American University in Cairo
AUC Knowledge Fountain

Faculty Book Chapters

1996

Renaissance England and the Turban

Nabil I. Matar

Follow this and additional works at: https://fount.aucegypt.edu/faculty_book_chapters

Part of the Cultural History Commons, English Language and Literature Commons, Islamic Studies Commons, and the Near Eastern Languages and Societies Commons

Recommended Citation

APA Citation
Matar, N. I. (1996).*Renaissance England and the Turban*. American University in Cairo Press. , 39-54
https://fount.aucegypt.edu/faculty_book_chapters/950

MLA Citation
Matar, Nabil I. *Renaissance England and the Turban*. American University in Cairo Press, 1996.pp. 39-54
https://fount.aucegypt.edu/faculty_book_chapters/950

This Book Chapter is brought to you for free and open access by AUC Knowledge Fountain. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Book Chapters by an authorized administrator of AUC Knowledge Fountain. For more information, please contact fountadmin@aucegypt.edu.

IMAGES of the OTHER

Europe and the Muslim World Before 1700

David Blanks
Editor

Contributors
Thabit Abdullah
Omaima Abou-Bakr
David Blanks
Nadia El-Cheik
Nabil Matar
John Rodenbeck
Elizabeth Sartain
John Tolan

CAIRO PAPERS IN SOCIAL SCIENCE
Volume 19, No. 2

CHAPTER TWO

RENAISSANCE ENGLAND AND THE TURBAN

NABIL I. MATAR

The Renaissance period witnessed England's first amicable engagement with Islam after centuries of crusading wars. From the early sixteenth century when English merchants began trading with Muslim ports, to the final departure in 1684 of the English garrison from Tangiers, there was fascination with the civilization of Islam, commerce with the dominions of the Muslims, and fear of the might of the Ottoman armies.

In those two centuries of changing attitudes and ambiguous "obsessions" with the Levant, one item of clothing specifically gauged England's attitude toward Islam: the turban. More than any other, the Muslim head-dress became the most dominant, the most feared, and the most awe-inspiring symbol of Islam in Renaissance England. While the scimitar and the crescent were familiar images, the turban became for preachers, theater-goers, and engravers the preeminent symbol of Muslim power and hegemony. On the continent the turban appeared chiefly in Flemish and Italian paintings that dealt with the Islamic (Ottoman) as well as the biblical orient. Muslim potentates, especially Suleyman the Magnificent and Khayr al-Din Barbarossa, appeared in turbans, but so too did various Old and New Testament figures, both male and female. One of the magi nearly always donned the turban. Likewise a conflation of the biblical and Islamic traditions appeared in the portrayal of the turban-clad Hagar whom the Bible along with continental Arabists like Joseph Scaligar identified as the mother of the "Saracens".[1] Paintings of Hagar reflected the European perception

---

[1] For European representations of turbaned Muslim leaders, see the engraving of Suleyman by Melchior Lorchs (1559); anonymous Venetian woodcuts (c. 1550 and c. 1563); a woodcut of Barbarossa by Agostino Veneziano (1535): in J. M. Rogers, and R. M. Ward, *Suleyman the Magnificent* (Secaucus, N.J., 1988). For turbaned biblical figures, see for instance Jan van Dornicke, "The Adoration of the Magi" (late 1520s);

of the bond-woman who had given rise to the Arabs who, in turn, gave rise to Islam.

By analyzing the image of the turban in literary sources and travelogues, it is possible to identify two contrary perceptions of Islam in the Renaissance period. On the one hand, there was a sense of fascination--English society, including the monarchy, luxuriated in wearing turbans and other Muslim clothes, and as contacts with the Turks increased in the seventeenth century, so too did the frequency with which oriental fashion could be seen on the streets of London. On the other hand, the arrival of Turkish fashion, which was brought in by Muslim ambassadors, merchants, captured seamen, and refugees, provoked hostility towards Islam which was reflected in various negative reactions to the turban. Here too this was especially true in the mid-to-late seventeenth century, when the forces of Protestant theology and British commerce were combining to confront the Turks and Moors of the North African regencies.

