Therefore, Chateaubriand's writing was heavily subjective because the difference between the romantic lens and others is that romanticism is subjective and influenced by emotions, as compared to other tones. This aspect of the genre caused Chateaubriand's writing to be something of his perspective and influence instead of something reflective of a more objective lens. This also meant that most of the influence would inevitably come from his opinion of the French superiority and perspectives gained from the North American trip. Politics also played a big part, as this was when

⁴⁴ Said, *Orientalism*, 12.

⁴⁵ Said, *Orientalism*, 12.

⁴⁶ Yee, “French Romantic,” 317.

France fought for the Rhineland with the new German confederation and rivalry for colonialism with their old nemesis Britain. Therefore, those who wanted literature to contain nationalistic and imperialistic messages such as wealthy and influential politicians would subsidize *travelogues*. This influence would only further the reality that such literary works would become almost an European invention.⁴⁷

Chateaubriand's itinerary begins by describing modern-day Turkey and it moves the reader to Jerusalem and afterward south to Egypt. As part of his description of the Dead Sea immediately before he returned to Jerusalem, he states,

“What most distinguishes the Arab peoples from those of the New World is that despite the coarseness of the former we nevertheless feel something delicate in their manners: one feels they were born in that Orient from which has emerged all the arts, all sciences and all religions.”⁴⁸

We see in this excerpt of his writing a mapping of three different worlds from the “savage” to “less savage” and finally to the “civilized world”: the New World, Orientalism, and Europe. By mapping the world in this way, Europe is presented as the superior culture, the pinnacle of civilization while the Orient is condescendingly praised for being “more sophisticated” than the New World. We also see here the designation of the Orient as the Cradle of Civilization and the idea that it still ultimately falls short in being truly “civilized.” The word “distinguishes”⁴⁹ depicts the privilege of classification of different cultures and peoples but also shows how Orientalism is central to European subjection as well as how they are subjectively different from the Middle East.

Chateaubriand's depiction of the Orient also appears in another literary work in which he describes his opinion on the Crusades. This literary work is called *Source* and in it he characterizes the Crusades as

“was not only about the deliverance of the Holy Sepulchre, but more about knowing which would win on the earth, a cult that was civilization's enemy, systematically favorable to ignorance [this was Islam, of course], to despotism, to slavery, or a cult that had caused to reawaken in modern people the genius of a sage antiquity, and had abolished base servitude.”⁵⁰

The first important observation about this quote is found in the way that Chateaubriand justifies the Crusades from a Christian European perspective. The phrase “The deliverance of the Holy Sepulchre”⁵¹ is an allusion to the idea that the action of the Crusades was ultimately driven by a desire to demonstrate loyalty to God by retaking the Holy Land and specifically the church in Jerusalem that held the place of the cross and tomb of Jesus. Though the Crusades began in the 11th century, the contemporary European colonization of the Middle East is viewed in this literary work as a new type of crusade, because the status between both sides is a return to the past power dynamics with the Europeans dominating the Oriental world. This conquering of the Middle East to justify Christianity and European culture, a part of British and French imperialist actions, is a replica of the Crusades in which Chateaubriand is involved.

Beyond an attempt to justify the Crusades, this quote also captures his belief about the ascent of civilization. By ascent of civilization, Chateaubriand characterizes European culture as superior and dominant compared to Oriental culture and this characterization also includes religion and secular culture. His use of the expression “Which would win on earth”⁵² depicts his belief that Christianity would ultimately prevail over Islam. As a result, he treats Islam as a case study that helps by comparison to present Christianity as the superior religion.

Chateaubriand was also extremely proud of European inventions and deemed them better than Middle Eastern cultural advances. As noted above, the Middle East was the Cradle of Civilization for him as Europe comes to represent the ultimate peak of civilization, and in this way he presents them with his

⁴⁷ Jennifer Yee, “French Romantic Travel Writing: Chateaubriand to Nerval, by C. W. Thompson,” *Studies in Travel Writing* 16, no. 3 (2012): 316–18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645145.2012.692919>, 317.

⁴⁸Chateaubriand, *Itineraire*, 311.

⁴⁹Chateaubriand, *Itineraire*, 311.

⁵⁰Said, *Orientalism*, 172.

⁵¹Said, *Orientalism*, 172.

