

**The Sultan of New York:**  
**Instructive Entertainment and Ottoman Armenian**  
**Politics in Nineteenth-Century America**  
**(1818-1895)**

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**Declaration**

I, Nora Lessersohn, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Signature: .....



## Abstract

This thesis is a biographical microhistory of Christopher Oscanyan (1818-1895), the first known Armenian American. Sent by American missionaries from Ottoman Constantinople to New York City in 1834, Oscanyan became known across the United States as “the Oriental lecturer,” and “the Turk.” Over the course of the century, he used a range of popular media — lectures, books, newspapers, photographs, *tableaux vivant*, comic opera, and personal costume — to “correct [Americans’] erroneous impressions” of the “Turks” and cultivate “mutual diplomatic relations” between his two countries. Through his efforts, he sought not only to create a “friendly” relationship between the United States and the Ottoman Empire based on mutual understanding between equal nations, but also to promote political reform within the Ottoman Empire itself.

The available sources reveal a man committed to delivering instructive entertainment as well as publicly discussing Ottoman and Armenian politics. Notably, his embrace of spectacle on the lecture circuit did not preclude him from engaging seriously with such political matters. In fact, his celebrity and credibility as an expert instructor gave him the platform from which to do so. This thesis analyzes how Oscanyan’s career illuminates and animates the rise of a professional ecosystem that blended entertainment, instruction, and politics.

Finally, this thesis traces the evolution of Oscanyan’s own political views. Oscanyan’s politics and diplomatic work changed radically in the 1870s, when relations between the Ottoman Empire and its Christian populations became more fraught than ever. From the late 1870s until his death, Oscanyan worked exclusively to construct strong diplomatic relations between Ottoman *Armenians* and Americans, championing, especially, Armenian immigration to the United States. While he still wrote about the Ottoman Empire and its people, these writings were increasingly styled as personal memoirs of Turkey’s past — not depictions of an equal nation with which to develop a diplomatic future.

## Impact Statement

As the first biography of Christopher Oscanyan and the first history of any person from what we now call the Middle East, living in the United States, in the nineteenth century, my thesis offers the academic study of history a new way of seeing the “US and the World.” It takes seriously Oscanyan’s Ottoman Armenian politics and is attentive to his political trajectory even in the absence of his being able to exert any real power or influence on American society. Looking at how Oscanyan engaged with American politics through the lens and language of Ottoman particulars (and how he engaged with Ottoman politics through the lens and language of American particulars) allows us to look for other unexpected ways in which people formulated political perspectives outside of party politics or other forms of collective action in the nineteenth-century United States. This is a contribution that can make an impact and inspire new ways of thinking and seeing in historical work on any area of the world.

In my thesis, I intentionally do not use the language of “identity” to analyze Oscanyan’s life and work. But outside of academia, identity is a topic on everyone’s mind. To that end, this thesis can show how identity is produced for historical, political, and practical reasons. It is a story that can be re-told to show how we create identities to pursue specific outcomes, even if we lose parts of ourselves in the process. In particular, this story shows how Oscanyan (re-)invented an Armenian-American identity long before a significant Armenian population came to the United States. At first, Oscanyan’s Armenian-American identity overlapped with a more general Ottoman-American one: he was committed to sharing and enacting widespread Ottoman Turkish values and promoting reform in Turkey. Owing to changing politics in the Ottoman Empire in the 1870s, however, as well as increasing Armenian immigration to the U.S. in the 1880s, Oscanyan embraced Armenian nationalism and an Armenian-American identity that allowed him to champion human rights in the face of what he identified as rising “Turkish tyranny and persecution.” This story of identity formation *because of* specific community needs is of immense appeal to a wider audience of Armenian-Americans. It can also be extracted to an even wider audience: understanding the *reasons* for identity creation and the sacrifices one makes to be as legible as possible for a wider audience (meta!) is an important insight to bring to conversations happening these days in schools, online, through the news, and within families.

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This thesis begins to answer questions I developed over a decade and many lifetimes ago. For this reason, a somewhat chronological series of acknowledgments feels in order.

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For my parents  
Louise Cherishian and James Lessersohn  
And their parents  
And their parents...

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## Introduction

### Microhistory Between the U.S. and the World

*“What is a country but a borderless sentence, a life?” - Ocean Vuong  
On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous<sup>1</sup>*

*(At the time I didn't know how things would turn out.) – Pramodya Ananta Toer,  
This Earth of Mankind<sup>2</sup>*

#### Biographical Overview

In Mark Twain's wildly popular comedic travelogue from 1869, *The Innocents Abroad*, the author has few kind words for the people of Constantinople (Istanbul), the capital of the Ottoman Empire and the bulk of the territory we now call the Middle East. Channeling an inflated Protestant, American superiority, he ridicules the Ottoman, or Turkish, people with a disdain he withholds during his survey of the Europeans. Put simply, he paints the Ottoman Turks as lazy, duplicitous, and uncivilized —a caricature no doubt informed by a visit to Constantinople that Twain feels is marked by disappointments. The future novelist continuously expects to encounter *Arabian Nights* luxury, but consistently feels he has failed to find it. Upon receiving the legendary narghille, or hookah tobacco pipe, for example, from “a copper-colored skeleton, with a rag around him,” Twain first responds with hope, only to take “one blast at it” and quit. Filling him with smoke, compelling him to cough “as if Vesuvius had let go,” the narghille thoroughly vexes Twain the tourist.<sup>3</sup> “The smoke had a vile taste,” he adds, “and the

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<sup>1</sup> Ocean Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous: A Novel* (New York: Penguin Press, 2019), 18.

<sup>2</sup> Pramodya Ananta Toer, *This Earth of Mankind: A Novel* (Ringwood, Australia: Penguin Books, 1982), 15.

<sup>3</sup> Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad: or, The New Pilgrims' Progress* (Hartford: American Publishing Company, 1869), 302.

taste of a thousand infidel [Muslim] tongues that remained on that brass mouthpiece was viler still.”<sup>4</sup> Twain concludes, discouraged: “Whenever, hereafter, I see the cross-legged Grand Turk smoking his narghili, in pretended bliss, on the outside of a paper of Connecticut tobacco, I shall know him for the shameless humbug he is.”<sup>5</sup>

Twelve years earlier, in 1857, an Ottoman native and naturalized American citizen named Christopher Oscanyan also wrote for an American audience about the people of Ottoman Turkey. His book, *The Sultan and His People*, covered some of the same topics Twain would cover in *The Innocents Abroad* — including the Turkish narghille. As Oscanyan tells his reader, “The narghilles or hookahs are also very popular, and often of exquisite workmanship...The effort necessary to draw the smoke from the narghille is, by some, considered as objectionable, but a little practice soon habituates to its use, and certainly with this instrument we have the smoke in its greatest purity. But it is not only the utility and beauty of the long *chibouk* [pipe] which constitute the Osmanlis [Ottomans] the best and most philosophical smokers. There is no tobacco in the world so delicious as the Turkish.”<sup>6</sup>

Although written more than a decade before Twain’s “innocents” traveled to Constantinople, Oscanyan’s work was nevertheless trying to inoculate Americans against the prejudices of people like Twain, combatting his description of the Turk as lazy, duplicitous, and uncivilized with a depiction of Ottoman diligence (“a little practice”), taste (“exquisite workmanship”), and intelligence (“the most philosophical smokers”). Oscanyan’s illustration well-nigh makes the American Twain seem unsophisticated and ignorant in comparison. While

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Christopher Oscanyan, *The Sultan and His People* (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1857), 308.

not a reply, then, to *The Innocents Abroad*, Oscanyan's book was a conscious response to the popular stereotypes subscribed to by his American audience.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, *The Sultan and His People* was just one of many ways in which Oscanyan used a wide variety of pursuits and popular American media to try to "correct erroneous impressions" of the "Turks" and cultivate what he called "mutual diplomatic relations" between his two countries. Through his efforts, he sought not only to create a "friendly" relationship between the United States and the Ottoman Empire based on mutual understanding between equal nations, but also to promote paths to political reform within the Ottoman Empire itself.<sup>8</sup> And yet his notion of an intelligent, logical, and civilized Middle East seems nearly unthinkable as a widespread conviction even in today's United States. This raises this thesis' driving question: how successful was Christopher Oscanyan?

Khachadur "Christopher" Oscanyan was born in 1818 and raised in Constantinople (Image A). He was an Armenian Christian in an empire ruled by Muslim Turks, but the empire still had a significant Christian population at the time of his birth; some accounts put the number of Christians at as high as forty percent of the empire's total inhabitants during the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup> It was an empire known for its multi-ethnic, multi-religious

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<sup>7</sup> Such representations are now usually called "orientalist" stereotypes, which category we will discuss later in the chapter.

<sup>8</sup> On "erroneous impressions," see, for example, "Lectures on Constantinople," *Boston Recorder* [Boston], December 14, 1838; on "mutual diplomatic relations," see Letter from Christopher Oscanyan to John Hay, President Lincoln's Private Secretary, Monday, August 5, 1861. From the Abraham Lincoln papers at the Library of Congress: Series 1. General Correspondence. 1833-1916. Available at: <https://www.loc.gov/item/mal1102800/> (Accessed November 9, 2022); on a "friendly" relationship, see "Mr. Oscanyan's Turkish Khave [sic]," *The Independent ... Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts* [New York], January 17, 1856.

<sup>9</sup> For population estimates of the Ottoman Ethnic/Religious population from 1844, see: Cem Behar, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun ve Türkiye'nin nüfusu, 1500-1927/ The Population of the Ottoman Empire and Turkey* (Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü, 1996), 28.

population: Armenians and Turks, as well as Arabs, Greeks, Circassians, Jews and many other ethno-religious communities lived side by side across the empire. Because contemporary U.S. and European audiences called the Ottoman Empire “Turkey” and the Ottoman people “Turks,” I will use the same terms interchangeably throughout the thesis.<sup>10</sup> With the help of American missionaries, Oscanyan first came to the United States in 1834, and was naturalized as an American citizen by 1839. He is the first known Armenian-American. That same year, he married an American woman named Maria Louisa Skinner (1815-1888), the daughter of the Rev. Thomas Harvey Skinner (1791–1871), a noted Presbyterian clergyman and a founder and director of Union Theological Seminary in New York City (now affiliated with Columbia University). The two were married on December 5, 1839 and left the United States together for Constantinople in January of 1840. There, in the Ottoman capital, Maria Louisa Oscanyan gave birth to all four of their children: Thomas, born 1841, William Hatchik, born 1843, Adele Montgomery, born 1846, and Evelyn Eglinton, born 1847.

Little is known about the woman who became Mrs. Oscanyan. At age twenty-four, she was open-minded – or rebellious – enough to marry an Armenian Christian from Turkey who had no claims to personal wealth or stature. She moved with him away from her American home and family. Perhaps she took comfort in his relationship with the American missionaries in Constantinople, and in the missionary community she would find there.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps she

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<sup>10</sup> Here I subscribe to Nebahat Avcioglu’s approach in her *Turquerie and the Politics of Representation, 1728–1876* (Farnham: Ashgate Press, 2011), 1. She writes, “I use the words ‘Ottoman’ and ‘Turkish’ indiscriminately in the same way as the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European contemporary texts.”

<sup>11</sup> Her father, Thomas Harvey Skinner, supported American missionary efforts and must have had many missionary contacts: he gave a sermon before the American Board of Foreign Missionaries (A.B.C.F.M) at their annual meeting in September 1843, when Maria Louisa was living in Constantinople. See: Thomas H. Skinner, *Progress: The Law of Missionary Work. A Sermon* (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1843). Available at: <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015064323374&view=1up&seq=5> (Accessed November 10, 2022).

wanted an adventure.<sup>12</sup> Whatever the case, Christopher and Maria Louisa Oscanyan created a life together in the Ottoman capital. While no available sources speak to their private dynamics, their daily interactions and marital conversations must have deeply informed each of their relationships to the other's culture and society. As Kelly Shannon suggests, "marriage is the most intimate form of foreign relations."<sup>13</sup> The Oscanyans stayed in Constantinople as a family for fourteen years before returning to New York City in late 1854, likely owing at least in part to the outbreak of the Crimean War. Once back, Christopher Oscanyan resumed his work representing Turkey and its people to an American audience, quickly earning a public reputation for these endeavors but unable to parlay this good will into the life of financial comfort and political influence he desired. He was considered, variously, a Turk, an Armenian, an Armenian Turk, an "Americanized Turk,"<sup>14</sup> and, eventually, a "confirmed New Yorker."<sup>15</sup> He was undoubtedly one-of-a-kind: a comedic periodical exchange from 1860 underlines Oscanyan's singular status.

Buggins – I only know one Turk – a first-rate man –  
Muffins – I know him too; he is Oscanyan.<sup>16</sup>

Over the course of sixty years, with projects that took him from Turkey to England and the United States, Christopher Oscanyan dedicated his career to Ottoman-American relations. Most of his work can be considered informal diplomacy. By this I mean that Oscanyan by and

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<sup>12</sup> An 1868 profile of her husband of inconsistent accuracy claims that the two "married 'under difficulties,'" but that these "'difficulties'" were "arranged... after marriage." See "Miscellaneous Personages," *The Sporting Times* [Boston], December 26, 1868.

<sup>13</sup> Kelly J. Shannon, "Bernath Lecture: 'Approaching the Islamic World,'" *Diplomatic History* 44-3 (2020), 387-408, at 405.

<sup>14</sup> "Miscellaneous Items," *Troy Daily Times*, September 10, 1867

<sup>15</sup> "Miscellaneous Personages," *The Sporting Times* [Boston], December 26, 1868.

<sup>16</sup> "Gotham Eclogues," *Frank Leslie's Budget of Fun* [New York], December 15, 1860, 14.

large operated as a non-state actor who nevertheless used his work to promote relations between the United States, the Ottoman Empire, and the Armenians. While there is no known collection of his correspondence or diaries, his efforts have left us an unusual range of primary sources: between 1840 and 1895, he published one of Constantinople's first newspapers, *Aztarar Puzantian (The Byzantine Advertiser)* (1840); curated an "Oriental and Turkish Museum" in London, and wrote its attendant catalogue (1854); opened a short-lived Turkish Coffee House in New York (1855) and attempted, twice, to open New York's first Turkish Bath (1855, 1862) – both of which were described in the daily papers; authored *The Sultan and His People*, on Ottoman government and culture (1857); gave illustrated lectures throughout the United States on topics such as "Turkish Manners and Customs," and "The Women of the East;" and published, right in the middle of the American Civil War, an album of photographs, depicting himself and others wearing traditional Ottoman attire (1863). In 1868, he wrote a booklet called *The United States and Turkey* in his capacity as the Ottoman Consul General to New York City. Throughout the decades, he was a contributor to newspapers and periodicals including *The New York Herald* and *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*; he was also frequently written *about* in the press. In the 1870s, Oscanyan litigated a soured kickback deal all the way up to the Supreme Court (1880). And as late as 1890, he wrote the libretto for a comic opera called *The Sultana* and served as the Editor-in-Chief of an Armenian-language periodical named *Azadoutioun Lrakir Azkayin* (Freedom National Newspaper) for the growing community of Armenians in the United States at this time. Through his work and travels, he associated with American luminaries including Abraham Lincoln, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and P.T. Barnum.

The available sources reveal a man committed to delivering instructive entertainment as well as publicly discussing Ottoman Armenian politics. Instructive entertainment is a term derived directly from the historical record: of Oscanyan's 1863 lectures, for example, *The New York Herald* declared, "we know of no more interesting and instructive entertainment."<sup>17</sup> Many entertainments of the era, not just Oscanyan's, were expected to be "instructive" – whether sincerely or "at least superficially," like those of P.T. Barnum.<sup>18</sup> Analyzing this blended form of performance, and the expectations it engendered regarding what was valuable and legitimate public discourse, is essential to understanding the professional world in which figures like Oscanyan forged their careers. Indeed, Oscanyan's embrace of spectacular forms of instruction on the lecture circuit – which, as one commentator explained, "developed some of the means to which showmen and others resort to draw a crowd"<sup>19</sup> – did not preclude his ability to write and speak on serious Ottoman and Armenian political matters. In many ways, his celebrity and credibility as an expert and experienced instructor gave him the platform through which to do so. Through the sources are particularly scarce, it is evident that Maria Louisa Oscanyan was also politically engaged. By 1863, she demonstrated a clear commitment to women's rights through her service as a founding trustee of the New York Medical College for Women (along with Elizabeth Cady Stanton). She was the corresponding secretary. In 1865, under the byline "Mrs. Oscanyan," she also wrote her own form of instructive entertainment in a defense of the

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<sup>17</sup> "Oscanyan's Lectures," *The New York Herald* [New York], October 22, 1863; On the significance of his entertainment being dubbed "interesting," see Milette Shamir, "On the Uselessness of Knowledge: William F. Lynch's "Interesting" Expedition to the Dead Sea," *Journal of the Early Republic* 38-3 (2018), 475-499.

<sup>18</sup> Adrienne Saint-Pierre, "Instructive Entertainments: Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century Panoramas," *The Barnum Museum*, September 10, 2021. Available at: <https://barnum-museum.org/instructive-entertainments/> (Accessed November 12, 2022).

<sup>19</sup> "Supernumeraries," *Union and Journal* [Biddeford, Maine], September 28, 1866.



practices of “the Women of Turkey” for *Frank Leslie’s Chimney Corner*.<sup>20</sup> The nature of the relationship between the Oscanyans after the 1860s is unclear. She died in 1888 of pneumonia; at her death it appears she was living in a separate residence from her husband, 9 Magnolia Ave in Jersey City.<sup>21</sup> He died in 1895 at his home in Brooklyn, also of pneumonia.<sup>22</sup>

Some of Christopher Oscanyan’s pursuits were more successful than others in either attracting an audience or securing official influence. He persisted throughout most of his career in both finding entertaining ways to communicate a complicated (and shifting) Ottoman Armenian political worldview and asking American audiences and decision-makers to accept and absorb that worldview on its own terms. But inviting Americans to think like Ottomans was perhaps asking too much, and in practice meant that Oscanyan could be popular without being influential. His professional and diplomatic failures are nevertheless instructive: they demonstrate that across the century American audiences and officials alike had little appetite to engage with what we now call the Middle East and Middle Easterners from a position of equality.<sup>23</sup> Without this willingness, true mutual understanding was an elusive goal.

All the same, Oscanyan’s career illuminates and animates the rise of a professional ecosystem that nurtured the confluence of entertainment, instruction, and politics. This thesis thus undertakes an analysis of Oscanyan’s successes and failures to achieve three separate but related goals. First, such analysis allows us to apprehend the constituent parts of that

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<sup>20</sup> Mrs. Oscanyan, “The Women of Turkey; or, Social Life in the East,” *Frank Leslie’s Chimney Corner* [New York], June 24, 1865, 60.

<sup>21</sup> “Died,” *The New York Herald*, April 11, 1888

<sup>22</sup> Certificate of Death for Christopher Oscanyan, Department of Health of the City of Brooklyn, August 2, 1895.

<sup>23</sup> The term “Middle East” came into use only in the early twentieth century. For more see Daniel Foliard, *Dislocating the Orient: British Maps and the Making of the Middle East, 1854-1921* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

professional ecosystem across the nineteenth century – namely, a robust American lyceum circuit and the valorization of instruction and expertise, a flourishing newspaper industry, the rise of photography and exhibition culture, the increasing political power of the American missionary, and the intensely interpersonal nature of political and professional networks. Second, having isolated these constituent parts we can analyze some of the ways they worked together in Oscanyan’s life and career, by drawing out how peddling instruction and expertise allowed him to bridge the domains of entertainment and politics. Thus, third, we can address what John L. Brooke has identified as a key issue for the study of the United States in the 1850s (and I would argue for most of the nineteenth century), namely, that “we know a lot about both politics and culture in the 1850s, but... they have not been examined carefully enough together in a single arena.”<sup>24</sup>

In his book, *There is a North*, Brooke tackles this deficit by exploring “how culture worked on politics” in the 1850s and “help[ed] many to resolve the effects of a profound political breakdown.”<sup>25</sup> In her *Spectacles of Reform*, Amy Hughes likewise looks at nineteenth-century American spectacle as a “communication strategy... utilized in multiple reform movements” such as temperance, abolition, and women’s suffrage.<sup>26</sup> And Melani McAlister’s *Epic Encounters* shows “how popular culture has shaped the ways Americans define their ‘interests’ in the Middle East” since World War II, a story to which Oscanyan’s career is a

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<sup>24</sup> John L. Brooke, *‘There is a North:’ Fugitive Slaves, Political Crisis, and Cultural Transformation in the Coming of the Civil War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2019).

<sup>25</sup> Brooke, *There is a North*, 21. Emphasis author’s.

<sup>26</sup> Amy E. Hughes, *Spectacles of Reform: Theater and Activism in Nineteenth-Century America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 7.

valuable precursor.<sup>27</sup> While each of these works examine successful *outcomes* of a world in which entertainment and politics are interrelated, Oscanyan's story, even of failure, allows us to map out how such a world came to be in the first place. While we cannot say that entertainment allowed Oscanyan to *successfully* influence political opinion and action, as we can for the protagonists in the above works, we *can* say that his story illuminates the professional ecosystem that supported his endeavor to *try*.

At the same time, my thesis traces the arc of Oscanyan's own political trajectory. Oscanyan's politics, and thus his professional and diplomatic work, changed radically in the 1870s, when relations between the Ottoman Empire and its Christian populations became more fraught than ever. From the late 1870s until his death in 1895, Oscanyan embraced Armenian nationalism and worked only to construct a diplomatic relationship between Ottoman *Armenians* and Americans, championing, most robustly, Armenian immigration to the United States. While he still wrote about the Ottoman empire and its many regions and people, these writings were increasingly styled as personal memoirs of Turkey's *past* – not depictions of an equal nation with which to develop a diplomatic *future*. By the end of his life, and the advent of large-scale government-backed violence against the Armenian people of the Ottoman Empire, Oscanyan turned against Turkey entirely, pleading for its obliteration. This violence, which was soon to become known as the opening salvo of the Hamidian Massacres (1894-96), began a new era of American engagement with the Ottoman Empire. This era – especially, the

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<sup>27</sup> Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945*, Updated Edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). This quote is from "About the Book" on the publisher's website: <https://www.ucpress.edu/book/9780520244993/epic-encounters> (Accessed August 31, 2022).

Christian humanitarian response to these massacres and later, the Armenian Genocide (1915-23) – has received much more historiographical coverage than the period preceding it. My thesis thus serves as a pre-history to the more familiar narratives of later U.S. engagement with the Armenian Question in the Ottoman Empire.

For all of Oscanyan's wide-ranging activities and personal connections, he only briefly appears in English-language studies of Ottoman, Armenian, and American society; just one scholar has written more than a few paragraphs about Oscanyan's life and work.<sup>28</sup> When Oscanyan surfaces at all in contemporary scholarship, he is usually and insufficiently depicted as a curio, an appealing and/or eccentric nineteenth-century figure whose endeavors provide interesting examples of larger cultural trends in England and the United States. His politics are almost entirely ignored. My project is not only the first biography of Oscanyan, however. It is the first history of *any* person from what we now call the Middle East, living in the United States, in the nineteenth century. It takes seriously his politics and is attentive to his political trajectory even in the absence of his being able to exert any real power or influence on American society. Indeed, looking at how Oscanyan engaged with American politics through the lens and language of Ottoman particulars (and how he engaged with Ottoman politics through the lens and language of American particulars) allows us to look for other unexpected ways in

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<sup>28</sup> Outside of passing references in works on Armenians in America, Oscanyan has appeared in the following works: Richard D. Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 1978), 496–97; Nebahat Avcioglu, *Turquerie and the Politics of Representation, 1728–1876* (Farnham: Ashgate Press, 2011), 224–28; Susan Nance, *How the Arabian Nights Inspired the American Dream, 1790–1935* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 54–64; Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray, “Women Thinking: The International Popular Lecture and Its Audience in Antebellum New England,” in *The Cosmopolitan Lyceum: Lecture Culture and the Globe in Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. Tom F. Wright (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013), 42–66. Ünver Rüstem is currently writing an article on Oscanyan's Oriental and Turkish Museum, which he addressed in a conference paper titled “Dressing the Part: Ottoman Self Representation in the Age of Orientalism, the abstract for which can be found here: <https://history-of-art.osu.edu/events/gild-lecture-%C3%BCnver-r%C3%BCstem> (Accessed June 3, 2022).

which people formulated political perspectives outside of party politics or other forms of collective action in the nineteenth-century United States.

### **Oscanyan in Armenian Historiography**

Despite the abundance of Armenian events and issues with which Oscanyan engaged directly over the course of his life, even scholars of Armenian history have essentially neglected his life and work.<sup>29</sup> It may be that Oscanyan has not fit comfortably into an Armenian historiography that has needed to grapple with the dual traumas of the Armenian genocide (1914-1923) and the Republic of Turkey's ongoing policy of genocide denial that has informed generations of Ottoman and Turkish Studies scholarship.<sup>30</sup> As Ronald Suny writes of the effects of this trauma, "Armenian history has often been written as that of a separate, coherent nation that stood opposed to the Muslims and the Ottoman state."<sup>31</sup> Being written with an understandable, but teleological view towards genocide, such Armenian histories have often

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<sup>29</sup> Oscanyan appears only briefly in surveys of Armenians in America. See: Hayk Demoyan, *Armenian Legacy in America: A 400-year Heritage* (Yerevan: Aurora Humanitarian Initiative, 2018); M. Vartan Malcom, *The Armenians in America* (Chicago: Pilgrim Press, 1919); Robert Mirak, *Torn Between Two Lands: Armenians in America, 1890 to World War I* (Cambridge: Distributed for the Dept. of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, Harvard University, by Harvard University Press, 1983); Vladimir Wertsman, *The Armenians in America, 1618-1976: A Chronology & Fact Book* (Dobbs Ferry: Oceana Publications, 1978). For an ethnography on the Armenian American community, see Anny P. Bakalian, *Armenian-Americans: From Being to Feeling Armenian* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1993). David Gutman explores Armenian migration to North America to tell the story of late Ottoman imperial practices. See: *The Politics of Armenian Migration to North America, 1885-1915: Sojourners, Smugglers and Dubious Citizens* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019).

<sup>30</sup> The Armenian genocide was a series of state-sponsored massacres, deportations, and forced conversions to Islam that targeted the Armenian Christian subjects of the Ottoman Empire largely during the course of World War I (1914–1918). Since the majority of the Armenian population lived in what is now eastern Turkey, near the border of the Russian empire (where Armenian subjects of that empire lived), the Ottoman government was paranoid that Ottoman and Russian Armenians would join together and turn against the Ottoman state. To prevent such an act, the Ottomans sought to severely reduce their Armenian population, ultimately killing approximately one million Armenians. A vast body of scholarly work has been written to document the components of the Armenian genocide and its aftermath. See for example: Taner Akçam, *The Young Turks' Crime against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); Raymond Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011).

<sup>31</sup> Ronald Grigor Suny, *They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else. A History of the Armenian Genocide* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 43.

emphasized intercommunal separation and violence to the exclusion of analyzing other forms of imperial engagement. And yet, as Suny adds, and as Oscanyan's life amply demonstrates, "for hundreds of years Armenians lived in a multinational empire into which they were effectively integrated."<sup>32</sup> "The trauma of the genocide," historian Sebouh Aslanian elaborates, "has contributed to making suspect attempts by scholars to emphasize the cosmopolitan, connected, and transcultural aspects of Armenian identities and histories, especially where Turks and the "Islamic world" are concerned."<sup>33</sup> It seems likely that Oscanyan's legacy has in part been obscured because he represents a more complicated history than both Armenian and Turkish historiography would, for a long time, permit. Not only does he express loyalty and affinity for both Turkish and Armenian people and customs, but many of his politics and affiliations changed over time. In other words, his life does not provide a static, "usable" past. In fact, in 2005 one Armenian scholar criticized Oscanyan in a footnote precisely for his "instability of views."<sup>34</sup> In what follows, I aim to explore this so-called "instability" directly – that is, to trace Oscanyan's politics, affinities, changes, and contradictions over the course of the century. Indeed, such "instability" is only recognizable as such if one is operating within a set of specific historical categories and expectations that deny personal and political complexity and/or change over time. In taking Oscanyan's multiple times, contexts, and sensibilities seriously, I build on the work of a cadre of historians of Armenian history such as Richard

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Sebouh Aslanian, From "Autonomous" to "Interactive" Histories: World History's Challenge to Armenian Studies, in Kathryn Babayan and Michael Pifer (eds.), *An Armenian Mediterranean: Words and Worlds in Motion* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 81-125, at 102. For other productive critiques of Armenian historiography see Sebouh D. Aslanian, "The Marble of Armenian History: Or Armenian History as World History," *Études Arméniennes Contemporaines* 4 (2014): 129-42.

<sup>34</sup> M.N. Hakobyan, *Stepan Voskanyan and His Environment: His Life, Work, And Sociopolitical Views* (Yerevan: Kidoutioun Publishing, 2005), 203-209, at 207. In Armenian.

Antaramian, Sebouh Aslanian, Bedross Der Matossian, and Vahe Tachjian who have been working to recalibrate more one-dimensional narratives of the Armenian past by focusing on topics like Armenian geographic mobility and intercommunal interaction.<sup>35</sup> Thus, my thesis represents, in part, a continued effort to write a multi-dimensional, integrated Ottoman Armenian history that takes its protagonist seriously as both an Ottoman and an Armenian.

### **Transnational United States History**

While it is critical to research and write about the life of Christopher Oscanyan as a function of his Ottoman and Armenian contexts, the vast majority of Christopher Oscanyan's work was distributed or presented to audiences in the United States. As such, it is crucial that my thesis speak above all to and from a historiography of the U.S. The U.S. context on its own, however, is inadequate for understanding the entirety of Oscanyan's politics, affinities, and goals. Fortunately, over the past two decades, scholarship on U.S. history has been embracing more integrated, transnational and transimperial approaches to a United States in and of the world – a United States that has been influenced by and implicated in global forces and concerns. As an *American Historical Review* editor wrote in 2013, "it has long been necessary

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<sup>35</sup> See, for example: Sebouh Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Richard Antaramian, *Brokers of Faith, Brokers of Empire: Armenians and the Politics of Reform in the Ottoman Empire* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2020); Bedross Der Matossian, *Shattered Dreams of Revolution: From Liberty to Violence in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014); Vahé Tachjian, *Ottoman Armenians: Life, Culture, Society* (Berlin: Houshamadyan Publication, 2014); Lerna Ekmekçioğlu, "Introducing the "Armenian Ottoman History" Issue of JOTSA," *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 4-2 (2017): 231-37; Alyson Wharton, *The Architects of Ottoman Constantinople: The Balyan Family and the History of Ottoman Architecture*. (London: I B Tauris, 2015). My thesis builds on my first article, "Provincial Cosmopolitanism" in Late Ottoman Anatolia: An Armenian Shoemaker's Memoir," which uses my great grandfather's memoir to argue that his vivid accounts of extended social, cultural, and commercial interactions and affiliations between Armenians, Turks, and Arabs in late Ottoman Anatolia are an expression of a "provincial cosmopolitanism" that should be accounted for when we seek to imagine, reconstruct, and represent the lived experience of ordinary Ottoman subjects. Nora Lessersohn, "Provincial Cosmopolitanism" in Late Ottoman Anatolia: An Armenian Shoemaker's Memoir," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 57-2 (2015): 528-56.

for history both to unhook itself from the narrative of the nation-state and to follow any and all experiences across any and all boundaries, both spatially and temporally.”<sup>36</sup> The effort to do this within U.S. history has spawned its own field, often called the “US in the World” or “Global American Studies.” But thinking only about the American side of global interaction is insufficient for writing the story of Christopher Oscanyan. In line with the goals of the U.S. in the World field, then, my study transcends the boundaries of U.S. nationhood, but also extends its remit. That is, it decenters the United States and produces a history that *involves* the United States but that is not written from an American national perspective. I do this by tracing the world and worldview of a foreign-born, naturalized American citizen whose social, cultural, and political commitments reached beyond the United States for the entirety of his life. To look at Oscanyan’s many contexts at once, as they existed in his life, is inherently to look at the histories of multiple geographies and spaces, both physical and mental – especially the American, the Ottoman, and the Armenian. One cannot write *his* history ‘hooked into the narrative of the nation-state.’ Which nation, after all, would we pick?

To describe my approach to writing a history of Oscanyan’s life and work, I will use the term “transnational” because I configure the United States, the Armenians, and the Ottoman empire-state as nations involved in various nation-making projects during the period in question.<sup>37</sup> In this thesis, I use “nation” (and thus national) not to signify, exclusively, an

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<sup>36</sup> Sebouh David Aslanian, Joyce E. Chaplin, Ann McGrath, and Kristin Mann, “AHR Conversation: How Size Matters: The Question of Scale in History,” *American Historical Review* (December 2013), 1431-1472, at 1438.

<sup>37</sup> Here I subscribe to Mostafa Minawi’s understanding of the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire as an empire-state, as discussed in a 2016 interview with *Jadaliyya*: “[my] book asks fellow historians of the empire-state to take the [Ottoman] empire on its own terms; it administers and/or rules a vast area which covers several continents that have a multitude of nodes of power across the spectrum of state and non-state actors from the local to the imperial, while ALSO having a strong administrative and diplomatic center in the metropole—Istanbul. It is not one or the other. It is complicated, very messy, utterly flawed, brilliant, and highly non-uniform. One or two models of



independent nation-state or an independence-seeking proto-nation-state, as we would most often use the term today – famously defined by Benedict Anderson as, “an imagined political community[,] and imagined as both inherently limited and *sovereign*”<sup>38</sup> – but to mean “a people having a common origin, tradition, and language and capable of forming or actually constituting a nation state” (a nation-state, here, being understood as *having a government*).<sup>39</sup> While the process by which such a nation becomes a *nation state* is usually described in terms of nationalism – an “ideological movement,” as Anthony Smith asserts, “for attaining and maintaining *autonomy*, unity, and identity on behalf of a human population”<sup>40</sup> – such a term does not capture or leave room for political interests, like those of many movements in nineteenth-century imperial contexts, that relate to nations, national belonging, and national or imperial reform, but not to nations being or becoming independent, self-governing, exclusionary nation states. As we will see, for most of his life and career, Christopher Oscanyan’s many expressions of belonging to the Armenian, Ottoman Turkish, and American nations cannot be made meaningful through the lens of “nationalism” – read, per Smith, as either seeking to attain or

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Empire will simply not do, and we need to stop trying to squeeze the entirety of the breathtakingly large forms of empire making into this or that imperial model.” Mostafa Minawi, “New Texts Out Now: Mostafa Minawi, The Ottoman Scramble for Africa: Empire and Diplomacy in the Sahara and the Hijaz,” *Jadaliyya*, October 30, 2016. Available at: <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/33681> (Accessed October 24, 2022). In 2002, Thomas Bender launched an explicit endeavor to transnationalize and deprovincialize American history as a means of “‘thickening’ the history of the United States, making it both more complex and truer to lived experience and the historical record,” Thomas Bender, Introduction, in his edited *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 1-21, at 10.

<sup>38</sup> Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Rev. ed. (London; New York: Verso, 2006), 6. Emphasis mine.

<sup>39</sup> This is the *Merriam-Webster* definition used by Nicole Phelps in her *Americans and International Affairs to 1921* (San Diego: Cognella, 2022), 3. She is quoting “nationality,” Merriam-Webster.com. 2022. <https://www.merriam-webster.com> (Accessed August 18, 2022).

<sup>40</sup> Anthony Smith, “Diasporas and Homelands in History: The Case of the Classic Diasporas,” in Athena S. Leoussi, Allon Gal, and Anthony D. Smith (eds.), *The Call of the Homeland: Diaspora Nationalisms, Past and Present*. Vol. 9. IJS Studies in Judaica (Leiden: BRILL, 2010), 3. Emphasis mine.

maintain national autonomy. It was not until late in life that Oscanyan championed ethnically-homogenous, self-governing, or exclusionary nation states – and much of his work before that time is a testament to the shared practices of what would today be considered two separate countries, Armenia, and Turkey. Indeed, to use the terms “nation-state” or “nationalism” to analyze and characterize most of Christopher Oscanyan’s political work would be to impose our understanding of what eventually happened onto a past where Oscanyan didn’t know how things would turn out.

Instead of defaulting to narratives of the “nation-state” and “nationalism,” then, this thesis considers a range of national forms and activity in the nineteenth century, and thus uses transnational to convey “the movement of peoples, ideas, technologies and institutions” across more than one type of nation.<sup>41</sup> In so doing, it adheres to Sven Beckert’s understanding of transnational history as being “engaged in a project to reconstruct aspects of the human past that transcend any one nation-state, empire, or other politically defined territory.”<sup>42</sup> While I take heed of Jay Sexton and Kristin L Hoganson’s warning that “assuming all border-crossing histories to be transnational in nature writes the contemporary prominence of the nation-state anachronistically into the past, collapsing power relationships into national frames,” I am being intentional in my usage.<sup>43</sup> I am taking up Thomas Bender’s call to have “greater curiosity about

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<sup>41</sup> Ian Tyrrell, *Transnational Nation: United States History in Global Perspective Since 1789* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) (second edition), 3. First published in 2007.

<sup>42</sup> C.A. Bayly, Sven Beckert, Matthew Connolly, Isabel Hofmeyr, Wendy Kozol, and Patricia Seed, “AHR Conversation: On Transnational History,” *American Historical Review* (December 2006), 1441-1464, at 1445.

<sup>43</sup> Kristin Hoganson and Jay Sexton (eds.), “Introduction,” in *Crossing Empires: Taking U.S. History into Transimperial Terrain* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 1-22, at 11.

the nation itself”<sup>44</sup> and “historicize and clarify its meaning.”<sup>45</sup> My thesis seeks precisely to explore how national communities could be imagined before the world-wide acceptance of nation-state borders and citizenries, of a method of organizing and governing people and land in which nation-states, as Benedict Anderson notes, present themselves as having an “immemorial past” as well as a “limitless future,”<sup>46</sup> even if they only recently conceived of themselves as independent nations in the first place. As such, my thesis examines a time when the category of the nation focused “much more on the group of people and less on government” because, as noted above, “to include the government, one needs to use the term *nation-state*.”<sup>47</sup> I will thus look at the changing and variable nature of both empire and nation over the course of the century, during which time the ideas of “Armenia,” “Ottoman,” “Turkey,” and the “United States” all took on different meanings at different times and for different constituencies. Despite looking closely at the changing nature of empire, however, I find the term “transimperial” only partially suitable for my endeavor; indeed, both the Ottoman Empire and the American Empire must be understood as much as empires as nations, and I fully intend, as Sexton and Hoganson implore, to “call out empire when it appears.”<sup>48</sup> But to use “transimperial” as my primary language of analysis erases the Armenians, who did not have the power to govern an empire in the nineteenth century, but did have the power to nation-make;

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<sup>44</sup> Thomas Bender (ed.), “Introduction,” in *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 1-21, at 10.

<sup>45</sup> Thomas Bender, *A Nation Among Nations: America’s Place in World History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), 4-5.

<sup>46</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 11-12.

<sup>47</sup> Phelps, *Americans and International Affairs*, 3.

<sup>48</sup> Hoganson and Sexton, “Introduction,” 11.

Oscanyan's Armenian community – his Armenian nation – is central to understanding the boundary-crossing element of his story that the term transnational facilitates.

Thus, this thesis uses the concept of national *affiliation* to achieve a range of historiographical outcomes. First and foremost, “affiliation,” unlike the teleology of “nationalism,” grounds Oscanyan's actions firmly in *his* contemporary moment – not ours. Second, the vocabulary of affiliation emphasizes the *choices* Oscanyan made at any given historical juncture: the *acts* of associating with one or more specific nations with the goal of achieving specific results. In short, to talk of affiliation is to give Oscanyan agency as an historical actor. Third, the language of affiliation underlines the reality that a man like Oscanyan could hold *multiple* allegiances, orientations, and/or commitments. Such language helps us sculpt Oscanyan as a multiply-affiliated actor of the past and not flatten his complexities by binding them with an immutable and timeless “identity” (or even “multiple identities”).<sup>49</sup> Finally, analyzing Oscanyan's affiliations as self-governed actions inextricably tied to the moments and context in which they were fashioned means we can better see and evaluate the diverse, conflicting, and changing modes in which he imagined an array of political futures for himself and his nations over the course of six decades.

To this end, this thesis is in part a story of how a highly-visible but atypical figure like Oscanyan could productively *affiliate* with one or more nations to achieve a number of goals: above all, to develop and wield social and political influence in spite of absent, or limited,

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<sup>49</sup> For more, see Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, “Beyond ‘Identity’,” *Theory and Society* 29-1 (2000), 1-47; Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006).

institutional and representational power.<sup>50</sup> Oscanyan used his influence to espouse altered and improved circumstances, above all, but by no means exclusively, for the Armenian community of the Ottoman Empire. He promoted his vision of these better futures as an Ottoman subject, an Armenian Christian, and an American citizen, and he imagined these better futures differently at different times. This thesis will thus address what Ussama Makdisi has identified as a missing piece of conventional nineteenth-century Ottoman histories: namely, that “the nineteenth century was as much a laboratory for new ways of thinking about coexistence as it was the setting for intercommunal violence and separatist nationalisms.”<sup>51</sup>

### **The U.S. in the World, The World in the U.S.**

Until now, the majority of transnational U.S. history, in seeking to de-exceptionalize the United States and bring attention to global connections, has analyzed the United States *in the world*; scholars like Jason M. Colby, Emily Conroy-Krutz, Michel Gobat, Mary A. Renda, and Nancy Shoemaker have made important contributions to our understanding of American empire abroad.<sup>52</sup> Fewer works on this era have focused on what could be called the world *in* the United States, or on other forms of U.S.-world engagement that do not privilege the American worldview. As Konstantin Dierks observes in a forum on globalization and its limits

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<sup>50</sup> This idea is inspired by Asef Bayat’s work on the modern state and the political work of its “urban subjects... who structurally lack institutional [sic] power of disruption.” See Asef Bayat, *Life as Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 11.

<sup>51</sup> Ussama Makdisi, *Age of Coexistence: The Ecumenical Frame and the Making of the Modern Arab World* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019), 45.

<sup>52</sup> Jason M. Colby, *The Business of Empire: United Fruit, Race, and U.S. Expansion in Central America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013); Emily Conroy-Krutz, *Christian Imperialism: Converting the World in the Early American Republic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015); Michel Gobat, *Empire by Invitation: William Walker and Manifest Destiny in Central America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018); Mary A. Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Nancy Shoemaker, *Pursuing Respect in the Cannibal Isles: Americans in Nineteenth-Century Fiji* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021).

between the American Revolution and the Civil War, “the overriding question of ‘the world in the United States’ ...seems much less considered and researched.”<sup>53</sup> Working to fill this gap, scholars like Kariann Akemi Yokota, David Sim, and John Kuo Wei Tchen, have published research on U.S.-based Americans and American immigrants who maintained affiliations with Britain, Ireland, and China, and what their engagements can tell us about the development of American culture and politics.<sup>54</sup> Such work shows us how some American political decisions and national identities have been formed within U.S. borders yet *in response* to events and people in or from beyond them. This thesis builds on their approach, but also seeks to draw out marginalized American perspectives such as Oscanyan’s, analyze why they have been marginalized, and suggest what that marginalization can tell us about both the nineteenth century and history writing today. Above all, it aims to be a transnational history that includes the U.S. but is not exclusively defined by it.

A transnational examination of Christopher Oscanyan as an Armenian in the United States, then, not only helps us better understand the implications of the ‘world *in* the U.S.,’ but will also add a new, Armenian and Ottoman perspective to the growing body of historical scholarship on nineteenth-century American encounters with Ottoman or Islamic culture.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Emily Conroy-Krutz, Jay Cook, Konstantin Dierks, Ann V. Fabian, Courtney Fullilove, Amy S. Greenberg, Nicholas Guyatt, Justin Leroy, and Kariann Akemi Yokota, “Interchange: Globalization and Its Limits between the American Revolution and the Civil War,” *The Journal of American History* 103-2 (2016): 400-33, at 416.

<sup>54</sup> Kariann Akemi Yokota, *Unbecoming British: How Revolutionary America Became a Postcolonial Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); David Sim, *A Union Forever: The Irish Question and U.S. Foreign Relations in the Victorian Age* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013); John Kuo Wei Tchen, *New York before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1776-1882* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

<sup>55</sup> My use of “Islamic” subscribes to Shahab Ahmed’s conceptualization of Islam and his concomitant use of the word “Islamic.” See: Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015). As Kelly J. Shannon notes in her lecture on “Approaching the Islamic World,” “We need to do more to analyze and disseminate the history of U.S. relations with Islamic countries. Many topics, countries, themes, and time periods remain to be explored in this subfield, particularly regarding Muslim societies outside

Scholars like Karine Walther, Timothy Marr, and Christine Leigh Heyrman have produced important studies on this theme, especially the consolidation of Islamophobia or orientalism in American thought during this time.<sup>56</sup> Additionally, they all show how “the place of the Islamic world in the cultural consciousness of Americans from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries was more prominent than today’s citizens and scholars have previously supposed.”<sup>57</sup> As Timothy Marr explains, “this was in part because the Ottoman (or Turkish) Empire... was still a formidable political reality in world affairs – even if its power rested more on its past grandeur than on its declining contemporary clout.”<sup>58</sup> Susan Nance, the only scholar to tend to Oscanyan at any length, has written about a number of performers, including Oscanyan, who she argues were “engaged in the art of playing Eastern” and how the stories they conveyed to an American audience of Eastern “leisure, abundance, and contentment” offered and reinforced “the same vision promised by the consumer capitalist ideology that would come to define the American dream.”<sup>59</sup> At a fundamental level, all of these works discuss American representations of the Ottoman Empire and its people – and, largely, how those representations were used to create American national identity. But in so doing, they examine the Ottoman/Islamic-U.S. encounter almost exclusively from the perspective of the United

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the Arab Middle East. See her “Bernath Lecture: “Approaching the Islamic World,” *Diplomatic History* 44-3 (2020), 387-408, at 393.

<sup>56</sup> Timothy Marr, *The Cultural Roots of American Islamicism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Karine V. Walther, *Sacred Interests: The United States and the Islamic World, 1821-1921* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Christine Leigh Heyrman, *American Apostles: When Evangelicals Entered the World of Islam* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2015). See also: Robert Allison, *The Crescent Obscured: The United States and the Muslim World, 1776-1815* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000); Bruce A. Harvey, *American Geographics U.S. National Narratives and the Representation of the Non-European World, 1830-1865* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); Malini Johar Schueller, *U.S. Orientalisms: Race, Nation, and Gender in Literature, 1790-1890* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998).

<sup>57</sup> Marr, *American Islamicism*, 9.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Nance, *Arabian Nights*, 1-2. For a critique of her analysis of Oscanyan, see Chapter 4.

States and its white American citizens. Indeed, what feels especially lacking in these histories is the voice and perspective of the Ottoman people themselves. As Kelly Shannon observes in her lecture on U.S. relations with the Islamic world, historians must “do more to center the roles and perspectives of people from the Muslim world and to allow them to reply to the American-centric perspective that dominates so much of the existing literature.”<sup>60</sup> To this end, my thesis analyzes how a native Ottoman subject and naturalized American citizen used his *own* representations of the Ottoman Empire and its people to achieve his *own* personal, commercial, and political goals. This thesis thus helps us expand previous scholarship, which perhaps unintentionally replicates the idea that the “East” was only there when it was seen by “Western” eyes. Oscanyan’s story shows us just one of many *local perspectives* through which the Ottoman Empire could be seen, evaluated, and represented.

My use of a life story to examine larger trends in U.S., Ottoman, and Armenian history is my primary methodology. While scholars of Ottoman history like Christine Philliou, Dana Sajdi, and Benjamin Fortna have effectively used what Metin Atmaca calls “biographical microhistory” to study larger developments in the eighteenth to twentieth centuries via Ottoman Greek, Ottoman Arab, and Ottoman Circassian subjects, historians of the U.S. and the World have been slower to take up this approach.<sup>61</sup> Ussama Makdisi, while a historian of the Modern Middle

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<sup>60</sup> Shannon, “Bernath Lecture,” 407-408. She also notes, “While there are many books and articles in English that examine Americans’ perceptions of Muslims, we still know very little about how people in Muslim countries have viewed Americans and the United States. More studies that illuminate the actions, perspectives, motivations, hopes, fears, and aspirations of those living in the Islamic world will greatly enhance our understanding of the various ways in which Americans and people from the Islamic world have engaged with one another.”

<sup>61</sup> Metin Atmaca, “Biography, Global Microhistory, and the Ottoman Empire in World History,” Book Review in *Journal of World History* 29-3 (2018), 438-445, at 440. Dana Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus: Nouveau Literacy in the Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Levant* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013); Christine M. Philliou, *Biography of an Empire: Governing Ottomans in an Age of Revolution* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2010); Benjamin



East, has taken important steps in bringing a microhistorical lens to the study of the U.S. and the World by leveraging the story of a nineteenth-century Arab convert to American Protestantism to explore the “plural nature of the [US Missionary-Middle East] encounter...and the diversity of its sources.”<sup>62</sup> As he notes, with regards to the scholarship on nineteenth-century American missions in particular, such work has focused “rarely, if ever, on the actual *objects* of mission.”<sup>63</sup> He continues with a critique of the issue in more general terms, noting that “the history of America overseas, has in a crucial sense not yet been written. American historians working on U.S. interactions with foreign places and peoples have traditionally not been interested in seriously studying the worlds beyond American shores, let alone qualified to evoke them...American scholars have largely confined themselves to telling a U.S. story overseas, positive or negative, as if all that mattered was the “American” aspect of this story.”<sup>64</sup> As a “biographical microhistory” of an Ottoman Armenian *in* the United States, that takes into account and takes seriously the multiple national contexts and commitments of its protagonist, my project not only extends the field of Ottoman microhistory detailed above, but also charts new territory in the history of the United States.

### **Microhistory, Fragments, and the U.S. and the World**

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C. Fortna, *The Circassian: A Life of Esref Bey, Late Ottoman Insurgent and Special Agent* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>62</sup> Ussama Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 5-6

<sup>63</sup> Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven*, 7. Emphasis mine.

<sup>64</sup> Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven*, 7-8. Kariann Yokota makes a similar point: “While I recognize the importance of recent scholarship that focuses on recovering the history of the expansion of the United States into “remote” corners of the world, I would like to see the historiography of the period focus on the other side of the equation: the other entities involved in these global encounters.” Emily Conroy-Krutz et al., “Interchange,” at 417.

Historians of transnational history (or its kindred fields including world history, global history, and international history) have used microhistory to “relate the general to the particular” since the 1990s.<sup>65</sup> They have looked especially at the movement of people, goods, and ideas as well as cultural and religious exchange across communities. Many historians refer to this method of exploring the past as “global microhistory.”<sup>66</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam helped pioneer this endeavor in 1997 with the publication of his now-classic article on connected histories (yet another kindred designation) in “Early Modern Eurasia.”<sup>67</sup> Much of the work in global microhistory focuses precisely on the “early modern” period, working specifically against the imposition of a nation-state model that does not apply to this earlier period. Bernhard Struck, Kate Ferris, and Jacques Revel provide some of the most compelling arguments for “introducing micro-scale analysis into transnational or world history.”<sup>68</sup> First, they argue, it allows “for bringing actors and agency back into the analysis, something that is usually missing in macro-social analysis of cultures or societies.”<sup>69</sup> Second, as Sebouh Aslanian summarizes it, “biographical studies of cosmopolitan individuals who... led ‘global lives’ and on whom archival information happens to be abundant, illuminate in concrete and localized ways worldwide

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<sup>65</sup> John-Paul A. Ghobrial describes “global history in its many disguises – world history, transnational history, connected history, *histoire croisee*, international history, and more – who share a set of family resemblances immediately recognizable to outsiders,” in John-Paul A. Ghobrial, “Introduction: Seeing the World like a Microhistorian,” for *Past and Present*, Supplement 14 (2019), 1-22, at 6; on relating the general to the particular, see 13.

<sup>66</sup> According to Ghobrial, the first use of the term ‘global microhistory’ “appears to date to a 2010 article written by Tonio Andrade,” Ghobrial, “Introduction,” 14.

<sup>67</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia,” *Modern Asian Studies* 31-3 (1997).

<sup>68</sup> Sebouh David Aslanian, “A Life Lived Across Continents: The Global Microhistory of an Armenian Agent of the Compagnie des Indes Orientales, 1666-1688,” *Annales HSS* 73-1 (2018), 19-54, at 51-52.

<sup>69</sup> Bernhard Struck, Kate Ferris, and Jacques Revel, “Introduction: Space and Scale in Transnational History,” in “Size Matters: Scales and Spaces in Transnational and Comparative History,” a special issue of *International History Review* 33-4 (2011): 573–84, at 577.

forces of imperial, commercial, or biological expansion, integration, and connection.”<sup>70</sup> Lastly, again in the words of Struck, Ferris, and Revel, “zooming in and out from grand and large-scale questions to micro analysis, case studies of individuals or small groups and vice versa enables the historian to fulfil [their] craft and the ethic of the discipline by working close to primary sources.”<sup>71</sup> As a whole, this microhistorical methodology allows historians to combine “precise and situated studies with large-scale historical questions.”<sup>72</sup> In my effort to apply a micro-scale lens to the study of Ottoman, Armenian, and American history across the nineteenth century, I use a particular microhistorical approach described by John-Paul Ghobrial as “‘following’ a single name through the archives in a way that recalls the ‘nominative methodology’ that Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni first proposed in 1979.”<sup>73</sup> Like Ghobrial, however, I have also needed to “depart from their approach” of tracking names in a single local, context, and instead enter the realm of global history because of the way Oscanyan, like Ghobrial’s protagonist, “straddled multiple traditions of record-keeping that stretched from the Mediterranean to Europe to the Americas.”<sup>74</sup>

Why have historians of the U.S. and the world, who have productively followed the transnational turn to produce global American histories, been less keen than their colleagues in early modern global history to use a microhistorical lens? In the case of Christopher Oscanyan,

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<sup>70</sup> Aslanian, “A Life Lived Across Continents,” 53. Summarizing Struck, Ferris, and Revel, “Introduction,” 577

<sup>71</sup> Struck, Ferris, and Revel, “Introduction,” 577.

<sup>72</sup> Aslanian, “A Life Lived Across Continents,” 53.

<sup>73</sup> John-Paul A. Ghobrial, “Moving Stories and What They Tell Us: Early Modern Mobility Between Microhistory and Global History,” *Past and Present*, Supplement 14 (2019), 243-280, at 249. He is referring to the argument in Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni, ‘The Name and the Game: Unequal Exchange and the Historiographic Marketplace,’ in Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero (eds.), *Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe*, trans. Eren Branch (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), at 6. This is the English translation of the original 1979 article.

<sup>74</sup> Ghobrial, “Moving Stories and What They Tell Us,” 249.

writing a global microhistory is precisely what allows us to bridge the gaps between his multi-national contexts and make meaning from his story: *he* is the connective tissue. One reason for the larger reticence in the field could be that many historians, in adhering to U.S.-centrism while 'going global,' may find that the microhistorical lens cannot capture enough on its own. To operate both locally and globally requires attention to details on all sides of the encounter. Such work often demands significant foreign language training, or exposure to multiple geographic historiographies, both of which dictate considerable and often unrealistic resources and time. But the process, if attempted, can be quite illuminating. Indeed, mining the implications of a life lived across continents allows us, as Matthew Pratt Guterl says, to "use biography strategically, like a levee, to direct a story that might spill sideways into other arenas, to direct it forward and more forcefully along the transnational course."<sup>75</sup>

However, my thesis *is*, still, the story of a single person, whose existence itself is worth emphasizing and drawing out. Oscanyan's absence from traditional historical narratives makes it even more important to recover his lost voice. As the editors of *Untold Histories of the Middle East: Recovering Voices from the 19th and 20th Centuries* note, "all history writing chooses to give voice to certain people, ideas, facts, events and places, while consciously or unconsciously silencing others." The challenge, they argue, "is to create academic and cultural conditions which allow for a pluralism of voices. To the extent that a universally valid reconstruction of the past is impracticable, a multiplicity of narratives is required in order to reach what used to be

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<sup>75</sup> Matthew Pratt Guterl, "Comment: The Futures of Transnational History," *American Historical Review*, 118-1 (2013), 130-139, at 139.

called ‘historical truth’ by historians.”<sup>76</sup> This challenge of giving voice to an unvoiced historical protagonist, however, is often made harder by a relative lack of sources. With no known trove of letters and diaries of his own, with a life that can only be recovered in archival fragments, stories like Oscanyan’s are indeed more difficult to tell, and raise questions about the ability to draw conclusions from incomplete knowledge. That it is not a complete biography, a “comprehensive, cradle-to-grave portrait,”<sup>77</sup> however, does not detract from its value, from its ability to help create a “multiplicity of narratives” and, further, to tell a larger story that can only be seen through the microhistorical lens. *Every* history has gaps. Writing a history with *obvious* gaps just forces us to be thoughtful and transparent, attentive to the sources we *do* have and dedicated to making clear both what they are telling us, and what they are *not* telling us. At the best of times, fragments, and the gaps between can them, can be stunningly evocative in their incompleteness. They are rapid portals to another mood and mode, which somehow in their isolation allow an immediate moment of access to Oscanyan’s humanity: that he wrote his name in the NYU registrar in 1834 in Armenian letters; that he gave a lecture in 1863 to support his wife’s fundraising for the New York Medical College for Women; that he met a diarist friend in 1858 without wearing his fez, having shaved off his mustache, and looking “generally shabby and dilapidated.”<sup>78</sup> That he crossed a near frozen Mississippi with a

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<sup>76</sup> Selçuk Akşin Somel, Christoph K. Neumann, and Amy Singer, “Introduction: Re-sounding Silent Voices,” in Amy Singer, Christoph K. Neumann, and Selçuk Akşin Somel (eds.), *Untold Histories of the Middle East: Recovering Voices from the 19th and 20th Centuries* (London: Routledge, 2011), 1–22, 1-2. For attempts to do this, see Lessersohn, “Provincial Cosmopolitanism,” 528-556, and for a discussion of an unvoiced Armenian past see especially 528-533. For a “Jewish voice,” see Aron Rodrigue and Sarah Abrevaya Stein (eds.), *A Jewish Voice from Ottoman Salonica: The Ladino Memoir of Sa’adi Besalel a-Levi* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).

<sup>77</sup> Guterl, “Comment: The Futures of Transnational History,” 139.

<sup>78</sup> Thomas Butler Gunn. Diaries, Vol. 9. Missouri History Museum, 1857. August 28, 1858: [http://digital.lib.lehigh.edu/cdm4/nysp\\_viewer2.php?col=gunn&search=&ptr=1855&CISOPTR=1790](http://digital.lib.lehigh.edu/cdm4/nysp_viewer2.php?col=gunn&search=&ptr=1855&CISOPTR=1790) (p. 189) (Accessed June 7, 2022).

letter-writing Ralph Waldo Emerson in 1867, arriving together at the other side “almost fixed ice ourselves,” but restored by the “long run to the Tepfer House, & the volunteered rubbing of our hands by the landlord & clerks.”<sup>79</sup> Ultimately, what makes someone human is precisely the gaps in our knowledge of them: their inner world we can never fully know. I propose looking at the people of the past with a deep appreciation for the missing pieces, and the reminder they provide that our histories of them are nothing more than a best guess.

### **Thesis Outline**

In Chapter 1, *Erroneous Impressions (1818-1854)*, I first provide a social and political overview of the Ottoman Armenian community into which Christopher Oscanyan was born. Then, I draw out his early encounters and affiliations with the American missionaries in Constantinople, before examining his first lectures in the United States. In these lectures, Oscanyan’s Armenian and Ottoman Turkish viewpoints took center stage and exhibited his earliest public acts of national affiliation, establishing for us the initial measuring points by which we can go on to assess changes in Oscanyan’s politics and affiliations over time. His use of the lecture platform to, first, solicit funds for the Armenians of Turkey and, later, to correct “erroneous impressions” of the Ottoman Turks, also animates some of the basic components of an emerging professional ecosystem in which figures like Oscanyan were supported in using their experience and/or expertise to bridge entertaining instruction and political advocacy. The chapter concludes with Oscanyan’s return to Constantinople in the 1840s, and an analysis of how his work back in the Ottoman capital – especially his publication of a newspaper for the

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<sup>79</sup> “Letter to Edward Waldo Emerson, Des Moines, Iowa, December 19, 1867,” in Eleanor M. Tilton (ed.), *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Volume 9, 1860-1869* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 295-296.

local Armenian community – should be understood in relation to the concurrent Ottoman Tanzimat reforms as well as the transnational ideal of “civilization.” In all his early endeavors, from Constantinople to New York City, Oscanyan built on his expertise and experience from elsewhere to try to change the minds of his audiences. Despite its limited influence, his work at this time thus shows how the lecturing and newspaper industries both structured and facilitated efforts like Oscanyan’s to shape his communities, and even the world.

In the two decades following his return to the United States in the mid-1850s, Oscanyan established himself as a professional intermediary between Turkey and the United States. To “promot[e] mutual diplomatic relations”<sup>80</sup> between his two countries, Oscanyan worked across numerous jobs and genres to portray the Ottoman people as interesting, civilized, and equal to Americans. Thanks to his efforts, by 1858, he was already known as a “champion” of Turkey and the Turks; a “lecturer and writer in judicious vindication of his native country and its present rulers.”<sup>81</sup> Chapter 2, *Thin Place Diplomacy* (1854-1862), examines one sector of Oscanyan’s mid-century diplomatic work; in particular, his efforts to place Ottomans, Americans, and the British on equal terms by creating a middle ground or “thin place” between Constantinople and, first, London and, later, New York. A thin place – used traditionally in a spiritual sense to describe “those rare locales where the distance between heaven and Earth collapses” and “the places in the world where the walls are weak,” where “another dimension seems nearer than usual” – offers an effective description of the spaces that Oscanyan created for American and British

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<sup>80</sup> Letter from Christopher Oscanyan to John Hay, August 5, 1861.

<sup>81</sup> “The Latest News,” *The New York Herald* [New York], May 15, 1858.

audiences as a multiply affiliated, multi-lingual figure in 1850s London and New York.<sup>82</sup> He did this both through designated physical spaces (a wax figure museum, a Turkish coffee house, and a Turkish bath) as well as through acts of cultural and linguistic translation (through his lectures, translation, and his personal clothing). In each of these pursuits, Oscanyan attempted to transport friends, colleagues, and consumers to another plane of existence; he wanted his American and British audiences to think and even act like Ottoman Turks and take this essential first step in building mutual understanding-based diplomatic relations. His efforts, however, were largely unsuccessful; his interlocutors seemed resistant to thinking and behaving like Ottomans. Both the museum and the coffee house closed relatively quickly, and the Turkish bath never gathered enough support to open. Audiences also preferred to receive both lecturers and foreign visitors on their own, domestic terms. Despite these political failures, however, Chapter 2 shows how Oscanyan was nevertheless able to cultivate personal celebrity by leveraging his expertise, experience, and social networks in service of instructive entertainment and his related political goals.

In Chapter 3, *Answers to the Eastern Question* (1856-1862), we will see how throughout his career, these political goals – and Oscanyan’s political perspectives in general – were intimately tied to what is often called “the Eastern Question.” Between the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries, interested citizens, politicians, and commentators across the Ottoman Empire, Europe, and the United States used “the Eastern Question” as shorthand for

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<sup>82</sup> Oliver Burkeman, “This column will change your life: where heaven and Earth collide,” *The Guardian* [London], March 22, 2014. Quoted in: Eric Weiner, *Man Seeks God* (New York: Twelve, 2012). Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/mar/22/this-column-change-your-life-heaven-earth#:~:text=There%20is%20a%20name%20for,spirituality%20travelogue%2C%20Man%20Seeks%20God> (Accessed January 18, 2020).



wondering about the fate of the Ottoman Empire and especially how the maintenance or dissolution of this “Sick Man of Europe” would affect the fragile balance of power between the so-called “Great Powers” – primarily Britain, France, and Russia. This chapter will look at Oscanyan’s proposed solutions to the issue – his answers to the Eastern Question – during the late 1850s and early 1860s. In so doing, it will accomplish two main goals. First, it will shed light on American awareness of the Eastern Question prior to the relatively more familiar stories of their later engagement with the Ottoman state from the 1890s to the end of World War I. Second, this chapter brings the voice of an Ottoman *himself* into the conversation about the Eastern Question and the fate of the Ottoman Empire during that time. Even when Oscanyan was living in New York City and not based in Ottoman territory, his political interests, ambitions, and emotions were always and markedly Ottoman Armenian. Chapter 3 will thus parse Oscanyan’s engagement with the Eastern Question in and through three separate channels: his 1857 book *The Sultan and His People* and, in particular, what he wrote about “the future of Turkey” for an American audience in the wake of the Crimean War (1853-56); the available material on Oscanyan’s pursuit of an American diplomatic position in the Ottoman Empire and his failure to attain one; and, lastly, a selection of Oscanyan’s anonymously published columns in the *New York Herald* from 1860-61 in which he tackled the Eastern Question as well as missionary overreach in Turkey.

