



**THE HAYDARPAŞA BRITISH CEMETERY:  
THE LEGACY OF A COMMON PAST<sup>1</sup>**

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*The British Cemetery in Haydarpaşa is one of the most important legacies of Turkish-British relations dating back to the late 16th century is. Founded during the Crimean War, the cemetery is the final resting place of the British soldiers who died in the war, and up until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, of the British military and diplomatic envoys to the Ottoman state, and Levantine British families.*

There must be very few people who have lived in Istanbul for many years and have not travelled by ferry between Kadıköy and Eminönü. Personally, even though I live within the city walls, I do these trips at least three or four times a month. In the summer, the taste of the sea air is something quite different. As the ferry passes near the historic Haydarpaşa station, you can see a lush area behind the building (Photograph 1). If you think that greenery can only be seen in cemeteries in Istanbul, especially in such places with high real estate value, you are not mistaken. This is the Haydarpaşa British Cemetery.

Istanbul has been a cosmopolitan city since time immemorial. Although the influence of the elements that make up this structure in the city has changed, Istanbul, an important transit point, has retained this quality throughout the eras. During the Byzantine period, the Italians established bases around Eminonu and the Golden Horn. Galata, as is common knowledge, bears the mark of the Genoese, who shared this area with the Armenians. During the Ottoman period, neighbourhoods such as Hasköy, Balat and Galata became synonymous with the Jews. In neighborhoods such as Samatya and Kumkapi, Armenian; and in Fener, Tatavla, and Therapia, Greek traces are still evident. Sisli, Pangaaltı and Moda stand out with their Levantine identities. The British Cemetery in Haydarpaşa is one of these specific areas. No history of the Crimean War, Robert College, the district of Moda, or Istanbul during the Armistice would be complete without a study of this cemetery.

Reaching the cemetery is actually quite easy. One merely has to follow the road that goes down to the beach between the monumental structure where the campus of Haydarpaşa High School is now located and the old Gülhane Military Academy of Medicine, now the Sultan Abdulhamid Han Training and Research Hospital. Just down the road, another road leading to the left takes one to the cemetery. However, before describing the cemetery in more detail, it is pertinent at this point to take a brief look at the Crimean War and a number of incidents that led to the opening of the cemetery.

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By 1853, Russia had demanded that Bab-ı Ali be given the task of protecting Jerusalem and some of the surrounding holy sites. The Ottoman Empire, which feared that this request would lead to Russian meddling in its internal affairs and create a new European crisis, rejected the request. Consequently, the war began when Russian troops entered Walachia and Bogdan. Since the main reason for the struggle was Russia's policy of going south through the Straits or the Balkans, Britain and France were disturbed by the developments, and a number of subsequent mediation attempts failed. The last straw for Britain and France was the destruction of the Ottoman navy by the Russians off the coast of Sinop on November 30, 1853. Because the Ottoman naval force had been assigned to protect Istanbul and the Bosphorus, this act of destruction meant that the war entered a critical phase. On 12 March 1854, after diplomatic initiatives failed, Britain and France signed an alliance agreement with the Ottoman Empire. About a month later, the first Allied troops left for Ottoman territory.

The arrival of the British and French in the Ottoman capital caused some concern for the people of the city. The soldiers of these states had conducted many hostile activities against the Ottomans in recent times, and now they had been deployed to the places allocated to them in critical areas of the city. Davutpasa, Selimiye, Taskışla, Gümüşsuyu, Kuleli Cavalry Barracks, Hagia Sophia were allotted to the allies. After a while, the troops in Istanbul set off for Crimea, but the Ottoman State maintained its position as a gathering center for Allied soldiers. Because the allies were far from their homeland, they used the Ottoman capital to replenish stocks and treat their wounded.

The war lasted longer than expected and took place under difficult conditions, resulting in the deaths, injuries, or unsanitary conditions of many soldiers, causing them to suffer from disease. In their memoirs, eyewitnesses of the period stated that soldiers who died from infectious diseases and non-sterile health conditions were almost more than soldiers who were shot and killed by enemy bullets on the front line. Cyrus Hamlin, who was in Istanbul during this period, likened the lice on the soldiers returning from the front lines in Crimea to monsters in his memoirs.