⁵²Said, *Orientalism*, 172.

repetition of “to ignorance, to despotism...to slavery.”⁵³ The expression “to ignorance” forms a veiled reference to Islam, an explanation of Islam as the inferior and ignorant religion. This characterization also serves to present European culture as the dominant and superior one in terms of achievements and the pinnacle of intellect. In a similar manner, “to despotism” may be understood as a possible allusion to the more commonly theocratic oriental governments compared to Europe’s renewed invention of democracy and the recent Enlightenment movements which argued that government and religion should be separated. that argue governments and religion should be separated. In this same vein, the use of the verb the verb “reawaken”⁵⁴ gives voice to the Enlightenment ideal of the rebirth of democracy in Europe. This argument is partially weak and superficial due to Chateaubriand’s own bias against democracy since he joined the loyalist army against the revolutionists during the start of the French Revolution. At the same time, he still uses this European background to back up his argument and to describe his opinions that European culture is newer and more advanced. This modernity is even more contrasted by using “antiquity” to describe the Middle East, which only furthers his characterization of the Orient as culturally and politically ancient and backward.

As Chateaubriand travels south from the Levant to Egypt, he describes his sight as he lingers around the Nile River. He exclaims

“I saw the remains of the monuments (several buildings erected by the French are still to be seen in Egypt) of a new civilization created by French genius on the banks of the Nile.”⁵⁵

The quote captures much of the power dynamics and the perspective of French superiority reflected in Chateaubriand’s nationality and gender. To begin with, though the world was becoming more globalized in the nineteenth century, it was still a privilege to travel out of one’s own country and witness something in foreign lands. In this case, Chateaubriand’s profession and class as well as his privilege formed a sense of inherent superiority in him. The phrase “remains of...a new civilization”⁵⁶ also implies how Egypt was an older civilization which was only recently enlightened through the arrival of the French. It was, according to Chateaubriand, a reborn child, one that had been reawakened by its mother Europe. This power dynamics evidently reminds readers of colonialism, and how this rebirth of civilization is due to the success of European colonialism. Furthermore, the “genius of France” that is “brought” to the area is a reference and allusion to liberty, a European, more specifically, a French invention, imposed in the Orient as a success and positive European influence. Not only does Chateaubriand justify the ascent of civilization, but he also praises colonialism because he believes that the changes European imperialism causes in these states are positive and something deserving of compliment.

There is also a less obvious aspect in Chateaubriand’s seemingly positive praising of the Nile and liberty. This is the use of feminizing language in order to depreciate the Orient and compare it to a more masculine Europe. The description of the “banks of Nile”⁵⁷ is an allusion to ancient Egypt and previous Egyptian civilizations, glorious in the European eyes, in the past, and how they were all based and harbored around the Nile. One of the cradles of civilization, the Nile is the mother of Egypt, and countries in the Orient were often feminized to be presented as softer, weaker, less vigilant, and more importantly, subordinate to their European counterparts.⁵⁸ Like a typical European nuclear family, the woman obeys and listens to the man in the family, and this contrast is presented in the power dynamics in the Middle East. By feminizing Egypt and the Nile, Chateaubriand presents his superiority and privilege over the Orient, almost as an attempt to secure Egypt in its place and allow judgements from the dominant side. Of course, a man can compliment a woman, just as Chateaubriand does to Egypt on behalf of Europe or France, but she will not be able to vocalize her dissent if she disagrees with the restrictions and definitions the man puts on her, just as Orientalism does.

⁵³Said, *Orientalism*, 172.

⁵⁴Said, *Orientalism*, 172.

⁵⁵Chateaubriand, *Itineraire*, 467.

⁵⁶Chateaubriand, *Itineraire*, 467.

⁵⁷Chateaubriand, *Itineraire*, 467.

⁵⁸Cynthia Ruth Chapman, *The Gendered Language of Warfare in the Israelite/Assyrian Encounter: A Thesis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2002), 1.