In 1624 the theologian Joseph Hall associated the turban with the Israelite High Priest,[2] but more than anything else, the English associated the turban with Islam. Throughout the seventeenth century, travel books with frontispieces portraying the divisions of the world and the empires of man presented the Turk/Muslim potentate with a turban.[3] Even the engraving of the Prophet

---

Gaudenzio Ferrari, "The Holy Family with a Donor" (late 1520s); Jacobo Bassano, "Christ healing the Lame Man" (fl. 1510-1592); Marcello Fogolino, "Adoration of the Kings," (fl. 1519-1548); Sisto Badalocchio, "Susannah and the Elders" (c. 1610); Francesco Caior "Judith with the Head of Holofernes" (c. 1630-1635); Rembrandt, "The Descent from the Cross," (1633); Pietro Berretini, "Hagar and the Angel" (c. 1637-38); Rembrandt, "The Dismissal of Hagar" (etching, 1637); Jacob Jordaens, "Boaz" (c. 1641-1642); Mattia Preti, "Salome with the Head of John the Baptist" (c. 1648).

[2] The reference is cited in *O. E. D.* Rembrandt accurately associated the turban with the "Oriental Jew" (1635), but not with European Jews. See the study by Franz Landsberger, Rembrandt, the Jews and the Bible, trans. Felix N. Gerson (Philadelphia, 1962).

[3] See for instance, George Sandys, *A Relation of a Journey begun An: Dom: 1610* (London, 1615), frontispiece; Thomas Fuller, *The Historie of the Holy Warre* (Cambridge, 1639), frontispiece; Henry Marsh, *A New Survey of the Turkish Empire*,

"Mahomet," which appeared in Alexander Ross's survey of world religions, shows that seventeenth-century Britons believed the turban to have first been donned by the founder of Islam himself. The turban pointed both at the beginnings of Islam and at the breadth of contemporary Muslim domination:[4] it was a symbol of the luxury of Ottoman power.

That is why, in the late medieval and the Renaissance periods, numerous English travellers returned from the Levant fully "attired in Turkish dress complete with turban".[5] For their families and communities at home, the turban was a token from a land beyond Christendom with which they had been made familiar by imports of its currants, rugs, spices, "Barbary" horses and by the mustaches "turnde the Turky waye".[6] The turban provoked curiosity about the 'exotic' orient but also represented a religious power that was challenging Christendom in Central Europe and in the Mediterranean. For in engravings and books that described for English and other continental readers the military and political changes in post-Reformation Europe, the turban always appeared on the head of the sultan -- and in the sixteenth century, Suleyman was the greatest and the most "magnificent" of Europe's potentates. The turban was thus an enviable symbol of might and authority. No wonder that in his first year of reign, the youthful king Henry VIII, along with the Earl of Essex, attended a banquet at Westminster dressed in Turkish dress consisting of "long robes of Bawdkin, powdered with gold, hattes on their heddes of Crimsoyn Velvet, with great rolles

---

History and Government Compleated (London, 1664), facing chapter 13; Edmund Bohun, *A Geographical Dictionary: Representing the Present and Ancient Names of all the Countries, Provinces, Remarkable Cities . . . of the whole World* (London, 1691), frontispiece.

[4] Alexander Ross, *A View of all Religions in the World* (1675, first publ. 1653), p. 589.

[5] Robert Schwoebel, *The Shadow of the Crescent: The Renaissance Image of the Turk (1453-1517)* (New York, 1967), p. 178.

[6] George Gascoigne, "Councell given to Master Bartholomew Withipoll" in *The Complete Poems of George Gascoigne*, W. Carew Hazlitt, ed. (London, 1869), vol. 1, p. 375.

of Gold".[7] Later in the century, Henry's daughter, Queen Elizabeth, received a present from the Sultana Safiyya in Istanbul consisting of a "princely attire being after the Turkish fashion".[8] Unfortunately, as the English ambassador in Istanbul noted, "the attyre for the head," which the queen had so much wanted, was "imbeazelled" on the way.[9] Notwithstanding this embezzlement, by the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Ottoman turban had made its way into the London fashion scene: the "hat-cappes" which the "younger Merchants wiues of LONDON" wore, wrote Thomas Gainsford in 1618, resembled the "Tulliuant" which had inspired them.[10]

