

## Chapter 4

### THE ORIENT ON A BICYCLE: TURKISH IMAGE IN THOMAS STEVENS'S *AROUND THE WORLD ON A BICYCLE*<sup>1</sup>

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#### Travel Literature and Thomas Stevens on His Bike

The first cyclist around the world, Thomas Stevens encouraged himself to undertake a perilous journey to pedal thousands of miles to see the world. The scope of his adventures covers a huge landscape beyond imagination in the late nineteenth century. In this very long journey, especially Stevens's representation of the Orient and Oriental people – specifically the Turks – along with their culture, lifestyle and manners provide an invaluable insight into the thinking of a Western person – a cyclist, in this case – and the cultural interaction between the East and the West. Referring to the main concepts of Orientalism, this article aims to discuss Stevens's version of the Orient and points out that the Orient is made up of various versions that deviate from each other depending on the approach of the gazer – in reference to the power/knowledge relationship – in line with the theoretical conceptualization of the Orient and Oriental discourse in the pre-established notions. Focusing on Stevens's nonfictional work, the study argues that there is still much more to say on the conflict between the East and the West in view of the contemporary conditions. Looking back into the late nineteenth century from the perspective of a European man, who by the way does not have the least intention to partake in this centuries-old discussion and simply happens to ride his bicycle in the Orient, the article concludes that European travellers have been missing so much about the Turks that it finally required a cyclist to reveal the mystery about Turkish people and culture.

Travel has always been one of the greatest desires of humanity. The will to see new lands, to meet unknown people and to discover what is beyond has been a source of motivation for us to accept all kinds of challenge for the sake of travelling. Sometimes travel has been incorporated into political, economic, cultural and social missions just because of the usually hospitable attitude towards

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## Conclusion

In conclusion, Thomas Stevens's unexpected portrayal of the Orient makes *Around the World on a Bicycle* an exceptional and extraordinary work to understand the hidden reality in this geographical and cultural concept. Stevens's approach to the Orient, as a cycling traveller with personal involvement in it, clears blurriness around it while enabling a comprehensive understanding of Turkish culture. In this regard, Turks turn into helpful, friendly, cooperative and pleasant people, challenging the historical conception of their horrible qualities. Despite the Oriental perception lurking between the lines at some points, the text provides a rich resource in order to observe Turks in their ordinary lives. Keeping himself distinct from Eurocentric views, Stevens destroys Oriental fantasies about the imaginary world hidden in the depths of Anatolia and creates a realistic depiction of the people living their culture and civilisation. From the perspective of cultural interaction between the Orient and the Occident, the traveller values their cultural elements and particular way of life free from the definitions that came forward along with other Orientalists. Accordingly, pedalling among the Turks and sharing their cultural codes, Stevens establishes a highly optimistic and promising image of the Orient in an objective attitude. We are far from acknowledging whether he has such a purpose on his mind or not when he starts his journey. Still, his dialectical method in evaluating the Orient looking at it in a first-hand experience brings him to a unique position in travel writing albeit his bizarre vehicle. Stevens recognises the importance of the Orient for its cultural value and realises that it does not have to depend on the Occident to be meaningful. After all, he is only a cyclist who has undertaken a great mission even in contemporary times, which makes it necessary to free him from any theoretical and cultural obligation. Therefore, I claim that Thomas Stevens contradicts Oriental discourse complimenting Turks and befriending them wherever he goes and destroys ambivalence on their identities, finally illustrating wrongly established theoretical arguments at that time and disclosing the truth about cultural multiplicity and substantiality of the Turks.

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