Britain's romanticism came earlier than France along with colonialism in the early 19th century. During this period, Britain had colonies all over the world, including from North and South Africa to South Asia and the Pacific. Hence, this colonial influence was exerted through multiple media, including literature in order to impose British cultural values and imperial rule all over the colonies. This was especially the case for the British attitude towards the Ottoman empire because the British attempted to use Ottoman internal conflict in order to protect its interests and trade route to British India. British missionaries have always depicted the East as "uncivilized." We can see then how Southey's condemnation of Hindu practices fits within this more significant trend. However, with romantic movements, there are parts appreciated in native culture. Here we see an example of Southey exhibiting this curiosity about Arab culture that straddles the tension between appreciation and othering.⁵⁹

Southey himself was a part of the romantic movement in Great Britain, therefore, his works consist mostly of strong sentiments and idealistic themes. One of the more relevant works that he produced related to Orientalism was *Thalaba the Destroyer*, which he completed in 1801. This was a long poem that describes a Bedouin boy, Thalaba, who escapes from a group of sorcerers who killed the rest of his family and how, with the guidance of Islam, he is able to avenge them. He worked on it in Portugal after finishing *Madoc*, as he has always wanted to write long poems since he was a schoolboy. The epic poem consists of twelve "books" with irregular stanzas and forms. Southey incorporated his understanding of Arabia and European traveler's documentations of the Orient and Arabian myths that add a magical dimension to his poetry. It is evident that Southey created this poem partially to fulfill his imagination of the mystic Arabia and a world beyond his touch.

In another excerpt from Book Five, Southey presents two scenes of Arabia that characterize the desert where Thalaba travels as the region of the nomad. The relevant part of the excerpt states,

The wandering Arab never sets his tent
Within her walls; the shepard eyes afar
Her evil Towers, and devious drives his flock.⁶⁰

Using "wandering" right next to Arab creates the stereotypical image of a nomad, people who do not settle, and hence, are less civilized. Perhaps another element of wandering belongs to the loneliness and sense of . This portrayal of the Oriental world served to depict it as a place that is caught in a stage in history where the people of the region wander and seek in need of a direction, the direction of God or someone who could lead them. In this case, Southey would argue that this direction would be formed by religion and European colonialism's religion of modern society. The comparison is drawn with nomads during the dawn of civilization, before the agricultural revolution and domestication. This comparison serves to project an image of "behind" cultures that resemble their past civilizations from millennia ago.

Similar to Chateaubriand, Southey also feminizes Arabic locations, as Arabia, or specifically, Babylon is described as "her walls" and "her evil towers."⁶¹ The use of "shepherd" is also a reference to the bible and has biblical context, and the "devious", meaning dishonest, veils the region with mystic shades. This also presents characteristics of a dimorphic society, or, in other words, a common European way of thinking about the Middle East. Dimorphic societies present the Middle East as peripheral as it does not belong in the desert/tribes or cities/urban, but a nuanced intersection with a careful mix of both.⁶²

What is also special about the quote is that the shepherd was not allowed to set his tent within the walls of the city, a reference to the Bible as shepherds were not allowed to set their tents in the city of sins-Babylon.⁶³ In this way, Southey frames his description of the now-defunct city of Baghdad by

⁵⁹ Francis Lo, "Southey, Shelley and the Orientalist Quest: Geography and Genre," *European Journal of English Studies* 6, no. 2 (2002): 143–58, <https://doi.org/10.1076/ejes.6.2.143.8837>, 146.

⁶⁰ Southey, "Thalaba".

⁶¹ Southey, "Thalaba".

⁶² M. B. Rowton, "Dimorphic Structure and the Parasocial Element," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 36, no. 3 (1977): 181–98, <https://doi.org/10.1086/372560>, 1.

⁶³ Michael Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 987.

alluding to the biblical city of Babylon. Just a few stanzas earlier in Book Five of Southey's poem where Southey fulfills his imagination of Arabic myths and how they relate to the modern context is his description of Bagdad. In this part of the poem he describes Bagdad as having fallen:

“Thou too art fallen, Baghdad! City of Peace, Thou too hast had thy day!”⁶⁴

This is an apparent reference to the fallen Babylon, as in Southey's opinion, Bagdad is simply another modern Babylon. Indeed, the subtext here is evident that Bagdad has fallen politically, culturally, academically, and economically and that the Middle East today is nothing like its past.

