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Pascale Barthe, *French Encounters with the Ottomans, 1510-1560*. London and New York: Routledge, 2016. xi + 179pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. \$165.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9781472420428; \$49.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 9780367175788; \$49.95 U.S. (eb). ISBN 9781315583228.

Review by Ina Baghdiantz McCabe, Tufts University.

Pascale Barthe reveals a polyphony of voices in French texts about the Ottomans in the first half of the sixteenth century. The book has a larger time span than the title suggests: the first poem is dated 1464 and the period examined is over a century, since the end date of the book is 1575, the date of a pamphlet called “La France-Turquie: C’est-à-dire conseils et moyens tenus par les ennemis de la couronne de France pour réduire le royaume en tel estat que la tyrannie Turquesque” (“France-Turkey, that is to say the advice and means suggested by the enemies of the French kingdom to reduce the kingdom to Turkish tyranny”). Barthes identifies the pamphlet as a key example of a turning point: the advent of the “single” discourse the French would adopt about the Ottomans (p.156). This book highlights representations of the Ottomans in texts written by eight main authors, but also refers to the work of several other authors. The only very well-known work is Rabelais’s *Pantagruel*. Some authors examined by Barthe have been neglected by scholarship; examining them is one of the strengths of this book. This is a successful literary analysis coupled with a historical summary of current events to uncover political agendas; interpreting them demands skill, as fifteenth- and sixteenth-century texts are complex both in structure and vocabulary. Through texts and in the last chapter a carved *boiserie* commissioned by the diplomat Jean Yversen, Pascale Barthe seeks a window into early modern France’s *mentalité*.

The book has been structured according to each author (or two authors for chapters one and two), but it has an overarching poetic structure borrowed from the famous twelfth-century Persian Sufi poet Farid-ud-Din’ Attar. Barthe writes in the introduction, “Like the birds of Farid-ud-Din’ Attar’s allegory, sixteenth-century Frenchmen embarked on a long and strenuous journey when they chose to comment on their neighbors, the Ottomans” (p. 1). Subsequent chapters, save for one, have bird titles inspired by Attar’s *Conference of the Birds*. Barthe’s reference to the Persian poet might be inspired by the ending of the mystical journey taken by Attar’s birds. The birds, after flying through seven valleys, find only their own version of reality. They can only behold only their own image. It is powerful way to indicate that all encounters are interpretations as interpretations are the focus of this book. As the chapters are quite separate and often self-contained, it is best to examine them one by one, but in a review it is only possible

to highlight some of them. This reviewer has chosen chapters one, two, and six to illustrate the multiplicity of views the author highlights.

Chapter one, entitled “All Birds Assembled,” examines the writing of Jean Molinet (1435-1507) and André de la Vigne (1470-1527?), both important court poets, chroniclers, and *rhétoriciens*. Barthe refers to them as “vitriolic examples” of the “Ottomanophobia” that marks the period of the crusades (p.13). Molinet’s “Complainte de Grèce” (1464) is about Turkish aggression against Greece. The aggressor is described “either as a wolf, a snake, or an abominable seven-headed dragon” (p.13) who swallows oppressed Greece. This is in the spirit of the crusades, and Molinet looks for a hero in the West to conquer the beast of the East: would the English dispatch George to kill the dragon, the French produce a second Charlemagne, or could it be the Duke of Burgundy, who happens to be Molinet’s patron? For Barthe the belligerent discourse overlaps a “pacifist discourse,” urging unification among the Christian princes (p.14). To further clarify the political agenda she detects in Molinet, a 1494 poem by André de la Vigne, chronicler to two French kings, serves as a perfect example: the crusades are used to justify expansion within Europe. De la Vigne’s Ottomanophobia is just as virulent; he uses language such as “the damned Turks, these treacherous dogs” (p.15). The poem is a polemic about war, where the belligerent side wins and French soldiers are rallied to defend *Dame Crestienté*. The poem does not question going to war in Constantinople, but refers to going to Naples. Barthe sees the crusade as absent, a façade for French imperialism and expansion into Italy for the conquest of Rome. The second part of the chapter is about the Franco-Ottoman alliance and Francis I’s ambitions and rivalry with Charles V for the imperial crown. Barthe considers the *apologies* written to support the French alliance with the Ottomans. These offer a very potent contrast to the poems chosen for the beginning of the chapter and underscore that their political agenda went hand in hand with current affairs. Barthe points out an *apologie* that fails to discuss any religious difference between the French and the Ottomans and sanctions the alliance as a necessary *fait accompli*. She reminds us that the poet du Bellay has left texts to argue for the importance of the alliance, that France was a major player in the Mediterranean, and that the Franco-Ottoman bond had the support of many major figures.