Elizabeth was fascinated by different national clothes. According to Sir James Melvil who attended her court, the queen wore the costume of a different country each day (although, as he added, she preferred the Italian); another Elizabethan, William Harrison, complained that as a result of the queen's constant changing of fashion, English men and women started to imitate their monarch, so much so that "all nations deride us . . . for we do seem to imitate [in our clothes] all nations round about us".[11] But Elizabeth's donning of Turkish dress may not have been just a fashion quirk: it coincided with London's political cooperation with Istanbul. In the 1580s and the 1590s, and as a result of a mounting Catholic threat, Elizabeth repeatedly turned to Sultan Murad III and then to his son Mohammed III for military assistance. Perhaps recalling the attitude of the Greeks before the fall of Constantinople--"Better the turban than the tiara"--the queen seemed to prefer cooperating with Islam rather than with

---

[7] Quoted by F. J. Furnivall in Andrew Boorde, *The First Book of the Introduction of Knowledge* (London, 1893), p. 214, n.1. In a painting of the King in 1537, Islamic interlacing patterns appear on both the king's gown and the curtain behind him In 1537: John Sweetman, *The Oriental Obsession: Islamic Inspiration in British and American Art and Architecture, 1500-1920* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 12.

[8] H. B. Rosedale, *Queen Elizabeth and the Levant Company* (London, 1904), p. 16.

[9] S. A. Skilliter, "Three Letters from the Ottoman "Sultana" Safiye to Queen Elizabeth I," in *Documents from Islamic Chanceries*, First Series, S. M. Stern, ed. (Cambridge, MA., 1965), p. 148.

[10] 10. T. G. (Thomas Gainsford), *The Glory of England* (London, 1618), p. 23r.

[11] Quoted in Elizabeth Burton, *The Pageant of Elizabethan England* (New York, 1958), pp. 119-121.

Papal Catholicism. Although Elizabeth did not receive assistance from the sultan, she came to be viewed in Catholic Europe as a duplicitous monarch who had signed a secret treaty with the "infidels": the Poles, it was reported in June 1588, believed that "the English lack nothing to make them sound Mussulmans, and need only stretch out a finger to become one with the Turks in outward appearance, in religious observance and in their whole character".[12] For the outside observers, the queen's dressing in Turkish clothes signified amity with the Turks, both on her part and on the part of her subjects.

This exchange of clothes and head-dress occurred at a period in England when strict regulations governing the dress of subjects were enforced. Queen Elizabeth implemented the laws of her half-sister and her father that linked dress to social status and to the differences between the nobility and the rest of the population.[13] Numerous offenders were prosecuted for wearing clothes that were either above or below their status. But English (and Scottish) travellers who were known to have dressed in Turkish clothes and turban did not, upon their return home, encounter prosecution. In his account of a journey to the Levant in 1596, Fynes Morrison openly mentioned his use of a turban, and the Scottish traveller William Lithgow added to his account of a journey to the Levant and North Africa in 1612 the first engraving that survives of a Briton dressed in Turkish clothes and turban.[14] "I clad in Turkish manner," wrote Henry Blount in his account of his 1634 Voyage into the Levant,[15] and forty

---

[12] The Fugger News-Letters, Victor von Klarwill, ed., L. S. R. Byrne, trans. (New York, 1926), p. 164. For Anglo-Ottoman relations in the Elizabethan period, see Albert Lindsay Rowland, *England and Turkey: The Rise of Diplomatic and Commercial Relations* (New York, 1968, first published in 1924).

[13] See *Elizabethan People: State and Society*, Joel Hurtsfield and Alan G. R. Smith, eds. (New York, 1972), pp. 30-32. For a study of sumptuary laws in England, see Frances Elizabeth Baldwin, *Sumptuary Legislation and Personal Regulation in England* (Baltimore, 1926).

[14] William Lithgow, *The Rare Adventures and Painful Peregrinations*, Gilbert Phelps, ed. (London, 1974), frontispiece, and p. 80.