We can further understand the significance of Southey's allusion to Babylon along three main lines: the city's biblical connection, its historical symbolism within Greek and Roman literature, and its romantic and utopian associations. These three elements form an Orientalist perspective to bring the past and present together and blur the time boundary between the ancient city of Babylon and the modern city of Bagdad. The first aspect of Southey's allusion is found in the city of Babylon's connection to the Bible, which allows him to convey the idea that its status as the city of evil and the triumph of Christianity. Babylon would have been known to his British contemporaries through classical history and the Old Testament in particular. There are a number of passages in the Old Testament for instance that focus upon the destruction of Babylon as the city of sin. In Isaiah 13, the prophet Isaiah foresaw the fall of Babylon due to its wickedness as he says “Babylon...will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It will never be inhabited.”⁶⁵ Another prophet, Habbakuk, also predicts the destruction of Babylon, and his conversations with God question God's indifference to evilness. Eventually, God acting on Babylon also shows that he is acting against evil which also suggests how they inherently think of Babylon as being evil. The rhetoric is critical because it creates a sharp contrast, with Babylon presented as an opulent, greedy city in comparison to Jerusalem, the City of God. Jerusalem is the city of Christianity for the Christians as when the Europeans retake the city they use the idea of Jerusalem to contrast with the fallen Babylon. By connecting the two cities, Southey creates the firm idea that the modern Middle East will, like Babylon, follow the footsteps of previous civilizations and be replaced by Europeans, which, in the eyes of Southey, they already have.

A focus upon Babylon's eventual demise in the biblical texts also forms a way for Southey to convey that the city represents a major turning point in history, a point where the wheels of history turn, and the peak of civilization gets passed on to newer empires, and importantly empires that Europeans felt were more a part of their ancestry. In the late 4th century when the Greeks took over the region of Mesopotamia the fortunes of the Middle East shifted toward the West. This meant those European powers eclipsed the power of cities like Babylon. Like other European depictions, Babylon and the Middle East were depicted as the birth of civilization, the fertile crescent where civilization first bloomed, but that had an end and was replaced by the Greeks and Romans, and after that other European nations which formed the world today with sovereignty and power mainly controlled in European hands. According to Tevdovski, “the idealistic classical world of the Greeks and the Romans have transformed into stable dichotomies of the Greek against the Near Eastern and of the Roman against the oriental and native.”⁶⁶ Again, it forms almost a justification for European powers, how the turning point marks European dominance over the Middle East just like how the Greeks dominated the Babylonians.

Finally, Babylon is also the protagonist of this “utopia” that Southey and other European writers and philosophers attempt to create for themselves. Bolton mentions in his book *Writing the Empire: Robert Southey and Romantic Colonialism* that Southey, like many of his romantic era contemporaries like Byron and Mitford, that he “created a utopian pastoral society in order to project his values.”⁶⁷ These romantic authors wrote poetry on exotic locations in the Orient to harbor their “utopia” to hide away from European civilization and cherish the purity, rudiments, or ancient societies and civilizations. Southey mainly chose the location to express his ideological and

⁶⁴ Southey, “Thalaba”.

⁶⁵ Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 987.

⁶⁶ Ljuben Tevdovski, “Classicism and Orientalism in the Light of the New Globalization Theories,” *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs, Institute for Research and European Studies - Bitola* 6, no. 3 (2021): 123–36, <https://doi.org/10.47305/jlia2163123t>, 127.

⁶⁷ Carol Bolton, *Writing the Empire: Robert Southey and Romantic Colonialism* (Routledge, 2016), 151.

philosophical freedom with support for imperialism.⁶⁸ Descriptions in the poem act like a garden of Eden for the authors to share their ideas and fantasies outside the boundaries of European moral structure because it is set in the “Orient”, a world with no morals, no proper civilization, where anything is allowed.⁶⁹

4. JERUSALEM AS A MICROCOSM OF ORIENTALISM IN THE MODERN PERIOD

Whereas the first part of the paper offered a sketch of the broader political dynamics of European interaction with the Ottoman Empire, we can turn to an immediate focus on European travel and interaction with the city of Jerusalem in the nineteenth century. Jerusalem is truly a city that is one of its kind, as it is the amphitheater of the Near East, with a geographic location with sufficient valleys and mountains and just the proper distance from the highways to make it able to be involved in worldly affairs but also separated from them. It is also the intersection of the different worlds, as it is an intersection of the three continents, the Arabian desert and Mediterranean coasts, and the East and West.