Chapter two, entitled “A Dove or a Crow,” examines the works of Jean Lemaire de Belges (1473-1525), and Jean Thenaud (c.1480-1542). Jean Lemaire de Belges wrote in support of Gallicanism, in praise of the king Louis XII’s aim to head a French church independent of the pope. Lemaire’s text has a dialectical structure: it presents an argument against the pope seen as responsible for all schisms that have plagued Christianity and supports the councils of the princes who are presented as peace-seeking; his *Traicté* is dedicated to Louis XII. The pope is the crow and the princes are doves. To demonstrate the superiority of Gallicanism, Lemaire even chose to organize columns with schisms and councils and their effects cited one by one, side by side. As a historiographer to the king, Lemaire introduces two contemporary Muslim monarchs, Shah Ismail of Safavid Persia and the Mamluk sultan; Barthe points out the quasi-absence of the Ottomans. At the beginning of the *Traicté* the Safavid shah, the “Sophy,” is seen as the source of all good as a powerful enemy of the Ottomans. Lemaire states that he is translating the history of the Shah Ismail from the Italian, and bases his description on an earlier Venetian work. Barthe comments on the utilitarian side of this translation: the Persian Shah and his breaking away from the Sunni serves as a perfect foil for the French king’s Gallican Church (p. 33). After describing the Shah’s many victories and dwelling on his temperament, Shah Ismail’s dietary habits are brought up to point out that he drinks wine and eats pork. Lemaire makes an amendment to the Italian original on this dietary breach; Lemaire added the words “in secret” (p.34). This is a

pseudo-Christian Shah Ismail that is found elsewhere. Although the parallels are clear—Shah Ismail against the Ottomans, Louis XII against the pope—Lemaire is careful not to directly assimilate the Persian monarch with Louis XII. Barthe reads the *Traicté* as an opening towards the Islamic East.

Next Barthe examines a travel account, *Voyage*, a pilgrimage by Jean Thenaud, but one with an unusual focus on the periphery rather than only on Jerusalem. Thenaud leaves Angoulême in 1511. Extraordinarily, Thenaud, a *Cordelier* (a name given to the Franciscan monks of France), includes Mecca in the holy places and also focuses on Cairo and Persia, rather than only concentrating on Christian holy places on the way. There is a description of French commerce and Thenaud mentions two French merchants by name. He also narrates the conditions of trade through the Levant. The new information brought by both Lemaire and Thenaud about the Islamic world is read by Barthe as a new opening, reflected the subtitle chosen for this chapter, “Jean Lemaire de Belges and Jean Thenaud Open the Way to the Ottomans.” Barthe’s careful analysis of Thenaud’s voyage is fascinating and highly detailed; *Voyage* is one of the most intriguing pieces studied in the book.

The last chapter, chapter six, “The Peacock’s Beautiful Feathers,” is devoted to Jean Yversen. Studying Yversen, Barthe puts forward a strong demonstration of how writing on the Ottoman Empire and representing it on a *boiserie* was in fact about domestic affairs within France. Yversen was a minor diplomat representing France in Ragusa and Constantinople under the French ambassador La Vigne. On his return to his hometown of Gaillac, Yversen embarks on a self-fashioning mission to pose as a major political figure. He also becomes a representative of the Catholic cause around 1565. His correspondence and other documents are examined but there is also a careful analysis of a *boiserie* ordered by Yversen to illustrate his stay in the Ottoman Empire. The scenes on the *boiserie* form a narrative discourse about the Ottoman Empire “in a disarmingly detached fashion” (p.141). Yversen, after decades away from France, was faced with religious tensions and the advance of Protestantism on his return. The *boiserie* is not only an attempt to self-aggrandize and claim power, but is read by Barthe as Yversen claiming to reinstate Catholic authority over his hometown. Although the *boiserie* never refers to Protestants, Barthe argues that sixteenth-century Catholics would have read the Protestant as the Infidel and conflated the Protestants and the Ottomans in a metaphor of the crusades. That a crusade against the Protestants was Yversen’s motive is made clear by the lintel of the *boiserie*. In the center are Yversen’s coat of arms, surrounded by two battle scenes, one with an Islamic city in the background, and another with cross against cross. Yversen’s self-fashioning was successful; he was given titles of nobility and became Jean d’Yversen.