[15] Sir Henry Blount, *A Voyage into the Levant* (London, 1936), p. 98.

years later, the cleric Thomas Smith also wrote about wearing Turkish dress and turban.[16]

These travellers were not punished because the replacing of a hat by a turban, according to Blount, made travel easier. "[I]n all the land of Turky, where Christian Merchants use not, if I appeared in the least part clothed like a Christian, I was [trusted] like an Owle among other birds".[17] Particularly because travellers-turned-writers were eager to report on the details of Muslim life, dressing like a "native" helped them in reducing the hostility to the "Frank" that was endemic in the Levant. Wearing a turban among the Muslims was a necessary expedient -- which the enforcers of the sumptuary regulations in England conceded. For the turban was obviously a more cumbersome head-dress than the English hat, and it may have also made the traveller look (and feel?) ridiculous. In his engraving, Lithgow seems to be preparing for a masquerade rather than for travel. No traveller in this period mentioned the coolness of the turban which was the reason for wearing it given by nineteenth-century travellers. In the seventeenth century, the turban was essential not for comfort but protection.

English writers recognized the importance of the turban because in the Ottoman Empire, there were clear regulations governing its use. Unlike the sumptuary laws of England, which were intended to maintain class distinctions, Ottoman regulations were connected to religious affiliation and the head-dress was the most important determinant. As early as the fifteenth century, the traveler Arnold von Harff explained that in the Muslim dominions, the color of the turban was the chief factor for distinguishing between religious groups. While visiting Cairo, he observed that Christians wore the blue turban, Turks (and "heathens") wore the white turban, and Jews wore the yellow turban. "Thus one can recognize these four nations in this town by their dress," he concluded.[18] No outsider could merge into Muslim society to the extent of losing his

---

[16] Thomas Smith, *Remarks upon the Manners, Religion and Government of the Turks* (London, 1678), p. 36.

[17] Blount, *A Voyage*, p. 99.

[18] Arnold von Harff, *The Pilgrimage of Arnold Von Harff Knight*, Malcolm Letts, ed. and trans. (London, 1946), p. 113.

religious identity: although the European traveller dressed like a Turk, he was never allowed to forget, and neither, of course, did he want to deny, the fact that he was a Christian.

The Ottoman Empire continued to expand until 1676, and because the new conquests brought a wide variety of peoples and cultures under the banner of Islam, the wearing of different colored turbans remained an important custom throughout the early modern period. The Muslim empire became multi-religious with large Christian and Jewish populations which integrated into the society, financial institutions, and culture; in addition, however, the Ottomans wanted to maintain special distinctions for the descendants of the Prophet, so the turban became the recognized symbol of lineage, religion and nationality.

The Muslim turban was white in color, wrote the traveller George Sandys in 1610, "like great globes, of callico... hauing little copped caps on the top, of greene or red veluet",[19] while Muslims who hailed from the Prophet's family, as Purchas noted in his *Pilgrimes*, wore "greene Tullipans".[20] Christians, however, "use not white nor round" turbans,[21] and Jews, wrote William Biddulph in 1600, "are knowne by their Hats; for they were accustomed to weare red Hats without brimmes".[22] There was no confusion about who wore which turban:

> [The Turks] cover their head with a Turbant, except those of the discent of Mahumet; these weare altogether greene, but the Christians inhabiting among them, weare no one colour, but as they please (greene except.) They are all clothed in long garments like the Turkes, and are not distinguished by any apparell they weare (of what profession soever they be) but only by the attire of their heads.[23]

---

[19] Sandys, *A Relation*, p. 63. Robert Baron quoted those words and added a long footnote on the turban in *Mirza a Tragedy* (London, 1647), pp. 179-180.

[20] Samuel Purchas, *Purchas his Pilgrimes* (London, 1617), p. 267.

[21] Collections of Arabia in *Purchas His Pilgrimes* (New York, 1965), vol. 9, p. 113.

[22] *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, vol. 8, p. 271.

[23] Giovanni Boteros, *Relations of the Most Famovs Kingdomes and Commonwealths thorowout the World*, R. I., ammended and trans. (London, 1630, first appeared 1601), p. 557.

The white turban constituted the dividing line between Muslim and non-Muslim, while the green turban divided Muslims among themselves. Following an unpleasant encounter with some Turks, Blount wrote that they could "[see] by my head, I was a Christian,".[24] Similarly, the French traveller Joseph (Jean Baptiste) Grelot noted that because Muslims in a mosque were so devoutly intent on prayer they never bothered to check "whether a Man's Turbant be Christian or Turkish".[25]

Britons were not worried that wearing foreign attire in a foreign country would put their adherence to their culture in danger. The turban did not re-contextualize the wearer: neither Lithgow nor Blount, for instance, felt that they had become "new" people or that they had lost their national identity. Wearing a turban did not imply crossing the barrier between being English and becoming Turkish because religion, as represented by the color of the turban, remained the crucial factor in separating national identities.