Overall, Oscanyan’s efforts to ameliorate the Eastern Question during this period show how his expertise and social networks, which he utilized to pursue various forms of instructive entertainment in Chapters 1 and 2, could be leveraged outside the realms of entertainment, education, and leisure. In many ways, the celebrity and credibility he cultivated through

instructive entertainment also gave him a platform from which he could communicate in more classically political ways (policy recommendations, diplomatic pursuits, and political editorials). Despite the opportunities provided by such a professional ecosystem, however, Oscanyan's political ambitions went unmet, and his political advice, unheeded. Oscanyan's failures in this regard – his failures to influence – reveal in part the limits at this time of American government engagement with the Middle East. But private groups weren't motivated by Oscanyan to engage politically with Ottoman people either, as they had been, for example, in giving aid and sympathy to Ottoman Greeks during the Greek Revolution. Evidently there was no appetite for most Americans to be on the side of the Ottoman Empire, or even to support Ottoman Christians in the absence of massacre or violence.

Chapter 4, *Spectacular Authenticity* (1863-1868) lays bare the fundamental tension between Oscanyan's desire to correct erroneous impressions of the Turks and the increasingly spectacular professional context in which he operated: a context that rendered it beneficial to him to utilize the very stereotypes he was aiming to undo in order to attract an audience. This spectacular context makes it impossible to ignore what had perhaps been the case all along: delivered in a world that increasingly conflated intercultural education and entertainment, Oscanyan's message often risked being superseded by the entertaining forms it took. What's more, his Turkish nativity, while the very source of his expertise and authority to instruct, at the same time frequently rendered Oscanyan himself a spectacle and a curiosity. His audiences regularly engaged with his nativity as a visual encounter, a satisfying end in itself – not necessarily as a cue to absorb his multifaceted worldview and correct their erroneous impressions. While Oscanyan clearly understood the audience-attracting power of his nativity,

and explicitly tailored his performances to increase his public appeal, this chapter asks if there is a difference between attracting an audience and influencing one.

To do this, Chapter 4 examines Oscanyan's use of spectacle, by which I mean forms of presentation that privileged and rewarded the act of looking, to pursue his diplomatic goals. During the 1860s, and especially during the Civil War (when he drew his largest audiences and received the most media coverage), Oscanyan used a widening range of popular media and tactics to draw a crowd. Through an examination of his 1860s lectures and their visual reception, his use of photography during this period, and the ways in which he deployed the topic of slavery both to attract an audience *and* work towards his goal of correcting erroneous impressions of the Turks, this chapter explores Oscanyan's drive to use spectacular forms to represent "authentic" Turkish realities – and the limits of those forms in meeting sincere instructional goals.

Following but by no means a consequence of this most spectacular phase of his career, Oscanyan was finally granted an official political appointment: he was named Ottoman Consul General in New York City. Chapter 5, *From Ottoman Consul to Armenian Nationalist (1868-1895)*, looks at the arc of Oscanyan's politics in the final three decades of his life, tracing his journey from Ottoman Consul General in New York to vocal Armenian nationalist. It examines what changed, when, and why, as well as the modes by which Oscanyan expressed his changing politics (and to what ends, and to whom). I argue that during the second half of his career, owing at least in part to the demands of emerging zero-sum Armenian and Turkish nationalisms, Oscanyan reconfigured his multifaceted Ottoman imperial worldview into the simpler languages of Christian humanitarianism and Armenian separatism. As we will see,

Oscanyan's political pivot in the 1870s occurred in lockstep with professional disappointment and in the immediate run-up to what historians call the internationalization of the Armenian question. By the 1880s, Oscanyan's work was increasingly aimed either at the growing Armenian-American community itself, or at encouraging a humanitarian diplomacy between Americans and Armenians exclusively. By the end of his life, as the Ottoman state began to perpetrate large-scale massacres of its Armenians, Oscanyan turned against Turkey entirely. A new era of U.S.-Armenian engagement, grounded in encouraging U.S. humanitarian commitment to the Armenians, was just beginning. Though Oscanyan did not live to see this era himself, his life and work provides a meaningful pre-history. The relationship between entertainment, diplomacy, and U.S.-Ottoman relations was about to take a new form.

# Chapter 1

## ***Erroneous Impressions (1818-1854)***

### **Chapter Overview**

This chapter will first provide a social and political overview of the Ottoman Armenian community into which Oscanyan was born. Then, it will draw out his early encounters and affiliations with the American missionaries in Constantinople, before examining his first lectures in the United States. In these lectures, Oscanyan's Armenian and Ottoman Turkish viewpoints took center stage and exhibited his earliest public acts of national affiliation, establishing for us the initial measuring points by which we can go on to assess changes in Oscanyan's politics and affiliations over time. His use of the lecture platform, first, to solicit funds for the Armenians of Turkey and, later, to correct "erroneous impressions" of the Ottoman Turks, also animates some of the basic components of an emerging professional ecosystem in which figures like Oscanyan were supported in using their experience and expertise to bridge entertaining instruction and political advocacy. The chapter concludes with Oscanyan's return to Constantinople in the 1840s, and an analysis of how his work back in the Ottoman capital – especially his publication of a newspaper for the local Armenian community – should be understood in relation to the concurrent Ottoman Tanzimat reforms as well as the transnational ideal of "civilization." In all his endeavors, from Constantinople to New York City, Oscanyan built on his expertise and experience from elsewhere to try to change the minds of his audiences. Despite its limited influence, his work at this time thus shows how the lecturing

and newspaper industries both structured and facilitated efforts like Oscanyan's to shape his communities, and even the world.

### **Being Armenian in the Ottoman Empire**

By and large, the Armenian community, or nation, into which Oscanyan was born defined itself not by cartographic precision but by a shared collective history and an established position within an Islamic Ottoman empire that for hundreds of years had effectively organized the ethno-confessional differences of its subjects to fulfill the needs of its imperial center at Constantinople.<sup>83</sup> Stretching from Hungary to the Arabian Peninsula at its territorial peak in the late seventeenth century, the Ottoman Empire in the early nineteenth century experienced a series of existential threats and territorial losses that at least in part compelled an early wave of policies aimed at creating a more centralized imperial state. As Donald Quataert notes of this period, policies ranging from "bureaucratic reform, fiscal centralization, and military action [to] clothing regulations... were powerful royal tools in Sultan Mahmud's effort to control and reshape state and society" during his reign (1808-39).<sup>84</sup> Amidst the "Greek War for Independence" (1821-1831), the Russo-Turkish War (1828-29), and the temporary seizure of Ottoman Syria by Muhammad Ali Pasha's armed forces (1831-33), these political tools "aimed to dismantle the power of the military and religious classes in favor of a new bureaucracy of

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<sup>83</sup> As Richard Antaramian notes: "Empires enforce regimes of difference to ensure a system of inequality that benefits the ruling class; the benefits of any imperial enterprise ultimately flow back to the center." Antaramian, *Brokers of Faith*, 8. See also: Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Ronald Grigor Suny, "The Empire Strikes Out" in Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin (eds.), *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 23-66.

<sup>84</sup> Donald Quataert, "Clothing Laws, State, and Society in the Ottoman Empire, 1720-1829," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 29-3 (1997), 403-425, at 403. See also M. Sukru Hanioglu's chapter on "The Dawn of the Age of Reform" in *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), at 55-71.

administrators and scribes.”<sup>85</sup> The threats and disruptions of the early nineteenth century – especially the Greek Revolution and its ultimate resolution, facilitated by Britain, France, and Russia – also demonstrated for the first time that the “survival of the sultanate depended as much on European policies as on Ottoman agency.”<sup>86</sup> As we will see over the course of the thesis, from this point onward, there but for the grace of Europe went the Ottoman Empire.<sup>87</sup>

The state-centralizing and European-facing recalibration that was starting to be enacted during Oscanyan’s childhood occurred after centuries of an Ottoman imperial rule that prioritized legal pluralism and a “horizontal network structure” in which the state “*share[d]* sovereignty with a variety of partners [people, groups, and institutions] in imperial politics.”<sup>88</sup> These partners included the Armenian Church, tax collectors, merchants, bankers, etc. What’s more, for most of its existence, the Ottoman Empire was a “political and social world where interpersonal relationships got things done.”<sup>89</sup> Importantly, these people and “partners in imperial politics” were not all of the same ethno-confessional background. During Oscanyan’s early years, no single ethno-confessional Ottoman group comprised a majority of the Ottoman population. Additionally, most groups were widely dispersed and mixed throughout the empire.<sup>90</sup> To put it another way, communal differences were not only a fact of empire in the

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<sup>85</sup> Quataert, “Clothing Laws,” 403.

<sup>86</sup> Makdisi, *Age of Coexistence*, 50.

<sup>87</sup> What this dynamic entailed, when, and for whom, would change over the course of the century. This ongoing international negotiation was dubbed ‘The Eastern Question’ and will be discussed at length in Chapter 3.

<sup>88</sup> Antaramian, *Brokers of Faith*, 4. Emphasis mine.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>90</sup> Fatma Müge Göçek, “The Decline of the Ottoman Empire and the Emergence of Armenian, Turkish, and Arab Nationalisms,” in Göçek (ed.), *Social Constructions of Nationalism in the Middle East* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 22.

Ottoman territories: for most of the empire's existence, these differences were *used* by the state to create advantageous outcomes for the ruling class.

In light of these early state-centralization efforts, then – accelerated by full-body shocks like Greek independence – the very mode in which the empire had long managed ethno-confessional diversity was starting to change. Historically considered *dhimmi* [Arabic, lit: “protected person”] or *reaya/rayah* [Arabic, lit: “subject”] of the Ottoman Sultan, non-Muslims like Oscanyan's family were by and large guaranteed “life, property, and freedom of religious practice in exchange for loyalty and subjection to certain discriminatory practices, including sartorial restrictions, exclusion from the military, and the payment of extraordinary taxes to the imperial treasury.”<sup>91</sup> However, for most of the empire's existence, these “rights and responsibilities,” were “determined on an ad hoc basis and were generally the result of negotiation between a clergyman and the government.”<sup>92</sup> In the 1820s and 1830s, the Ottoman government encouraged Ottoman Armenian representatives, still engaged in horizontal acts of influence, to re-conceive of the Armenian community as a collective, structured body that “collaborated with the imperial state... to create top-down governance.”<sup>93</sup> In other words, through these early reforms, the state sought more direct, standardized control over its subjects.

While most Armenians at this time did not ascribe distinct borders to the historical territory of Armenia, of which they considered themselves descendants, the “geographic term Armenia was broadly used [by Armenians] to characterize the eastern[most] provinces of the

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<sup>91</sup> Antaramian, *Brokers of Faith*, 8.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-10.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.



Ottoman Empire,” now eastern Turkey, where the majority of the Armenian population at this time also lived.<sup>94</sup> As we will see later in this chapter, Oscanyan, at least in the 1830s, provided further specificity as to the location of Armenia, depicting it as a territory outlined by ancient boundaries “on the east by Media and Albania, on the North by Iberia and Colchis, on the West by Assyria, and on the South by Mesopotamia.”<sup>95</sup> This Armenian territorial height existed only briefly during the reign of Tigran the Great (95-55 BCE). Oscanyan almost certainly derived these parameters from the same ancient and contemporary Armenian authors cited to the same end by the American missionaries, discussed below.<sup>96</sup>

To see Armenia as an ancient territory was also then to see a long history of subsequent takeovers by Turkic tribal dynasties (between 1071 and the 1400s); the dispersion of Armenian merchants, ecclesiastics, and other men of learning from their historical homeland to cities like Venice, Vienna, and Calcutta; and the impact of these takeovers and dispersions on the political circumstance of the vast majority of Armenians as nineteenth-century subjects of a centralizing

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<sup>94</sup> As Dzovinar Derderian notes of the fifty years between 1820 and 1870, “regions in the Russian Empire that overlap with the current Republic of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabagh were not taken into consideration in [Ottoman Armenian] discourses on Armenia.” Dzovinar Derderian, “Nation-Making and the Language of Colonialism: Voices from Ottoman Van in Armenian Print Media and Handwritten Petitions (1820s to 1870s),” (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2019), 2.

<sup>95</sup> “Armenia,” *New-York American for the Country* [New York], November 24, 1835.

<sup>96</sup> Mik’ayel Ch’amch’yants’ and John Avdall (trans). *History of Armenia by Father Michael Chamich, Translated from the Original Armenian by Johannes Avdall* (Calcutta: Printed at Bishop’s College Press, by H. Townsend, 1827), originally written in 1784; Movses Khorenatsi and Robert W. Thomson (trans). *History of the Armenians* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), originally written in the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD. Both works were cited in Eli Smith and H. G. O. Dwight, *Researches of the Rev. E. Smith and Rev. H.G.O. Dwight in Armenia: Including a Journey through Asia Minor, and into Georgia and Persia, with a Visit to the Nestorian and Chaldean Christians of Oormiah and Salmas* (Boston; New York: Crocker and Brewster; J. Leavitt, 1833).

Islamic empire (the Ottomans).<sup>97</sup> This historical narrative was profoundly important, too, for Oscanyan's ideas regarding what was best for himself and his Armenian people.

When Oscanyan spoke about Armenians, as a people, during the 1830s, he did not only consider inhabitants of historical Armenia. Rather, he subscribed to and spoke about an “abstract [Armenian] cultural identity that revolved around language and religion,” which notion was “was popular with the Istanbul elite.”<sup>98</sup> As Benedict Anderson notes, all types of communities, not just nations or nation-states, “are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by *the style in which they are imagined*.”<sup>99</sup> Which is to say, Oscanyan's Armenian nation – as a political entity of people – was *not* imagined in the style of an independent, exclusionary, nation-state; rather, it was imagined as an ancient community, currently subject to a Turko-Islamic empire. With whom, precisely, this community began and ended – or where it was located – was largely immaterial for Oscanyan and his goals regarding national and imperial governance, reform, and education. Thus, regardless of how Oscanyan defined – or chose not to define – this abstract body of Armenians, whenever he spoke publicly of Armenians, he usually started his story with the Bible and Noah, from whose son Armenians are said to descend. Armenians today are still known colloquially as the first nation to adopt Christianity in AD 301, as well as for their distinctive alphabet, the transliteration of which renders the range of nineteenth-century Latinized spellings that may be evident throughout this thesis.

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<sup>97</sup> For a concise summary, see Razmik Panossian's chapter, “A Multilocal Awakening: The Consolidation and Radicalisation of Collective Identity in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century,” in his *The Armenians: From Kings and Priests to Merchants and Commissars* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), at 128-187.

<sup>98</sup> Antaramian, *Brokers of Faith*, 124-125.

<sup>99</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6. Emphasis mine.

With this background on Armenia and the Ottoman Armenian community in mind, we can now turn to recover a telling detail about Oscanyan's parents (about whom we have little additional information), and thus begin our account of Oscanyan's life. It is in the 1880 census record for 134-136 Baltic Street in Brooklyn, New York, that Christopher Oscanyan left a single clue about the life of his family before he was born. When asked to indicate his place of birth, "naming State or Territory of United States, or the Country, if of foreign birth," Oscanyan told the census taker: "Turkey." For the next two questions, which asked the "Place of Birth of the Father [and Mother] of this person, naming the State or Territory of United States, or the Country, if of foreign birth," Oscanyan named "Armenia" for both of his parents.<sup>100</sup>

Because Oscanyan indicated that his parents were born in "Armenia," we know that they most likely were born and raised somewhere in the eastern Ottoman provinces, and moved to the Ottoman capital sometime before 1818, the year of Oscanyan's birth. His parents must have had the means to relocate but were probably not wealthy; they were likely artisans of some stripe.<sup>101</sup> On Oscanyan's father, an American missionary told the American readers of the *Missionary Herald* that his baptismal, or first, name was Oscan, as "Oscanyan" means "son of Oscan." Thus Mr. Oscan, as the American missionaries referred to him, "may be called, by way of distinction, Oscan Manoogean, his father's baptismal name having been Manoog."<sup>102</sup> In

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<sup>100</sup> Tenth Census of the United States, 1880. (NARA microfilm publication T9, 1,454 rolls). Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29. National Archives, Washington, D.C. The 1880 census was the first to include the state or country of birth of each person's father and mother.

<sup>101</sup> For more on Armenian migration during this period, see: Yasar Tolga Cora, "Transforming Erzurum/Karin: The Social and Economic History of a Multi-Ethnic Ottoman City in the Nineteenth Century," (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, The University of Chicago, 2016).

<sup>102</sup> "Constantinople," in *Report of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, Read at the Twenty-Fifth Annual Meeting, held in the City of Utica, October 8, 9 and 10, 1834* (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1835), 454-455. Hereafter, all ABCFM Reports will be written as "ABCFM Report from --."

this way, we know our only piece of information about Oscanyan's paternal grandfather: his name was Manoog.

Because Oscanyan put "Turkey" as the country in which he was born, we know that Oscanyan placed the Ottoman capital (Constantinople) in "Turkey." This was not, however, a designation that the Ottoman ruling class would have used to describe their territory in this period. Nor would they have called it an Ottoman "nation." The moniker "Turkey" was largely a European and American designation for the imperial center of the Ottoman territories; this is a designation that Oscanyan either internalized or purposefully adopted. For our purposes, "Turkey" is a meaningful category because Oscanyan's European and American contemporaries *operationalized* the term *as a nation* for the benefit of European and American audiences who were largely ignorant of Ottoman geopolitics. It is thus a meaningful designation with which Oscanyan affiliated to achieve personal and political goals.

### **The American Missionaries (ABCFM) and Early U.S.-Ottoman Relations**

Into this arena of early efforts towards centralization, pronounced territorial loss or threats of loss, and a restrained but still-present horizontal network structure that incentivized relationship-building to garner social and political influence, American missionaries first arrived in the Ottoman capital in 1831, when Oscanyan was thirteen years old. Established in New England in 1810 by recent graduates of Williams College in Massachusetts, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) was an interdenominational Protestant organization created to "bring about the conversion of the whole world."<sup>103</sup> Between 1812 and

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<sup>103</sup> Conroy-Krutz, *Christian Imperialism*, 1.

1840, the ABCFM sent missionaries first to British India, then to Tennessee and the Cherokee Nation, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii), China, Singapore and Siam (Thailand), Greece, Cyprus, Turkey, Syria, the Holy Land and Persia (Iran), as well as West Africa and Southern Africa (the Zulus). Their missionary endeavor was in many ways a natural expression of ongoing evangelical and expansionist currents in the United States – especially the acts-oriented religious zeal of what has become known as the Second Great Awakening – but could also be distinguished, as Emily Conroy-Krutz argues, by a globally-minded “Christian imperialism” that was not, at this early moment, prominent in American foreign policy circles.<sup>104</sup>

Arriving in the “Bible lands” of Jerusalem in 1819, and then moving to Beirut in 1823, the American missionaries first tried to convert the local Jewish and Arab populations but were met with considerable resistance.<sup>105</sup> After over a decade of failures in the Levant, the American missionaries turned their attention to the Armenians. From May 1830 to May 1831, two American Congregational missionaries from New England, Rev. Harrison Gray Otis Dwight and Rev. Eli Smith, undertook an “arduous exploring tour through Armenia” – which territory they described as being “an inland country at the eastern extremity of Asia Minor, lying at short distances from the Mediterranean on the southwest, the Black Sea on the northwest, the Caspian on the northeast, and at much greater distance from the Persian gulf on the

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 5. Conroy-Krutz writes, “If traditional interpretations have described the early republic as continental and republican, the Christian imperialism of the missionaries reveals that this was not a universal worldview. Missionaries and their supporters were, on the contrary, international and imperial in their thinking about their nation in the world.”

<sup>105</sup> Ussama Makdisi, *Faith Misplaced: The Broken Promise of U.S.-Arab Relations: 1820-2001* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2010), 39.

southeast.”<sup>106</sup> In 1833, they published their exhaustive correspondence with the missionary headquarters in New England as a book titled *Researches of the Rev. E. Smith and Rev. H.G.O. Dwight in Armenia: Including a Journey Through Asia Minor, and Into Georgia and Persia*. The missionary authors of this book were focused on evaluating the Armenian community’s existing churches and schools – which, to their eyes, were lacking both physically and spiritually. As Rev. Smith wrote of the schools in Constantinople: “it is painful to find that none of the modern improvements in primary education have been introduced, even in this most enlightened part of the Armenian nation.”<sup>107</sup>

The missionaries turned to the Armenians because they considered them to be degenerate Christians more amenable to missionary efforts than the Jewish and Arab populations of Beirut. Throughout *Researches*, Smith referred to the Armenians as “nominal Christians” in a “perishing state” with “superstitious rites and ceremonies” who “feel secure in courses which they know to be wicked.”<sup>108</sup> Not surprisingly, Smith regularly evoked common stereotypes that we will encounter through this thesis, especially the “Asiatic want of energy.”<sup>109</sup> And yet, Smith concluded, “their reformation is practicable.” “Christians in Mohammedan countries are accessible to missionaries,” he determined – that is, “no Turkish ruler will... hinder [the missionary].”<sup>110</sup> “Only from Christians,” he noted, “may opposition be expected to originate.” Of their sponsors in New England they thus asked: “allow us to instruct

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<sup>106</sup> “Constantinople,” ABCFM Annual Report from 1832, 4; Smith and Dwight, *Researches*, Loc 212.

<sup>107</sup> Smith and Dwight, *Researches*, Loc 1058.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, Loc 10163; *Ibid.*, Loc 10176; *Ibid.*, Loc 10188; *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, Loc 5387.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, Loc 10188.

and enlighten them by schools, by circulating Bibles and tracts, by religious conversation, and expounding the Scriptures.”<sup>111</sup>

Perhaps above all, the Revs. Smith and Dwight expressed their desire to “enlighten” the Armenians because these “nominal Christians” were, in their *degenerate* state, unable to reform the “Mohammedan”: “Preach to him Christianity,” Smith wrote, “and the Mosley [sic] understands you to invite him to embrace a religion which he has always regarded as beneath him, and as less beneficial than his own.”<sup>112</sup> As such, these “corrupt forms of Christianity have prejudiced Moslems against it.” If the nominal Christians were to be converted, however, and could present to Muslims “Christianity in its purity, exemplified in lives of piety” then “their apology for rejecting it must vanish; the glory of their own religion must be turned into shame.” He continued,

Let every missionary station raise up from the corrupt mass of nominal Christians around it, a goodly number of true followers of the Lamb, and it will be a city set on a hill which cannot be hid, a light to lighten the gentiles also. Had the churches of the East remained as when the apostles planted them, how long since would Mohammedanism have shrunk away from their holy contact? Or rather, would it have ever existed? Restore to them their primitive purity, therefore, and the prop upon which Mohammedanism has so long stayed itself is gone, and it must fall.<sup>114</sup>

Smith considered that the “god of this world” had thus left open a “point of attack” – an “entrance into the heart of our enemy’s territory” – through which Christianity could conquer Mohammedanism (Islam).<sup>115</sup> At this time, Americans in general largely understood Islam through “Christian eschatological interpretations that viewed Islam (at times, alongside

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., Loc 10202.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., Loc 10234.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., Loc 10243.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., Loc 10254.

Catholicism) as a representation of the Anti-Christ.”<sup>116</sup> This belief, as Karine Walther shows, “helped fuel a missionary movement that prompted hundreds of Americans to move to the Ottoman Empire and other Muslim-majority countries over the course of the nineteenth century.” As we will see in this thesis, as the years progressed, and the American missionary presence in these territories grew, their “power, financial resources, and influence with the US government led them to play an outsized role in shaping American diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire.”<sup>117</sup> With the Revs. Smith and Dwight’s pivot to work with the Armenians, the relationship between the United States and Turkey, predicated on “religious beliefs about the superiority of the [Protestant] Christian faith,” was just beginning.

On his return to Constantinople from Armenia, Rev. H.G.O Dwight was paired with the Rev. William Goodell, also a Congregational minister from New England, to set up the Americans’ first missionary station in Turkey. “Without power or influence or even permission,” Goodell wrote reflectively in 1853, they “quietly seated themselves down in the very city of the Sultan.”<sup>118</sup> Goodell and Dwight worked swiftly to set up Lancasterian schools in the Ottoman capital, a popular form of schooling in the early nineteenth century in which more advanced students would help the teacher by helping other students: “He who teaches, learns,” went the motto of the movement’s founder, Joseph Lancaster. Goodell and Dwight also hosted Bible readings and services, and undertook serious language study in the Turkish, Armenian, Greek, Ladino (Judeo-Spanish), French, and Italian languages, some combination of which they

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<sup>116</sup> Karine V. Walther, “Islamic World Encounters,” in Kristin Hoganson and Jay Sexton (eds.), *Cambridge History of America and the World Volume II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 669-692, at 669.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> William Goodell, *The Old and the New*, (New York: M. W. Dodd, 1853), 52. Quoted in Cary Corwin Conn, “John Porter Brown, Father of Turkish American Relations, An Ohioan at the Sublime Porte, 1832-1872,” (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, The Ohio State University, 1973), at 42.



understood to be categorically necessary for communicating with the local, multilingual community of Armenians, Turks, Jews, Greeks, and “Franks.” While their goal was of course to convert or “enlighten” the native inhabitants, they prescribed no formal conversion process so much as they paid attention to the language and sincerity of their “promising” local associates. In 1839, for example, Rev. Dwight noted of a particular Armenian banker that the missionaries “do not regard [him] as a truly converted man, though, of course, we cannot judge his heart. He is much enlightened, and has evinced, at different times, much seriousness.”<sup>119</sup>

Intimately tied to the idea of enlightenment was the idea of civilization. As Jürgen Osterhammel notes in his global history of the nineteenth century, while “for thousands of years, some human groups have considered themselves superior to their neighbors,”<sup>120</sup> it was not until around the year 1800 that “civilizing missions began to be practiced in grand style.”<sup>121</sup> These missions were “associated with the idea that civilized people have a task, or even a duty, to propagate their cultural values and way of life” – a “self-given assignment to transmit one’s norms and institutions to others.”<sup>122</sup> Colonizing state agents as well as religious missionaries could use this framework to underwrite their endeavors. As Conroy-Krutz explains, for the British and American missionary, “civilization... could lead to Christianization.”<sup>123</sup> For this reason, missionaries like the Revs. Dwight and Goodell not only endeavored to spread “civilization” through their work in foreign lands – for example, through building schools – but also looked for already-established signs of civilization in those they sought to convert as

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<sup>119</sup> ABCFM Report from September 1840, from an entry regarding November 1839, at 354.

<sup>120</sup> Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), at 826.

<sup>121</sup> Osterhammel, *Transformation of the World*, 828.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 826-827.

<sup>123</sup> Conroy-Krutz, *Christian Imperialism*, 30.

promising indicators of future success. Across the century, especially for the European Powers, this civilizational framework “became a political tool to underpin the justification of empire and the acquisition of new colonies.”<sup>124</sup> In particular, an “insufficient degree of civilization,” Davide Rodogno elaborates, could be used by European Powers as a pretext for intervention.<sup>125</sup>

Sometime between 1831 and 1833, a young Khachadur “Khatchig” Oscanyan first met the American missionaries. The earliest named references occur in the ABCFM Annual Report from 1834 regarding a period in 1833 when a “Mr. Hoskins” translated Rev. Dwight’s English geography of Turkey “into Armenian for the Armenians.”<sup>126</sup> In a July 22, 1833 entry from the journal of Rev. Dwight, also published in the Annual Report from 1834, Dwight described a tour through the Sea of Marmara in which “Mr. Hoskins” was present along with Rev. Goodell and an Armenian teacher named Boghos Physikos.<sup>127</sup> While the American missionaries did regularly Anglicize the names of their “native” associates, “Hoskins” is quite a departure from “Oscanyan.” Two pieces of evidence tell us that this Mr. Hoskins from 1833 is Christopher Oscanyan. First, in her published letters, Rev. Dwight’s wife, Mrs. Elizabeth B. Dwight – who died of the bubonic plague in Constantinople in 1837 – wrote on March 2, 1834 that “a young Armenian in our family, by the name of Hoskins” was then “seeking a passage for America, expecting to receive an education in New-York.” To the friend to whom she was writing she added, “should Providence ever throw him in your way, I doubt not you will be pleased to have

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<sup>124</sup> Ozan Ozavci, *Dangerous Gifts: Imperialism, Security, and Civil Wars in the Levant, 1798-1864* (Oxford University Press, 2021), 182

<sup>125</sup> Davide Rodogno, “European Legal Doctrines on Intervention and the Status of the Ottoman Empire within the “Family of Nations” Throughout the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of the History of International Law* 18 (2016), 5–41, at 6.

<sup>126</sup> ABCFM Report from 1834, at 54. This entry was first published in February.

<sup>127</sup> ABCFM Report from 1834, at 216.

an acquaintance with him. He already speaks English well, and is an interesting youth, above most of his nation, though not pious.”<sup>128</sup>

Second, Oscanian’s sister, Eliza, was also invoked by Mrs. Dwight as “Eliza Hoskins” before later being called “Eliza Oscanian.” In a letter dated September 22, 1833, Mrs. Dwight wrote to her nieces that “we have taken an Armenian girl about twelve years old to educate if she is contented, whose name is Eliza Hoskins.” She further explained to her nieces how Eliza dressed, to give them an idea of the “Armenian costume” – though she added that the young Armenian girl was “making herself a frock in English style” and that they had just fitted a *bonnet* for her.”<sup>129</sup> By 1835, Mrs. Dwight was referring to Eliza as “Eliza Oscanian,” writing to her sister, for example, that “Eliza Oscanian sends her love; she is a very bright girl, and speaks English with as much ease as her brother did when he left.” Ever concerned with piety, she added: “She has made a good deal of improvement since she came to us in almost every respect, yet there is room for a good deal more; above all we want to see her truly pious.”<sup>130</sup>

The American missionaries first referred to Christopher, or Khachadour, Oscanian by his Armenian name in an 1834 reference to his work in 1833 as a translator: “Mr. Oscanian,” the report stated, “translated [an English geography of Turkey] into Armenian for the Armenians.”<sup>131</sup> This appears to be a second citation of the same work attributed above to Oscanian as “Hoskins.” His work as the Armenian translator of “Murray’s Abridged English grammar” was also mentioned twice in the 1835 ABCFM Annual Report, at which time of

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<sup>128</sup> Rev. H.G.O. Dwight, *Memoir of Mrs. Elizabeth B. Dwight, Including an Account of the Plague of 1837* (New York: M.W. Dodd 1840), 215.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 211. Emphasis author’s.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

<sup>131</sup> ABCFM Report from 1834, at 48.

publication he was already in the United States.<sup>132</sup> Of the need for such a grammar at this time, Dwight wrote, “we regard this as a very important book, as the number of Armenians who wish to learn the English language is constantly increasing, and there are very many reasons why we should encourage such a desire.” It is worth noting that immediately prior to this section on Oscanyan’s Armenian translation of the “very important” Murray’s abridged grammar, Dwight described his translation of a children’s book into modern Armenian. He added: “as the people here are all children in intellect, I think this work will be admirably adapted to their wants.”<sup>133</sup>

Oscanyan may have been mentioned by, and thus associated with the American missionaries even earlier than 1833. In a journal entry by Rev. Goodell from August 1831, which date was just a few months after he and Rev. Smith first settled in Constantinople, he wrote of an anonymous “young man from Constantinople” who “thirsts for knowledge [and] is very anxious to go to England or America to acquire it.” Of this young Armenian Goodell further detailed that he “belongs to the old [Apostolic] Armenian church; is of a modest appearance, and great promise; and, in addition to the Turkish and Armenian languages, he already understands English, French, and Italian.” He concluded this depiction by noting that, “no literary institution suitable for these and such like youth is to be found here [in Constantinople]. A school of a high order is much needed; and... such a school here would be far preferable to sending the young men abroad for an education, unless they were able and willing to support themselves.”<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> ABCFM Report from 1835, at 43 and 53.

<sup>133</sup> ABCFM Report from 1835, 53.

<sup>134</sup> “Constantinople,” ABCFM Report from 1832, 183-184.

It was incredibly rare in the 1830s for a native Ottoman subject to have knowledge of English. Whether before or after 1831, from where did Oscanyan learn this language? Mrs. Dwight's 1834 letter certainly implied that Oscanyan had lived with her family and was thus exposed to education in English. A short biography of Oscanyan from 1888 – which he could have contributed to himself – also indicated that he may have studied with her husband Rev. Dwight:

He [Oscanyan] learned from private tutors the Armenian, Turkish, and modern Greek languages; to these he soon added Italian and French, and, having heard English spoken, he conceived a desire to acquire it also. To this end he made the acquaintance of the American missionaries that had been lately arrived in Turkey. One of these, Rev. Harrison G. O. Dwight, took an interest in him, and after the death of Oscanyan's mother enabled him to come to this country [the United States] to obtain a liberal education.<sup>135</sup>

It is still possible, however, that Oscanyan was the young man depicted by Goodell, as Goodell only indicated that the anonymous Armenian *understood* English in 1831. Oscanyan would mention later in the 1830s that he spent time living with Europeans in Constantinople. Perhaps he learned his French and Italian in this immersive way from European residents of the Ottoman capital. He may have also first picked up English in this manner, given that there were British missionaries and merchants living in the city, too. Perhaps he simply advanced and improved his English through regular contact with the Dwights, the way he “learned” Armenian and Turkish from private tutors, both of which languages he would have already been speaking in daily Ottoman Armenian life in Constantinople.

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<sup>135</sup> James Grant Wilson and John Fiske (eds.), *Appletons' Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, Vol. 4 (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1888), 598.

A line from Barbara Merguerian's chapter on the early nineteenth-century missionary press of Smyrna (Izmir) suggests that Oskanyan may not only have advanced his English skills through the American missionaries but was perhaps even a main reason they eventually amended their English-teaching policies. She writes of how the missionaries eventually "discouraged the teaching of English," as they were "alarmed that students who had no interest in evangelical Christianity were taking advantage of mission facilities to acquire language skills for secular careers or to emigrate to the United States." She specifically calls out the "young Armenian translator of [Murray's English] grammar, Khachatur Oskanyan, who went on to enjoy a successful career as a journalist in New York City."<sup>136</sup> Merguerian is here speaking of the very English grammar that was mentioned in the ABCFM Annual Report from 1835, at which time of publication Dwight signaled the *importance* of teaching English to the Armenians.

All in all, while the missionaries depicted an early symbiosis in Constantinople between themselves and a young Oskanyan, they perhaps intentionally understated the relationship. While the Revs. Dwight and Goodell clearly lauded other promising young Armenian men for their piety and contributions to the missionary effort, Oskanyan was never highlighted in this way. His translation work was cited, as we have seen, but his educational pursuits in New York were mentioned only by Mrs. Dwight or in conjunction with Oskanyan's father, "Mr. Oscan," who appeared a bit more often as an exemplary, if older, convert. By 1839, Oskanyan's father had become a bookseller of the American Mission in Constantinople, having set up shop "in the

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<sup>136</sup> Barbara J. Merguerian, "The Missionary Armenian Language Press of Smyrna, 1833-1853," in *Armenian Smyrna/Izmir: The Aegean Communities*, edited by Richard G. Hovannisian (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2012), 127-152, at 136-137. I thank Jennifer Manoukian for pointing me to this quote and her attendant observation.

midst of the bazaars in the city.”<sup>137</sup> While Oscanyan would occasionally evoke a Protestant affiliation once he arrived in the United States, the American missionaries never announced that Christopher Oscanyan had been enlightened or converted. In what manner, then, did Oscanyan *become Protestant*? Rev. Dwight’s own words offer a clue, when in an 1835 journal entry he described the increasing number of Armenians who had “*styled themselves* protestants.” While this was not, of course, the ABCFM ideal, it was indeed considered “a first step.”<sup>138</sup>

At the same time as the ABCFM began to target the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire – in fact, exactly while Revs. Dwight and Smith were traipsing around Armenia – the United States and the Ottoman Empire signed their first formal commercial treaty. In their book, Dwight and Smith actually mentioned a “Mr. Rhind, who was then negotiating a treaty between the government of the United States and the Porte.”<sup>139</sup> While they were on their journey in June 1830, they also received word of the treaty being signed. As Karine Walther explains, this Treaty of Commerce and Navigation granted Americans “capitulatory rights, which protected [them] from prosecution in Ottoman courts, granted them religious freedom, and allowed them to travel and reside in the Empire. The treaty’s stipulations also increased American consular representation in the Ottoman Empire.”<sup>140</sup> As a result of this treaty, the United States sent its first chargé d’affaires to Constantinople in 1831, Commodore David Porter, who served in the Ottoman capital until his death in 1843. As Cary Corwin Conn indicates in his dissertation on

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<sup>137</sup> H.G.O. Dwight, “Intelligence from the Missions: Constantinople,” *The Dayspring* [Boston], March 1, 1842

<sup>138</sup> ABCFM Report from 1836, 49. Emphasis mine.

<sup>139</sup> Smith and Dwight, *Researches*, Loc 1132.

<sup>140</sup> Walther, “Islamic World Encounters,” 678.

Porter's nephew, John Porter Brown, "his [Commodore Porter's] understanding of the Ottoman Empire was based on the Bible, Greek mythology, and an imprisonment of two years in a Barbary jail."<sup>141</sup> Porter's nephew, who served in the American Legation in Constantinople from 1832 until his death in 1872, will appear again throughout this thesis. Over time, he and Oscanyan developed an acrimonious relationship predicated on competition for diplomatic positions in the Ottoman capital – especially the role of dragoman, or interpreter.<sup>142</sup>

Commodore Porter and the American missionaries were close companions, which demonstrates the formative relationship between U.S. diplomatic and missionary endeavors. Their families even lived together between October 19, 1831, and March 24, 1832, in the aftermath of a devastating fire that consumed the Revs. Goodell and Dwight's new homes. In Goodell's memoirs, Rev. Goodell's son-in-law later wrote of the missionaries' relationship with the Commodore as "an intimacy that continued with little interruption until the death of Commodore Porter in 1843." Of Porter's engagement he added, "the American ambassador for many years took the liveliest interest in the work of the missionary, giving him his protection and the warmest personal friendship; accompanying him on his missionary tours, and affording him material aid in carrying out his plans for the welfare of the people to whom he was sent."<sup>143</sup>

### **Lecturing in America**

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<sup>141</sup> Conn, "John Porter Brown," at. 44; See also: David F. Long, *Nothing Too Daring: A Biography of Commodore David Porter, 1780-1843* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1970); David Porter, *Constantinople and Its Environs* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1835).

<sup>142</sup> See: Gary Leiser, "John Porter Brown, Early American Orientalist (1814–1872)," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 140-1 (2020): 183-88; Conn, "John Porter Brown."

<sup>143</sup> E.D.G. Prime and William Goodell, *Forty Years in the Turkish Empire, Or, Memoirs of Rev. William Goodell, D.D.* (New York: Robert Carter, 1876), at 123.



In the autumn of 1834, almost certainly with the support and guidance of the American missionaries, Christopher Oscanian arrived in New York City to attend the recently-established University of the City of New York, the school we today know as New York University.<sup>144</sup> At this time, he was the only student from what we now call the Middle East in attendance.<sup>145</sup> *The New York Commercial Advertiser* was encouraging: “We hope that he [Oscanian] may be the forerunner of many others, who hasten to our shores on a like errand.”<sup>146</sup>

At the university registrar’s office, in October of 1834, Oscanian signed his name – *Khachadour Osganian* – in Armenian letters. To the right, he indicated that he was from Constantinople.<sup>147</sup> Multiple secondary sources on Armenians in America describe Oscanian as the first Armenian immigrant to the United State but offer no documentation.<sup>148</sup> While immigration records prior to the 1850s are scarce, according to M. Vartan Malcom, an early chronicler of Armenians in America, between 1850 and 1870 there were no more than 55 documented Armenians in the country. Some of these men were students, but most of them came to the United States to “learn trades.”<sup>149</sup> Oscanian was one of only a handful of young Armenian men who came to the United States prior to the middle of the century.

In his earliest days at the university, however, he would certainly have encountered Greek students, former Ottoman subjects who had come to New York following their new

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<sup>144</sup> For more on the history of New York University, see Thomas J. Frusciano and Marilyn H. Pettit, *New York University and the City: An Illustrated History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

<sup>145</sup> “University of the City of New York,” *New York Commercial Advertiser* [New York], October 9, 1834; Nance, *Arabian Nights*, 56.

<sup>146</sup> “University of the City of New York,” *New York Commercial Advertiser*.

<sup>147</sup> I thank Ünver Rüstem for his photograph of this precious document from the New York University Archives, and Janet Bunde at NYU for her help in locating the source: Oscanian Signature, Records of the Office of the Registrar, 1832-1916, New York University Archives, Matriculation Book, Box 1, on page for October 1834.

<sup>148</sup> Demoyan, *Armenian Legacy in America*, at 32; Malcom, *Armenians in America*, at 57; Mirak, *Torn Between Two Lands*, at 38; Wertsman, *Armenians in America*, at 1.

<sup>149</sup> Malcom, *Armenians in America*, 58.

nation's successful war for independence between 1821 and 1830 – a cause for which many Americans were actively sympathetic.<sup>150</sup> Importantly, however, this American sympathy for the Greek cause was in many ways sympathy for themselves: as Maureen Connors Santelli explains, the “enthusiasm for the Greek cause [was] driven by the belief that democratic ideals bound early Americans to Greece's ancient past.”<sup>151</sup> “The Greek War of Independence,” she elaborates, “helped early Americans to define themselves as a people and interpret the legacy of the American Revolution on an international stage.”<sup>152</sup>

To the young Oscanyan, New York City in 1834 may have felt less cosmopolitan than the capital of the Ottoman Empire to which he was accustomed. Just overtaking Philadelphia as the largest city in the United States at the time, with a population of nearly 250,000, New York was embroiled in the urgent issues of American nation-making: the questions of the expansion of slavery and the expropriation of native land; the economic reconfigurations of the market revolution and the social reconfigurations of an almost exclusively white and male democracy; and the moral imperatives of a fervent national evangelism.<sup>153</sup> In a strong indicator that Oscanyan maintained a social relationship with the American missionary community during his university days, Mrs. Dwight advised her niece in New York to ask Oscanyan about a popular Ottoman dessert when she saw him. “Oscanian can tell you what it [*helvar*] is,” she wrote in 1835. “It is very sweet, and the children ate of it heartily.”<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> For more on this subject, see Maureen Connors Santelli, *The Greek Fire: American-Ottoman Relations and Democratic Fervor in the Age of Revolutions* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020).

<sup>151</sup> Santelli, *The Greek Fire*, 3.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>153</sup> Though Ottoman population numbers are notoriously difficult to ascertain, the population of Constantinople may have grown from around 115,000 in 1830 to 213,000 in 1844. See Kemal H. Karpat, *Ottoman Population 1830-1914: Demographic and Social Characteristics* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 202.

<sup>154</sup> Dwight, *Memoir of Mrs. Elizabeth B. Dwight*, 227.

In the fall of 1835, a seventeen-year-old Oscanyan gave his first-ever lectures on the topics of “Education Among the Armenians” and “Armenia.” The first, “Education Among the Armenians,” was delivered to the American Lyceum in Boston, likely in September or October of that year, for which he was he was billed as “Christopher Oscanean, a native Armenian.”<sup>155</sup> The essay’s language itself was sometimes awkward – what Oscanyan called his “medley sort of half Armenian and half English expressions”<sup>156</sup> – and he confided that it took him “great pains to construe such a labyrinthian synthesis.”<sup>157</sup> Half educational essay, half philanthropic appeal, the bulk of the lecture consisted of descriptions of the Armenian schools and academies in Constantinople, Venice, Moscow, Tiflis (Tbilisi), and Calcutta. This was meant to demonstrate both the will of the Armenian youth to learn and the lack of proper schools through which they could do so beyond ages fourteen to sixteen in Constantinople itself. We can recall here Goodell’s complaint regarding Oscanyan’s lack of educational opportunities in Constantinople. Oscanyan, likewise, lamented that such Armenians who sought higher education have needed to “set out from home” and have since “lost the recollection of their native country... becoming members of different literary departments in Europe.”<sup>158</sup> What’s more, he explained, for an “Armenian youth to start on a journey from Constantinople to Hindoostan [India], or to the new world [for higher education], is equal to an attempt to travel towards the moon.”<sup>159</sup>

After demonstrating the Armenians’ merits in this way, Oscanyan advertised his relationship with his “friends at Constantinople, the Rev. Messrs. Goodell and Dwight, two of

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<sup>155</sup> “Education Among the Armenians,” *Americans Annals of Education and Instruction*, Vol. V, No. X, October 1835, 445-450. This essay is included in the October section of the *Annals*.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 445.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 450.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 447.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 449.

your American Philanthropists, who are deeply engaged for the enlightening of my nation,”<sup>160</sup>

before closing his lecture with a direct solicitation as a “delegate from the Armenian youth.” He asked:

Trusting to your philanthropy, I have been impelled to lay this petition before you, and solicit your aid and interest in the cause of their [the Armenian youth’s] advancement in knowledge, that by your means, they might again be an enlightened nation, of which they show great marks.<sup>161</sup>

In short, in his first presentation in front of an American audience, Oscanyan argued that the Armenians were a good American investment. Echoing the missionaries’ arguments regarding the relationship between civilization, enlightenment, and conversion, he sought to persuade Americans that the Christian Armenians were a people capable of (renewed!) enlightenment, and thus worthy of the expense of the educational resources needed to get there. This was a model of Christian diplomacy that was not dissimilar to that used by American fundraisers during the Greek War of Independence. As Maureen Connors Santelli writes, “in supporting the Greek Revolution, Americans believed they were participating in the ultimate battle for virtue and truth, which meant helping the Christian Greeks overthrow the Muslim Turks and reclaim an independence not seen since before Alexander the Great.”<sup>162</sup> Oscanyan would indeed reference American charity towards the Greeks in his next lecture.

On November 18, 1835, Oscanyan delivered what was likely his second-ever lecture on “Armenia” before the Philomathean Society of New York University, an extracurricular literary club. While this lecture, too, had a philanthropic angle, he did not this time talk at length about

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 450.

<sup>162</sup> Santelli, *The Greek Fire*, 8.

Armenian educational institutions. He did, however, express his deep commitment to what he described as his “nation” and his “country,” and concluded with a direct appeal to American charity for the “introduction of schools and colleges among the Armenians”:

In looking around at the institutions of the Bible, Tract, Education, Foreign Missionary, and a thousand other similar Societies, which stand as the monuments of your philanthropy, or, on treading the Grecian shores, and witnessing the stamp of American charity upon the condition of the inhabitants; or, when placed in the midst of a missionary school, surrounded by a thousand pupils, who are just beginning to taste the cup of wisdom; the most satisfactory evidences of your boundless generosity are presented, and can I be otherwise than assured that my nation will participate in your benevolence?

Why may not an association be formed, whose object shall be the introduction of schools and colleges among the Armenians, that the lights of science may be rekindled in the East? I will comfort myself with the reflection that the gradual march of education, aided by patriotism and Christianity, may yet revive the ancient glory of Armenia.<sup>163</sup>

To teach his audience about the people on whose behalf he was petitioning, he appealed, however sincerely, to their prior knowledge: “You will, doubtless, recollect the geographical situation of that beautiful portion of the world, viz. Armenia, which is bounded on the east by Media and Albania, on the North by Iberia and Colchis, on the West by Assyria, and on the South by Mesopotamia.”<sup>164</sup> These boundaries will not correspond to any map from the 1830s, but rather evoke an ancient Caucasia (95-55 BCE), as noted above. He then proceeded to describe this ancient Armenia as “the birthplace of man” and the “harbor to Noah’s Ark.” The Armenians, he explained, are the descendants of Noah and his three sons. He continued:

I cannot, however, for a moment reflect upon the ancient state of that country, without yielding myself to painful emotions, in comparing it with its present condition. Yet on such an occasion as this, such feelings must be chastised. Blind Fortune’s wheel had

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<sup>163</sup> “Armenia,” *New-York American for the Country* [New York], November 24, 1835.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

crossed and re-crossed her boundaries, but its tracks now seem entirely obliterated, and her star, within a few centuries, seems to have fallen. Thus Armenia, like many other countries, became subject to those neighboring monarchs, who took possession of her territory by the unresisted force of an illegal usurpation. And these freeborn children, have since courted the heavy yokes of their most despotic tyrants.

Whatever I have, therefore, to say of Armenia, concerns the modern, not the ancient – the living, and not the dead. It regards her not as she exists in history, triumphant over time, and tyranny, and ignorance, but as she is now, contending for the common privilege of human nature,” using Shakespeare’s vocabulary, “to be, or not to be;” since *to be*, is *to know* – for through knowledge comes civilization; through civilization, morality; through morality, Christianity; and through Christianity, eternal life. For this, and this alone, they solicit compassion from their friends and “cousins” in every part of the world.<sup>165</sup>

He then built on his argument from the first lecture, noting that helping the Armenians would not just help them, but ultimately the whole “East.” The Armenians, he argued, exactly like his missionary associates before him, were the *key* to converting the entirety of the region.

There have been many who have succeeded in obtaining an education by resorting to Europe. But there are yet thousands, who are struggling for the same prize. And where are these anxious multitudes to look for aid? ... As it is admitted by all that the Armenians are the *key* to the East, in opening a door for Christianity into that region, their illumination must be the means of enlightening those other surrounding nations who are wrapped in a thick veil of darkness, and who are continually hastening to the grave in that pitiable condition. A country with such promising prospects and interesting anticipations as Armenia, must naturally produce something of warmth and enthusiasm in the heart of every Christian.<sup>166</sup>

Oscanyan’s acts of affiliation are in this second lecture quite clear: he spoke directly of Armenia as his “nation” and his “country.” He affiliated with Armenia in this way to represent the Armenians’ cause to an American audience. He solicited an American audience in order bring “schools and colleges” to his people: as he said, in terms that directly mirrored the

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

missionaries: “through knowledge comes civilization; through civilization, morality; through morality, Christianity; and through Christianity, eternal life.” And he prefaced this declaration by quoting Shakespeare, which not only demonstrated his own civilized nature (and thus his worthiness) but, by extension – through affiliation – the worthiness of all Armenians to receive the generosity of Americans.

In this way, Oscanyan set up a theme that he would return to in various guises throughout the rest of his career: the United States, specifically, could help the Ottoman Empire. In closing, he exalted: “Though deprived of our political eminence, tho’ subjected to the slavish yoke of vile Barbarians, although for centuries, sojourners and helpless wanderers over the face of the globe, yet we cannot but cheer our hearts with the rays of comfort, brightly beaming from these most philanthropic and Christian friends of this Western Hemisphere. How wonderful, how interesting, that the youngest nation of the earth should become the instructor of the oldest!”<sup>167</sup>

Three years later, between late 1838 and late 1839, Oscanyan (now ages twenty and twenty-one) undertook a lecture tour on another topic entirely. Instead of talking about Armenia and its need for institutions of higher education in a bid to raise money for such an endeavor and establish a connection between Christian nations, he organized a series of lectures on Constantinople (his home city) and, importantly, its people, the “Osmanlis” (Ottomans)<sup>168</sup> – complete with costumes, a model of a Turkish room, and a “collection of pipes,

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> “Osmanlis” is the anglicized plural of the Ottoman Turkish word for an Ottoman (Osmanlı). In this thesis, I will use the term “Ottomans” unless I am quoting directly. For the most part, Oscanyan stopped using the word “Osmanlis” after the 1830s in favor of the term “Turk” or “Turks,” likely for the ease of his American audience. As a case in point, a review of a first Oscanyan lecture refers to the Ottomans as “Osthmanders.” In the second review, it uses the correct albeit anglicized term, Osmanlis (Ottomans), and includes a correction about the spelling. This

*nargileh*, coffee cups, national books, writing implements, [and] specimens of embroidery”<sup>169</sup> – designed and executed without an apparent fundraising aim. Rather, he sought to “correct erroneous impressions” and “acquaint” Americans with the *people* [of Turkey], “which no foreigner could do.”<sup>170</sup>

### **Erroneous Impressions**

It has been well-established by scholars across fields that European and, later, American Christians have, for centuries, defined themselves against an Islamic Other – often imagined as a violent, fanatical, and/or sexualized Other. It is an image that we *still* see used and exploited today. But it has by no means been a static image across time. “During the period of Ottoman military supremacy in the 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries,” Zachary Lockman writes, Europeans considered the Islamic empire “the great bogeyman of Christian Europe.”<sup>171</sup> Many, however, also admired the Ottoman state’s vast power and wealth. Yet this view changed by the late 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries when Ottoman military power weakened considerably. Educated Europeans started then to depict Turks and the Ottoman state as “boorish, ignorant, dishonorable, immoral, ineffectual, corrupt, and irrational”<sup>172</sup> – in a word, “barbaric,” a condition they conflated with Islam and posited in distinction to Christian civilization, as discussed above.

These representations were simultaneously created and fortified by early modern European

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not only indicates that the newspaper text was likely not submitted by Oscanyan and was rather transcribed, summarized, and reported, but also gives us a clue as to how the reporter *heard* the Turkish word (that is, what formal American English may have sounded like at the time). The short “l” in Turkish – at the end of “Osmanlı” – is pronounced more like “ih” than “ee.” For this reason, we can guess that, to the writer’s ear, the “er” in Osthmanders” sounded more like an elided British “r” vs. a hard “err” we in the US might hear today. See: “Lectures on Constantinople,” *Boston Recorder* [Boston], December 14, 1838 and “Lectures on Constantinople,” *Boston Recorder* [Boston], December 21, 1838.

<sup>169</sup> “Lectures on Constantinople,” *Boston Recorder* [Boston], November 30, 1838.

<sup>170</sup> “Lectures on Constantinople,” *Boston Recorder* [Boston], December 14, 1838.

<sup>171</sup> Lockman, *Contending Visions*, 42.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.



political thinkers who “came to see their own societies as based on freedom and on law, which limited (or should limit) the power even of kings and the aristocracy.”<sup>173</sup> In contrast, then, while it had little basis in reality, the Ottoman empire came to be viewed as “the prime contemporary example of despotism, a state characterized by the concentration of arbitrary, lawless and absolute power in the hands of the all-powerful sovereign (the sultan) and the reduction of all his subjects to virtual slavery.”<sup>174</sup>

The consequences of the idea of “Oriental despotism” were immense and long lasting. European thinkers would use this idea to “help explain why a socially, economically[,] and culturally dynamic “West” had come to dominate the world, including many parts of Asia and Africa inhabited largely by Muslims, and why that domination was necessary and good.”<sup>175</sup> But such Western domination and concomitant Ottoman weakening could of course not really be explained by an essentialist determinant like “Oriental despotism.” Rather, starting at the end of the fifteenth century, with the European colonization of the Americas, the dispossession and decimation of their indigenous populations, and the establishment of the transatlantic slave trade in pursuit of free, coerced labor to cultivate wealth-generating crops and commodities, there were profound global economic transformations that created new worldwide power dynamics between Western Europe and regions across the globe – a world order in which we still operate today. As a consequence of these new “patterns of production and consumption,” Lockman writes, “western Europe gradually became the center of a new global economy, the region into which the lion’s share of the vast profits of transregional trade and production

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 48

flowed.”<sup>176</sup> Previously, Western Europe had only been able to access these wealth-generating commodities “in small quantities and at high prices from Middle Eastern and other middlemen.”<sup>177</sup> From the late eighteenth century onwards, the Industrial Revolution in Europe and the United States, which was funded by the profits from African slave labor and indigenous American land, only compounded the “disparities between the European center and the non-European periphery of the emerging new global system.”<sup>178</sup> The Ottoman Empire, no longer integral to facilitating trade between Europe and Asia, fell deeper and deeper into financial crisis and looked weaker and weaker in light of European global hegemony. These economic realities were then used to reinforce representations of the West as civilized and superior, and of the non-West, including the Ottoman Empire, as uncivilized, licentious, barbaric, and backwards. Such representations could then be cultivated and exploited to continue colonizing, enslaving, intervening, and otherwise exploiting these non-Western people and states.

Oscanyan was working against these very narratives when he took to the American lecture podium in the 1830s. These condescending attitudes towards the Middle East and its people, particularly in their relationship to the establishment and maintenance of Western imperial power, have been famously conceptualized as “Orientalist” by Edward Said in his landmark 1978 text *Orientalism*.<sup>179</sup> The influence of Said’s work on understanding the relationship between knowledge, representation, and power, particularly vis-à-vis the Middle East, cannot be overstated. Arguing that culture and colonialism were connected – that

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 53

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>179</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

European literature, art, travel writing, scholarship, and other forms of knowledge production could shape and were shaped by European colonial practices – Said shows how European representations of an “Orient” pitted a static, exotic, barbaric, irrational “East” against a superior, dominant, civilized, rational “West.” In the words of Jo Laycock, this framework, in turn, helped to “reaffirm and legitimize the superiority of the European world and therefore European imperial power” – particularly its power over the Middle East.<sup>180</sup> Needless to say, these Orientalist representations of the Middle East were not “objective” depictions of what a novelist, painter, traveler, or scholar had studied or observed. Rather, Said argues, their vision was predetermined by their imperial needs and expectations, expectations that their creative works then proceeded to reinforce.<sup>181</sup>

In what follows, we will build on Edward Said’s insights and historicize the “Orientalist” discourses in which Oscanyan was implicated and with which he engaged throughout his career: not only what he called the “erroneous impressions” he explicitly sought to counter, but also those tropes he utilized to attract an audience or even believed himself, a variation of what Ussama Makdisi has usefully called “Ottoman Orientalism” in which Ottomans orientalized “their own Arab periphery as an integral part of their engagement with, explicit resistance to,

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<sup>180</sup> Jo Laycock, *Imagining Armenia: Orientalism, Ambiguity and Intervention, 1879–1925*, 20–21.

<sup>181</sup> Said’s work of course has its critics, especially those who have identified his failure to historicize the works he looks at. As Laycock explains, “although he focuses on the period of ‘high’ imperialism during the nineteenth century, Said traces a lineage of ‘orientalism’ from the ancient world. In doing so he is in danger of presenting orientalism as a ‘natural’ way of perceiving the world and confusing his argument that orientalist discourse is specifically linked to the age of imperialism.” Laycock, *Imagining Armenia*, 22. The scholarship utilizing, praising and/or critiquing Said is immense. For some responses to *Orientalism*, especially critiques, see for example Talal Asad, “Review of Orientalism,” *The English Historical Review* 95 (July 1980); James Clifford, “On Orientalism,” in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); Robert Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing: The Orientalists and Their Enemies* (London: Allen Lane, 2006); John MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995); Dennis Porter “Orientalism and its Problems,” in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds.) *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory* (London: Routledge, 1994), 150–161.

but also implicit acceptance of, Western representations of the indolent Ottoman East.”<sup>182</sup> I will not, however, use the phrase “orientalist” in my own analyses, as I find it obscures more than it reveals. It risks overpowering a clear-eyed assessment of the past in service of a familiar, rote argument. Instead, I will analyze Oscanyan’s work in terms he himself used (e.g. “erroneous impressions”) in order to best evaluate and interrogate the power dynamics and tropes at play.

### **Lectures on Turkey**

While from his first lectures on Armenia one may assume that Oscanyan would not speak favorably about his imperial overlords – and would perhaps even subscribe to the negative representations outlined above – Oscanyan in fact spoke sympathetically of the Ottomans. At this time, for example, he made an explicit point of not calling them “Turks,” which they considered a “highly offensive” term.<sup>183</sup> And, at the end of one lecture, he even spoke of himself *as* an Ottoman. As the reporter summarized it,

Mr. O concluded his lecture by describing ... the curious impressions which an Osmanli would receive on witnessing the domestic economy of [a] European. Mr. O said that when he first visited this country, although he knew it was the custom for the ladies to receive the gentlemen of the parlors, he could hardly help retreating instinctively when the servant asked him to a room filled with ladies—it appeared to him to be some strange mistake.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Ussama Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism,” *The American Historical Review* 107-3 (June 2002), 768-796 at 768.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> “Turkish Habits,” *Christian Watchman* [Boston], December 21, 1838; For more on this, see my article “A Life of Longing and Belonging: The Ottoman Armenian American Worldview of Christopher Oscanyan (1815-1895),” *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 4-2 (2017): 261-285. There, I have written about how this reflects a “hierarchy of personal significance,” in which his political views, while sometimes mutually incoherent, are not mutually exclusive. This is a personal hierarchy we will see borne out throughout his career.

Why in 1838 did Oscanyan start to talk publicly about the Ottomans? Put another way, why did he publicly affiliate with them? What did it provide him? What did it mean to him? What, if anything, had changed over the course of three years since he lectured on Armenia and the “vile Barbarians” – the Ottomans, of which group, apparently, he is a part! – under whose yoke they suffered?

We know almost nothing about Oscanyan’s life between 1836 and 1838. We know he didn’t graduate from college, where he studied Civil Engineering – the significance of which may relate to his desire to help his Armenian community become more “enlightened” and “civilized.”<sup>185</sup> A letter from his father-in-law in 1857 indicates that after leaving university he “served three years as civil engineer under general McNeil.”<sup>186</sup> General McNeil almost certainly refers to William Gibbs McNeill (1801-1853), who served as Chief Engineer to various railroads and other public works throughout the 1830s and 1840s, including the Louisville, Cincinnati and Charleston railroad project from 1837 to 1840. A brief 1888 biography also mentioned that Oscanyan “joined the staff of civil engineers engaged in constructing the Charleston and Cincinnati Railroad.”<sup>187</sup> This railroad attempted to connect South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Kentucky.<sup>188</sup> For Oscanyan to have been in this geographic location would make sense given that, in one of his lectures from 1838, he told a story of “traveling at the West” in

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<sup>185</sup> NYU does not have a record of his graduation.

<sup>186</sup> Letter from Thomas Harvey Skinner to President James Buchanan, January 7, 1857, U. S. Department of State, Letters of Application and Recommendation During the Administration of James Buchanan (Christopher Oscanyan file), M967. This letter is a recommendation letter for a diplomatic position, Oscanyan’s pursuit of which I will discuss at length in Chapter 3.

<sup>187</sup> Wilson and Fisk, *Appletons’ Cyclopaedia*, 598.

<sup>188</sup> H. Roger Grant, *The Louisville Cincinnati and Charleston Railroad: Dreams of Linking North and South* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 2014.

which a “high-minded *Kentuckian*” exclaimed “What a ---Turk!”<sup>189</sup> He may have additionally worked with McNeill on “the Western railroad” (which worked to connect Boston and Albany) on which McNeil was also engaged as Chief Engineer from 1836-40. This would have located him in Massachusetts.

How Oscanyan went from civil engineering to lecturing about Constantinople is unclear. One clue may be found in his citation of a travelogue, *The City of the Sultan and Domestic Manners of the Turks* (1837) by Julia Pardoe, and his noting her “excess of imagination.”<sup>190</sup> Julia Pardoe – often called “Miss. Pardoe” – was an English writer who travelled to Constantinople with her father in 1835. Throughout her travelogue, which became extremely popular, she mentioned repeatedly that she was trying to afford her readers a “more just and complete insight into Turkish domestic life.”<sup>191</sup> Her effort to do so, while thorough and genuine, was limited by her lack of knowledge. She also, notably, was not a fan of the Armenians, going so far as to say, “they have no soul.”<sup>192</sup> Miss. Pardoe preferred the Greeks.<sup>193</sup> One could imagine Oscanyan reading *The City of the Sultan* – or Pardoe’s 1838 follow-up, *The Beauties of the Bosphorus* – and wanting to say something for himself. Perhaps he was encouraged by friends and associates to do so. Indeed, as Egyptian novelist Ahdaf Soueif notes of travel writing, “the trouble with travel books is that their subjects/victims don’t normally get to read them, much

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<sup>189</sup> “Lectures on Constantinople,” *Boston Recorder* [Boston], December 14, 1838. Emphasis mine. Here he was trying to show that for the Ottomans, the word “Turk” was just as “odious” without the “nameless adjective.”

<sup>190</sup> “Lectures on Constantinople,” *Boston Recorder* [Boston], January 4, 1839.

<sup>191</sup> Julia Pardoe, *The City of the Sultan and Domestic Manners of the Turks*, Vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea & Blanchard, 1837), x.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>193</sup> Presumably Pardoe, like many British and American people, had pro-Greek sentiments, especially given their recent support for their revolution. For more, see Santelli, *The Greek Fire*; and Caitlin Fitz, *Our Sister Republics: The United States in an Age of American Revolutions* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2016).

less to give their version of what things were like.”<sup>194</sup> The young Ottoman Armenian articulated as much in his first lecture, when a reporter noted that, “his [Oscanyan’s] object was to make them [his audience] acquainted with the people [of Constantinople], which no foreigner could do... In the first place, he would correct some erroneous impressions respecting the people called Turks, which prevailed both in this country [the United States] and Europe.”<sup>195</sup> Oscanyan, it seems, was able to do what a subject normally could not.

