



John Buchan and the Ottoman Other: Qualifying His Imperialist Vision

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Abstract: This article asks was John Buchan a thoroughgoing jingoistic imperialist assuming ineffable European superiority and destiny to govern the non-European world or should his imperial view be seen from a more nuanced perspective. Focusing mainly on his 1916 novel, *Greenmantle*, this article argues that Buchan broke ranks with official propaganda (although he directed the wartime Propaganda Bureau) in refusing to depict either Germans or Turks as demonic, influencing post-World War I public opinion in Britain on the future of Turkey. The article also examines how Buchan's Scottish identity impacted his imperial vision.

1. SETTING THE SCENE

John Buchan lived for most of his life in England but, as 'a Scot, not an Englishman' he was also, 'an outsider if not quite an Other' in the metropolis (Katz, 2016, pp. 223-4). As such, he could depict the East differently from the 'growing British conceptualization of what the' post-World War I 'east would look like' (Katz, 2016, p. 222). Unquestionably loyal to the British establishment, Buchan could also dissent from its policies. He considered his novels to be 'shockers' and, despite the success of *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915) as a book and film (1935) there has been comparatively little serious analysis of his writing. Recent exceptions to this include Katz's chapter and the essays in *Reassessing John Buchan* (2015) edited by Kate Macdonald. While that volume focuses on *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, one essay discusses *Greenmantle* in some detail. That essay, by Ahmed al-Rawi who teaches at Simon Fraser University, British Columbia, represents Buchan as wholly subscribing to the dominant paradigm of European, Christian superiority and of 'backward, decadent, ... corrupt and childish' non-Europeans. Given Buchan's reputation as a thoroughgoing jingoist, challenging or modifying this would seem to be counter intuitive. However, without disputing Buchan's commitment to Britain's imperial project, this essay suggests that *Greenmantle* can be read differently – as less paternalistic and polarizing than al-Rawi claims. As in Rudyard Kipling's writing, 'cracks' can be identified in his 'imperial narrative' – to borrow an expression from Peter Morey - that suggests that he parted company from some (see Morey, 2018). Buchan did not share all the dominant assumptions about Muslims whom he resisted othering, as he did Germans in his *Nelson's History of the War* (1915-1919, twenty-four volumes). In that work, which is often dismissed as propaganda, Buchan did not demonize Germans and even praised the 'intrepidly' of German troops (Grievies. 1993. p. 547). Edward Said (d. 2003) in his influential critique of European scholarship of the non-Western world, *Orientalism* (1978), characterizes this as juxtaposing a civilized, democratic, advanced, and progressive 'us' with a culturally sterile, despotic, backward static Other. Yet not everyone fully subscribed to this binary, and, notwithstanding racist assumptions, Buchan can be seen as an example of a writer who saw humanity where others could only see negative difference despite his ideas about racial characteristics. This discussion focuses on Buchan's *Greenmantle* (1916) arguing that the novel helped the British public to distinguish between the Turkish people and the Ottoman administration that sided with Germany in World War I. During the war, British sentiment was markedly anti-Turkish although there were some notable exceptions. Some of these will be identified. This was largely due to the 1876 agitation over the Bulgarian atrocities led by William Gladstone who opposed and later reversed Benjamin Disraeli's pro-Turkey policy. Yet Buchan treated Turkish Muslims as human beings – as he did some German characters in the book. After a brief biographical sketch, which establishes Buchan's imperialist views, this paper analyses his treatment of Islam and Muslims

in *Greenmantle* as, despite this, challenging Britain's policy on the Ottoman empire at the time and popular images of Islam as a source of global and societal instability. Though hostile towards Turkey during the war, public opinion became more sympathetic after its end. There was no appetite for British troops to take part in crushing the 1919-1923 revolt against the allied occupation of Anatolia and, at the subsequent Lausanne conference, the payment of war reparations by Turkey was nullified and an independent republic recognized within an expanded territory.

2. BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Buchan was born in Perth, Scotland on August 26, 1875. His father was a Free Church of Scotland minister. As a child he often stayed in the Borderlands with his maternal grandmother. The borderland scenery would feature in his novels. After attending Grammar School, he won a scholarship to Glasgow University in 1892 where his favourite teacher was Gilbert Murray (d. 1957) later Oxford's Regius Professor of Greek. His influence led Buchan to hanker for an Oxford education. Winning a scholarship, he entered Brasenose College in 1895. At Oxford, he won an essay and a poetry prize, and was elected President of the Union. His first novel was published in 1896. When he graduated first class in 1899, he had already enrolled at Middle Temple in London where he passed the bar examination in 1901. In August 1901 he accepted an appointment as private secretary to Alfred Milner (d. 1925), British High Commissioner for Southern Africa and administrator of several provinces and set sail six weeks later. After spending 1901-1903 in Africa, he became a partner in the publishing firm, Thomas Nelson & Son run by his Oxford friend, Thomas Nelson III (d. 1917) (who played rugby for Scotland). *A Lodge in the Wilderness* was published in 1906 followed by *Prester John* in 1910 both set in Africa. In the *Lodge*, Buchan's ideas about British imperialism fulfilling her 'destiny' are clear (p. 28) as are some of his assumptions about 'lower races' whose 'dependent' territories in Africa and Asia, unlike the 'self-governing colonies' such as Canada and Australia would need perpetual supervision because 'autonomy is eternally impossible' for them (p.103). On the other hand, one of his characters voices the liberal critique of imperialism, saying:

Men's minds have been too long dazzled by thye jingo generation of empire. Imperialism battens on the baser attributes of humanity, the lust of conquest and power, the greed of gold, the morbid unsettlement and discontent of a degenerate age. It is for Liberalism to bring back the people to the paths of political wisdom which are also those of peace and pleasantness ... The overgrown burden of armaments must be reduced, and England must appear before the world as the herald of a truce between nations... Provision must be made for the old and feeble of the land, the slums – that eyesore of our civilization – must be opened up to the wholesome air and light, the workmen must be placed on a level with the master in our economic struggle, and for that purpose raised above the caprice of juries; in the exploitation of her neglected assets the State must find work for those who are squeezed out of the capitalist mill ... (p. 27)

On July 15, 1907, Buchan married Susan Charlotte Grosvenor (d. 1977), a relation of the Duke of Westminster. In 1910, they visited the Balkans and Constantinople, which he described as 'pure Arabian Nights'. He felt history 'more vividly' there than anywhere else (Katz, 2016. p. 203). They dined with the Sultan's brother and at embassies. The Buchans then joined a friend on his yacht and visited Aegean islands, several Greek cities and Venice before returning to London. In 1911, Buchan stood unsuccessfully for parliament as a Unionist candidate for a border constituency. When the First World War began, he was recruited by the Propaganda Bureau, for which Rudyard Kipling (d. 1936) and many other well-known writers worked. He was in France for some time reporting for the *Times* with the rank of temporary Lieutenant. His thriller (he called it a 'shocker'), *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, featuring Richard Hannay, was published in 1915 followed by the second Hannay adventure, *Greenmantle*, in 1916. Partly set in Turkey, this is analyzed below. Hannay appeared in five more novels. In 1917, promoted to Lt. Colonel, Buchan was appointed Director of Information. When he 'put' the 'American journalist Lowell Thomas (d. 1981) on the track of T.E. Lawrence (d. 1935) he helped create 'the myth of Lawrence of Arabia' (Katz, 2016, pp. 222-223). Lawrence's mission, like Hannay's, was 'also 'to light the spark of Islam' (Hitchens, 2004, p 107). According to al-Rawi, Lawrence can be seen behind Buchan's character, Sandy (al-Rawi, 2015, p. 126) although Sandy was originally based on Aubrey Herbert (1888-1923), an army colonel, diplomat, spy and Conservative Member of Parliament who championed Albanian independence and spoke Albanian, Arabic, Greek, and Turkish and as well as several Western European languages. Herbert disguised himself as a tramp

when traveling incognito. After the war, Buchan and Lawrence became friends. Lawrence's ideas on the future of the Ottoman Empire's provinces parted company from British-French plans envisioning a division of territory that took account of tribal and religious identities, and, with the leaders of the Arab Revolt, Lawrence felt betrayed by the post-war settlement. In 1927, Buchan won a by-election as Unionist Party candidate for the United Scottish Universities' seat and held that until he was raised to the peerage as Baron Tweedsmuir in 1935 and sent to Canada as Governor-General, a country about which he had written several essays and set a posthumously published novel *Sick Heart River* (1941). As well as novels, he wrote histories and biographies including the life of Walter Scott (1925) whom he admired. Like Scott, Buchan has been credited with contributing to the development of a distinct Scottish identity within the United Kingdom; 'one side of Buchan's work,' comments David Goldie, 'is all about emphasizing unity and homogeneity, in the form of the common cultural bonds that hold together the English speaking peoples' but there is 'another side to his thinking in which national differences and discrete national identities are valued and celebrated' (2016, p. 37). Buchan remained Governor-General until his death on February 11, 1940. After a state funeral in Ottawa, his body was taken back to Britain and buried at his Oxfordshire estate. Buchan received honorary doctorates from nine universities including Glasgow and Oxford, was made a Companion of Honour, a Knight Grand Commander of the Royal Victorian Order and of the Order of St Michael and St George. He had a lifelong association with the Free Church of Scotland serving as an elder at churches in London and Oxford. After the Free Church merged with the Church of Scotland in 1929, he twice represented the King at the General Assembly (1933 and 1934).