Yet while Britons dressed like Ottomans, the Muslim Sultans prohibited their subjects from dressing like the "Franks" whether at home or abroad. The Ottomans valued English cloth and wool, and numerous travellers presented such products to Turkish soldiers, traders and government officials, but there is no evidence that the Turks used those presents to cut clothes in the English style. No Ottoman subject, Muslim, Christian or Jew, is ever described in "breeches" or other forms of English dress (except in the case of a possible imposter who visited London in 1607 and, at first, appeared in his turban and national dress but then donned English clothes).[26] "A Musulman," wrote John Trapp in 1647, is "a believing Turk both within and without".[27] The clothes and turban "without" were as much a demonstration of Islam as of the faith "within."

---

[24] Blount, *A Voyage*, p. 98.

[25] Joseph Grelot, *A Late Voyage to Constantinople*, J. Philips, trans. (London, 1683), p. 128.

[26] *The Progresses, Processions, and Magnificent Festivities of King James the First*, John Nichols, ed. (London, 1828), vol. 2, pp. 157-158.

[27] John Trapp, *A Commentary or Exposition upon all the Epistles and the Revelations of John the Divine* (London, 1647), p. 678.

Clothes identified the "Turk" and even after burial, the Turk's turban was placed prominently above the tomb to indicate status and religion.[28]

Blount is unequivocal on this point. For the Turks, the levantine style of clothing was as much part of national tradition as of political identity:

> desiring perpetuall hostility with the Christians, [the Turks] must estrange the people from their Customes as utterly as may bee; Now there is no innovation drawes in forreigne manners faster, then that of Apparell: Besides that, it seemes honourable for the Turkish Nation to retaine their ancient habit of clothing; for as the French Court gives this side of the World patterne of apparell, so does the Turkish to the Levant.[29]

The turban was a powerful symbol--of both authority and fashion. No wonder that three decades after Blount's journey, King Charles II used the turban to challenge the French fashion of his court: in 1667, he adopted a Persian dress with a glowing turban on his head. He used this "Persian mode," as John Evelyn reported, only for a few days in order to draw attention to clothing styles that were not as expensive as those from France.[30] Although there was humor in his gesture, it is significant that the king thought to challenge the supremacy of French high couture with Turkish high couture: the only way to defeat the ascendancy of French dress in England was to introduce the powerful oriental dress and turban of the Muslims.

Blount's observation about Turkish unwillingness to dress in Frankish clothes suggests a defensiveness on the part of the Turks which had not appeared among Britons. But such defensiveness did appear when compatriots wore the turban inside England. It was acceptable that a traveller wear a turban among the Muslims, but never among his own people because it signified a defiance of political authority. At a time when there were people in England and the rest of the British Isles who moved easily between Christendom and Islam--perhaps too

---

[28] See Blount, *A Voyage*, p. 107. This tradition continued well into the nineteenth century: the tomb of Muhammad Ali in the mosque after his name in Cairo exhibits his turban. See also Samuel Chew, *The Crescent and the Rose* (Oxford, 1937), p. 203 n.

[29] Blount, *A Voyage*, pp. 99-100.

[30] John Evelyn, Diary, E. S. De Beer, ed. (Oxford, 1955), vol. 3, pp. 464-465.

easily--it was important that religious and national identity be clearly and strictly defined within the realm. In this respect, clothes played a crucial role because the Reformation and Counter-Reformation partition of Christendom into religions/nation states, and the confrontation between Christendom and Islam, had turned clothes into distinctive indicators of where each individual belonged geographically. Clothes defined national allegiance, religious affiliation and personal social status. "God hath many times," translated Robert Ashley from the Italian in 1637, "made garments expresse his intentions, peradventure because they are in some sort a part of our selves".[31]