Adding to the suspicion that he may have been motivated in part by Pardoe’s publications, during a lecture in Boston, Oscanyan engaged her text directly, saying “that the Osmanlis were not the lazy and luxurious people which they had been described by travellers, and that one of the most remarkable traits in their domestic habits, was that of *early rising*.” The newspaper writer continued, “Mr. O read the following extract, from Miss Pardoe’s “City of the Sultan,” not, he said, for the purpose of corroborating her statements, so much as to excite admiration at the excess of her imagination. ‘Their habits,’ Oscanyan read, quoting Pardoe,

are, generally speaking, most luxurious and indolent, if I except their custom of early rising, which, did they occupy themselves in any useful manner, would be, undoubtedly, very commendable – but as they only add, by these means, two or three hours of *ennui* to each day, I am at a loss how to classify it. Their time is spent in dressing themselves, and varying the positions of their ornaments – in the bath – and in sleep, which they appear to have as entirely at their beck, as a draught of water: in winter, they have but to nestle under the coverings of the *tandour*, or in summer, to bury themselves among their cushions, and in five minutes they are in the land of dreams. Indeed, so extraordinarily are they gifted in this respect, that they not unfrequently engage their guests to take a nap, with the same *sang froid* with which a European lady would invite her friends to take a walk.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Ahdaf Soueif, “Passing Through,” *London Review of Books* Vol. 7 No. 17, October 3, 1985.

<sup>195</sup> “Lectures on Constantinople,” *Boston Recorder* [Boston], December 14, 1838.

<sup>196</sup> “Lectures on Constantinople,” *Boston Recorder* [Boston], January 4, 1839.

After quoting her at length, Oscanian “said that when Miss Pardoe visited the family of which she speaks, it was during the fast of Ramazan, which lasts for one month, when it is forbidden to eat any food between sunrise and sunset. In consequence of this, during the fast of Ramazan, night is converted into day, and day into night – many of the public offices are closed during the fast, and the Courts are not in session – the inhabitants attend to their business or pleasure, or pursue their domestic occupations, during the night, and repose during the day. It was under these circumstances that Miss Pardoe visited in Constantinople and being a stranger to the language and to the customs of the people, and habituated to philosophizing, it was not strange that she should have fallen into an error.”<sup>197</sup> Julia Pardoe would surely have asked, along with Jerry Seinfeld, if the Ottoman Empire wasn’t a whole empire about putting your feet up!<sup>198</sup>

The Constantinople lectures ran from May 1838 to November 1839, in cities including Boston, Philadelphia, Providence, and New York City. Tickets were sold for 50 cents for a single lecture, and \$2.00 for the full course (\$3.00 for a gentleman and lady). In their chapter on the international popular lecture and its audience in antebellum New England, Ronald and Mary Zboray provide a peek into the mind of one of Oscanian’s female audience members, quoting an eighteen-year-old diarist’s impressions of the twenty-year-old Ottoman Armenian in Boston: he was “a handsome man,” she wrote, “exceeding graceful in his movements.” The young lady added: “He occasionally made a droll mistake,” despite his fluent English.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> *Seinfeld*. “The Non-Fat Yogurt.” Episode 71. NBC, November 4, 1993.

<sup>199</sup> Zboray and Zboray, “Women Thinking,” at 42. They are citing Annie Lawrence, December 11, 1838, Diary, Lamb Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.



While summaries of many of Oscanyan's lectures appeared in various newspapers from this time, ranging in length from a paragraph to coverage spread over two columns, his course of six lectures in Boston was thoroughly reported by the *Boston Recorder*, which had been founded in 1816 by Nathaniel Willis, Jr. as a Congregationalist newspaper.<sup>200</sup> There is much to comment on in these rich portrayals of Oscanyan's Boston lectures, but looking at his varied tactics of "correcting erroneous impressions" is the most helpful way to begin an analysis of Oscanyan's work as a purveyor of instructive entertainment. In addition to the "clarification" technique he employed to correct Julia Pardoe, Oscanyan also used a charming "relativist" approach to make the familiar foreign and thus the foreign familiar (or vice versa?). For example, of Boston, he observed that, "at a distant view, [it] possesses a striking resemblance to Oriental cities. On [my] first entering the harbor, the very sight of the dome of the state house, brought [me] back to [my] native city. The addition of a few minarets was all that was necessary to make it the dome of St. Sophia."<sup>201</sup> He also borrowed the folksy phrasing of a fellow steamboat passenger between New York City and Boston to describe his lecture goal of depicting "the lay o' the land" and the "make o' the men."<sup>202</sup> And, of Constantinople and New York, he leveraged a direct comparison: "Both cities," he instructed, "are also situated in about the same latitude; though the climate of the former is much the mildest."<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> "Personal," *The New York Times* [New York], October 27, 1858. Sometimes the *Boston Recorder* used *Mercantile Journal* coverage of Oscanyan's lectures, as in the January 4, 1839 coverage of Oscanyan's lecture.

<sup>201</sup> "Lectures on Constantinople," *Boston Recorder* [Boston], December 14, 1838.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*; William Goodell makes the same observation in his memoir fifteen years later: "The latitude of Constantinople is about the same as that of New York City, but the climate is much less severe." Did Goodell hear this from Oscanyan, or Oscanyan from Goodell? See: William Goodell, *The Old and the New: Or, The Changes of Thirty Years in the East, with Some Allusions to Oriental Customs as Elucidating Scripture* (New York: M. W. Dodd, 1853), at 10.

Why did Oscanyan seek to “correct erroneous impressions” of the Ottomans? Was it merely a personal gripe with European travelogues, or a way, as perhaps the only Ottoman subject resident in the United States, to make a little bit of money? Could there have been a political goal, as there was for his lectures on Armenia? A look at Oscanyan’s remarks on the Ottoman government offers a clue. In his series-concluding lecture on January 8, 1839, he presented the reigning Sultan Mahmoud as a reformer. He referred to him as “no ordinary character” and commended his “quiet, moral revolution” currently underway, citing changes including “the subjugation of the *Ulemas* [Muslim legal scholars],” the eradication of the Janissaries [elite military unit], and the introduction of “a great improvement into the mode of collecting the revenue.”<sup>204</sup> Despite the vitriol he flung at the Turkic imperial oppressors of the Armenians in 1835, he notably levied *no* criticism at the Ottoman government in his lecture in 1839. Instead, he praised the Sultan’s actions as having been “distinguished by purity of motive; by energy of purpose; by strong attachment to his people, and a desire to root out the remnant of barbarism, however much it may tend to reduce his power, or that of his successors.”<sup>205</sup> Was Oscanyan’s about-face on the Turkish empire perhaps *too* nice – which is to say, disingenuous? Or was there a reason for his abundant praise? If his agenda was to correct erroneous, usually negative, impressions, his exclusive emphasis on the positive attributes of the Ottoman government may have been the end in itself. But maybe the answer is less calculated: maybe Oscanyan was a true believer in these “quiet,” ongoing reforms.

### **Return to Constantinople and *Tanzimat* Reforms**

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<sup>204</sup> “Lectures on Constantinople,” *Boston Recorder* [Boston], January 18, 1839.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*

Christopher Oscanyan returned to Constantinople about a year after he gave these hopeful remarks. Upon his departure back to Constantinople in 1840, the *Newburyport Morning Herald* published a revealing tidbit about Oscanyan's time in the United States. The *Herald* wrote that while stateside, he undertook

the study and practice of civil engineering, and to studying the institutions of this country – and obtaining a knowledge of the commerce, manufactures, agriculture, internal improvements, &c, of a land where the people are the sovereign rulers.

They concluded:

He will return to his home with a power and a disposition to throw light on many subjects, which in the Ottoman empire have hitherto been enveloped in darkness – and in this he will be vastly aided by the great moral revolution which has already commenced in that quarter of the world.<sup>206</sup>

So, what exactly was this “great moral revolution,” and how did Oscanyan really feel about it?

Oscanyan returned to the Ottoman Empire just after the 1839 Edict of Gülhane had been signed in November of that year, inaugurating what is today known as the Ottoman *Tanzimat*, or the reorganization era (1839-1876).<sup>207</sup> His American lectures were thus delivered in advance of this precise moment of imperial change, but still in the period immediately preceding, when the reorganization was taking shape. The *Tanzimat* era was ultimately to be characterized by a series of political, legal, and administrative reforms that built on the changes implemented earlier in the century and stemmed from the realization that, after Greek independence, the empire needed European approval to survive. Indeed, amid “aggressive

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<sup>206</sup> “Bank of the United States,” *Newburyport Morning Herald* [Newburyport], January 13, 1840.

<sup>207</sup> For more on the Tanzimat, see for example Roderic H. Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1856-1876* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963); Antaramian, *Brokers of Faith*.

European claims to intervene on behalf of the [Ottoman] Christians,”<sup>208</sup> in tandem with the fact that “Christian subjects across the Balkans... recognized the potential efficacy of appealing to European Christian sympathy,” the Ottoman state during the Tanzimat era “understood, more urgently than it ever had, the need for an overhaul of the empire in order to save the substantial parts of it that remained.”<sup>209</sup> Thus, in what Ussama Makdisi calls its “desperate bid to appease circling European powers,” the Tanzimat era “had as its core mantra the declaration of nondiscrimination between Muslim and non-Muslim subjects of the empire.”<sup>210</sup>

To this end, the text of the 1839 edict promised *all* Ottoman subjects a range of reforms including security for “life, honor and property” as well as regularized tax and military conscription systems. These reforms were the brainchild of Mustafa Reşid Pasha, an Ottoman statesman with recent diplomatic experience in Paris and London. As Ozan Ozavci argues, Mustafa Reşid, building on the clothing, military, and bureaucratic reforms discussed above, “thought that the promulgation of a new series of reforms would seal the Porte’s commitment to ‘civilization’ in the eyes of the European Powers and particularly those of French liberal public opinion.”<sup>211</sup> For Armenian Christians like Oscanian, the Edict of Gülhane signified an opportunity for non-Muslims of the empire to be treated as equals with their Muslim peers even though, as Makdisi explains, the Tanzimat mandated, in effect, the equality of inequality of all communities before a theoretically absolutist sultan.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Makdisi, *Age of Coexistence*, 46.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 50-51.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>211</sup> Ozavci, *Dangerous Gifts*, 204.

<sup>212</sup> Makdisi, *Age of Coexistence*, 53. For more on the Armenians and the Tanzimat reforms, see Masayuki Ueno, “‘For the Fatherland and the State’: Armenians Negotiate the Tanzimat Reforms,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 45 (2013), 93-109.

Prior to his return to Constantinople, sometime before January 1839, Oscanyan had been naturalized as an American citizen.<sup>213</sup> At the end of that same year, on December 5, 1839, he was married to Maria Louisa Skinner.<sup>214</sup> Together they left the United States for Constantinople in January of 1840 and would stay there for the next fourteen years.<sup>215</sup> All four of their children were born in the Ottoman capital: Thomas, born 1841, William Hatchik, born 1843, Adele Montgomery, born 1846, and Evelyn Eglinton, born 1847.<sup>216</sup> That he returned to the Ottoman Empire, after becoming an American citizen and marrying an American woman, is significant. While no extant sources spell out Oscanyan's motives for returning, we can confidently assume that he went back, as above report suggests, at least in part to help his country and his people. This was a common practice for educated urban Ottoman Armenians who went to study in Europe before returning home to Constantinople.<sup>217</sup> In fact, the 1840s saw the "first generation of [Ottoman Armenian] western intellectuals, mostly Constantinople-based but educated in Europe" who worked to disseminate European literature (in translation) to their community.<sup>218</sup> Oscanyan, though returning to Constantinople from the United States and not Europe, began his work back in his home city with a publishing project of his own.

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<sup>213</sup> 1840 passport application: National Archives and Records Administration (NARA); Washington D.C.; Roll #: 1; Volume #: Roll 1 - Register of Passport Applications, November 14, 1834- May 8, 1843; 1857 passport application: National Archives and Records Administration (NARA); Washington D.C.; Roll #: 64; Volume #: Roll 064 – July 1, 1857-August 31, 1857; Craig Robertson, *The Passport in America: The History of a Document* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>214</sup> "Married," *Christian Watchman* [Boston], December 13, 1839.

<sup>215</sup> "Passengers," *Commercial Advertiser* [New York], January 24, 1840.

<sup>216</sup> Thomas Harrison Montgomery, *A Genealogical History of the Family of Montgomery* (Philadelphia: Printed for Private Circulation, 1863), 92.

<sup>217</sup> For more on this phenomenon, see Vartan Artinian, *The Armenian Constitutional System in the Ottoman Empire, 1839-1863* (Istanbul: No Publisher, 1988), 59-65.

<sup>218</sup> Panossian, *The Armenians*, at 138.

### The Byzantine Advertiser (*Aztarar Puzantian*)

Oscanyan's first endeavor upon returning to the Ottoman capital was to publish a newspaper for the Armenian community. Named *Aztarar Puzantian* (*The Byzantine Advertiser*), it was one of the very first newspapers published for an Ottoman audience.<sup>219</sup> Its tagline clearly stated its mission: "The enlightenment of a nation comes from knowledge and education." Oscanyan was thus at the very forefront of a movement within Ottoman Armenian intellectual circles that sought to develop "ընթերցասիրութիւն/entertsasiroutyun"—or a "love of reading" in a larger swath of the Armenian public. Jennifer Manoukian has written about what she calls this "cultural ideal" and the campaign, which started in the 1840s, to instill it in nineteenth-century Ottoman Armenian society. These calls by Ottoman Armenians to promote a "love of reading" and the related "ուսումնասիրութիւն/ousoumnasiroutyun," or "love of learning," sought to "expand literacy and education" beyond boys training for the clergy and members of the elite.<sup>220</sup> Importantly, and as Oscanyan's newspaper slogan shows, the "love of reading" campaign was "inextricably linked to the project of nation-building."<sup>221</sup> As Manoukian explains, "by the mid-nineteenth century, many urban Ottoman Armenians came to admire the wealth, power, and growing sense of national consciousness among Western Europeans and sought to fashion Armenians in their image, setting out to discursively create a nation out of a geographically disparate, linguistically diverse and culturally varied group."<sup>222</sup> In the same way

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<sup>219</sup> The impact of the daily papers would have been abundantly clear to Oscanyan in 1830s New York City. See: David M. Henkin, *City Reading: Written Words and Public Spaces in Antebellum New York* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

<sup>220</sup> Jennifer Manoukian, "Literary Translation and the Expansion of the Ottoman Armenian Reading Public, 1853-1884," *Book History* 25-1 (Spring 2022), 128-171, at 130-131.

<sup>221</sup> Manoukian, "Literary Translation," 131.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid. For more on early Armenian attempts at nation-building, see Panossian, *The Armenians*, 75-127.

that the “Armenia” Oscanyan evoked in his 1830s lectures was not an established state but rather a collective idea, the nation Armenians sought to build in the middle of the nineteenth century was, as Manoukian describes it, “a sense of national consciousness” imagined in the template of Western Europe. While this was not the first time that Armenians had attempted such a unifying pursuit, it was the first time that Armenian intellectuals sought to bring along “a wider swath of the Armenian population” in their “national project.”<sup>223</sup> Newspapers, and the ability to read them, were central to this mission.

Indeed, as Benedict Anderson has famously shown, not just the narratives contained within them but the *consumption* of newspapers themselves created a national community: the idea that one is reading the same newspaper as an “imagined community” of others – i.e. a nation, or a budding nation. As he writes, each newspaper consumer is “well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion.”<sup>224</sup> To fortify such a performative and imaginative act of nation-building, then, newspapers like Oscanyan’s sought to connect the “importance of reading to the promise of what they termed “ազգային յառաջդիմութիւն/azkayin harachtimoutyun” or “national progress.”<sup>225</sup> While the extant issues of Oscanyan’s newspaper do not use this phrase directly, the intention was there: Oscanyan’s newspaper was a text to be read (or listened to) as a means of acquiring knowledge about the world and thereby growing in enlightenment and uniting, imaginatively, as an

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<sup>223</sup> Manoukian, “Literary Translation,” 131-132.

<sup>224</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 35.

<sup>225</sup> Manoukian, “Literary Translation,” 132.

enlightened and progressing, Armenian nation – a nation that was a part of the Ottoman Empire but not at its mercy. Oscanyan and his peers both believed and expected that their distribution of knowledge would produce enlightenment – that it would change minds and change behaviors. And in an important way, they were right: as Murat Yıldız has shown, by the twentieth century, young Constantinopolitan men, across ethno-religious communities, were being encouraged to *stop* reading so much and start exercising!<sup>226</sup>

Only two issues of Oscanyan's newspaper still exist.<sup>227</sup> Because Ottoman newspaper editors at this time largely wrote the contents of the newspapers themselves, the words of *Aztarar Puzantian* should be read as Oscanyan's. The first issue of the paper, published on Saturday November 30, 1840, was written in Armenian. By the Saturday January 4, 1841 issue (the other extant issue), Oscanyan was using Turkish written in Armenian letters (or Armeno-Turkish).<sup>228</sup> This change was almost certainly made to increase his readership (and thus his

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<sup>226</sup> Murat C. Yıldız, "Strengthening Male Bodies and Building Robust Communities: Physical Culture in the Late Ottoman Empire" (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2015).

<sup>227</sup> I examined the two extant issues of *The Byzantine Advertiser* at the Library of the Mekhitarist Monastery of Vienna. They are now available online through the press collection of the Mekhitarist Library at <https://arar.sci.am/dlibra/publication/295565?language=hyw#structure>. These issues are: *Aztarar Puzantian* [Constantinople], November 30, 1840 and *Aztarar Puzantian* [Constantinople], January 4, 1841.

<sup>228</sup> For more on Armeno-Turkish see Murat Cankara, "Çifte Maduniyet, Çifte İşlev: Ermeni Harfli Türkçe Basında Dil ve Kimlik," *İlef Dergisi* 2-2 (2015): 105-130; Murat Cankara, "Armeno-Turkish Writing and the Question of Hybridity," in Babayan and Pifer, *An Armenian Mediterranean*, 173-191; Masayuki Ueno, "One Script, Two Languages: Garabed Panosian and His Armeno-Turkish Newspapers in the Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Empire," *Middle Eastern Studies* 52-4 (2016): 605-622; Bedross Der Matossian, "The Development of Armeno-Turkish in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Ottoman Empire: Marking and Crossing Ethnoreligious Boundaries," *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 8- 1 (2020): 67-10; and Sebouh D. Aslanian, "'Prepared in the Language of the Hagarites': Abbot Mkhitar's 1727 Armeno-Turkish Grammar of Modern Western Armenian," *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies* 25 (2016): 54-86; Börte Sagaster, "The Role of Turcophone Armenians as Literary Innovators and Mediators of Culture in the Early Days of Modern Turkish Literature," in Evangelia Balta and Mehmet Ölmez (eds.), *Between Religion and Language: Turkish-Speaking Christians, Jews and Greek-Speaking Muslims and Catholics in the Ottoman Empire* (Istanbul: Eren, 2011), 101-10.



profitability).<sup>229</sup> As Masayuki Ueno argues of Ottoman Armenian newspapers in the 1860s, readers valued Armeno-Turkish because Turkish was the dominant spoken language in Constantinople as well as the provinces: while many Armenians did understand, speak, and write in both Armenian and Turkish, many more Armenians understood Turkish only. Thus, through Armeno-Turkish, both multilingual and monolingual readers (and listeners) could engage with the text.<sup>230</sup>

Beyond business, attracting a wide audience was essential to achieving Oscanyan's goal of national enlightenment. A nation needs people. To enlighten his community or nation (*azk*), Oscanyan sought to "publish scientific and moral issues" in addition to "spreading the general news" so as to "enlighten our community in every aspect."<sup>231</sup> In his first issue, he covered topics relating to Politics (both local and from places like Egypt and France), Philology, Morality, Business, Crafts, and Entertainment. He explicitly forbade any content written about religion or against the Ottoman government, however. The instructional element of his project was clear. That is, Oscanyan was selling a product that he needed to teach people how to use. The purpose of reading a newspaper (*gazeta*), he wrote,

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<sup>229</sup> See the notice on the change in "The Aztarar Puzantian," *Arshalouys Araradyan* [Smyrna], January 3, 1841 at <https://arar.sci.am/dlibra/publication/295706/edition/271348/content>. The editor writes: "The Aztarar Puzantian" newspaper's owner informs in its fourth issue that he will shift from Armenian and will start publishing his newspaper in Turkish. We are very sorry that the above-mentioned newspaper owner, convinced of the advice of people who do not value the Armenian language much, and especially seeking to find more contributors, made this decision reluctantly. Indeed, we also know that the majority of our people, not having enough knowledge in Armenian, or especially discrediting their own language, are more gratified by using the Turkish language. However, we will do our best to eradicate this vile habit from our nation, which unfortunately is very common today. And we very much hope that little by little, our modern Armenian language will become familiar to most, and we will not be ashamed in front of foreign nations, begging for another language to express our thoughts." I thank Jennifer Manoukian for identifying this notice and Varouj Tenbelian for his help with translation.

<sup>230</sup> Ueno, "One Script, Two Languages," 611.

<sup>231</sup> "Annotation," *Aztarar Puzantian* [Constantinople], November 30, 1840.

is to be informed about the events happening around the world. Then in order to utilize the news in the newspaper and enjoy such a habit, one needs to be familiar with geography and history, that is, we should know what the Earth is made of and who those numerous peoples living on Earth are and where they live. Since these two scientific disciplines (that is Geography and History) are not so commonly known among us, we feel the need to serve our readers by briefly providing information on these two disciplines in our newspaper once in a while...We have to show that these two sciences are the easiest, the most enjoyable and the most useful. It is the easy science as we hear that children are taught it in the enlightened European countries. If children can learn such sciences, then cannot the adults comprehend it? Or do the adults here fall short of intelligence compared to the kids in those countries?<sup>232</sup>

This comparison – this challenge – in which Oscanian dared his readers to show that they could operate at the same level as “the enlightened European countries” demonstrates Oscanian’s adoption of a civilizational framework and hierarchy that placed Europe, at least in some way, at the top. In the January 4, 1841 issue of *Aztarar Puzantian*, Oscanian wrote about the “progressive schooling” of an Armenian school in Constantinople. There was no doubt, Oscanian wrote, that the school would continue to develop and improve, “carrying itself to the level of advanced countries.”<sup>233</sup> Oscanian, like most other Ottoman Armenian intellectuals of his time, believed in the political and intellectual supremacy of the “advanced countries” of Western Europe – i.e., in “Western civilization.” Indeed, as Manoukian writes, agents like Oscanian attempted to “direct Ottoman Armenians to follow in their [Western Europe’s] footsteps down their well-trodden path to ‘progress’” so that “they too would one day join the ranks of the so-called ‘enlightened’ and ‘civilized’ nations.”<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> “Philology,” *Aztarar Puzantian* [Constantinople], November 30, 1840.

<sup>233</sup> “Istanbul,” *Aztarar Puzantian* [Constantinople], January 4, 1841.

<sup>234</sup> Manoukian, “Literary Translation,” 132.

The belief in an evolutionary march towards civilization was not just taken up by Armenians. It was a trend in Ottoman society writ large. Ozan Ozavci contends that the Ottoman use of the idea of “civilization” can be traced back to the 1830s. He argues that even though Ottoman Greek revolutionaries used the term in international diplomacy in the 1810s – specifically to position themselves against “barbaric Turks”<sup>235</sup> – the “vocabulary of civilization (*medeniyet*)”<sup>236</sup> was not naturalized into Ottoman Turkish rhetoric for another twenty years when it was taken up by Ottoman statesmen to “situate Istanbul among the civilized imperial Powers.”<sup>237</sup> Oscanyan, in using the language of enlightenment and civilization, and comparing Armenians to Europeans, was likewise positioning Armenians on an equal plane – or at least capable of being on an equal plane – with those who seemed to rule the world.

Oscanyan’s newspaper ceased production by 1841 after only one year, a closure that seems to be due to a lack of support by readers.<sup>238</sup> His venture may have been a bit too ahead of the curve – to develop the communal act of reading while trying to grow a business predicated on the act of reading is inherently challenging. But Oscanyan was able to move on to other endeavors. By 1843, he was involved extensively with the activities of the Ottoman Porte.<sup>239</sup> Around this time, the reigning Sultan Abdulmecid I (r. 1839-1861) tasked him with purchasing the dowry of his sister, Adile Sultan, who was betrothed in 1845 to Mehmet Ali Pasha, the commander of the Ottoman Imperial Navy. The Porte at this time

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<sup>235</sup> Ozavci, *Dangerous Gifts*, 117.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>238</sup> This is implied in a later issue of *Arshalouys Araradyan* from August 22, 1847. Available at <http://tert.nla.am/archive/HGG%20TERT/arshaluys%20araratyan%20ozmyrnia/1847/292.pdf>.

<sup>239</sup> The following information relies heavily on Wilson and Fisk, *Appletons’ Cyclopaedia*, 598. It is unclear how Oscanyan established a relationship with the members of the Ottoman government.

also appointed Oscanyan as private secretary of Ahmed Fethi Pasha, a former Ottoman ambassador to Russia, Austria, and France.<sup>240</sup> Ahmed Fethi Pasha was among the most important people in the Ottoman government during this period: the husband of Atiye Sultan, another sister of Sultan Abdulmecid I, he was named marshal of the Imperial Arsenal (Tophane-i Amire Müşiri) sometime before 1846. A collector of Ottoman antiques, Ahmed Fethi Pasha was also responsible for creating the Empire's first imperial museum, the first incarnation of which was established in 1846. This exhibition hall was effectively a semi-private collection of military antiques that included an assemblage of 140 wood mannequins dressed in historical costumes and attire, particularly the historic dress and accouterment of the divisions of the Janissary (military) corps.<sup>241</sup> In 1852, the ancient costumes exhibit was "separated from the rest of the collection" and "became a major tourist attraction in Istanbul."<sup>242</sup> A few years later, in 1855, Jean Brindesi even published in Paris an album of 22 lithographs based on the costume displays at the museum.<sup>243</sup> Oscanyan's next major attempt to introduce the Ottoman people to a non-Ottoman audience was derived from this very establishment. His "Oriental and Turkish Museum" opened its doors in London in August of 1854. It is this pursuit, and Oscanyan's next professional phase of similar endeavors, to which we will now turn.

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<sup>240</sup> Oscanyan stated this himself in 1883 in Christopher Oscanyan, "Suleiman Pasha, of Shipka Pass," *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly*, July 1883, XVI.

<sup>241</sup> Wendy M.K. Shaw, *Possessors and Possessed: Museums, Archaeology, and the Visualization of History in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 54-58.

<sup>242</sup> H. Ahmet Arslanturk and M. Mert Sunar (eds.), *Elbice-i Atika: Musée des Anciens Costumes Turcs de Constantinople, Osmanlı Kiyafetleri/Ottoman Costumes* by Jean (Giovanni) Brindesi (Istanbul: Okur Tarih, 2018), 8-9.

<sup>243</sup> Jean Brindesi, *Elbice-i Atika: Musée des Anciens Costumes Turcs de Constantinople* (Paris: Lemerancier, 1855)

## Chapter 2

### *Thin Place Diplomacy (1855-1862)*

#### Chapter Overview

This chapter examines Oscanyan's mid-century diplomatic efforts to place Ottomans, Americans, and the British on equal terms by creating a middle ground or "thin place" between Constantinople and, first, London and, later, New York. A "thin place" – used traditionally in a spiritual sense to describe "those rare locales where the distance between heaven and Earth collapses" and "the places in the world where the walls are weak," where "another dimension seems nearer than usual"<sup>244</sup> – offers an effective description of the kinds of spaces that Oscanyan created and offered to American and British audiences as a multiply affiliated, multi-lingual figure in 1850s London and New York. He did this both through designated physical spaces (a wax figure museum, a Turkish coffee house, and a Turkish bath) as well as through acts of cultural and linguistic translation (through his lectures, translation, and his personal clothing). In each of these pursuits, Oscanyan attempted to transport friends, colleagues, and consumers to another plane of existence; he wanted his American and British audiences to think and even to act like Ottoman Turks and take this essential first step in building mutual understanding-based diplomatic relations. His efforts, however, were largely unsuccessful: his interlocutors seemed resistant to thinking and behaving like Ottomans. Both the museum and

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<sup>244</sup> Oliver Burkeman, "This column will change your life: where heaven and Earth collide," *The Guardian* [London], March 22, 2014. Quoted in: Eric Weiner's travelogue, *Man Seeks God* (New York: Twelve, 2012). Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/mar/22/this-column-change-your-life-heaven-earth#:~:text=There%20is%20a%20name%20for,spirituality%20travelogue%2C%20Man%20Seeks%20God> (Accessed January 18, 2020).

the coffee house closed relatively quickly, and the Turkish bath never gathered enough support to open. Audiences also preferred to receive both lecturers and foreign visitors on their own, American terms. Chapter 2 shows how, despite these political failures, Oscanian was able to leverage his expertise, experience, and social networks to cultivate a platform and a personal celebrity that enabled him at least to try to reach his goals.

### **Oriental and Turkish Museum (1854)**

Along with a partner, another Ottoman Armenian named Servope Aznavour, Oscanian installed the “Oriental and Turkish Museum” at St. George’s Gallery in London’s Hyde Park Corner in the summer of 1854.<sup>245</sup> An exhibition of wax figures arranged in scenes such as a harem, an Armenian wedding, and the inside of a “Turkish bath” (*hamam*), the museum took over a space (a pagoda!) that had initially been constructed for the extremely popular Chinese Collection, which was organized in 1841 and ran throughout the 1840s.<sup>246</sup> Opened towards the outset of the Crimean War (1853-56), in which the United Kingdom was allied with the Ottoman Empire against Russia, Oscanian’s museum was a diplomatic thin place designed to strengthen the alliance between Britain and her new ally.<sup>247</sup> As indicated by the museum’s location, however, the display also emerged during a period of intense showmanship in London: the ongoing popularity of “nontheatrical entertainments” and the recent Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851 all “ministered” to the same “widespread impulses and interests” –

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<sup>245</sup> At present, nothing else is known about Servope Aznavour.

<sup>246</sup> Altick, *Shows of London*. On the Chinese Exhibition, see 294. On the Oriental and Turkish Museum, see 496. For more on the Museum, see Jenny Elkan, “Knightsbridge Could Not Go to Mahomet,” *Museums Journal* 89 (1989): 28–30.

<sup>247</sup> Avcioglu, *Turquerie*, 225.

namely, the "desire to be amused or instructed."<sup>248</sup> The museum was received enthusiastically by the press, though it opened amidst the off-season in August 1854 during "a period when exhibitions of any kind have ceased, for a brief period, to attract large numbers of visitors." As the reviewer continued, "People are enjoying themselves elsewhere. In the meantime, those who visit the Museum cannot fail to be struck by the interesting claims which it possesses, and thus its reputation will be well-established by the time the long vacation is over, and town is once more filled."<sup>249</sup> Another reviewer quipped: "The "close of the season" has not frightened two Turkish adventurers, C. Oscanyan and S. Azravour [sic], who, for the last ten months have been preparing an "Oriental and Turkish Museum," which they open to the public tomorrow."<sup>250</sup> In general, reviewers emphasized the realism of the museum's wax figures; as one wrote, "the arms and legs of the males are rough with real hair, most delicately applied," and "actual drops of perspiration are on the brows of the porters...The whole thing is less a copy of life than life itself brought to stagnation."<sup>251</sup> Still, such detail could not demand any price: the hefty two-schilling cost of admission for adults and one schilling for children was apparently a source of complaint; the proprietors likely felt strapped for cash.<sup>252</sup>

The Oriental and Turkish Museum would have been understood in the context of the Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851, where the Ottoman exhibit hall, which featured textiles,

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<sup>248</sup> Altick, *Shows of London*, 1. See also, Sadiah Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade: Exhibitions, Empire, and Anthropology in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2011).

<sup>249</sup> "Turkish and Oriental Museum," *The Era* [London], August 13, 1854.

<sup>250</sup> "Notes from Our London Correspondent," *Yorkshire Gazette* [Yorkshire], August 12, 1854. If Oscanyan and Aznavour had indeed been working on the museum for ten months, it seems likely that they left Constantinople to do so right near the beginning of the war in late 1853.

<sup>251</sup> Extract from the "Times," August 9, 1854, in Christopher Oscanyan, *The Catalogue of the Oriental and Turkish Museum* (London: W.J. Golbourn, 1854).

<sup>252</sup> See for example "Multiple Classified ads," *Morning Post* [London], October 23, 1854 in which a price dropped to one schilling is noted "in compliance with the suggestions of multiple patrons."

artisanal products, and other objects displayed in the manner of a Turkish Bazaar, was seen as a “diplomatic exchange” between Turkey and Britain, one that demonstrated a mutually-beneficial relationship between the two states.<sup>253</sup> Indeed, at the time of the Exhibition in the early 1850s, “the overall attitude of the British was strongly pro-Ottoman” owing largely to their sympathies for the Tanzimat reforms discussed in Chapter 1.<sup>254</sup> Oscanyan’s early advertisements for the museum likewise promised that “the great sympathy now felt by the British public, for the Turkish nation, will ensure the success of this most interesting, and truly unique Turkish exhibition.”<sup>255</sup> As Francesca Vanke argues, “in mainstream British commentary,” the Ottoman Empire was seen “as an illustration of an evolving nation, which was in the process of becoming less an ‘other’ than a part of ‘us’ by means of its seemingly willing espousal of ‘progress.’”<sup>256</sup>

On the one hand, Oscanyan emphasized this exact pursuit of progress – as well as the Ottoman willingness to work as diplomatic partners with Britain – in his preface to the *Oriental and Turkish Museum* catalogue (see Image B). Appealing to Britain’s powerful position on the world stage, he wrote: “Doubtless, ere long, there will be many other wonderful reforms in Turkey: indeed, who can foretell the fate of this interesting country, now struggling for life or death, and only upheld by the kind interference of its powerful protectors.”<sup>257</sup> On the other hand, Oscanyan also emphasized Turkey’s history. He thus

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<sup>253</sup> Francesca Vanke, “Degrees of Otherness: The Ottoman Empire and China at the Great Exhibition of 1851,” in Jeffrey A. Auerbach and Peter H. Hoffenberg (eds.), *Britain, the Empire, and the World at the Great Exhibition of 1851* (London: Ashgate, 2008), 191-205, at 204. For detail on the contents of the exhibit, see Gülname Turan, “Turkey in the Great Exhibition of 1851,” *Design Issues* 25-1 (Winter 2009), 64-79, at 69-73.

<sup>254</sup> Vanke, “Degrees of Otherness,” at 193.

<sup>255</sup> “Advertisements & Notices,” *Daily News* [London], June 12, 1854.

<sup>256</sup> Vanke, “Degrees of Otherness,” at 200.

<sup>257</sup> Oscanyan, *Oriental and Turkish Museum*, iii.



promised viewers that while Turkey's "past glory and magnificence are still fresh in our memories," the museum would serve "to revive and portray to the world, Turkey as it was, and as it is at the present time."<sup>258</sup> He likewise said that the proprietors "offer[ed] for inspection an Oriental Museum, or a Collection of Models from Life, illustrating the Turkish nation, 'past and present,' realized by correct Costumes, including every minute detail of Arms, &c." He continued, "Never before has been exhibited in Europe, or elsewhere, anything of this sort, so true to nature."<sup>259</sup> Throughout, there was a clear emphasis on realism and accuracy to facilitate a convincing thin place between London and Constantinople, as well as between the past and the present.

Art historian Nebahat Avcioglu sees this emphasis on the past as a demonstration that Oscanyan saw his museum as "an indirect means of political criticism of the Ottoman Empire, or rather of the changes introduced under the modernizing programme of the *Tanzimat* (meaning re-ordering) along Western models during the reign of Sultan Abdulmecid (1839-1861)." She argues that Oscanyan was one of a contingent of Ottoman elites who "saw the changes as essentially antithetical to the pluralist nature of the Empire as the state tried to rationalize and institutionalize egalitarian and secularist laws." Oscanyan, she continues, thus "sought for the preservation of the system as it was before the reforms."<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid. Emphasis mine.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> Avcioglu, *Turquerie*, 225-226. Of Oscanyan, she also says that "In his book *The Sultan and His People*, he glorified the ancient regime of the Ottomans and criticized the *Tanzimat* for subverting the balance of power enshrined in tolerance and peaceful coexistence within the Ottoman Empire. He argued that these new reforms could have worked better had there not been the Russian threat, which destabilized the old Osmanlis who became unnerved by the new rules and as a result returned to the religious dogmas, which were now the source of social tensions within the empire." But she does not cite the pages to which she is referring, and I cannot locate these exact arguments.

While Oscanyan did, in part, represent costumes and practices of the past, it was neither to the exclusion of representing the present day, nor in opposition to Ottoman reform. As he stated in the catalogue, he believed that “there will be many other wonderful reforms in Turkey.”<sup>261</sup> There are at least two reasons why he may have emphasized the past as well as the present. First, as he would go on to write in his 1857 book, Oscanyan believed *contrast* was “often the greatest source of pleasure to the mind,” and thus appealed to the public taste.<sup>262</sup> As such, he likely knew that visions of a world that looked entirely different to 1850s London would help him attract an audience to his museum. Indeed, as H. Ahmet Arslanturk and M. Mert Sunar say in their introduction to a compilation of Jean Brindesi’s images of costumed figures from the *Elbise-i Atika* (the precursor to Oscanyan’s museum, with which he likely worked in Constantinople), “the majority of European visitors to the Ottoman lands were more interested in [the] native and exotic than the modern Ottoman image.”<sup>263</sup> In utilizing imagery that appealed to his audience, Oscanyan was practicing a method of showmanship and diplomacy that we will see again and again in his work: namely, combining a familiar image with corrective adjustments to represent a more “authentic” reality, a representation that in turn gave Oscanyan credibility as an expert. Second, and quite practically, Oscanyan may have emphasized the older Ottoman dress because the costumes themselves were brought directly from the museum in Constantinople.

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<sup>261</sup> Oscanyan, *Oriental and Turkish Museum*, iii.

<sup>262</sup> Oscanyan, *The Sultan and His People*, 10.

<sup>263</sup> H. Ahmet Arslanturk and M. Mert Sunar, *Elbise-i Atika: Musee des Anciens Costumes Turcs de Constantinople, Osmanli Kiyafetleri/Ottoman Costumes by Jean (Giovanni) Brindesi* (Istanbul: Okur Tarih, 2018), 7. For more on the Elbise-i-Atika, see Theophile Gautier, *Constantinople of Today*, Translated from the French by Robert Howe Gould (London: David Bogue, 1854), Chapter XXVI: The Elbise-i-Atika, 319-326.

Using the third person plural throughout the text – i.e., *they* do such and such – Oscanyan, as he did in his 1830s lectures, took the role of cultural translator or native informant to represent the “true spirit and style” of the Ottomans to a European audience for whom it had “always been difficult, and in many cases impossible... to acquire much correct information about the institutions of the Turks.”<sup>264</sup> In other words, once again, Oscanyan wanted his museum to counter “erroneous impressions” of the people of the Ottoman empire. To do this, he once again quoted and corrected a previously published travelogue; this time, it was Robert Walsh’s 1839 *Constantinople and the Scenery of the Seven Churches of Asia Minor*. Before transmitting a passage about the Turkish Bath, or *hamam*, in full, he explained that the process of being cleaned in the famed institution had been “most ridiculously described, and, either through malice or ignorance, most egregiously exaggerated by travellers.” He then quoted a full passage by Walsh, in which Walsh described a typical bather as a “sufferer” at the hands of the *hamam* attendant, a sufferer who feels as if, during his treatment, his “very spine was separated, and the vertebrae of the back torn asunder.” “In vain,” Walsh laments, “he complains of this treatment, screams out in anguish and apprehension, and struggles to extricate himself.” “The incubus,” Walsh writes of the *hamam* attendant, is undeterred: he “sits grinning upon” the bather, “torturing him till he becomes passive from very exhaustion.”<sup>265</sup>

The first stop on Oscanyan’s textual museum tour was precisely the Turkish bath. Here, Oscanyan corrected erroneous descriptions such as those perpetuated by Walsh and

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<sup>264</sup> Oscanyan, *Oriental and Turkish Museum*, iii-iv.

<sup>265</sup> Oscanyan, *Oriental and Turkish Museum*, 5, quoting Robert Walsh, *Constantinople and the Scenery of the Seven Churches of Asia Minor* (London: Fisher, Son, & Co., 1839), at 36.

described its uses and physical attributes at length, including the behaviors of typical patrons, male and female. He was unqualified in his praise for the institution, which he noted was “the more attractive on account of its entire dissimilarity from all establishments for the same purpose in Europe.”<sup>266</sup> While one might expect that as an Ottoman Armenian with significant European and American sympathies, Oscanyan’s primary goal in representing his culture/s and his people/s to a non-Ottoman audience would be to demonstrate their *similarities* to Europe and, as such, to “Western civilization.” It is striking, however, that this was *not* usually the case in the catalogue. Even when Oscanyan was demonstrating Ottoman “progress” (usually, in the image of Europe), he was still overwhelmingly concerned with presenting a different, *unique* way of life. Oscanyan’s painstakingly detailed account of the rituals and environment constituting the Turkish bath was a prime example of this tendency. In the exhibit for “A Kahve, or a Turkish Coffee Shop,” he likewise depicted the everyday experience of visiting such an establishment, which he described as “the resort of persons of all ranks and condition.”<sup>267</sup>

Following the *hamam* and the Ottoman coffee house, Oscanyan introduced an Armenian wedding, and through it, the Armenian people. In a text of over eighty pages written expressly to represent the *Ottoman and Turkish Museum*, the Armenians were described at considerable length (five pages) beginning on page twelve, under the heading “A Group Representing an Armenian Wedding.” While Oscanyan did not use “we” in this section – he continued to use the third person plural of the informant – his emphasis, tone, and

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>267</sup> Oscanyan, *Oriental and Turkish Museum*, 10.

narrative selections spoke volumes. Not only did his early inclusion of the Armenians in the catalogue and museum convey a pride of place, but his exalted tone and description also indicated that he held the Armenian people, his people, in the highest regard. As he wrote, the Armenian community “constitutes the very life of Turkey.”<sup>268</sup> Additionally, Oscanyan’s tone was here for the first time negative regarding the Turkish Empire, about which, at the tour-stops immediately preceding, he had spoken with genuine praise. For example, Oscanyan wrote, as he did in his 1830s lectures, that “the Turkomans... subjugated them, took possession of their territories, and have ever since held them in bondage.”<sup>269</sup> Without the Armenians, Oscanyan concluded, “the Osmanlis could not survive a single day.”<sup>270</sup>

After this passage, Oscanyan continued by praising the accomplished multilingualism of the Armenian community in Turkey, as well as the shared “habits of life” of the Armenians and their “masters.”<sup>271</sup> He moved forward to discuss the importance of Christianity to Armenians, and the patriarchal structure of the Armenians’ social institutions, culminating finally in a description of an Armenian marriage ceremony, which an attendant diorama depicted. He concluded this wedding depiction with the interjection, “It is to be observed, that the Armenians are daily adopting the manners and customs of the more civilized nations of Western Europe,”<sup>272</sup> – a behavior he occasionally lamented when speaking of the Ottoman world as a whole, such as when he said that the Turkish bath was all “the more attractive on account of its entire dissimilarity from all

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<sup>268</sup> Oscanyan, *Oriental and Turkish Museum*, 13-14, emphasis mine. This phrase will also appear in Oscanyan’s later writing on the Armenians.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid. Emphasis mine.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid. Emphasis mine.

<sup>271</sup> Oscanyan, *Oriental and Turkish Museum*, 14.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid., 15.

establishments for the same purpose in Europe.” Encouraging Armenians to take up the “manners and customs of the more civilized nations of Western Europe” was also a pursuit he supported in his newspaper fourteen years earlier. Indeed, Oscanyan’s imperial politics were complex: one might wonder how a British audience would interpret statements, such as the above, that critiqued the Ottomans within a larger museum that extolled their virtues. Or how they were to understand the inconsistent valorization of “Western civilization.” Perhaps they hardly noticed. After all, reviewers tended to focus on the richness and beauty of the costumes, the extensive attention to detail and realism of the wax figures, and even opportunities for further consumption. One reviewer even suggested some additions to the museum that, as we will see, may have given Oscanyan a good idea for his next venture. Specifically, he proposed that a “pipe-shop” be added to the museum, and “Rahat-lokoum” [Turkish delight] be served in the refreshment-room “instead of merely English cakes and biscuits.” Additionally, he submitted, “*bona fide* sherbet would have a great “call,” for, in the present weather, visitors are as thirsty as a Turkish tiler in Ramazan.”<sup>273</sup>

### **Departure from London**

Not long after opening the Museum, in October of 1854, Oscanyan resigned his role as manager and left the enterprise in the care of his co-proprietor.<sup>274</sup> Not two days before his official resignation was noted in the papers, ads for the museum indicated that the admission price had dropped from the high two schillings to one schilling, “in compliance with the

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<sup>273</sup> “Turkish Exhibition,” *The Field* [London] September 2, 1854

<sup>274</sup> “St. George’s Gallery,” *Daily News* [London], October 28, 1854

suggestions of multiple patrons."<sup>275</sup> One wonders if there were business disagreements between the two partners. Oscanyan was on a boat to the United States by November 1854.

The Manifest of Passengers collected upon arrival of the *Steamship St. Louis* by the agent at the Port of New York listed the names of passengers who arrived together from Cowes, England and Le Havre, France on November 13, 1854. Christopher Oscanyan was listed on the second page, travelling along with a young woman named Emma and his two daughters, Adele and Evelyn. At the top of the list sat a name with which most New Yorkers at the time would be familiar: James Gordon Bennett, Occupation: Editor.<sup>276</sup> There are few people with whom it would have been more beneficial for Oscanyan to spend two weeks crossing the Atlantic to New York City. James Gordon Bennett was not just an editor, but the owner of the most-read newspaper in the country, *The New York Herald*. And as we have seen, newspapers were a big deal. Not simply a morning read, they were read out loud and shared between friends. In an important way, they not only provided cohesion to local communities but also organized information about an increasingly accessible wider world. *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, for example, was known for having "an insatiable fascination with foreign developments and cultures"<sup>277</sup> Always on the lookout for talented correspondents, Bennett would have appreciated Oscanyan's journalistic background and literary talents.<sup>278</sup> A short

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<sup>275</sup> "Multiple Classified ads," *Morning Post* [London], October 23, 1854

<sup>276</sup> Manifest of Passengers, 1854; Arrival: *New York, New York, USA*; Microfilm Serial: M237, 1820-1897; Reel 148, November 13-December 14, 1854. Available at: <https://archive.org/details/passengerlistsoo0148unix/page/n25/mode/2up> on page 26 (Accessed October 24, 2022).

<sup>277</sup> David Prior, "'Crete the Opening Wedge': Nationalism and International Affairs in Postbellum America," *Journal of Social History* 42-4 (2009): 861-87, at 868.

<sup>278</sup> James L Crouthamel, *Bennett's New York Herald and the Rise of the Popular Press* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1989), 50.

biography of Oscanyan from the 1880s indicates that Bennett was indeed “impressed with Oscanyan’s linguistic ability.”<sup>279</sup> With his fluent English, Armenian, Turkish, French, Italian, and Greek, Oscanyan must have felt like a personal conduit to thousands of others across the world.

Direct evidence of a relationship between Bennett and Oscanyan is scarce, but in an intensely face-to-face social and professional world like that of Bennett and Oscanyan’s New York City, it is almost certain that Bennett’s good will would have helped grease the wheels of Oscanyan’s new American career. He would indeed go on to have “considerable influence with the New York *Herald*” and to be “on friendly terms with the members of the Press in general.”<sup>280</sup>

While some later newspaper reports indicated that Oscanyan’s move back to the United States in 1854 was intended to be permanent, it is still unclear why he and his family undertook the move at all: was it a business decision? Did his wife want or need to go home to her family? Or had the Crimean War prompted a relocation first, to England, and then, back to New York? Of his intentions upon returning, the passenger list for the *St. Louis* offers only one clue: Oscanyan listed his occupation as “Merchant.” Having just left his position as a proprietor of the Oriental and Turkish Museum in London, one wonders: What was he selling?

### **Turkish *Kahve*, Turkish *Fez*, Turkish Bath**

Docking at New York on November 13, 1854, Oscanyan returned to a city that had grown considerably since he left almost fifteen years earlier. Whether it was good sense or good fortune, Oscanyan’s return to New York amid the city’s “individualistic, freewheeling

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<sup>279</sup> Wilson and Fisk, *Appletons’ Cyclopaedia*, 598..

<sup>280</sup> “Miscellaneous Personages,” *The Sporting Times* [Boston], December 26, 1868.



midfifties” was serendipitous.<sup>281</sup> A time of “flexible role players,”<sup>282</sup> when “idiosyncrasy in dress was a badge of honor;”<sup>283</sup> when there was an “emergence of celebrity and celebrity culture;”<sup>284</sup> and when a booming market for “useful knowledge” had both produced and fortified a “golden age of oratory,”<sup>285</sup> the era and the metropolis was fertile ground for Oscanyan’s professional activities. As *Frank Leslie’s* put it, by early 1856, he had already become “Oscanyan, the Turkish Lecturer” – “one of the celebrities of the day.”<sup>286</sup> Oscanyan’s experiments in a range of professional roles were all directed towards the same goal: improved U.S.-Ottoman relations and mutual understanding. In the two decades following his return to the country, Oscanyan established himself as a professional intermediary between Turkey and the United States. To “promot[e] mutual diplomatic relations”<sup>287</sup> between his two countries, Oscanyan worked across numerous jobs and genres to portray the Ottoman people as interesting, civilized, and equal to Americans. Thanks to his efforts across a range of fields, by 1858, he was already known as a “champion” of Turkey and the Turks; a “lecturer and writer in judicious vindication of his native country and its present rulers.”<sup>288</sup>

As will already be clear, by and large, Americans at this time referred to non-Arab Ottoman subjects as “Turks” – people who lived on or came from the land of Turkey, be they Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Turkish, Armenian, or otherwise. Reports that Oscanyan was, for

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<sup>281</sup> David S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman’s America: A Cultural Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1995), 363.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, 363.

<sup>284</sup> Bonnie Carr O’Neill, *Literary Celebrity and Public Life in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2017), 2. O’Neill, paraphrasing Henry James, describes celebrity as “a temporary appeal to a mass audience of his contemporaries,” at 1. “Their elevation to popular notice,” she adds, “seems to some like a vernacular style of election,” at 4.

<sup>285</sup> Reynolds, *Walt Whitman’s America*, 167,

<sup>286</sup> “Oscanyan, The Turkish Lecturer,” *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* [New York], February 23, 1856.

<sup>287</sup> Letter from Christopher Oscanyan to John Hay, August 5, 1861.

<sup>288</sup> “The Latest News,” *The New York Herald* [New York], May 15, 1858.

example, an “Armenian Turk,” or a “genuine Turk by birth” but a “Christian by education,”<sup>289</sup> show that even if Americans understood most Turks to be Muslim, they also felt one could be a Turk – of Turkey – and something else, too. In this way, Americans usually identified Oscanyan as a Turk, and Oscanyan positioned many of his own endeavors in the United States as “Turkish” – i.e., his Turkish Coffee House, or his plans for a Turkish Bath. American discourse largely ignored the fact that Ottoman people themselves – as Oscanyan himself repeatedly made clear— would never refer to themselves as “Turks,” a term they considered derogatory. But Oscanyan seems to have embraced the term for what it conveyed in his American context.

Oscanyan’s American “Turkishness” did not mean that being Armenian was unimportant to him, or that he was trying to deny his background. Quite the contrary. As we have already seen, Oscanyan considered himself to be first and foremost an Armenian. Being a Turk in America did not unmake him an Armenian. Rather, it made it legible, to the largest possible audience, that he was “of Turkey” – a land with Turkish rulers, not a land inhabited by a single ethno-religious group. As he wrote in the *Oriental and Turkish Museum* catalogue, in a sentiment he would employ throughout his career, the Armenian community “constitutes the very life of *Turkey*.” For Oscanyan, being a Turk was an American expression of ownership, and of belonging; it was his American way of saying he was an Ottoman.<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> “Orientalism in New York” *The Evening Mirror* [New York], June 6, 1855.

<sup>290</sup> It is unclear to what degree an American audience consistently understood that Oscanyan was not just a Turk but an Armenian Christian – even though he self-identified as an Armenian in his publications and lectures, and distinguished between Turks, Armenians, and others throughout his diplomatic efforts.

By February of 1855, news surfaced of Oscanyan's next venture: another thin place. A little below Bleeker Street in Manhattan, at 625 Broadway, a *Kahve*, or Turkish Coffee House, would soon welcome guests.<sup>291</sup> At its opening, the *Evening Mirror* noted that customers would be served in "Constantinopolitan style." "Ours is a cosmopolitan city," they boasted.<sup>292</sup> In March 1855, Bennett's *Herald* published a meaty piece on Oscanyan's establishment, which he opened along with another Armenian man named Hagop Pulgian. Little information exists about Pulgian, other than that he was an "Armenian gentleman," who ran the Turkey exhibition at the New York Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations in 1853-54.<sup>293</sup> In June 1853, he and his wife also exhibited "panoramic views" of Constantinople at 632 Broadway – right across the street from the future *Kahve* – which they advertised in Bennett's *Herald*. Describing themselves as "natives of the city of Constantinople, and Christians, belonging to the Armenian community," Mr. and Mrs. Pulgian indicated that they would "wear Turkish and Greek costumes, varying them from time to time."<sup>294</sup> A later ad concluded: "Pulgian Aga and his lady, both native Armenians, will be in attendance in different modern oriental costumes... Turkish, Armenian and Grecian – never before witnessed in this country."<sup>295</sup> As we will see, such efforts, particularly in costume, were a popular mode of both entertainment and conveying instructive material.

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<sup>291</sup> "City Intelligence," *The Evening Post* [New York], June 18, 1855; "Mr. Oscanyan's Turkish Khave [sic]," *The Independent*, January 17, 1856.

<sup>292</sup> "The News," *The Evening Mirror* [New York], February 19, 1855.

<sup>293</sup> *Official Catalogue of the New York Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations* (New York: G.P. Putnam & Co., 1853), 192.

<sup>294</sup> "A Card.—Mr. Editor—We Beg to Inform The," *The New York Herald* [New York], June 6, 1855.

<sup>295</sup> "Constantinople and Environs," *The New York Herald* [New York], June 12, 1853.

Of the two men and their joint pursuit, the *Herald* wrote that “two worthy Armenians, having compassion on our ignorance, and desirous of inducting us into the true oriental style of preparing and drinking the delicious beverage [coffee], have opened a Kahve, or Turkish coffee shop, in Broadway, between Houston and Bleecker streets.” They celebrated the fact that at the new establishment, located but a few steps from the noisy thoroughfare,” one could “sit for hours undisturbed,” and sip “from the porcelain cup,” smoke “the tchibouk or cooling nargile,” and “imagine himself in a city of the Osmanlis.” Such was a description of a thin place at work. The *Herald* even posited that a visit to the *Kahve*, quite in line with Oscanyan’s vision of correcting erroneous impressions, would satisfy even “the most skeptical that the Turks are not such Turks after all.”<sup>296</sup>

In opening a Turkish coffee house outside of the Ottoman Empire, Oscanyan and Pulgian joined a tradition of Armenian merchants who established these social centers in major “Western” cities. Oscanyan even mentioned this in his book: “In 1672, an Armenian at Paris, at the fair time, opened a coffee house. This establishment was much frequented by the literati.”<sup>297</sup> As Jean Leclant writes of coffee and cafes in Paris, “the Armenians, who by 1666... were bringing bales of coffee into Paris, realized that they could profit from the Parisians’ infatuation with the concoction by opening shops that would sell nothing but the murky brew... Thus, in 1672, at the Saint Germain Fair of Paris, a “caffé house” run by a certain Harouthioun or Pascal opened and was a great success.”<sup>298</sup> This same Pascal opened the first coffee shop in

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<sup>296</sup> “A Kahve in the Metropolis,” *The New York Herald* [New York], March 24, 1855.

<sup>297</sup> Oscanyan, *The Sultan and His People*, 318.

<sup>298</sup> Jean Leclant, “Coffee and Cafés in Paris: 1644–1693” in Robert Forster and Orest Ranum (eds.), *Food and Drink in History: Selections from the Annales, économies, sociétés, civilisations, Volume 5* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 86-97, at 88-89.

London in 1652. In 1685, an Armenian named Hovhanness Diodato opened the first coffee house in Vienna.<sup>299</sup>

Hagop Pulgian did not appear in other press on the *Kahve* outside of the March announcements, and after June, Oscanyan was mentioned as the only proprietor. Something must have changed between March and June. As we saw, Oscanyan also parted with his Armenian business partner in London only two months after opening the museum in 1854. His difficulties with business associates, including future agents, would continue throughout his career; it seems likely that he was in some way difficult to work with.

Located on Broadway between Bleecker and Houston streets, Oscanyan's *Kahve* was unusual both inside and out. From the street, walkers-by would see window displays stuffed with Turkish dresses, leather slippers, water pipes, and other bazaar-like offerings. To travel to Constantinople, they simply had to enter the saloon, the heavy door, as it closed, pushing out the bright light and noise of Broadway with its weight. Inside, the lighting was dim, but picturesque, emitted only from the ceiling. The perimeter of the main room was lined with cushioned benches and the walls were papered with an arabesque pattern. A small library of Persian poetry, European travelogues, history books, and other "Oriental" tales offered guests an array of titles to prompt their imaginations. To create an analogy, Oscanyan also placed a *Qur'an* alongside a Bible. The air always smelled of tobacco smoke and roses.<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> "Nayiri Partamian, "Coffee: A Cup of History," Available at: <https://anca.org/press-release/coffee-a-cup-of-history/> (Accessed July 18, 2022)

<sup>300</sup> For descriptions of the interior layout, see "Mr. Oscanyan's Turkish Khave [sic]," *The Independent*, January 17, 1856; "City Intelligence," *The Evening Post* [New York], June 18, 1855.

To guests, the waiters were said to speak French, “the language of diplomacy.”<sup>301</sup> To the proprietor, they were said to speak “their own language”<sup>302</sup> – presumably Turkish. A New York correspondent cast doubt on this representation, however, in the following “amusing incident” that reveals a tension between entertainment and education (a tension we will explore in greater depth in Chapter 4).

Among the many lecturers to whom the Gothamites are respectfully invited to listen is a Turk by the name of Oscanyon. He keeps a Coffee House on Broadway, where gentlemen of leisure often retire to smoke from a Turkish pipe and sip excellent Mocha. Great trouble is experienced by visitors to make the waiters understand their wants, for as they – the waiters – are dressed in Turkish costume, they take it for granted that they speak the language of the Turks and no other. Bayard Taylor happened in there the other day and anxious to give his Arabic an airing asked the waiter in that language for a cup of coffee. All he received however was a look of stupid astonishment. Supposing that he might be mistaken in the name of the article he made a careless remark about the weather which no Moslem would misunderstand. Chagrined that he could not make himself understood through a language in which he took so much pride he ventured to ask in English:

“What is your name?”

“Patrick Mulrooney, yer oner,” replied the waiter, as his eyes brightened. After that, Mr. Taylor took his coffee in quiet.<sup>303</sup>

As if prompted by the English writer who suggested the Oriental and Turkish Museum might offer tobacco pipes, “Rahat-lokoum... instead of merely English cakes and biscuits,” and “bona fide sherbet,” Oscanyan’s *Kahve* menu offered items including the *nargille* (water pipe), Turkish and Havana cigars, “loccom” or “fig paste” (i.e. Turkish Delights), and “racky” (“Turkish

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<sup>301</sup> “City Intelligence,” *The Evening Post*, June 18, 1855.

<sup>302</sup> “Mr. Oscanyan’s Turkish Khave [sic],” *The Independent*, January 17, 1856.

<sup>303</sup> “Mr. Taylor and an Irish Turk,” *Daily Evansville Journal* [Evansville], December 17, 1855.

brandy), with a note that “*kebab, pillaf, and kofte* may be had if ordered one day previously.”<sup>304</sup>

In June of 1855, Oscanyan also started advertising sherbet in New York’s newspapers. The ad read: “The World Renowned Sherbet, Delicious Turkish Beverage” with “Sherbet” printed below it in Arabic in a large, striking font. The text beneath the header described its ingredients and noted that it was “the favorite drink of the present Sultan.” Fearing or feigning competition, Oscanyan added, “As it has already gained great celebrity in New York, no doubt many imitations will be attempted. The public are therefore warned that all other preparations are spurious but those bearing the seal and signature of C. OSCANYAN.”<sup>305</sup>

Of Oscanyan’s intentions in opening the *Kahve*, one paper wrote, “He had, doubtless, a two-fold object in opening this cafe; profit and pleasure — the pleasure of introducing the luxuries of his own land into that of his adoption, and of having rooms where Turks and Americans could cultivate friendly relations by meeting in an unrestrained and social way.”<sup>306</sup> Another newspaperman noted: “He anticipates great advantages both to his own countrymen and ours from a better acquaintance with each other, to which he hopes his cafe will conduce.”<sup>307</sup> Yet another described the endeavor as “the effort of Mr. Oscanyan to cultivate a Turkish taste among Young America.”<sup>308</sup> “Young America” was most likely a reference to the young faction of Democrats dedicated to cultivating American cultural nationalism and literature; the movement was especially prominent in New York City in the 1840s and 1850s.

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<sup>304</sup> “City Intelligence,” *The Evening Post* [New York], June 18, 1855.

<sup>305</sup> For example, “The World Renowned Sherbet,” *New York Evening Mirror* [New York], June 18, 1855.

<sup>306</sup> “Mr. Oscanyan’s Turkish Khave [sic],” *The Independent*, January 17, 1856.

<sup>307</sup> “City Intelligence,” *The Evening Post* [New York], June 18, 1855.

<sup>308</sup> “Gathered News Fragments, &c,” *The Maine Farmer: An Agricultural and Family Newspaper* [Augusta], January 31, 1856.

In many ways, Oscanyan's *Kahve* was also an attempt to bring his museum's wax-figure displays to life: no matter how evocative his museum's details – how fine the costumes, how realistic the applied hair, how carefully positioned the drops of faux perspiration – nothing could convey the “true spirit” and logic of the Ottoman people better than Ottoman people themselves. One could even play chess at the *Kahve* with the “Oriental Club,” which *Frank Leslie's* tells us met on Wednesday and Friday evenings. With “no regular organization” and players who could “hardly be ranked as first class,” they still hosted “first-rate chess players... almost every evening.” The proprietor himself, they noted, was “quite adept at the game.”<sup>309</sup>

Of its proprietor, the *Evening Post* depicted “a gentleman of much refinement and talent,” adding that he “is an excellent linguist, speaking nearly all of the European languages, and many of the Asiatic.”<sup>310</sup> *Frank Leslie's*, in 1856, described him as “our valued friend,” who was “a ripe scholar, a perfect polyglot, and a cultivated gentleman, capable and willing to impart more information about Turkey and her institutions in one evening than could be gleaned from a score of books of travel.”<sup>311</sup> The *Independent* made a point to comment on his physical appearance, writing that “[Oscanyan] has a handsome Oriental face, but is thoroughly American in his appearance and costume, with the exception of the Turkish Fez which I hope he will always wear.”<sup>312</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> “Oriental Club,” *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* [New York], January 5, 1856

<sup>310</sup> “City Intelligence,” *The Evening Post* [New York], June 18, 1855.

<sup>311</sup> “Oriental Club,” *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* [New York], January 5, 1856

<sup>312</sup> “Mr. Oscanyan's Turkish Khave [sic],” *The Independent*, January 17, 1856.



This brief evocation of the fez speaks volumes about Oscanyan's goals and American attitudes towards Oscanyan. Wearing his fez, Oscanyan walked into an American urban landscape filled with relatively personalized fashion choices. As David S. Reynolds writes of the 1850s in his cultural biography of Walt Whitman, "individualistic expression even came to characterize clothing fashions in the fifties, a decade of great creativity and latitude in American dress."<sup>313</sup> Hats, in particular, were often used to make a statement: even "offbeat variations," like the "Italian alpine and Mexican sombrero, were allowed for men," underlining a "kind of do-your-own-thing mentality."<sup>314</sup> These dressing choices often had political implications: wearing the "Garibaldi fashion," for example, "featuring red blouses with puffed sleeves and short military-style jackets," could show affinity with the Young Italy movement that championed a united Italian nation.<sup>315</sup> Turkish fashion itself had even had a moment in the flexible fifties. Two years prior to Oscanyan's return, in 1851-52, some female reformers donned the Turkish "bloomer costume" – that is, "loose-fitting ankle-length trousers, inspired by Turkish pantaloons and worn under a shorter skirt"<sup>316</sup> – to promote "liberat[ing] the female

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<sup>313</sup> Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America*, 143.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

<sup>315</sup> Don H. Doyle, *The Cause of All Nations: An International History of the American Civil War* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 17.

<sup>316</sup> "From Harem Pants to Bloomers or Vice Versa" <https://blog.imagesmusicales.be/from-harem-pants-to-bloomers-or-vice-versa/> (Accessed March 31, 2021).

body from the tyranny of [women's] fashion for the practical reason of promoting physical health."<sup>317</sup>

For Oscanyan, the Turkish fez was a marker of Ottoman reform, of the Ottoman project to establish equality between Muslims and non-Muslims under Ottoman law. Starting in 1829, new Ottoman clothing laws removed the sartorial markers of difference that had long governed a society where "dress was identity" and clothing...marked the wearer as Muslim...Christian, or Jew, whether it be color of shoes or headgear, or texture and color of drapes of clothing."<sup>318</sup> As the prominent historian of the Ottoman Empire Donald Quataert writes,

No less than bureaucratic reform, fiscal centralization, and military action, clothing regulations centered on an 1829 law were powerful royal tools in Sultan Mahmud's effort to control and reshape state and society. The 1829 law specified the clothing and headgear to be worn by the varying ranks of civil and religious officials. It sought to replace ancient community and occupational signs of differentiation by dress with a homogenizing status marker – the fez – that placed the state at the center of Ottoman life as the sole remaining arbiter of identity.<sup>319</sup>

In other words, Oscanyan's fez was not only a marker of his difference in American society; it was also an affiliation with the Ottoman state, and a marker of a democratic sensibility that held all Ottoman subjects equal.