This unique city attracted many Europeans to explore its religious significance. Beginning in the 19th century, many French and British explorers traveled to Jerusalem to not only learn about its culture and fulfill curiosity but also to trace the origins of the journeys of Abraham, Moses, and Joshua in order to prove “the literal truth of the Bible by scientific, empirical methodology.”⁷⁰ This desire to connect with the Holy Land through the Bible only strengthened the preexisting Orientalism. Explorers like American explorer Robinson expressed that visiting Jerusalem felt like a “visit was a ‘return’”⁷¹ to a younger him as if he had seen Jerusalem in his dream, and this self-posing imagination of the East and he as a European in it was a reflection of Orientalists beliefs during that time, with the explorer as the center and maker of the dream, reflecting European manipulation in an Orient imagination.

A key aspect of the European concern with Jerusalem and the Holy Land was not only nationalism but also the role that religion was playing in the European imagination. The French and English explorers’ visit to Jerusalem was also an internal battle between Protestantism and Catholicism because as explorers they tried to use Jerusalem as a way to validate their religious views. Therefore, when Robinson unearthed “large stones”⁷² spanning the Tyropoeon valley, supposedly documented by Joseph, the man who raised Jesus, the Catholics did everything they could to prevent the release of such a discovery. There were also clashes between the Orthodox church and catholic church, and Russia and France, the protectors of their respective religion, got involved in a clash that was a cause to the Crimean war, which the British and French declared on Russia, and their winning gave them more say in the region, which triggered French and British exploration in the region.

Visiting Jerusalem was a part of exploring the origins of the western religion, and because the British and French history and roots valued Christianity, many Englishmen, such as Oxford University Professor Stanley who gave a speech in 1862, expressed that pilgrimages to Jerusalem was respected to religious roots and hence respect to English culture and made them more English. The French also shared this, as Chateaubriand said that touring Jerusalem “was a matter of touring the realm of political will, political management, political definition”⁷³ of France. These illustrations of divisions between Christians in the 19th century show that during this period Jerusalem became the symbol of nationalism that was also dependent upon differences in religious identity.

As more explorers from European countries visited Jerusalem, the image of the Holy land began to take shape as European missionaries started sending missionaries to “evangelize” the so-called motherland. Vogel mentions in his book that many American missionaries settled in the middle east because they were “Motivated by the desire to spread Christianity”⁷⁴ and “attempted to base their

⁶⁸ Bolton, *Writing*, 151.

⁶⁹ Andrew Scheil, *Babylon under Western Eyes: A Study of Allusion and Myth* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 276.

⁷⁰ Karen Armstrong, *Jerusalem* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2005), 570.

⁷¹ Armstrong, *Jerusalem*, 571.

⁷² Armstrong, *Jerusalem*, 571.

⁷³ Bar-Yosef, *The Holy Land*, 77.

⁷⁴ Lester Irwin Vogel, *To See a Promised Land: Americans and the Holy Land in the Nineteenth Century* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993).

evangelistic activities” in the holy land. The motivation for this was also simple—this was the “land where Christianity was born,”⁷⁵ and the land that has seen all the European victories in the Middle East, including the Crusades, and surely, if this land belonged to the Christians, it would be the best symbol for Christian victory on Earth. British and German missionaries also joined the efforts in the beginning of the 19th century, with the Church Missionary Society and the London Jews Society playing the largest role, as they set up missionaries in the Ottoman Empire. The target were Eastern Europeans in the region because they were safer to convert and considered as ““primitive” and “underdeveloped” Christians.”⁷⁶ Missionaries like the Jaffa sisters or the Society of Friends set up missionary stations and schools, some were more successful than others. Towards the end of the 19th century, American missionary work “flourished in the region”⁷⁷ as Ottoman Empire conditions became better for conversion and with strong financing and support back in the US. However, it was still the romantic imagery of the holy land that made it receive the most attention, or rather, the fabricated imagery from the Western imagination.

The First World War would play a most decisive role in shattering the map of the Ottoman Empire and changing the political landscape of the Middle East. In the aftermath of the Ottoman Empire's loss to the Allied Powers, the League of Nations mandated that Britain would take over Palestine and Jerusalem. This international move would have significant consequences for Jerusalem as the British would begin a process of favoring the creation of a Jewish homeland in this part of the former Ottoman Empire. In 1917, Foreign secretary Alfred Balfour famously wrote in a letter to Rothschild, one of the leaders of the Anglo-Jewish community, in what would become the Balfour declaration: “His Majesty’s Government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.”⁷⁸ This document would become one of the most significant parts of the efforts by Europeans to support the creation of a nation for the Jews in Palestine. There were different reactions to this idea. The Muslims, originally living in the region, were inevitably surprised, and the Vatican City expressed their concern of the holy land, how it should not be that “the most holy sanctuaries of the Christian religion were given to the charge of non-Christians.”⁷⁹ Jerusalem now clothes all the admiration and fascination from Europeans.

