

THE PROPHET AND THE AMBASSADOR: SAID EFENDI'S VISIT, THE DELAYED PRODUCTION OF VOLTAIRE'S MAHOMET, AND THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE LAW OF NATIONS

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The horrendous killing perpetrated on 7 January 2015 at the offices of the French satirical weekly newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* shook the world. In France, four days later, an estimated four million people took to the streets, proclaiming their attachment to the Republic and its universalist principles. Among the symbols brandished during these feverish days of collective soul-searching was Voltaire. A placard with Voltaire's portrait widely seen at demonstrations had him proclaim "Je suis Charlie." Though initial reports that his *Traité sur la tolérance* had soared up the best-seller list proved exaggerated and premature, sales increased steadily over the next few months (100,000 copies were sold between January and April 2015).¹ Because he stands for tolerance, freedom of expression, and the art of satire, Voltaire seemed to many the obvious recourse against the terrorists, whose perceived goal in targeting *Charlie Hebdo* had been to avenge the paper's decision to reprint the infamous caricatures of Muhammad first published in 2005 by the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*.

The aim of the present article is to put into historical perspective this moment when the Enlightenment and its values became a rallying cry and to ask questions about the nature of its legacy. Indeed, the problem of whether it was advisable to represent Muhammad satirically was actually raised in the eighteenth century, on stage rather than in print, when no other than Voltaire composed *Le fanatisme ou Mahomet le prophète*. The play casts Muhammad in a dark light as

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a manipulative and murderous impostor. Yet, the standard interpretation is that it has nothing to do with Islam. According to this reading, *Mahomet* is an instance of that classic Enlightenment ploy, indirect satire. Although apparently targeting Islam, Voltaire was actually aiming at Catholicism and at fanaticism in a general way. According to Nicholas Cronk, Muhammad offered a “veil only just opaque enough to distract critics from the thought of other (unnamed) religious impostors.”² This is evidenced by the reactions of a number of contemporaries, such as Lord Chesterfield, who thought that “il en voulait à Jesus-Christ, sous le caractère de Mahomet” [his target was Jesus-Christ, under the guise of Mahomet].³ Consequently, when the Jansenist-leaning magistrates of the Paris Parliament protested against the play’s irreligion through their mouthpiece *procureur général* (the king’s representative in the Parlement) Joly de Fleury, Voltaire had no choice but to bow to police authorities and withdraw it after only three performances. Furious against those he dubbed the “convulsionnaires en robe longue” [the long-robed convulsionists] (VC, D2643, To Argental, 22 August 1742) in reference to the miraculous cures accompanied by convulsions which had been taking place on the diacre Pâris’ tomb in the Saint-Médard cemetery and had become a powerful symbol of the Jansenist cause, he decided to ridicule their reading of the play by having it dedicated to Pope Benedict XIV. This he achieved three years later, albeit slyly, by garbling the pope’s answer so that it would explicitly refer to the play.⁴

What the focus on second degree readings has perhaps somewhat obscured is the intriguing possibility, not by any means contradictory, of a literal understanding of the play as referring to Islam—this is how, after all, Voltaire had presented it to the pope (VC, D3192, To Benedict XIV, 17 August 1745). Yet, as his tragedy enjoyed a successful revival in 1751, Voltaire confessed that “Il n’appartenait assurément qu’aux musulmans de se plaindre, car j’ai fait Mahomet un peu plus méchant qu’il n’était” [The Muslims alone had a legitimate reason for complaining, for I have portrayed Mahomet slightly more evil than he actually was] (VC, D4597, To Madame Denis, 29 October 1751). This statement, which reflected Voltaire’s evolution over the years on the subject of Islam as he worked on the *Essai sur les mœurs*, playfully denied any legitimacy to the Jansenist-inspired protests by contrasting their—in his opinion—empty claims, to those of the Muslims, whom he thought would have been justified in feeling aggrieved at his portrayal of Muhammad.⁵ Indeed, Voltaire knew for a fact that *Mahomet* had the potential to disturb and shock Muslim spectators, for he had just received notice of such a reaction to his play. From Paris, Lord Keith had written to him that he had just attended a performance of *Mahomet* along with his adopted daughter Emet Ulla, the daughter of a Janissary captain captured at the siege of Ochakov and a Muslim by faith, and that she had been “très scandalisée” [much scandalized] (D4597, To Madame Denis, 29 October 1751).⁶

