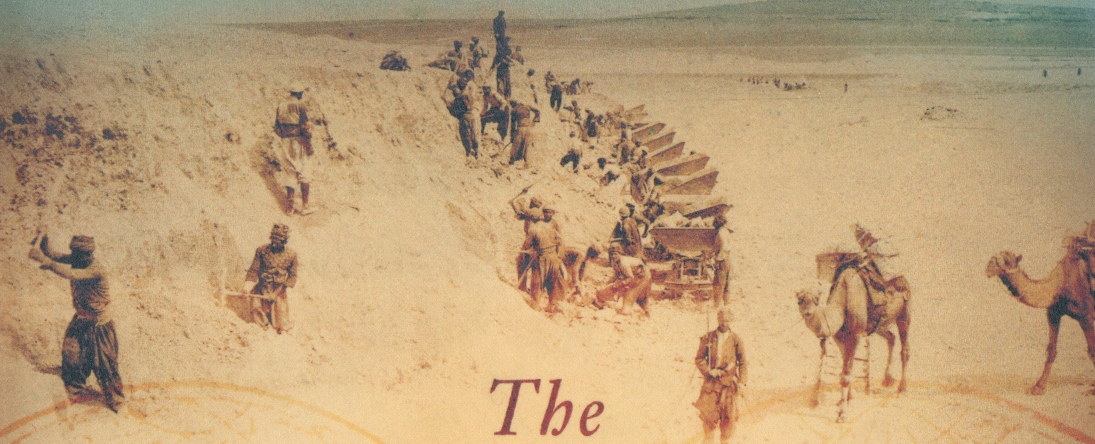
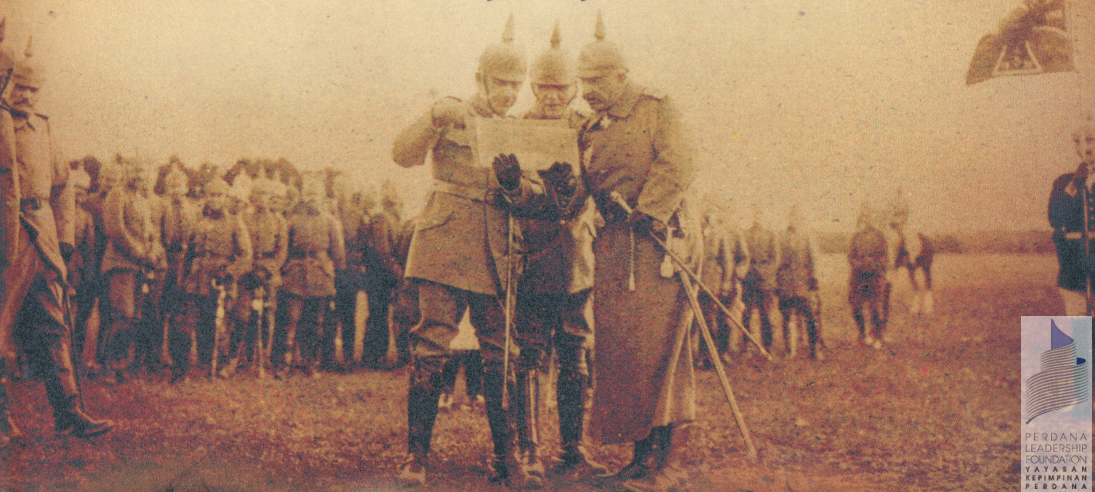


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1898-1918



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For Nesrin



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*Some day, when the full history is written – sober history with
ample documents – the poor romancer will give up business
and fall to reading Miss Austen in a hermitage.*

John Buchan, *Greenmantle* (1916)