The Allies requested the Ottoman Empire to allocate hospitals for their wounded. Interestingly, while the most important health structures in Istanbul were allocated to Britain and France, more exceptional places had to be used to care of the Turkish wounded. The British wounded were given balances of the Haydarpaşa Military Hospital, one of the most modern facilities in the capital, which was completed about a decade before the Crimean War, as well as the Selimiye Barracks and Kavak Kasrı. The sultan's mansion in Therapia, the British Navy Hospital in Beyoglu and two Ottoman warships were allocated for the care of British marines. While the French navy was separated from a large mansion in Kanlıca, the Davutpasa, Gümüşsuyu, Taskışla and Gülhane barracks allocated to the French soldiers were provided with the necessary equipment for the care of the wounded.

It would be pertinent at this point to provide some information on the region in which the Haydarpaşa British Cemetery is situated. The coastal region, which stretches from the



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Uskudar-Salacak coast to Harem and from there to Haydarpaşa, was known as the palaces and mansions of the Ottoman dynasty. Indeed, in addition to the Uskudar Palace, whose gardens extend to the Harem, Kavak Kasrı, near Harem, are the buildings that appear in historical engravings. By the 19th century, the demand for these mansions had decreased and some of them had been destroyed due to poor maintenance. The region also had its share of Ottoman modernization initiatives, and Sultan Selim III approved this area for the construction of the Selimiye Barracks, named after him. The barracks, which were built in wood, were later destroyed during one of the frequent fires that plagued Istanbul, and it was eventually rebuilt as a stone building by Mahmoud II. Selim III built mansions to solve the accommodation problem of the officers who would serve in these barracks, and gave these mansions to the officers, and the *İhsaniye* district takes its name from here. Selimiye Barracks (Photograph 2) were allocated to the care of the British wounded. The hospital was the center of attention of the European printing press of the period, both because it was the place where the wounded of the Crimean War were treated, and because Florence Nightingale, who laid the foundations of the modern nursing profession, served there.

Florence Nightingale, the most important face of the hospital, to which the cemetery was attached, was born in 1820. Nightingale had been committed to nursing from an early age and, in the belief that the profession had not been given the necessary importance, she made history with the reforms she introduced. Nightingale's first job as a health administrator was in 1853, when she was in charge of organizing the *Institute for the Care of Sick Gentlewomen* in London. Nightingale soon put the hospital in order, when she received an offer to care for patients in the British army, which was drawn into the Ottoman-Russian war about a year later. Nightingale departed on October 21, 1854 with thirty-eight caregivers. Only the five from the Roman Catholic Monastery were trained nurses. Nightingale arrived in Uskudar on November 5, 1854, where she witnessed many deaths caused by poor conditions. After a brief time, the measures she took began to give results. Specifically, the wards of soldiers carrying infectious diseases were separated, sheets were washed, and bed pans emptied in time, clothes were boiled in large boilers and disinfected as much as possible. Despite all this, successive injuries and incoming patients slowed down the effect of the measures taken. In January 1855, the number of patients increased to 12,000. Still, Nightingale continued to take care of her patients in person. In the evenings, she walked around the wards with a lamp to cheer them up. She became known among the soldiers as the "Lady with the Lamp".

When Florence Nightingale started nursing, hospitals were extremely poor in hygiene. In almost all hospitals, the wooden floor was never brushed, and the walls were mildewed from the damp. Doctors never washed their hands before surgery, they would go into the operating room in street clothes and wear only a dirty jacket to avoid getting covered in blood. Naturally, the condition of the caregivers working in such an environment was deplorable. This was a profession often directed at orphaned and helpless women. Moreover, due to the harsh living conditions, most of these women are drunk, careless, and filthy. However, despite all this, perhaps the most important of the problems was that patients with



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infectious disease were put in the same room as other patients, sometimes even in the same bed. A person who came to the hospital because of a broken arm could die of tuberculosis shortly afterwards. Indeed, Florence Nightingale rightly said: "The first duty of hospitals is not to harm patients."

Consequently, in order to keep alive the memory of Florence Nightingale, the guardian angel of the British soldiers, in 1954 a plaque dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the nursing profession was erected in the Victoria monument, which I will mention in a moment. The plaque reads the date of 1854 with the words "To the Immortal Services of Florence Nightingale, Founder of Modern Nursing, between 1854-1856."