Ten years previously, in the last days of 1741, as Voltaire was preparing for the Parisian premiere of *Mahomet*, the presence of Ottoman ambassador Mehmed Said Efendi, who stayed in France for practically a whole year, from September 1741 to August 1742, had suddenly drawn attention to the potentially injurious content of his tragedy. By focusing on this coincidence, previously overlooked or considered as a mere curiosity, and collecting the traces it left behind in the record, from Voltaire’s correspondence to reports in the periodical press and the pages of

the *Encyclopédie*, this study will demonstrate to what extent the ambassador's stay interfered with the creation and reception of Voltaire's play. It does so by taking its cue from an increasingly large body of scholarship, which in recent years has documented the manifold presence in early-modern Europe of people, goods, and ideas from the Islamic world.⁷ The century between 1650 and 1750 has recently been described as the "age of Turquerie," defined as "not solely a European representation of a foreign people, but a set of responses to an increase in the movement of Ottoman goods and ideas."⁸ The Ottoman empire was not merely an object of fantasy and imagination, but a major commercial and diplomatic partner, whose material and cultural productions appealed widely to the European elite. Although admittedly thin on the ground, Muslim presence more generally was a reality in eighteenth-century Europe.⁹ Among the main vectors of this presence were the embassies regularly sent to Europe by Muslim polities (Morocco, Algiers, Tunis, Tripoli, the Ottoman Empire, and Persia). Whereas previous studies would view them with an eye to their impact back home as agents of Westernization,¹⁰ new scholarship stressing their frequency, duration, and profound social impact in Europe now considers them as "part of a larger chain of a virtually never-ending mechanism of reciprocity and obligation."¹¹

The problematic coincidence between the impending performance of *Mahomet* and Said Efendi's stay in France can fruitfully be understood, this article argues, against this historiographic background. Said Efendi's embassy took place at perhaps the height of the appreciation of all things Ottoman, before attitudes started to shift—the watershed being the publication of Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws* in 1748. Yet, Said Efendi's mission has been surprisingly understudied compared to the more famous 1721 embassy of his father Mehmed Efendi.¹² Drawing on a wide range of evidence, from official correspondence to contemporary accounts and visual sources, this study will document the exceptional welcome he was afforded by the French state, local authorities, and Parisian high society, which amounted, it will be argued, to a process of naturalization as a man of the Enlightenment, in which Said Efendi himself played no small a part.¹³

It was in these circumstances that the question of the performance of *Mahomet* arose. From the outset, it was framed in the language of the law of nations. The law of nations, or *droit des gens* in French, derives from the Roman category of *jus gentium* or "law of peoples," which referred to the legal principles, based on natural law, governing relations between the Romans and conquered peoples. By the eighteenth century, through the reflections of jurists such as Alberico Gentili, Hugo Grotius, or Samuel Pufendorf, and as a consequence of the rise of modern states, it had come to designate something different, namely the set of rules governing the interactions between states.¹⁴ In the *Encyclopédie*, the jurist Antoine-Gaspard Boucher d'Argis defined it as les "règles de bienséance, d'humanité, & de justice" [the rules of decency, humanity, & justice] that nations had tacitly agreed to follow in peace as well as in war.¹⁵ Would a performance of *Mahomet* in the presence of the Ottoman ambassador contravene the law of nations? This question in turn referred to the problem of the universality of its reach. Did the law of nations apply to dealings with extra-European polities, and with the Ottomans in particular? This is precisely the question Jennifer Pitts asks in a recent study where she proposes to consider the "eighteenth century . . . as a period of