The British historian Robert J.C. Young characterizes the creation of the Orient as “if it does not really represent the East, signifies the West’s own dislocation from itself, something inside that is presented, narrativized, as being outside.”⁸⁰ The place reflects the Western imagination of the Oriental world, Jerusalem’s status in the European imagination as the pinnacle of the holy world, the one and only city, reflects Orientalism in the formation of the city in the early 20th century. For the Europeans they needed a city that represented this center of European dominance, and after World War I both competition within Europe and its advancement “caused them to prod the Orient into active life, to press the Orient into service, to turn the Orient from un-changing “Oriental” passivity into militant modern life.”⁸¹ Therefore, ever since the Balfour letter in 1917, more Jews migrated to the region, and finally, after World War II, Israel was founded as a homeland for Jews and Jerusalem as the center of the state.

Orientalism’s definition also included long term western intervention in the region, which, in this case, the formation of Israel was just a continuation of this long term tradition of Western dominance and superiority and its ability to maneuver Middle Eastern affairs. It is evident that this is a mere fascination because the contrast versus reality was too much. When some travellers realized that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was the site where Jesus was crucified, because of the ostentatious interior, some even developed the idea to “sweep...the building away”⁸² in order to make the Jerusalem they see more closely aligned with the one in their imagination.

⁷⁵ Vogel, *To See*, 98.

⁷⁶ Vogel, *To See*, 100.

⁷⁷ Vogel, *To See*, 117.

⁷⁸ Arthur James Balfour, “Balfour Declaration 1917,” The Avalon Project : Balfour Declaration November 2, 1917, November 2, 1917, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/balfour.asp.

⁷⁹ Armstrong, *Jerusalem*, 603.

⁸⁰ Bar-Yosef, *The Holy Land*, 32.

⁸¹ Said, *Orientalism*, 240.

⁸² Gabriel Polley, “Jerusalem through Evangelical Eyes: Nineteenth-Century Western Encounters with Palestinian Christianity,” *Institute for Palestine Studies*, August 23, 2021, <https://www.palestine-studies.org/sites/default/files/jq-articles/Jerusalem%20through%20Evangelical%20Eyes.pdf>, 123.

Orientalism is also reflected in the defaming of Muslim rule and appraising the “Christian duty”⁸³ in the holy land by creating a contrast before and after the arrival of European power in Jerusalem. Europeans were crafting an image of Jerusalem that contrasted the desolation of the city under Ottoman rule and the hope of what it could return to under European control. This orientalism would play an important role in erasing Palestine, the previous Muslim character of the region, and its existence from Orientalist imagination and replacing it with a Jewish one. Orientalism is reflected in the contrast between Jerusalem (or Palestine) in the biblical imagination and real life. In the Western imagination, the land is filled with “green landscapes”⁸⁴, but in reality, it is full of “barren land.”⁸⁵ The reason for this contrast is because the Europeans could use the description of the barren land to reflect the deterioration of Jerusalem under muslim rule, as Jerusalem used to be flowing with “milk and honey.”⁸⁶ The imagery of the land as a place “flowing with milk and honey” came from biblical promises of what the land would look like when it was taken by ancient Israel. As a result, this biblical picture could also be put in service of the modern idea of a new Israel taking the land.

By contrast, images of barren land, or deserts, would be associated with Muslim characteristics and past uses of the land. According to Belinder, “The mere presence of a desert, that most non-European feature, signified inefficiency, laziness, and bad government.”⁸⁷ This attitude toward Palestine also worked to the favor of European Jewish settlers migrating to Palestine in the mid-twentieth century, some of whom would regard the land as deteriorated and in need of resettling and revitalizing. The orientalist imagination of the contrast depicts the attempt to demonstrate the British control over Jerusalem as a rebirth of the city, just like how Jesus was reborn, the city was reborn, rid of its Muslim heritage and embraced Christianity into a “sinless” city. Today many Palestinians link themselves to “anti-orientalists” and in this way they work against the forces of Orientalism.