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List of Abbreviations

AVPRI	Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Imperii (Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire), Moscow, Russia
BOA	Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri (Ottoman Government Archive), Sultanahmet, Istanbul, Turkey
DBB	Deutsches Bundesarchiv Berlin, Lichterfelde, Berlin, Germany
EJP	Ernst Jäckh Papers, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut
GPA	Geheimes Preussisches Staatsarchiv, Berlin, Germany
HHSA	Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Vienna, Austria
KW	Kriegsarchiv Wien, Vienna, Austria
MvO	Max von Oppenheim Stiftung, Sal. Oppenheim jr. & Cie KGaA, Cologne, Germany
NA	National Archives of the United States (NA), US Embassy, Ankara, Turkey
PAAA	Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Berlin, Germany
PRO	National Archives of the United Kingdom (formerly Public Record Office), Kew Gardens, London, United Kingdom*

* Although it has been several years now since the Public Record Office was renamed the National Archives of the United Kingdom, I do not know of a single researcher who refers to it by the new name. For the sake of tradition and to preserve common currency, I continue to reference it in this book as the PRO.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

QO

Quai d'Orsay Archives, Paris, France

RGVIA

Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Voenno-
Istoricheskii Arkhiv (Russian
Government Military-Historical Archive),
Moscow, Russia

A Note on Names and Translations

With apologies to my Turkish friends, I have generally gone with ‘Constantinople’, as it was still called in the pre-First World War and wartime era, even by Ottoman government officials, unless I am talking about the city today, in which case it is indeed ‘Istanbul’. Living in Ankara myself, I could not, however, countenance using the classical ‘Angora’, much as I like the sound of it. With most other cities I have used the contemporary form with modern usage in parentheses, thus ‘Adrianople (Edirne)’ or ‘Üsküp (Skopje)’. Today’s St Petersburg was likewise ‘St Petersburg’ until 31 August 1914, after which date Peter’s Germanic sounding city was Slavicized as ‘Petrograd’ (in the current narrative, we do not have to contend with its years as ‘Leningrad’).

With regard to Turkish spellings, I have generally rendered the ‘c’ as ‘dj’ (as in *Djavid* and *Djermal*) and used the dotless ‘i’ where appropriate (it sounds a bit like ‘uh’) to differentiate from the Turkish ‘ı’, which sounds like ‘ee’. Likewise, I have tried to render properly ‘ş’ (sh) and ‘ç’ (ch) to add Turkish flavour to the text, even if these letters are really post-1928 concoctions of Atatürk’s language reforms. It is impossible to be consistent in all these things; may common sense prevail.

All translations from the French, German, Russian and Turkish, unless otherwise noted, are my own.



Prologue: The View from Haydarpasha

On a small promontory jutting out from the Asian shoreline of Istanbul, where the Bosphorus meets the Sea of Marmara, sits the stunning neo-classical façade of Haydarpasha station. So perfectly does the edifice fit the small peninsular setting that, from a distance, Haydarpasha appears almost to float on the water. This is no accident. A masterpiece of German architecture of the late Wilhelmine era, Haydarpasha in fact rests not on the shore itself but on over a thousand wooden piles, each driven into the earth by steam-hammer, which support a state-of-the-art steel-carass bearing system. Although damaged over the years by fires, explosions and sabotage, the original structure still stands as a monument to German engineering in its golden age.

The dramatic setting brilliantly captures the allure of the city which lies astride two continents. Haydarpasha, Istanbul's railroad gateway to Asiatic Turkey and the East, is physically oriented towards the West, commanding one of the finest views of Istanbul's European shoreline. The minarets of the Blue Mosque beckon across the upper reaches of the Sea of Marmara, along with the golden cupola and faded red brick of the Hagia Sofia, and the outlines of Topkapı Palace and the Sublime Porte, just above the old fortress walls of Byzantium. Scanning to the right, one takes in the entrance to the Golden Horn, and further north, on a very clear day, it is just possible to catch a glimpse of the suspension bridges spanning the Bosphorus.