Despite – or because of – its abundance of novelty in an era that embraced the unusual, Oscanyan's *Kahve* failed to support its proprietor and his family and closed within a year of

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<sup>317</sup> Marr, *The Cultural Roots of American Islamicism*, 282-297, at 282.

<sup>318</sup> Virginia Aksan, "Who was an Ottoman? Reflections on 'Wearing Hats' and 'Turning Turk'," In Barbara Schmidt-Haberkamp (ed.) *Europa und die Türkei im 18. Jahrhundert / Europe and Turkey in the Eighteenth Century* (Bonn: Bonn University Press, 2011), 305-318 at 307.

<sup>319</sup> Donald Quataert, "Clothing Laws," 403.

opening, at the end of January 1856. While with the sources available we cannot know exactly what combination of social, economic, and logistical factors contributed to the closure of the coffeehouse, Oscanyan would later attribute the failure to the American temperament. In the third-person voice he wrote that an “attempt [to open a coffee house] was made in New York in 1855, but soon relinquished; notwithstanding the proverbial fondness of the Americans for good coffee and tobacco. The fact is, their temperament is too nervous, and their habits are too restless to allow them quietly to sip their coffee and smoke their pipes as the Orientals do.” And yet, he continued, “the style of preparing the coffee in Turkey is decidedly superior to any known in Europe or America, and has met with the approbation of those who have tasted it either in New York, or in the sultan’s dominions.”<sup>320</sup> As such, he added: “There is no doubt a desire among the Americans, to obtain this beverage in its purity and excellence, as evince the many machines and contrivances they use; yet they seldom if ever succeed in their attempts. The mixture from the grocers, and the ingredients they mingle at home, such as eggs, isinglass, etc., render it impossible to secure a pure, unadulterated, fragrant solution of this berry.”<sup>321</sup>

An auction was held to sell off the *Kahve’s* remaining contents and merchandise, including a “Turkish overcoat” worth \$500, which fetched a mere \$52.50. Apparently Oscanyan lost “some \$1300 in the enterprise.”<sup>322</sup> Whereas concurrent immigrant-run businesses — such as Chinese restaurants in 1850s San Francisco — were successful, catering as they did to large immigrant communities, a Turkish Coffee House in America did not have a natural clientele at this time: in the 1850s, there were only a small number of residents living in New York City who

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<sup>320</sup> Oscanyan, *The Sultan and His People*, 313-314.

<sup>321</sup> Oscanyan, *The Sultan and His People*, 314

<sup>322</sup> “Gathered News Fragments, &c,” *The Maine Farmer*, January 31, 1856.

were born in Turkey. A large Ottoman immigrant community would have identified the coffee house as one of *the* main spaces to socialize, and coffee as *the* beverage with which to do so. As Dana Sajdi notes of the institution, the coffeehouse could also be “employed as a mise-en-scene for high literary culture,” such as Arabic love poetry – a fact which no doubt would have appealed to the sensibilities of Ottoman literati like Oscanyan.<sup>323</sup> Perhaps, as Oscanyan suggested, his enterprise was simply too Ottoman, asking Americans to *be* Turks, rather than to be American or at the very least to be something in-between – like in the many coffee houses that now flourish across Manhattan, serving fancy coffee to nervous Americans (and exported, in turn, as distinctly American!).

In a separate attempt to transfer the topography of the Ottoman capital onto Manhattan and create yet another thin place, Oscanyan tried to raise funds to install a Turkish Bath in the city – first in 1855 and again in 1862.<sup>324</sup> Through advertisements, a prospectus (of which no known copy still exists), newspaper pieces that extolled the Bath’s health-giving properties, and, we must assume, a bevy of interpersonal, conversational pitches, Oscanyan worked hard to get the institution up and running.<sup>325</sup> In May 1855, he published an editorial in the *New York Observer*, articulating the virtues of the Turkish bath and how it worked, before delineating his plan:

I am very desirous to establish a bath of this sort in New York, where there is every facility; capital to start the enterprise, men of enlightened views to patronize, and many others to recommend it from actual experience. If the subject should meet with your approbation, I would beg you to recommend such a project to the public. The capital

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<sup>323</sup> Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus*, 147.

<sup>324</sup> Oscanyan’s enterprise is mentioned in Nebahat Avcioglu, “The Turkish Bath in the West,” in Nina Ergin (ed.) *Bathing Culture of Anatolian Civilization: Architecture, History and Imagination* (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 267-304, as well as her *Turquerie*, 224-225.

<sup>325</sup> On the prospectus, see: “The Turkish Bath,” *Metropolitan Record and New York Vindicator* [New York], June 14, 1862.

requisite for an establishment of this sort, commensurate with the tastes and wants of the people of New York, could be raised by a joint stock company, in share of \$25, and I could procure the requisite attendants, furniture, &c, from Turkey. As I have already erected a bath on the shores of the Bosphorus, there would be no difficulty in constructing one here, and I should be happy to submit plans, &c. to any person inclined to embark on this enterprise.<sup>326</sup>

After failing to get the project off the ground in 1855, Oscanyan revived the idea in early 1862. By March he had developed the Turkish Bath Company, the Board of Directors for which included William Cullen Bryant, former New York City mayor Daniel F. Tiemann, and multiple figures affiliated with Columbia University (at the Law Library of which Oscanyan was working at the time).<sup>327</sup> Oscanyan was the Secretary and General manager. In these early days, the company asked for \$30,000 to be raised through 600 shares at \$50 each. Subscriptions, the ads noted, could be received at the offices of the *Evening Post*, *Express*, *Journal of Commerce*, *Times*, *Tribune*, and the *World*. In late April, some interested parties proposed a reduction in the price of shares, to which Oscanyan agreed and began selling shares for \$10 a piece.<sup>328</sup> Oscanyan advertised aggressively in the papers through the end of November 1862, after which the trail runs cold. At the end of August 1863, one newspaper noted that “an effort was made some time ago to start a Turkish bath, with all the oriental accompaniments in this city. We have not heard of it lately, and cannot say whether the idea has been postponed or abandoned.”<sup>329</sup>

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<sup>326</sup> Christopher Oscanyan, “Turkish Bath In New York,” *New York Observer and Chronicle* [New York], May 10, 1855. I have as of yet found no evidence to support Oscanyan’s claim that he erected a Turkish bath in Turkey.

<sup>327</sup> For example, see “The Turkish Baths,” *New York Tribune* [New York], April 7, 1862.

<sup>328</sup> “The Turkish Bath,” *Evening Post* [New York], April 25, 1862.

<sup>329</sup> “Wanted—Public Baths,” *The Journal of Commerce, Junior* [New York], August 29, 1863. A competitor named Chas. H. Shepard, MD seems to have opened up a Turkish Bath as an addition to his “water cure” facility in November of 1863 in Brooklyn Heights. See: “The Turkish Baths,” *New York Tribune* [New York], November 6, 1863.

Thus, both times, Oscanyan failed to break ground on his Turkish Bath endeavor, despite what sounds like a committed campaign. A humorous vignette from 1862 conveys the nature of Oscanyan's dogged pursuit. Published in *Vanity Fair*<sup>330</sup> (1859-1863), a weekly humor magazine closely connected to New York's "Bohemian" community, of which Oscanyan was "an occasional caller,"<sup>331</sup> the piece was almost certainly written by Oscanyan's companions – especially given that at the time of publication, Oscanyan's ads for the Turkish Bath Company stated that he could be "seen at the office of the Vanity Fair, 115 Nassau Street, or at 37 Lafayette Place,"<sup>332</sup> an address associated with Columbia Law School. Titled "A Blast from the Golden Horn," the piece animated an agitated and persistent "Oscanyan: 'Be Shemeth!' cried Sidi Oscanyan, 'be shemeth! - throw bitumen upon my head and set a match to it, if these Americans are not a queer set of fellows. I'll bet a rack of lupees not one of 'em ever had a Turkish bath! We must undertake to clean their cuticles for them thoroughly by contract.'" <sup>333</sup>

Humor is rarely an end in itself; it is meaningful. As Shahab Ahmed writes of a different Ottoman writer and gentleman, Evliya Çelebi (1611-1682), and a different joke, about the "Greater Jihād" as a euphemism for sex, "humour takes place precisely in a social and discursive complex or matrix of shared meaning. Here, to get the joke— that is, for the "rational soul" to become aware "when laughing, of the meaning of its laughter"—one has to know the Hadith [about lesser and greater jihad]." <sup>334</sup> Likewise, in *Vanity Fair*'s laugh-out-loud jab, written by

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<sup>330</sup> See more: Robert J. Scholnick, "An Unusually Active Market for Calamus": Whitman, *Vanity Fair*, and the Fate of Humor in a Time of War, 1860-1863," *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review*, 19-3 (2002), 148-181.

<sup>331</sup> Mark A. Lause, *The Antebellum Crisis and America's First Bohemians* (Ashland: Kent State University Press, 2013), 52.

<sup>332</sup> "The Turkish Bath Company," *Evening Post* [New York], April 29, 1862.

<sup>333</sup> "A Blast from the Golden Horn" *Vanity Fair* [New York], April 5, 1862, 171.

<sup>334</sup> Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, at 320-321. He is quoting a ninth-century physician, Isfīāq b. Ibrāhīm, who said in his monograph *On Melancholy* that: "Laughter is produced by the rational soul . . . Its end is the awareness of the soul,

Oscanyan's bohemian associates, in order to get the joke, one had to know Oscanyan. The magazine's humor makes clear just how insistent – and perhaps alien – Oscanyan's pursuit must have been.

In an Armenian publication from the early twentieth century, written nearly twenty years after Oscanyan's death, the editors shared another account of Oscanyan's mission to bring a Turkish bath to America:

On a brave and rebellious day through his friends Odian, Rousinian, Servichen, and Hamamjian he is presented to Ali Pasha [the Grand Vizier], to help Vosganian find a new position. Vosganian was a strange man and for this reason many were frightened of him. The archbishop asked Vosganian what the best way to introduce the Turks to the Americans was. Khachig Vosganian answered ingeniously – “you have to build a Turkish bath (*hamam*) in New York.”

This answer upset Ali Pasha. Sarkis Hamamjian Effendi said, “this man is not worthy of being an official or even a teacher.”<sup>335</sup>

Whether or not this story is true, like the *Vanity Fair* joke, it does express that this pursuit was a part of Oscanyan lore and a mission and an institution in which he fiercely believed.

Clearly, there were limits to, or parameters of, what an American audience was willing to consume. Why, at a time when Oscanyan had found popularity and acceptance, did both the Turkish Coffee House and the Turkish Bath fail? What was unattractive about thin places such as these? A clue may lie in looking at where he found much greater success.

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when laughing, of the meaning of its laughter by gaining clarity about its purpose as either humorous or serious,” at 317-318.

<sup>335</sup> V. G. Zardarean (compiler), “Khachadur Osganian. 1818-1900,” *Hishatakaran: Hay erewelineru kensagrut'iwinnerë, lusankarnerë, dzeragirnerë, grut'iwinnerë, 1512-1912 / The Biographies, Photographs, Projects and Writings of Armenian Notables, 1512-1912* (Istanbul, 1910-1912), 8-10. Ali Pasha was the Grand Vizier on and off between 1852 and his death in 1871. This same story is mentioned in Mushegh Seropian, *American-Armenian Yearbook* (Boston: 1912) 16-23, at 17 [in Armenian].

## Lyceum Culture and Cultural Translation

By October of 1855, while he was running the *Kahve*, Oscanyan had again started lecturing on “Turkey and her institutions – Political and Social” to audiences in New York City. For these first lectures, he was billed as “Mr. Oscanyan, of Constantinople,” and, later, “Oscanyan, The Turkish Lecturer” (Image C).<sup>336</sup> Tickets were sold for \$1 for a full course of three lectures held at 8pm on the 18<sup>th</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup>, and 25<sup>th</sup> of October, and 50 cents for a single lecture. They could be picked up, of course, at the *Kahve*. These first lectures in October of 1855 were so well-received that Oscanyan was asked to repeat the course by “many prominent citizens” in a letter that was published by *The New York Herald* as a way of promoting the series on the day of the first repeated lecture.<sup>337</sup> Signatories included Horace Greeley, Bayard Taylor, and Henry J. Raymond. In his flattered response, printed beneath the signatures, Oscanyan added that “knowing the general ignorance with reference to Oriental institutions, I was induced to offer my humble testimony to their merits and demerits.”<sup>338</sup>

This was a promising start for Oscanyan’s revived lecturing career. Between 1855 and 1861, he would go on to lecture in the 1855-56, 1856-57, 1858-59, and 1860-61 seasons, visiting cities across the nation including Albany, Ann Arbor, Boston, Buffalo, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Lowell, New Haven, New York, and Rochester. The newspaper coverage of Oscanyan’s lectures during this time depicted a series of efforts designed to cut through stereotypes and position Turks and Americans as equals. Through what we might today call

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<sup>336</sup> “Mercantile Library,” *The Evening Mirror* [New York], October 15, 1855.

<sup>337</sup> “Mr. Oscanyan Upon Turkey,” *The Independent... Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts* [New York], November 29, 1855; “Oscanyon [sic], The Turkish Lecturer,” *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, [New York] February 23, 1856.

<sup>338</sup> “Lectures on Turkey – To Mr. Oscanyan,” *The New York Herald* [New York], November 19, 1855.



cultural translation and cultural relativism, Oscanyan used his lectures to create a thin place between the United States and Turkey, drawing attendees into a world where their assumptions about *both* Turks and Americans were, at least in theory, turned on their heads. Covering topics including the religion, history, and women of Turkey, Oscanyan attracted a sizeable audience, which often included “many leading personages in the professional, mercantile, and fashionable worlds.”<sup>339</sup>

Oscanyan’s presence on the mid-century American lecture circuit was a natural fit for a man who excelled in languages and had something unusual to say with them. Lectures at the time were delivered on topics ranging from American slavery, women’s rights, and temperance to natural history, travel, and astronomy. Popular antebellum lecturers included Ralph Waldo Emerson, Frederick Douglass, Bayard Taylor, and Horace Greeley. Such figures were part of a growing culture of literary celebrity and the profession of authorship.<sup>340</sup> Oscanyan, then, was both original and popular: his lectures were often described as particularly novel or “the most interesting” that had ever been delivered in a particular city.

Scholarship on the American lyceum usually, and effectively, examines the institution’s “nation-building impulse,”<sup>341</sup> as well as its role as a forum of both education and entertainment.<sup>342</sup> Recently, Angela G. Ray and Paul Stob have described the American lyceum

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<sup>339</sup> “Oscanyan’s Lecture – A Night in the Harem,” *The New York Herald* [New York], December 14, 1856.

<sup>340</sup> See Carr O’Neill, *Literary Celebrity*, and William Charvat and Matthew J. Bruccoli (ed.), *The Profession of Authorship in America, 1800–1870: The Papers of William Charvat* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1968).

<sup>341</sup> Wright, “Introduction,” *Cosmopolitan Lyceum*, 4.

<sup>342</sup> While still relatively understudied, the American lyceum has received important treatment in the following works: Angela G. Ray, *The Lyceum and Public Culture in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press), 2005; Angela G. Ray and Paul Stob, *Thinking Together: Lecturing, Learning, and Difference in the Long Nineteenth Century* (University Park: Penn State University Press), 2018; Wright (ed.), *The Cosmopolitan Lyceum*; Tom F. Wright, *Lecturing the Atlantic: Speech, Print, and an Anglo-American Commons, 1830-1870* (New York: Oxford University Press), 2017; Carl Bode, *The American Lyceum: Town Meeting of the Mind* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1968); Donald M. Scott, “The Popular Lecture and the Creation of a

as a forum of “popular learning” and “thinking together.”<sup>343</sup> Their edited volume places a particular emphasis on how “people living on the margins of society managed to think together despite the many obstacles they faced.”<sup>344</sup> But viewing Oscanyan’s lectures only through the lens of American nation-building and audience education is insufficient. In his edited volume *The Cosmopolitan Lyceum: Lecture Culture and the Globe in Nineteenth-Century America*, Tom Wright seeks to extend the analysis of the American lyceum beyond nation-building. His push to focus on Americans’ relationship with international topics is important: as he writes, “the more one examines the period’s lecture culture, the more one is struck by how lyceums were one among many spaces that provided an interface with world cultures. More often than we might assume, a night at the lyceum meant thinking about people, things, and ideas from beyond the United States.”<sup>345</sup> A night at an Oscanyan lecture, both in the 1830s and in the 1850s and 60s, was indeed spent in this way, which Ronald J. and Mary Saracino Zboray describe in their chapter in Wright’s edited volume using the journal of a young Bostonian woman named Annie Lawrence. Annie, who found Oscanyan, “a handsome man . . . exceeding graceful in his movements,” noted the way Oscanyan corrected the “erroneous ideas” Americans had of the harem, and “contradicted the notion... that the Turks smoke opium with tobacco.”<sup>346</sup>

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Public in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America,” *The Journal of American History* 66, no. 4 (1980): 791-809; Donald M. Scott, “Print and the Public Lecture System 1840–1860,” in William L. Joyce et al (eds.), *Printing and Society in Early America* (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 1983), 278–99; and Donald M. Scott, “The Profession That Vanished: Public Lecturing in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America,” in Gerald Grierson (ed.) *Professions and Professional Ideologies in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 12–28.

<sup>343</sup> Ray and Stob, *Thinking Together*, 3.

<sup>344</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>345</sup> Wright, *Cosmopolitan Lyceum*, 6.

<sup>346</sup> Zboray and Zboray, “Women Thinking,” in *Cosmopolitan Lyceum*, at 42-43. Quoting Annie Lawrence, December 11, 1838, Diary.

Scholars have yet to examine how Oscanyan's lectures expressed his *own* diplomatic efforts and his *own* diplomatic goals. While the American public's reception of figures like Oscanyan is important, writing from that perspective only tells us one kind of American history – a history that renders Oscanyan's own worldview, as an American, as an Ottoman, and as an Armenian, not only inaccessible, but virtually invisible. A look at Oscanyan's lectures from *his* point of view is thus in order.

Like Oscanyan's 1830s lectures, his antebellum lectures on "Turkey and her Institutions" were intended to correct the views of "foreigners," who, "in judging of the institutions of Turkey, are too much impregnated with the prejudices of European education to decide fairly and impartially."<sup>347</sup> While the exact nature of each lecture would change over time, their general contents can be summarized as follows. He would begin with the history of "the Tartar horde whom we have in recent centuries known as the Turks; – a name, by the way, which they never apply to themselves, and which they consider a term of reproach,"<sup>348</sup> before sketching the "character of the Janissaries... and a vivid description of their destruction," an event to which, Oscanyan told his audience, he had been an eye witness.<sup>349</sup> He would then describe the Ottoman legal system and the activities of the Sublime Porte or central government, as well as the domestic life of the Sultan. His overview would also include a depiction of the Turkish religion, or Islam – especially "the worship of the Musselman in the Mosque, which we are all aware it is morally impossible to be eye witness of — the Mohammedan believing in excluding

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<sup>347</sup> "A Turk Lecturing on Turkey," *New Albany Daily Ledger* [Albany], October 20, 1855. The paper reprinted this report from the *New York Times*.

<sup>348</sup> "Mr. Oscanyan Upon Turkey," *The Independent*, November 29, 1855.

<sup>349</sup> He was around 8 years old in 1826, when this violent dissolution, popularly called the "Auspicious Incident," occurred.

infidels from his holy places.<sup>350</sup> The *New York Herald* reported: “in order to give a just idea of the peculiar ceremonies of the mosque, he sang, chanted and prayed for the edification of his audience.”<sup>351</sup>

In each of his lectures, Oscanyan worked to destabilize the categories of “civilization” and “barbarity” as in the following anecdote, in which Oscanyan painted

a very ludicrous picture of the American minister, who on some important state occasion, astonished the natives by the freedom with which he cut off a quid of tobacco and chewed in presence of the Sultan and the court, and then, finding no other resource at hand, was fain to relieve himself by spitting through a high open window; from which it seems the nasty usages which have become so common among us, are already our reproach among even these semi-barbarians.<sup>352</sup>

Nowhere were Oscanyan’s attempts to equalize the Ottomans and Americans more evident than in his lectures about the “Women of Turkey” and the Harem. This lecture topic was also his most popular. In his three-lecture course, these lectures were given second. While attendees would sometimes note that it wasn’t the view they expected or hoped it would be, these lectures’ popularity shows how Oscanyan used American interests and popular imagery to attract an audience, but ultimately did not tell them what they expected to hear. Instead, he provided alternative representations and impressions of Turkish women and their domestic life and tried to show how Turkish and American practices were not that different; or that American practices, to outsiders, might seem just as odd as Turkish ones seemed to Americans.

An 1856 lecture summary titled “A Night in the Harem” in *The New York Herald* offers a revealing look at the contents of Oscanyan’s lectures on this topic. “The lecturer,” they wrote,

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<sup>350</sup> “Turkey as Described by a Turk,” *The Daily Cleveland Herald* [Cleveland], December 18, 1860.

<sup>351</sup> “Oscanyan’s Lecture – A Night in the Harem,” *The New York Herald* [New York], December 14, 1856.

<sup>352</sup> “Mr. Oscanyan Upon Turkey,” *The Independent*, November 29, 1855.

“attired in the court costume of the Sultan, was necessarily a great attraction, but then his subject counted for something, proposing, as he did, to enlighten the Occidentals on the “Harems and Women” of his country.” After lamenting that Oscanyan “confine[d] himself... to simple statement of fact, without illustration,” the author summarized the lecturer’s lessons as follows:

Harems exist in America, says Mr. Oscanyan, precisely the same as they do in Turkey; that is to say, the common Western idea of Eastern harems has no foundation whatever in fact. So all our notions of the glorious time which Pachas and nabobs are supposed to have are upset in a breath. The word “harem” does not mean polygamy, for the Christian subjects of the Porte use the word too, and yet possess but one wife. Harem is merely the Turkish for home (*le foyer, zuhause*)... The two holy cities of Mecca and Medina are spoken of as Harems, in the same way as the Christian calls heaven his home – the oriental would say “heaven is my harem” without any reference to the several score of black eyed houris which the Prophet has promised the faithful. When the American minister arrives at Constantinople, should he bring his family with him, the Hon. Mr. So and So is announced, “with his harem.”

The upper part of the house, which we style the ladies’ apartments, is kept for the female sex alone, and bears the mystic name. The ladies’ cabin in our ferry boats, would, in Turkey, be dignified with the title, harem... A Turkish woman would be as confounded if caught without her veil, as an American surprised *en toilette de nuit*.

... The lecturer went on to state that “harem” meant an assemblage of women, but not by any means of such women as was generally supposed. True, polygamy exists; but it is fast dying out, and very few now possess more than one wife.<sup>353</sup>

The national lecture circuit also connected Oscanyan to some of the most famous Americans of his time. While in Springfield for his lectures in 1861, Christopher Oscanyan made the acquaintance of then President-elect, Abraham Lincoln, who was stationed in his adopted home city until the March 4 inauguration. Also in Springfield at this time was a sculptor named Thomas D. Jones, absorbed in the task of sculpting a bust of the President-elect. Ten years later,

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<sup>353</sup> “Oscanyan’s Lecture – A Night in the Harem,” *The New York Herald* [New York], December 14, 1856.

in 1871, Jones would write briefly in his *Memories of Lincoln* about his encounters with Oscanyan during this time – they had known one another in New York City, often dining together at the house of Carlos D. Stuart, an editor of *The New York Sun* – and about the relationship between Oscanyan and Lincoln: “Lincoln and Oscanyan soon became warm friends,” he wrote. “Both were modest, and very entertaining in their way. One was the rough diamond, while the other had all the polish of a Damascus blade, if not its keenness.”<sup>354</sup> Later, during another Western tour in late December 1867, American luminary Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote to his son, Edward Waldo Emerson, about having “had the pleasure of crossing the Mississippi, in a skiff, with “Mr. Oscanyan, the Turk.” <sup>355</sup> He noted that he and Oscanyan were, along with “a man & a boy for oarsmen” the “sole passengers.” Of the incident, which involved traversing an almost-frozen river, he wrote: “I have no doubt that [the oarsmen] did their work better than the Harvard six could have done it, as much of the rowing was on the surface of fixed ice, in fault of running water. But we arrived without other accident than [being] almost fixed ice ourselves, but the long run to the Tepfer House, & the volunteered rubbing of our hands by the landlord & clerks, & good fire restored us.”<sup>356</sup> This event was also reported in *The Daily Iowa State Register* on December 20, 1867: “Ferried Over on Ice – Mr. Emerson (Ralph

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<sup>354</sup> Thomas D. Jones, *Memories of Lincoln* (New York: The Press of the Pioneers, 1934), 9-11. Originally printed in 1871. Jones refers to Carlos D. Stewart as a “popular songwriter.” Not long after Lincoln’s assassination in 1865, a notice the New York Correspondence to a New Orleans newspaper indicated that Oscanyan “had prepared a volume containing a full account of all the honors paid to the memory of the late President in the form of funeral pageants, patriotic meetings, meetings of condolence, with the sermons, addresses, poems, hymns inspired by the sad occasion, as well as an account of the decorations and mourning which were worthy of special remark.” “The work,” the notice continued, “will be a complete history of the popular woe which bewailed the assassination of the President, and the grief that followed him to the grave.” I have been unable to locate such a volume. “Our New York Correspondence,” *New Orleans Times* [New Orleans], May 24, 1865.

<sup>355</sup> “Letter to Edward Waldo Emerson, Des Moines, Iowa, December 19, 1867,” in Tilton, *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 295-296.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid.

Waldo) was ferried over the Mississippi river on his way to Des Moines on Wednesday morning last, in a skiff on ice, the oarsmen using accidental inequalities of the ice as a fulcrum for their oars, instead of water. The necessity for this kind of navigation was, that the ice was not stout enough to walk on, and the water was not thin enough to swim in.”<sup>357</sup>

Through the lyceum network, Oscanyan also became acquainted with his famous competitors. While Oscanyan was unique in being a *native* disseminator of information about Turkish people and customs, he was not the only one on the antebellum lecture circuit to discuss the people of the Ottoman Empire. During the early 1850s, the most popular author of American travel literature was an American poet, travel writer, and later diplomat named Bayard Taylor (1825-1878), whom we encountered earlier in this chapter in his struggle to speak Arabic with a waiter at the *Kahve*. In 1851, Taylor traveled to Ottoman Egypt, Palestine, and Asia Minor (Turkey), and eventually onwards to India, China, and Japan. When he returned to the United States, he published three books on his travels, including *The Lands of the Saracen; or, Pictures of Palestine, Asia Minor, Sicily and Spain* in 1854<sup>358</sup> – the same year in which Oscanyan installed his Oriental and Turkish Museum in London. In conjunction with his books, he embarked on a two-year lecture tour, speaking on topics such as “India” and “The Arabs.” Evidently, the poet-traveler had returned from his time abroad as an “Oriental” enthusiast – enamored especially of a landscape and lifestyle that he felt were particularly conducive to the poetic process. Donning a white turban, full beard, and airy “Arabian” pants, Bayard Taylor regaled the American public with his stories of rummaging through crowded

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<sup>357</sup> “Ferried Over on Ice,” *The Daily Iowa State Register* [Des Moines], December 20, 1867.

<sup>358</sup> Bayard Taylor, *The Lands of the Saracen, or, Pictures of Palestine, Asia Minor, Sicily and Spain* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1855).

Ottoman cities, blazing across their golden deserts, and sailing down the ancient Nile. A particularly famous account of his experiments with *hasheesh*, and its immobilizing and stimulating properties, became synonymous with Taylor's escapades abroad. By 1856, Taylor had moved on from anything related to the Islamic world, traveling to Scandinavia to study Swedish life and culture. While Taylor's work and identity as a consummate traveler ultimately transcended his Arabian-specific affiliations, it never fully overshadowed them; a comparison with Oscanyan is thus instructive.

In her book *How the Arabian Nights Inspired the American Dream (1790-1935)*, Susan Nance compares Taylor with Oscanyan directly to make her point that, while "playing Eastern" was a popular form of entertainment between 1838 and 1875, "Americans prefer[ed] to hear about the East from other Americans... rather than from Easterners themselves." She also describes their "*Ex Oriente Lux*" (from the East comes light) "mode of communicating about the Muslim world,"<sup>360</sup> which she argues they used to convince audiences that "they were gaining instruction that set them apart from some imagined, uncritical public characterized by "common misunderstanding."<sup>361</sup> Although Taylor, like Oscanyan, did seek (at least rhetorically) to debunk "common misunderstandings" – arguing that the Arabs, in particular, had been both "misunderstood and misrepresented"<sup>362</sup> – his method of correcting such fallacies reinforced many of the very stereotypes he was ostensibly attempting to disable. His crowd-pleasing account of drug use, for example, and his emphasis on the languid and lolling, played straight into commonplace, fantastical tropes from the *Arabian Nights* and other popular stories. In

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<sup>360</sup> Nance, *Arabian Nights*, 53.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>362</sup> "Bayard Taylor, 'The Arabs,'" *Cleveland Weekly Plain Dealer* [Cleveland], March 29, 1854.



Chapter 4, we will discuss the extent to which Oscanyan's work, too, risked confirming impressions he intended to correct. While Nance argues that Taylor's "genius" was in how he "branded his writing and lyceum performances for his peers with a persona of Eastern gentleman enjoying Oriental calm and for middling audiences of adults and kids with a persona of rugged traveler,"<sup>363</sup> she arguably misses the real reason behind Taylor's popularity, and never fully proves that audiences preferred Taylor to Oscanyan.

Taylor's popularity tells us as much about Taylor as it does about Oscanyan. As one newspaper report mused on Taylor's appeal: "It is the flavor of *individuality*... an individuality rough, native American which neither the blandishments of Europe could dissipate, the torpor of Asia allay, nor an African sun exhale."<sup>364</sup> In other words, American audiences loved Taylor because they were able to project themselves into his experience as an *American traveler*: self-made, rugged, adventurous. These audiences related to him, and his stories of the "Orient" functioned in the first instance as episodes that showed them the power and possibilities of being an *American* – not an Ottoman. Much like during the Greek War of Independence when Americans were inspired more by the ancient idea of democracy and freedom than they were by contemporary Greeks themselves, Taylor's remembrances offered a flattering mirror of Americans, where Oscanyan's offered one of Turks. As Bonnie Carr O'Neill says of another nineteenth-century showman, P.T. Barnum, he (much like Taylor) "excelled at crafting exhibits that tapped into America's fascination with itself."<sup>365</sup> Clearly, unlike Taylor's efforts, Oscanyan's thin place diplomacy was not created to feed into or encourage American self-love. As one

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<sup>363</sup> Nance, *Arabian Nights*, 78.

<sup>364</sup> "Bayard Taylor," *Portland Weekly Advertiser* [Portland], December 11, 1855.

<sup>365</sup> O'Neill, *Literary Celebrity*, 16

*Frank Leslie's* writer joked amidst the “*furor*” of his 1863 lectures on Turkey: “It is feared that Mr. Oscanyan will not be satisfied till he has converted us into a nation of Turks.”<sup>366</sup> From the Turkish coffee house, to the Turkish bath, to the lecture hall, Americans wanted to see and hear from Oscanyan, the Turk. But there is no evidence that they wanted to behave like Turks, themselves – or even to consider that Americans and Turks were truly equals. As a diplomatic tactic then, intended to promote reciprocity between these two peoples, thin place diplomacy had its limits: Americans would engage with Turkish topics, but they would not consider themselves equal to Ottomans and become the global, cosmopolitan citizens Oscanyan imagined they could be.

#### **Interpreter for the “Turkish Visitors”**

In March of 1858, Oscanyan was engaged by the city as the Turkish-English interpreter for the Rear Admiral Mohammed Pasha and his legation of members of the Ottoman navy during their visit to the United States – a trip they undertook to “make a contract for a ship-of-war.”<sup>367</sup> Dubbed a “lion” – that is, a “‘foreigner of distinction,’ who is led captive in a civic procession, who shakes hands all day in City Hall, and who is dined and wined at the public expense,”<sup>368</sup> the Rear Admiral had distinguished himself in the recent Crimean War. As the translator hired to enable the meeting between the Turkish lion and his American hosts, Oscanyan was able to facilitate a thin place through language. Translation, whether linguistic or cultural, is by its very nature an act of thin place diplomacy: a translator both creates and exists in a space where two worlds are brought to touch one another and interact. In many ways,

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<sup>366</sup> “Personal,” *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* [New York], December 26, 1863.

<sup>367</sup> “A Turkish Lion,” *New York Semi-Weekly Tribune* [New York], February 16, 1858.

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid.*

these worlds together create a new space entirely, where, theoretically, the two sides are made equal in their need to be translated to the other. As we will see however, during the Ottomans' visit to the United States, Americans approached the Ottomans almost as exhibits and curiosities – “real Turks,” as Oscanyan, too, was sometimes touted to potential audiences. The encounter thus demonstrates how translation and coexistence alone do not remove entrenched impressions of superiority or inferiority. For Oscanyan, thin place diplomacy once again failed to place Ottomans and Americans on equal footing.

In advance of the Rear Admiral's visit, the newspaper coverage conveyed the entertaining nature of the U.S.-Turkish encounter. The *Herald* argued that the Rear Admiral, “his Ottoman Excellency,” should be received “properly,” as he was the “first Osmanli of exalted rank and official position that has ever visited us.”<sup>369</sup> Besides, they added, “it is a good thing to have a show once in a while; and we have had nothing in the way of an official reception since Kossuth,”<sup>370</sup> a Hungarian statesman who famously visited America in 1851-52 to great fanfare. Writing largely tongue-in-cheek about the preparations for Turkish visitors, the *New York Daily Tribune* asked, “How shall the jolly Turkish tar, the Rear Admiral Mohammed Pasha, be entertained? This will be a delicate matter, for Turks have strong prejudices against some things which we regard at least with indifference. We therefore recommend to the Committee to peruse all works upon the manners and customs of Turkey, the nature of Islamism, with selections from the Koran, that no violence may be done to Oriental feelings... How many of his wives this distinguished mariner will bring with him we are not informed; but

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<sup>369</sup> “The Turkish Admiral,” *The New York Herald* [New York], February 18, 1858.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid.

if many, a harem should be fitted up at once. Might not Mr. Oscanyan be induced to revive his defunct divan for the occasion? We would suggest the erection in the Park of a temporary mosque – a sort of wooden St. Sophia – with the proper minaret and cupolas, to which the Admiral might daily retire, at the appointed hour, to perform his devotions after the manner of his country.”<sup>371</sup> He continued: “We await with anxiety the results of this visit. Will it bring in the fez, as Kossuth introduced the Hungarian hat? How many young women will be converted to the Turkish trowsers [sic]? How many men will cease to shave who always shaved before? How many who have always preferred cigars will betake themselves to hubble-bubbles? How many will be converted to Islamism?”<sup>372</sup>

This humorous piece shows us two important things: first, if Oscanyan had changed any minds through his work to that point, they were either so few or so faintly changed that the writer could completely disregard the lessons. Even if, at best, this disregard was undertaken in the name of humor, a desire not to be further enlightened is clear. Second, the anxiety, however comical, about American “conversion” to Turkish habits and Islamism is evident again here, as it is in the 1863 comment mentioned above. Presumably, there was no true threat; rather, it was a way of humorously expressing the very incongruity of cultures that Oscanyan was seeking to bridge through his thin place diplomacy.

Upon the arrival of the “Turkish visitors” in early March, the *Herald* laid out the foreign relations implications of the distinguished Admiral’s visit. Noting that while the visit had created great excitement in the community, it was yet unclear exactly what the “real nature” of the

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<sup>371</sup> “A Turkish Lion,” *New York Semi-Weekly Tribune*, February 16, 1858.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid.

Admiral's visit was meant to be. Like the reviewers of the Oriental and Turkish Museum, the *Herald* also commented on Turkey's "process of reform," which was "creating new habits and necessities more in sympathy with modern civilization," and suggested that the United States should thus not "overlook" the empire. Of the nature of the visit, the *Herald* surmised that, while the U.S. had "hitherto been content to remain in the background and allow England and Europe to absorb nearly all the commerce of this great empire," the Turks had perhaps grown tired of their monopoly, "realized the superiority of American workmanship," and were hoping to have an American architect rebuild one of their previously destroyed ships. That said, they further deducted, if "the mere construction of a vessel was required, it could have been arranged otherwise." Rather, the Turkish government had "apparently determined... to cultivate friendly relations with us" through the dispatch of a "distinguished personage, who is the first official dignitary of the Ottoman empire that ever visited our shore, and who will prove, we surmise, to be the harbinger of an ambassador from the Sublime Porte to Washington."

Tellingly, the *Herald's* discussion of the distinguished Admiral turned to his appearance, and especially how he compared to others from his country. "His appearance is very prepossessing," they began.

He is nearly six feet high, and of good proportions, with a manly countenance, somewhat bronzed by exposure and active service. His fine black eyes have the peculiar brilliancy which belongs to his native clime, and his whole bearing is, at the same time, affable and dignified, entirely unlike the proud and conceited Turk of ancient times and Mozlem prejudice. Indeed, we consider Mohamed Pasha a most flattering representative of his countrymen, and the fairer portion of our community need feel no compunction in extending to him their smiles and patronage, since he is the honorable husband of a single wife.<sup>373</sup>

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<sup>373</sup> "The Turkish Visitors [sic]," *The New York Herald* [New York], March 8, 1858.

Here we should note that this statement was made not two years after the new Republican party dedicated their platform in part to abolishing the “twin relics of barbarism: slavery and polygamy.”<sup>374</sup> As he was deemed a suitable representative of a civilizing nation, the *Herald* advised that “our greetings then to Mohamed Pasha should be in the spirit of genuine national hospitality and with the design of impressing upon the mind of this illustrious guest, the honor and dignity of our own noble republic.” They concluded their whole analysis by expressing appreciation that the Common Council had decided to “avail themselves of our suggestion in securing the services of Mr. Oscanyan, who is a countryman and an old acquaintance of his Excellency.”<sup>375</sup> While Oscanyan’s thin place diplomacy may have failed to cultivate mutual understanding between Americans and Turks, it was clear that it had rather quickly given him a public profile, a reputation as an expert, and a social network that offered him opportunities in more formal state-to-state diplomatic encounters like this visit.

After their arrival, the Turkish suite went to receive an official welcome from Mayor Daniel F. Tiemann at the City Hall where, since the morning papers had announced the special visitors, a “crowd of curious citizens began to collect as early as ten o’clock” requiring the presence of a large police force, both outside and inside the building.<sup>376</sup> These crowds had gathered to see the sight of the visiting “lions,” of which Mohammed Pasha, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* noted, was “the grandest and most lordly... that New York ha[d] seen for many a day.”<sup>377</sup> These lions had the added novelty of being “real Turks,” though, as the Washington

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<sup>374</sup> Republican Party Platform, 1856. Available at:

[https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp\\_textbook.cfm?smtID=3&psid=4028](https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtID=3&psid=4028) (Accessed July 21, 2022).

<sup>375</sup> “The Turkish Visitors [sic],” *The New York Herald*, March 8, 1858.

<sup>376</sup> “The Turkish Visitors [sic],” *The New York Herald* [New York], March 9, 1858.

<sup>377</sup> “A Lion,” *Philadelphia Inquirer* [Philadelphia], March 10, 1858.

D.C. paper *The States* noted, “there was nothing that especially indicated the Musselman, beyond their fez caps.”<sup>378</sup>

Although it was a cold, snowy day in New York, the crowds happily endured an uncomfortable wait for the Admiral and his suite, who were running late. Once they finally arrived, and Mayor Tiemann welcomed them, the Rear Admiral noted through Oscanyan that “both the government and people of Turkey were anxious to cultivate friendly relations with the people of the United States,”<sup>379</sup> and that he had been “authorized” by them to “express the fraternal feelings which they entertain for the people of this country.”<sup>380</sup> The guests were then escorted to a lunch elsewhere in the building, to which many uninvited citizens tried to enter, forcing the committee and guests to push through a crowd to reach their destination; only some in the crowd succeeded in gaining entry – among them “quite a number of ladies, friends and relatives of the members [of the Committee of Reception], whose curiosity to see the Turks had led them to brave the [illegible] of the day.”<sup>381</sup>

The lunch itself was a topic of elaborate discussion in the papers the next day, it being a “meagre repast” of sandwiches and cakes, which the *Herald* interpreted as an embarrassing display of national hospitality. The *Tribune* agreed, dedicating many sardonic lines to the country’s “munificent liberality,” and lamenting, at length, that the distinguished guests were not served beans or pumpkin pie, which foods, unlike sandwiches, had a “national significance.”<sup>382</sup> A later report indicated that the sandwiches were not just sandwiches, but

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<sup>378</sup> “Reception of the Turkish Admiral,” *The States* [Washington, DC], March 10, 1858.

<sup>379</sup> “The Turkish Visitors [sic],” *The New York Herald* [New York], March 9, 1858. “Cultivate friendly relations” is a phrase Oscanyan used in relation to his *Kahve* and elsewhere.

<sup>380</sup> “The Turkish Officers at the City Hall,” *The New York Tribune* [New York], March 9, 1858

<sup>381</sup> “The Turkish Visitors [sic],” *The New York Herald* [New York], March 9, 1858.

<sup>382</sup> “The Turkish Officers at the City Hall,” *The New York Tribune* [New York], March 9, 1858

ham sandwiches: the headline, dripping with irony, read, "A Mohammedan Entertained with Ham Sandwiches and Wine."<sup>383</sup> The crowds, impatient "to see the lions feed,"<sup>384</sup> were surprised that they "seemed to eat and drink much as most of us are accustomed to do."<sup>385</sup> After the lunch of "a sandwich, a cracker, a minute cube of cheese, and a square inch of cake,"<sup>386</sup> the Turkish visitors left City Hall and were met again by the crowd outside that "had by no means diminished, either in numbers or curiosity, and eagerly pressed forward to see the Turks. Cries of 'Which is he?' 'Where's the Turk?' 'That's him with the red cap.' 'Where's his wives?'... and similar exclamations peculiarly democratic saluted their ears, while most everyone in the crowd mistook Mr. Oscanyon [sic] for the Pacha because he wore a red cap and walked first in the procession with Alderman Boole," chairman of the reception committee.<sup>387</sup> From the City Hall they drove to have their daguerreotypes taken, and, that evening, they attended the opera. A separate report in the *Herald* indicated that the opera they saw was "The Huguenots," to which they again arrived late, at the end of the first act, and were greeted with much applause throughout the evening.<sup>388</sup> Of the spectacle that day, *The New York Tribune* observed: "The distinguished guests, who are evidently men of intelligence, were of course puzzled what to make of the whole performance; they had come to America to see and not to be made a show of. But they were trotted into the ring, for exhibition, while the eager multitude jammed

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<sup>383</sup> "Reception of the Turkish Admiral," *The New York Semi-Weekly Tribune* [New York], March 12, 1858

<sup>384</sup> "The Turkish Officers at the City Hall," *The New York Tribune* [New York], March 9, 1858

<sup>385</sup> The Turkish Visitors [sic], *The New York Herald* [New York], March 9, 1858.

<sup>386</sup> "The Turkish Officers at the City Hall," *The New York Tribune* [New York], March 9, 1858. At the end of this piece, the writer noted that he had been informed that, in fact, there was *no cheese*.

<sup>387</sup> The Turkish Visitors [sic], *The New York Herald* [New York], March 9, 1858.

<sup>388</sup> "Academy of Music. – "The Huguenots," *The New York Herald* [New York], March 9, 1858.



themselves into a hard knot on the outside of the railing, in the frantic struggles to see the distinguished guests.”<sup>389</sup>

On the day following the welcoming festivities at City Hall, in light of considerable snowfall, the Rear Admiral and Hassan Bey, along with Oscanyan and Smith, were taken on a sleigh ride, pulled by “six spirited horses” through “the more desirable portions of the city.”<sup>390</sup> The sleigh was pulled “jingling down Broadway,”<sup>391</sup> and “attracted the utmost curiosity.”<sup>392</sup> Crowds again gathered, and the Turkish visitors received cheers and “hurrahs”! as they passed. Men smiled at the passing sleigh from doorsteps, and women waved their handkerchiefs.<sup>393</sup>

In the days that followed, the Turkish guests and their American hosts visited the Brooklyn Navy Yard, inspected naval warships and guns, toured Randall’s and Blackwell’s Islands, and visited the lunatic asylum, workhouses, almshouses, and penitentiary to gain a better understanding of the city’s “charitable institutions.” At the Navy Yard, many ladies – relatives of the American officers – were present. The *Herald* noted, in typical smug humor, that while they seemed, in part, to fear being incorporated into the Admiral’s harem, they mostly “looked upon [the] suite very graciously” for “the Turkish guests far outshone in attractiveness most of the American officers present.” According to the *Herald*, while the afternoon was a picture of mud, slush, and crowds, once the legation was taken on the water in a cutter, the Turkish suite was impressed by the city’s “magnificent harbor,” for “although the greenness of

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<sup>389</sup> “The Turkish Officers at the City Hall,” *The New York Tribune* [New York], March 9, 1858

<sup>390</sup> “The New Yorkers and their Turkish Guest,” *The Daily Exchange* [Baltimore], March 11, 1858.

<sup>391</sup> “Vice-Admiral Mohammed Pasha Takes a Sleigh-Ride and Dinner,” *The New York Times* [New York], March 10, 1858.

<sup>392</sup> “The New Yorkers and their Turkish Guest,” *The Daily Exchange* [Baltimore], March 11, 1858.

<sup>393</sup> “Vice-Admiral Mohammed Pasha Takes a Sleigh-Ride and Dinner,” *The New York Times* [New York], March 10, 1858.

the earth was shrouded in a mantle of snow, the waters of [New York's] bay sparkled as brilliantly in the genial sun as the waters of their own beautiful Bosphorus." That evening, after a long day and dinner on the water, the guests were taken to Laura Keene's, the eponymous theater of the famed actress and theater manager, where private boxes had been arranged for them, "tastefully decorated with flags." The Pacha was again welcomed with "hearty cheers."<sup>394</sup>

At Randall's Island – where the muddy grounds disturbed neither the Admiral, who had acquired "thick boots" for the occasion, nor his American hosts, who "were too much accustomed to walking through Broadway to complain of bad walking on the island" – the Turkish visitors interacted with the many resident children, a fourteen-year-old representative of whom expressed his hope that "the American eagle will always float amicably beside the Turkish crescent" and that both countries would be "united in the bonds of friendship and civilization." The Admiral, through Oscanyan, gratefully received these sentiments, and said he would "try and spread in his own country the benefits of the institutions which he had this day witnessed." At the end of his remarks, the Randall's Island boys, of whom there were about 400, cheered for the "Turkish empire," and, later that day, in call-and-response to "all the boys who liked Turkey." At the Lunatic Asylum, which greatly impressed the Admiral (he said it was a "great credit to this country, and to the government"), the honored guest was given an inscription of the word "March" – in the Arabic letters – "both for the period of Anno Domini and for the Hegira."<sup>400</sup>

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<sup>394</sup> "The Turkish Visitors [sic]," *The New York Herald* [New York], March 12, 1858.

<sup>400</sup> "The Turkish Visitors [sic]," *The New York Herald* [New York], March 15, 1858.

After just over a week in New York City, the Turkish legation along with Oscanyan, headed south to Washington DC. During their first evening in the city, while they attended dinner at the Willards' Hotel, where they were staying, the *Daily Union* reported that a thief tried to rob the visitors of valuable decorations and gold from one of their hotel rooms. Fortunately, the thief was interrupted by a servant. The paper concluded: "We trust that the Pacha will not form an unfavorable opinion of our national character from this daring attempt to rob him, and from the almost equally censurable annoyances to which he has been subjected by those who have so pertinaciously "lionized" him."<sup>401</sup>

During their time in DC, the Turkish visitors were introduced to a bevy of government representatives, including the Secretary of State, the Secretary of the Interior, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, and the Attorney General. Through Oscanyan – whom the *Daily National Intelligencer* noted spoke English "with fluency and elegance, and without any perceptible foreign accent" – the Rear Admiral was able to have a series of agreeable conversations with these leaders of Washington.<sup>402</sup>

Later in March, the Turkish officers, along with Oscanyan, visited the Washington Arsenal, to which they were invited and hosted by the Secretary of War. After a tour of the arsenal, its workshops and arms depositories, the guests were brought to the Eastern quay where a series of firearms were tested and displayed. "While the party was watching the shooting," *The Washington Union* reported, "a large band of Indians appeared on the scene, having been also invited by the Secretary of War, who wished to give his visitors from the

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<sup>401</sup> "Daring Attempt at Robbery," *The Daily Union* [Washington, DC], March 17, 1858.

<sup>402</sup> "Movements of our Turkish Visitors [sic]," *The Daily National Intelligencer* [Washington, DC], March 20, 1858.

Bosphorus an opportunity to see the aboriginal inhabitants of the *Yenia Dunia* or New World.”<sup>403</sup> The “Indians” here were in fact a group of Sioux who were in town to sign treaty and who had been “taken on an outing that had an ulterior motive” – that is, to entertain “some officials of the Turkish navy.”<sup>404</sup>

The Secretary of War and his guests, “with an array of ladies,” watched from a “grove on the bank of the Potomac” as “the Indians, singing a war song... seated themselves on the ground in a circle, presenting a most picturesque appearance.” Soon, “three of their number” started “beating monotonously on drums, and singing an equally monotonous chaunt [sic], varied by occasional cries from the others.” After a time, “one old fellow jumped up and began dancing or rather jumping, and soon the entire party (except the drummers) were joining in the war dance, brandishing their pipes and tomahawks and giving the war whoop.” After the dancing had concluded, one of the ladies in the audience asked “Little Crow” to deliver a speech, which he did and which General W.J. Cullen, the superintendent of Indian Affairs, translated. A “Major Bell” then invited everyone present to a reception at his quarters, “where the Indians were also entertained. The Turkish officers expressed themselves highly pleased with what they had witnessed.”<sup>408</sup>

Back in New York, *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* dedicated coverage across two weeks to the visit, including a cover image of the Admiral and an image inside of Oscanyan standing between New York mayor Daniel F. Tiemann and other city officials, and the Rear

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<sup>403</sup> “The Turkish Officers and the Indians,” *The New York Herald* [New York], April 3, 1858, reprinted from *The Washington Union*, March 30, 1858.

<sup>404</sup> Barbara T. Newcombe, “A Portion of the American People: The Sioux Sign a Treaty in Washington in 1858,” Available at <http://collections.mnhs.org/mnhistorymagazine/articles/45/v45i03p082-096.pdf>, at 86-87.

<sup>408</sup> “The Turkish Officers and the Indians,” *The New York Herald* [New York], April 3, 1858, reprinted from *The Washington Union*, March 30, 1858].

Admiral Mohammed Pasha and his Turkish Legation (Image D). This image quite literally figured Oscanyan in a central role within the whole diplomatic exchange. In the Ottoman tradition, translators, or dragomans, held a serious political position. Natalie Rothman describes these “diplomatic translator-interpreters” as “ambiguous figures in-between... who accompanied ambassadors on their audiences and acted, ritually, as their mouth and ears, mediating the unfolding ceremony.” As Rothman argues, these men also played an important role in “systematizing and circulating knowledge of the Ottoman Empire, its histories, languages, and societies.”<sup>409</sup> Perhaps with such a role in mind, Oscanyan was likewise hoping at this time to take up a serious diplomatic post on behalf of the American consular office in Constantinople. Thus, to his pursuit of formal political power we now turn.

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<sup>409</sup> Natalie E. Rothman, *The Dragoman Renaissance: Diplomatic Interpreters and the Routes of Orientalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021), 1-2.

## Chapter 3

### ***Answers to The Eastern Question (1857-1861)***

#### **Chapter Overview**

Throughout his career, Oscanyan's political perspectives were intimately tied to what is often called "the Eastern Question." Between the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries, interested citizens, politicians, and commentators across the Ottoman Empire, Europe, and the United States used "the Eastern Question" as shorthand for wondering about the fate of the Ottoman Empire and especially how the maintenance or dissolution of this "Sick Man of Europe" would affect the fragile balance of power between the so-called "Great Powers" – primarily Britain, France, and Russia.<sup>410</sup> This chapter looks at Oscanyan's proposed solutions to the issue – his answers to the Eastern Question – during the late 1850s and early 1860s. In so doing, it accomplishes two main goals. First, it sheds light on American awareness of the Eastern Question prior to the relatively more familiar stories of their later engagement with the Ottoman state from the 1890s to the end of World War I. As such, this chapter builds on scholarship like Karine Walther's important analysis of the United States' "sacred interests"

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<sup>410</sup> On the Eastern Question, see Ozavci, *Dangerous Gifts*; Efraim Karsh and Inari Karsh, *Empires of the Sand: The Struggle for Mastery in the Middle East, 1789–1923* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); M. S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question, 1774–1923: A Study in International Relations* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1966); Alexander L. Macfie, *The Eastern Question 1774–1923* (Harlow: Longman, 2013); Lucien J. Frary and Mara Kozelsky, 'Introduction', in *Russian–Ottoman Borderlands: The Eastern Question Reconsidered*, ed. Lucien J. Frary and Mara Kozelsky (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014). On the related topic of humanitarian intervention, see Gary J. Bass, *Freedom's Battle: The Origins of Humanitarian Intervention* (New York: Random House, 2008); Davide Rodogno, *Against Massacre: Humanitarian Interventions in the Ottoman Empire (1815–1914)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011). On the formation of the Concert of Europe, see Louise Richardson, "The Concert of Europe and Security Management in the Nineteenth Century," in *Imperfect Unions: Security Institutions over Time and Space*, ed. Helga Haftendorn, Robert Keohane, and Celeste Wallender (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 51; Jennifer Mitzen, *Power in Concert: The Nineteenth Century Origins of Global Governance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

in the Islamic world during the period 1821-1921. Second, this chapter brings the voice of an Ottoman *himself* into the conversation about the Eastern Question and the fate of the Ottoman Empire during that time. As Ozan Ozavci notes, “scholarship [on the Eastern Question] has usually concentrated on the Western ‘great men’, how they dealt with the predicament of the Ottoman Empire, piloted her reforms, and resolved her diplomatic quandaries, usually leaving little (if any) space in their analysis for the discursive practices of the so-called ‘Eastern’ actors, their internal struggles, ambitions, emotions, insecurities, or agency in the widest sense.”<sup>411</sup> Even when Oscanyan was living in New York City and not based in Ottoman territory, his political interests, ambitions, and emotions were always and markedly Ottoman Armenian.

In what follows, we will parse Oscanyan’s engagement with the Eastern Question in and through three separate channels. First, we will examine Oscanyan’s 1857 book, *The Sultan and His People* and, in particular, what he wrote about “the future of Turkey” for an American audience in the wake of the Crimean War (1853-56). His solutions emphasized intervention, a separation of church and state, and political and legal equality between Muslims and Christians. Whereas in his thin place diplomacy, his public affiliation with Turkey may have overshadowed his condition as an Armenian, in his work directly regarding the Eastern Question, he often placed his Armenian Christian subjectivity front and center; in general, understanding Oscanyan as an Armenian is crucial to understanding his politics and his diplomatic goals. Second, we will analyze available material on Oscanyan’s pursuit of an American diplomatic position in the Ottoman Empire, and what his failure to attain one tells us about American missionary power and the relationship between the ABCFM, the U.S. State Department, and the Eastern

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<sup>411</sup> Ozavci, *Dangerous Gifts*, 11.

Question. Finally, we will look at some of Oscanyan's anonymously published columns in the *New York Herald* in which he again tackled the Eastern Question directly, as well as missionary overreach in Turkey. These columns provide insight into Oscanyan's evolving politics, as well as help us further conceptualize his general philosophy on U.S.-Ottoman relations at mid-century; by this time, Oscanyan was openly critiquing the practice of European diplomacy and the U.S. (missionary) emulation thereof. While his views on intervention had evolved by the 1860s, until the middle of the 1870s, Oscanyan still believed that the Ottoman Empire could be reformed domestically through the true establishment of legal and political equality between Ottoman Muslims and Christians.

Overall, Oscanyan's efforts to ameliorate the Eastern Question during this period show how his expertise and social networks, which we saw him utilize to pursue various forms of instructive entertainment in Chapters 1 and 2, could be leveraged outside the realms of entertainment, education, and leisure. In many ways, the celebrity and credibility he cultivated through instructive entertainment also gave him a platform from which he could communicate in more classically political ways (policy recommendations, diplomatic pursuits, and political editorials). Despite the opportunities provided by such a professional ecosystem, however, Oscanyan's political ambitions went unmet, and his political advice, unheeded. Oscanyan's failures in this regard – his failures to influence American policy or policymakers – reveal in part the limits at this time of American government engagement with the Middle East. As Charlie Laderman notes, while the U.S. government, via the American missionaries, had already by the mid-nineteenth century created a deep link with the Ottoman Empire, it could not be compelled to take official state action as they had “traditionally avoided involvement in the



diplomatic disputes arising out of the Eastern question, regarding it as an extension of European affairs and therefore an inappropriate sphere for political involvement.”<sup>412</sup> But private groups weren’t motivated by Oscanyan to engage politically with Ottoman people either, as they had been, for example, in giving aid and sympathy to Ottoman Greeks during the Greek Revolution. Evidently there was no appetite for most Americans even to support Ottoman Christians in the absence of massacre or violence.

### **The Sultan and His People**

The Crimean War, fought by the Ottoman Empire, France, Britain, and Sardinia against Russia over influence in the Ottoman territories, was in many ways a turning point for the Ottomans. In initiating conflict, Russia, in the name of Christianity, endeavored to break up and partition the empire once and for all. This prompted the European powers to defend the Ottomans from such encroachment in the name of maintaining the status quo (and their power). It was what Marc Baer calls “the first modern war, a dress rehearsal for the methods of destruction of the First World War.”<sup>413</sup> In addition to new military technology, telegraphs, photography, and steamships meant war news could travel fast and in unprecedented ways. Newspapers were therefore able to cover the war extensively, and Western reading publics maintained a high level of interest throughout the conflict. Public opinion – particularly British public opinion – mattered to decision-makers. But it was the war’s outcome that produced the most profound consequences for the Ottoman Empire.

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<sup>412</sup> Charlie Laderman, *Sharing the Burden: The Armenian Question, Humanitarian Intervention, and Anglo-American Visions of Global Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 14.

<sup>413</sup> Marc David Baer, *The Ottomans: Khans, Caesars, and Caliphs* (New York: Basic Books, 2021), 349.

Owing to the support of the British and French in particular, the Ottomans achieved their only victory against Russia in the nineteenth century. With the end of the war in 1856 and the signing of the Treaty of Paris on March 30 of that year, the Ottomans were also admitted into “the European state system, the so-called *Concert of Europe*.”<sup>414</sup> A new era commenced in which the Ottomans were to ‘prove’ they could reconfigure themselves as an empire-state ‘on par’ with those of Europe. A major part of the proof the European powers required was that the Ottomans “guarantee the protection and rights of Christian subjects.”<sup>415</sup> To this end, right before peace talks began in Paris, the Ottoman state issued a new edict, the *Hatt-ı Hümayun* or *Islahat Fermani* of 1856, to state that the promises of the 1839 edict would be “confirmed and consolidated” and that “measures” would be implemented so that they could “have their full and entire effect.”<sup>416</sup> Above all, the new edict stipulated that the Muslim and non-Muslim subjects of the Ottoman Empire would now be equal *under law*.<sup>417</sup> The Treaty of Paris underlined the geopolitical importance of these promises. As Ussama Makdisi notes, the treaty made the “well-being” of Ottoman Christians “a barometer of Ottoman progress.”<sup>418</sup> While the 1856 edict and the Treaty of Paris thus signaled an opportunity to the non-Muslim populations of the empire, many Ottoman Muslims reacted with increased resentment at the loss of their centuries-old supremacy. It is within the context of the Crimean War and the Treaty of Paris that we must read Oscanyan’s next pursuit: a book, published in New York, and titled *The Sultan and His People*. Printed in March 1857, it was written and released at the very beginning

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<sup>414</sup> Candan Badem, *The Ottoman Crimean War (1853-1856)* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 2.

<sup>415</sup> Baer, *The Ottomans*, 351-352.

<sup>416</sup> For a full English translation of the “Rescript of Reform – Islahat Fermani, February 18, 1856,” see <https://www.anayasa.gen.tr/reform.htm> (Accessed November 24, 2022).

<sup>417</sup> Badem, *The Ottoman Crimean War*, 343.

<sup>418</sup> Makdisi, *Age of Coexistence*, 54.

of a period in which the Ottoman Empire (and Ottoman Christians in particular) could consider (a) England and France to be true allies, and (b) that a renewed promise of equality between Muslims and non-Muslims in the Empire was worth taking seriously.

In *The Sultan and His People*, Oscanyan positioned himself as an author particularly equipped to comment on the appropriate path to Ottoman reform, and to construct a bridge between Muslims and Christians, and between the Ottoman Empire, Europe, and the United States. Underneath his author portrait, he featured two of his signatures, visually demonstrating his duality and thus his role as intermediary: the top, in Armenian letters, and the bottom, in the Latin alphabet. On the title page, he emphasized his native Ottoman and Armenian origins. He was listed as C. Oscanyan, “of Constantinople,” which was featured above an original crest that combined a range of Armenian symbols including a lion, an eagle, an owl, Mount Ararat (with Noah’s ark), and the river Araxes, along with OSGANYAN again written in the Armenian letters (Image E). In his preliminary chapter, he underlined his insider status – his ability to tell you about the Turkey and its future in a way no traveler could – by writing, “the author presents himself to the American public a native of Constantinople, and of Armenian parentage.”<sup>419</sup> The book’s dedication, however, drew out his American *bona fides*, showing an American audience that he understood the American mind: “To my Alma Mater, The University of the City of New York, this work is respectfully dedicated by one of its offspring.” As an “*offspring*” of the university, he made clear that he was “of” America as much as being “of Constantinople” made him “of” Turkey and being “of Armenian parentage” made him “of” Armenia. In short, Oscanyan leveraged his affiliations to show that he could speak expertly

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<sup>419</sup> Oscanyan, *The Sultan and His People*, 19.

about the Ottoman Empire and its people to an American Christian audience as an insider of all three communities.

Oscanyan and his authorship have precedents in figures like Ignatius Mouradgea d'Ohsson, an Ottoman Armenian dragoman (interpreter) for the Swedish consul in Constantinople, who published his *Tableau général de l'Empire Othoman (Panorama of the Ottoman Empire)* in 1787 in Paris. As Elisabeth Fraser says of Ohsson's endeavor: "Ohsson wrote in the political wake of the Russian defeat of the Ottomans in 1774; with the renewal of hostilities imminent, a dramatic upheaval in alliances threatened and the sultan now reversed his unilateral politics, seeking coalitions with European powers (Prussia, France, Sweden, and England). In this fraught context, Ohsson forthrightly cast his book as a defense of Islam and the Ottoman Empire."<sup>420</sup> Oscanyan, in contrast, was writing on the heels of a victory, though he was still, like Ohsson, "seeking coalitions with European powers" (and American ones): he positioned his text as an insight into the Ottoman Empire and its people, a defense of its value and interestingness, and an appeal for its preservation and reform. In other words, though the Empire had been victorious, Oscanyan was still writing from a position of weakness.

To attract and satisfy an audience, Oscanyan's text, like his *Oriental and Turkish Museum*, both used and subverted popular tropes. As Alyson Wharton-Durgaryan notes, *The Sultan and his People* at times "repeated Orientalist clichés of Ottoman peoples exemplifying the Biblical record, and perpetuated charming and romantic vistas."<sup>421</sup> But read carefully,

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<sup>420</sup> Elisabeth A. Fraser, "Dressing Turks in The French Manner:" Mouradgea d'Ohsson's *Panorama of the Ottoman Empire*," *Ars Orientalis* 39 (2010): 198-230. For a comprehensive examination of this influential text and its author, see: Carter V. Findley, *Enlightening Europe on Islam and the Ottomans: Mouradgea D'Ohsson and His Masterpiece*, (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2019).

<sup>421</sup> Alyson Wharton-Durgaryan, "The Unknown Craftsman Made Real: Sopon Bezirdjian, Armenian-ness and Crafting the Late Ottoman Palaces," *Études Arméniennes Contemporaines* 6 (2015): 71-109.

Oscanyan's text as a whole sought to subvert and destabilize the very power dynamics of what we now call Orientalist discourse, and, like his lectures, to place Ottoman Turks on equal footing with Americans and Europeans. He often "zoomed out" to take a big picture approach: for example, he began the whole text with a line intended to depict all people, Ottoman, American, European, or otherwise, as part of one mankind. "Mutability' is the appropriate motto of humanity," he wrote, "for what are men but creatures of a day; monarchs, but transient shadows of earthly greatness; empires, but passing events?"<sup>422</sup> Despite believing Islam was "barbarous," he presented a generally sensitive account of Islam, seeking to present insight into an Islamic way of seeing the world. Overall, he considered the Empire capable of regeneration and reform – not a stagnant society incapable of "civilization."