That is why when the Ambassador from the Persian court, who happened to be the Briton Robert Shirley, appeared in a turban before King James I, the latter was displeased and a near diplomatic crisis occurred.[32] For to James, the turban on Shirley's head represented allegiance to another potentate. In order to allay the King's anxiety, Shirley attached a small cross to the turban thereby demonstrating that he had not deserted Christianity. But by combining the turban and the cross, Shirley succeeded in actually "showing" the King the content of the message he bore him from the "Sophie": that between the Muslim turban of the Persian ruler and the Christian cross of the British King there need not be conflict, but that both Persia and England could join together against their common enemy, the Turk. Shirley knew how powerful and sensitive the turban and the cross were: by attaching them together, he created the first iconographic symbol in the Western tradition that represented cooperation between Muslims and Christians (much like the cross-in-the-crescent symbol that was used in the Egyptian revolution of 1919 and later in Syria, Palestine and Lebanon, to represent national religious unity against imperialism).

After long negotiations that were delicately handled by the Master of Ceremonies, James I allowed Shirley to approach him with the turban-cum-cross. But the King remained anxious about turbans because he was aware that numerous Britons in that period were testing the porous nature of the British-

[31]*The Marquesse Virgilio Malvezzi, Il Davide Perseguitato, David Persecuted,* Robert Ashley, trans. (London, 1650), p. 14.

[32] See Chew, *The Crescent and the Rose*, pp. 306, 311, 325, 334.

Muslim encounter in the Mediterranean by converting to Islam and openly proclaiming that conversion in their Muslim clothes and turban.[33] Thus the turban gained added significance--already an awe-inspiring symbol of the Ottoman Empire--to a hated and feared one. For long before Shirley's visit, turbaned Britons had begun to appear among the Muslim pirates attacking navigation in the North Sea and the Mediterranean; they also appeared in the Barbary Coast and the Ottoman Empire, employed as gunners, translators, and slave-merchants. Never before had Britons seen their compatriots so dressed and so "other". What was particularly unsettling about those compatriots was that their wearing the white turban inside Muslim territory unquestionably signified their adoption of Islam.

As a deterrent, English writers repeatedly described the process of Christian conversion to Islam in order to emphasize the heinous symbolism of the turban. When a Christian converted to Islam, writers concurred, he was circumcised--in accordance with Islamic law--and turbaned--in accordance with Ottoman religio-national conduct. By replacing his Christian hat with the Muslim turban, the convert demonstrated that he had renounced his monarch and country in favor of the Muslim Sultan and the "Mahometan" world. During his visit to Turkey, George Sandys described Christians in the process of converting to Islam: he noted specifically that after their admission to the new faith, they threw "away of their bonnets" and received a "change of rayments".[34] English and continental writers emphasized this link between conversion and the turban: when the pirate John Ward converted to Islam, the playwright Robert Daborne described him donning the turban in preparation for circumcision.[35] The French

---

33 See my "'Turning Turk': Conversion to Islam in English Renaissance Thought," *Durham University Journal*, 86 (1994): 33-43.

34 Sandys, *A Relation*, p. 56.

35 Robert Daborne, A Christian Turn'd Turk," A. E. H. Swaen, ed. in *Anglia: Zeitschrift für Englische Philologie* (Halle, 1898), Band XX., ll. 1268-1278. When Frances Parthenope Verney wrote her *Memoirs of the Verney Family During the Civil War* (London, 1892), she maintained that there was still preserved at Claydon House in England the "turban" of the renegade Sir Francis Verney, who had joined forces with Ward, 1:63-68.

traveller the Sieur du Mont included a portrait of a Christian convert to Islam in which the convert sat on a horse with a prominent white turban on his head, and followed by turbaned celebrators: As soon as he [the convert] has made a public Profession of his Faith by pronouncing these Words, they put a Turbant on his Head, and make him kiss the Alcoran.[36] A convert to Islam, wrote John Trapp, is "circumcised, and do put on a new turbant, as a badge of a Musulman or right believer".[37]