Like many of the world's great buildings, Haydarpasha seems to come from a vanished era, its very grandeur a reproach to the bland mediocrity of the present age. Built almost exactly one hundred years ago, Haydarpasha conjures up the astonishing confidence of Europe's

fin de siècle era, the crusading imperial spirit of an age which knew neither irony nor apology. There is nothing subtle about the station, or the intent behind it. Haydarpasha was designed to be a flagship station of the beloved Berlin to Baghdad railway of Kaiser Wilhelm II. Here the German Emperor's *Weltpolitik* first took concrete form, seeking to unite East and West, Asia and Europe, and put imperial Germany firmly on the path to world power.

It was an intoxicating vision, one of the all-time great gambits of history; and yet it is all but forgotten today. The Kaiser's dream of empire has mostly fallen down the memory hole, a victim both of the amnesia accorded history's great losers and of its having been overlaid by the nihilistic horrors of Nazism. Even without the comparison of the ideas of his hideous successors, the Kaiser's vision remains oddly appealing. Wilhelm's oriental fixation had something of the feeling of a love affair, as he courted the affections of the various peoples of the Ottoman Empire. To be sure, Wilhelm wanted Germans to lead the way in 'civilizing' the Middle East, reinvigorating its moribund economy and integrating it with Europe's. In this sense, Germany's *Wilhelmine Drang nach Osten* was akin to the Russian push into Siberia and Central Asia or America's path to the Pacific under Manifest Destiny – and a good deal more sensible in economic terms than the mad European Scramble for Africa. The Kaiser's vision was the most romantic, and arguably the most sympathetic, of all of these imperial projects. The subjects he wished to bring into the modern age were not primitive tribesmen, but the once-great peoples of the Near East, whose ancestors had given the world writing, Abrahamic religion, democracy, philosophy and science. Let the Americans have the plains, the Russians Siberia, the French and Belgians and British various malaria-ridden lands in Africa. Germany would build her own economic empire in the very cradle of Western civilization.

Wilhelm's motivation was not exclusively economic, of course. Rummaging around in a London apartment vacated by a German family after the outbreak of war in 1914, the new English tenant 'came across a German geographical globe with a system of projected and completed railways clearly marked from Berlin to Madras via Constantinople, southern Persia, Baluchistan, and Bombay'.¹ Here was the map of an empire to crown all empires, with Wilhelm strutting

across the world stage as a true modern Alexander, taking in Anatolia, Mesopotamia and Persia and toppling the British Raj. German steel rails would conquer this vast expanse, fording deserts, mountains and swamps to introduce European technology to Asia, while bringing the silks, spices, minerals and raw materials of the Orient to the markets of the West. Whereas Hitler was willing to concede the British their global, sea-based empire in exchange for recognition of his own domination of the Eurasian landmass, Wilhelm wanted the British Empire too, including its crown jewels of Egypt and India.

It may have seemed like a pipe dream, but Wilhelm had a trump card up his sleeve: Islam. Long before the formal crowning of the Triple Entente in 1907, the Kaiser had begun sizing up the enemy coalition coalescing against him. Russia, France and particularly Great Britain all shared one colossal Achilles heel: they each now ruled over millions of unruly Muslim subjects, whose resentment at being dictated to by infidels might easily be inflamed in a European war. Strange as it might seem today in our post-colonial age, the greatest Muslim power on earth a hundred years ago was not Afghanistan, Persia or even Ottoman Turkey (then the only independent Islamic countries of note) but the British Empire, which counted over 100 million Muslim subjects, scattered across the Indian subcontinent, the Gulf States, Egypt and Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. Even Tsarist Russia's count of 19 million Islamic subjects was greater than the entire Ottoman population, infidel and Muslim alike, and France was not far behind. Imperial latecomer Germany, by contrast, could reasonably claim innocence in the Islamic world, having only a smattering of Islamic subjects in her own tiny African empire.

That the world's Muslims had less ground for resenting Germany than her enemies in the Triple Entente did not, of course, necessarily mean they saw themselves as German allies. Not for nothing, however, had the ancient Chinese notion that 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend' become a favoured proverb in the Arab world. The Kaiser would not have to make Muslims love him if he was to weaken the Entente powers, merely ensure that the furies of their pent-up *ressentiment* were directed at their proper target – and far away from the Germans. So long as the powers remained at peace, Wilhelm would have to be reasonably careful about spreading sedition in the

colonial territories of the Entente. If a war of the Great Powers ever came, however, the gloves would come off.