2.1. Greenmantle

This analysis cites the 2011 Polygon edition, authorized by the John Buchan Society with a forward by Allan Massie (pp. v-xiii). The story runs for 270 pages. As the novel opens, Sir Walter Bullivant of the Foreign Office recruits Major Hannay, who is convalescing after the battle of Loos in World War I, to undertake a secret mission. He is tasked with locating a Muslim leader in Turkey known as 'Greenmantle' who, it was believed, was about to declare a jihad in fulfilment of a prophecy that the Germans were encouraging believing that they would benefit if more Muslims joined their axis. The British had regarded Islam as a spent force but seemingly 'Islam had a bigger hand in it than [they] thought' (p. 6) Hannay was to redirect this Muslim uprising to support the allies instead on the basis that the Young Turks had dragged the Ottoman Empire into the war 'for purposes that no Turk cared a rash about' (p. 7). The only clue was a cryptic note that Bullivant's son, a field agent, had obtained before being killed-in-action. Hannay could choose his own team. He chose his old friend and fellow Scot, Sandy Arbuthnot, who spoke several Eastern languages and could pass himself off as a native in a dozen countries, and Harry Blenkiron, an American eager to help the war effort despite the US's neutrality. Sandy was confident that 'Mohammedan natives' were 'bound to show [him] what hand they' held (p. 25). They plan different routes to Constantinople and where to meet in two months' time. Sandy would arrive from the East, Blenkiron would ingratiate himself with the Germans pretending to be anti-British, while Hannay – who could speak Afrikaans - would pose as an anti-British Boer (p. 22) and try to pass through Germany. Hannay travels via Portugal to build his cover, where, by 'sheer monumental luck' he runs into Peter Piannaar, a friend from South Africa, whom he recruits. Hannay and Piannaar are separated in Germany when Peter ended up in jail (p.65) but meet up again later and reach Constantinople (p. 119), as does Blackiron (p. 136) who had wheedled his way into the confidence of the German Colonel von Stumm, and the mysterious Hilda von Einem, who were somehow involved in the Greenmantle affair. Hannay and Peter had also met up with Stumm. Sandy had convinced him that he could help mobilize Muslim support but when Stumm planned to send him to Cairo, realizing that this would compromise the mission, Hannay had knocked Stumm out and fled (p. 77). While in Germany Hannay meets the Kaiser, who 'was no common man'. 'In his presence' Hannay 'felt an attraction which was not merely the master of one used to command' but 'here was a human being who ... had the power of laying himself alongside other men' (p 71). Pursued by Stumm's men, he then traveled toward Turkey along the Danube working as an engineer on a barge towing steamer (p. 100).

Sandy, who had become leader of a Muslim fraternity called the Companions of the Rosy Hour, joins them (p. 135). The Companions had supported the Young Turks but now 'stood for Islam and the old ways' (p. 140). The Germans 'were squeezing the life blood out of the Osmanli for their own ends' (p. 140). As he spoke, Sandy 'had the appearance of a mad mullah.' They travel east toward the front