Before turning to Oscanyan's thoughts on the "future of turkey," we need to better understand what he meant by "Turkey" and how he understood his role as an Armenian, without political equality, in it. Much of the latter has to do with how he understood the nature and exercise of power in the absence of such equality, to which issue we will turn first. As in the catalogue and elsewhere, Oscanyan depicted the Armenians as superlative to all other members of the Ottoman Empire. Of the three non-Muslim communities he treated, he dedicated twenty-three pages to the Armenians, while allotting eleven to the Greeks, and four to the Jews. He again located the Armenians in a long historical narrative, placing them on contemporary Ottoman lands long before Turkic tribes ever conceived of migrating west; in short, he described Armenian indigeneity. While there were many passages in *The Sultan and his People* that were verbatim insertions from the earlier museum catalogue — such as the

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<sup>422</sup> Oscanyan, *The Sultan and His People*, 1.

references to Armenians as “the very life of Turkey...without whom the Osmanlis could not survive a single day” – there were also many new passages that provided further historical information on the ancient experience of the Armenian people, as well as explicitly to compare and exalt the Armenians over others in the empire, especially the Greeks. For example, using an objective voice to make a clearly subjective point, Oscanyan declared:

Hitherto the Europeans have regarded the Greeks as the predominating Christian population of the East; the truth is, among the different communities the Armenians stand most prominent, because not only next to the Bulgarians they rank high in number, but in reality supersede all others, politically and morally, in their relations with Turkey.<sup>423</sup>

Such comparisons succinctly illustrate Oscanyan’s understanding of power in the absence of political equality. He clearly valorized the good favor of the Ottomans, the people who governed the land – even as he said – practically in the same breath – that the Armenians have “suffered more than any other Christian subjects” at the hands of their conquerors.<sup>424</sup> He went so far as to boast that the “pride of the Mussulmans” – the conquerors at whose hands the Armenians have suffered – is “not compromised in associating with the Armenians, who are so much like their masters in manners and language, that often it is impossible to detect any difference.”<sup>425</sup> “Besides,” he wrote,

there exists a congeniality of sentiment and community of interest between them and the Mussulmans. For, being originally from the same region, they were alike in their habits and feelings; therefore, easily assimilating themselves to their conquerors, they gained their confidence, and became and still are the most influential of all the rayas. There is not a pasha, or a grandee, who is not indebted to them, either pecuniarily [sic], or for his promotion, and the humblest peasant owes them the value of the very seed he sows; *so that without them the Osmanlis could not survive a single day.*<sup>426</sup>

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<sup>423</sup> Ibid., 340.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid., 371.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid., 368-369.

<sup>426</sup> Oscanyan, *The Sultan and His People*, 353-354. Emphasis mine.

One might think that for an American audience, Oscanyan would want to distance himself from the “Mussulmans” to assert his own “civilization” – and in many places he did just that, citing, for example, “Mussulman fanaticism” and “barbarism.” At times, he combined both sentiments, making statements that were all at once expressions of superiority and influence, critiques of the ruling power, and affiliations with Turkey and the Ottomans. The pride surrounding and emphasis on *influence* brings to the fore a rather understudied and undervalued component of mid-nineteenth century Armenian attitudes towards the Ottoman state. Criticism and collaboration were not mutually exclusive. Armenians like Oscanyan felt both special and subjugated. In an imperial system of governance in which society was organized by a religious hierarchy, Armenians and other non-Muslim subjects could feel and wield political power in and through their personal influence on important decision-makers, or the influence exerted by their people. Such loyalty (self-)narratives were not uncommon: the Ottomans considered the Armenians the “loyal millet.”<sup>427</sup> Other communities had similar narratives: Marc Baer has shown that the Ottoman Jewish community has promoted “a historical narrative of sultanic saviors, tolerant Turks, [and] grateful and loyal Jews.”<sup>428</sup> Such narratives show us that in the absence of Ottoman non-Muslim political equality, loyalty and influence were highly valued. Oscanyan’s statements also show that a people can feel subjugated by a ruling power, but not adopt the view of their rulers. To say one is subjugated or

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<sup>427</sup> On the “loyal millet,” see Ronald Grigor Suny, *Looking Towards Ararat: Armenia in Modern History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), at 101.

<sup>428</sup> Marc David Baer, *Sultanic Saviors and Tolerant Turks: Writing Ottoman Jewish History, Denying the Armenian Genocide*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020), at 2. Of note, as Baer argues, this worldview has been argued hand-in-hand with one that promotes the idea of “anti-Semitic Armenian and Greek traitors, a narrative that has simultaneously served to deny the very possibility of an Armenian genocide,” also at 2.

subordinated is not to say by definition that one has neither confidence nor power. Indeed, Oscanyan's evocations of Armenian superiority and influence convey, precisely, Armenian confidence and power.<sup>429</sup>

In presenting Armenian political realities and imperatives as those of Turkey itself, Oscanyan was, in effect, portraying Turkey as a Muslim-Christian empire-state. He made clear again and again that "religion and nationality were synonyms" in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>430</sup> To Armenians like Oscanyan, then, "Turkey" was a space of *multiple* nationalities; an area of land, not an ethno-national state. In other words, Turkey, to Armenians like Oscanyan, did not, as its name might suggest, purely belong to the Turks: as he said, "the Armenians are the real life and soul of Turkey." To Armenians of the Ottoman Empire, Turkey was *home* – not just in the present day, but for thousands of years before. For these reasons, for someone like Oscanyan, it was unacceptable for members of only one religion to rule the land they in fact shared with others. Oscanyan's mid-century beliefs and policy recommendations in this regard were most concretely expressed in his section on "The Future of Turkey."

### **The Future of Turkey**

In his forty-page conclusion on the "Future of Turkey," Oscanyan outlined the genealogy of the current political moment as well as a comprehensive if overly optimistic political solution for Turkey that was particularly mindful of its heterogeneous population – especially its Christians. Early in his narrative, he even included an English translation of the *Tanzimat Edict* or *Edict of Gülhane* of 1839, which was comprised of three main promises: all Ottoman

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<sup>429</sup> For more on Oscanyan's personal worldview and his "hierarchy of personal significance," see my article, "A Life of Longing and Belonging."

<sup>430</sup> Oscanyan, *The Sultan and His People*, 387.



subjects, regardless of religion, would be guaranteed “security of life”; there would be tax reform (namely, the abolition of tax farming, in which the rights to collect taxes were sold off to third parties who could thus exploit their position); and there would be conscription reform (non-Muslims could join the military in theory, but in practice they paid a *Jizya* tax and continued not to serve). As noted, this 1839 edict was supplemented and superseded by the February 1856 Edict in which Muslim and non-Muslim equality was at least theoretically established, so it is interesting that Oscanyan included a translation of the 1839 Edict rather than the 1856 one. In fact, he did not mention the 1856 edict at all. Was this simply to facilitate his narrative of why these the 1839 promises failed? Was it a dismissal of a mere “promise,” favoring instead his own policy suggestions?

Oscanyan understood that the preservation and reformation of Turkey – its future – was not just of interest to its own people. Rather, it was the heart of the Eastern Question, wherein the “integrity” or “maintenance” of Turkey was also an “essential element in the polity of Europe” who did not want Russia to expand its influence.<sup>431</sup> Thus believing that Europe would support Turkey no matter what, because it was in their own self-interest, Oscanyan argued that after the proclamation of the 1839 Edict, “the Turks of the *ancien regime*,” perceiving no threat to their existence from Europe, developed “schemes of oppression” in order to “deprive the *Rayas* [non-Muslim subjects] of their newly acquired privileges.”<sup>432</sup> In particular, the “lords of the realm” were worried about the *Armenians* having “equality of civil and political rights,” for these people – Oscanyan’s people – were “better educated and more enlightened than they

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<sup>431</sup> Ibid., 433.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid., 434.

themselves were,” and were in fact the “ruling spirits.” This being the case, he said, they would soon have “preceded them in all the departments, and taken the lead in the control of the country.” To prevent this, Oscanyan wrote, “Mussulman fanaticism brought on a retro-grade movement, and threatened the entire ruin of the country” rightly earning it the “cognomen of the SICK-MAN.”<sup>433</sup> He didn’t indicate what this movement entailed. Given the Ottomans’ weakness, Oscanyan argued, Russia and Austria sensed that such a time was “propitious” to “pounce upon their victim” and planned a “coup-de-main” – i.e., the Crimean War. But this was not to be: “notwithstanding the corrupt character of those [Ottomans] in power,” Oscanyan stated, “the spirit of regeneration was not wholly extinct in the country,” and “war was declared.” As Europe’s interests were tied to the “fate of Turkey,” he continued, “‘foreign interference’ became inevitable.” He believed this was fortunate, however: without such interference, “Turkey, like Poland, would have been ingulphed [sic] by Russia and Austria.”<sup>434</sup>

With Ottoman victory in the war, Oscanyan wrote, “the Russian bear” was “driven to his den, and the congress of nations at Paris has adopted the Osmanlis into their fraternity.” Still, he warned, the “‘Eastern question,’” which at this moment he defined as “the maintenance of Turkey, as a barrier between Russian despotism and European liberty,” was “far from being settled.” While it would seem that Turkey was “secured” from “Russian animosities,” Oscanyan continued, “unless the country be set on a new basis, and rendered capable of maintaining itself, the future of Turkey will inevitably be only a repetition of the past, if not indeed far worse.” “This difficult subject,” he predicted, “will, no doubt, engross the wisdom of Europe.”

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<sup>433</sup> Ibid., 435.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid., 436.

For Oscanyan, the present moment was one to be “seized,” while the “indebtedness of the Osmanlis to their allies is fresh in their memories, and the gates of their vast empire stand open to civilization and reform.”<sup>435</sup> His total trust that the Allied powers were central to the future of Turkey was thus clear: “Will the Allies again content themselves with mere scrolls, parchments, and state papers like the Tanzimat of 1839?” he asked. “Shall the patriots of the state again be left subject to the sway of a conceited bigotry and blind fanaticism? In a word, shall the country be permitted to feed upon its own vitals until it consumes itself?” Oscanyan concluded: “the time has arrived when fictitious progress can no longer be tolerated, and a wholesome reaction must take place.”<sup>436</sup> In short, Oscanyan was offering a manifesto in support of the new stage of reforms, albeit without mentioning them. It is unclear how his U.S. audience received such a proposal.

After this explanation of the historical moment in which the Ottoman Empire found itself, Oscanyan turned to explicating the “internal discord” that had “maintained an empire of misrule.” According to Oscanyan, “religious animosity” and “party spirit” – Christians against Christians, and Muslims against “the whole host of *giavours* [non-Muslims]” – defined the empire.<sup>437</sup> How could such a population, he asked, possibly unite to make things better in feeling or in action? The answer, Oscanyan argued, was not to be found in the realm of religious liberty, as one might assume; he took pains to explain how “religious toleration” had always existed in full force in Turkey, and “all classes of Christians and Jews have always had freedom of religious worship with the free exercise of their peculiar rites and observances, public and

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<sup>435</sup> Ibid., 437.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid., 437-438.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid., 438.

private.”<sup>438</sup> He brushed away possible counterarguments, such as the refusal by the Ottoman government to erect or repair churches, as functions of *corruption*, not intolerance: as soon as it was “understood that a liberal sum might be obtained for these privileges... the officials could not resist such occasions for increasing their revenues.”<sup>439</sup> To Oscanyan, religious conflict was itself a function of freedom of religious expression and thus of toleration. Indeed, to the Ottoman government, “as long as the rayas were of various creeds and conflicting with each other, the Mussulmans were in no danger.”<sup>440</sup>

Despite this climate of religious toleration, Oscanyan continued, Russia had worked to “mislead the whole world, and especially the Christian population of Turkey” by arguing that only through *them* would “all classes of Christians in Turkey” receive a “Guarantee of Liberty of Worship.” But Oscanyan was not convinced: “her conduct at home belies her sincerity,”<sup>441</sup> he wrote, and “under the pretence of being the champion of the Cross, the real object of Russia has ever been to avail herself of the existing religious fanaticism of the East, and by fanning the flames of Christian ardor, to institute a crusade of the nineteenth century!”<sup>442</sup>

And so, finally, Oscanyan turned to his solutions to the Eastern Question; or, as he laid it out, the way in which to preserve and regenerate Turkey, and thwart Russian attempts to manipulate the Christians of Turkey, pull apart the Ottoman people, and destroy the “peace of all Europe and the world in general.”<sup>443</sup> As elaborated, according to Oscanyan, the impediment here was *not* one of the Christians of Turkey requiring *religious* freedom – which they already

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<sup>438</sup> Ibid., 439.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid., 440.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid., 438-439.

<sup>441</sup> Ibid., 441.

<sup>442</sup> Ibid., 442.

<sup>443</sup> Ibid., 448.

had – but rather needing “*political franchise and unbiased justice.*”<sup>444</sup> “The “Eastern question” Oscanyan wrote, “demands... political and civil equality” throughout the “Ottoman dominions.”<sup>445</sup> Later in his chapter, he expounded on this belief:

The wisest of the Turkish statesmen... feel themselves bound to certain compromises with their friends the Allied Powers, who engaged in the war, as they well know, not with the view to reinstate Mussulman oppression and bigoted misrule, but to set the country on a new footing – *by raising the Christian population to a level with the Mussulman.* Considering the almost equal proportion of the Christians to the Mohammedans, it is but just, *there should at least be an equality of national rights and privileges.* For in civilized countries, even a MINORITY is protected and their rights respected; how much more then should this be the case where there is not only no disproportion in numbers – but decided superiority in civilization. Besides, should the Mohammedans resist the required concessions – the great Christian population of Turkey is ready to join their western coreligionists in any movement.<sup>446</sup>

The road to universal Ottoman political and civil equality would be neither short nor simple. Oscanyan first eliminated the notion that either Muslims or Christians could themselves solely rule the empire: “The past has sadly proved that the Mohammedans are incapable even of self government,” he wrote. “At best,” he offered, “Mohammedan domination has had a demoralizing tendency over half, if not the entire population.”<sup>447</sup> And yet he did not believe that the country should be “ruled by the other half of the inhabitants viz., the Christian population,” either, for “this population is like a house divided against itself [owing largely to denominational differences], and besides their incapacity in other respects, they, having so long felt the bitterest animosity towards their Mussulman masters, would in their turn become even greater oppressors than the Mohammedans themselves.”<sup>448</sup> “*Fusion,*” he believed, was the

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<sup>444</sup> Ibid., 443. Emphasis author’s.

<sup>445</sup> Ibid., 444.

<sup>446</sup> Ibid., 453-454. Emphasis mine.

<sup>447</sup> Ibid., 443.

<sup>448</sup> Ibid., 443.

“only policy that can resuscitate the Turkish Empire”: the *expansion* of Christian political rights and representation so that Muslims and Christians could rule together. The question thus became how to bring this about, especially when the Tanzimat of 1839 had become “almost a dead letter,” having had no “coercive measures” to put it “into play.”<sup>449</sup> According to Oscanyan, in such a “poisoned atmosphere” as the Ottoman Empire, no “salutary influence” could be effected until “the axe is laid at the root of the evil.” He proposed a series of preliminary measures to be taken in order to give a “fresh stamina to this fading empire.”

First and foremost, Oscanyan suggested “a new and complete code of justice” that was “consistent with progressive civilization, and suited to the necessities of these heterogeneous peoples.” Second, he advised an “entire separation of church and state,” in order to “overthrow the scepter of oppressive bigotry” and “to prevent the interference of the ulema [the Muslim scholars of theology and law] in the administration of justice.”<sup>450</sup> With this, Oscanyan believed, (rather optimistically!), that the “aristocracy of religion” would be “abolished” and the “animosity existing between the Moslems and Christians” would be “annihilated,” thus allowing “hitherto excluded portions of the subjects of the sultan” to be “acknowledged as members of the great Ottoman family.”<sup>451</sup> It is important to note here that his notion of “Ottoman” was thus divorced from both Islam and Turkishness.

Next, Oscanyan suggested that for the “mutual benefit” of both Christians and Muslims, “a mixed administration must be formed,” which would be “composed of representatives of the

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<sup>449</sup> Ibid., 444.

<sup>450</sup> Ibid., 445.

<sup>451</sup> Ibid., 445-446. He followed this with “The identity of religious faith and nationality long swayed even the European states, but in those countries, this idea is now obsolete, and must of necessity become so in Turkey, since she has entered their confederacy.”

different communities, and Mussulman supremacy no longer tolerated.” Such a “sharing of supreme power,” he believed, would result in Christians losing “their former incentives to cunning and self-interest,” and Muslims making “rapid strides in the true science of government.” This “mutual authority” was to be “supported and confirmed by a superior tribunal... consisting of the powers of Europe, who, having constituted themselves the champions of Turkey, and shed their blood in her defense, are entitled to become the guardians of her interests, which are, henceforth, so identified with their own.”<sup>452</sup> Oscanyan’s reliance here on the powers of Europe was explicit: they were very literally to be Turkey’s “guardians.” Without their “aid and influence” in accomplishing his proposed “salutary reforms,” he wrote, there would be “no hope of the preservation of Turkey,” nor “any security for the peace of all Europe and the world in general.”<sup>453</sup>

Moving to issues of commerce, the economy, and development, with an eye towards the country’s underutilized natural resources, Oscanyan argued that “the resources of the country must be developed, and a system of internal improvements established, by which the ruinous principle of centralization will be counteracted.”<sup>454</sup> (“Internal improvements” was certainly language he picked up from his American context).<sup>455</sup> He further advised a “general and accurate survey of the country” in order to define “the exact boundaries of both public and private lands” and to encourage individual “exploration” of the “natural treasures of the soil” – that is, the “wealth of the country” that has merely “lain dormant.” Oscanyan likewise believed

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<sup>452</sup> Ibid., 446.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid., 448.

<sup>454</sup> Ibid., 446-447.

<sup>455</sup> John Lauritz Larson, *Internal Improvement: National Public Works and the Promise of Popular Government in the Early United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

that the *Vakuf* or Islamic charitable endowment system should be abolished, and that that “accumulated wealth” should be instead “devoted to internal improvements.” This, he noted, would also deprive the Ulema of their “great arm of power” and would thus further separate civil administration from the realm of religion; a separation of church and state. Finally, Oscanyan argued that “equal taxation should be levied on property, and the tariff equitably regulated.” A “limited” free press, he added, “must be established as the only means of bringing into publicity the corruptions and abuses to which the officials have hitherto been addicted.”<sup>459</sup>

After his list of suggested (if vague) reforms, Oscanyan posed the question: “*Can these reforms be effected in Turkey?*”<sup>460</sup> His response, notably, organized itself around religion; though his aspirations were for a Turkey that was governed without “religious fanaticism, which is so hostile to moral and social progress,”<sup>461</sup> his analysis of its feasibility still needed to take it into account. “The nature of the Mohammedan religion is not essentially in opposition to reform,” he declared.<sup>462</sup> He elaborated his point with examples to show that “the principles of Islamism are so very simple that they can be adapted to any degree of modification and reform, especially under the pressure of circumstances.” Besides, he added, “necessity knows no law, not even the Koran itself.”<sup>463</sup> A bit later he argued that moving to a separation of church and state would not be an obstacle for the empire, as the “Turkomans had, previous to embracing Islamism, a civil government of their own; and, in making the Koran the rule of faith and

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<sup>459</sup> Oscanyan, *The Sultan and His People*, 447. It’s not clear what he means here by “limited.”

<sup>460</sup> *Ibid.*, 448. Italics his.

<sup>461</sup> *Ibid.*, 454.

<sup>462</sup> *Ibid.*, 448.

<sup>463</sup> *Ibid.*, 449.



conduct, they never lost the idea of Sovereignty independent of Religion.”<sup>464</sup> Further, he wrote, the Sultan, the only person in whom church and state – or Allah and government – did unite, had “already introduced many measures of reform.”<sup>465</sup> “Much good,” Oscanyan added, could be “anticipated from the liberal sentiments and benevolent dispositions of the Sultan, were he but rightly advised and sustained in the exercise of his absolute power; with the requisite protection against inimical intrigues and aggressions, both foreign and domestic.”<sup>466</sup> Holding such views as he did at this juncture on the ability of the Ottomans to effectively separate religion and government put him in sharp contrast with the majority of American publics at this time, such as policy-makers and missionaries, who, as we saw in Chapter 1, perceived the Ottomans exclusively through the lens of their commitment to a barbarous and indelible Islam.

Oscanyan then presented another possible counterargument or concern: “it may be said that the government thus remodeled will no longer be Turkish or Mohammedan.” To this he expressed no feelings of loss. “Surely,” he told his audience, “the aim of the friends of this failing empire is not to re-instate a decaying faith, but to enable the Turks and all the inhabitants of the land, to gird up their strength and stand before the world a united and powerful people, freed from bigotry and superstition, a great Ottoman nation.” “Turkey,” he continued, “has been admitted into the fraternity of Europe; not as a Mohammedan power, but as one of the powers that rule the earth’s domains.” Among the “potentates of his times,” Oscanyan reasoned, the sultan was not the “voice of Mohammed the Prophet,” but a “civilized

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<sup>464</sup> Ibid., 450.

<sup>465</sup> Ibid., 451.

<sup>466</sup> Ibid., 452-453. Did Oscanyan wish that he could be that very advisor?

and regenerated friend of his own people and the world in general.”<sup>467</sup> Perhaps in this configuration, Oscanyan was aiming to find another way of persuading his American, Christian audience that the Ottomans should not be conflated with (barbarous) Islam and could thus safely inspire sympathy and support. It was a hard sell indeed for him to ask Americans to support practitioners of a religion who were represented as both the Anti-Christ in Christian eschatology and as representatives of an Islamic empire against whom the Greeks, for example, so recently fought for their independence. As if throwing multiple arguments against the American wall to see what would stick, Oscanyan here (and elsewhere) seemed to concede that Islam was barbarous, but not irredeemably so.

As he championed the pursuit of equality between the Christians and Muslims of the Empire, so he viewed the Ottomans’ entrance into the concert of Europe as a sign of their accepting parity with Christian nations, and thus as a sign of their growth and potential and an indication that the Muslim Ottomans could work together with the Christian Ottomans as equals:

A new era has dawned upon Mohammedanism; for, if the Christian world has for the first time received into its confederation an anti-Christian empire, the Mohammedans, by entering into such a confederation, have also for the first time place themselves on an equality with the former Giavours, whom the precepts of the Koran have proscribed, and doomed to the sword of the Faithful. Here then is a bold stride beyond the confines of a faith only suited to barbaric days.<sup>468</sup>

Oscanyan’s vision of a secular Ottoman nation with a separate church and state and true civil equality never came to pass. But one still wonders who Oscanyan had sought to influence

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<sup>467</sup> Ibid., 449.

<sup>468</sup> Ibid., 449-450.

with his book; who did he imagine to be reading his recommendations? At least one intended audience was politicians and the politically influential: Oscanyan submitted copies of *The Sultan and His People* along with his letters of inquiry to the State Department regarding U.S. diplomatic positions in the Ottoman Empire. He also gave the book as a gift or a reference to others he considered politically valuable. A scanned edition from the New York Public Library, for example, is inscribed to George Bancroft, the Democratic historian, diplomat, and politician; William H. Seward, who was serving as a Republican New York senator in 1858, also received a signed copy that year in Washington.<sup>469</sup> In the next section, we'll explore Oscanyan's pursuit of an American consular role, and what his failure to achieve this goal can tell us about the relationship between the American missionaries, the U.S. State Department, and the Eastern Question at this time.

### **Pursuit of Diplomatic Position**

Starting in March 1856, not long after the auction of his *Kahve* at the beginning of the year, and after his first season back on the American lecture circuit, Oscanyan began to enquire about "government vacancies in the East."<sup>470</sup> In 1856, congress enacted reform legislation on

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<sup>469</sup> Bancroft's inscribed book can be seen here:

<https://archive.org/details/sultanandhispeo01oscagoog/page/n5/mode/2up> (Accessed June 23, 2022). For William H. Seward's copy, see <https://sewardproject.org/seward-book-list/public/holdings/67032> (Accessed June 20, 2022).

<sup>470</sup> Cary Corwin Conn, "John Porter Brown," 163. "In March 1856, [Brown] responded to a request from Christopher Oscanyan, concerning government vacancies in the East. Brown attempted to have him appointed Ottoman Consul at New York, but Fuad Pasha, Minister of Foreign Affairs, discouraged it on the basis of expense. Brown also informed him that the Consulate at Constantinople was vacant at twenty-five hundred dollars a year, a vice-consul was needed at Galatz for one thousand dollars annually, and the legation needed an assistant dragoman" (p. 163).

consular positions, legislation which included implementing salaries.<sup>471</sup> Whether this related to Oscanyan's decision to pursue a post is unclear, though he did mention the "passage of the new Diplomatic and Consular Bill" in follow-up letters to Secretary of State Lewis Cass and President James Buchanan in 1857.<sup>472</sup> In his dissertation, Cary Corwin Conn covers the saga of Oscanyan's pursuit of a diplomatic position – as it relates to the subject of his dissertation, John Porter Brown. John Porter Brown, the nephew of Commodore David Porter, America's first minister to the Ottoman Empire, whom we met in Chapter 1, served over time and often at once as the U.S. Chargé d'Affaires, Consul, and Secretary and Interpreter (Dragoman) at Constantinople. Conn argues: "From 1858-1869, [Oscanyan] actively worked to undermine Brown in order to obtain his position."<sup>473</sup> During this time, Oscanyan campaigned to be either Consul or Secretary Interpreter at Constantinople and received recommendations from a number of New York politicians and other prominent Americans including men of letters Washington Irving and William C. Bryant. Although he was unopposed in his first attempt, Oscanyan did not receive the appointment. Francis Markoe, then Under Secretary of State and a friend of John Porter Brown's, quashed Oscanyan's nomination so Brown could hold the position instead (and thus increase his salary).<sup>474</sup> In March of 1857, now in the Buchanan administration, and at the same time as Oscanyan published *The Sultan and His People*, Oscanyan again had recommendation

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<sup>471</sup> Nicole Phelps, "One Service, Three Systems, Many Empires: The U.S. Consular Service and the Growth of U.S. Global Power (1789-1924)", in Kristin Hoganson and Jay Sexton (eds.), *Crossing Empires: Taking U.S. History into Transimperial Terrain* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 141-143.

<sup>472</sup> Letter, Christopher Oscanyan to James Buchanan, April 4, 1857, U.S. Department of State, Letters of Application and Recommendation During the Administration of James Buchanan, (Christopher Oscanyan file).

<sup>473</sup> Conn, "John Porter Brown," 93. Conn's dissertation is a clear defense of John Porter Brown, so his analysis is not of the essence here. He does, however, provide a chronology of events that is useful. For more on Brown, see also Gary Leiser, "John Porter Brown, Early American Orientalist (1814–1872)," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 140.1 (2020), 183-188.

<sup>474</sup> Conn, "John Porter Brown," 163.

letters sent, of which the following from William B. Maclay, a Democratic Congressman from New York City at the time of writing, was typical:

He speaks the English language in such a manner that one would not suppose him other than a native of this country and of the ease and propriety with which he writes to the public have evidence in the recent book, which he has published in relation to Turkey and the Turks. In fact he combines in a rare degree many of the advantages desirable in a representative of the United States in Turkey. His wife is a lady of this city and his associations and interests are here.<sup>475</sup>

Still, no appointment transpired.

One year later, in May of 1858, some New York papers reported that Oscanyan had been appointed Dragoman, or Secretary Interpreter, at Constantinople, in place of Brown.<sup>476</sup> Ultimately, this didn't come to fruition. One can imagine that Oscanyan spread the news of the appointment himself, perhaps believing it to be a done deal when it in fact was not. The reactions to the rumored appointment provide an insight into why Oscanyan had trouble being confirmed to such a post.

On May 18, 1858, Rev. William G. Schauffler, who was then serving the ABCFM primarily as a missionary to the Jews in Constantinople, wrote to the Secretary of State, Democrat Lewis Cass, regarding his belief that Oscanyan had been appointed secretary and dragoman, and would be replacing Brown: "I cannot doubt for a moment, that if Mr. Oscanyan's appointment is confirmed, the American missionaries in Turkey will be obliged to put themselves and their work under English protection."<sup>477</sup> The Rev. Rufus Anderson, Secretary of the ABCFM, also

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<sup>475</sup> Letter, William B. Maclay to Lewis Cass, April 1857, U. S., Department of State, Letters of Application and Recommendation During the Administration of James Buchanan, (Christopher Oscanyan file).

<sup>476</sup> See for example, "Mr. Oscanyan," *New York Evening Post*, [New York], May 13, 1858.

<sup>477</sup> Conn, "John Porter Brown," 176, quoting Letter, William Schauffler to Lewis Cass, May 18, 1858, U. S., Department of State, Letters of Application and Recommendation During the Administration of James Buchanan, (Christopher Oscanyan file).

wrote to Cass “on behalf of the sixty missionaries living in Turkey”: “[Oscanyan's] appointment as Dragoman in the place of Mr. Brown, would be regarded by them as a serious and alarming calamity. It would greatly disturb their present feeling of security in Turkey, as American citizens, since Mr. Oscanyan is believed by them to be unfitted for the post.”<sup>478</sup>

One month later, in June of 1858, Brown himself wrote to his friend and Under Secretary of State Markoe:

What in the world is this about Oscanyan as Consul for Constantinople? Here he was a buffoon and a (pimp?), and in New York, a retailer of Fig paste and Segars... All the Americans here are up in arms about the mere mention of O. as a Consul. He is a fussy consequence, addlepated puppy, and has not one recommendation for a Consulate. At the most, he could act as an interpreter for a Consul who would ... keep him in his place. I fear, if he is sent here, that my sun has set for ever... I do not wish to leave here now.<sup>479</sup>

In sum, by 1858, the American missionary community was alarmed at the idea of Oscanyan serving in an American diplomatic position in the Ottoman Empire; the same community, conversely, held Brown in “high regard.”<sup>480</sup> While the cause itself remains unclear, the outcome is certain: the American missionaries supported Brown and not Oscanyan, and their opinion held outsized weight with the American government. This was perhaps an early expression of what would become a larger trend in the relationship between the ABCFM and the U.S. government. As Karine V. Walther notes,

The elite political status of many of the ABCFM’s members meant that the organization also held extraordinary influence over the US government’s policies in the Ottoman Empire. The organization often succeeded in placing its hand-picked candidates, including some of its own members, in US diplomatic postings throughout the empire.<sup>481</sup>

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<sup>478</sup> Ibid.

<sup>479</sup> Conn “John Porter Brown,” 177, quoting Letter, J. P. Brown to Francis Markoe, June 15, 1858, Library of Congress, Manuscripts Division, The Galloway, Maxey, and Markoe Papers (Vol. LV, Item 19473- 19474).

<sup>480</sup> Conn “John Porter Brown,” 187.

<sup>481</sup> Walther, “Islamic World Encounters,” 677. In *Sacred Interests*, she writes, “By 1876... the ABCFM often played a decisive role in determining diplomatic assignments in the [Ottoman] empire.” Walther, *Sacred Interests*, 69.

Emily Conroy-Krutz likewise explains that this was a more general trend, not one just evident in the U.S.-Ottoman relationship. “For some regions of the world,” she writes, “government officials turned to missionaries for advice on world affairs... Many [missionaries] found no particular problems in combining their religious roles with more political ones.”<sup>482</sup> This had profound implications, which meant that, as Conroy-Krutz notes, the missionaries’ priorities “came to shape U.S. ideas about the locations, the people, and what a U.S. presence ought to look like if and when the State Department turned its attention in that direction.”<sup>483</sup>

Later that summer, in late August 1858, after the uproar over Oscanyan’s rumored appointment, Oscanyan had plans to meet up with Thomas Butler Gunn, a British illustrator and writer who lived in America between 1849 and 1863. In his account of his encounter that day with Oscanyan, Gunn described a somewhat down-and-out figure, demoralized, perhaps, by recent events:

Met Oscanyan near the Post Office. He didn’t wear his fez, had shaved off his mustache, had a bristly beard of three days growth and looked generally shabby and dilapidated. Said he was in want of something to do. Decidedly un-oriental circumstances for a Turk to be encountered under, in a drizzling shower of rain, in a Yankee metropolis.<sup>484</sup>

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<sup>482</sup> Emily Conroy-Krutz, “American Missionaries in the World” in Hoganson and Sexton, *Cambridge History*, 452-473, at 466.

<sup>483</sup> Emily Conroy-Krutz, “‘What Is a Missionary Good For, Anyway?’: Foreign Relations, Religion, and the Nineteenth Century,” *Diplomatic History* 46-3 (June 1, 2022): 433–61, at 444. She also writes, “Over the course of the nineteenth century, both the Protestant mission movement and the U.S. State Department grew and evolved. And, as it turns out, they both grew in relation with each other. Missionaries brought the state into new parts of the world, demanded that the state clarify the rights of citizenship for Americans abroad, and forced hard conversations about how, when, and why the state would intervene in foreign affairs,” at 442.

<sup>484</sup> Thomas Butler Gunn. Diaries, Vol. 9. Missouri History Museum, 1857, August 28, 1858: [http://digital.lib.lehigh.edu/cdm4/nysp\\_viewer2.php?col=gunn&search=&ptr=1855&CISOPTR=1790](http://digital.lib.lehigh.edu/cdm4/nysp_viewer2.php?col=gunn&search=&ptr=1855&CISOPTR=1790) (p. 189)

Oscanyan continued to have no luck in securing a diplomatic post abroad. He was still hopeful in March of 1861, when he spoke to another diarist, George Templeton Strong, who was a lawyer affiliated with the Columbia Law School. Oscanyan was working there at the time as a custodian (and was later described as the Law School Librarian in 1864).<sup>485</sup> Of the conversation, Strong wrote:

Oscanyan, our Columbia College Law School janitor, wants a diplomatic position in Mesopotamia, or that neighborhood. I know not precisely where. (Probably the consul-generalship at Alexandria, salary \$3,500, which Thayer of the *Evening Post* seems to have secured.) Gave him the benefit of my political influence, for so inefficient a janitor may make a brilliant diplomat, and I cheerfully contributed my mite to relieve the Law School of a sweeper and maker of fires who knows so little of his profession.<sup>486</sup>

The next month, on April 5, 1861, a week before the Confederates attacked Fort Sumter and ignited the American Civil War, Preston King, a Republican Senator from New York (and thus one of Oscanyan's representatives at the time), submitted Oscanyan's application for a "diplomatic appointment to Constantinople" to President Lincoln.<sup>487</sup> It is worth noting here that Oscanyan utilized Democratic references during Democratic administrations and Republican references during Republican administrations. This tactic of appealing to multiple political constituencies is one we will return to in Chapter 4. Oscanyan's own correspondence with the government at this time focused on attacking Brown. On August 5, 1861, Oscanyan wrote to John Hay, who was serving as the Private Secretary and Assistant to President Lincoln, to

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<sup>485</sup> As "janitor," see: *One Hundred and Seventh Annual Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Columbia College including the Law and Medical Departments and the Grammar School*, for 1860-1861 (New York: Published by the Trustees, 1860), 10. As "librarian," see: "G. Oscanyan, The Turk," *Daily Eastern Argus* [Portland, ME], February 27, 1864. Oscanyan's connection with the Columbia Law School requires more exploration. His correspondence in the 1860s was directed to and from the Columbia Law address, 37 Lafayette Place.

<sup>486</sup> Allan Nevins and Milton Halsey Thomas (eds.), *The Diary of George Templeton Strong, The Civil War: 1860-1865* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1952), 111.

<sup>487</sup> Correspondence from Preston King to Abraham Lincoln, April 5, 1861, in the Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress, Series 1, General Correspondence, 1833-1916.



request the removal of the Secretary Interpreter at Constantinople: this, of course, was none other than John Porter Brown. Writing from the Columbia Law address at 37 Lafayette Place, Oscanyan explained that he had taken the liberty to send Hay “a synopsis of the reasons why Mr. Brown should be recalled, and also a copy of Mr. Carr’s letter, our former Minister to Turkey [from 1843-49], the original which you have already perused.”<sup>488</sup> He continued:

The enclosed slip embodies nearly all the charges against Brown. Every one of which can be proved. His recent letter from Constantinople to the Tribune, published on the 17<sup>th</sup> [illegible] shows plainly how insolent and abusive he is, and has even been against his Chiefs, all of whom have had good reason to complain of him. In the last correspondence of the N.Y. Herald, of which I send you a copy, you will see how bitterly he is complained of. I beg that you would be kind enough to make known all these facts to the President at an opportune moment, so that his Excellency may thusly be able to do justice both to him and to your humble servant, C. Oscanyan.<sup>489</sup>

In the enclosed piece, “Who is J.P. Brown, the Dragoman?” – which Oscanyan perhaps forgot was actually from the *New York Atlas* rather than the *New York Herald* – the author, who may well have been Oscanyan himself, complained of Brown having acted “in the multifarious capacity of charge, consul, secretary and interpreter, all at once and the same time,” and wrote that it was indeed Brown’s “earliest policy to intrigue against whoever was in the path of his ambition, and by degrees he aspired to the entire control of the Legation, till he has been able proudly to say *l’etat, c’est moi!*”<sup>490</sup> Of his service to America, the author wrote, Brown has “neglected the interests of American citizens, especially when they clashed with his own.” As an example of this, the writer cited Mr. John Reeves, who was employed by the Turkish government as a naval architect, and “Mr. C. Oscanyan, now of New York,” who, in 1845,

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<sup>488</sup> Letter from Christopher Oscanyan to John Hay, August 5, 1861.

<sup>489</sup> Ibid.

<sup>490</sup> Ibid. The original can be found as “Who is J.P. Brown, the Dragoman?” *The New York Atlas* [New York], June 17, 1860.

chartered a steamer: "His charter party was violated by a Sardinian subject, and his property seized. No redress was obtained by Brown, either from fear of offending the Sardinian legation or from a desire to conciliate the aggressor." The writer concluded: "By general testimony, Brown is disliked by the people of Constantinople, distrusted by the officials, and ridiculed at the Porte, where he has been dubbed *Turkjeh-Bilmez-Teruman*, the "Don't know Turkish Dragoman!" Travelers lament his indifference, and our citizens who have had the misfortune to need his interference in affairs of business, complain bitterly of his imbecility, so much so that one of whom, piquantly observed – 'if you wish to have a project killed outright, *employ Brown!*'"<sup>491</sup>

The final component of the remaining documents in Oscanyan's file to Hay was a list titled: "Synopsis of the reasons why Mr. Brown should be recalled, and Mr. Oscanyan appointed Secretary Interpreter at Constantinople," which was written either in a different hand than Oscanyan's, or in his neatest handwriting. Therein, Oscanyan distilled a series of points as to why Brown should no longer fill the post of Secretary Interpreter. First, Oscanyan argued, Brown was "by no means the only American citizen qualified to act as Secretary Interpreter at the Porte," and, what's more, he "has rendered no essential service to our government... He has neither approximated us to the East nor advanced our commercial interests in the regions; the only distinguishing act of his long service has been to palm off upon our government and the public, a counterfeit official representative of the Porte, in the person of Amin Bey, without any credential."<sup>492</sup> Oscanyan next argued that because Brown had served for over twenty-five

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<sup>491</sup> Letter from Christopher Oscanyan to John Hay, August 5, 1861

<sup>492</sup> Ibid. I will investigate the Amin Bey debacle in a later incarnation of this project.

years in Constantinople, there was “every reason to believe that Mr. Brown has been tempted beyond his loyalty to his own, and the Turkish government.” Further, he wrote, “it is not true that Mr. Brown has been liked by all our Ministers at Constantinople.” Indeed, Oscanyan claimed, “by his long retention in office, the Minister’s post has become secondary, or rather the Secretary Interpreter has become a sort of Dictator, which fact has often been the source of difficulty in our Legation at Constantinople.” Oscanyan then brought up the missionary issue itself: “Although Mr. Brown enjoys the patronage of the missionaries,” he wrote, “the policy of this government not being based upon religious propagandism his continuance in office cannot be maintained on that ground, and we have other merchant and naturalized citizens in Constantinople whose interests have also claims upon our government; nor is Mr. Brown the only person who could sustain and defend the rights of missionary citizens.”<sup>493</sup>

In his closing remarks, Oscanyan made the case for himself: “On the other hand,” he wrote, “Mr. Oscanyan should receive the appointment of Secretary Interpreter at Constantinople because

- I. He is sustained by the most eminent men of the United States.
- II. He is universally acknowledged to be eminently qualified for the post.
- III. On account of his thorough knowledge and appreciation of both countries – the United States and Turkey – he infinitely surpasses the present incumbent in all the facilities for promoting mutual diplomatic relations, and also for the extension of general knowledge of Oriental peoples and affairs.<sup>494</sup>

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<sup>493</sup> Ibid.

<sup>494</sup> Ibid.

Despite his campaigning, Oscanyan did not receive a formal U.S. diplomatic position. Brown and the ABCFM were likely too influential. It is unclear what turned the ABCFM against Oscanyan, and when. The American missionaries were of course his first champions in the United States. What we do know is that by 1860, Oscanyan's views on the missionaries had likewise soured. Even in 1856, he was still writing positively about their work, as in a *Frank Leslie's* piece on the Armenians where he wrote that, unlike Catholicism, of which he expressed negative views, "Protestantism will make rapid strides on account of its elevating and liberal privileges."<sup>495</sup> Perhaps his changing views were in response to their campaign against his consular appointment. Perhaps his positive views had eroded prior to this point. Oscanyan's evolving views on the American missionaries in Turkey, as well as on the Eastern Question, can be found in a series of anonymous columns he wrote for *The New York Herald* in the early 1860s, to which we will now turn.

### **Newspaper Presence and Herald Columns**

Oscanyan was a beneficiary of the constant discourse of the mid-nineteenth-century press. He both wrote for the papers and was written about by them: his celebrity thereby profited from what Bonnie Carr O'Neill calls the "personal journalistic style" that came to "dominate civic discourse" in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>496</sup> Editor-driven newspapers, she explains, "cultivated a first-person vernacular style and encouraged audiences to respond in kind. Newspapers thereby promoted an attitude of familiarity among their readers that

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<sup>495</sup> Christopher Oscanyan, "The Armenians," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, June 14, 1856.

<sup>496</sup> O'Neill, *Literary Celebrity*, 7.

pervade[d] public life.”<sup>497</sup> This forged a platform that was central to the realms of both politics and entertainment. It is hard to determine the extent of Oscanyan’s footprint in the newspapers of the time, given that so much writing was published anonymously, and that pieces could also have been written by journalists in whose ear Oscanyan was often speaking. His involvement appears to have been considerable, however: he was an active member of the New York Press Club, though I’ve been unable to find much information on the nineteenth-century iteration of this organization and Oscanyan’s work therein.

We do know that he wrote anonymous editorials on “the East” for the Bennett’s *New York Herald*. On October 1, 1861, the writer and illustrator Thomas Butler Gunn, whom we met earlier in this chapter, wrote in his diary that he he’d gone to “Weston’s, the “Courier” and “Times” office; met Oscanyan at the latter, who told me he had been writing editorials on “the East” for the “Herald.”<sup>498</sup> Corroborating this, the editor of an Armenian American yearbook from 1912 writes:

Khachadur Vosganian managed to build a reputation for himself in America, in the press, with his articles published in the New York Herald. Although he came and studied with missionary support, he had the consciousness to fight, in his life as a journalist, against the missionary misinformation that was accusing the Armenian nation and the church of being uncivilized and unreligious, and we owe the robust insights published in the New York Herald against the misleading path of the missionary to Vosganian’s authorship. He was the one who named the Armenians of Asia Minor the Yankees of Asia Minor in the New York Herald.<sup>499</sup>

Starting in the summer of 1860, when Christians in Mount Lebanon and Damascus were massacred by local Muslims and Druze and the “Eastern Question” was once again brought to

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<sup>497</sup> Ibid., 7-8.

<sup>498</sup> Thomas Butler Gunn, *Diaries*, Vol. 17. Missouri History Museum, 1861. October 1, 1861: [http://digital.lib.lehigh.edu/cdm4/nysp\\_viewer2.php?col=gunn&search=&ptr=3827&CISOPTR=3803](http://digital.lib.lehigh.edu/cdm4/nysp_viewer2.php?col=gunn&search=&ptr=3827&CISOPTR=3803) (p. 223)

<sup>499</sup> Seropian, *American-Armenian*, at 17.

the fore of global concern, we can identify with a high degree of certainty a handful of Oscanyan's columns. These columns spoke to topics including the American missionaries, plans to solve the Eastern Question, and Armenian democracy in Turkey.<sup>500</sup> As we will see, between 1857 and 1860, Oscanyan had changed his mind about the beneficence of the European powers; he now believed that they contributed directly to the lamentable situation in the Ottoman Empire. As already noted, by 1860, Oscanyan had also changed his mind about the American missionaries. In a column titled "The Armenian Riots – Constantinople – Russian Intrigue Again Busily at Work," published on Monday August 20, 1860 in the *Herald*, Oscanyan first expressed his anti-missionary sentiments. Writing about a conflict in the Ottoman capital between Protestant Armenians and Orthodox Armenians, "Christians themselves against Christians," Oscanyan first provided a short background on the "old Armenian church" and the Armenians themselves, saying they were "very tenacious of their religion" (as he did verbatim in the Oriental and Turkish Museum catalogue) and "a community isolated from the government." He then argued that they had lived "in unity and peace" and maintained "homogeneity as a people" until the last one-hundred and fifty years when "Catholicism was introduced among them." This, he claimed, "touched the patriotism of the people, who dreaded the dismemberment of their nation; for Catholicism has a denationalizing tendency." Such divisions were then compounded with the arrival of Protestantism, he wrote:

Within the last thirty years Protestantism has also been introduced through the efforts of the American missionaries. In the beginning there was little or no opposition, the missionaries being well received by the Armenians as friends of the people, having at

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<sup>500</sup> For more on this conflict and its implications, see Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), and Ozavci, *Dangerous Gifts*.

heart no object but their real welfare and moral advancement. But in time their influence increased, to such an extent that they began to insinuate their sectarianism and entice the lower classes from the church fellowship. The schools which they established proved mere establishments for manufacturing proselytes. Sectarian books were disseminated, and conventicles set up, where the discussion of abstruse doctrines, and Puritan psalm singing, to the tune of Old Hundred, took the place of the time-honored church ritual. The Armenians displayed bitter animosity and opposition to these efforts, and persecutions followed.

The newsworthy riots in Constantinople were between members of the “old church” and the Protestants (“seceders” from the old church) over the attempted burial of a Protestant Armenian in Orthodox Armenian burial grounds. The “persistence of both parties,” Oscanian claimed, was “unprecedented” – for this, he blamed both Russia and the Protestants: “It is plain that this peaceable people [the Armenians] would not have thus compromised themselves had they not been instigated and sustained by Russia on the one hand, and by the representatives of [American] Protestantism on the other” – i.e. the ABCFM. Russia, he wrote, echoing his argument in *The Sultan and His People*, knew that “the Armenians are the real life and soul of Turkey; hence the policy of Russia has of late been to gain them over to her interest.”<sup>501</sup> Of this burial fiasco Rev. H.G.O. Dwight himself wrote a comprehensive account in the *Missionary Herald*. In his letter, he also noted that it was “strongly suspected” that there had been a “foreign instigator” for what he called the “outrageous proceedings of the Armenians at the burying ground, so unlike their former character.”<sup>502</sup> “It is firmly believed,” he continued, that *the great object* was to provoke the Turks to fire upon the mob, when the hue and cry would have been raised that Mussulman fanaticism had shed Christian (?) blood, and tens of thousands of Christians (?) in this capital would have started up to revenge it;

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<sup>501</sup> “The Armenian Riots at Constantinople – Russian Intrigue Again Busily at Work,” *New York Herald* [New York], August 20, 1860.

<sup>502</sup> For the full account from the ABCFM perspective, see “Letter from Mr. Dwight,” July 25, 1860, in *The Missionary Herald*, October 1860, Vol. LVI, No. 10, 311-313. For the assignment of blame, see 312.

which of course would have brought on a general and terrible civil war, in the streets and houses of Constantinople.<sup>503</sup>

While Dwight and Oscanyan may have both, to different degrees, suspected that foreign instigation was at play, Oscanyan entirely blamed Russia and the missionaries, whereas Dwight ultimately concluded that “the Armenians were the sole cause of the disgraceful scenes here, and so it has been on all similar occasions heretofore.”<sup>504</sup> To put it another way, Oscanyan defended the Armenians, while Dwight disparaged them. In his column Oscanyan was particularly attentive to the power dynamics of the situation at hand, and especially to the “game being played out” in which Ottoman Christians were being used as the pawns of outside powers: “The outpouring of innocent blood and the sacrifice of valuable lives,” he wrote, “are of but little import if their ambitious designs can be accomplished.” He concluded: “Verily, the “Eastern Question” is becoming more and more difficult of solution, for, between grasping Christianity and fanatical Islamism, the sick men seems to have but little chance of dying a natural death.”<sup>505</sup> Here Oscanyan stated rather clearly that he believed “grasping Christianity” was no longer just a Russian menace, but one sustained as well by American Protestants. The Eastern Question, to Oscanyan, had thus become something with which the Americans were directly implicated.

At the end of the month, on August 31, 1860, Oscanyan published a column that provided a new solution to the “Eastern Question,” a scheme that diverged in important ways

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<sup>503</sup> Ibid, 312-313. Emphasis and (?) are the author’s.

<sup>504</sup> Ibid, 313.

<sup>505</sup> “The Armenian Riots at Constantinople,” – Russian Intrigue Again Busily at Work,” *New York Herald*, [New York], August 20, 1860.



from his proposal three years earlier in *The Sultan and His People*. In “A Plan for Settling the Eastern Question,” it was clear that, perhaps owing to the massacres in Lebanon and Syria, in the years between the publication of his book and the writing of his column, Oscanyan had lost considerable faith in the European Powers. By 1860, he believed that while finding a solution to the Eastern question was not *inherently* difficult, it was made so by the “interest which the leading European Powers have in continuing the present unsatisfactory condition of things in Turkey. They all feel, like the Emperor Nicholas, that it will be better to let that empire fall to pieces than to reconstruct it, for they may then come in for a share of the fragments.” He did not mince words: “if they could only be prevailed on to make a sacrifice of their selfish views the Eastern question would be susceptible of an easy and definite solution.”

Oscanyan still blamed the Ottoman government for their part in the problem, however. He attributed the “atrocities” that had “recently shocked the Christian world” to the “decrepit government of the Sultan... and its weakness.” Clearly, he argued, the “present political system of Turkey” was “inadequate to the protection of its Christian subjects, who form more than half its population” – a statistic, albeit an inflated one, that he emphasized and invested with great importance in his book, as well. While just three years earlier he had suggested that the way to reform Turkey’s political system was to do so in a manner that provided Ottoman Christians and Muslims equal rights so they could rule together *under European oversight*, by 1860 he no longer trusted that Europe had the best interests of Turkey and its Christians at heart: “owing to the jealousies of the three leading European Powers,” he wrote, “there is no possibility of its being so reconstructed as to insure that object [the protection of Ottoman Christian subjects].”

What, then, he asked, was the empire to do? How was it to protect its Ottoman Christian subjects while also placing itself “out of the reach of France, Russia and England?”

Oscanyan had a new answer. He proposed a plan to divide up the Ottoman provinces into “small but independent States” so that the “unruly population of each can be kept in perfect control by its chief.” Despite his emergent distrust of the leading European powers, he still placed his proposed Ottoman states under their watchful eye: as smaller, independent states, he wrote, “the misgoverned provinces of Turkey would be placed under better, or at least more stringent rule, and rendered separately responsible to Europe for their treatment of their Christian population.”

Oscanyan divided the empire in the following manner:

Syria, which is distinct from Turkey in its language, its customs and its prejudices, might be given to Abd-el-Kader, whose abilities as a ruler and friendly disposition towards the Christian population point him out as eminently fitted for its government. The two Armenian provinces could be combined under the rule of one of their old princes, many families of which are still in existence. This would leave Turkey, on the Asiatic side, the whole of the peninsula, from Kizil Irmak to Marash, or thereabouts, as well as the command of the Black Sea. In Europe it would be good policy to make the Balkans her artificial, as it is her natural, boundary, which would still leave to her a noble territory, comprising the Herzegovina, Albania, Macedonia and Roumelia with Constantinople as its capital. Bosnia and Servia might then be united under one prince, as are Wallachia and Moldavia, whilst Bulgaria should have a separate government of its own.

With this plan, Oscanyan argued, the sick man would be “relieved from the cares with which he is at present unable to cope,” and revived to a condition in which he could “do full justice to his people.” And Europe, he concluded, “would no longer be fretted by anxieties regarding the fate of Constantinople and the disposition of an inheritance which so many

covet.”<sup>506</sup> In short, he was proposing a form of Ottoman federation, a model that was not taken up by other Armenian political thinkers until over forty years later.<sup>507</sup>

In a five-column spread the following week (nearly a full page), published on September 5, 1860, Oscanyan provided an historical overview of the Eastern Question, starting “early in the ninth century” when “a tribe of Turkomans crossed the Caspian mountains and invaded Armenia.” He then proceeded to explicate the “causes of degeneration,” blaming the misrule of “the Turks”: “instead of ameliorating the condition of the heterogenous peoples whom their arms had conquered,” he wrote, “or blending them into a common nationality, they fostered reciprocal animosities among them, regarding them severally, as adjuncts to their own glory, and the means of their own prosperity, the while treating them as rayahs, or subjugated people, who ought to be thankful for the mere boon of life itself.” He continued: “Accordingly they denied them the rights of citizenship, and imposed upon them many other indignities. They were not allowed to hold any office, nor to give their testimony in the courts of justice against a Mussulman, nor to carry arms, even in self defence. The only road to preferment or social equality was to embrace Islamism, outside of which all were compelled to bear the burden of taxation, and in reality become the menials of the conquerors.”

In his very next sentence, Oscanyan evoked language from Andrew Jackson’s farewell address from 1837, presumably to connect the fight of the Ottoman Christians for equal rights with that of the American working man: “The legitimate consequence [of Ottoman rule],” Oscanyan wrote, “has been that they [Ottoman Christians] have been and still are the tillers of

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<sup>506</sup> “A Plan for Settling the Eastern Question,” *New York Herald* [New York], August 31, 1860.

<sup>507</sup> Houri Berberian, *Roving Revolutionaries: Armenians and the Connected Revolutions in the Russian, Iranian, and Ottoman Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), 121-143.

the soil, the artisans, the mechanics, the merchants, in fine, *the bone and sinew of the land*, while the Mussulmans themselves considered it beneath their dignity to be employed otherwise than as rulers or soldiers.”<sup>508</sup> As Andrew Jackson wrote of the American “planter, the farmer, the mechanic, and the laborer,” they formed “the great body of the people of the United States; they are the bone and sinew of the country — men who love liberty and desire nothing but equal rights and “equal laws.”<sup>509</sup>

Thus, emphasizing the desire for and worthiness of the Ottoman Christians to have equal political rights in the empire, Oscanyan, as he did in *The Sultan and His People*, advised that, in order “to promote the regeneration of the Ottoman empire and preserve the peace of Europe, the form of the Turkish government must be entirely remodeled, so that the Christian population will be on an equality with the Mussulman.” To effect this, he first presented the plan of “a correspondent who has passed some years in Constantinople,” only to explain that such measures could not be adopted on account of “both internal and external opposition to them” – that is, from Turks, who would not want to share “administrative functions” with their “conquered subjects” and from Russia, who would “oppose any salutary measures.” This plan, which had clear echoes of Oscanyan’s 1857 proposal, was as follows:

1. Every Pashalik [Ottoman administrative division] must be formed into an independent State, like the United States of America, with its own internal administration, consisting of a Medjlis [council], composed of Christians and Mussulmans, to be elected by the people, and presided over by a President elected

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<sup>508</sup> “The Great European Problem,” *New York Herald* [New York], September 5, 1860. Italics mine.

<sup>509</sup> Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren, *Farewell Address of Andrew Jackson to the People of the United States; and the Inaugural Address of Martin Van Buren, President of the United States* (Washington City: Blair and Rives, 1837). See also: Andrew Jackson, “Farewell Address,” available at <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/farewell-address-0> (Accessed November 8, 2022). Anna-Lisa Cox has also written about the use of the term by African American leaders in the 1840s in her *The Bone and Sinew of the Land: America's Forgotten Black Pioneers and the Struggle for Equality* (New York: Public Affairs, 2018).

- by the members of the Medjlis – the Governor of the province to be appointed by the central government.
2. The Central government to be composed of delegates sent by the Medjlis of the different provinces, thus representing the popular will.
  3. A Senate, to be composed of a limited number appointed by the Sultan, half Mussulman and half Christian.
  4. A new code of laws, not based upon the Koran, but upon the systems of the civilized world.<sup>510</sup>

According to Oscanyan, there was only one method of solving the Eastern Question and it was the scheme he suggested in his previous column, which was thus reproduced in the remainder of the feature. He did not explain why either the Turks or Russia would be satisfied with that plan and not the other.

On September 12, 1860, the *Herald* published the report of an anonymous Constantinople correspondent, who, with phrases like “us, the Armenians,” and “our people,” was clearly writing to Oscanyan directly, as Oscanyan was the only *Herald*-affiliated Armenian in New York City at that time. (It is not clear if this correspondent was the same one from the previous feature on the Eastern Question.) He also thanked Oscanyan, though not by name, for his “contribution and the file of American newspapers which [he was] kind enough to send” to the reading room and library that had been established in Constantinople to support the “mental elevation of our people; for, having so long been subjected to despotic sway and fanatical persecutions, the inhabitants of the provinces, as you know, have had little chance of mental culture.” This is a belief that echoed not only Oscanyan’s 1830’s lectures on Armenia and the premise of his newspaper in 1840, but, as discussed in Chapter 1, represented a larger

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<sup>510</sup> “The Great European Problem,” *New York Herald*. Italics mine.

Ottoman Armenian progressive literary movement. The correspondent also provided an unusual glimpse at on-the-ground Ottoman-American relations in 1860 Constantinople:

As this [reading room] society is composed of a few young men, with limited means, we would therefore state that any contributions from publishers and editors in America will be gratefully received by us and the public. Pray do not neglect to send us the New York Herald. We have acquired from it very different ideas of the United States from the very restricted notions we had imbibed from the missionaries, who are the only Americans resident here. Since the Crimean war we have had many more English, French, and Italians, who came to establish themselves among us. Why have we not American merchants or mechanics? It is somewhat unaccountable, but some one suggested, “perhaps Americans are all missionaries.”

The American missionaries were clearly an issue for the Ottoman Armenian community of mid-nineteenth century Constantinople. In his letter, which was written on August 6, 1860, the correspondent, like Oscanyan had in late August, described at length the “rumpus” about “our own [Armenian] people and the seceders from our church – I mean the proselytes to Protestantism – about the burial of one of their flock.” In his column from August 20, Oscanyan also referred to the Protestant Armenians as “seceders” – presumably, a term that could evoke a considerable emotional response in 1860 New York. While in that column Oscanyan did not fully explain *why* he had claimed that the Protestants were partly to blame for the uproar, the correspondent provided abundant argumentation: the Protestants, he wrote, “being disappointed in their unjust demands [to bury a member of their community in the Orthodox cemetery], reported to the English and American Ministers, who, unacquainted with the rights of the Armenian nation, immediately made an appeal to the Porte, and repaired to our Patriarchate to protest personally against this injustice.” After detailing the events surrounding the attempted burial, and the animosities it inspired, the correspondent stated his claims clearly:

Now, knowing the habitual quiet temper and liberal sentiments of our people, you will doubtless wonder what was the secret motive which produced such a commotion and decided animosity? The truth is, for the past few months, the American missionaries have not ceased to attack and abuse our community, not only through their organ, the *Avedaper* (Messenger), but by special pamphlets, and have succeeded in awakening a deadly animosity towards them and their proselytes, and the more so since the Armenians have learned that these missionaries can avail themselves of the diplomatic services of the ambassadors. You can easily perceive that the recent event was brought about through their instrumentality, for why should the Protestants persist to bury their dead where they knew they had no right?<sup>511</sup>

Bringing to his readers' attention an issue that would only grow in significance as the American missionaries gained an even larger foothold in the empire through the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the correspondent expressed immense frustration with the way the American missionaries would "malign and misrepresent us [the Armenians] before the Christian world." He argued that it was only natural that the Armenians would be "incensed by such persevering efforts to create disunion," and yet, if and when "any animosity is manifested, we are regarded as turbulent and bigoted, and the patronage of the Protestant Embassies is made available to sanction their denationalizing maneuvers, and the world is informed that there is persecution and bloodshed."<sup>512</sup>

The news from Constantinople was not all bad, however. "The all-absorbing topic of the day," the correspondent wrote, was "the privilege of real self-government among us, the Armenians."<sup>513</sup> "As you were the originator of that movement," he continued, "I suppose you

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<sup>511</sup> "Our Constantinople Correspondent - Constantinople August 6, 1860," *New York Herald* [New York], September 12, 1860. I will investigate the American missionaries' attacks on the Armenian community in the next iteration of this project.

<sup>512</sup> Ibid.

<sup>513</sup> Ibid. It is unclear if Oscanyan translated the letter – which he probably would have indicated, as he did elsewhere – or if it was written in English and he modified some of the language to explain material to an American audience that he himself would not need explained, or if the correspondent did that himself.

will be glad to hear the particulars of its progress.”<sup>514</sup> While I am unable to corroborate this designation of Oscanyan as the “originator” of the self-government movement, a council representing the Armenian community of Istanbul had indeed produced a new draft of an Armenian constitution to submit to the Ottoman government in 1860.<sup>515</sup> This was not the first draft, either (nor would it be the last). As early as 1847, the Ottoman Armenian community started making plans to establish councils to govern community affairs.<sup>516</sup> And, in 1855 (and thus even before the Ottoman Reform Edict of 1856), a committee had been established to draft the first Armenian constitution. This committee produced a final draft in 1857 but it was not approved by the Ottoman government.<sup>517</sup> It was not until 1863 that the Ottoman government officially ratified an Armenian constitution and permitted an Armenian National Assembly, as established within the Armenian national constitution, to convene.

Oscanyan’s name does not appear on the lists of council members or as a part of the constitutional drafting committee. His unnamed correspondent, however, announced in his 1860 letter that he, on the other hand, had “the honor to be one of the elect – a member of the council established along with the 1860 draft.” After outlining the adoption of the constitution, the correspondent described the formation and election of the associated national council: “everything went off quietly,” he wrote. “All taxpayers or real estate owners were duly registered and allowed to vote, which they could do either in person or by letter, enclosing the

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<sup>514</sup> Ibid.

<sup>515</sup> On the Armenian National Constitution of 1863, see Ueno Masayuki, “The First Draft of the Armenian Millet Constitution,” in the *Annals of the Japan Association for Middle East Studies*, 23-1, 2007; Artinian, *The Armenian Constitutional System*; Aylin Koçunyan, *Negotiating the Ottoman Constitution 1839-1876* (Paris: Louvain Peeters, 2018).

<sup>516</sup> Artinian, *The Armenian Constitutional System*, 73; Masayuki, “The First Draft of the Armenian Millet Constitution,” 214.

<sup>517</sup> For more on this draft, see Masayuki, “The First Draft of the Armenian Millet Constitution.”



ticket of their choice.” With no small amount of romanticism, the correspondent asserted that the voters all seemed to have been “actuated by one motive, viz, the good of the nation; hence they have neither shown partiality nor aversion to class or caste, but have, so far, selected reliable and patriotic men – bankers as well as tradespeople, literary as well as illiterate.” The consequence of this, he concluded, was that the Armenians would have “wisdom as well as practical common sense” in their national council.<sup>518</sup>

In a passage that mirrored the *Sultan and His People* in multiple ways, the correspondent explained that with the with these new developments in Armenian political representation, they had “not only conquered our enemies, the aristocratic oligarchists, but established a government within a government, and that of democracy itself, in the very heart of Turkey.”<sup>519</sup> Whether the “supineness of the Porte” in permitting such activities was “owing to its helpless condition, or from an appreciative policy to alienate any sympathy towards Russia, by thus granting us privileges which we could never enjoy under Russian domination,” he argued, “it matters little.” Indeed, just like Oscanyan, he believed that their “Mussulman friends, the powers that be, will be as much benefited as ourselves. They will learn from us practical administrative ability, which they do not possess; and Europe will learn also that if Turkey can be saved it will only be through us, the Armenians.”<sup>520</sup> Such shared sentiments between Oscanyan and his correspondent suggest that Oscanyan’s views were not his alone; rather, they at least in part spoke to a shared ethos and politics amongst a certain segment of Constantinopolitan Armenians at this time.

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<sup>518</sup> “Our Constantinople Correspondent,” *New York Herald*.

<sup>519</sup> Ibid.

<sup>520</sup> Ibid.