In the meantime, Wilhelm could busy himself with one of history's great diplomatic charm offensives. Sultan Abdul Hamid II, whose paranoia about foreign designs on his Ottoman realm was legendary, was a promising target for seduction. Menaced by the Russians in the Balkans, the French in North Africa, and the British in Egypt and Arabia, the 'Sick Man of Europe' was desperate for a strong European ally who could stand up to the Entente bullies. The Kaiser, who dreamed of extending German influence into the Islamic world of the Near East, was in need of a sponsor who could give him credibility with Muslims – and Sultan Abdul Hamid was by title also Caliph, or supreme religious authority, of Sunni Islam. It was a match made in heaven.

Although there were fits and starts along the way, the romance between Kaiser and Sultan was in full flower by the first decade of the twentieth century. Spurred on by a sense of shared threat of Entente encirclement, a team of German engineers and Turkish workmen broke ground at Haydarpasha in May 1906. The signing of the long-feared Anglo-Russian Convention in August 1907 only heightened the sense of urgency, and the great neo-classical masterpiece on the Asian shore was completed ahead of schedule in summer 1908, shortly after the signing of the third and final Baghdad railway convention between Kaiser and Sultan. As German railway experts began the first surveying work on the Taurus mountains near the Cilician Gates once traversed by Alexander's army, it seemed there was nothing that could stop the expansion of German influence in the Near East, as Teutonic engineers began prospecting for oil and mineral resources in Anatolia, Syria, Mesopotamia and Arabia, even as salesmen plied German machines, manufactures and medicines. Once the Orient Express was up and running from Berlin to Baghdad and the Persian Gulf, it would be game, set and match in the German bid for world power.

I The Vision



We must not forget that everything taking place in a Mohammedan country sends waves across the entire world of Islam.

Baron Max Oppenheim



I

The Kaiser, the Baron and the Dragoman

*Pour chasser les démons, il faudrait un prophète.*¹

King Louis Philippe to François Guizot

As the *Hohenzollern* passed through the Dardanelles en route for Constantinople in the first week of November in 1889, an astonishing spectacle greeted its distinguished passengers, all crammed onto the outer decks. 'From Settl-Bahar and Kum-Kaleh to Abydos,' wrote an English journalist observing from the shore, 'all the forts hoisted the German flag, the military bands played the German anthem, and as the Imperial yacht passed between the castles where the straits are narrowest the forts on either side thundered forth their welcome in a salute of 101 guns.' After docking at the Golden Horn, the German royal party was received with elaborate ceremony by Sultan Abdul Hamid II at the imperial palace of Yıldız: official visits to the even grander Dolmabahçe and Beylerbey palaces would follow. A particular highlight was a tour of the Bosphorus aboard elegant Ottoman court caiques, each one 'rowed by ten pairs of oars'. So warm was the Sultan's reception, so beguiling the oriental sights on display, that the German delegation extended its official visit to four full days filled with pomp and panoply.²

It was a heady experience for young Kaiser Wilhelm II. Having ascended to the German throne the previous year, his thirtieth, the Kaiser was anxious to make a name for himself and emerge from the shadow of Germany's long-serving Chancellor, Prince Otto von Bismarck. The state visit to Constantinople accomplished both tricks at once, not least because Bismarck had made clear his stout opposition