with Russia at Erzerum, where clues were leading them. Greenmantle's presence there would 'rally the Turkish defence' (p.182). Stumm captures them but they escape. In the process, Hannay steals Stumm's map of the German defenses (p.224) and, identifying a weakness where the Russians could break through, sends Peter – a skilled tracker and survivalist- to inform their allies. Meanwhile, Greenmantle dies. However, Sandy assumes the role and proclaims himself to be fulfilling the 'long-awaited-for revelation' (p. 270). The Russians take the city, and Hannay and Blenkiron survive. Given that Buchan liked Constantinople, surprisingly the novel describes it as 'a mighty disappointment.' Hannay had 'expected a sort of fairy-land Eastern city, all white marble and blue water, and stately Turks in surplices, and veiled houris, and nightingales, and some sort of string band discoursing sweet music'. Instead, he saw 'a dingy colonial suburb – wooden houses and corrugated iron roofs, and endless dirty, sallow children' (p. 119). In the novel, neither Germans nor Turks are all bad. The Companions help Hannay and his team, although a Turkish lieutenant, who was corrupt, came close to ruining their mission. There are references to the need for caliphs to be of the Quraysh (p. 20), to the Madhi of Sudan (p. 6, p. 48) and to the Senussi (p p. 6, op. 20) and to Muslims having shaken the gates of Vienna (p. 6). The Sheik-ul-Islam in Turkey 'was being neglected' (p. 5). Sandy described Greenmantle, whom he met, as 'a dreamer and a poet, too – a genius' (p. 178). 'The West,' he told Hannay, 'Knows nothing of the true Oriental ... they want to live face to face with God without a screen of ritual and images and priestcraft' (pp. 178-79). Before this, Hannay had tried to fix in his head what Greenmantle was like and the 'nearest' he 'got was a picture of an old man in a turban coming out of a bottle in a cloud of smoke, which he' remembered from a child's edition of the *Arabian Nights*' (p. 153). An 'accursed mist' is 'from Eblis' (p. 246). A muezzin's cry is heard 'from the minaret's of Erzerum' (p. 215). The German engineer, Herr Gaudian, whom Hannay liked, told him that Enver Pasha (d. 1922) was 'no true son of Islam, which is a noble faith, and despises liars and boasters and betrayers of their salt' (p. 156). Several references, though, allude to Orientalist tropes: Sandy has 'a more than Oriental reticence' (p. 11); 'Oriental despotism' (p. 136) and 'Oriental methods of doing business' (p. 115) referring to the system of kick-backs. What almost sounds like a reference to Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406) reads, 'when mankind is smothered with shams and phrases and painted idols, a wind blows out of the wild to cleanse and simplify life' (p. 175). Khaldun proposed a theory of cyclical renewal in Islamic societies as dynasties arise in the desert, 'become decadent and are then replaced by another desert dynasty' (Graebner, 2007, p. 260). Bullivant thought that Islam is 'a fighting creed, and the mullah stands in the pulpit with the Koran in one hand and a drawn sword in another' (p. 6) rehearsing an old trope associating Islam with warmongering.

2.2. Romantic Imperialist, or a More Nuanced View

Buchan is often described as a Romantic Orientalist. The poet Byron, the novelist and poet Kipling, among others fit this category. In representing Buchan as a thoroughgoing Jingoistic imperialist convinced of European superiority and their right to govern non-Europeans, al-Rawi points out how the character of Sandy resembles the type of adventurous European about whom Edward Said wrote who 'knew' colonized countries 'better than the natives' (Said, 1987, p. 27). In Kipling's *Kim*, Colonel Creighton, who slipped in and out of disguise, spoke local languages faultlessly like Sandy, 'satisfies the Kipling who had imagined an ideal India, unchanging and attractive, as an eternally integral part of the Empire' (Said, 1987, p. 35). In contrast, his Bengali assistant though 'clearly a bright man' whose ambition of belonging to 'the Royal Society' was 'not entirely unfounded' is Creighton's 'opposite ... because he is not white.' He is pictured as 'funny,' 'gauche ... not because he is incompetent' but because as an Indian he 'can never be a Creighton' (Said, 1987, p. 33). Al-Rawi describes Sandy similarly as assuming, even inflating, his 'intellectual abilities.' In *The Three Hostages* (1924) Sandy 'talks of preparing aeroplanes to take Muslim pilgrimages to their destination.' Thus:

Buchan sets up a fictional world where Sandy makes pilgrimage possible, the most important religious act for a Muslim. This implies a colonial attitude because it suggests such inefficiency and economic dependency on the part of Muslims to take charge of their affairs and act independently. Sandy's role in Buchan's novels is to be a mediating contrast with the Western and Muslim characters. By inflating his intellectual abilities and infinite intrigues, Sandy's character confirms Buchan's idea of the superiority of the British, particularly the Scottish, over other races and indicates the writer's continuous imperialist belief that the British are destined to participate in the most intricate matters of other nations and religions (Al-Rawi, 2015, p. 127).

