

# INVENTED TRADITIONS

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I can see some eyebrows being raised. If not in academic circles, then in popular culture. What? Invented traditions? How can traditions be invented? Traditions are not invented; they are... well, traditions. Nobody has deliberately created them. They have existed from time immemorial.

Yesterday, for example, Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, was put to rest. He died at Windsor Castle on 9th April, and his funeral took place, again at Windsor Castle, on 17th April 2021. Due to covid restrictions, the direct participation was quite small: only thirty mourners, plus nearly 800 military and civilian staff. Other countries might make exceptions for major political or state events. Even facing a pandemic of such massive and legal proportions, crowds might be allowed to gather for governments or parties in power. Not in England. Of course the very existence of a royal house is inequality and privilege. But it had to abide — it recognised and accepted that it had to abide — by the same rules as everybody else. Still, there was audio-visual compensation. From start to finish, the whole event was televised by the BBC and watched by millions.

Even if, like me, you are neither British nor Christian nor with any degree of affection for dynastic states or the colonial Great Powers of yesteryear, I suspect that you might still have appreciated this careful, measured, calculated combination of religious, imperial, and military cultures. The quiet that descended on everything. The silent wait. The band. The honor guard. The pall-bearers. Their colorful uniforms, representing the various branches of the armed forces. The coffin, draped in Philip's own coat of arms, and his Admiral of the Fleet sword and cap on top. Slowly carried to and placed in the hearse. The queen's arrival in her claret-and-black state Bentley. The formation of the cortège. The slow, solemn procession from the castle to St George's Chapel. The accompanying *marcia funebre*, punctuated by single gun salutes followed by a single bell. Ascending, step by step, the church's staircase. A final minute of silence at the entrance, simultaneously observed all over the country. Then inside, the beginning of the religious last rites. The Dean of Windsor and the Archbishop of Canterbury. The dispersed seating. The queen alone by herself. Readings from the Bible, both Old and New Testaments. Prayers. Singing. Psalms. And a martial ending. Philip's styles and titles are read. The catafalque begins to descend into the Royal Vaults under the chapel. A Scottish regiment's pipe major plays *A Lament* on the bagpipes, walking away from us as he and the melody recede in the distance. The buglers of the Royal Marines sound *The Last Post* (which would be comparable to the Turkish *tadat*, the day's final head count). The state trumpeters of the Household Cavalry play *Reveille* (*kalk borusu*). The buglers close with *Action Stations* (*silâh başına*), the call to prepare for battle at sea.

No display of excessive emotions. No melodramatics. Instead, restrained mourning. Simple, dignified, understated — and monumental. Nobody put a foot wrong. No hitch, no hesitation at any point. A consummate choreography. Well, of course, an entire monarchical and aristocratic sense of occasion; a long-established etiquette and protocol; royal rituals that have been around for centuries — would you say?

Not really. To see why, please read (or go back to) David Cannadine's essay on "The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the 'Invention of Tradition', c.1820-1977", which argues that the pageantry which surrounds the British monarchy does not date from a very distant past (marked by rather shabby practices) but is actually the product of the late-19th and early-20th centuries. It is in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp 101-164. That same year, mind you, also saw the appearance of Ernest Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism* and Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*. All came in the wake of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). And as a threesome (or foursome) they marked a sea-change in the social sciences. As Hobsbawm put it in his Introduction, many "traditions" which "appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented." Modern processes of nationalism and nation-building have proved particularly fertile ground for such invented traditions that are intended and designed to create a national identity promoting national unity, and legitimising certain institutions or cultural practices. This turns out to be very relevant for studying the entire 20th century course of Turkish nationalism.

Meanwhile, if you have started with Cannadine, why don't you also read Hugh Trevor-Roper's, Prys Morgan's, Bernard Cohn's and Terence Ranger's contributions to the same volume, dealing with invented traditions in Scotland (clan tartans), Wales (bards and eistedfodds), India (darbars), and Africa (colonial schools and elites)? And then continue to Larry Wolff's *Inventing Eastern Europe* (1994) and Maria Todorova's *Imagining the Balkans* (1997)? Constructions, inventions, imaginings. All have become part and parcel of the conceptual toolbox of modern historians.0012.(17th April 2021).