In Oscanyan's column that same day, he argued that the events described in the correspondent's column seemed to "foreshadow the accomplishment of some such plan as that we recommended the other day for the settlement of the Eastern question, inasmuch as the Armenians are gradually preparing to take possession of their own portion of the Sultan's dominions."<sup>521</sup> This was a remarkable statement: in 1860, Oscanyan imagined the Armenians to be "preparing to take possession" of the historical Armenian provinces. This is very early for anything resembling an Armenian independence movement in Turkey.<sup>522</sup>

Again, however, he turned his attention to Russia: what will Russia say to such an arrangement, he asked. He quoted the Emperor Nicholas: "I will not permit the breaking up of Turkey into small republics. I would rather go to war, and, as long as I have a man and a musket left, would carry it on."<sup>523</sup> Having learned that the Russian minister at Constantinople sided with the Armenians in the "late quarrel with the Protestants about the burying ground at Constantinople," Oscanyan wondered if the Russian diplomat would thus "follow out the policy of his late master," or instead "continue to manifest his sympathy with the Armenians when they attempt to regain their country and their independence." "We shall see," he concluded.<sup>524</sup>

Later that fall, on October 21, 1860, Oscanyan published a column in which he once again took up the issue of the Protestant burial uproar in Constantinople and dispensed even more aggressive arguments against the American missionaries. It was also this column in which

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<sup>521</sup> "New Political Organization in Turkey – Democratic Government Among the Armenians," *New York Herald* [New York], September 12, 1860.

<sup>522</sup> For more on the history of Armenian liberation movements, see Gerard Jirair Libaridian, "The Ideology of Armenian Liberation: The Development of Armenian Political Thought before the Revolutionary Movement (1639-1885)," (Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1987).

<sup>523</sup> "New Political Organization in Turkey," *New York Herald*.

<sup>524</sup> Ibid.

he referred to the Armenians as the “Yankees of the East.”<sup>525</sup> Oscanyan first framed the ongoing hostilities as an example of “exaggerated religious enthusiasm” and marked Constantinople as the “field” in which “modern European diplomatists” were “prosecuting their rival interests, under cover of this pretended zeal for religion” – “Russia, through the Greeks and Armenians, France through the Catholics, and Great Britain and other Protestant Powers through a new community recently created by the American missionaries, of whom our own Minister has, it seems, also constituted himself the protector.”<sup>526</sup> The minister in question here appears to be James Williams, who was American Minister Resident in Constantinople from January 1858 to May 1861. Oscanyan then argued that the recent “riot,” discussed above, which took place over the Protestant burial, “furnished a pretext to championize Protestantism which was eagerly seized upon.” According to Oscanyan, the missionaries, through the diplomatic interference of James Williams, who inserted himself into the burial fiasco, sought to create a disturbance in order to “intimidate the Porte” and substantiate a “demand which they are said to have forwarded to our government for a man-of-war.”<sup>527</sup> From the perspective of American interests, then, Oscanyan wrote at length about the danger of American “meddling in the affairs of other countries.” He elaborated as follows:

Such are the facts as they have been reported to us. We trust that they have been exaggerated, and that our Minister has not been led by the persuasions of these men to

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<sup>525</sup> H.G.O Dwight referred to the Armenians as “Anglo-Saxons of the east” six years earlier in his *Christianity in Turkey: A Narrative of the Protestant Reformation in the Armenian Church* (London: James Nisbet & Co, 1854), 14.

<sup>526</sup> “The Missionary Broil at Constantinople,” *New York Herald* [New York], October 21, 1860. I believe Oscanyan here was talking about the creation of a Protestant *millet*, or official Ottoman religious community, in 1850 at the initiation of two British diplomats. For more see, “Ottoman Decree Regarding Protestants, 1850,” in World History Commons, <https://worldhistorycommons.org/ottoman-decree-regarding-protestants-1850> (Accessed October 26, 2022).

<sup>527</sup> “The Missionary Broil at Constantinople,” *New York Herald*. I will elaborate on this demand, as well as the work of James Williams and the creation of the Protestant *millet* in Constantinople in the next iteration of this project.

forget his position as representative of the United States, whose policy is opposed to everything like aggression, or political or religious meddling in the affairs of other countries. When we want a territory, we pay for it, as in the case of California and New Mexico, and as we should be glad to do for Cuba; and when we desire to secure commercial influence we go straight to our object, as we did in the case of Japan. However strong may be our religious sympathies with our fellow Christians abroad, we do not allow them to betray us into disputes which our political system has made no provision for. We are a commercial republic, and not an intriguing despotism. Our diplomatic text book is the ledger, and our *primum mobile* dollars and cents. Our interest in Turkey lies in her drugs and spices, her fruits, wool and other products, rum, Yankee notions &c; and if we feel any particular sympathy towards the Armenians, it is because they are the Yankees of the East, as well as Christians like ourselves. Hence it neither comports with the spirit of our constitution nor with our commercial interests that we should interfere in the religious differences of other nationalities, and strict watch should be kept over our diplomatic agents to prevent them being made the dupes and instruments of a set of fanatics who would embroil the world for the sake of making a single proselyte.<sup>528</sup>

Oscanyan here put all his cards on the table when he said, “strict watch should be kept over our diplomatic agents to prevent them from being made the dupes and instruments of a set of fanatics who would embroil the world for the sake of making a single proselyte.” But he did not stop there: “It is important,” he added, “that the Eastern populations should be made to understand that the American missionaries do not represent the American people, inasmuch as they are men of limited experience, little knowledge of the world, and, though well meaning, fiercely bigoted. This explanation is especially due to the Armenian community and their Patriarch, who must have been led to form strange opinions of our boasted liberality in religious matters from the conduct of these men, backed up as it is reported to have been, by the ill judged interference of our Minister.” Operating in many ways as both an American insider and outsider, Oscanyan took up the tone of a disappointed parent, writing, “we trust

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<sup>528</sup> Ibid.

that steps will be taken to remove any unfavorable impression which the conduct of our representative may have created at Constantinople.”<sup>529</sup>

In a column from almost a year later, published on August 31, 1861, Oscanyan continued his campaign against the missionaries. Titled “Another Missionary Broil at Constantinople,” the column offered a series of critiques of “that *religio-politico* close corporation designated the A.B.C.F.M.” Unlike the “religious press,” which would only publish uncritical reports of missionary activity, Oscanyan wrote that they at the *New York Herald*, “not being in the same category, feel ourselves at liberty to promulgate such intelligence to the Christian public as it is important for them to know, and the more particularly from the great interest which it must possess for those who have already seceded from the A.B.C.F.M.” After succinctly summarizing the goals, setbacks, and successes of the missionary operations in Constantinople (the Greeks “proved stumbling blocks” but the Armenians “received the missionaries with friendship”), Oscanyan wrote that these “ultra fanatics, as usual, insisted upon extremes,” choosing to do work not “of enlightenment and civilization [e.g. secular schooling], but of absolute propagandism and proselytism.” Oscanyan, here, was clearly expressing intense frustration at the missionaries: to him, “enlightenment and civilization” were important goals – ones he, too, wanted to encourage in the Armenian community. Why, he seemed to say, did they have to go and ruin it with their “propagandism and proselytism?” He then levied his strongest-yet attack:

Moreover, in order to further their own designs, these missionaries do not hesitate to involve our diplomatic representatives and consular agents in their proselyting schemes, nor to advise the government who are the “improper” and who are the “proper” persons to represent us abroad. They have even had the modesty to ask for a man-of-

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<sup>529</sup> Ibid.

war to sustain them. The truth is, these men, relying upon Christian enthusiasm for their support, believe that they can throw dust into the eyes of all the world. Instead of being heralds of peace, they have sown discord wherever they have gone, and are now reaping confusion.<sup>533</sup>

In his conclusion, which represented a turn from his 1857 *embrace* of more European influence, Oscanyan argued *against* Western intervention with an argument that would become only more prescient in the decades to come. “If it is desirable that Mahomedanism should be superseded by Christianity,” he wrote, echoing a belief held by the missionaries themselves, “it can only be effected through the Christian populations – not by dividing them into sectarian cliques, and setting one against the other, like a house divided against itself, but by elevating the moral and intellectual tone of these communities”<sup>534</sup> In this way, he wrote, “the errors of their faith and practice, if such there be, will correct themselves – not by assimilating them to the Puritanical notions of the Western World, but by harmonizing them with the spirit of their own institutions and social organizations.”<sup>535</sup> Thus, within the course of a few years, Oscanyan went from welcoming European intervention and protection to believing that the future of Turkey – the answer to the Eastern Question – was dependent on Ottomans themselves being able to listen to the “spirit of their own institutions” and determine their own fate outside the “selfish” actions of outsiders. To Oscanyan, by 1861, this meant above all that the American missionaries needed to stop their meddling and that the Ottoman provinces needed to be allowed to govern themselves.

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<sup>533</sup> “Another Missionary Broil at Constantinople,” *New York Herald* [New York], August 31, 1861.

<sup>534</sup> *Ibid.*; Oscanyan also used the simile of a “house divided” in *The Sultan and His People*.

<sup>535</sup> *Ibid.*

## Chapter 4

### Spectacular Authenticity (1863-1868)

#### Chapter Overview

This chapter lays bare the fundamental tension between Oscanyan's desire to correct erroneous impressions of the Turks and the increasingly spectacular professional context in which he operated: a context that rendered it beneficial to him to utilize the very stereotypes he was aiming to undo in order to attract an audience. This spectacular context makes it impossible to ignore what had perhaps been the case all along: delivered in a world that increasingly conflated intercultural education and entertainment, Oscanyan's message always risked being superseded by the entertaining forms it took. What's more, his Turkish nativity, while the very source of his expertise and authority to instruct, at the same time frequently rendered Oscanyan himself a spectacle and a curiosity. His audiences regularly engaged with his nativity as a visual encounter, a satisfying end in itself – not necessarily as a cue to absorb his multifaceted worldview and correct their erroneous impressions. While Oscanyan clearly understood the audience-attracting power of his nativity (and of his Ottoman-American hybridity) and explicitly tailored his performances to increase his public appeal, this chapter asks if there is a difference between attracting an audience and influencing one.

The following examines Oscanyan's use of spectacle, by which I mean forms of presentation that privileged and rewarded the act of looking, to pursue his diplomatic goals. Throughout the 1860s, but especially during the American Civil War (when he drew his largest audiences and received the most media coverage), Oscanyan used a widening range of popular media and tactics to draw a crowd. First, we will look at Oscanyan's lectures in the 1860s from

the lens of their visual reception and the increasingly attention-grabbing tactics used to advertise them. Next, we will look briefly at Oscanyan's attempts to turn his spectacular lectures into single-venue, nightly events: his "*Soirees Orientales*" and Turkish Hall were explicit blends of instruction and entertainment that took a form somewhere between an exhibition, a lecture, and a performance. Finally, we will look at Oscanyan's use of photography during this period and the way he deployed the topic of slavery both to attract an audience *and* work towards his goal of correcting erroneous impressions of the Turks. Throughout we will analyze Oscanyan's drive to use spectacular forms to represent "authentic" Turkish realities – and the limits of those forms in meeting sincere instructional goals.

### **The Lecture as Visual Encounter and Spectacle**

As noted in Chapter 2, Oscanyan's lectures in the 1850s and 1860s covered topics including the religion, history, and women of Turkey. They attracted a large audience, which often included "many leading personages in the professional, mercantile, and fashionable worlds."<sup>536</sup> His talks were held at major venues, like the Great Hall at the Cooper Institute, where Abraham Lincoln gave his now-famous speech in 1860 to a full house of 1,500 audience members.<sup>537</sup> Attendees of Oscanyan's lectures were drawn in by his Turkish nativity and experience. Of his qualifications to lecture on "Turkey and the Turks," *The New York Herald* noted: "Mr. Oscanyan is eminently fitted for the task he has undertaken. Born in Turkey, he long remained there, and became entirely familiar with every phase of Oriental life." In

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<sup>536</sup> "Oscanyan's Lecture – A Night in the Harem," *The New York Herald* [New York], December 14, 1856.

<sup>537</sup> Harold Holzer, *Lincoln at Cooper Union: The Speech That Made Abraham Lincoln President* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006).



Constantinople, they added, he “filled various offices of trust.” And, “his position in several legations has made him perfectly familiar with the inside view of Turkish diplomacy, and we may expect much novel and valuable intelligence from his lectures.”<sup>538</sup> Over the course of his lecture career, he was represented by a range of flashy sobriquets that evoked the singular figure he cut in American society: “the Turk,” “a genuine Turk,” “a veritable Turk,” “the Grand Turk,” “the celebrated Turk” and “the native Armenian Turk,” as well as “the Turkish Lecturer,” “the Oriental Lecturer,” and, more simply, “an Armenian,” “a Constantinopolitan,” or “of Constantinople.” Given his “nativity,” or “foreignness” (depending on how you look at it), newspaper reports also regularly commented on Oscanian’s English abilities, a common journalistic practice particularly for foreign-born speakers, who might be harder for an American audience to understand. Potential hearers were told: “He speaks English as well as one of us;”<sup>539</sup> “His English is irreproachable;”<sup>540</sup> and “He speaks the English language fluently, and can easily be understood.”<sup>541</sup>

From its outset, the American lyceum system presented edification as enjoyment. Already by the late 1840s, as Donald Scott writes, “a public lecture was expected to entertain as well as instruct and inspire, and the newspaper reviews always assessed the quality of the performance as well as the substance of the message.”<sup>542</sup> While as we have seen, the lyceum

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<sup>538</sup> “Turkey and the Turks,” *The New York Herald* [New York], October 18, 1855. As Mary Cayton writes, “one criterion that audiences increasingly used to evaluate the worth of performers was the national or international reputation of the performer or amusement in question.” Mary Cayton, “The Making of an American Prophet: Emerson, His Audiences, and the Rise of the Culture Industry in Nineteenth-Century America,” *The American Historical Review* 92-3 (June 1987), 597-620, at 615.

<sup>539</sup> “New York Correspondence,” *Charleston Courier* [Charleston], October 5, 1855.

<sup>540</sup> “Turkey and the Turks,” *The New York Herald* [New York], October 18, 1855.

<sup>541</sup> “Turkey as described by a Turk,” *The Daily Cleveland Herald* [Cleveland], December 18, 1860.

<sup>542</sup> Scott, “The Popular Lecture,” 805.

system began as an effort to provide “useful knowledge” for a growing American public,<sup>543</sup> by the late 1850s, there was already a clear move towards showmanship and spectacle, a merging of “education and entertainment, instruction and showbiz.”<sup>544</sup> What John L. Brooke calls “entertainment capitalism” was “exploding” in the 1850s, bringing with it a new world of “commercial ventures for mass audiences,” and “a host of evolving technologies.”<sup>545</sup> In short, from the 1850s onwards, Oscanyan was lecturing in a professional environment that no longer placed sincerity and transparency paramount the way it had in the 1830s when he gave his first U.S. lectures; he was now operating in a culture that increasingly embraced theatricality.<sup>546</sup> And to attract an audience, Oscanyan heeded the call.

One of the most effective ways in which Oscanyan dazzled his audiences was with the use of costume. By 1856, Oscanyan had started to appear in costume on stage, which, as *The Daily Cleveland Herald* reported in 1860, “has more than the charm of novelty in it. It is an actual assistance to the hearer in understanding and appreciating the object: it is to this lecture what the black board or diagram is to the practical, scientific lecture.”<sup>547</sup> In his introductory lectures, Oscanyan would dress “in the full costume of a Turk of the working class, bearing in his hand a lantern with a lighted candle in it, explaining it to be the dress worn by carpenters, boatmen, hostlers, servants, &c., illuminating his own path, for the authorities of

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<sup>543</sup> Ibid., 791.

<sup>544</sup> Peter Gibian, “The Lecture Room as Contact Zone: Bayard Taylor’s Travel Lectures,” in Tom F. Wright, *The Cosmopolitan Lyceum*, 173. Chapter 1 of Angela Ray’s *The Lyceum and Public Culture in the Nineteenth-Century United States* is called “From Mutual Education to Celebrity Entertainment.”

<sup>545</sup> John L. Brooke, “*There is a North*,” 160.

<sup>546</sup> Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 153-190.

<sup>547</sup> “Turkey as Described by a Turk,” *The Daily Cleveland Herald* [Cleveland], December 18, 1860. This is a reprint from Union, Rochester, NY.

Constantinople provide no lights in the street.”<sup>548</sup> Indeed, his wearing “Oriental costume” – such as the “court costume of the Sultan” or the “dress of the working class” was a particular coup for an audience. An ad for Oscanyan’s January 1861 lectures in Springfield, Illinois mentioned it explicitly in order to attract attendees: “The Lecturer will appear *in costume*, carrying the peculiar lantern in use by the inhabitants of Constantinople while traversing the narrow thoroughfares of that city at night.”<sup>549</sup>

Costumed or not, it is clear that Oscanyan *himself* was a sight to see: a curiosity. As one Cleveland paper noted of his upcoming lecture in December 1860, “As Mr. Oscanyan gives but one lecture here (tomorrow evening, at the Melodeon) let all our citizens who wish to enjoy a rich intellectual treat, as well as those who have the curiosity to see a *live Turk* be on hand.”<sup>550</sup> This is reminiscent of the rush to see the “Turkish visitors” in 1858, depicted in Chapter 2. Of course, Oscanyan was operating in a world in which what Timothy Marr calls “Islamicist” imagery and tropes were employed to express American “worldliness” and to signify a romantic liberation as well as “commercial enterprise and burlesque performance.”<sup>551</sup> *Playing “Islamic”* or “Turkish” was commonplace: between 1848 and 1857, for example, P.T. Barnum lived in an “oriental villa” he named Iranistan in Bridgeport, Connecticut (the inspiration for which he in fact derived from the Royal Pavilion in Brighton, England).<sup>552</sup> Female reformers in the early 1850s wore Turkish pants to enact a radical personal liberty, and Bayard Taylor donned “oriental” garb during his U.S. lectures in 1854-56 to express his masculine freedom and

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<sup>548</sup> “Turkey as Described by a Turk,” *The Daily Cleveland Herald* [Cleveland], December 18, 1860.

<sup>549</sup> “Lectures! Lectures!” *Daily Illinois State Journal* [Springfield], January 21, 1861.

<sup>550</sup> “Mr. Oscanyan’s Lecture,” *Plain Dealer* [Cleveland], December 19, 1860. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>551</sup> Marr, *The Cultural Roots of American Islamicism*, 266.

<sup>552</sup> *Ibid.*

immersive approach to travel.<sup>553</sup> During the Civil War, dozens of regiments, across the North and the South, adopted colorful Zouave uniforms in order to literally put on the bravery and romance of the Algerian soldiers they were emulating.<sup>554</sup> Oscanyan, contrary to these American imitations, was the real deal. It is not surprising that in such a cultural context, Oscanyan emphasized his authenticity and his nativity to distinguish himself from other forms of “Oriental” performance.

American-born lecturers, however, also piqued the curiosity of audiences across the country. Bayard Taylor, for example, gave audiences “the opportunity to encounter and assess the enigma of the traveler himself: the representative American everyman who had left small-town Pennsylvania to immerse himself in a wild range of global cultures and now returns to tell about it.”<sup>555</sup> More than his accounts of “marvelous sights in faraway places” or the “exotic lifeways of foreign peoples,” audiences wanted to see how this man – “who had learned foreign languages, eaten foreign food, worn foreign clothes, traveled with foreign peoples” – had “responded to or been transformed by his almost incredible experiences of Otherness.”<sup>556</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson appealed to audiences as a “kind of spiritual spectacle.”<sup>557</sup> As Angela Ray contends, public lectures allowed audiences to “‘pay twenty-five cents’ to hear ‘remarkable’ people ‘with the privilege of looking at them for an hour and criticizing them for a week.’”<sup>558</sup>

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<sup>553</sup> Donald Scott calls Bayard Taylor a “participant-observer.” Scott, “Public Lecture,” 803.

<sup>554</sup> Marr, *The Cultural Roots of American Islamicism*, 265, 288-296.

<sup>555</sup> Gibian, “The Lecture Room as Contact Zone,” 175.

<sup>556</sup> Ibid.

<sup>557</sup> Carr O’Neill, *Literary Celebrity*, 90.

<sup>558</sup> Angela Ray, *The Lyceum and Public Culture*, 34.

This desire to physically see famous people went together with the rise of celebrity culture in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>559</sup> And lecturers were some of the most popular celebrities around. In 1862, a writer for Harper's Magazine claimed that the nation's top lecturers were "personally more widely known than any other class of public men in this country."<sup>560</sup> Speakers like Bayard Taylor, Christopher Oscanyan, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, were, as Mary Caton notes, "publicized in newspapers and competed with the theater, concerts, panoramas, and wax museums for public audiences"<sup>561</sup> as a part of the increasing "celebration and amplification of the figure of the media star, the author as celebrity, the cultural spokesperson as 'personality'<sup>562</sup> – in other words, a "national trend toward celebrity-making."<sup>563</sup> As Peter Cherches writes, "audiences who attended lectures by P.T. Barnum and Horace Greeley were presumably less interested in the ostensible message of the discourse than in the opportunity to see a celebrity in the flesh...One might say that persona, more so than language, was the essential content of the star lecture."<sup>564</sup>

In her analysis of Oscanyan and Taylor as public personas, Susan Nance refers to their careers as ones of "playing Eastern for a living." Of Oscanyan she elaborates, "He suffered, or chose, a kind of public typecasting as an Armenian Turk in order to make a living. And what we cannot know from the published sources that remain of Christopher Oscanyan's life in the

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<sup>559</sup> Carr O'Neill, *Literary Celebrity*, 2. For more on the rise of celebrity culture in the United States, see also David Haven Blake, *Walt Whitman and the Culture of American Celebrity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

<sup>560</sup> Quoted in Simone Natale, *Supernatural Entertainments: Victorian Spiritualism and the Rise of Modern Media Culture* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2016) at 15; Blake, *Walt Whitman*, at 36; Scott, "Public Lecture," 799-800. Quoting: "Lectures and Lecturing," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* XIV (December 1856), 124.

<sup>561</sup> Cayton, "American Prophet," 615.

<sup>562</sup> Gibian, "The Lecture Room as Contact Zone," 173; referencing Ray, *The Lyceum and Public Culture*, 36-41, and Bode, *The American Lyceum*, 201-23.

<sup>563</sup> Cayton, "American Prophet," 615.

<sup>564</sup> Peter Cherches, *Star Course: Nineteenth-Century Lecture Tours and the Consolidation of Modern Celebrity* (Rotterdam: Brill, 2017), 13.

United States is whether he had any personal moments of doubt or came to resent those Americans who for thirty years would demand that he play Eastern as a representative for the entire Ottoman Empire.”<sup>565</sup> But Oscanyan was not playing. Even his increasingly spectacular self-presentation was rooted in a critical and *political* act of affiliation. Julia Phillips Cohen describes similar activities by Ottoman Jews at the 1893 World’s Fair in Chicago and argues for “taking seriously this form of imperial identification among Jews who engaged in commercial pursuits” as it “reveals the potentially productive relationship between self-exoticizing spectacle and the performance of political belonging.”<sup>566</sup> Of Robert Levy, for example, the Ottoman Jewish manager of the Ottoman Empire’s exhibit in Chicago, she writes that when he “dressed in clothes recognizable as those of a Muslim religious scholar or an Aegean *Zeybek* warrior, or even in the tailored frock coat and fez introduced by Sultan Mahmud II’s 1829 clothing reform, he was not simply “playing” Muslim, *Zeybek*, or modern Ottoman.” Rather, by wearing these clothing items, he “both displayed the complex sartorial patrimony of the Ottoman state and proclaimed his right to represent that varied imperial heritage.”<sup>567</sup> Further, as

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<sup>565</sup> Nance, *Arabian Nights*, 64. The chapter on Oscanyan and Taylor includes wild inaccuracies and mis-readings. For example, she says that Oscanyan left the U.S. for London during the Civil War to install a Turkish Bath (p. 64) and that “after some years back in Istanbul, Oscanyan returned to New York City and in 1849 married a local woman, Mari Louisa” (p. 58). Her account also fails to consider even the *notion* that Oscanyan would have had his own politics and commitments to his native land; she sees him only as a function of his Anglo-American audience. She argues that Taylor and Oscanyan both sought to flatter their audiences with their work, asking them to “believe they were gaining instruction that set them apart from some imagined, uncritical public characterized by ‘common misunderstanding’” (p. 52). But “common misunderstanding” was not an empty rhetorical tool or, in Nance’s words, a “straw man” (p. 52) for Oscanyan to wield: he genuinely identified “erroneous impressions” from his lived experience as an Ottoman Armenian and an American, neither of which experience Nance takes seriously. This, despite her claims in her Introduction that “As a historian, I assume that people have agency and act for conscious reasons,” and that “What I provide in the following pages is an attempt to... listen to those who played Eastern” (p. 7).

<sup>566</sup> Julia Phillips Cohen, “Oriental by Design: Ottoman Jews, Imperial Style, and the Performance of Heritage,” *The American Historical Review* 119-2 (2014): 364–98, at 368-369.

<sup>567</sup> Cohen, “Oriental by Design,” 393

we've seen, Oscanyan's "performance of political belonging" was not just an end in itself: it was intended to cultivate relations between the Ottoman Empire and the United States (as equals), and it was representative of a deep political concern for the present and future of Turkey.

Oscanyan's mode of representing his Ottoman affiliation, however sincere, was not a static one: he did so in different ways at different times. His (self)-presentation took its most spectacular form between 1863 and 1868 when he began lecturing with a troupe of costumed models. This turn began in earnest in February of 1863 (not long after his second attempt to construct a Turkish Bath), when he delivered a lecture on "The Condition of the Women of Turkey," which he repeated later that month at the Cooper Institute "for the benefit of the orphans of our soldiers."<sup>568</sup> At that repeat lecture, "he introduced women in various costumes of the several sects of the Levant."<sup>569</sup> It was not long before newspaper reports and advertisements began to call these costumed women "living illustrations." And Oscanyan's popularity began to skyrocket. He was invited for four more repeat performances at the Cooper Institute.

In July of 1863, the same month as the New York City Draft Riots, the *American Phrenological Journal* provided a comprehensive review of an April presentation of the "Women of Turkey" lecture, which they deemed "more entertaining and successful than any [Oscanyan] had preciously delivered."<sup>570</sup> The lecture platform, they noted, "was cleared of the

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<sup>568</sup> "Mr. Oscanyan's Lecture," *New York Herald* [New York], February 15, 1863. In June, he was acknowledged by the Institute of Reward for Orphans of Patriots for his lectures on behalf of the Institute. See "Institute of Reward for Orphans of Patriots," *The New York Times* [New York], June 20, 1863.

<sup>569</sup> "Lectures," *New York Observer* [New York], March 5, 1863

<sup>570</sup> "The Women of Turkey," *The American Phrenological Journal* [New York], July 1863.

usual array of chairs, evidently to make room for the living illustrations.” The *Journal* recounted the lecture as follows. First, Oscanyan explained “the rationale of social life in the East,” before describing the “appearance of the Oriental ladies, both at home and abroad, their habits, manners, etc.” Then the real show began. With a clap of his hands, Oscanyan summoned “one of the sable [black] attendants of the ladies” who “immediately appeared in Turkish livery, wearing a sword, as is customary.” Instructed to go and fetch the first young lady, the “‘Black Prince,’ with a respectful salaam, disappeared, and soon returned, entirely eclipsed by a moon-faced houri [beautiful maiden] from Allah sent.” The reviewer was enamored, describing how the woman “slowly advanced to the front of the platform” to the “unbounded” applause of the audience. “It is impossible to convey in words an idea of the *tout ensemble* of this beautiful apparition,” the *Journal* wrote. “She might have been taken for the Queen of Night, in her azure robes, glittering with silvery stars and crescents.” She also wore a head-dress, which was described as “very peculiar” and made up of rose-colored tissue, silver, jewels, and a bird of paradise. The reviewer commended her “stately bearing” and “genuine Oriental salutation,” noting that her whole presentation was “entirely different from the travesties we see upon the stage.”

After this opening act, Oscanyan introduced a series of other models including a lady in “Egyptian costume,” a “colored nurse, with her charms scrupulously veiled [sic], carrying a baby in swaddling clothes”, an “Oriental bride,” and a “Druse [sic] lady of Syria” wearing an “immense covering of thick white muslin, elevated at least half a yard above the head by an arrangement called the horn, which is often mentioned in Scriptural history.” The reviewer observed that “the whole group of these figures on the platform presented a most effective



Oriental tableau,” and that these illustrations “elicited frequent bursts of applause.” The whole lecture, the *Journal* concluded, was “interspersed with amusement and instruction” and “made real much that has seemed mythical in Biblical history.”

The appeals to Biblical and Scriptural history were not just employed by outside reviewers; they were made also by Oscanyan himself in his lectures, advertising, and publications. American audiences at this time were steeped in Biblical references and themes, and the Holy Land had immense popular allure.<sup>571</sup> The promise of seeing elements of the Bible in some way brought to life (or “made real” as the above review applauds) thus not only attracted viewers but encouraged them to see the *familiar* evocation as an *authentic* evocation. Oscanyan, in turn, thus sought out and relied on such an association with the authentic to sustain his credibility, his popularity, his authority and, ideally, his ability to influence others.

With the start of the 1863-64 lecture season that fall, ads appeared for a new rendition of Oscanyan’s “Women of Turkey” lecture. Between an ad for Barnum’s American Museum and one for Wood’s Minstrel Hall, where audiences could be entertained by the burlesqued, blackface singing and dancing of a “Happy Uncle Tom,” *The New York Herald* listed “OSCANYAN’S CHARACTER LECTURES / THE WOMEN OF TURKEY / FROM THE CRADLE TO THE GRAVE / WITH LIVING ILUSTRATIONS.”<sup>572</sup> This ad described much of what was depicted in the

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<sup>571</sup> For more on the American obsession with the Holy Land in the nineteenth century, see John Davis, *The Landscape of Belief: Encountering the Holy Land in Nineteenth-Century American Art and Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Lester Vogel, *To See a Promised Land: Americans and the Holy Land in the Nineteenth Century* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1993).

<sup>572</sup> “Oscanyan’s Character Lectures,” *New York Herald* [New York], October 22, 1863. Emphasis in the original. Wood’s Minstrel Hall was one of many venues that hosted minstrelsy performances that were managed by Henry Wood. Henry Wood was a brother of Fernando Wood, a prominent Southern-sympathizing Democrat and mayor of New York City between January 1, 1855 – December 31, 1857, and again between January 1, 1860 – December 31, 1861. He was also a member of the House of Representatives for multiple terms between 1841 and 1881.

*American Phrenological Journal*, e.g. “Oriental life and habits will be delineated by the assistance of Turkish, Jewish, Druz, Egyptian and other ladies, who will appear in both indoor and outdoor costumes,” with the notable introduction of “various tableaux vivants” depicting “LIFE IN THE HAREM. A GRAND RECEPTION. A PEEP INTO A TURKISH NURSERY. LOVE, MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE. TURKISH DANCES.”<sup>573</sup> Based on its location in the advertisements alone, Oscanyan’s lecture was evidently a major attraction. By December, Oscanyan had further developed both his lecture and his advertising for upcoming performances outside of New York. This new evolution included giving names to the models in his performances, and describing the scenes, songs, and dances that an audience would get to view. He also continued to use of Biblical associations to attract an audience. In the *Boston Evening Daily Transcript*, the following ad appeared on December 21<sup>st</sup> for a showing at Boston’s largest venue, Tremont Temple:

OSCANYAN’S

Grand novel, moral, and highly instructive Oriental Entertainment, “THE WOMEN OF TURKEY,” or, SOCIAL LIFE IN THE EAST, With Living Illustrations, Tableaux Vivants, Turkish Music, Dancing, etc. etc.

FIRST

Mr. Oscanyan will appear in full Turkish costume, and explain the philosophy of the social system of the East, which has deviated but little from the old habitudes of Bible times.

Mr. Oscanyan’s descriptions being eminently “Life Illustrated,” he is assisted by the following characteristic personages, viz:

1. Gulnar Hannum, a Turkish lady of rank, in a costume of indescribable magnificence.
2. Keyoylu-Kaddun, a peasant girl decked in rustic elegance,
3. Pembeh Hannum, a lady in Turkish veil and cloak, as worn in the streets of Constantinople.
4. BOOLITZAH, a Jewish Lady of the East, in mummy head dress and veil, as worn in the times of the Pharaohs, and at the present day.

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<sup>573</sup> “Oscanyan’s Character Lectures,” *New York Herald* [New York], October 22, 1863. Emphasis in the original.

5. FATMAH, an Egyptian lady entirely muffled, excepting her two eyes, as the women appear in Cairo.
6. SIDI, a Druz Lady of rank, wearing the famous Scriptural horn on her head, and displaying but one eye.
7. ABU-KASSEM, the Druz Chief
8. JAFFER, the sable guardian of the ladies.

During this tableau, Mr. Oscanyan will sing the famous song of "The Veil," in Turkish, in Illustration of modern innovations in Turkey.

#### SECOND

Mr. Oscanyan will give an inside view of a Turkish Nursery, exhibiting a genuine

9. ORIENTAL BABY, according to Scriptural tradition, well salted and swaddled.

After a few words about Oriental Education, Mr. Oscanyan will show how Love, Marriage and Divorce are effected in Turkey.

#### THIRD

A wedding will be described and

10. AN ORIENTAL BRIDE will appear, a mass of shawls and tinsel, on her way to her husband's house
11. GAYLIN HANNUM, the Bride, will be presented as she appears "at home," to receive the congratulations of her husband and friends after the nuptial ceremony.

#### FOURTH

A final grand tableaux of

12. A TURKISH RECEPTION, showing how visitors are received and entertained in a Harem, with pipes, sweetmeats, sherbets and coffee, during which the Hannum will sing a Turkish Song, specially imported by Mr. Oscanyan
13. 14. LEILA and LULU, two Circassian girls in waiting will entertain the company with a Turkish dance, accompanied with merry castanets and genuine Oriental music, &c, &c.<sup>574</sup>

Of this event, the high-brow *Boston Evening Transcript* the next day proclaimed: "No more piquant lecture has been heard in Boston for many years than that delivered last night by Oscanyan."<sup>575</sup> They described Oscanyan as having "considerable graphic power," and providing

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<sup>574</sup> "OSCANYAN'S Grand novel, moral, and highly instructive Oriental Entertainment," *Boston Evening Daily Transcript* [Boston], December 21, 1863.

<sup>575</sup> "Turkish Social Life" *Boston Evening Daily Transcript* [Boston], December 22, 1863.

descriptions of Turkey which, as a consequence of his “having long been in this country,” were dispensed from a “partially American point of view” and thus “unite[d] entertainment and instruction to a great degree.”<sup>576</sup>

Further innovations and elaborations were yet to come. By February 1864, Oscanyan was advertising for his lectures in Portland, Maine with the following: “THE GRAND TURK and his HAREM OF CIRCASSIAN SLAVES ARE COMING!” A MARVELLOUS EXHIBITION AND LECTURE, given by C. Oscanyan, The Turk, accompanied by his TURKISH LADIES! And their Sable Guardians.”<sup>577</sup> The ad continued:

The ladies accompanying Prof. Oscanyan are undoubtedly the most beautiful women ever seen in America, and were formerly CIRCASSIAN SLAVES in Constantinople, where they were selected for their surpassing beauty to bring to this country to illustrate his lecture.<sup>578</sup>

The rest of the listing was largely the same as it had been in December 1863, with the exception of the descriptions of Leila and Lulu, no longer “two Circassian girls in waiting” but “two Circassian girls of the most bewildering beauty.”<sup>579</sup> This ad was repeated in Boston and presumably elsewhere for performances the ad claimed were booked through to May.<sup>580</sup>

Reviews of these lectures once again spoke to their particular blend of instruction and entertainment. The *Portland Daily Press*, for example, expressed surprise and satisfaction: “the entertainment,” they began, “which probably many expected to be nothing more than a divertissement much after the fashion of those given by travelling companies of Ojibway or Penobscot Indians, proved to be a lecture on Turkish social and domestic habits and customs.”

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<sup>576</sup> Ibid.

<sup>577</sup> “New City Hall,” *Daily Eastern Argus* [Portland, ME], February 25, 1864.

<sup>578</sup> Ibid.

<sup>579</sup> Ibid.

<sup>580</sup> For example, “New Advertisements,” *Boston Evening Transcript* [Boston], February 27, 1864.

The mixed goals and outcomes of the performance are evident: “He imparted a large amount of information in relation to that semi-barbarous people,” the paper reported. “For one,” they concluded, “we felt greatly gratified with the evening’s *entertainment*.”<sup>581</sup>

Above a description of Barnum’s Museum’s new fairy drama, a write-up in *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* in March 1864 succinctly conveyed the “furore” created by Oscanyan in New England during this time, where he had been “engaged to deliver 15 of his illustrated lectures for the snug sum of \$3000.”<sup>582</sup> This placed him at least temporarily among the ranks of the highest paid speaker of the day, Henry Ward Beecher, who charged \$200 for one evening’s lecture.<sup>583</sup> “The Oriental gentleman,” *Frank Leslie’s* wrote, “seems to have met with flattering receptions everywhere, and in Boston alone the “rush”... exceeded anything that has been seen for some time.”<sup>584</sup> Owing to the fact that Oscanyan had “invented a perfect novelty in the way of lecturing” – indeed his lectures, the writer noted, were “more of a spectacle than a discourse” – tickets to the event were sold “at a dollar a piece,” which was much higher than the fifty-cent average.<sup>585</sup> *Frank Leslie’s* then elaborated on what made Oscanyan so popular: namely, his visual spectacles. “Instead of tiring his hearers by a long description of the women of Turkey,” they wrote, “he brings the women themselves before you, as they appear in the harem and in the streets, and forms picturesque tableaux of Eastern life and manners, with Oriental music, whose curious measure is marked by the graceful movements of beautiful dancing girls, with tambourine and merry castanets.” But then the writer returned to the

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<sup>581</sup> “Lecture on Turkey,” *Portland Daily Press* [Portland, ME], February 29, 1864. Emphasis mine.

<sup>582</sup> “Mr. Oscanyan,” *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* [New York], March 26, 1864.

<sup>583</sup> Cherches, *Star Course*, 9.

<sup>584</sup> “Mr. Oscanyan,” *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*.

<sup>585</sup> “Mr. Oscanyan,” *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*; Cherches, *Star Course*, 6.

lecture's instructive value, stating that "the youthful mind is more instructed in a single evening by Mr. Oscanyan's living illustrations that it would be by a six months course of geographies and books of travel," before concluding, again, with the spectacular: "the gentlemen enjoy an opportunity which would never occur, even in Turkey, of getting a peep into that mysterious harem about which we have all read so much and know so little."<sup>586</sup>

For a man trying to correct erroneous impressions of the Turks – who spent years, for example, trying to disabuse audiences of their preconceived notions of the harem – these new spectacular and suggestive performances certainly risked being counterproductive, no matter what he *said* about the harem when he spoke. This was perhaps exacerbated by the transformation of a lecture-going *public*, once engaged in communal critical discourse, into a lecture-going *audience*, now pursuing "acts of individuated reception, however uniform in mode."<sup>587</sup> Where lecture-going was, in the 1820s and 30s, the pursuit of "self-culture, the active expansion of one's faculties and the promoting of self-awareness," Mary Cayton writes in her analysis of Ralph Waldo Emerson and his audiences in nineteenth-century America, with the rise of celebrity culture in the 1850s, it was transformed "into culture, the conspicuous consumption of the performances of people who were nationally and internationally defined as important intellectuals." She elaborates: "Culture was a state to be achieved, a status to be acquired, no longer a process of self-awareness and introspection." Of Emerson, for example, Cayton explains that a public personality such as his "contributed to a national system of

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<sup>586</sup> "Mr. Oscanyan," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*.

<sup>587</sup> Cherches, *Star Course*, xiv, quoting Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1989), 160–161.

culture that was effectually the consumption of well-known texts and performances.” She quotes Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who wrote that Emerson's popularity rested “not on the ground that the people understand him, but that 'they think such men ought to be encouraged.’”<sup>591</sup> As Donald Scott writes of public lectures in 1840s and 1850s, “audiences came away from a popular lecture *with a sense* that the lecturer had carried them to a state of “enlarged understanding.”<sup>592</sup>

In other words, this was a world in which the rise of an entertainment sector and celebrity culture lead to an increase in instructional *consumption*, of leaving a lecture or other performance with the *idea* that one had learned something, rather than having actually grown in wisdom or knowledge. *Harper's* in 1856 observed a related phenomenon: that audiences came to lectures increasingly to see what they already knew expressed in a new way, not to change their minds. “People have been informed and instructed by other means,” the *Harper's* editor wrote before asking, “What, now, can be a more signal benefit ... than the opportunity, afforded by lectures, of reviewing their former acquirements and recovering their grasp of them? ... The old furniture ... is handsomely dressed; a good, glossy varnish is applied, stains and scratches disappear, and you can see your face again in the polished walnut and mahogany ... The people should have their indistinct conceptions and anticipations made audible in [the lecturer's] utterance, and their own heart throbs should come back to them in his inspiring eloquence.”<sup>593</sup>

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<sup>591</sup> Cayton, “American Prophet,” 618 quoting Thomas Wentworth Higginson, “The American Lecture-System,” *Every Saturday* 5, April 18, 1868, 494.

<sup>592</sup> Scott, “Public Lecture,” 806. Emphasis mine

<sup>593</sup> “Editor's Table,” *Harper's Monthly* 14, December 1856, 123. Quoted in Cherches, *Star Course*, 10.

Such a practice of cultural consumption was at cross-purposes with Oscanyan's political goals of cultivating new American ways of perceiving the Ottoman Empire and its people. He could work to increase his popularity and his celebrity, but this was not a guarantee that he would also become more influential; in fact, popularity and celebrity may have cultivated precisely the opposite effect through their commodification of the performer. We can't know how Oscanyan felt about gaining popularity without gaining in influence; or if he perhaps separated his spectacular endeavors from his political concerns. He did, however, deliberately choose his tactics in order to attract a larger audience. An article from Keokuk, Iowa's *Daily Gate City and Constitution Democrat* offers a rare glimpse at Oscanyan's creative process: "In conversation with Mr. Oscanyan," they wrote, "he told us that when he commenced lecturing, he prepared a very elaborate and scholastic lecture." On this, he told them, his "critical friends" complimented him, engaging with it as a "literary production." But it "didn't take with the public." For this reason, Oscanyan said he "put himself to studying what would suit the uncritical (and yet critical) ones." The *Democrat* argued that he did so successfully, stating that his lectures on Oriental Life and Customs were the "illustrative realized products of that study on his part." They called the results "very satisfactory to his hearer" and the lecture "graphic and entertaining," with Oscanyan's "simple and profoundly clear descriptions of those dwellers in the Orient" never failing to "engage the full attention of his audience."<sup>594</sup>

In the fall of 1864, Oscanyan looked for ways to reinvent and centralize his performances, perhaps to avoid the travel of the lecture circuit. These endeavors also show the

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<sup>594</sup> "The Lecture," *Daily Gate City and Constitution Democrat* [Keokuk, IA], December 20, 1867. They also wrote, "he has high opinions of the West and the people that inhabit it. And his encomiums are the more flattering, as they are the result of a discriminating analysis, and a careful study of men and character."



melding of, and tension between, instruction and entertainment that we have already seen in Oscanyan's lectures. He first initiated what he called "Soirees Orientales" at New York's Irving Hall in October of 1864. Signaling the type of audience Oscanyan attracted (or hoped to), the *New York Atlas* commended the event for drawing a full house "in spite of the attraction of the opera" and warned that "no man or woman of intelligence should miss attending the series." Praising the "excellence of the entertainment," which consisted of "various personations," dresses, dancing, and ceremonies, the *Atlas* saw in the *Soirees* what had also been so appealing about Oscanyan's "Women of Turkey" lectures: "one need not go to Stamboul," they wrote, to see and know the Turk and his hareem."<sup>595</sup>

The next month, in November, newspaper reports indicated that Oscanyan, the "distinguished Oriental," was "fitting up a place on Broadway" called the Turkish Hall where he would "give his illustrations of life in the East."<sup>596</sup> On January 14, 1865, *Frank Leslie's* reported that Oscanyan had finally opened this "long promised" venue at 720 Broadway.<sup>597</sup> A broadside for the Hall touted it as "Oscanyan's Grand, Novel, Highly Moral and Instructive Oriental Entertainment! (Image F) and provided details of five scenes much resembling his popular lectures: A Kahve, or Coffee House, the Interior of an Oriental House, a Turkish Bazaar!, the Interior of a House!, and a Kiosk, or Summer House."<sup>598</sup> The same figures from the lectures were featured, including "a Circassian SLAVE GIRL fresh from the Caucasus, the "Druz Lady with the Scriptural Horn and Veil," and an "Oriental Bride." The Meddah, or Storyteller (Oscanyan's new

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<sup>595</sup> "Mr. Oscanyan's Soirees," *New York Atlas* [New York], October 8, 1864.

<sup>596</sup> "The New Turkish Hall," *New York Atlas* [New York], November 26, 1864.

<sup>597</sup> "Oscanyan Has Opened," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* [New York], January 14, 1865.

<sup>598</sup> "Turkish Hall (720 Broadway), [1864]" from the *Jay T. Last Collection of Entertainment: Theatrical BroadSides and Playbills*, priJLC\_ENT\_TBroadSides, Folder 23, Huntington Library.

self-fashioning for purposes of the Turkish Hall), was advertised as performing a range of descriptive functions, including his chanting of “the famous Call to Prayer of the Muezzin.” The call to prayer is a projected recitation delivered from a mosque five times a day to literally call Muslims to prayer. It is a summons that can still be heard from mosques in the present day and is a sound that would have punctuated Oscanyan’s daily life in Constantinople, even as a Christian. It is of course noteworthy, then, that Oscanyan was performing this function as a Christian for his audiences in the United States.

The papers found plenty to comment on in the endeavor. *Frank Leslie’s* lauded the Hall by saying that Oscanyan had given New York an “original entertainment.” “If it does not succeed,” they warned, it “will only argue that we lack taste and appreciation... He has pretty women and gorgeous costumes, well painted scenery, and a pleasant delivery, and as a consequence fills his snug little hall nightly with a first-class discriminating audience.”<sup>599</sup> Of note, and reminiscent of Taylor’s encounter at the Turkish *Kahve*, the *New York Dispatch* mentioned that at the Turkish Hall, Oscanyan was “assisted by a corps of ladies and gentlemen of contested nationality.”<sup>600</sup> The *New York Tribune* offered “only a single improvement” – namely, that he “abandon the humorous parts of his narrative and confine himself to simple statement and description.”<sup>601</sup>

The Hall seems to have been particularly short-lived: on January 28, 1865, the *New York Atlas* reported that Oscanyan’s “many friends” were arranging a “complimentary benefit” for him at Niblos’s Saloon on February 9 in order to support their friend who had hit upon “some of

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<sup>599</sup> “Oscanyan has opened,” *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* [New York], January 14, 1865.

<sup>600</sup> “Oscanyan at Turkish Hall,” *New York Dispatch* [New York], January 15, 1865.

<sup>601</sup> “Turkish Hall,” *New York Daily Tribune* [New York], January 5, 1865

the frowns of life.”<sup>602</sup> This report already spoke of the Turkish Hall in the past tense, noting that Oscanyan’s Turkish Hall had “offered so splendid an opportunity for amusement combined with instruction.” The benefit, the *Atlas* explained, would “take the shape of a grand concert,” with the talent, all volunteered, to include “Mrs. Motte, Miss. Fisher, Miss Ballard, the Turkish lady who sang so sweetly at the “Hall,” Mr. Kerrison, Mr. Waters, &c.” Oscanyan, the report concluded, was “laborious and deserving enough to merit a bumper, which he must have if we all spend our last shilling.”<sup>603</sup> What had transpired to merit such a showing of support?

While we can’t know with the available sources what happened for certain, a newspaper report from 1874 mentioned the death of Oscanyan’s son “eight years ago.”<sup>604</sup> Given the imprecisions of the press, perhaps the death actually occurred in January of 1865. Indeed, the months after the benefit concert in February were a quiet press period for Oscanyan. He next popped up in the papers in May of 1865, for a grief-related endeavor, when a New York correspondent in a New Orleans newspaper reported that Oscanyan had “prepared a volume containing a full account of all the honors paid to the memory of the late President [Lincoln] in the form of funeral pageants, patriotic meetings, meetings of condolence, with the sermons, addresses, poems, hymns inspired by the sad occasion, as well as an account of the decorations and mourning which were worthy of special remark.” In other words, the report noted, the work was to be “a complete history of the popular woe which bewailed the assassination of the President, and the grief that followed him to his grave.” “The sad duty,” the

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<sup>602</sup> “Mr. Oscanyan, the eminent oriental lecturer,” *New York Atlas* [New York], January 28, 1865.

<sup>603</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>604</sup> “Local Miscellany, Horrible Death at a Water Cure,” *New York Tribune* [New York], August 11, 1874.

*Times* concluded, which “Mr. Oscanyan has imposed on himself,” will no doubt “be worthily executed.”<sup>606</sup>

Starting that summer, Oscanyan announced his intention to lead a forthcoming group pleasure trip to the Mediterranean. Set to cover locales ranging from Ireland, England, and Italy to Turkey, Egypt, and the Holy Land over the course of 10 months, Oscanyan’s trip could fit 100 people and would cost \$2,500 per person.<sup>607</sup> Originally scheduled for departure on May 12, 1866, the pleasure trip – which had attracted the likes of ex-President Millard Fillmore and his wife – was ultimately postponed due to a cholera outbreak in some of their destinations.<sup>608</sup> By November of 1865, Oscanyan was back to giving lectures in places such as Harrisburg, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, and Troy, and in late December, *Frank Leslie’s* reported that he was headed out west “to fulfil numerous engagements.” Calling him one of the “lions” or celebrities of the day, *Frank Leslie’s* argued that “the ear will not only be delighted with Oriental

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<sup>606</sup> “Our New York Correspondence,” *New Orleans Times* [New Orleans], May 24, 1865. Unfortunately, I have been unable to locate such a volume, though the level of detail in the correspondence leads me to believe that Oscanyan did indeed prepare such a work. Whether he ever distributed it is unknown.

<sup>607</sup> “To the Old World,” *The Press* [Philadelphia], November 3, 1865. An official announcement with further details can be seen at the American Antiquarian Society. See “Pleasure Trip to the Mediterranean and the Black Sea,” 1866, Broadides.

<sup>608</sup> On the Fillmores’ plans, see for example, “Departure of Ex-President Fillmore for Europe,” *Chicago Tribune* [Chicago], January 6, 1866. On the postponement of Oscanyan’s trip, see the description for the original pleasure trip prospectus contained in the *Catalogue of First and Other Editions of the Writings of Samuel Langhorne Clemens [Mark Twain] and of Lafcadio Hearn, the Property of the Tomlinson-Humes Company and Merle Johnson, To be Sold Jan. 20, 1914 Under the Management of the American Art Association* (The American Art Association, 1914). In 1868, Mark Twain set sail on a similar trip that resulted in his wildly successful *The Innocents Abroad*, a passage from which began this thesis. As the catalogue notes of Oscanyan’s prospectus, “This is probably the First Announcement of a type of excursion made famous by that of the “Quaker City,” advertised February 1, 1867, and joined in by Mark Twain and others, and which has extended down through the Cook’s Tourist Agencies, &c of the present day. Mr. Oscanyan, the well-known Orientalist of his time, would have personally conducted this particular tour, but owing to the appearance of the cholera in the East, the project was postponed to the following year, when the trip of the “Quaker City” was undertaken, and which is described by Twain in “Innocents Abroad.” The next line adds, “THE PENCILLED NOTES ON VERSO OF PROSPECTUS ARE THOUGHT TO BE IN THE AUTOGRAPH OF TWAIN,” indicating that Twain was likely aware of Oscanyan and his work. See page 1869 for this entry.

eloquence, but the eye, also, will be delighted.”<sup>609</sup> In December, papers like the *Herald* reported that he had been named Secretary at the Turkish Embassy in Paris, but that never came to pass.<sup>610</sup>

By August of 1867, Oscanyan was reported to be writing a play set in Constantinople “before the reformation in Turkey” titled “Adilleh; or the Grand Vizier’s Daughter.” It was noted to be “of the spectacular order,” yet “a faithful representation of life in the East.” As such, it called for “a strict Oriental costume, with the graceful robes of the women and all the pageantry of the seraglio, including the famous Circassian dancing girls.”<sup>611</sup> A report from that September (which referred to Oscanyan as “the Americanized Turk”) added that the play was “intended to quite outdo the Black Crook in its natural and artificial splendor.”<sup>612</sup> The Black Crook was an 1866 musical that premiered at Niblo’s Garden (where the benefit for Oscanyan was held) just one year before Oscanyan announced his own spectacular production. It was immensely popular and known precisely for its use of spectacle; Oscanyan almost certainly attended the show and was inspired to create his own in short order. Yet *Adilleh; or the Grand Vizier’s Daughter* never came to the stage.

### **Photography, Circassians, Slavery**

In conjunction with his 1863 lectures, Oscanyan published “some very tasteful and striking *carte de visite* pictures of ladies dressed in the Turkish costume.”<sup>613</sup> By 1861, the *carte de*

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<sup>609</sup> “We learn that Mr. Oscanyan,” *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* [New York], December 23, 1865.

<sup>610</sup> “Personal Intelligence,” *The New York Herald* [New York], December 21, 1865.

<sup>611</sup> “News and Miscellaneous Items” *Boston Evening Transcript* [Boston], August 30, 1867.

<sup>612</sup> “Miscellaneous Items” *Troy Daily Times* [Troy, NY], September 10, 1867.

<sup>613</sup> “Turkish Manners, Customs and Costume” *New York Journal of Commerce* [New York], April 21, 1863.

*visite*, a small photograph card measuring about 2.5 inches by 4 inches, had become a highly popular object that one could send, possess, and collect. Americans and Western Europeans in particular would send copies of *cartes de visite*, of themselves or others, to relatives and friends across countries and continents. They would also purchase collections of *cartes de visite* on themes such as scenery, art, or celebrity figures to place in albums dedicated to this purpose, often combining family photos with those of images of famous people or places. This vogue for album assembly began in 1862.<sup>614</sup> An early-adopter as ever, Oscanyan took up and modified the form by September of 1863, when ads appeared for Oscanyan's *Oriental Album* – a collection of 23 *cartes de visite* photographs of people (including himself) wearing the Ottoman costumes from his popular “Women of Turkey” lectures.<sup>615</sup> It appears that some of the models (and the figures they represented) were the same as would have been seen on the platform in New York, though there were also additional figures such as The Armenian Girl. On the page opposite each image was a short descriptive text. These photographs were intended to evoke the experience of attending one of his lectures. In this way, the photographs were designed to be “authentic” representations of both the lecture event *as well as* of the Ottoman realities they sought to convey.

The photographs are today attributed to Jeremiah Gurney by the George Eastman Museum, though C.D. Fredericks & Co. of 587 Broadway were awarded the Silver Medal in Photographs by the American Institute for “four character pictures (“Oscanyan”) in 1863.<sup>616</sup> In

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<sup>614</sup> William C. Darrah, *Cartes de Visite in Nineteenth Century Photography* (Gettysburg: W.C. Darrah, 1981), 4-9.

<sup>615</sup> Christopher Oscanyan, *Oriental Album*, 1863. George Eastman Museum. Available at <https://collections.eastman.org/objects/32017/christopher-oscanyans-oriental-album.jsessionid=A7CD65E80F7E18C3302F2E4CC8864ADD> (Accessed November 9, 2022).

<sup>616</sup> *Annual Report of the American Institute of the City of New York for the Years 1863-64* (Albany: Comstock & Cassidy Printers), 1864, 34.

early ads for the album, Oscanyan noted that the pictures in his Album “have received the award of a SILVER MEDAL from the American Institute,” which means they were indeed the character pictures by Fredericks & Co.<sup>617</sup> The Fredericks Studio also produced his *cartes de visite* that were disseminated around the same time (Image G): the cards read, “As introduced at the Lectures of Mr. Oscanyan. Entered, according to Act of Congress, in the year 1863, by Chas. D. Fredericks & Co., in the Clerk’s Office of the District Court of the United States for the Southern District of New York.”

At least some of the figures in the *Oriental Album* may have been members of his family, as indicated by a newspaper clip that claimed he used “living models of his own family.”<sup>618</sup> This could be true, or a promotional tactic, or a rumor. But that there would even be the pretense of them being members of his family is expressive: the evocation (or, indeed, use) of family models is a claim to authenticity – not only were these images of real Turks, wearing real Ottoman attire, but they were the flesh and blood of “*The Turk*” in the United States. Many consumers would have been able to identify Oscanyan’s family: five years after the Album, newspapers reported that his daughter was named “the most beautiful young lady in the United States,” (though by whom she was named and in what context is entirely unclear).<sup>619</sup> Regardless, such media gossip, part of the celebrity-making media ecosystem of the 1850s and 60s,<sup>620</sup> shows that his family was visible, perhaps lending credence to the idea that Oscanyan made use of his authentically-Turkish offspring. In a world of “playing Oriental,” appealing to

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<sup>617</sup> See ad for example in *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* [New York], October 17, 1863.

<sup>618</sup> “Art and Authors,” *Springfield Republican*, February 20, 1864.

<sup>619</sup> “General Intelligence,” *The Chicago Republican* [Chicago], April 15, 1868.

<sup>620</sup> Cayton, “American Prophet,” 615.

the “authentic,” as we have seen, was not only Oscanyan’s biggest selling-point, it was a way of signaling his expertise and equality: his authority and credibility. This authenticity anxiety was also evident in a later round of ads that cited a new addition to the Album: a page of Oscanyan’s signature in four different languages (English, Armenian, Turkish, and Greek) as proof of the album’s authenticity (Image H).<sup>621</sup> It’s not clear whether there were actually fakes circulating, or if Oscanyan simply wanted to underline that his product was a genuine Oriental article (because it was *his*.)

Ottoman costume albums were a popular staple of Ottoman and European book production. As Ünver Rüstem explains in his recent chapter on the genre, Ottoman-themed costume albums were a “centuries-old tradition rooted in the European belief that Ottoman dress codes provided a direct window onto the empire’s political and social workings.”<sup>622</sup> According to Rüstem, books containing images of Ottoman clothing were first produced in the sixteenth century in Europe, and were taken up as a form by Ottoman painters in the early 1600s for consumption by European visitors.<sup>623</sup> From that time onwards, a dialogue between these two forms of costume albums ensued – between the “work[s] of outside observers” and the “self-representational” practices of Ottomans themselves – revealing a tension inherent to the genre between “the costume books’... claims to veracity on the one hand... and their dependence on pictorial formulae on the other.”<sup>624</sup> Oscanyan’s concern for authenticity, in his

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<sup>621</sup> See for example, “Oscanyan’s Oriental Album,” *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* [New York], October 29, 1864.

<sup>622</sup> Ünver Rüstem, “Well-Worn Fashions: Repetition and Authenticity in Late Ottoman Costume Books,” in Margaret S. Graves and Alex Dika Seggerman (eds.) *Making Modernity in the Islamic Mediterranean* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2022), 21-49, at 21.

<sup>623</sup> Ibid.

<sup>624</sup> Ibid., 21-22.



*Oriental Album* and elsewhere, was not new: the Ottoman artists behind costume albums understood that “Ottoman self-representations” were seen as more desirable to Western consumers than “Western-made portrayals” and they would thus aim not to shun but rather to “tweak” familiar tropes in ways that “flaunt[ed] the real-time, insider perspective of the painters.”<sup>625</sup> Rüstem suggests that this “corrective impulse” may have been more than just “marketing savvy” – it was also a form of “assertiveness” in engaging “the foreign viewer, whether by providing a more complete and accurate picture or by promoting international recognition of Ottoman progress.”<sup>626</sup>

In some instances, Oscanyan’s publication was perfectly in line with his European and Ottoman antecedents, such as his image of an Egyptian Woman which looks exactly like earlier costume albums (Image I and J). His was likely also the first Ottoman *photographic* costume album; a famous ensuing Ottoman costume album of photographs was published in 1873 as a part of the Vienna World’s Fair.<sup>627</sup> This album, the *Elbise-i Osmaniyye*, was, as Erin Nolan explains, a “catalogue of Ottoman regional costumes,” made up of 320 pages of French and Ottoman text, as well as 74 photographs of “men and women in traditional dress.”<sup>628</sup> Because the Ottomans for most of their rule used dress to indicate ethnicity, status, hierarchy, and

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<sup>625</sup> Ibid., 29-30.

<sup>626</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>627</sup> For more on this album, see Erin Hyde Nolan, “You Are What You Wear: Ottoman Costume Portraits in the *Elbise-i Osmaniyye*,” *Ars Orientalis* 47 (2017): 178–209; Ahmet Ersoy, “A Sartorial Tribute to Late Tanzimat Ottomanism: The *Elbise-i ‘Osmāniyye* Album,” *Muqarnas* 20 (2003), 187-207. Whether Oscanyan’s album inspired the 1873 Ottoman endeavor is unknown. At least one newspaper report claimed that Oscanyan did indeed send his album to a contact in Turkey: “Mr. Oscanyan recently sent a set of Oriental pictures (photographs) to Mehmed Pacha, the present Grand Admiral. The Sultan happening to see them was so pleased with their truth and beauty that he carried them to his harem for the entertainment of the royal ladies.” “Miscellaneous,” *The New York Clipper* [New York], October 10, 1863.

<sup>628</sup> Nolan, “You Are What You Wear,” 178. Also: Victor Marie de Launay, “Costumes Populaires de Constantinople,” in *L’Exposition Universelle de 1867 Illustree* (Paris, 1867).

position – and because of the profoundly multi-ethnic nature of their empire – Ottoman costume albums were, as they had been since their inception, a natural way to depict and represent information as part of a world’s fair. As we have seen, however, the Ottoman state pursued clothing reforms starting in 1829 that replaced these “longstanding social and cultural modes of dress” with “homogenous status symbols: the fez... and the *stambouline* frock coat” in order to promote new imperial ideals of ostensible equality between subjects.<sup>629</sup> Albums like the *Elbise-i Osmaniyye* and Oscanayan’s *Oriental Album*, in “celebrating local diversity through various costumes,” thus “complicated the *official* vision of Ottoman collectivity and redefined Ottoman society as a pluralistic community composed of many types of people.”<sup>630</sup> As Ahmet Ersoy argues in his article on the 1873 *Elbise-i Osmaniyye*, its creators “dismissed images of the westernized urban elite,” and “chose to focus exclusively on the Ottoman commoner who largely maintained the traditional tastes and lifestyle of the pre-Tanzimat era.”<sup>631</sup> But this was, of course, intentional: Ersoy explains that it was precisely through “official rhetoric, art, and ceremony,” like the *Elbise*, that the Ottoman state “gave tangible form to its utopian image of popular participation without actually redistributing power.”<sup>632</sup> Oscanayan’s *Album* was not an official product of the Ottoman state (even if he considered himself an informal ambassador).

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<sup>629</sup> Nolan, “You Are What You Wear,” 180.

<sup>630</sup> Ibid., 181. Emphasis mine.

<sup>631</sup> Ahmet Ersoy, “A Sartorial Tribute,” 191.

<sup>632</sup> Ersoy, “A Sartorial Tribute,” 197. This official image would change later in the century. On this, see Erin Nolan and Emily Voelker, “Reading Across American and Ottoman Archives: Diplomacy and Photography in the Nineteenth Century,” *Transatlantic Cultures*, 2019, <https://www.transatlantic-cultures.org/en/catalog/photographic-album>, especially their observation that “during the Hamidian era specifically [1876-1909], they [diplomatic Ottoman photographs] visualized the fixity and uniformity of imperial agendas (rather than difference) through both government policy and the camera’s lens. As a social experiment similar to the “Normal Schools” of the same period in the United States (such as Carlisle Indian Industrial School and the Hampton Institute), The Imperial School for Tribes aspired to create a specific type of Muslim ‘citizenry.’”

We can only speculate that Oscanyan emphasized imperial diversity to support the *actual* redistribution of power in the empire, a project in which as we have seen in Chapter 3, he was deeply invested.

Even though many of the photos in the *Elbise* and, to some extent, Oscanyan's *Oriental Album* were derivative of longstanding tropes, we should take seriously their use *in aggregate* by Ottomans themselves to convey the multiplicity of the Ottoman population. And, as we have seen again and again in Oscanyan's work, an Ottoman like him could both use and subvert tropes owing to a range of causes and desired outcomes. Furthermore, the use of such "costumes as relics of the past," Rüstem argues, was not a signal from Ottoman creators that the Ottomans themselves were backwards or stuck in time, but rather that they were "an up-to-date society able to indulge in nostalgic representation."<sup>633</sup> In other words, Ottomans like Oscanyan used these images precisely to convey their civilization. Indeed, such "sartorial retrospection," Rüstem continues, "was in itself a hallmark of European modernity, for the nineteenth century witnessed a more general tendency toward standardization in the continent's fashions, especially in male dress, prompting many societies to engage in romantic reflections on their historical and folkloric costume."<sup>634</sup>

In the 1873 *Elbise-i Osmaniyye*, Nolan argues, it was the "fabric, not the face," that a viewer was encouraged to consume in order to grasp the diversity of the Ottoman population.<sup>635</sup> "Like models in a fashion show," she writes, the faces in the *Elbise* were

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<sup>633</sup> Rüstem, "Well-Worn Fashions," 38.