The shift from examining poets directly tied to the court at the beginning of the book to Yversen, a bourgeois in a provincial town in a southwestern France at the end of the book, is not unique within the work. Throughout Barthe has made an effort to choose texts of many genres produced by a multiplicity of authors in different social positions. In addition to the authors discussed above, there is Jacques de Bourbon, a Knight of Saint John, who wrote a detailed account of the fall of Rhodes to the Ottomans, Rabelais whose *Pantagruel* includes a scene that takes place in the Ottoman Empire, and Bertrand de la Borderie’s *Le discours du voyage de Constantinople*. In all instances textual analysis is coupled with a discussion of current affairs in order to highlight the political subtext. In addition to its cogent analysis, the fact that some of these texts have been neglected, such as the account of the fall of Malta, makes Barthe’s book an important contribution that adds to our knowledge of the sixteenth century.

In her conclusion Barthe examines a 1575 pamphlet, “La France-Turquie: C’est-à-dire conseils et moyens tenus par les ennemis de la couronne de France pour réduire le royaume en tel estat que la tyrannie Turquesque.” Barthe argues that this pamphlet marks the end of an era of mutual understanding. She attributes this change to a conflation of the Protestants with the Ottomans, since “during the course of the sixteenth century the crusade against the Ottomans transformed itself into a crusade against a much closer enemy, Protestants” (p. 159). She very briefly mentions that 1576 is the date of the publication of Jean Bodin’s *République*, and also mentions Guillaume Postel’s earlier work, *De la République des Turcs*. Barthe cites them as the exception, the few Frenchmen that would counter her thesis of a single discourse by 1575, and that the overture to Ottomans had come to a close. Bodin’s praise of the Ottomans is a study of their financial and military system which he offers as a model to the King of France, praising its superiority and efficiency.[1] Barthe concedes that the era allowed some plurality of opinion, naming Bodin again, but argues further that the description of Ottoman tyranny in *La France-Turquie* anchors Orientalist thought in France. Why is this pamphlet singled out as the anchor of Orientalism in France? It is not the virulent insulting and crusading tone of the pamphlet reminiscent of Molinet’s Ottomanophobia that dictates her choice. How does Pascale Barthe understand the difference? She contrasts Molinet’s work about an allegorical queen to the realism of the pamphlet. The pamphlet was about Catherine the Medicis, held responsible for the religious turmoil in her realm. Barthe clearly points to the religious propaganda for a crusade against the Protestants within France. The pamphlet’s aim had little to do with the Ottomans it featured; it centered on the domestic affairs of France (p.159-60). Gone is the symbiosis, “the vibrant culture of openness” that Barthe powerfully describes in texts such as *Pantagruel* or Lemaire’s *Traicté* (p. 161). The conclusion is too brief for such an important argument, which may very well stand if she had elaborated on it. No other texts written after 1575 are cited to uphold this turning point. If Barthe had continued to follow her path of highlighting a multiplicity of views and voices, as is so well done in chapter one, by analyzing Jean Bodin’s views on the Ottomans, albeit briefly with the pamphlet side by side, and pointed to texts written after 1575 to support the turning point she argues, it would have made for a stronger conclusion in an otherwise excellent study of France’s complex textual production about the Ottomans. Pascale Barthe’s study is a major contribution to our knowledge of Franco-Ottoman encounters in the early modern period.

NOTE

[1] For more on this aspect of Jean Bodin's work, see Ina Baghdiantz McCabe, *Orientalism in Early Modern France: Eurasian Trade, Exoticism, and the Ancien Regime* (Oxford: Berg, 2008), pp. 58-64.

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