Spanning thirty acres, the British Cemetery is connected to the *Commonwealth Cemetery Directorate*, headquartered in Canakkale. The cemetery is divided into three parts. On entering through the door on the campus side of the University of Health Sciences, one first comes across the caretaker residence. In this first part lie mostly soldiers and officers who lost their lives during the Crimean War. The *Victoria Monument* (Photographs 3, 4), which is situated towards the end of the area, is an extremely impressive monument. At a height of twenty-eight meters high, the monument was erected by Queen Victoria in 1857 to commemorate the British soldiers who lost their lives in the Crimean War. In each of the four corners of the monument, there is a statue of an angel holding a crown woven from a laurel branch in one hand, and a quill in the other. The crown probably symbolizes the heroes who shed their blood while making history. The structure is also known as the "Monument of Angels" due to the figures in its four corners, and some of it can be seen from the sea if viewed carefully when crossing by ferry. The following lines are written on all four sides of the monument in English, French, Italian and Arabic; "This column, erected in memory of the officers and privates of the British army and navy who died for their country in the war against Russia in 1854, 1855 and 1856, was built by Queen Victoria and her nation in 1857." The reason for the preference of these languages is that they are the languages spoken by Allied states that joined forces against Russia. As is known, later in the war, the Italian State of Piemonte also joined.

Another important tomb in this area is that of the British envoy Edward Barton, who was the first (and last, to the author's knowledge) ambassador to go on a campaign with the Ottoman army. Edward Barton was the ambassador for Queen Elizabeth I of England in Istanbul during the days of Sultan Murad III and Mehmed III. He had the most important task of bringing the Ottoman Empire into a war against the Holy Roman Germanic emperor and King Philip II of Spain. Thus, the kingdom of Catholic Spain, Britain's greatest enemy, would be neutralized. During the reign of Mehmed III, Elizabeth I also sent a warship named Hector full of gifts to Istanbul. The most prominent of the gifts was a magnificent organ which had been built for the Sultan. Barton managed to endear himself to the Ottoman court and the sultan. As a result, he was rewarded by allowing him to participate in the siege of Eğri over Austria during the reign of Sultan Mehmed III. Since Austria and Spain were ruled by the



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same family, the Habsburgs, this time it was also built on the most relentless opponent of the British state to which Barton belonged. The Sultan praised Barton for his assistance and loyalty during the campaign. However, when Barton returned to Istanbul, he was met by a dysentery epidemic. Following the advice of the people around, he sought refuge from the epidemic in Heybeliada. However, he met his worst fear, and Barton died of the epidemic here. His body was buried in the courtyard of the Kamariotissa church in Heybeliada, but after the Navy confiscated the church and its land, the stone was moved to another area near the church. He is then believed to have disappeared. However, it was found again in the 1990s and transported to the British cemetery in Haydarpaşa, where it is protected. To the author's knowledge, it is the oldest English tombstone in Istanbul, with the date 1597 and Latin inscriptions. The inscription reads: "Edward Barton, the very famous and respected ambassador of the Queen of England, went on an expedition to Hungary with the Turkish emperor and died victorious on his return. He was thirty years old, may his soul be blessed."

Ranked officers are buried in the section opposite the monument in the part of the cemetery facing the sea. One of the graves here belongs to General Guyon, a remarkable figure. After marrying a noble Hungarian woman, Guyon, a Hungarian subject, devoted himself to the Hungarian national cause. In 1848, when the Hungarian nationalists who rebelled against Austria were crushed by Russian support, many Hungarian officers, including Guyon, defected to the Ottoman state. Sultan Abdulmecid allowed Guyon to carry the rank of general and assigned him a mansion in the Şehzadebaşı district. When this officer, believed to be a Muslim, died, his wife refused to allow him to be buried in the Islamic cemetery, and she claimed Guyon was a Christian until his last breath, while respecting the Quran. In this incident, which caused a minor diplomatic crisis, the Ottoman government backed down and the British-born Hungarian general was buried here (Photograph 5).

After passing the first part of the cemetery, one enters a narrow path, at the end of which one comes across a large green area, where there is nothing but a small shrine (Photograph 6). This grave is that of the British ambassador, Nicholas O'Connor, who died in Istanbul in 1908. Continuing along the path that runs through the trees ahead, one passes on to the other part of the cemetery. There are more soldiers' graves at the entrance to this place, which can be regarded as the second section.

Another important figure lying in the cemetery is the officer known as Hobart Pasha in British-Ottoman sources. Augustus Charles Hobart Hampden was born into a noble family in 1802. He joined the British Navy and served in the Crimean War. In 1867, he began serving in the Ottoman navy at the proposal of Keçecizade Fuad Pasha. Hobart Pasha, who did important work in the War of 1893, rose to the rank of Marshal. He died in Milan in 1886 and his body was brought to Istanbul upon his will and buried in the Haydarpaşa British Cemetery.