particular fluidity in conceptions of the law of nations, when the older notion of a unified *Christianitas* or *respublica christiana* predicated on hostility to infidels was losing its hold, and the divide between civilized and barbarous was not yet as deeply entrenched as it would become in the nineteenth century.” In this context, the Ottoman Empire was the “defining marginal case of the European international order” and relations with the Ottomans a kind of litmus test of the inclusiveness of the law of nations.¹⁶ The creation of *Mahomet* enables us to consider this problem from an unexpected perspective.

Beyond that, the fact that performance of *Mahomet* was delayed until after Said Efendi's departure from Paris hints at the episode's singular place in the history of religious toleration during the Enlightenment. Indeed, the representative of the Ottoman state, Said Efendi was also viewed through the lens of his religious faith and it was in order not to hurt his religious sensibilities that the performance was delayed. According to Benjamin Kaplan, toleration in early-modern Europe can be defined as the “peaceful coexistence of people of different faiths living together in the same village, town, or city.”¹⁷ The issue of the performance of *Mahomet* in the ambassador's presence, as it was discussed during his visit and in the aftermath, thrust the practice of toleration onto a global scene, the law of nations defining a specific mode of toleration, one geared towards a “foreign” religion. Through the law of nations, it was thus the universality of the Enlightenment and its values that were, it will be argued, put to the test.

ON A COLLISION COURSE

Though he also knew of George Sale's translation of the Quran, Voltaire's main source for *Mahomet* was the count of Boulainvilliers' *La Vie de Mahomed*.¹⁸ However, the plot of *Mahomet* is for the most part made-up, as Voltaire himself readily admitted.¹⁹ It centers around the siege of Mecca. Zopire, the old sheriff of Mecca, is the bulwark protecting the city against Mahomet's conquering armies. As Palmire, Zopire's female captive, extolls the virtues of Mahomet, the spectator is at first left uncertain as to the character of the latter, but all doubts are dispelled from the moment Mahomet appears on stage at the beginning of act II, confessing to his limitless lust for power on a world-historical scale. A cynic, he does not believe in his own religion and merely uses it as a means to establish his political domination: “Oui; je connais ton peuple, il a besoin d'erreur; / Ou veritable ou faux, mon culte est necessaire.” [Yes; I know thy people, they are in need of error; / whether true or false, the cult I preach is a necessity.]²⁰ Throughout the play, he appears as scheming, manipulative and ruthless, in spite of the fact that his wild ambition is fueled by his hopeless love for Palmire. The play hinges on Mahomet and his lieutenant Omar's efforts to brainwash the young Séide, Palmire's lover (and therefore Mahomet's rival), into assassinating Zopire. Before being sent on his deadly mission, Séide is administered a delayed-action poison. But after he has reluctantly perpetrated his crime, he discovers that he and Palmire are in fact brother and sister, the long-lost children of Zopire, and that he has therefore killed his own father. Just as he rises in revolt to confront Mahomet, the poison starts having an effect and he is struck down in front of the assembled people, seemingly by the hand of God. Although apparently complete, Mahomet's triumph is marred by Palmire's suicide, and he is left to contemplate his fate as one whose power will

forever rest on fraud: “Je dois régir en Dieu l’Univers prévenu : / Mon Empire est détruit si l’homme est reconnu” [I must rule the deluded Universe as a God : / My power will be destroyed if I am recognized to be a man].²¹