This link between conversion to Islam and the turban transformed the latter into a symbol of all that was weak in Christendom and powerful in Islam. And the more the Turks gave prominence to the turban, the more Britons and other European travellers feared it. The French traveller Tavernier Bernier recounted an episode that showed the supreme importance which Muslims placed on the distinctiveness of their dress/turban: when an Armenian merchant mistakenly put on a Muslim's turban, he was immediately forced to convert to Islam because the turban could not be worn except by a Muslim.[38] Later, when the merchant decided to return to his former faith, he went to "where the Basha was sitting in Council with the Grandees of the Country and getting as near the Mufti as he could," he threw his "Turbant in his face".[39] Reassuming Christianity necessitated the renunciation of the turban. When Dorax in John Dryden's *Don Sebastian* (c. 1689) converted back to Christianity, the stage direction read: "Re-enter Dorax, having taken off his Turbant and put on a Peruque, Hat and Crevat" (IV, iii, after l. 380). For both Christians and Muslims, clothes proclaimed the man, and the white turban distinguished for Englishman and Turk alike, the believer from the infidel.

---

36 The Sieur du Mont, *A New Voyage to the Levant* (London, 1696), p. 326. The engraving is on p. 334: "The Triumph of a Christian that has renounced the Faith."

37 Trapp, *A Commentary*, p. 679. See also Ross, *A View*. Muslim children "are circumcised at eight years of age; the Child is carried on horse back, with a Tullipant on his head," p. 173.

38 Tavernier Bernier, *Collections of Travels through Turkey into Persia, and the East Indies* (London, 1688), p. 169.

39 Bernier,*Collections of Travels*, p. 169.

This anxiety over turbans further intensified after British and continental men, who "took the turban," rose to positions of prominence in the Muslim Empire and flaunted that prominence before their former co-religionists. In 1637, the Ambassador of Morocco, Alkaid Jaurar ben Abdella, visited England and was received with due pomp and ceremony. In the account written about him, mention was made that he was a Portuguese convert: and the portrait in the frontispiece shows him with a magnificent white turban on his head.[40] And in 1682, when the "renegade" John Rowlands accompanied the Moroccan ambassador Mohammad bin Haddu on a visit to England, he was given the respect which his office commanded. Clearly, there was enterprise, reward and glory in converting to Islam and numerous Britons--and continentals--seized the opportunity to "take the turban." Especially during the political and economic uncertainty in England which preceded the Civil Wars, there was allure in the turban and in all that it represented: settlement and secure employment in an environment which was physically cleaner (Muslim cities were more hygienic than London) and cheaper (food supplies were more varied and less expensive than in England).

As England entered the Restoration period, the turban was no longer just a feature of the distant realm of Islam and the alluring world of the "Turks." For the late 1650s witnessed the introduction from the Levant of the coffee bean and the coffee house: and with coffee came the turban since many coffee-house keepers donned the turban as an advertising ploy. A broadside entitled "Wonders on the Deep: or The most exact Description of the Frozen RIVER of THAMES" (1683) showed the Duke of York's coffee house with two turbaned men inside; the illustration to "A Broad-Side against Coffee" showed a black man serving coffee to two Englishmen and to a big turbaned Turk with twirled moustaches.[41] What was significant about this coffee-turban association is that there was extreme hostility in England against coffee: not only was it seen to threaten local breweries, but it was seen as a malicious ingredient that would

---

40 *The Arrivall and Intertainments of the Embassador, Alkaid Jaurar Ben Abdella, with his Associate, Mr. Robert Blake* (London, 1637), frontispiece.

41 "A Broad-Side Against Coffee: or, The Marriage of the Turk," in *The Touchstone, or, Trial of Tobacco* (London, 1676).

undermine English society and convert its population to Islam. There were numerous treatises and poems written against coffee so much so that in 1675, the King issued a proclamation banning its use: "By the King. A Proclamation for the Suppression of Coffee Houses." Although the ban was never upheld, coffee was consistently denounced as a Muslim berry. In such a hostile environment, the fact that some of the coffee house owners wore turbans added to the negative and fearful image of the head-dress.[42]

While the coffee house was invading London culture, the British navy was developing into the most powerful fighting machine in the Mediterranean. The outcome of England's military and technological assurance was the adoption by Charles II of a confrontational position towards the North African regencies. In 1669, he ordered his fleet to pursue pirates and attack their outposts on the Mediterranean and the Atlantic coasts. The fleet achieved tremendous success and reported the sinking of numerous Algerian ships and the bombardment of harbors.[43] A few years later, in 1675, Charles was celebrated in a statue which was erected for him by Sir Robert Viner in Stocks Market, London: it showed the King on his horse astride the figure of a turban-clad Oliver Cromwell. For the London viewer of the statue, the regicide was being shown as the Turk both of whom had been defeated (the former morally and the latter militarily) by the restored King. The turban no longer signified allure or power: it was being destroyed under the hooves of the English equestrian monarch.[44]