On the side of the area overlooking Kadıköy are buried British civilians who died in Istanbul (Photograph 7). This area was private property and purchased by the Ottoman



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Empire in 1855 and gifted to Britain. The headstones here are particularly noteworthy. In addition to the Masonic tombstones, one can stumble upon the sail-shaped tombstones of sailors, and another headstone belonging to a Buddhist British citizen. In this section, in addition to the British officers who died in the line of duty during the occupation years of Istanbul, there are also the graves of the British who died during World War II. During the Crimean War, too, soldiers who died of infectious diseases such as cholera at Haydarpaşa Hospital and Selimiye Barracks were buried in a mass grave in this part and covered with lime to prevent the spread of the disease. In fact, during the Crimean War, allied armies were initially allocated space as a burial ground behind today's Kuleli Military High School. However, due to the fact that this location is far from the hospital area and many soldiers died of infectious diseases, the current burial site was designated as a new burial ground. It is estimated that the number of soldiers killed and buried here during the Crimean War is close to 5,000, most of whom are buried in mass graves. The graves of Muslim Indian soldiers who fought in the British army in World War I are also present. Therefore, visitors to the cemetery should not be surprised to see the Arabic word "Bismillah" on some of the graves. In addition, it is possible to come across the tombstones of British soldiers who died in Büyükdere and Beykoz in this section. These stones were moved here on various dates after the elimination of these cemeteries. For example, the stones found in the British cemetery in Beykoz were transferred here on 2 December 1891 with the permission of Sultan Abdulhamid II.

Perhaps the most important face in the section reserved for civilian British citizens in this section is that of Sir Denison Ross. Ross was also known for translating *the History-i Rashidi*, one of the most important sources about the Mughal Empire in India, into English, and was especially known for his work on Indian and Persian culture. Invited to participate in the simplification of the Turkish language at the invitation of the Turkish government, Ross came to Turkey and was advise the work done on this subject in the following years. In 1939, he was appointed consul in charge of commercial relations in Istanbul, representing the British government. However, he died in April 1940, about five months after losing his wife. Both husband and wife were taken to their final resting place in the Haydarpaşa British Cemetery (Photograph 8).

The burial site contains some important faces in terms of Istanbul's educational history. Two of them are Miss Jane Walsh, who was the principal of the British High School for Girls in Taksim Odakule, and her sister Georgina Walsh. Jane Walsh died in 1872 after 23 years as headmistress, after which her brother led the school for five years. The two sisters lie in the same grave. Mr. Peach, who was the principal of the boys' section of the same school for 30 years, died in 1953, is buried in this section.

Another family that should be given a separate mention is the van Millingens. The family's first famous face in Istanbul was the doctor Julius van Millingen, a British citizen of Dutch descent. Van Millingen served as a physician in the British army for a long time, then came to the Ottoman state and became the physician of Abdulmecid and his mother,



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Bezmiâlem Valide Sultan, and of Mahmud II and his sister Esma Sultan. One of his sons, Edwin, was one of the first graduates of Robert College and went on to study diseases of the eye, ear, and nose in Vienna. After returning to Istanbul, he served the palace and worked at the Austrian hospitals of Saint George and La Paix in France. The most important name of the family in terms of the history of Istanbul is Alexander van Millingen, one of the leading figures of the period in Byzantine studies. Alexander van Millingen (Photograph 9), who taught history at Robert College for a long time, lived in the rector's building of what is today known as Bosphorus University. The building was built in the 1930s as the Library of Robert College. There are also many graves belonging to the Whithalls and La Fontaines (Photograph 10), the famous families of Moda.

To conclude, the Haydarpaşa British Cemetery is an emodiment of Turkish-British relations. In addition to the memories of the soldiers who were allies of the Turks in the Crimean war, it also contains memories of the officers and soldiers who invaded Istanbul between 1920 and 1922. If examined in detail, it is obvious that many academic writings will emerge from this burial site.



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## PHOTOGRAPHS

**Photograph-1:** View of the Haydarpaşa British Cemetery behind the platforms of Haydarpaşa train station at the beginning of the 1900s. [Source: Atlas Tarih Dergisi, Vol. 69 (June-July 2021); Önder Kaya Archive.]