The play was performed for the first time in Lille on 25 April 1741. This was unusual for a work by Voltaire, whose plays had until then premiered on the scene of the Comédie-Française in Paris.²² Voltaire had in fact completed a first draft as early as July 1739, but getting the play on stage proved a long-drawn affair.²³ Although a performance in Paris was expected in the early days of 1740, Voltaire was unsatisfied with his work and decided to take it back in order to revise it. This took him the better part of one year, and it was only in January 1741 that it was scheduled for performance, after being approved first by the assembly of players, whose prerogative it was to decide on the content of their repertoire, then by the lieutenant general of police Claude-Henry Feydeau de Marville. This was in spite of the negative report allegedly handed in by the censor of plays, the playwright Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon, which was offset by Cardinal André Hercule de Fleury, the *de facto* prime minister, having given his blessings.²⁴ Just as preparations were getting under way, however, Voltaire learnt that both Jeanne-Françoise Quinault, who had acted as his go-between with the comedians, and her brother Quinault-Dufresne, were leaving the troupe (VC, D2455, To Jeanne Françoise Quinault, 1 April 1741).²⁵ This was an important setback, and precluded any possibility of a performance in Paris in the immediate future. Voltaire, who was then staying with Madame du Châtelet in Brussels, therefore turned to neighboring Lille, where he was acquainted with the leader of the local troupe, La Noue. Indeed, the original inspiration for writing a play about Muhammad had been La Noue’s *Mahomet Second*, a play about sultan Mehmed II, which had triggered the association of ideas (VC, D1962, To Argental, 2 April 1739). As Voltaire saw it, the performance in Lille would prove a good testing ground in a more serene environment than Paris (VC, D2459, To Argental, 7 April 1741). The play was performed four times there and Voltaire was pleased about the whole experience (VC, D2477, To the Argentals, 5 May 1741).

At about the time when *Mahomet* was being performed in Lille, Mehmed Said Efendi was chosen by sultan Mahmud I as his ambassador (*elçi*) to Paris. Accompanied by a suite of approximately two hundred persons, he left Constantinople at the beginning of August 1741 and, on 17 September 1741, he sailed into Toulon, where he had to go through the quarantine procedures.²⁶ In the meantime, Voltaire, who had submitted the text of *Mahomet* to a number of friends, was busy revising the play. He had been impressed by La Noue’s performance in Lille and wished him to play the part of Mahomet in Paris, which meant he must be received as a member of the royal troupe. Madame Du Châtelet was confident that this might be achieved if the Gentlemen of the Bedchamber, who superintended the Comédie-Française, got behind the project. She already foresaw that Said Efendi’s presence might prove a problem though, but she thought he would already be gone by the time the Paris actors would be ready: “L’ambassadeur turc sera parti, et rien ne s’y opposera” [The Turkish ambassador will be gone by then, and nothing will stand against it] (VC, D2569, Madame du Châtelet to Argental, 21 September 1741). After having passed through Lyons and Dijon, Said Efendi reached the gates of Paris at the end of December 1741. Still busy “filing away” at his play, Voltaire

then pointedly inquired to know “combien de temps l’ambassadeur turc sera à Paris” [how long the Turkish ambassador will be staying in Paris] (VC, D2574, To Argental, 25 December 1741).

The collision between *Mahomet* and Said Efendi, who made his formal entry in Paris on 7 January 1742, was still only virtual, but problematic nevertheless. Voltaire by this point was getting worried that Alexis Piron’s new play *Fernand Cortès* would be performed before his (VC, D2584, Voltaire to Argental, 19 January 1742). If Piron seized on the subject to write a scene featuring Cortès bringing down the gods of Tlaxcala, would it not take the element of surprise out of the “miracle” performed by Mahomet in act V, when Séide is struck down as if by the hand of God? Since Voltaire was planning on staying for a few weeks in Paris, he was anxious to have the play performed under his supervision and as soon as possible. Yet, he recognized it would not be possible as long as Said Efendi would be in Paris. According to Madame du Châtelet, Voltaire “compte faire jouer son prophète dès que son ambassadeur sera parti” [intends to have his prophet performed as soon as his ambassador departs] (VC, D2583, Madame du Châtelet to Cideville, 14 January 1742), and Voltaire elaborated on the point a few days later:

J’auray encore le temps d’attendre que L’ambassadeur turc soit party, car en vérité il ne seroit pas honnête de dénigrer Le profète pendant qu’on nourit L’ambassadeur, et de se moquer de sa chapelle sur notre théâtre. Nous autres français nous respectons le droit des gens, surtout avec les turcs.