However, in Buchan's novel Sandy only speculated that as fewer opportunities for adventure presented themselves, he might become a businessman, and transport 'pilgrims from all over the Moslem world to Mecca' believing that he could reduce the 'average cost' of the pilgrimage while still making 'a handsome profit' (Buchan, 1924, pp. 65-66). Later in the novel Sandy speaks of this again, 'I am going to be the great benefactor to the democracy of Islam, by means of a fleet of patched-up 'planes and a few kindred spirits that know the East' (p.297). This sounds patronizing, but Sandy does not actually do this. He was a widely traveled man who felt at home with Muslims looking for another adventure. Al-Rawi may overstate the case for this as proving Buchan to be an outright imperialist with no respect for non-European cultures. As a novelist, he was telling a story of high adventure, but he was also aware that Europeans like Lawrence, Sir Richard Burton and others did have adventures in the East, did speak Arabic and other languages, and that some travelled in disguise. Nothing that Buchan says about Turks in *Greenmantle* suggests that he lacked any respect for them or posited his own ineffable superiority over non-Europeans. Stumm is portrayed as a hard-core Nazi, but Buchan does not paint all Germans with the same brush and resists stereotyping them. Rasta Bey, the young Turkish officer who pursues Hannay in the novel is similarly described in unflattering terms, but Buchan did not transfer this to all Turks. Stereotyping of all Muslims as terrorists lurks behind much Islamophobic fear mongering but judges all Muslims by the heinous (and Islamically unjustified) acts of a few.

3. CONCLUSION

Christopher Hitchens (d. 2011) points out that while Buchan's 'attitude to authority was trustful and loyal...his writing shows an attraction ... to the exotic and the numinous, and ... to the underdog, the rebel and the outsider' (2004, p. 105). Katz argues that by refusing to demonize Germans and Turks, and by portraying Turks sympathetically as duped by the former, Buchan expressed dissent from British policy at this time (2016, p. 222). Unlike Hannay, British war propaganda vilified the Kaiser, and pictured 'spike-helmeted "Hun" cutting off the hands of children, boiling corpses to make soap, and ... crucifying prisoners of war' (Welch, 2014). Hannay's 'I realized the crazy folly of war' when he was recovering in the home of a German woman whose husband was away fighting and thought 'what good would it to do Christian folk to burn poor huts like this' (p. 95) expresses Buchan's own disillusionment with war. For this reason, he supported appeasement in the 1930s and disliked Churchill (Hitchens, 2004, p.106). Katz compares Buchan with Benjamin Disraeli (d. 1881). Both wrote 'lightweight novels' which nonetheless made them household names (p. 224). Both were, in different ways, outsiders in the context of the English establishment (p. 223). It was after William Gladstone (d. 1898) reversed Disraeli's policy of Anglo-Ottoman friendship in 1881 that the Ottomans increasingly turned to Germany for advisers, technology, railroad construction and finance. This led ended to their siding with the Axis powers in World War I. After the Armenian massacres of 1894-6 British public opinion became markedly more anti-Turkish. British Muslims were among the few who remained sympathetic to the Ottoman empire and found themselves suspect as a result. Their activities were closely monitored by the security services.

Buchan's Scottishness is especially evident in his description of Sandy's ability to blend in everywhere he goes. He is 'the wandering Scot carried to the pitch of genius' who, 'in the old days, would have led a crusade ...'. 'Scots,' Buchan wrote, 'call themselves an insular nation', but are 'better than the English' at 'getting inside the skin of remote people; (p. 18) perhaps because Scotland is itself peripheral to the metropole, which gives Scots a different perspective. Walter Scott had believed that the union of Scotland and England and the colonial project would open opportunities for Scots to serve and engage in commerce, which it did. As well as having relatives who served in India Scott helped friends, their sons, and clients find jobs there and corresponded with officials there to advance their careers. As early as 1833, about 2,000 Scots had returned from India with large fortunes and remained overrepresented in the colonial service, army, and police force. In summary, in Buchan's 'narrative, the Turks were not England's mortal enemies but a religious people who had succumbed to German' trickery' to which Britain's abandonment of Turkey made them susceptible (Katz, 2016, p. 269). By showing Turkey and Islam in a positive light, he influenced British public opinion toward a more favorable, less punitive view of post-war Turkey. As Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (d. 1938) led the independence struggle against the Allied occupation in Turkey, British public opinion opposed British involvement in the war and favored a negotiated settlement (Kayaoglu, 2010, p. 134). This did not halt the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire or the imposition of the mandate

system after the war, but it did contribute to Britain's role at the Lausanne Convention (1922-23) which, chaired by Lord Curzon (d. 1925) eliminated there parations that had been demanded from Turkey, and restored most of Anatolia to the newly recognized republic of Turkey.

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