<sup>634</sup> Ibid.

<sup>635</sup> Nolan, "You Are What You Wear," 189.

“scaffolding for the clothes, something upon which they hang.”<sup>636</sup> This was underlined by the fact that the *Elbise* models, or “generalized subjects,” were used repeatedly in the album to model a range of costumes and “represent various ethnicities and religions.”<sup>637</sup> While Oscanyan’s *Oriental Album* also highlighted Ottoman costume and thus imperial diversity, the poses were not exclusively uniform, and it seems unlikely that the appearance of the models was meant to be overwhelmed by their clothing; indeed, some of the clothing repeats despite signifying different scenes. A note on the back of one of Oscanyan’s *carte de visite* images from 1863 – an image that also appeared in the *Oriental Album*, in which a young lady is seen serving Turkish coffee to a seated Oscanyan – makes clear just how resonant the model’s faces themselves could be (Image K). “Dear father,” a woman named Bessie wrote in pencil on the card, “please accept this for your book. I selected it out of a set of Turkish ones because the Lady looks so like [illegible], everyone is struck with the likeness.”<sup>638</sup> This inscription suggests not only that the models could be as resonant as the costumes for a typical American consumer, but that Oscanyan’s figures were discussed amongst groups of family or friends: “everyone is struck with the likeness.” As images attached to (and constituent of) Oscanyan’s rising celebrity in mid-nineteenth century New York City, these photographs must be understood both as extensions of the Ottoman and European costume album genre (and as

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<sup>636</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>637</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>638</sup> From the collection of Jeffrey family photographs at the University of Kentucky. Jeffrey family, “Jeffrey Family Photographs,” circa 1900 1861, University of Kentucky, [https://exploreuk.uky.edu/catalog/xt7bk35mbp44\\_3\\_1?q=mammoth+life&f%5Bformat%5D%5B%5D=images&f%5Bsource\\_s%5D%5B%5D=Jeffrey+family+photographs&per\\_page=20](https://exploreuk.uky.edu/catalog/xt7bk35mbp44_3_1?q=mammoth+life&f%5Bformat%5D%5B%5D=images&f%5Bsource_s%5D%5B%5D=Jeffrey+family+photographs&per_page=20). (Accessed January 21, 2022).

such, as an Ottoman political statement, per above) as well as self-consciously *American* expressions of this Ottoman and European format.<sup>639</sup>

Oscanyan's 1863 *Oriental Album* was not just an American product, but an American product produced during the Civil War. Four photographs and texts in the Album are particularly revealing of his effort both to attract an audience with provocative and topical images and themes, as well as to use these very same materials to achieve his instructional goals. These four photographs and texts are, in order of depiction: "The Circassian Slave Girl" (Image L), "Slavery in Turkey" (Image M), "Oriental Baby and Nurse" (Image N), and "Oriental Reception" (Image O).

The Circassian slave girl was a figure that we have mentioned repeatedly as a key component of Oscanyan's spectacular lectures. Circassian is the name of an ethnic group from a region in the Caucasus. They were a people idealized at this time by both Ottomans as well as Europeans and Americans as being the pinnacle of beauty.<sup>640</sup> The Ottomans considered Circassian women to be among the most coveted of women to serve as slaves in the elite harems and households of Constantinople; as such, as Madeline Zilfi notes, "Circassian and Georgian women were highly priced and prized, [and] would continue to be until the final years of the empire."<sup>641</sup> Even though the Ottoman sultan had signed a decree in 1857 abolishing the

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<sup>639</sup> An "Oriental Album" of lithograph illustrations was published by the Rev. Henry J. Van-Lennep in New York in 1862. This book included "twenty illustrations of the people and scenery of Turkey." Like Oscanyan's album, figures included a "Turkish Lady of Rank," an "Armenian Bride," and a "Druze Girl." H. J. Van-Lennep, *The Oriental Album* (New York Public Library Digital Collections, 1862), <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47d9-646f-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>. (Accessed January 10, 2022).

<sup>640</sup> Betsy Golden Kellem, "Circassian Beauty in the American Sideshow," *The Public Domain Review*, September 16, 2021. Available at <https://publicdomainreview.org/essay/circassian-beauties> (Accessed November 1, 2022).

<sup>641</sup> Madeline C. Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire: The Design of Difference* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 155. For more on the practice of Ottoman slavery, see also Ehud R. Toledano, *Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997); Y. Hakan Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its Demise, 1800-1909* (London: Macmillan Press, 1996).

African slave trade in the empire, Circassian slavery remained unchecked.<sup>642</sup> Oscanyan obliquely mentioned the slave trade prohibition in his 1857 book, but did not do so at all in his admittedly much briefer *Oriental Album* text. In the book he wrote, “Although the slave trade has been nominally abolished in Turkey, and the public mart formally closed to this traffic, yet the practice of buying and selling has not been, nor will it ever be altogether abandoned, because the slave constitutes an essential element in the composition of their domestic institutions.”<sup>643</sup>

As “Caucasians,” Circassians were associated with purity and whiteness in Europe and the United States. For Americans, then, Oscanyan’s many evocations of the Circassian slave girl tapped into an existing fascination with white female slavery: audiences were captivated by the tension between the sensual image of white female purity with the idea that she was enslaved in a harem (which, as we know, was widely if erroneously considered to be a site of much salacious activity). In the late 1840s, for example, Hiram Power’s *The Greek Slave*, a marble sculpture of a nude Greek woman “held in captivity by the Turks,” caused a sensation throughout the country.<sup>644</sup> Two originals of the sculpture toured the U.S. between 1847 and 1850 and inspired a flurry of porcelain miniatures, visual and literary representations, and newspaper coverage that enabled a broad distribution of the image. While Greek independence had been achieved in 1829 – and the image of an enslaved Greek woman bound by Turkish chains was itself a nonsensical image of Ottoman subjecthood – the nude, all-white female slave figure allowed Americans viewers to feel superior to the “barbaric” Turk while also

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<sup>642</sup> Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire*, 107-13.

<sup>643</sup> Oscanyan, *The Sultan and His People*, 274.

<sup>644</sup> Marr, *American Islamicism*, 273.

engaging with the image sensually, “still keeping it at arm’s length as ‘foreign’ or ‘exotic.’”<sup>645</sup> In other words, as Timothy Marr explains, “the popularity of *The Greek Slave* demonstrated how the Orient provided not only a model of female beauty but also a transnational field in whose latitudes a variety of sensual fantasies and anxieties could be expressed, displaced, and/or sublimated.”<sup>646</sup> American audiences were also intrigued by literature on this theme. In 1851, Maturin Murray Ballou, a writer and publisher from Boston, published *The Circassian Slave; or, The Sultan’s Favorite: A Story of Constantinople and the Caucasus*.<sup>647</sup> In 1853, the famed Boston-based abolitionist senator Charles Sumner wrote *White Slavery in the Barbary States*.<sup>648</sup> The Circassian Slave was additionally a popular image in what we now call Orientalist painting. (Image P and Q).

Oscanyan’s “Harem of Circassian Slaves” advertising and models, as well as his “Circassian Slave Girl” photograph in the *Album* and *cartes de visite*, thus tapped into an existing American fascination to attract an audience. However, while he certainly utilized the popular and encoded language of the Circassian slave, Oscanyan’s images and descriptions were not particularly salacious or exploitative; they were still intended to convey information about the Ottoman Empire. To put it another way, Oscanyan was attempting to correct an erroneous impression by using the same visual language of the fantasy itself; he wanted to critique but not disrupt the imagery that would appeal to his audience. As such, “The Circassian

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<sup>645</sup> Joy S. Kasson, *Marble Queens and Captives: Women in Nineteenth-Century American Sculpture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 54-5, 66. Quoted in Marr, *American Islamicism*, 276.

<sup>646</sup> Marr, *American Islamicism*, 273

<sup>647</sup> Maturin Murray Ballou, *The Circassian Slave; or, The Sultan’s Favorite: A Story of Constantinople and the Caucasus* (Boston: F. Gleason, 1851).

<sup>648</sup> Charles Sumner, *White Slavery in the Barbary States* (Boston: John P. Jewett and Company, 1853).

Slave Girl” was pictured in quite a natural manner (Image L), and the archetype described as follows:

The social system of the East does not permit the free women to perform the offices of servants; slaves are therefore imported from Nubia and Circassia. The Nubians are employed in menial service, and the Circassians are personal attendants. The women of Circassia are generally supposed to be beautiful; but owing to their mountaineer condition the Circassians are rustic in their appearance and habits, and when freshly imported much resemble the fair daughters of Erin. Their immense reputation for beauty has doubtless arisen from the fact that many Circassian children are imported and delicately nurtured, who often attain a degree of beauty and grace unsurpassed. Such are never exposed for public sale, but are either appropriated to the Sultan, or are married to the sons of gentlemen of rank.<sup>649</sup>

Historians often credit P.T. Barnum, America’s most renowned (and notorious) innovator of nineteenth-century spectacular performance, with first introducing live “Circassian girls” to the American public in late 1864 when he added “Zalumma Agra” to his American Museum and began distributing her image on *cartes de visite* (Image R). Linda Frost, for example, discusses Zalumma Agra as “the first American Circassian Beauty,”<sup>650</sup> and analyzes her image as a “gathering point for assumptions regarding abolition, racial mixing and miscegenation, the sexuality and gender of American women (both white *and* black), and notions of American imperialism.”<sup>651</sup>

As is evident from these images, in which the same woman is seen posing in different but equally confident positions, Barnum’s Circassian girl did not look like the Circassian girl from the paintings. (Nor did she look Oscanyan’s Circassian slave girl.) Barnum’s Circassian, in contrast, had huge bushy hair – basically an afro, a hairstyle that her audience would identify as

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<sup>649</sup> Christopher Oscanyan, “The Circassian Slave Girl,” *Oriental Album*, 1863.

<sup>650</sup> Linda Frost, *Never One Nation: Freaks, Savages, and Whiteness in U.S. Popular Culture, 1850-1877* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 81.

<sup>651</sup> Frost, *Never One Nation*, 56-85, at 64.



African, and thus evocative of American slavery. The woman (and later, women) who Barnum turned into a Circassian made her hair this way by soaking her hair in beer and teasing it out to frizz and stand straight up and out.<sup>652</sup> Owing to her “not-quite-but-almost-slave-status”<sup>653</sup> as well as her black-and-white appearance, Barnum’s constructed Circassian girl was one of a series of what James W. Cook calls “liminal figures” that Barnum marketed to captivate and provoke an American audience throughout the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>654</sup> These figures included “a caricatured disruption of the normative boundaries between black and white (albino Negroes), male and female (bearded ladies), young and old (General Tom Thumb), man and animal (dog-faced boys), [and] one self or two (Siamese twins).”<sup>655</sup> Through such manufactured hybrid, liminal figures, Barnum sought to encourage viewers – from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds – to develop questions and interpretations for themselves. It was an immensely effective tactic. After Barnum’s launch of Zulumma Agra, (faux) Circassian beauties popped up at “dime museums and sideshows” and were basically a mainstay of this kind of entertainment until the twentieth century when the trend petered out.<sup>656</sup>

This prevailing historical analysis of Barnum’s popularization of the living Circassian slave figure fails to consider an important influence, or at the very least an important precedent: Christopher Oscanyan, who launched the “living illustrations” of Circassian slavery in his own lectures, *Oriental Album*, and *cartes de visite* at least a year before Barnum took up the form. And Barnum was indeed a member of Oscanyan’s audience. In early October of 1863, towards

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<sup>652</sup> Frost, *Never One Nation*, 81

<sup>653</sup> *Ibid.*, 67

<sup>654</sup> James W. Cook, *The Arts of Deception: Playing with Fraud in the Age of Barnum* (Cambridge, MA: University of Harvard Press, 2001), 119-162.

<sup>655</sup> Cook, *The Arts of Deception*, 121.

<sup>656</sup> Frost, *Never One Nation*, 65.

the end of a year of repeated “Women of Turkey” lectures in New York, and not long after Oscanyan’s “Circassian Slave Girl image” was first published in the *Oriental Album*, newspapers reported that P.T. Barnum had made Oscanyan an offer to work for him after having seen him perform. “The novelty of [Oscanyan’s] lecture,” *The New York Herald* wrote, has naturally attracted the attention of one of our shrewdest citizens, who is always on the *qui vive* [lookout]. Mr. Barnum having been present at one of these lectures, has, it seems, made a liberal offer to Mr. Oscanyan to lecture for him, as will be seen by the following correspondence, but which Mr. Oscanyan has declined, for reasons of his own.”<sup>657</sup> The *Herald* went on to print a letter dated October 6, 1863, from Barnum’s American Museum, as well as Oscanyan’s reply:

Mr. Oscanyan – Dear Sir: I have reflected upon the subject of your lecture since our conversation in the Custom House last week, and have concluded to make you the following offers. I will give you three hundred dollars (\$300) to deliver your lecture on the Women of Turkey in this city one time before your start on your tour – of course the lecture to be illustrated by your ten living subjects in costume, and I would also like to have the privilege of two to four more lectures at the same price. An answer by return post will oblige. Very respectfully, PT Barnum

Dear Sir: I feel highly flattered with your kind offer, but I beg leave to decline it, with many thanks. Yours respectfully, C. Oscanyan.<sup>658</sup>

In February of 1864, at the same time Oscanyan was advertising his arrivals with the HAREM OF CIRCASSIAN SLAVES! This exchange was mentioned by Barnum himself during a lecture at the Cooper Institute on “How to Make Money.” “BARNUM ENDORSES OSCANYAN,”

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<sup>657</sup> “Mr. Oscanyan’s Lectures on the Women of Turkey,” *New York Herald*, October 8, 1863.

<sup>658</sup> Ibid.

*Frank Leslie's* exclaimed above their reprint of Barnum's observations from that night. "The public will not be humbugged twice," the summary began,

No amount of advertising can deceive them twice. Anything present to them must be worthy of their patronage, and must possess intrinsic merit. As an apt illustration of this, I am happy to observe among the audience the face of an individual who has shared largely the patronage of the public – I mean Mr. Oscanyan, the justly celebrated Oriental lecturer – (applause). I myself had the pleasure of hearing one of his lectures, and witnessing his unique and unexceptionable illustrations of Eastern characters, and I assure you I was not less delighted than the rest of the audience, because it possessed the charm of novelty, originality and excellence – hence his popularity. Though it is evident that he was not born a showman, yet popular sentiment will lead him to fortune. I myself made him a liberal offer, but for some reason or other he declined it. I say this in proof of what I have already observed about public patronage, and in justice to the individual who deserves it fully, though doubtless unexpected by him. (Applause).<sup>659</sup>

It is telling that Oscanyan turned Barnum down – or, if the letters and public endorsement were coordinated promotional tactics, at least wanted to *appear* as if he had turned Barnum down. While Oscanyan may have been willing to "lean in" to tropes to attract an audience at this time, he wasn't willing to depart from the ideal of authenticity. To affiliate with Barnum was precisely to affiliate with (suspected) inauthenticity, which was the very opposite of Oscanyan's goals. One almost forgets that all these spectacular modifications were implemented not long at all after Oscanyan's passionate *New York Herald* editorials about anti-Christian activities in the Ottoman Empire: he was still profoundly concerned with the political future of Turkey and believed as ever in placing Americans and Turks on *equal* footing. That said, how well Oscanyan believed that spectacular performance could reflect complex authentic reality is an open question. Barnum, too, made claims to the authentic: he *depended* on an

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<sup>659</sup> "BARNUM ENDORSES OSCANYAN," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* [New York], February 20, 1864. Published first as "Mr. Barnum about Mr. Oscanyan," *New York Evening Post* [New York], February 5, 1864.

audience wondering if his displays were truly authentic or not. What is important here is that Oscanyan was making his own *claim* to authenticity, he was *claiming* the power to represent what was authentic, in distinction to someone else attempting to do the same.

The next three images in which Oscanyan evoked slavery in his album were called “Slavery in Turkey,” “Oriental Baby and Nurse,” and “Oriental Reception,” all of which featured Black bodies (as opposed to the white enslaved body of the Circassian slave). In “Slavery in Turkey,” a young Black man, the young “sable guardian” from the “Women of Turkey” lectures, stands at the right of the image, attending to a young woman who sits to his right, her head resting on her left hand, her whole demeanor looking somewhat forlorn (Image M). Oscanyan’s associated text explained: “Slavery in Turkey is not a condition of perpetual servitude but rather a species of apprenticeship.”<sup>660</sup> He continued:

Although they are bought for life, every Mussulman feels morally bound to give them their freedom after seven years service. The children of slaves are free, and the mothers also become free by right of maternity. There is no prejudice against color, and a favorite or clever Nubian often attains an elevated position. Yet with all this liberality the distinction of the races is more remarkable than in almost any other country.

As they occupy various positions in social life, it often happens, that one slave is seen in attendance upon another.<sup>661</sup>

In “Oriental Baby and Nurse” (Image N), which image also appeared on a *carte de visite* with the title “Black in White,” Oscanyan wrote:

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<sup>660</sup> Christopher Oscanyan, “Slavery in Turkey,” *Oriental Album*, 1863. Oscanyan’s argument seems to have been common in Ottoman circles. As Madeline Zilfi notes, “the practice was so common in the case of young girls that it is said to have been regarded as not much different from an apprenticeship, in this case, for the Ottoman marriage market,” See Zilfi, *Women and Slavery*, 127.

<sup>661</sup> Oscanyan, “Slavery in Turkey.” For more on what Zilfi calls “accretional abolitionism” and the issue of seven years service, see Zilfi, *Women and Slavery*, 127; Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire*, 9-10, 154-60; Toledano, *Slavery and Abolition*, 95-99.

An Oriental infant upon its birth is now, as in the days of Ezekiel, the Prophet, *well salted and carefully swaddled*, much in the style of a diminutive Egyptian mummy. The *swaddling-clothes*, so often mentioned in the Scriptures, are only taken off when the child is placed in the cradle, where it is firmly secured by bandages. It is nursed while in the cradle, the mother kneeling by the side.

The nurse, as represented in the accompanying photograph, is taken in the street costume, in order to show that though a native of Nubia, she is as chary of her charms as a Circassian beauty.<sup>662</sup>

At the very time that Oscanyan released his *cartes de visite* and *Oriental Album*, abolitionists were using the same mass-market methods to distribute images of formerly enslaved people and the markers of their enslavement (e.g. the scars and brands on their bodies). Oscanyan's *Oriental Album* was published within months, for example, of the abolitionist's "first major propaganda photograph," "The Scourged Back," of an escaped enslaved man called Gordon, who posed in a seated position with his severely scarred back turned towards the camera and, by extension, a northern white audience.<sup>663</sup> Oscanyan's images of slavery must in the first instance be understood as coexistent with these horrific photographs designed to demonstrate the cruelty of American chattel slavery and provoke an emotional (and then political) response. In distinction to such testimony, Oscanyan's images of enslaved people, lacking all signs of physical brutality, would have immediately conveyed to a northern white audience a slavery of a different character all together – a slavery that might in

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<sup>662</sup> Christopher Oscanyan, "Oriental Baby and Nurse," *Oriental Album*, 1863.

<sup>663</sup> Matthew Fox-Amato, *Exposing Slavery: Photography, Human Bondage, and the Birth of Modern Visual Politics in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 171-173. One black surgeon, quoted by Fox-Amato, called the photograph "a lecture in itself." For more on the image, see David Silkenat, "'A Typical Negro': Gordon, Peter, Vincent Colyer, and the Story Behind Slavery's Most Famous Photograph," *American Nineteenth-Century History*, 15-2 (2014), 169-186.

some manner portray its Ottoman practitioners as comparatively civilized, compassionate, and logical.

But physical testimony was not the only mode of representing bondage; photo compositions were revealing too. In *Exposing Slavery: Photography, Human Bondage, and the Birth of Visual Politics in America*, Matthew Fox-Amato analyzes photos of enslaved people from the rise of photography in the 1840s through the Civil War. Two of the major visual tropes he discusses offer clear parallels with Oscanyan's "Oriental Baby and Nurse," "Slavery in Turkey," and "Oriental Reception." "Oriental Baby and Nurse," for example, which showed a Nubian nurse caring for a carefully swaddled baby [doll] in Biblical fashion, was a prime example of what Fox-Amato calls the "chattel Madonna" (Image S). In the antebellum south, enslavers would use "chattel Madonna" images of a Black enslaved woman holding a young white child in order to project slavery "as a system of harmonious, intimate relations between blacks and whites."<sup>664</sup> Using the "long-standing Christian iconography [of] the Madonna and Child," these portraits also spoke to and from what Drew Faust calls the "evangelical stewardship" the enslavers believed they were performing (Image T).<sup>665</sup> The imagery helped enslavers "reaffirm" their Christian benevolence<sup>666</sup> by "orient[ing] the eye toward the religiosity, domesticity, and tenderness of bondage – and away from its violence and commodification."<sup>667</sup> Oscanyan's "Nubian Madonna" may have made the same claims as the enslavers' "chattel Madonnas": namely, that (Ottoman) slavery consisted of "harmonious,

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<sup>664</sup> Fox-Amato, *Exposing Slavery*, 40. On the "chattel Madonna," see 40-51.

<sup>665</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830–1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 13. Quoted in Fox-Amato, *Exposing Slavery*, 42.

<sup>666</sup> Fox-Amato, *Exposing Slavery*, 51.

<sup>667</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

intimate relations” between, in this instance, Nubian enslaved people and Ottoman babies and were relations that, while conducted in an Islamic Empire, were expressive of Christian benevolence. While the chattel Madonna portraits largely circulated amongst families in the south, northern whites would certainly have identified the evocation of the Madonna and Child and may have interpreted Oscanyan’s representation of Ottoman slavery in much the same way as southern whites: as an indication that [Ottoman] slavery was benevolent, and thus (ideally, for Oscanyan) that their barbaric impressions of the Ottomans were erroneous.

Unlike “Oriental Baby and Nurse,” Oscanyan’s “Slavery in Turkey” and “Oriental Reception” are clear examples of what Fox-Amato calls “domesticating portraits.” In such images, formerly enslaved people would be shown in diminutive positions alongside Union soldiers. Such photographs, which were circulated via stereograph and *carte de visite*, were, as Fox-Amato explains, one method by which northern soldiers used “the constant presence of photographers” in their camps to assert “the status of ex-slaves” and envision “the proper social relations between blacks and whites,” particularly in the aftermath of the January 1, 1863 Emancipation Proclamation.<sup>668</sup> Many of these portraits sought to depict “black male feminization” by showing Black men “with pitchers and glasses in their hands, ready to serve” (Image U and V).<sup>669</sup> According to Fox-Amato, such photographs not only served to “undercut black manhood as black men were enlisting,” but also appealed to northern whites who saw a black servant as a “symbol of civilization and refinement... one they visually concretized during

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<sup>668</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>669</sup> Ibid., 193.

the fleeting moments of war.”<sup>670</sup> It seems incredibly likely that Oscanyan used the same visual language of the black servant and the domesticating portrait also to convey “civilization and refinement.” In his “Slavery in Turkey” and “Oriental Reception,” however, he was of course seeking to convey the civilization and refinement not of northern whites, but of the people of Turkey. At an even more fundamental level, however, Oscanyan’s photographs and descriptions sought, as ever, to show Ottomans – including Ottoman slaves, both Circassian and Nubian – as people. Indeed, “photographic representation,” especially for abolitionists like Frederick Douglass, was seen precisely as “evidence of personhood.”<sup>671</sup> That Oscanyan also conveyed a *hierarchy* of personhood, then, while a reflection and expression of entrenched Ottoman realities, may have served a double function: as many northern whites were scared of losing their “racial superiority”<sup>672</sup> in the wake of emancipation, they may have found comfort in the simultaneous domestication *and* foreignization of Black people that Oscanyan’s images provided. While Oscanyan perhaps only intended his images to show Turkish realities, he may have additionally also helped Americans imagine “the future of the American racial order.”<sup>673</sup> In this way, these domesticating portraits, whether from a Union camp or the Oriental Album, were so powerful not despite the emancipatory moment but precisely *because of it*.

There are yet other ways these portraits can be read. Elite New Yorkers, Oscanyan’s main audience, were largely divided at this time between abolitionist and southern

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<sup>670</sup> Ibid., 193-194. It is worth noting that “black male feminization” would have been an accurate depiction of the black harem eunuch who was tasked with supervising the ladies in the Ottoman imperial harem.

<sup>671</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>672</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>673</sup> Ibid., 181.



sympathizing camps.<sup>674</sup> But their politics were not necessarily stable over the course of the war. By late 1863 when these images were published, abolitionists could have read such portraits rather as testaments to how the Union army provided a safe-haven as well as opportunity to the formerly enslaved. Oscanyan's images, then, could have evoked a kind of parallel Ottoman benevolence, thus also furthering his public relations campaign. On the flip side, Southern-sympathizing New Yorkers, like Oscanyan associate James Gordon Bennett, might have seen Oscanyan's portraits as Ottoman models of a more gradual emancipation, as opposed to what Bennett perceived as the radical, abolitionist-driven policy of Lincoln. That Oscanyan's photographs could be read – could be *looked at* – in multiple ways is precisely the point. Not only did it facilitate spectacular representation by offering multiple levels with which a viewer could engage, but it appealed to an audience and patronage network, such as Oscanyan's, that crossed party and ideological lines at a contentious national moment. His goal was to correct erroneous impressions of the Turks for as many Americans as possible: maintaining and growing his audience, even if they disagreed with one another, was of the essence.

Popular Orientalist imagery, such as the painting of the Circassian slave girl (Image P) we saw earlier in this chapter, also depicted black Ottoman enslavement, not just white Ottoman enslavement, on which Oscanyan may have also been drawing. In this image, we can see how the black Eunuch in the back attends to the white enslaved women reclining mostly nude in the foreground. As he did with the image of the Circassian slave girl, Oscanyan's images of slavery in Turkey here too aimed to critique an erroneous form of representation without disrupting

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<sup>674</sup> For a good summary of the attitudes of elite New Yorkers during this time, see Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850-1896* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 111-144.

the familiar image, thus still safely appealing to his audience who may have interpreted the familiar as authentic. Whether using the visual language of popular imagery, then, or the debates surrounding American slavery and race relations, Oscanyan deftly capitalized on contemporary interests to pursue his own goals and present Ottoman Turks as civilized equals. Again and again throughout the decade, Oscanyan used spectacle, forms of presentation that privileged and rewarded the act of looking, to convey the faithful, the authentic, the corrective, the educational, the instructive. He did this in pursuit of mutual understanding, because mutual understanding requires scaffolding, something to bridge one side to the other. The question is, is spectacle a sturdy bridge?

There are, after all, major downsides. When it falls flat, or when it's not well-executed, a spectacular performance can make a joke of the performer and ruin the effect entirely. While Oscanyan may have astutely hit a sweet spot in 1863, in 1868, he categorically failed to impress the good people of Des Moines, Iowa with his harem of "live women" who were in reality "waiting girls from the principal hotel of the city, uncommonly Erse [Scots/Irish] in appearance."<sup>675</sup> A newspaper report notes, "a great deal of the oriental loveliness was lost in the palpable prevalence of fact over imagination." "Whatever his abilities and culture," the correspondent continued, Oscanyan "was capable of out-Barnuming Barnum in humbug."<sup>676</sup>

After so intentionally separating himself from Barnum's deceptive presentation style, Oscanyan was nevertheless deeply susceptible to being painted with the same brush. And there

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<sup>675</sup> "From Des Moines – Lectures," *Chicago Tribune* [Chicago], January 27, 1868. Another piece on the Iowa lectures notes, "it was a very common Turkish harem made out of hotel chambermaids." See "From Des Moines," *Weekly Ottumwa Courier* [Ottumwa, IA], January 30, 1868

<sup>676</sup> Ibid.

we have perhaps the biggest issue with spectacle as a bridge to mutual understanding: if an audience focuses on the spectacle itself, they can lose sight of the reality it is intended to convey – and the people they’re intended to better understand.

It is impossible not to wonder if Oscanyan’s evocations of slavery were meant to be read as critiques of American chattel slavery, especially given that he would have known his images of slavery in Turkey would be compared to contemporary images of slavery in America, and that he *explicitly* described Ottoman slavery as a “species of apprenticeship” *as opposed to* “a condition of perpetual servitude.” We can only surmise. We do however have one clue: a letter, composed by Oscanyan in the aftermath of the Civil War, when the question of the civil rights, liberties, and citizenship status of former enslaved people was up for debate in Congress and across the nation. At least by 1866, Oscanyan explicitly supported full citizenship rights for formerly enslaved people.

“Sir,” wrote Oscanyan on March 13, 1866, to Charles Sumner, author of *White Slavery in the Barbary States*, in anticipation of an upcoming Congressional vote on the Civil Rights Act of 1866, which was designed to define United States citizenship and attest that all citizens were equally protected by the law. “As the franchise of the once enslaved race in this country is now the theme of patriotic and political discussion, allow me respectfully to submit to your distinguished consideration a few observations on the condition of slavery in Turkey.”<sup>677</sup>

Oscanyan proceeded, “Although slavery still exists in Turkey, it is not and never has been a condition of perpetual servitude, nor is it exclusively confined to a particular race, but

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<sup>677</sup> Letter from Christopher Oscanyan to Charles Sumner, March 13, 1866. Charles Sumner correspondence, 1829-1874, Box 18, Houghton Library Repository, Harvard University.

affects equally the Circassian as well as the Nubian.” Arguing that Turkey’s social system required the “foreign importation” of people to perform “domestic services,” he stated that the empire first conducted a “hand to hand traffic in prisoners of war,” before turning to “foreign importation with the advent of peace.” “For Turkey, despotic, barbarous, anti-Christian and fighting sword in hand for conquest and proselytism,” he argued, “has always maintained the fundamental principle that no native born is or can be made a slave!” [underline his, from here onwards]. Oscanyan later quipped that while it may be said that the whole population of the Ottoman Empire are no better than slaves, “are not all nevertheless on equal footing?”<sup>678</sup>

At the end of his letter, Oscanyan directly conveyed American political opinions in a way we have only to this point seen him do for Turkey; he argued for the right to citizenship of former enslaved people by citing the practices of the Ottoman Empire. As Oscanyan concluded: “If then an empire like Turkey, based upon despotism and the sword has maintained from its earliest existence to the present day such a principle of equity and equality, why should not every American born irrespective of color, race, or nationality be entitled to the right of full citizenship passes comprehension, especially under a government which professes to be the most free, liberal and enlightened in the world.” He signed it: “I have the honor to be, Sir, Your humble servant, C. Oscanyan.”<sup>679</sup>

It seems here that Oscanyan was equating American citizenship with Ottoman subjecthood. According to Oscanyan, Ottoman subjects, by definition, could not be slaves,

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<sup>678</sup> Ibid.

<sup>679</sup> Ibid.

because “no native is or can be made a slave.” As such, he seems to say, every Ottoman subject has citizenship – which he essentially glossed as a non-slave relationship with the state.

If even the Ottomans could do it, he argued, every “American born” – every American not enslaved – should have citizenship, too. While this hints very little at his views on American slavery, we are tempted to read his defense of Ottoman slavery as *not* being “a condition of perpetual servitude” (which he mentions also in his *Oriental Album* and presumably his lectures) – and his statement that it does not target a single race – as a critique of an American system that is and does.

Beyond providing a glimpse at his American political beliefs, this letter reminds us just how complicated Oscanyan’s Ottoman politics were, and how difficult it was for him to influence an American audience without feeding their own preconceived notions. Given Oscanyan’s views on the need for the empire to radically reform, we can understand how *he* found Turkey both “despotic, barbarous, anti-Christian and fighting sword in hand for conquest and proselytism,” *as well as* misrepresented and worth appreciating, and even emulating. But this is a tough case to make. Even we may be tempted to think since he was not one-hundred percent sympathetic with the empire, he was in fact anti-Turkey. But nuanced and changing views are proof of any real politics – and being a critical member of society is not mutually exclusive with feelings of affiliation and belonging.

## Chapter 5

### From Ottoman Consul to Armenian Nationalist (1868-1895)

#### Chapter Overview

This chapter will explore the arc of Oscanyan's politics in the final three decades of his life, tracing his journey from Ottoman Consul General to vocal Armenian nationalist. It will examine what changed, when, and why, as well as the modes by which Oscanyan expressed his changing politics (and to what ends, and to whom). It will argue that in the second half of his career, owing at least in part to the demands of emerging zero-sum Armenian and Islamic nationalisms, Oscanyan recast and reconfigured his multifaceted Ottoman imperial worldview into the simpler languages of Christian humanitarianism and Armenian separatism. As we will see, Oscanyan's political pivot in the 1870s occurred in lockstep with both professional disappointment as well as with what historians call the internationalization of the Armenian question. By the 1880s, Oscanyan's work was increasingly aimed either at the growing Armenian-American community itself, or at encouraging a humanitarian diplomacy between Americans and Armenians exclusively. While he still wrote about the Ottoman empire and its many regions and people, these writings were increasingly styled as personal memoirs of Turkey's *past* – not depictions of an equal nation with which to develop a diplomatic *future*.

#### Oscanyan as Consul General

Oscanyan finally received an official diplomatic position in 1868, though it was from the Ottomans not the Americans.<sup>680</sup> He was named Consul General of Turkey in New York, not long

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<sup>680</sup> List of Diplomatic and Consular Officers of the United States together with their Compensation, Places of Official Residence, States where Born and whence Appointed (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1868).

after the first Ottoman minister had been assigned to Washington DC in 1867.<sup>681</sup> In 1868, in his capacity as consul, Oscanyan published a pro-Turkey booklet titled *The United States and Turkey*, written largely in response to the Crete insurrection (1866-68) and Charles Sumner's July 21, 1868 resolution to Congress in which the senator read the following:

Resolved, That the people of the United States renew the expression of their sympathy with the suffering people of Crete, to whom they are bound by ties of a common religion, and by the gratitude due to the Greek race, of which the Cretans are a part; that they rejoice to believe that the sufferings of this interesting people may be happily terminated by a policy of forbearance on the part of the Turkish Government, and they hereby declare their earnest hope that the Turkish Government will listen kindly to this representation, and will speedily adopt such generous steps, as will secure to Crete the much-desired blessings of peace and the advantages of autonomic government.<sup>682</sup>

Arguing that "public men" have formed their impressions of Turkey only from depictions "'in certain journals and well-known publications" and have thus "imbibed from these sources simply an erroneous idea of a nation which is at this hour in process of transformation and is passing through a pacific revolution," Oscanyan explained that it was only on account of such ignorance that Congress had expressed "resolutions of sympathy" in support of the Cretans, whom they identified with "the great Hellenic family." To this, Oscanyan countered the "truth" regarding an "insurrection, which... has never been well understood on this side of the ocean."<sup>683</sup> He presented a negative view of the Cretans dating back to ancient times, and

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Available at <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.b3839244&view=1up&seq=104&skin=2021&q1=oscanyan> (p. 100) (Accessed November 25, 2022); "Oscanyan," *Leavenworth Evening Bulletin* [Leavenworth, KS], March 31, 1868.

<sup>681</sup> Sinan Kuneralp, "Ottoman Diplomatic and Consular Personnel in the United States of America, 1867-1917," in Bilge Nur Criss, Tony Greenwood, Louis Mazzari, and Selcuk Esenbel (eds.), *American Turkish Encounters: Politics and Culture, 1830-1989* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publisher, 2011), at 100-108.

<sup>682</sup> Oscanyan quotes Sumner's resolution in his booklet. Christopher Oscanyan, *The United States and Turkey* (McGill & Witherow: Washington DC), 1868, 17-18. For more on the Crete Insurrection and the American response, see: Prior, "'Crete the Opening Wedge.'

<sup>683</sup> Oscanyan, *United States and Turkey*, 18-19.

argued that the Cretans “enjoyed, like the other Greeks, very liberal municipal franchises” under “Mussulman domination.”<sup>684</sup> The latest “movement,” he explained, was “neither a national nor a religious insurrection, like that of 1821.” Rather, it was “simply a question of taxation and of administrative reforms, which served as pretexts to a new resort to arms.” The Cretans, he wrote, “complained that they were overburdened with taxation; that they had no roads, no schools, no hospitals, no liberty of worship; in a word, that they were the slaves of another race.” “It would be but too easy a task,” he continued, “to expose the exaggerations and the fallacy of these recriminations.”<sup>685</sup> Rather, Oscanyan argued, the Cretans’ demands for reform were insincere, as they had “from the outset resolved to free themselves by force” even though the Ottoman Government was in fact “disposed... to redress any serious cause of discontent among the Cretans, and to accord to them the most liberal reforms.”<sup>686</sup> The Cretans were in fact only fortified in their insurrection by “foreign intriguers” – namely, Greece and Russia, who, respectively, sought to annex Crete and further dismember the empire.<sup>687</sup> Modern-day Greeks, Consul General Oscanyan argued, echoing his anti-Greek sentiments from *The Sultan and His People*, were incapable of self-government and had failed to become a functional state; they had no right to Crete.

In conclusion, Oscanyan assured the U.S. Congress that “the Government of the Sultan, in the sympathy which it has manifested for the unhappy Cretans, proves itself in accord with the Philhellenists of the United States Senate.” The Sultan, he wrote, had *already* “suspended

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<sup>684</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>685</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>686</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>687</sup> Ibid., 34-35.



hostilities” and “granted to the island the reforms of 10<sup>th</sup> January, 1868.” He then asked: “May the American Philhellenists graciously permit the observation: We also are Philhellenes; but our Philhellenism, more eclectic than theirs, does not extend indiscriminately to all the Greeks of times past, present, and future; it ceases with the century of Demosthenes.” The Greeks of the current day, Oscanyan reasoned, offered the Cretans anarchy, not salvation. “Let those who have ever for a moment entertained the idea of annexing Candia [Crete] to Greece,” Oscanyan wrote, “search in this latter kingdom for a province which enjoys an administration more independent, or more autonomic, than that conceded to the island of Crete [by the Ottomans].”<sup>688</sup>

Oscanyan ended his argument with something of a warning, albeit one that presupposed the idyllic world of international relations through mutual understanding that he championed in his informal public diplomacy. He first conceded that while Europe recognized that the “constitution of the Americans, their principles, and their political customs, naturally lead them to sympathize with any revolution which has for its object the downfall of despotism” and “testify these sentiments towards an oppressed people,” Americans should still seek to “live in good will with all the world, and more particularly with those countries which do not so readily assimilate with them.” In order to do this, Oscanyan argued, Americans needed to “confine themselves within the limits imposed by international law” and its “respect for the independence of each State.” To not do so, to “give to an insurrection, which all the world considers as suppressed, and which is no longer mentioned in Europe, an importance and a moral aid which no longer comport with it,” Oscanyan continued, tacitly accusing the

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<sup>688</sup> Ibid, 57.

Americans of being behind the times, would be a “forgetfulness of their obligations of neutrality towards Turkey.” He brought his entire argument to a close by warning that if the Americans acted “in despite of facts” by showing “a determination to impose their ideas upon those who are not obligated to think as they do,” they would “run the risk of encountering legitimate resistance, and of thwarting their own plan of justice and humanity.”<sup>689</sup> Here again, as he did in his *Herald* columns, Oscanyan encouraged non-intervention in the Ottoman Empire, arguing essentially that Americans should not seek to force their values on others, and evoking the American foreign policy buzzword of “neutrality” to do so.

Oscanyan served in the consul position until 1874, though for reasons unknown he seems to have spent much of his time as consul to New York on a “leave of absence” in Constantinople.<sup>690</sup> In 1871, he attended a July 4 festival at Robert College – an American college founded by Christopher Robert and Cyrus Hamlin in Constantinople in 1863 – along with former Secretary of State William H. Seward and his nemesis John Porter Brown.<sup>691</sup> The *Herald* called Robert College part of an “American colony in Turkey.”<sup>692</sup> As Karine Walther writes of the celebration, which doubled as a dedication for new buildings at the College, “the shared date with America’s Independence Day was surely no coincidence and illustrated the pride American Protestants felt in extending their country’s religious and political values to the empire.”<sup>693</sup> In 1872, Oscanyan accompanied famed Union Army General William Tecumseh Sherman during

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<sup>689</sup> Ibid., 58-59

<sup>690</sup> “General Sherman in Europe and the East,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, September 1873, 481-495, at 485.

<sup>691</sup> “Fourth of July in Turkey,” *The Sun* [Baltimore], August 3, 1871; “The Crescent and the Cross,” *The New York Herald*, July 30. 1871.

<sup>692</sup> “The Crescent and the Cross,” *The New York Herald* [New York], July 30. 1871.

<sup>693</sup> Walther, *Sacred Interests*, at 73.

his stay in Constantinople on his tour of “Europe and the East.”<sup>694</sup> According to a 1912 publication on Armenian notables, Oscanyan also met one of the most famous nineteenth-century Armenian figures while back in Constantinople: Mkrtich Khrimian, known as “Hayrig” (an affectionate Armenian term for “father”) to his community. Khrimian was the Patriarch of Constantinople, the most important post in the Ottoman Armenian community, between 1869 and 1873 – precisely when Oscanyan was visiting. Of their encounter, a short 1912 biography asserts that “when [Oscanyan] met Hayrig, he asked Hayrig to write a note and give him a badge of honour. Hayrig replied that [he] already ha[d] a badge of honour that shines under the nickname of an Armenian boy.”<sup>695</sup> This was the name under which Oscanyan apparently published columns in Constantinople’s prominent Armenian newspaper, *Masis*, though I have yet to find examples of these columns.

In 1874, Oscanyan either resigned his position or was forced out. While American newspapers reported that he was denied the salary he was owed and was thus returning to the U.S. having resigned his post “in disgust,”<sup>696</sup> it seems that he was in fact stripped of the position by the Ottoman government owing to a matter of disrepute. A letter from October 31, 1872, from George Boker, U.S. Minister to Constantinople from 1871-1875, to Hamilton Fish, U.S. Secretary of State from 1869-1877, sheds light on the situation. In the wake of John Porter Brown’s death in April 1872, Fish had written to Boker noting that he knew of “but one person qualified to fill the joint offices of Secretary and Dragoman [at Constantinople], and that he

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<sup>694</sup> “Harper’s Magazine,” *Whaleman’s Shipping Lists and Merchant’s Transcript* [New Bedford, MA], August 26, 1873; “General Sherman in Europe and the East,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*.

<sup>695</sup> Zardarean, “Khachadur Osganian. 1818-1900,” *Hishatakaran*, 8-10.

<sup>696</sup> “Personalities,” *The Daily Graphic* [New York], June 10, 1874.

would probably be unacceptable both at Washington and Constantinople.” Boker wrote in reply “I conjecture that your reference is to Mr. C. Oscanyan. Whatever might be Mr. Oscanyan’s fate before the Senate, you are right in concluding that he would not be acceptable, if received at all, to the Turkish Government.” Boker explained: Oscanyan was in “disgrace with his government” at Constantinople. He would thus “not be permitted to return to New York in his former office of Consul General for Turkey.” According to Boker, the reason was related to a session of the Arms Commission held recently in the Ottoman capital, in which a Mr. O.F. Winchester, the founder of the Winchester Repeating Arms Company, “publicly testified that Mr. Oscanyan said that he was accustomed to pay such bills of the Turkish Government as passed through his hands in paper, and charge the government in gold; the difference in value being his commission!” What’s more, Mr. Winchester “also stated that Mr. Oscanyan endeavored to make an arrangement on this basis with him... the affair growing out of a sale of arms and machinery which Mr. Winchester made to the Turks.” Because of this testimony, Boker continued, “Mr. Oscanyan brought two suits for slander in our Consular Court, one against Mr. Winchester and the other against his agent, Mr. Azarian.” Oscanyan did not win either suit.

“All this is a matter of public notoriety,” Boker explained, “and it would be a bad record for an officer of our Legation to start with.” But, it seems, it was not just the stench of Oscanyan’s legal battles that Boker objected to. “In fact,” he wrote, “one cannot trust a man of Levantine birth. Such a thing as ordinary honesty does not exist among them, nor is it considered any shame to be detected in such falsehoods and frauds as would drive a man out of society with us. If one of these people held either the office of Secretary or of Dragoman, he

would straight begin to make a job of his position; and such are the opportunities that he would amass a fortune in a few years, without the fear of detection, or the shame of it if he were discovered.<sup>697</sup>

In the very next paragraph, Boker wrote that it had been “forced upon” his knowledge that John Porter Brown, whose position they did not consider Oscanyan “acceptable” to fill, “took pay for his official services; but he did this in a moderate way, thereby enabling himself to live in a style that he could not possibly have done on his salary.”<sup>698</sup> Indeed, nearly all consular agents engaged in such activity. Boker’s was thus a very clear double standard, which shows an intentional discrimination, a distinguishing between people based not on behavior, which was essentially the same, but rather on ethnicity: as he wrote, “one cannot trust a man of Levantine birth.”

But what was the arms deal of which Boker wrote? International gun sales were an important source of income for gun companies in the aftermath of the Civil War, when national sales plummeted, and national arsenals were being sold off. Between the mid-1860s and mid-1870s, “gun industrialists... relied on foreign, international markets and consumers to stay alive.”<sup>699</sup> In May of 1869, when Oscanyan was Consul General and based in New York, a Turkish army officer and old associate of Oscanyan’s named Rüstem Bey, was dispatched to the U.S. to “recommend and purchase arms and ammunition.” Not conversational in English, Rüstem Bey relied on Oscanyan to be his “guide and interpreter.”<sup>700</sup> Somehow Oscanyan worked out a deal

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<sup>697</sup> Letter from George Boker to Hamilton Fish, October 31, 1872, Library of Congress, Manuscripts Division, The Hamilton Fish Papers, Container 91; This is quoted in Conn, “John Porter Brown,” 283-284.

<sup>698</sup> Ibid.

<sup>699</sup> Pamela Haag, *The Gunning of America: Business and the Making of American Gun Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 112.

<sup>700</sup> Ibid., 132.

with the Winchester Arms Company such that he would encourage Rüstem Bey to purchase Winchester rifles and, in return, he would earn a ten percent commission on any sales that were ‘affected through his instrumentality.’”<sup>701</sup> In early 1870, Oscanyan was able to convince Rüstem Bey to convince the Sultan [Abdulaziz] to order 1,000 Winchester guns. But Winchester meanwhile had decided to “work every angle,” and made an additional deal with a Constantinople-based company called Azarian, Pere et Fils, “to act as the WRAC’s official representative in all transactions with the Ottoman Empire.”<sup>702</sup> In the spring of 1870, Winchester sent the company sixteen guns to show to representatives of the Turkish government. After a series of tests and trials, the Ottomans seemed ready to buy. But Winchester did not want to pay commissions to both Oscanyan and Azarian, so “in mid-July [they] began talking exclusively with Azarian.”<sup>703</sup> Oscanyan was furious. The Turkish government ultimately purchased arms in the amount of \$520,000 on November 9, 1870, and in the amount of \$840,000 on August 19, 1871. Oscanyan maintained that these contracts were “procured through the recommendations which by his influence were made by Rüstem Bey.”<sup>704</sup>

As noted, Oscanyan brought two suits of slander in the American consular court at Constantinople, one against Winchester and one against Azarian, for statements they made during an Arms Commission in Constantinople.<sup>705</sup> In the U.S., he sued the Winchester Arms company for \$136,000 (ten percent of the \$1,360,000 total, meaning, it appears that he included the sales made through Azarian as a function of his influence, too). Oscanyan litigated

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<sup>701</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>702</sup> Ibid.

<sup>703</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>704</sup> *Oscanyan v. Arms Company*, No. 103 U.S. 261 (Supreme Court 1880).

<sup>705</sup> Letter from George Boker to Hamilton Fish, October 31, 1872.

the case with the Winchester Arms Company first in lower New York City courts starting in 1875 and then all the way up to a Supreme Court Case in 1880. He claimed that because his consular position was honorary, it was expected that he would pursue commissions to sustain himself. But the courts had no sympathy for Oscanyan's position: he lost all his suits. The 1880 Supreme Court decision chastised him thus: "... even if the contract in question had been made in Turkey, and even if it had appeared that the Ottoman Empire, by express legislation, recognized the extraordinary principle that such a contract made by one of its officers was not in contravention of public morality and decency, still the contract could not be enforced in our courts, because it is repugnant to the very principle upon which those courts are founded."<sup>706</sup> In a way, this was a version of Boker's sentiment in legal terms: as if to say, maybe a Turk could engage in such corrupt practices in Turkey, but we don't do that here in the United States.

### **Changing Tides**

Oscanyan's political dedication to the future of Turkey seemed up for debate in the wake of his return to the U.S. in 1874, with one report, as already noted, claiming he had left Turkey "in disgust"<sup>707</sup> and another claiming that Oscanyan "says he does not like it [Asia Minor] and that America is as good as Turkey, and, to his mind, somewhat better."<sup>708</sup> In the early months of 1875, he even traveled to Florida "for the purpose of selecting a site for an Armenian colony," but he was "not favorably impressed" with the state "for the purpose he had in

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<sup>706</sup> *Oscanyan v. Arms Company*, No. 103 U.S. 261 (Supreme Court 1880).

<sup>707</sup> "Personalities," *The Daily Graphic* [New York], June 10, 1874.

<sup>708</sup> "Personalities," *The Daily Graphic* [New York], July 17, 1874.

view.”<sup>709</sup> But he still engaged with Turkish topics in the lecture hall. In the spring, he lectured on the “Domestic Life of Turkey” before the New York Liberal Club, rehashing familiar corrections of American assumptions about the Turk and his cultural practices.<sup>710</sup> By July, it was reported that he would lecture on “The Women of Turkey, or Domestic Life in the East” that upcoming season.<sup>711</sup> And in the fall of 1876, it even seemed that Oscanian and the Turkish government may have been back in each other’s good graces, and that, despite personal disappointment, Oscanian still possessed a willingness and a desire to engage and affiliate with the Ottoman government.

On October 27, 1876, U.S. newspapers reported that Oscanian was “to have a seat in the new senate about to be formed by the Turkish Government, as one of the representatives of the Armenians, who are to have ten members in that body.”<sup>712</sup> The report added: “Mr. Oscanian was not long ago elected a member of the National Assembly of the Armenians,” a

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<sup>709</sup> “Personal Items,” *Boston Traveler* [Boston], March 12, 1875. A similar endeavor is mentioned in Mark Kalustian, *Did you know that...? A Collection of Armenian Sketches* (Arlington, MA: Armenian Cultural Foundation, 2002), 127. He writes: “When Oscanian returned to the United States [in 1874], he noticed that travel had become much easier. As interest in forming an Armenian community in the United States had been rekindled among his friends in Constantinople, he wrote to the Interior Department in Washington concerning the availability of government lands. The reply was that each immigrant recipient would be entitled to 160 acres after paying a very small fee for initial office registration. Also each person would have to live on the property for five years and cultivate at least five acres before becoming the owner and gaining permission to sell the land after the sixth year. In fact, the superintendent of the Georgia State Railroads wrote to Oscanian that upon payment of \$800, each family would be the owner of 100 acres of land with a six-room house, and the additional payment of one dollar would make one the owner of uncultivated land with a twelve-year loan. Oscanian related this information to Constantinople, together with a plot plan of a city to be named Nor Ani with secondary streets named after Armenian towns such as Van, Mush, Zeitun, Garin, etc., and the main avenues to be named after the well-known boosters of the project. Indeed, the settlement would be graced with a school, church, theater, municipal park, and, of course, the old country Turkish bath. Suffice it to say that this excellent idea came to naught due to the squabbles of the prospective homesteaders.” Unfortunately, Kalustian does not provide the source of this detailed information. Such a migration movement is also referenced in *Zardarean*, “Khachadur Osganian. 1818-1900,” *Hishatakaran*. “When Vosganian returned to the US he took steps to form an organization for Armenian migration, but his work was not fruitful due to his wife, who did not want to leave New York and go to Ohio.”

<sup>710</sup> “Turkish Life,” *Stamford Advocate* [Stamford, CT], April 9, 1875.

<sup>711</sup> “Personal City,” *Quincy Daily Whig* [Quincy, IL], July 22, 1876.

<sup>712</sup> See for example: “The News,” *Lewiston Evening Journal* [Lewiston, ME], October 27, 1876.



body, as we saw in Chapter 3, that was established in 1863 as a part of the Armenian National Constitution.<sup>713</sup> Neither of these claims were true. The Ottoman senate to which this report referred was not officially declared until late December 1876 (nearly two months after the first reports in the American papers) when it was announced as a part of the new Ottoman constitution. Some members were selected to serve by the Sultan himself, and others were chosen through elections held in December and January 1877. Oscanyan, in the end, was neither appointed nor elected. But the first report was reprinted verbatim starting on November 11, 1876, in papers from Boston to Dallas to New York.<sup>714</sup> It seems certain that Oscanyan was either the direct or indirect source of the report. *The Daily Graphic* in New York even featured a large-scale image to announce the occasion (see Image W), with “Oscanyan Effendi” written in the Ottoman or Arabic script beneath his portrait (which text Oscanyan was the most likely New Yorker to have provided).<sup>715</sup> We can’t know whether Oscanyan spread this report because he knew no one in the United States could know otherwise, or because, as with his American diplomatic position, he was in conversations about receiving such a position and it simply didn’t come to pass

To Armenians like Christopher Oscanyan, the new Ottoman parliament and constitution of 1876 had profound “symbolic value” as the “embodiment of equal recognition and the equal enjoyment of civil and political rights” – political goals for which many, including Oscanyan, had been working for decades at this point. As Aylin Koçunyan notes, the parliament and

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<sup>713</sup> Ibid.

<sup>714</sup> See for example: “Personal Gossip,” *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* [New York], November 25, 1876.

<sup>715</sup> “A. [sic] Oscanyan, Ex-Consul General of Turkey at New York,” *The Daily Graphic* [New York], November 14, 1876.

constitution also constituted a “legal framework” that allowed them to “identify themselves with international society.”<sup>716</sup> It is no surprise that Oscanyan, who had long championed these principles, would want to be involved and associated with such an endeavor. Indeed, the Armenians, including his friends and associates, even played a major role in its creation; Krikor Odian, a prominent Armenian politician and writer, whom we met briefly in Chapter 2 when he escorted Oscanyan to the Grand Vizier in search of a new position, was one of the primary architects of the document.<sup>717</sup> While the Ottoman constitution and parliament were the products of an ongoing constitutional movement in the empire that, as we saw in Chapter 3, began with the Armenian National Constitution in the early 1860s, the process was accelerated in October 1876 (around the same time as Oscanyan’s New York announcement) in the midst of what is now called the “Eastern Crisis” of 1875-78 – a period of immense and consequential imperial instability.

Starting in 1873, drought, flood, and famine plagued Anatolia and rendered it harder for subjects to pay – and thus harder for the Ottoman state to collect – taxes from the area. Already in deep public debt to European creditors, the Ottoman government increased taxes in the Balkan [Southeastern European] territories, which had been spared from the natural disasters. But this incensed the Ottoman peasantry in these lands. In 1875, just seven years after the nationalist uprisings in Crete (1866-68), rebellions erupted first in Herzegovina and soon after in neighboring Bosnia. The Ottoman state perceived these uprisings as major

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<sup>716</sup> Koçunyan, *Negotiating the Ottoman Constitution*, 159.

<sup>717</sup> Krikor Odian was also the close friend and advisor of the head of the constitutional committee, Midhat Pasha, who was perhaps the key player in the Ottoman government at this time. Caroline Finkel describes Midhat Pasha as “a true representative of Tanzimat optimism who believed that separatist tendencies could be best countered by demonstrating the benefits of good government.” See Caroline Finkel, *Osman’s Dream: The Story of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1923* (New York: Basic Books, 2007), 500.

existential threats. Terrified of territorial loss, when the Bulgarians initiated an uprising of their own in April 1876 (killing many Muslims in the process), the Ottomans brutally suppressed the rebellion, “hoping to deliver a violent warning that they hoped would resonate throughout the empire.”<sup>718</sup> These events and in particular their reception across the Western world had profound long-term consequences. They also laid the groundwork for the deposition of not one but two sultans in the year 1876 alone: Abdulaziz (r. 1861-1876), the reigning sultan during Oscanyan’s tenure as Consul General, was overthrown by Midhat Pasha and other statesmen during a coup on May 30, 1876, on account of his mismanagement of the empire. His replacement, Murad V, who supported an Ottoman constitutional government, lasted only 93 days, having suffered a mental breakdown. In July of his short reign, the Ottoman principalities of Serbia and Montenegro declared war on the empire, initiating hostilities that would ebb and flow for most of the next two years and prompt Russia to mobilize for war at least rhetorically on behalf of their fellow Slavs. Owing to his mental state, Murad V was deposed on August 31, 1876, and replaced by Abdulhamid II (r. 1876-1908).

The slew of ethno-nationalist uprisings and the Ottomans’ response to them had external as well as internal consequences. As Karine Walther notes, while the Ottomans’ aggression against the Bulgarians stemmed from an imperial political calculus, Americans and Europeans, as they had during the Greek and Crete rebellions, understood the conflict in religious terms: they “depicted Bulgarians as politically and religiously advanced Christians at the religious mercy of fanatical, violent, and despotic Muslim rulers.” On-the-ground actors like the American missionaries “alerted the world” to the massacres (of Christians) in these terms,

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<sup>718</sup> Walther, *Sacred Interests*, 68.

and in so doing created an international sensation; European and American audiences would go on to dub these massacres the “Bulgarian horrors,” and the “Bulgarian atrocities.”<sup>720</sup> The resultant public outcry across Europe and the United States – adding on, as it did, to the ongoing turmoil of Ottoman financial troubles, serial uprisings that tempted Russian intervention, and the rapid changes in Ottoman leadership – soon prompted the Great Powers (Austria-Hungary, Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Russia) to meet in Constantinople between December 12, 1876 and January 20, 1877 to “enforce reforms on the Ottoman Empire” and try to stave off another war between Russia and Turkey.<sup>721</sup> On December 23, they proposed a plan for an autonomous Bosnia and Bulgaria, including substantial reforms to be undertaken in those areas, but the Ottomans rejected them outright. On the same day as the proposals, the Sultan certified the new Ottoman constitution, which promised Christian equality before the law. But it did not offer autonomy or independence to any of the rebellious Orthodox-Christian populations. Russia saw this Ottoman refusal to grant autonomy to Bulgarians and other Slavic peoples, combined with the widespread international outrage, as an opportune moment once again to expand its territorial reach (and avenge its embarrassing loss in the Crimean War). Thus once again using Ottoman mistreatment of its Orthodox Christians as a pretext, Russia declared war on the Ottoman Empire on April 4, 1877. This was the third war between Russia and the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century, and the eighth since the eighteenth century.

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<sup>720</sup> Ibid.

<sup>721</sup> Ibid., 85.

While Russia may have been singing the same old song, with this new war in 1877, Oscanyan had changed *his* tune entirely. Even though as recently as 1868 Oscanyan defended the Ottoman state against charges of religious fanaticism, even denigrating Christian Greeks and Cretans in the process – and as recently as November 1876, he sought to work with the empire for reform and progress – Oscanyan now supported Russia, after years of staunch opposition, *precisely and only because of their Christianity*. The *New York Tribune* summed it up concisely in their headline for a summary of his lecture on the night of June 1, 1877 to the New York Liberal Club: “An Armenian’s Opposition to Turkey: Views of the Former Turkish Consul-General in Favor of Russia as a Progressive Nation.”<sup>722</sup> Oscanyan’s argument bears quoting in full for its stark expression of his political about-face, as well as its humanitarian logic, the language of which Brendan Simms and D. J. B. Trim note first came into use only in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>723</sup>

“Russia is right,” said Mr. Oscanyan. “Intellect rules the world today, and behind intellect is moral responsibility. You ask whether the condition of the people will be improved if Russia is successful. At first it seems as if there was no choice. Russia is a despot; Turkey is the incarnation of devilry. But the one has a faith which is founded upon charity; the other has nothing but brutality. The religion of one is “Love your neighbor as yourself.” The creed of the other is “Take not the Jew or the Christian for your friend; contract no friendship for any others than yourselves; let not the faithful take the infidel for his protector, unless you fear danger from him” – mark the hypocrisy. There is hope in the one case, and none in the other. I am in favor of Russia because I am a humanitarian. The Turks are incapable of improvement and should not stand in the way of progress. And if Russia will not meet the demands of the age, she too will go down. I stand in favor of humanity and progress.”<sup>724</sup>

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<sup>722</sup> “An Armenian’s Opposition to Turkey,” *New York Tribune* [New York], June 2, 1877.

<sup>723</sup> Brendan Simms and D. J. B. Trim, “Towards a History of Humanitarian Intervention,” in their *Humanitarian Intervention: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1-24, at 3.

<sup>724</sup> “An Armenian’s Opposition to Turkey,” *New York Tribune*.

During a lecture on the conflict later that summer, an audience member asked if Russia was better off than Turkey. Oscanyan answered “She is, because Russia’s religion is one of improvement and Russia is amenable to the laws of change. Russia can be made better; Turkey cannot.”<sup>725</sup> Oscanyan’s new views on Russia and Turkey represented a *major* change from 1857 when he said, “the nature of the Mohammedan religion is not essentially in opposition to reform.”<sup>726</sup> Seemingly overnight, Oscanyan’s diplomatic language had become one of insurmountable religious difference between Muslims and Christians in the Ottoman Empire. His arguments now matched the very paradigms employed by American and European media that he had worked for decades to complicate. While Oscanyan had always fought for equality between Christians (especially Armenians) and Muslims in an empire that he believed needed to reform, he did not until this point express doubt that it could. His Christian sympathies had become mutually exclusive with a defense of Islam and the Ottoman state.

So, what happened? Oscanyan’s change of heart and politics may well have stemmed from a feeling of betrayal: a feeling of personal rejection after his loss of the consular position, and/or his potentially being snubbed for a seat in the new Ottoman parliament. But Oscanyan’s final disillusionment and political pivot also arrived in the run up to what historians call the “internationalization of the Armenian question.” Through the century, Armenian intellectuals, like other Ottoman Christian populations, increasingly using the European language of nationalism and reform as a “general framework” through which to “interpret the plight of their people” and determine the scope and nature of their political rights.<sup>727</sup> This “plight”

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<sup>725</sup> “What Led to the Conflict: Mr. Oscanyan’s Historical Sketch,” *New York Tribune* [New York], August 18, 1877.

<sup>726</sup> Oscanyan, *Sultan and his People*, 448.

<sup>727</sup> Panossian, *The Armenians*, 165.

included “looting and murder in Armenian towns by Kurds and Circassians, improprieties during tax collection, criminal behavior by government officials, and the continued refusal to accept Christians as witnesses in trials.”<sup>728</sup> Unlike other Ottoman Christian populations with grievances, however, the Armenians occupied a unique position in the empire. As Donald Bloxham notes,

the Armenians themselves were in arguably the most difficult position, in no place constituting a demographic majority that would have formed the basis for national separation, and living in precisely the region that Britain was most determined to see maintained within the Ottoman empire. They were, nevertheless, encouraged by alternate Russian and British pressure for reforms, and by the end of the Tanzimat [in 1876] had begun to appeal to these powers in desperation, having lost their initial faith in the Ottoman reform agenda.<sup>729</sup>

The Armenians’ peculiar circumstance was underscored and exacerbated by what followed in the aftermath of the Russo-Turkish war, which the Russians won at the beginning of 1878. First, after the truce at the end of January 1878, Sultan Abdulhamid prorogued the new Ottoman parliament and suspended the constitution in February; hopes of constitutional reform and equality for all were dashed. On March 3, Russia and the Ottoman Empire signed the Treaty of San Stefano, with Russia imposing severe territorial losses on the Ottomans. Of note for the Armenians of the empire, Article 16 of the treaty “made the withdrawal of Russian armies from the Eastern provinces or Western Armenia contingent upon the realization of reforms in those areas.”<sup>730</sup> Armenians living in the area largely saw this as a reason for hope; Russia, they believed, would guarantee Armenian security.<sup>731</sup> The Great Powers, however, were alarmed by

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<sup>728</sup> Taner Akçam, *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), 36.

<sup>729</sup> Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 38.

<sup>730</sup> Libaridian, “The Ideology of Armenian Liberation,” 148.

<sup>731</sup> Panossian, *The Armenians*, 170.

the immensity of Russia's proposed gains and convened the Berlin Conference between June 13 and July 13, 1878 to renegotiate the terms of the settlement in a way that curbed Russian influence in the region. This conference produced the consequential Treaty of Berlin.

Through the Treaty of Berlin, Serbia, Montenegro, Romania, and part of Bulgaria were all granted the independence from the empire for which they had agitated. Russia was allowed to keep only some of the territories from San Stefano (Kars and Batum in the Armenian provinces as well as a part of Bulgaria), and Austria-Hungary was granted control over Bosnia and Herzegovina. With Cyprus now under British rule, too, the total Ottoman losses were huge, especially in its European territories (Image X). The empire had lost over one third of its land, and a large portion of its Christian population. But the Armenian Christians, residing in Asia, were conspicuously absent from the abundance of European Christian gains in the treaty. This was not for lack of trying. Travelling to Italy, France, and Britain in advance of the conference in Berlin, a delegation of Armenians had undertaken their first major act of international "high" diplomacy," asking for "European-guaranteed reforms,"<sup>732</sup> the maintenance of Article 16 as well as "the granting of administrative autonomy to the Western Armenian provinces."<sup>733</sup> Despite their peaceful campaigning, however, the Great Powers granted them only a tepid promise that the Porte would carry out the necessary reforms and improvements. Article 16 of the Treaty of San Stefano became Article 61 of the Treaty of Berlin, which read as follows:

The Sublime Porte undertakes to carry out, without further delay, the ameliorations and reforms demanded by local requirements in the regions inhabited by the Armenians, and to guarantee their security against the Circassians and the Kurds. It will periodically

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<sup>732</sup> Ibid.,168.