Further denigration of the turban in English culture occurred in 1682 after the visit to London of the Moroccan ambassador Mohammad bin Haddu. The diarist John Evelyn described the visitor and his turban: "The Ambassador had a string of pearls oddly woven in his turban," he wrote on 11 January 1682. The portrait of bin Haddu that was made by Robert White shows an elegantly

---

42 Writers denigrated the coffee house keeper who "Ap'd a Turbant" and turned into a "perfect Turk", *The Character of a Coffee-House* (London, 1673), p. 2.

43 See the reports in Calendar of State Papers, *Domestic: Charles II, October 1668-December 1669*, vol. 9, pp. 632-33; *ibid.*, 1670. With Addenda, 1660-1670, vol. 10, pp. 168-169.

44 See a picture of the statue in Poems on *Affairs of State: Augustan Satirical Verse, 1660-1714*, George de F. Lord, ed. (New Haven and London, 1963), p. 269.

imposing turban sitting above the proud face.[45] The reception of the ambassador in England was both extensive and courteous, but as soon as King Charles learned that the English ambassador in Morocco had been humiliated by Mulay Ismail, he had bin Haddu similarly humiliated by forcing him to appear at court without turban or shoes.[46] The turban, along with the Moroccan Empire it represented, no longer frightened the King of England: in 1611, James I had had to negotiate the removal of the turban from the head of the Persian Ambassador; seventy years later, his grandson simply had it torn off.

For Muslims in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, the turban held important symbolic meanings. Those meanings crossed over into English culture and discourse thereby providing a venue by which English society "fashioned" itself vis-a-vis the most formidable non-Christian civilization that it had ever encountered. At court and in the coffee house, among travellers and London ladies, the turban was worn and unworn, praised and defamed, admired and hated: it appeared in theological writings and in travelogues, worn by Muslim ambassadors and pirates, and by English merchants and diplomats. And yet this headdress that was so widely engaged in England--both in texts and in society--belonged to the "Mahumetans" who were a continent away from London. The turban thus reveals another side of the exchange that occurred between Britons and "Turks" in the early modern period: although the former frequently saw themselves in a condition of conflict and alterity with the "bloody and cruell Turk," it is revealing of the porous nature of that conflict how widely the turban entered into English thought, imagery, and attire. The turban shows that, to some extent, Renaissance Britons shared symbols and

---

[45] See a reproduction of the painting opposite p. 177 in Wilfrid Blunt, *Black Sunrise: The life and times of Mulai Ismail, Emperor of Morocco, 1647-1727* (London, 1951).

[46] Significantly, this humiliation was not publicized in London, and only the French account of bin Haddu's visit mentioned the event -- the French being eager to give reason to Mulay Ismail to break commercial and political contacts with England. See the description of the Ambassador's visit in Blunt, *Black Sunrise*, pp. 191 ff. and specifically the reference to the account by Saint-Olon (1695), p. 191, n. 4.

meanings with Islam--that consciousness of Islam did not remain confined to the literature and imagination of conflict, but reached into fashion, faith, and discourse.[47]

---

[47] When in 1677, George Fox, the founder of the Quaker movement, wrote to defend his unwillingness to remove his hat in front of magistrates, he based his argument on the Turks who never removed their turbans during salutation: "And now, is not the Turks' Proverb a Reproach to the Christians? who say, that The Christians spend most of their time in 'shewing their bare Heads one to another'". Although there was a long association in Protestant history between religious dissent and the refusal to remove hats, Fox recognized that the allusion to the Turks would infuse his argument with the strength of Islamic tradition. George Fox, *The God's Hypocrites* (London, 1677), pp. 11-12. See also William Biddulph: the Turks wear "a Turbant of white Shash, made of cotton Wooll, which they never uncover in their salutations to any man," *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, vol. 8, p. 290.