**Photograph-2:** In the background, Selimiye Barracks, used as a hospital during the Crimean War. In the foreground, the British Cemetery. The painting depicts the military funeral of a British soldier, William Simpson. [Source: Atlas Tarih Dergisi, Vol. 69 (June-July 2021); Önder Kaya Archive.]





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**Photograph-3:** A 19th Century photograph of the monument erected by Queen Victoria in the British Cemetery. It is twenty-eight metres high and has a statue of an angel holding a branch of bay at each of the four corners. [Source: Atlas Tarih Dergisi, Vol. 69 (June-July 2021); Önder Kaya Archive.]





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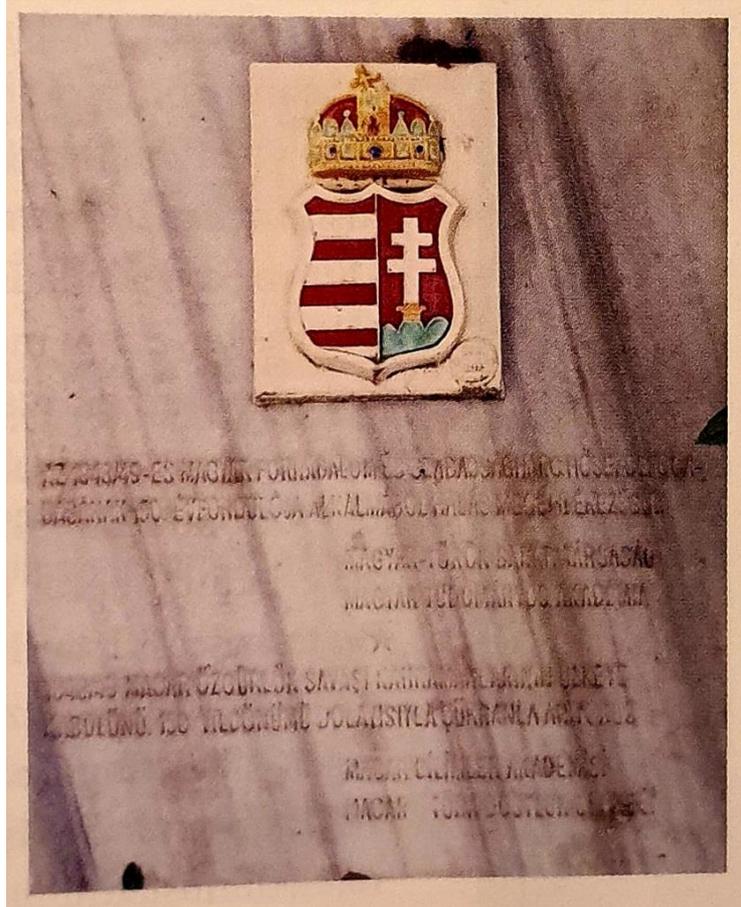
**Photograph-4:** The Monument of Angels in the Haydarpaşa British Cemetery today.  
[Source: Source: Atlas Tarih Dergisi, Vol. 69 (June-July 2021); Önder Kaya Archive.]





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**Photograph-5:** The grave of British-born Count Richard Guyon, who served in the Hungarian Rising of 1848. [Source: Atlas Tarih Dergisi, Vol. 69 (June-July 2021); Önder Kaya Archive.]





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**Photograph-6:** The tomb of Nicholas O'Connor (1843-1908), British Ambassador.  
[Source: Atlas Tarih Dergisi, Vol. 69 (June-July 2021); Önder Kaya Archive.]





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**Photograph-7:** In addition to the graves of the British soldiers who lost their lives in the Crimean War, those of the British diplomats who served on Ottoman territory, and British Levantine families can also be found in Haydarpaşa British Cemetery. [Source: Atlas Tarih Dergisi, Vol. 69 (June-July 2021); Önder Kaya Archive.]





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**Photograph-8:** The grave of Denison Ross and his wife, with the English translation of the Tarikh-i Rashidi, one of the most important resources on the Babur Empire of India. [Source: Atlas Tarih Dergisi, Vol. 69 (June-July 2021); Önder Kaya Archive.]



**Photograph-9:** The grave of Alexander van Millingen, expert on Byzantine architecture who worked as professor of history at the Robert College between 1879-1915. [Source: Atlas Tarih Dergisi, Vol: 69 (June-July 2021); Önder Kaya Archive.]



**Photograph-10:** The grave of the British Levantine trading La Fontaine family.  
[Source: Atlas Tarih Dergisi, Vol. 69 (June-July 2021); Önder Kaya Archive.]