<sup>733</sup> Libaridian, "The Ideology of Armenian Liberation,"149-152.



make known the steps taken to this effect to the powers, who will superintend their application.<sup>734</sup>

Still, despite the vague language, many Armenians saw this as a victory, and as a means of bringing important international attention to their struggle.<sup>735</sup> For them, Article 61 officially catapulted the Armenian issue into the international arena as never before. The “Armenian Question” was no longer the Armenians’ concern alone.

Other Armenians, however, saw Article 61 as a profound disappointment. Feeling empty-handed and resentful, the leader of the Armenian delegation to Berlin, Mkritch Khrimian, whom we met earlier in this chapter during his time as Patriarch in Constantinople, gave a famous sermon upon his return to the Ottoman capital in 1878, in which he employed the metaphor of the “iron ladle” to encourage the use of force as a means of inspiring European intervention. As Razmik Panossian sums it up, “Khrimian spoke metaphorically of the ‘dish of liberty’ from which Serbs and Bulgarians served themselves using ‘iron ladles’ (weapons and force). Armenians went to get their fill, but they only had ‘paper ladles’ (petitions and promises), which dissolved and were useless to serve liberty.” The message was clear: “in order to obtain freedom, arms had to be used.”<sup>736</sup> But Khrimian didn’t offer a practical application for his sentiments, and his Armenian contemporaries continued to debate the merits between “autonomy and independence, force and diplomacy, revolt and self defense.”<sup>737</sup> Most liberal Armenians at this stage remained committed to the idea of reform *within* the empire, not violent revolution to shake it off entirely: in other words, to establishing “equality of

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<sup>734</sup> Quoted in Laycock, *Imagining Armenia*, 44.

<sup>735</sup> Libaridian, “The Ideology of Armenian Liberation,” 151.

<sup>736</sup> Panossian, *The Armenians*, 172.

<sup>737</sup> Libaridian, “The Ideology of Armenian Liberation,” 168.

individuals, representative government, constitutional rule, intellectual enlightenment, [and] secularization of politics” as *Ottomans*.<sup>738</sup> But Khrimian’s message, and the ensuing debates, galvanized existing currents of Armenian nationalism and planted the seeds for formalized Armenian revolutionary movements to eventually emerge in the late 1880s and early 1890s (to which we will turn later in the chapter). As Donald Bloxham notes, however, “since nationalism was being expressed ubiquitously [in the empire]...it is probable that Armenian political nationalism would have found expression irrespective of the extent of the Armenian plight in the eastern provinces. The parties certainly desired reform, but their version of reform was not just a desire for equality and security but for a very specific form of national status.”<sup>739</sup>

Indeed, for those in power, too, the pursuit of national status and nationalist goals would in many ways dictate the empire’s path for the remainder of its existence. With the loss of significant Christian populated-territories and the redistribution of half a million Muslim refugees into the remaining Ottoman lands, the Ottoman government also moved towards more pan-Islamic (and later, Turkish) concepts of organizing the empire, moving away, in this regard, from the reformist doctrines of religious equality that they had articulated for most of the century. Marc Baer calls this “proto-Muslim nationalism” the Ottomans’ “new formula for saving the empire.”<sup>740</sup> As part and parcel of this transition, the Ottoman government sought to create “religious conformity” even amongst its diverse Muslim populations, many of which believed in different strains and practices of Islam. The regime’s actions in this regard, which

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<sup>738</sup> Panossian, *The Armenians*, 149.

<sup>739</sup> Bloxham, *Great Game of Genocide*, 50.

<sup>740</sup> Baer, *The Ottomans*, 367. For more on the rise of Islamic, Ottoman, and Turkish nationalism, see Hasan Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

included the creation of specific schools and curricula, were, as Baer interprets it, “similar to the Americanization of Native Americans” in the American West.<sup>741</sup> While these efforts were not particularly successful, they were representative of a conservative government increasingly looking to homogenize its population.

These Islamicizing decisions were driven in large part by the reigning sultan, Abdulhamid II (r. 1876-1909) who, over the course his rule, became an increasingly autocratic, paranoid, and violent leader who felt continuously threatened by the specter of foreign intervention. While at the start of his reign in late 1876 he was amenable to the new Ottoman parliament and constitution – and the language of equality that went along with it – after just one year he “turned into a dictator” and in short order succeed in “suspending the constitution, murdering its author, dissolving parliament, arresting the opposition including members of parliament, jailing journalists, and exercising personal control over the empire.”<sup>742</sup> Over the years, Abdulhamid’s authoritarian tendencies eventually led to the justification of what Gerard Libaridian calls “state terrorism”<sup>743</sup> and the exploitation of *existing* corrupt practices into “tools of repression.”<sup>744</sup> For example, the sultan “encouraged” the nomadic Muslim Kurds to escalate their existing exploits, to “prey on Armenian villages, a policy of aggression which... constituted the deepest source of immediate discontent for rural Armenians; normal life was constantly disrupted by largely unpunished brigandage, looting, kidnappings, rape, and murders.”<sup>745</sup> Muslim refugees from newly-independent or Russian-occupied territories who had been

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<sup>741</sup> Baer, *The Ottomans*, 369.

<sup>742</sup> Ibid., 363.

<sup>743</sup> Libaridian, “The Ideology of Armenian Liberation,” 136.

<sup>744</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>745</sup> Ibid., 179.

resettled in the Eastern provinces also exploited the local Armenians, frequently taking their land for their own use. Even before Abdulhamid's reign, such conditions had begun to carry more political significance. Urban Armenians in Constantinople, for example, had been introduced to the reality of life in the provinces through the influx of migrants (*pandukhts*) from villages in Armenia in the 1860s and 70s, people who served as a "living testimony to the conditions in Armenia" and thereby "awakened in the hearts and minds of the bourgeois and cosmopolitan Armenians in the capital an awareness, and even a concern" for the provinces that "for a long time had been neglected, if not actually ignored."<sup>746</sup> Activist intellectuals like Khrimian were also "were instrumental in situating Armenia — the actual Armenian provinces of the Ottoman interior — on the map of nationalist thinking. They perceived the homeland not only as the subject of liberation, but also as its agent and contributor."<sup>747</sup> In short, for Constantinopolitan Armenians like Oscanyan (even in diaspora), as nationalist frameworks hardened owing to the separatist victories of the Treaty of Berlin and Abdulhamid's increasingly autocratic rule, Armenian political consciousness became less and less focused on the "abstract [Armenian] cultural identity that revolved around language and religion" that we saw in the 1830s-60s and more and more focused on the historic Armenian provinces themselves: on having and liberating a national homeland.<sup>748</sup>

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<sup>746</sup> Panossian, *The Armenians*, 161; quoting Hagop Barsoumian, "The Eastern Question and the Tanzimat Era," in Richard G. Hovannisian (ed.), *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times, Vol 2: Foreign Dominion to Statehood: The Fifteenth Century to the Twentieth Century* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 175–201, at 191; Derderian, "Voices from Ottoman Van"; Yaşar Tolga Cora, Dzovinar Derderian, and Ali Sipahi (eds.), *The Ottoman East in the Nineteenth Century: Societies, Identities and Politics* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016).

<sup>747</sup> Panossian, *The Armenians*, 173-174.

<sup>748</sup> Antaramian, *Brokers of Faith*, 124-125.

Thus, while the Berlin Congress of 1878 and its aftermath does not explain Oscanyan's political shift in 1877, it does provide a necessary context for understanding why, from this time onwards, Oscanyan's diplomatic efforts in the U.S. were undertaken *exclusively* on behalf of the Armenian community. Moving into the 1880s, Oscanyan would still write about the Ottoman empire and its many regions and people, but he would do so in a more personalized and memorial way, offering accounts of Turkey's *past*, rather than its *future*. He was no longer providing instruction in service of building a present or future U.S.-Ottoman relationship.<sup>749</sup> Instead, he was placing the empire strictly in the annals of history and affirming Islam as the enemy of Christianity and the entire "civilized world."<sup>750</sup> Between 1879 and 1887, he wrote at least eleven longer-form pieces to these ends for *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly*. Topics ranged from those we have seen repeatedly such as "The Armenians" and "Circassia and the Circassians," to new themes such as "Lebanon and its Inhabitants" and profiles of figures brought to fame by the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78. It was in these latter pieces in particular that Oscanyan used the voice of the memoirist. In "Osman Pasha, of Plevna," for example, he celebrated the eponymous Ottoman war hero and relayed an amusing personal encounter with

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<sup>749</sup> An 1885 piece titled "A Royal Tragedy in Turkey" detailed the drama around the deposition of the two sultans in 1876 in the manner of a short story. The title indicated that it was from "Advanced Sheets of a Work on Turkey," a work that Oscanyan never finished but which the essay suggests he may have written as a storyteller and memoirist rather than an aspiring diplomat seeking to cultivate a mutually beneficial relationship between the Ottomans and the Americans. See Christopher Oscanyan, "A Royal Tragedy in Turkey," *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly* [New York], October 1885; XX, 4.

<sup>750</sup> See for example, Christopher Oscanyan, "Soudan and its Complications," *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly* [New York], March 1884, XVII, 3: "From this summary statement of facts the reader will at once perceive that the nature of the great question of the day is... a conflict between Christian civilization and Mohammedan barbarism... The hatred of the Mohammedan against the Christian and against civilization is innate and irrepressible. This hydra-headed monster will ever raise its head at the slightest provocation, and under the least pretext, to devour all that may come in its way. If at times quiet, it lies dormant, and not dead, ever dreaming of Alhambra and the walls of Vienna, and of over-running one day the civilized world."

the hero's father and a bottle of *raki*.<sup>751</sup> He opened this story with the unabashed phrasing of memoir, writing, "If my memory serves me right, I think it was in the Summer of '49..."<sup>752</sup> In a subsequent essay, "Suleiman Pasha, of Shipka Pass," he likewise wrote about another "character" who was known to him personally; as he wrote, "Suleiman Pasha is well known to the writer." He continued, "The writer, being at the time Fethi Pasha's private secretary, had occasion to come in constant contact with Suleiman Bey, and became very intimate with him. We used to visit at each other's houses in a queer way; he having the privilege to see the writer's family and dine with them, whereas I could not see his wife nor dine with her – not because he was jealous of me, but because his wife, according to Mussulman code, could not appear to one who was proscribed by the Koran without losing self-respect."<sup>753</sup> He later relayed an encounter between Suleiman and his own son:

Once he entered into an argument with my son, then a mere lad, who was decrying the barbarous conduct of a certain Turk, when Suleiman took him to task, saying:

"Why do you run the Turks down? You yourself are a Turk, too."

"Indeed I am not," was the prompt reply made by the boy.

"Indeed you are," retorted Suleiman Bey. "You were born in this country, and your father is a Turk by virtue of his nativity. So, you being his son, are a Turk also."

The lad, being nonplussed by the force of logic, remarked, in despair:

"I don't care; I am not a Turk, because I was not baptized by a Turkish priest."

Suleiman Bey was highly amused at the expression used by the child, because Mussulmans have no such ceremony as baptism, and their clergy are called *imams*, and not priests. But he good-naturedly said:

"You are right, my boy; religion constitutes nationality in the East."<sup>754</sup>

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<sup>751</sup> Christopher Oscanyan, "Osman Pasha, of Plevna," *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly* [New York], December 1881, XII, 6.

<sup>752</sup> Ibid.

<sup>753</sup> Oscanyan, "Suleiman Pasha."

<sup>754</sup> Ibid.

By 1887, Oscanyan's views on national dominion had decidedly shifted from those expressed in his remembrance of this 1840s conversation. To this end, his views on Greece and the Greeks had evolved considerably from the days of the *Oriental and Turkish Museum* (1854), *The Sultan and His People* (1857), and the *United States and Turkey* (1868). While he scoffed at the idea of Greek self-government in 1868, for example, his view in 1887 showed a decisive acceptance of nationalist self-rule, including by the Greeks. He also embraced his own move from an imperial subject to an aspiring national citizen. He ended a piece called "When Greek Meets Turk" with the following unequivocal statement: "*Nationalité satisfaite*" [nationality satisfied] has become a fixed principle in politics, which will be observed in the case of Greece, and her claims will be admitted sooner or later."<sup>755</sup>

Oscanyan's other entertaining pursuits at this time also framed Turkey as a place in the past. Sometime in the late 1880s, for example, Oscanyan worked to develop the libretto for a satirical comic opera named "The Sultana; or, the Lily of the Mountain." The score was written by his friend and fellow New York Press Club member, Francesco Franciulli, an Italian-American who emigrated to the United States in 1876 and, in 1892, would replace John Philip Sousa as director of the United States Marine Band.<sup>756</sup> The Sultana's plot, in two acts, was based in a timeless, fantastical Turkey; it was not an evocation of a country with which to develop a diplomatic relationship. *The Sultana* told the story of "a very beautiful girl named Leila," held in the possession of Circassian slave dealers, who had been "chosen for the sultan's harem." One

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<sup>755</sup> Christopher Oscanyan, "When Greek Meets Turk," *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly* [New York], January 1887; XXIII, 1.

<sup>756</sup> The New York Press Club was founded in 1873. Multiple sources say that Oscanyan once served as president, but a history of the Club doesn't include his name as one of the presidents: William H. Freeman, *The Press Club of Chicago; a History with Sketches of Other Prominent Press Clubs of the United States* (Chicago: Press Club of Chicago, 1894), Available at <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001013152> (Accessed November 25, 2022).

day, a “wealthy young man” saw her and fell in love with her. To kidnap her and make her his, he joined a band of Zeybeks [irregular military] “but in some manner an old veiled hag [was] obtained instead.” But all’s well that ends well: Leila “turn[ed] out to be the sultan’s own daughter” so she was able to marry the “wealthy young wooer” amidst festivities and a “grand ballet.”<sup>757</sup> Songs like “Circassia Forever!” and the Sultan’s four wives singing in unison: “You’re right, it is exultin’/To think that our dear Sultan/Is the Boss of the Bos-phor-us!/For you are the Boss, the Boss, Boss, Boss/For you are the Boss for us! (All dance.)” all evoke classic Oscanyan tropes of engaging an American audience, but through yet another new genre.<sup>758</sup> Astute readers will also remember that one of Oscanyan’s Circassian slaves in his Civil-War era Turkish shows was named Lelila. *The Sultana*, however, was never produced.<sup>759</sup>

In the 1880s, Oscanyan’s political activities likewise positioned Turkey as a country where Armenians could not have a viable future. By 1885, Oscanyan was robustly encouraging Armenian immigration to America. In that year, Oscanyan wrote the aforementioned article on “The Armenians” for *Frank Leslie’s Popular Monthly* about a “novel gathering” that had recently taken place in Brooklyn in which “seventy natives of Armenia” had met to hear a lecture “in

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<sup>757</sup> “Musical Matters,” *Plain Dealer* [Cleveland], July 27, 1890.

<sup>758</sup> Francesco Franciulli, “Maid of Paradise Libretto,” The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, at 6.

<sup>759</sup> At some point, presumably after Oscanyan’s death in 1895, the story/show was revised by Thomas Chrystal. Renamed “The Maid of Paradise,” the new plot catered more fully to an American audience: Chrystal changed the beautiful slave girl from being the Sultan’s own daughter, to being an American girl from New York who is visiting Turkey and is kidnapped in order to satisfy the Sultan’s desire for a new (fifth) wife. Added songs included: “Working Girls’ Song” and “The Girl from the U.S.A.” This version of the comic opera was not produced either. Franciulli’s score for *The Maid of Paradise*, as well as the Chrystal’s libretto for *The Maid of Paradise* and Oscanyan’s libretto for *The Sultana*, are available at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, \*MNX Amer (librettos) and \*MNZ Amer (score). I am most grateful to Joseph Rubin for his help in locating and analyzing these materials, as well as Nailah Holmes for her months-long support of my scan requests during the pandemic. Selections from *The Sultana* are currently being filmed and recorded by members of the New York Gilbert and Sullivan Players at the NYU Kevorkian Center.



their own vernacular,” as well as sing in their “native dialect and air.”<sup>760</sup> The entire affair was conducted to encourage Armenian immigration to America so other Armenians could “enjoy the blessings which [America] afforded.”<sup>761</sup> The speaker, Oscanyan noted, “said there were over six hundred Armenians scattered through the States, and he hoped that this number would multiply and become as numerous as other races. The Americans were a kind-hearted people, and loved all who were industrious and sober; therefore the Armenians were just the people to suit their peculiarities, and would on that account gain their affection and sympathy, and would soon prosper.”<sup>762</sup> The meeting was also held to establish a “social union” of Armenians in the area, as a means of taking a “concerted action in the regeneration of their compatriots,” and showing them “an opening against Turkish tyranny and persecution.”<sup>763</sup> The Union seems to have been established by the following year, in 1886.<sup>764</sup> In his overview, Oscanyan reported that the success of this first meeting was deemed “encouraging.”<sup>765</sup>

To educate his non-Armenian audience, Oscanyan followed the summary of the meeting with a lengthy account of the Armenians’ “past and present condition,” as well as the “motives of the presence of some of them in our midst.”<sup>766</sup> What followed was in many ways verbatim from texts such as the Oriental and Turkish Museum catalogue and *The Sultan and His People*. And in some ways, it had been radically changed. One key difference was that in 1885,

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<sup>760</sup> Christopher Oscanyan, “The Armenians,” *Frank Leslie’s Popular Monthly* [New York], March 1885, XIX, 3.

<sup>761</sup> Ibid.

<sup>762</sup> Ibid.

<sup>763</sup> Ibid.

<sup>764</sup> In his *Azadoutioun (Freedom) National Newspaper*, Oscanyan wrote, “Every Armenian national is cordially invited to attend this event and join the members of the Union to honor the memory of an immortal Armenian hero and to celebrate the 4<sup>th</sup> year of the Union.” See: “Official Announcement – Armenian Union in New York,” *Azadoutioun* [New York], No. 37, March 8, 1890.

<sup>765</sup> “The Armenians,” *Frank Leslie’s Popular Monthly*.

<sup>766</sup> Ibid.

Oscanyan no longer separated *Turks* from *Osmanlis*. In 1857 -- after describing the “cruelties” the Turks “committed on the inhabitants” of the lands they conquered -- he wrote that “the Osmanlis of the present day regard the very name of Turk opprobrious, as it reminds them of former barbarities.”<sup>767</sup> In 1885, however, he kept the description of the cruelties, verbatim, but removed the disclaimer about the Osmanlis of the present day. For Oscanyan, there was no longer a distinction to be made between the two.

In 1889, a similar meeting was held in Hoboken, New Jersey, over which Oscanyan presided; he was by this point the clear patriarch of a growing Armenian-American community. Nearly two hundred of about three hundred Armenians in New Jersey attended the gathering to “consider the condition of their brothers in Armenia and to show their practical sympathy for the condition of things in their native land.”<sup>768</sup> Many of the attendees worked in silk mills. At the end of the meeting, “subscriptions were taken to aid the suffering Armenians” and “the coat of arms of Armenia under its last King, Leo VI, was shown.” This coat of arms contained “blue and red flags, above which Mount Ararat [was] represented and below a female figure representing the mother of the country.”<sup>769</sup> The attendees also listened to the reading of a statement written by a member of the British Parliament, James Bryce, in response to a note of gratitude some Hoboken Armenians had previously sent him for his sympathy for the Armenian cause.

Also in 1889, Oscanyan started an Armenian-language newspaper in New York, the *Azadoutioun* (Freedom) National Newspaper. Its slogan was “The Price of Freedom is Blood

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<sup>767</sup> Oscanyan, *The Sultan and His People*, 351.

<sup>768</sup> “Armenians Aroused,” *The New York Times* [New York], October 7, 1889.

<sup>769</sup> Ibid.

Alone.” The image on the header of the newspaper featured the same coat of arms imagery that was shown at the Armenian meeting in Hoboken (Image Y). There are only three extant issues of the newspaper, all from March 1890. Their contents reveal a community distraught by the treatment of Armenians in Turkey, especially the escalation of the grievances mentioned earlier – e.g. targeted attacks and mistreatment by Circassians and Kurds, often supported by the Ottoman state itself.

For Oscanyan, the solution to this problem now lay in a free Armenia, an Armenia liberated from persecution the way other Christian nations had been liberated over the course of the nineteenth century. Oscanyan’s language of liberation through violence if necessary directly mirrored the rhetoric of newly-emerging formal Armenian revolutionary parties, especially the Hnchakian Revolutionary Party, which was established in Geneva in 1887 by a group of young Russian Armenian students, and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (usually called the Tashnags/Dashnaks), which was founded in Tiflis (Tbilisi) in 1890. These parties, according to Donald Bloxham, “signified the end of organized Armenian pressure for *evolutionary* change in the Ottoman empire.”<sup>770</sup> The first flier of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, for example – which would become the “most significant [Armenian] revolutionary-political party”<sup>771</sup> — “declared its intention to ‘fight until its last drop of blood for the liberation of the fatherland.’”<sup>772</sup> This, of course, expressed a similar sentiment to Oscanyan’s contemporaneous newspaper slogan, “The Price of Freedom is Blood Alone.”

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<sup>770</sup> Bloxham, *Great Game of Genocide*, 50. Emphasis mine.

<sup>771</sup> Panossian, *The Armenians*, 206.

<sup>772</sup> Bloxham, *Great Game of Genocide*, 50.

While the exact nature of “liberation” varied between parties and philosophies, all revolutionaries believed that any liberation could not be achieved without the help of others. Organized Armenian liberation groups collectively held an “expectation that European (imperial) forces ought to—and therefore will—liberate Armenia(ns) from the Ottoman yoke.”<sup>773</sup> Even Oscanyan, who had previously lost faith in the European powers’ ability to abandon their selfish interests and effectively intervene, now once again believed that if Armenians were able to raise awareness among the “enlightened people of America and Europe,”<sup>774</sup> these nations would be inspired to effect Armenia’s “Independence and Freedom from the barbaric government.”<sup>775</sup> At this stage of his life, it was through his newspaper that he felt best equipped to sound such an alarm. In the following analysis, I will assume that Oscanyan, as editor in chief, penned the anonymous editorials in question, especially as they evoke ideas and turns of phrase that we have seen him proclaim elsewhere.

In his paper, Oscanyan spoke in the same terms of indelible and insurmountable religious distinctions between Christians and Muslims that he had started using during the Russo-Turkish War (terms that had long been utilized by American missionaries, policymakers, and other American publics). These terms were also a way of revising the language of Christian diplomacy that he utilized briefly in the 1830s when he sought to encourage Christian Americans to support the education of Christian Armenians. Now, he employed a vocabulary and paradigm of Christian humanitarianism in which Christian Armenians were physically suffering at the hands of their Muslim rulers. In an editorial titled “The Free Press,” for example,

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<sup>773</sup> Panossian, *The Armenians*, 189. Emphasis in original.

<sup>774</sup> “The Free Press,” *Azadoutioun* [New York], No. 37, March 8, 1890.

<sup>775</sup> “Telegram Sent from London,” *Azadoutioun* [New York], No. 38, March 15, 1890.

Oscanyan explained that while the Armenian Patriarch in Constantinople had recently tried to remedy the situation of the Armenians by sending an “ultimatum to the Sublime Porte demanding that the persecution be stopped and that the terms of Article 61 of Congress of Berlin be implemented immediately,” such action, he believed, would ultimately amount to nothing: “Expecting the implementation of such terms in an Islamic state, without coercion, is impossible,” he wrote. The reason? Because an Islamic state bases its laws on the Quran, and the Quran teaches and demands that “true believers” must “seek, find and kill the disbelievers.” For this reason, he wrote, “persecuting Christians has been the main policy of the Turks” and Armenians continued to be persecuted because they were Christians who had not yet received their liberation the way other Christian nations had over the course of the nineteenth century.<sup>776</sup> “The tragedies of Armenians,” he continued, would only be removed “if Enlightened Europe becomes aware of our sufferings.”<sup>777</sup>

In the same editorial, Oscanyan also made two significant references to popular American themes (beyond the free press) to legitimize his political arguments. He opened the piece, for example, by asking why the Armenians were deprived of the “right to live and pursue happiness” that belonged to every person – the well-known claim of the Declaration of Independence. Later in the editorial, he evoked America’s “savages” – not, as we might expect, to compare their eradication and persecution to that of the indigenous Armenians, but rather to use them as an example of what would happen to Turks if they persisted in their barbarism. “Turks have this inner conviction that by persecuting us they can annihilate us,” he wrote, “but

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<sup>776</sup> “The Free Press,” *Azadoutioun* .

<sup>777</sup> Ibid.

let us remind them of the example of the end of America's savages. As they were wiped out due to their savage conduct, the Turks, instead of erasing us, will erase themselves because of their own barbarism, for those who have such vicious ideas have no reason to exist [*raison d'être*]." It was "the enlightened people of America and Europe" who would execute this eradication once they were "fully aware of the essence of the matter." And it was up to "the free press and the efforts of patriotic people" to make them aware: to pursue "the task of waking up the enlightened people."<sup>778</sup>

Oscanyan, it is clear, believed in the power of public opinion. He even penned an editorial on the subject in which he argued quite optimistically that "the world is led by ideas" and that public opinion was having a greater and greater influence on political beliefs because "it is human nature to acknowledge what is right, to alleviate violence and resist monarchy." Indeed, even "supreme powers are obliged to respect and humbly kneel before" public opinion's "irresistible power." A weak state like the Ottoman Empire, he claimed, in "always adhering to their barbarism and religious fanaticism, without consulting public opinion, which supports justice and humanism" was doomed.<sup>779</sup> Again, then, he made the case for enlightening an American audience: "when they get informed," he wrote, "they will definitely sympathize with us by sending a reporter to Armenia and thus expanding the perimeter of the public opinion." He concluded by asking the "Armenian immigrants here" to "do their duty" by spreading information to the American people, in particular by distributing issues of the paper "nationwide."<sup>780</sup>

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<sup>778</sup> Ibid.

<sup>779</sup> "Public Opinion," *Azadoutioun* [New York], No. 39, March 20, 1890.

<sup>780</sup> Ibid.

While Oscanyan's political vision had in many ways come to fixate on seeing only a Muslim/Christian binary, his feelings towards the Ottomans writ large remained complicated, subtle, and capacious. For example, in his paper Oscanyan expressed gladness that news they had received previously of the death of Sultan Murat V (r. 1876), whom we will recall from his deposition earlier in the chapter, was in fact false. "In view of the disputes that we have with the Turkish government," he wrote, "Turks may find this sincere expression of compassion as deceitful sarcasm, but they are sorely mistaken about it." He explained:

We, who have the honor of personally knowing Sultan Murat, do not hesitate to affirm that his majesty shines through extraordinary humanity - agreeable and gentle, humane and sensitive in nature. With these qualities he was loved by everyone and when he accidentally came to the throne, the people's heart was filled with joy. So it is no surprise that we were saddened when we heard the news of his death and expressed our condolences. We will extend the same condolences to all who have the same qualities, regardless of their social status or religious differences.

This is incomprehensible to a Turk because he is such a prejudiced being who observes everything in religious terms and measures it in a religious way. How can we expect compassion from the Turk, when he forbids strangers from attending a funeral service with blind fanaticism? Being a liberal and Christian nation, we do not hesitate in showing our reverence and expressing compassion when needed.

Certainly, we express enmity towards the Turks to the point of hatred, but our enmity is neither personal nor social; it is political. Turks have persistently persecuted and exterminated Christians and we will certainly oppose this Turkish conduct. Will we be accused of not giving the pleasure of being slaughtered or sacrificed for fanaticism?

So, "Should we remain silent?"<sup>781</sup>

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<sup>781</sup> "Sultan Murat V," *Azadoutioun* [New York], No. 39, March 20, 1890. Oscanyan was here referencing the song "Shall We Be Silent?" by Raphael Patkanian (1830-1892) which expresses the following sentiment: "Shall we be silent, brothers? Shall we be silent still? Our foe has set against our breasts His sword, that thirsts to kill; His ears are deaf to cries and groans. O brothers, make a vow! What shall we do? What is our part? Shall we keep silence now?"

Four years later, in the summer of 1894, Ottoman soldiers did indeed murder Armenians at a scale they had never done before, killing thousands in a town called Sasun in the eastern provinces. Accounts of what, exactly, occurred and how many Armenians were killed are varied, but historians posit that anywhere from a few thousand to ten thousand Armenians were massacred by soldiers sent by the Ottoman sultan in response to skirmishes between local Armenian farmers and Kurdish tribal nomads.”<sup>782</sup>

Oscanyan was outraged. From his sick-room, where he seems to have spent at least the last year of his life, Oscanyan “issued an address to his Armenian compatriots, on the subject of the recent massacres in that country,” which would be delivered on his behalf at a meeting of the Armenians at Cooper Union. The *New York Recorder* called Oscanyan the “Patriarch of the Armenian Colony in America,” and reported that he “called on America to Avenge the Turkish Outrages.” Armenia’s “Only Hope,” they wrote, “is the United States.” Oscanyan closed his address with the following: “The utter extinction of a power so barbarous, inhuman and relentless as Turkey all through history has shown itself to be, would be a blessing to the world. I may not see that glad day, nor may you, my brothers but pray God our children shall see it. It is written in the decrees that the slayer of women and children, the arch-enemy of religious freedom, the foe that has sworn to extinguish Christianity, and the most dissolute and degraded power that has ever disgraced the face of the earth, will disappear, crushed and obliterated by a strong, humane and just civilization.

“Heaven speed the day!”

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<sup>782</sup> On the Sasun massacres, see especially Owen Miller, “Rethinking the Violence in the Sasun Mountains (1893-1894),” *Études arméniennes contemporaines*, 10 (2018), 97-123. Also, Ann Marie Wilson, “In the Name of God, Civilization, and Humanity: The United States and the Armenian Massacres of the 1890s,” *Le Mouvement social* No. 227 (2009), 27-44, at 29; Laderman, *Sharing the Burden*, 12.



"OSCANYAN."<sup>783</sup>

Christopher Oscanyan died of pneumonia on August 1, 1895 and was buried in Staten Island. His tomb, an obelisk, has separated from its base. It reads only OSCANYAN in Armenian letters (Image Z).

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<sup>783</sup> "Oscanyan's Cry for Aid," *New York Recorder* [New York], November 22, 1894.

## Epilogue

### Humanitarian Engagement (1894-1919)

Oscanyan wrote his letter at the outset of what has since become known as the Hamidian Massacres (1894-96), named so after the reigning Ottoman Sultan Abdulhamid II.<sup>784</sup> Over three years, these massacres killed between 100,000 and 200,000 Armenians and expressed the sultan's new "policy of terror against the Armenians," in which he sought to punish "an entire community for the political transgressions of a few."<sup>785</sup> This not only signaled a change within the empire itself, however. With the Hamidian Massacres began a new era of *American* engagement with the Ottoman Empire – an engagement that Oscanyan would not see, but that his work certainly foreshadowed.

Starting in late summer and fall of 1894, in the run-up to Oscanyan's sick-bed letter, widespread news coverage of the Sasun massacres outraged the American public. The American public's response to these massacres, and the massacres to come, also occurred right as "elected officials began to reconsider the role the federal government might play in channeling the humanitarian energies of the citizenry." As Ann Marie Wilson, Charlie Laderman, and others argue, the Hamidian massacres were in fact the "signal episode" in this transformation. While for most of the century, as we have seen throughout this thesis, "American efforts to assist or intervene in the troubles of distant peoples remained sporadic,

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<sup>784</sup> For more on the Hamidian Massacres as well as the American response, see Peter Balakian, "Part 1: The Emergence of International Human Rights in America: The Armenian Massacres in the 1890s," in *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America's Response* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2004), 3-132; Karine Walther, "Chapter 7: The United States and the Armenian Massacres, 1894-96," in *Sacred Interests*, 241-270.

<sup>785</sup> Wilson, "In the Name of God," 29.

localized, and limited to private channels,” the 1890s saw a turn towards government-backed international humanitarianism that would make the United States look righteous on the world stage.<sup>786</sup> By January of 1896, compelled by public opinion, Congress even passed a joint resolution to call on the European powers to help the Armenians, their responsibility for whom had been established in the Treaty of Berlin.<sup>787</sup>

Public opinion had not been swayed in a vacuum, however. As Wilson argues, “the transformation of a little-known Ottoman minority into an international cause célèbre began in the writings and meeting rooms of Armenian immigrants and American missionaries.”<sup>788</sup> While, as we have seen throughout this thesis, these two groups were often at odds, their opposition to the new and extreme violence of the 1890s brought them together. Other activists, including ministers, suffragists, and journalists, also joined in the cause. Like Oscanian, most of these advocates “constru[ed] their project... as an effort to rescue "innocent Christians" from "fanatical Muslims" and “believed that they were defending "Christian civilization" from a "barbarous" other. In this way, “support for Armenia contributed to American self-understanding as a nation uniquely positioned to define, and to defend, civilization itself.”<sup>789</sup> Indeed Armenians were now lauded as ancient Christians with Biblical roots even by the American missionaries who once targeted them as “nominal Christians.” “Time and again,” Wilson notes, “Americans read in their newspapers that Noah's ark had once rested atop Mount Ararat... and that Armenian monarchy had been the first to adopt Christianity as its

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<sup>786</sup> Wilson, “In the Name of God,” 27.

<sup>787</sup> “Jan. 22, 1896.” U.S. Congress. Congressional Record. 54th Cong. 1896, Vol. 28: 854.

<sup>788</sup> Wilson, “In the Name of God,” 31.

<sup>789</sup> Ibid., 28-29.

official religion in 301 A.D.”<sup>790</sup> Advocates also racialized the Armenians in a way that boosted the image of their American supporters. Now commonly called the “Yankees of the Orient” -- a name quite similar to that used by Oscanian in his 1860 *Herald* column (“Yankees of the East”) as well as that employed by H.G.O Dwight in his 1854 text (“Anglo-Saxons of the East”) – the Armenians were linked with whiteness.<sup>791</sup> As Karine Walther argues,

During the Armenian Massacres, religious and political leaders and the press repeatedly relied on this depiction of Armenians as their “Anglo-Saxon” representatives in the Ottoman Empire. As the category of whiteness narrowed with the influx of immigrants from eastern and southern Europe to the United States, identifying Armenians as Anglo-Saxons conferred membership in this club of racial privilege and enhanced their already elevated status as Christians.<sup>792</sup>

In short, sympathetic Americans at this time underpinned their humanitarian feelings towards the Armenians with a belief in their shared commitment to (Anglo-Saxon) Christianity and (Anglo-Saxon) civilization. As early as the 1830s, Oscanian had been trying to make these very connections between Armenians and Americans. Long before the 1890s massacres, he argued that the Armenians’ Christianity, their industry, their ancient traditions, and their capacity for civilization made them particularly deserving of American attention and support. It was not until the rise of anti-Armenian mass violence, however – in conjunction with an American national turn towards positioning itself as “a more honorable defender of “humanity” than the European powers” – that Americans seemed to respond to the call. Ann Marie Wilson even calls this response a “*spectacle* of American humanitarianism on behalf of suffering Armenians,” meaning that it was in many ways the optics of morality that mattered more than

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<sup>790</sup> Ibid., 34-35.

<sup>791</sup> See for example, “Yankees of the Orient,” *Boston Daily Globe* [Boston], December 29, 1895. “Yankees of the Orient” was a moniker also applied to the Japanese and the Jews at different times. On “Anglo-Saxons of the East,” see Dwight, *Christianity in Turkey*, 14.

<sup>792</sup> Walther, *Sacred Interests*, 246.

the outcomes it produced.<sup>793</sup> This connection between spectacle, violence, the Armenians, and robust American humanitarianism was only to become clearer during the years of the Armenian genocide (1915-1923). There is much to be said of this event and U.S. engagement therewith, most of which lies beyond the scope of this conclusion. But it is worth exploring one component of the U.S-Armenian relationship during the genocide, as it involves an endeavor to which Oscanyan's work provides an instructive precursor and comparison.

In 1919, a foundation called The American Committee for Syrian and Armenian Relief (now the Near East Foundation) released a silent film titled *Ravished Armenia* in order to raise funds and awareness for the Armenians as part of a campaign that ultimately raised \$110 million for the cause; this is equivalent to \$1.25 billion today.<sup>794</sup> This film was based on the published testimony of Aurora Mardiganian in which she described the massacres, deportation, and rape that constituted her experience of the genocide (as well as that of many other Armenians).<sup>795</sup> As Leshu Torchin notes in her article on the relationship between *Ravished Armenia*, visual media, and humanitarian advocacy, the 17-year-old Mardiganian herself even starred in the movie "in a bid to both authenticity and sensationalism" – a combination we saw Oscanyan harness to represent Ottoman civilization, especially in the 1860s.<sup>796</sup> As a fundraising initiative, the film was a great success: it "enabled more immediate contact with suffering at a distance" which prompted in its audience "a sense of moral obligation to those overseas –

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<sup>793</sup> Wilson, *"In the Name of God,"* 43. Emphasis mine.

<sup>794</sup> See "History" of the Near East Foundation at <https://www.neareast.org/who-we-are/> (Accessed November 14, 2022).

<sup>795</sup> Aurora Mardiganian, *Ravished Armenia* (New York: Kingfield Press, 1918).

<sup>796</sup> Leshu Torchin, "Ravished Armenia: Visual Media, Humanitarian Advocacy, and the Formation of Witnessing Publics," *American Anthropologist* 108-1 (2006), 214-220, 214.

whether legally, politically, or charitably.”<sup>797</sup> It was also, as Torchin argues, a prime example of the “convergence of international humanitarian activism and entertainment media practices at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.”<sup>798</sup> Clearly, however, despite seeking to blend entertainment and activism in similar ways, *Ravished Armenia* was more successful than Oscanyan’s endeavors in meeting political goals on behalf of the Armenians of Turkey. Why?

The answer lies in the *purpose* of the professional ecosystems that supported these separate, albeit similar, endeavors. The extremity of the anti-Armenian violence in 1915-1919, the rise of American humanitarian intervention in the early twentieth century, and the civic context in which *Ravished Armenia* was screened – i.e. as part of “a wider consciousness-raising campaign that was designed to transform feeling into *immediate action*” – meant that American audiences of the film, unlike those of Oscanyan’s instructive entertainments, were both primed *and* directed in their political reaction.<sup>799</sup> As Torchin elaborates, “film-based campaigns... incorporated context and provided *direct action routes* in tandem with the film presentations.”<sup>800</sup>

Apart from isolated events such as his earliest fundraising lecture on behalf of the Armenians, and his lecture on behalf of the New York Medical College for Women (neither of which have left behind evidence of their impact), Oscanyan did not ask his audiences to take direct action. Rather, he asked them only to view and to be instructed. As we have seen, consuming instruction, or the semblance of instruction, was precisely not an action-generating

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<sup>797</sup> Torchin, “Ravished Armenia,” 215.

<sup>798</sup> Ibid., 214. Film was not the only form of humanitarian entertainment that American advocates employed during the genocide. I will address this larger entertainment network in a future project.

<sup>799</sup> Torchin, “Ravished Armenia,” 215. Emphasis mine.

<sup>800</sup> Ibid., 219. Emphasis mine.

endeavor; it was often an end in and of itself. Instruction satisfied or flattered the individual viewer while giving expert-purveyors like Oscanyan the authority, celebrity, and cultural capital to try to influence others. In many ways, instructive entertainment like Oscanyan's served the disseminator more than either the audience or the topic of the instruction itself.

*Ravished Armenia*, on the other hand, asked its audiences to *witness*; in particular, to witness as Christians. Unlike instruction, witness tasked the audience with feeling empathetic and connecting with subjects emotionally. A related action item – making a donation – then allowed them to put that empathy to use. Whether this dynamic better served the subject (in this case, the Armenians in need of aid) or the audience (in this case, Americans affiliating with morality and honor) is not of the essence. Rather, the point is that the act of witness centered the audience and the subject; instructive entertainment emphasized the performer.

While later-career Oscanyan and the film's creators shared tactics in representing their content, such as highlighting the "religious dimension of Turkish atrocities against Christians," they pursued these tactics in different ways and to different ends. For example, the creators of *Ravished Armenia*, unlike Oscanyan, sought to elicit "empathy by connection to a visual tradition of suffering in Christian iconography" such as the depiction of the crucifixion of Armenian women. The film was successful, then, "not only because visual images produced a moral obligation to act but because those images were part of a much larger global network of information and humanitarian concern constructed over time by Christian mission organizations."<sup>801</sup> The film also drew on "iconic tropes" of the Turkish harem and slave markets to "engage and stimulate [a] witnessing public while making legible (and palatable) a concept of

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<sup>801</sup> Ibid., 215.

distant suffering.”<sup>802</sup> While Oscanyan used these same tropes of the harem and Ottoman slavery to fortify his authority in conveying Ottoman civilization, he did not use them in service of Christian witness. Though his writing towards the end of his life was moving in this direction, he still operated by and large as an instructor: he sought to tell more than to show, to be an expert rather than one who evokes emotion.

In preceding these later humanitarian engagements, Oscanyan’s life and work, which we have seen throughout this thesis, offers us a pre-history of this moment in U.S.-Ottoman-Armenian foreign affairs. In so doing, Oscanyan’s failure to compel either private or government action thus underscores the success of these later endeavors. Oscanyan himself started to make use humanitarian language and appeals (and he no doubt would have been a film enthusiast!), but he remained until the end locked in the position of instructor, committed to the moral value of instruction and of others being instructed; as we saw in his 1890 column, for example, he still championed providing information to the American public as a means of swaying public opinion. He did not, however, compel the act of (Christian) *witness* that would activate public empathy and donations.

While encouraging American witness may have centered the Armenians in an important way, however, the mode in which Armenians were represented by films like *Ravished Armenia* was anything but multi-dimensional: the motifs of Christian suffering and the Turkish harem portrayed the Armenians either as hapless victims or as salacious spectacles. While this was effective in soliciting aid, it was perhaps no better at meeting Oscanyan’s original goals of

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<sup>802</sup> Ibid., 217.



forging true mutual understanding and diplomatic relations between equals. One has to wonder how anyone could achieve such an outcome.

In the end, Oscanyan's multifaceted, Ottoman imperial worldview was twice lost in translation: first, to the demands of an American audience and, later, to the exclusionary, zero-sum demands of Armenian nationalism and Christian humanitarianism. For most of his career, Oscanyan worked to convey complexity by expressing his complicated politics and trying repeatedly to get Americans to understand the Ottoman worldview – but these endeavors were all markedly unsuccessful. He was unable to build a U.S.-Ottoman relationship based on true mutual understanding and where he did succeed, there were clear limits to the nature of the diplomatic relationship that he produced. In the later years of his career, motivated by some combination of personal and political grievances, Oscanyan embraced the dominant American and European paradigm of Islam vs. Christianity that he had worked for decades to complicate. Through this act, he chose legibility over complexity as a means of securing his desired humanitarian outcomes.

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## Appendix 1: Illustrations

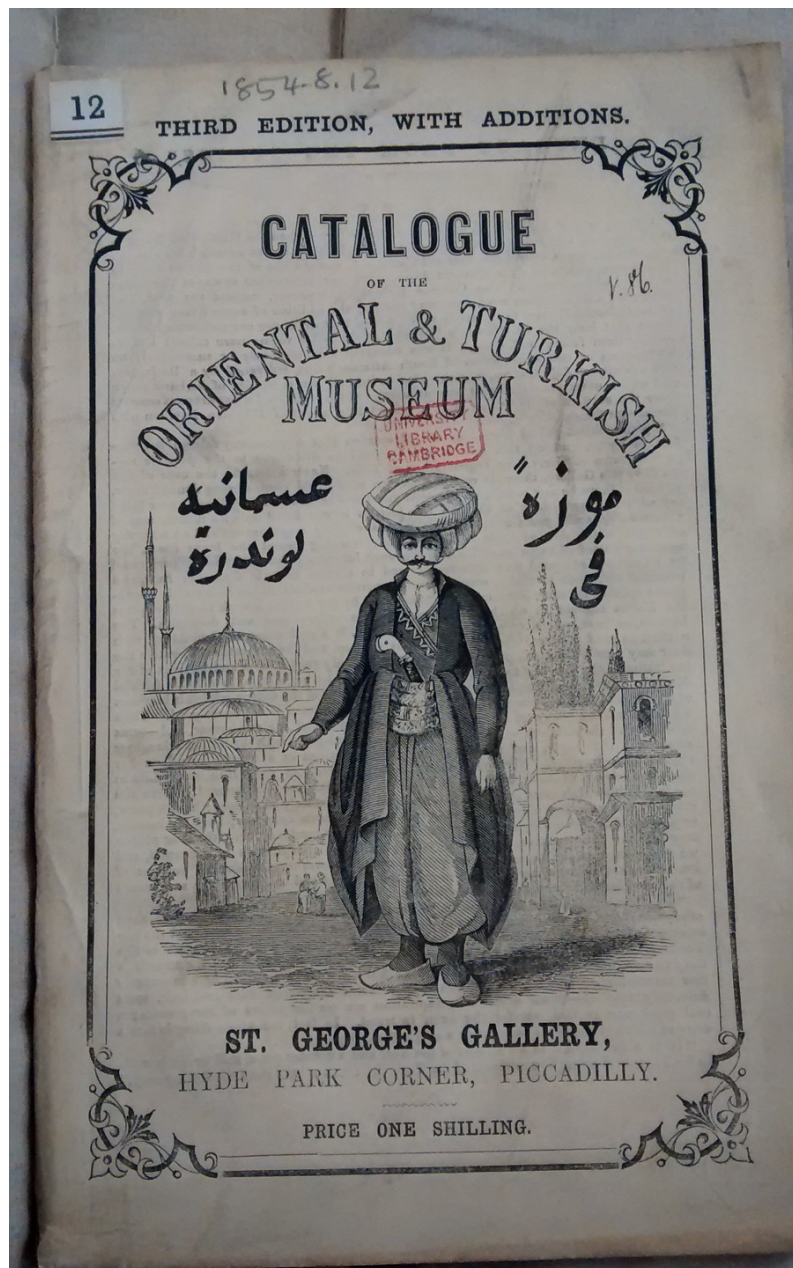
Image A: "The Costume of the Lower Classes," Oscanyan's Oriental Album (1863)



Image Courtesy of the George Eastman Museum



Image B: Oriental and Turkish Museum Catalogue Cover (1854)



University of Cambridge, Cambridge University Library

Image C: Oscanyon, The Turkish Lecturer (1856)

for commercial purposes with Bengal. The products of Europe and other foreign countries across the ocean will find their way by a con-



OSCANYON, THE TURKISH LECTURER.  
FROM AN AMBROTYPE BY BRADY.

tinuous water carriage to the shops and markets of the towns along

"Oscanyon, The Turkish Lecturer," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, February 23, 1856

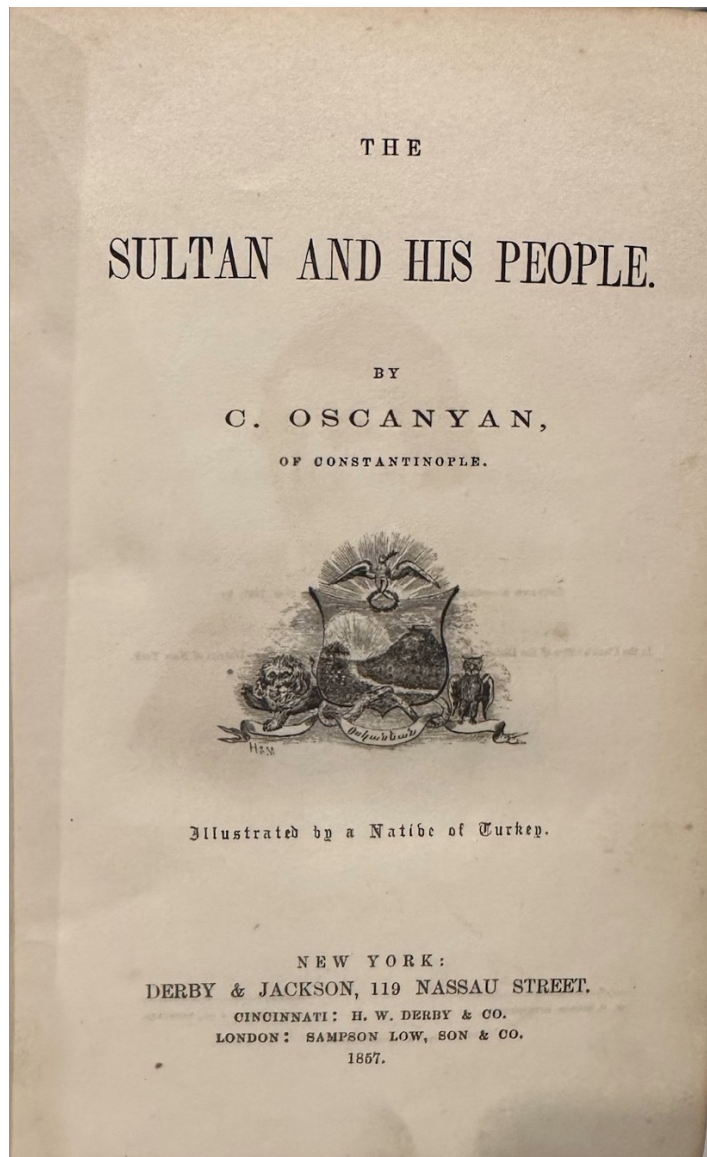


## Image D: Our Turkish Visitors (1858)



Oscanyan between the "Turkish Visitors" and Mayor Tiemann and others, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, March 20, 1858

Image E: Crest from *The Sultan and His People* (1857)

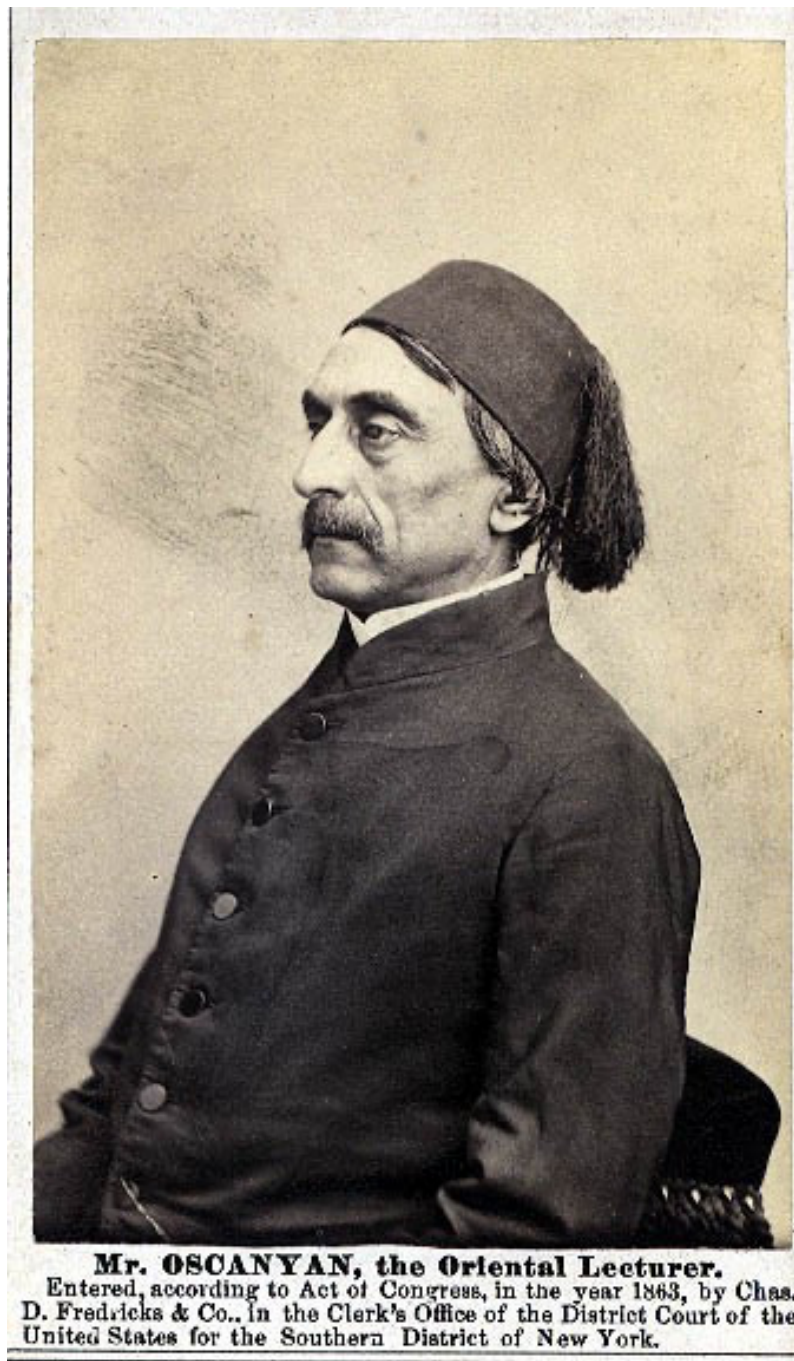


From the author's personal collection.



[illegible]

Image G: Mr. Oscanyan, the Oriental Lecturer, Carte de visite (1863)



**Mr. OSCANYAN, the Oriental Lecturer.**

Entered, according to Act of Congress, in the year 1863, by Chas. D. Fredricks & Co., in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States for the Southern District of New York.

From the author's personal collection.



Image H: Oriental Album Signature Page (1863)

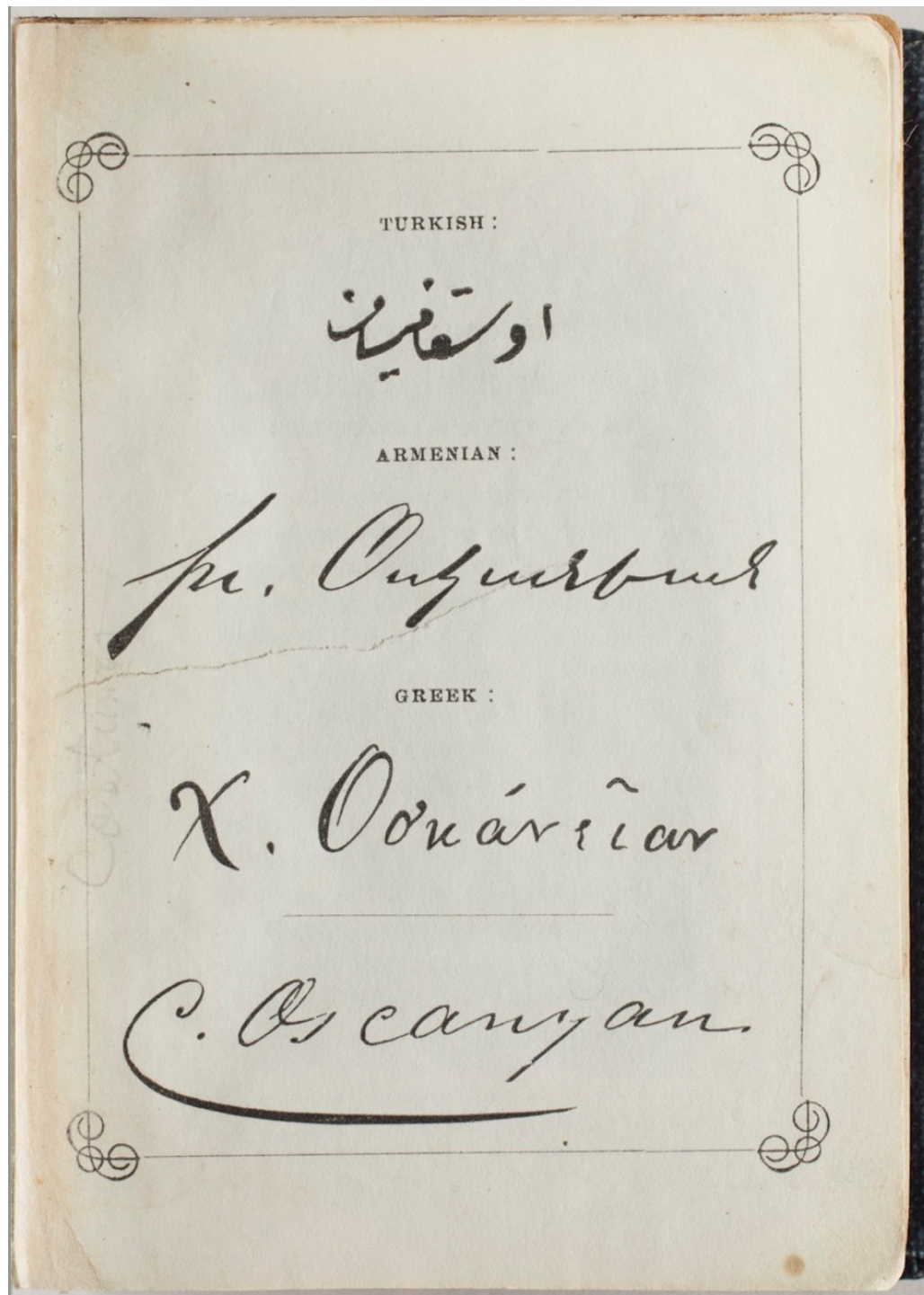


Image courtesy of the George Eastman Museum

**Image I: "The Egyptian Woman," Oscanyan's Oriental Album (1863)**



Image courtesy of the George Eastman Museum



Image J: "Egyptienne Voilee" (1790)



Ignace Mouradjea d'Ohsson *Tableau général de l'Empire Othoman*, Vol. 2, 1790

Image K: "Domestic Life in Turkey," Carte de visite (1863)



"Domestic Life in Turkey / As introduced at the Lectures on Turkey by Mr. Oscanyan."; note in pencil on back: "Dear Father please / accept this for your / book I selected it out / of a set of Turkish / ones because the / Lady looks so like / [illegible], every one is / struck with the / likeness / Bessie." From: Jeffrey family photographs, Box 1, Item 3, University of Kentucky: Link: <https://exploreuk.uky.edu/fa/findingaid/?id=xt7bk35mbp44>

Image L: "The Circassian Slave Girl," Oscanyan's Oriental Album (1863)



Image courtesy of the George Eastman Museum



Image M: "Slavery in Turkey," Oscanyan's Oriental Album (1863)



Image courtesy of the George Eastman Museum

Image N: "Oriental Baby and Nurse," Oscanyan's Oriental Album (1863)



Image courtesy of the George Eastman Museum

Image O: "Oriental Reception," Oscanyan's Oriental Album (1863)



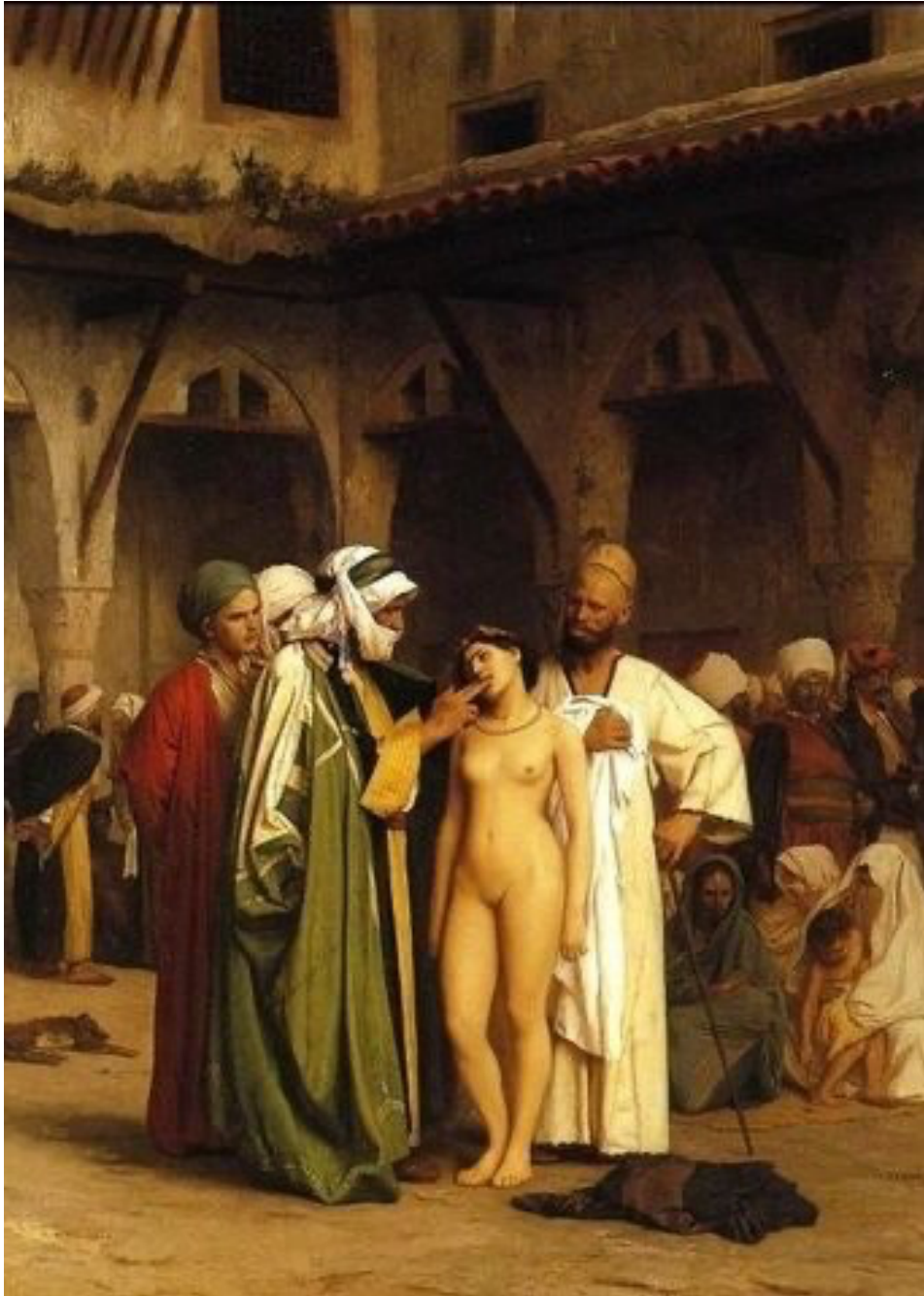
Images courtesy of the George Eastman Museum

**Image P: Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Odalisque, Slave, and Eunuch* (1839-40)**

Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Odalisque, Slave, and Eunuch*, 1839-40, Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, 1943.251



Image Q: Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Slave Market* (1866)



Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Slave Market*, 1866, 1955.53. Image courtesy of the Clark Art Institute:  
<https://www.clarkart.edu/artpiece/detail/slave-market>



**Image R: Barnum's Circassian Beauty, Zalumma Agra (1865)**



Mathew Brady Studio, *Circassian Beauty*, 1865, Photographic Negative, National Portrait Gallery, Frederick Hill Meserve Collection, NPG.81.M1785:  
[https://npg.si.edu/object/npg\\_NPG.81.M1785](https://npg.si.edu/object/npg_NPG.81.M1785)

**Image S: The “Chattel Madonna” (ca. 1857)**

*Charlotte Helen Middleton and Her Enslaved Nurse, Lydia*, ca. 1857, by George Smith Cook, ambrotype, Gift of Alicia Hopton Middleton, Gibbes Museum of Art/Carolina Art Association, 1937.005.0010.

Image T: Madonna and Child (late 1480s)



*Madonna and Child*, late 1480s, by Giovanni Bellini, oil on wood. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Rogers Fund, 1908.

Image U: A "Domesticating Portrait" (1864)



Brandy Station, Va. Dinner Party Outside Tent, Army of the Potomac Headquarters, April 1864, by Timothy H. O'Sullivan, collodion negative. Civil War Glass Negatives and Related Prints Collection, Civil War Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-DIG-cwpb-00725: <https://www.loc.gov/resource/cwp.4a39411>



Image V: A “Domesticating Portrait” (1865)



Maj. H. H. Humphrey and Others, June 1865, by William Morris Smith, photographic print. Civil War Glass Negatives and Related Prints Collection, Civil War Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-131080: <https://www.loc.gov/item/2002712119/>

RESULT OF THE BRITISH EXPEDITION TO THE

اوسقانیان افندی  
A. OSCANYAN, EX-CONSUL-GENERAL OF TURKEY AT NEW YORK.  
ARMENIAN MEMBER OF THE NEW SENATE OF TURKEY.

### CAPTAIN RAD'S GREAT WORK ON THE MOUTH

EDWIN ADAMS, SHAKESPERIAN ACTOR.

summer, otherwise it might have been of a  
during the winter, when the allowance of

THE LATE DUCHESS OF AOSTA.

MISS OF AOSTA.

**Image X: Map of the Ottoman Empire (1807-1924)**



Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Ottoman-Empire/The-empire-from-1807-to-1920>



Translation of the Letter of the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople to His Grace Bishop H. C. POTTER.

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**Image Z: Oscanyan's Tomb (2014)**



Photographs taken by and courtesy of Ünver Rüstem.