[I will still have time to wait for the Turkish ambassador’s departure, for in truth it would not be right to denigrate the prophet while we nourish the ambassador, and to mock his faith on our stage. We Frenchmen respect the law of nations, especially when dealing with the Turks] (VC, D2585, Voltaire to Cideville, 19 January 1742).

The reference to the law of nations and its implications will be returned to in a later section. What it reveals to start with, is that the ambassador’s presence had transformed the performance of *Mahomet* into a matter of state. The Comédie-Française was a royal theatre: a performance of the play would have seemed to confer official sanction on its content, and was therefore out of the question.

The risk of a collision was all the greater as Said Efendi proved an avid theatre-goer during his stay. On his way to the capital already, as cities welcomed and feted him, he was often treated to evenings at the theatre. Interestingly, local authorities did not hesitate to draw upon the Turkish element in the repertoire. In Lyons, on 23 November 1741, Said Efendi attended a performance of Jean-Philippe Rameau’s famous opera-ballet *Les Indes galantes*, whose first entrée entitled “Le Turc généreux” [The Generous Turk] features the character of the amorous yet magnanimous Osman. The records of the Lyons consulate record how, on this occasion, Said Efendi lent a helping hand, arranging for a tailor-made turban to be sent over to the actor playing the part of Osman.²⁷ This “real” turban given by Said Efendi to give more authenticity to the production of the Turkish act of Rameau’s opera encapsulates how “Turquerie” was not merely the realm of fantasy, but fed upon real life interactions.



During his stay in Paris, Said Efendi regularly visited the theatre. The *Mercure de France* reported on his first visits to the three official theatres. On 21 January 1742, he was at the Paris Opera to view a production of the pastoral *Issé* by Antoine de La Motte and André Cardinal Destouches. Three days later, he went to the Comédie-Française for a comedy triple bill. On the 29th, he was at the Comédie-Italienne. He also visited the fair theatres and went back to the official theatres “lorsqu’on a représenté des Pièces considérables, & qu’il a jugées dignes de son attention” [when considerable plays he deemed worthy of his attention were performed].²⁸ Indeed, although the *Mercure* did not report on Said Efendi’s further visits to the Comédie-Française, the daily registers of receipts reveal that he visited the theatre at least once more, on February 28.²⁹

A few years later, Voltaire would recall in his *Philosophie de l’histoire* that Said Efendi during his stay in Paris had seen a performance of Molière’s *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* with its famous “Turkish Ceremony” and that he had considered it to be “la profanation la plus abominable” [the most abominable profanation], because of the use of the word “*Hou*” (a word for God used by Sufis) in the lingua franca nonsense verse. However, we know for a fact that *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* was not performed in Paris during Said Efendi’s stay.³⁰ Voltaire was in fact mistaking Said with the fictitious “Hadgi Mehemmed Efendy” invented by the orientalist Alexandre-Louis-Marie Pétis de la Croix in a book published in 1735 and directed against the memoirs of Laurent d’Arvieux, Molière and Lully’s consultant in all matters “Turkish.” Although invented, the protests uttered by the imaginary envoy against the “sottes & ridicules scenes Turques du Bourgeois Gentilhomme” [stupid and ridiculous Turkish scenes of the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*] show that the potentially offensive nature of parts of the repertoire had been discussed prior to Said’s visit.³¹

In the end, Said Efendi’s stay in Paris lasted six months, much longer than had been expected at first. La Noue made his début at the Comédie-Française on May 15, but it was only after June 30, the day Said Efendi eventually left Paris, that things started moving again. The Parisian premiere of *Mahomet* eventually took place on August 9, when Said Efendi was back in Toulon, whence he embarked for Constantinople on the fifteenth.

