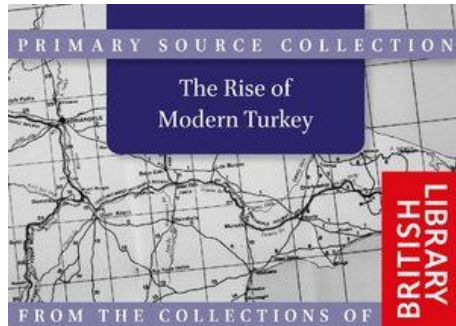


The Rise of Modern Turkey, c. 1906–1939

Brill Primary Source



About this database

The archives of the Political and Secret Department of the India Office are an outstanding source for modern Turkey. **This is the first time the major files have been made available in their entirety in a digital format.** The material in this online primary-source collection consists of confidential printed reports, maps, memoranda, and handbooks, together with Political and Secret Department policy files describing the wider context of international relations, as well as the practical details of an expanding political administration and social and economic infrastructure.

Historical background

On the death of Kemal Atatürk, in 1938, the British Ambassador to Turkey, Sir Percy Loraine, commented in his annual report to the Foreign Office on the "vast strides in moral, material and political progress" accomplished in "the brief span of fifteen years under the dynamic impulse of this remarkable man". Loraine's report is one of a series included in this online collection of files and printed material from the India Office archives at the British Library. The collection focuses on the international aspects of the decline of the Ottoman Empire from the beginning of the twentieth century to its formal end after the First World War. At the same time it traces the emergence of Turkey as a nation state from the Young Turk revolution in 1908 and 1909 through the proclamation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, followed by post-war modernisation and secularisation programmes and territorial consolidation up to the death of Atatürk and the outbreak of the Second World War.

International rivalry: British relations with the Ottoman Empire

British relations with the Ottoman Empire in the late-nineteenth century were the responsibility of both the Foreign Office and the India Office. The East India Company had regularly appointed agents at Constantinople from the late-eighteenth century onwards and the Government of India subsequently maintained a continuous political interest, particularly after the Ottoman expansion into the Arabian Peninsula in the 1870s. International rivalry in the Gulf in the period immediately before World War I focused on oil concessions in Ottoman territories and on the construction of the Baghdad railway and the international implications of German involvement in the project. After the cessation of hostilities in 1918 the India Office was closely involved in the lengthy peace settlement negotiations, the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire and the official diplomatic recognition of the modern Turkish state by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923.

The rise of modern Turkey

After the First World War peace settlement British Indian interests were concentrated on the questions of the Caliphate and the abolition of the Sultanate as well as on the wider issues of boundary drawing in the former Ottoman territories. At the same time, however, the India Office monitored closely the events leading up to hostilities between Turkey and Greece in the early 1920s. Throughout both the 1920s and the 1930s they were kept informed of Turkey's foreign relations and internal political developments from Foreign Office reports which were regularly circulated to India Office officials.

Contents of the collection

The India Office material on Turkey during the first part of the twentieth century is surprisingly comprehensive and ranges way beyond the specific interests of the British imperial administrations in India and the Gulf. As well as the files relating to Anglo-Ottoman rivalry in the Gulf region, the material includes printed confidential Foreign Office correspondence on the political situation in Constantinople and on events in other Ottoman territories in the 1900s. The First World War stimulated a series of secret and confidential intelligence reports and handbooks on all the Turkish provinces, including "Turkey in Europe" and "Turkey in Asia". Files from the 1920s and 1930s contain detailed information on the financial and economic situation, education, the distribution of population, foreign relations, military and naval affairs and aviation.

Provenance and archival background

The India Office Political and Secret Department (and Military Department) archives form part of the Oriental and India Office Collections (OIOC) now within the Asia, Pacific and Africa Collections at the British Library. The Political and Secret Department papers and printed material have now been catalogued under the OIOC reference L/PS. Military Department papers are located under the reference L/MIL.

From 1902 the most important of the Political and Secret Department's correspondence and papers accumulated in London were registered, indexed and arranged in files according to subject. From 1902 to 1930 the "Subject Files" are located under the reference L/P&S/10. Around 1930/1931 the department replaced its subject file system with a new series of "Collections", arranged according to geographical area. They are now to be found under the reference L/P&S/12. Material in this edition is drawn from collection 39 ("Turkey").

During the same period, and earlier, the department also maintained its own reference library of confidential handbooks for the restricted use of its own officials, as did the Military and other India Office departments. The departmental reference libraries from which the printed items in the collection are drawn are now classified as L/P&S/20 and L/MIL/17. These archive groups also include the set of Foreign Office printed correspondence on Asiatic Turkey.

Some highlights of the collection

- The rise of the Turks. The Pan-Turanian Movement. Handbook prepared under the direction of the Historical Section of the Foreign Office, 1919;
- Railways in Asiatic Turkey and the Baghdad Railway negotiations, 1903–1914;
- Turco-Italian war, 1911–1913;
- The Caliphate and Pan-Arab movement, 1914–1918;
- The question of the Caliphate and Sultanate, 1919–1925;
- Treaty of Peace with Turkey: Treaties of Sèvres and Lausanne, 1919–1930;
- Turkey and Greece: war and peace, 1921–1923;
- Foreign Office annual printed reports on Turkish affairs, 1926–1938;
- Remilitarisation of Dardanelles: Montreux Conference, 1936–1937.

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