5. CONCLUSION

The present paper has argued that three major events had a decisive impact upon the reshaping of the Middle East in the modern era. The first one was the gunpowder empire, which provided muslim empires, including the Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal Empires, with even stronger gunpowder weapons, allowing them to spread and centralize, which the success threatened their European neighbors. The second was the commercial revolution, as the introduction of goods from the new world as well as European domination of trade across the world formed a Eurocentric world order in which the Middle East fell into the periphery. The last was the Protestant reformation, as polarizing relations between the Catholic and Protestant churches caused protestant states, like Britain, to seek new alliances outside Europe, for example the Ottoman Empire, in order to fight against the non-protestant christians. Therefore these powers shift contemporary readers’ perception of Middle Eastern history.

These events also had a large impact upon the ways in which Europeans began to write about and study the Middle East in the modern period. This European study and writing about the Middle East led to what Edward Said refers to as Orientalism, with the Orient defined as “a system of representations framed by a whole set of forces that brought the Orient into Western learning, Western consciousness, and later, Western empire.”⁸⁸ and the definition of the concept of Orientalism, corresponding to the Orient, as “a school of interpretation whose material happens to be the Orient, its civilizations, peoples, and localities.”⁸⁹ Putting back into context, the larger frame in which these writings and study of the Middle East took place then was the power dynamics between the West and the faltering Ottoman Empire. The European travel writers Chateaubriand and Southey illustrate this tendency by providing texts and poems on Orientalist writings related to the Middle East. Chateaubriand describes his journeys from Paris to Jerusalem and along the way different places he explore such as Greece or Turkey and Southey paints his imaginary Arab though his poem “Thalaba the Destroyer” and voicing their opinion in a manner that reflects Orientalists beliefs and the inherent thought that European culture and politics are superior.

⁸³ Bar-Yosef, *The Holy Land*, 76.

⁸⁴ Bar-Yosef, *The Holy Land*, 81.

⁸⁵ Bar-Yosef, *The Holy Land*, 81.

⁸⁶ Bar-Yosef, *The Holy Land*, 81.

⁸⁷ Bar-Yosef, *The Holy Land*, 81.

⁸⁸ Said, *Orientalism*, 203.

⁸⁹ Said, *Orientalism*, 203.

Highlighting these two aspects of European involvement in the modern Middle East provides greater understanding of the international events of the early twentieth century. The outbreak of conflicts between Israel and the Arab states ultimately stems from the Europeans' involvement in Middle Eastern affairs. Though war broke out in 1948, it can be traced right to the Balfour declaration in 1917 and even sometime before that. Therefore, the interactions between the West and the "Orient" are more intertwined than many contemporary readers might imagine, containing cultural, religious, political, military conflicts that in many cases trace back to either the Crusade or the Gunpowder empires. This phenomenon is also seen in Jerusalem, due to this wish of creating the European vision of the "Holy Land" as many European travelers awe when they finally visit the holy city in their dreams and disappointment when they realize the city is not like what they imagined. This city split between Orient and the West is the amphitheater of the Oriental world where European countries try to create an European Garden of Eden in which would provide a homeland for the Jews, regardless of the native in the region.

When we look at the most recent eruption of violence this year on October 7, 2023 and the past two weeks of war between Israel and Hamas, we can see how these events continue to be shaped by the relationship between the West and the Middle East. With the rapid development of the internet and a more interconnected world through social media we will likely see a reinforcing of the extreme stereotypes that some Westerners will apply to the Middle East. Though it is true that all literature and academic pieces have a certain degree of bias, the difference in Orientalism lies in the power dynamics created by a supposed victor and loser. This would not be easy, as the action of classifying "us" and "them" are inherent in human nature, so the important thing will be scrutinizing the "academic dishonesty" in sources to realize the oriental components in it. We do not know how history will depict this event yet, but it is possible to use Said's Orientalism concept to predict the framework in which it might happen. Once the filter for documents and sources are viewed with a conscious awareness that this is potentially Orientalist, in that case, as Said mentions, we are closer to "the 'unlearning' of the dominative mode"⁹⁰ and a step closer to learning more truth than a Western perception about this region.⁹⁰

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Citation: Zhihan Gao. "A Historical Context, Literary Analysis and Modern Relevance of Orientalism" *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education (IJHSSE)*, vol 10, no. 12, 2023, pp. 37-53. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20431/2349-0381.1012004>.

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