to the trip, for fear of offending Russia to no good purpose. Ever since the unification of Germany under Prussian leadership in 1871, Bismarck had been content to consolidate the boundaries of the new German empire, trying to avoid unnecessary foreign adventures at all costs. Bismarck's famous remark about the Balkans not being 'worth the bones of a single Pomeranian grenadier' is in fact a misquote: what he actually said was that 'the whole Orient' – meaning the entire Ottoman Empire – should not be a concern of Germany's foreign policy.³ Although Bismarck did support the spread of German influence in Turkey, personally approving the dispatch of a German military mission led by Generalmajor Otto Kaehler on Abdul Hamid's request in 1883, he did so as quietly as possible, for fear of ruining Germany's fragile relations with Russia, which viewed the Straits at Constantinople with greedy eyes.*⁴ In 1887, Bismarck had tried to counter Russian suspicions with his 'Reinsurance Treaty', in which Russia and Germany pledged to remain neutral in wars with third countries (including Ottoman Turkey).[†] And now here was the Kaiser making an unprecedented state visit to the Sultan, confirming the Russians' worst fears about German intentions in the Near East.

What was a diplomatic nightmare for Bismarck, however, was for the young Kaiser very good fun. Wilhelm was fêted everywhere he went in Constantinople, even by the English colony, which took him in as one of their own (he was, after all, the grandson of Queen Victoria). Aside from the salutes and cannonades, there was enough political intrigue in four days to fill a book. Addressing his German counterpart, in accordance with Islamic tradition, through a pair of interpreters (despite knowing French perfectly well), Sultan Abdul Hamid took the impressionable young Kaiser into his confidence, complaining of palace plots, unflattering embassy gossip and, more pointedly, the designs of other European sovereigns on his domains. Because Germany had not, as of yet, displayed similar territorial ambitions, Wilhelm remembered the Sultan telling him, with an air of conspiracy, that

* After Kaehler's death in 1885 the mission was headed by Lieutenant Colonel Freiherr von der Goltz, with whose name the pre-war initiative is usually associated.

† A secret clause spelled out that Germany would remain neutral in the event of Russian naval intervention in the Bosphorus or the Straits.

'my visit would make these powers very nervous'. This was music to the ears of an ambitious young Emperor keen to make his mark on the world.⁵

In the young Kaiser's ostentatious state visit to Constantinople in 1889, we can see those qualities which would soon both fascinate and repel the world. On the one hand, it is easy to see why the visit was so well received. Wilhelm's childlike curiosity and capacity for wonder, his ability to be fascinated by new sights and sensations, from the Ottoman caiques and palaces to the 'gracious, delightful, rhythmic dances of the Circassians' in the Sultan's *harem*: all this went over very well with Constantinople's residents. An ancient caravan people known for their hospitality to travellers, Turks have always responded well to visitors' attentions and compliments. Kaiser Wilhelm did not disappoint them, thanking the Sultan effusively for his 'splendid hospitality' and declaring himself 'much moved by the feelings of cordiality and sympathy shown towards their Majesties both by the Sovereign of Turkey and his subjects'. The Kaiser then gave the Sultan's Grand Vizier a diamond-set Prussian Order of the Eagle.⁶

The flip side to the flattery on display during the Kaiser's state visit was Wilhelm's vanity and insecurity, his need to be the centre of attention, which has been remarked on by nearly all of his biographers. Born in the breech position after an agonizing ten-hour delivery which his mother barely survived, the future Kaiser suffered nerve damage that crippled his left arm, which by adulthood was six inches shorter than the right and essentially useless. As a result of his deformity, Wilhelm could not even cut his own meat without help, let alone handle weapons like the soldier he always wanted to be. The young Kaiser had thus grown up with a very large chip on his shoulder, a sense that he had always to prove himself and win acclaim. Kaiser Wilhelm, it was said, had to be 'the stag at every hunt, the bride at every wedding, and the corpse at every funeral'. This was not a man likely to resist the lure of oriental gifts and blandishments.⁷

The trip to Constantinople also highlighted Wilhelm's reckless sense of statecraft, born of his restless, unbalanced character. Able to muster up sudden enthusiasms on a moment's notice, Wilhelm yet lacked the ability to focus on essentials, or note contradictions. It is of more than passing historical interest, for example, that the Kaiser

'Let the Americans have the plains, the Russians Siberia, the French and Belgians and British various malaria-ridden lands in Africa. Germany would build her own economic empire in the very cradle of western civilization'



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