

Historical Genesis Of Western Orientalism

Ruzibaev Dostonbek Dilmurod ugli

National University of Uzbekistan, Department of Basic Doctoral (PhD) “Philosophy”, Uzbekistan

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Submission Date: 26 August 2025

Accepted Date: 24 September 2025

Published Date: 26 October 2025

VOLUME: Vol.05 Issue10

Page No. 22-25

DOI: - <https://doi.org/10.37547/social-fsshj-05-10-04>

ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the historical processes of Orientalism’s formation, its ideological and philosophical foundations, as well as the role of this phenomenon in shaping relations between East and West. The study examines the historical roots of Orientalism and the evolution of Western academic activities aimed at studying the East. The main significance of this work lies in its contribution to a deeper understanding of East-West relationships by revealing the specific historical and contemporary aspects of Orientalism.

Keywords: - Orientalism, orientalist, West, East, dichotomy, dominance, marginal culture, self-orientalism, colonialism.

INTRODUCTION

Following the publication of Edward Said's Orientalism [1] in 1978, Western Orientalism began to be studied based on new conceptual paradigms. Although Said was not among the first to conduct research in this field, through his concept of Orientalism, he created theoretical frameworks that were crucial for the formation of new research trends in this area. The origins of Orientalist thought, however, date back far earlier than the modern era. Its intellectual foundations can be traced to antiquity, when the dichotomy between “East” and “West” first emerged as both a geographical and cultural distinction. Over time, this binary perception evolved into an epistemological construct that shaped Europe’s self-identity through contrast with the imagined “Other”.

During the Enlightenment and the colonial expansion of the 18th and 19th centuries, Orientalism transformed into an institutionalized field of study that legitimized European dominance over the East through knowledge production. Scholars, explorers, and colonial administrators

contributed to the creation of an image of the Orient that reinforced the West’s cultural and political superiority. In this sense, Orientalism was not merely an academic pursuit, but also a mechanism of ideological and imperial control. Therefore, examining the historical genesis of Western Orientalism is essential for understanding how knowledge and power became intertwined in the formation of the modern world order. This study aims to trace the development of Orientalist thought from its early conceptual emergence to its institutional establishment in Europe, analyzing key intellectual, political, and cultural factors that shaped its evolution.

METHOD

The term “Orientalism” is derived from the French word “orientalisme,” which means the study or scholarly discipline related to the Orient. In the modern sense, the word “Orientalist” was first used to refer to a member of the Greek or Eastern Church, as evidenced in sources dating back to 1683. In a source from 1693, Anthony Wood mentions a person named Samuel Clarke as an “Oreintalian” or orientalist, meaning someone who

knows an Eastern language. “However, the term “orientalist”, referring to a scholar specializing in the study of the true East, first appears in an article written in English by Edward Pocock in 1779” [2, 428-437]. “Orientalism appears in the French Academic Dictionary of 1838 with the meaning of ‘studying the East’ (oriental study)” [3, 78].

“To date, there is no consensus on when Western Orientalism emerged. According to the most widely proposed hypothesis, the period of Orientalism’s emergence is considered to be around the 10th-11th centuries” [4, 20]. Although there is no clear understanding of when the field was formed, there is a general view that Orientalist research began alongside Islamic and Arabic studies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

With the development of Western colonialism in the East, Orientalism evolved into a field that studies all the languages, cultures, customs, and geography of the East, as well as the most widely used dialects of the peoples living in these regions. Some researchers trace the origins of Orientalism to the Battle of Mu'tah in 629 or the Tabuk expedition in 630. Scholars who support this approach also associate Orientalism with the Crusades, which were rooted in political conflicts between Christians and Muslims. According to proponents of this view, the formation of Orientalism in this direction led to the development of stereotypical perceptions in Western thought.

Other researchers designate the official birth of Orientalism as the decision of the Council of Vienne in 1312 to establish departments specializing in the study of the Arabic language in some European universities.

The renowned Islamic scholar and orientalist of the 20th century, the German scholar Rudi Paret, explains this issue based on a completely different approach. “According to it, the emergence of a unified field of Orientalism is linked to the formation of a community of Islamic and Arabic scholars in the 12th century, the translation of Arabic sources into European languages, and the creation of the first Latin Arabic dictionary” [5, 20]. Turkish scientist Khalil Inalcik also expresses an opinion close to this approach. He puts forward the idea that “Orientalism began with Arabic studies and the study of Arabic texts based on hermeneutic methods” [6, 22]. The ideas put forward above show that it was a difficult scientific task to determine precisely from what date Orientalism began as a field.

Another well-known Turkish scholar recognized for his research in Oriental studies discusses the historical development of this field, noting that Vasco da Gama’s discovery of a sea route to Asia around the Cape of Good Hope in 1498 was one of the decisive historical factors that greatly expanded the scope of Orientalism as a discipline. However, he emphasizes that detailed and systematic studies about the East began to appear in Europe only in the 18th and 19th centuries [7, 191].

In the 17th century, Europe experienced a growing interest in the systematic study and documentation of the East, which led to the publication of numerous translations, dictionaries, and encyclopedias devoted to providing detailed information about Eastern civilizations. Among the most prominent figures of this intellectual movement was the French Orientalist Barthélemy d’Herbelot (1625–1695), who became widely known for his project entitled “The Books of the East.” He devoted much of his life to compiling an extensive encyclopedia called “Bibliothèque Orientale” or “Universal Dictionary.” This monumental work functioned as an encyclopedic repository of knowledge about the Islamic world, encompassing an impressive range of topics such as history, literature, geography, religion, and culture, with particular emphasis on the Arab, Persian, and Turkish civilizations [8, 33–34].

