



37th Levantine Heritage Foundation Zoom lecture with guest speaker Eric Covey  
11 March 2025, 6.00 pm (UK time)

### Revisiting George Bethune English in the Ottoman World

In 2011, the prominent American scholar of Islamic jurisprudence Dr. Zulfiqar Ali Shah reflected on the life of George Bethune English, a “proud American and a proud Muslim” who refused to give up his religion when pressured by his friends in 1827 and 1828. Shah’s intent was to use English, who spent a significant amount of time in the Eastern Mediterranean between 1815 and 1825, as an object lesson to familiarize his audience with the long history of Islam in the United States. The only problem with the story was that it had little basis in reality. Of course Shah was not the first to claim that English was a convert to Islam. For example, in 1928 Walter Livingstone Wright Jr. described English as a “renegade”. And other biographers have added imaginative details of their own over the years, such as Harold E. Bergquist’s 1983 claim that English was a “prominent American Turkophile”, this despite English’s own admission that he did not read Turkish. Indeed, much of what has been written about English is unsupported, with later writers simply repeating the errors and speculations of earlier generations. Yet, English’s life and published works do offer important insights about the relationship between the United States and the Levant in the early nineteenth century, and in my talk, I revisit my own appraisal of English in *Americans at War in the Ottoman Empire: US Mercenary Force in the Middle East* (I.B. Tauris, 2018).

Booking essential: <https://eric-covey-presentation.eventbrite.co.uk>

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The Ottoman shipyards and Arsenal on the Golden Horn, Constantinople



Eric Covey is a faculty member in Brooks College of Interdisciplinary Studies at Grand Valley State University in Michigan, USA. He received his PhD at the University of Texas in Austin, served as a Fulbright U.S. Scholar in Nigeria, and is the author of *Americans at War in the Ottoman Empire: US Mercenary Force in the Middle East* (I.B. Tauris, 2018).