After d’Herbelot’s death, the *Bibliothèque Orientale* was published posthumously in 1697 and soon became one of the most significant sources for Oriental studies in Europe. The encyclopedia not only facilitated the dissemination of information about the East but also provided a scholarly framework that influenced later generations of researchers. Within the intellectual and technological boundaries of its era, this work represented an ambitious and comprehensive effort to compile the available knowledge about the East into a single corpus. Consequently, it served as both a repository of accumulated Oriental knowledge and a foundational reference for the development of Orientalist scholarship in the centuries that followed.

The late 18th century — a period when the West’s dominance over the East began to manifest clearly — marks the second, modern stage in the development of Orientalism. Until the 18th century, the field of Orientalism had largely been concerned with the study and conceptual construction of the “marginal” — that is, peripheral cultures and peoples existing outside the bounds of

Europe's intellectual and cultural mainstream. However, by the end of the 18th century, the West had assumed what it perceived as a "civilizing mission" toward these marginalized nations.

At the same time, Orientalism transformed into an ideology that not only sought to reveal and study the distinctiveness of the East but also to emphasize Western superiority by appropriating and exploiting Eastern knowledge and resources. Through this process, Orientalism evolved into a powerful intellectual and ideological instrument that justified and reinforced the notion that Western dominance was both natural and necessary — a hegemony that, in the eyes of the West, ought to extend across the entire world.

The publication of the first comprehensive studies on European Orientalist research centers dates back to the first quarter of the 19th century. In 1784, Great Britain founded the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal in Calcutta, marking the beginning of institutionalized Oriental studies in the British Empire. Following this, France established the Société Asiatique de Paris in 1821, while Britain opened another major hub, the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, in 1823.

During this period, France — Britain's main rival in the global struggle for dominance — also sought to deepen its knowledge of the East, particularly the Near East. In 1798, Napoleon Bonaparte, during his Egyptian campaign, brought with him a team of 165 scholars, engineers, technicians, archaeologists, and linguists to Alexandria. Under French initiative, the Institute of Egypt (Institut d'Égypte) was established in Cairo, which became a crucial center for the study of Egyptian history, language, and culture.

Furthermore, in 1833, the University of Oxford opened a Chair of Sanskrit and established the Oriental Translation Fund, an agency dedicated to Oriental studies and translations. Between 1829 and 1833, more than fifty works were translated into Indian languages, significantly expanding Western access to and understanding of Eastern texts and traditions [9, 31–35].

The Société Asiatique of Paris, the Royal Asiatic Society, and the American Oriental Society are regarded as the most influential institutions established in the field of Orientalism. The first academic journal dedicated to Orientalist studies, titled "Fundgruben des Orients" ("Sources of the Orient"), was published between 1815 and 1818 in Vienna by Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall. This

journal played a crucial role in advancing Oriental studies by introducing Eastern—particularly Arabic, Persian, and Turkish—sources to European readers. Hammer-Purgstall's work was among the first of its kind, marking an important stage in the institutionalization of Orientalism as a scientific discipline.

Orientalism reached a new level of academic recognition with the establishment of the first International Congress of Orientalists in 1873, which signaled its full institutionalization across Europe. According to the Turkish scholar Aslı Çırağan, Orientalism represents a transhistorical discourse that encompasses a wide range of geographical and cultural contexts, including Asia, China, India, Egypt, Turkey, the Near East, Iran, and North Africa [10, 187].

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the historical development of Western Orientalism demonstrates that it is not merely a product of colonial expansion but a deeply rooted intellectual and cultural paradigm that has shaped the West's perception of the East for centuries. The evolution of Orientalism—from early geographical and religious distinctions to complex epistemological constructions—reveals how knowledge and power have intertwined in defining the "Other." Despite the globalizing tendencies of the modern world and the growing interconnectedness between East and West, Orientalism continues to function as an implicit framework within Western thought. Understanding its historical genesis, therefore, is essential not only for re-evaluating the West's intellectual heritage but also for developing more equitable and dialogical models of cross-cultural interaction in the 21st century.

REFERENCES

1. Said, E. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Book Books. 1979
2. Bulut, Y. (2012a). Oryantalizm. *Diyanet İslam Ansiklopedisi*, (33).
3. Adanır, E. O., & İleri, B. (2013). Oryantalist resimlerde Türk halıları. *Yedi*.
4. Bulut, Y. (2012a). Oryantalizm. *Diyanet İslam Ansiklopedisi*.
5. Gönültaş, E. (2008). Edward Said'in Eserlerinde Emperyalizm ve Oryantalizm İlişkisi (Publication No. 219861) [Master dissertation, Kirikkale University]. Higher Education Institution National Thesis Center.
6. İnalcık, H. (2002). Hermenötik, Oryantalizm, Türkoloji. *Doğu-Batı*, (20), 22.

7. Yüksel, M. (2014). İslamofobinin tarihsel temellerine bir bakış: Oryantalizm ya da Batı ve öteki. İstanbul Üniversitesi Hukuk Fakültesi Mecmuası.
8. Atasever, G. (2009). Dogu-Batı ilişkileri bağlamında oryantalizm (Publication No. 253517) [Master dissertation, Mugla University]. Higher Education Institution National Thesis Center.
9. Atasever, G. (2009). Dogu-Batı ilişkileri bağlamında oryantalizm (Publication No. 253517) [Master dissertation, Mugla University]. Higher Education Institution National Thesis Center.
10. Cırakman, A. (2002). Oryantalizmin varsayımsal temelleri: Fikri sabit imgelem ve düşünce tarihi. DoğuBatı.