AN ENLIGHTENED OTTOMAN IN PARIS

Said Efendi’s embassy of 1742 has been overshadowed by the previous Ottoman embassy to France, that of Mehmed Efendi, which took place twenty years earlier, in 1721. A strong thread of continuity links the two missions, since Said was Mehmed’s son and had accompanied his father in 1721, acting as his personal secretary. This was in spite of the fact that Ottoman politics had in the meantime undergone a deep crisis. In 1730, the Patrona Halil rebellion exploded. Grand vizier Ibrahim Pasha, the driving force behind the 1721 embassy, was executed before sultan Ahmed III was ousted from power. This put an end to the so-called Tulip Era. From 1736 onwards, the Ottoman empire managed to keep in check the combined onslaught of the Austrians and the Russians in the Russian-Austrian-Ottoman War, which was brought to an end in 1739. The role played by the French ambassador Louis-Sauveur de Villeneuve in the peace negotiations leading up to



the signing of the treaty of Belgrade, though it may have been exaggerated and was only circumstantial, resulted in the renewal of the French capitulations in 1740 and the decision on the part of sultan Mahmud I to send a new embassy to Paris.³²

Said's embassy of 1742 has remained in the shadow of his father's because of the celebrated embassy account written by Mehmed Efendi. Said, on the other hand, although the practice had by then become fairly common and he had himself written one after his 1732–1733 embassy in Stockholm, does not seem to have given an account of his French mission—at any rate, no such document has yet come to light. As for Mehmed Efendi's account, it has achieved classic status both in a Turkish and a French context. Reprinted three times in Istanbul in the second half of the nineteenth century, it was construed as a decisive step towards the Westernization of Turkey, resulting in innovations in palace architecture and garden design epitomized by the construction of the Sa'dabad palace complex.³³ It was published in a French translation by the dragoman and scholar Julien-Claude Galland as early as 1757. This text was republished in the early 1980s under a suggestive title as a rare instance of an Oriental view of Enlightenment France, the “authentic” counterpoint to the fictional *Persian Letters* by Montesquieu that were coincidentally published the very same year as the embassy had taken place.³⁴

The historiographical fortune of Mehmed's account should not obscure, however, the fact that Said's arrival in France in 1741 was an important event, perhaps less from a diplomatic perspective than because of the wide media coverage it garnered. For six months, Said Efendi was the talk of the town, as a wide range of sources attests. One month before he even reached Paris, his arrival was already “l'Évangile du jour” [the Gospel of the day] according to Swedish envoy Carl Gustaf Tessin.³⁵ As he kept his wife abreast of Said Efendi's hectic social agenda, Tessin's letters to her became a kind of “Journal du Mahometan” [a Diary of the Mahomedan's activities]. He had to apologize for his obsession with Said Efendi: “Je ne puis, comme vous voies, m'empêcher d'en parler” [I cannot, as you see, refrain from speaking about him].³⁶ Two special issues of the *Mercure de France* comprising among other items a detailed summary of Said Efendi's activities, were published to commemorate his stay.³⁷

The embassy also constituted a visual event. Dozens of cheap prints were commercialized. As Perrin Stein has demonstrated, some of these prints, those commemorating the more formal occasions (the Paris entry and the public audience at Versailles) were recycled from earlier plates dating from Mehmed Efendi's embassy or even from the Persian embassy of 1715 (figure 1).³⁸ This was also the case of a few portraits, but a high proportion, such as the one by Seraucourt after Fenouil, “seem to actually bear a resemblance to Said's features.” (figure 2)³⁹ More than a generic Ottoman ambassador, it was thus the individual Said Efendi who was the object of widespread attention and the visual impact of his presence can probably be related to the budding culture of celebrity.⁴⁰

Contemporary reports are quite laconic concerning Said Efendi's faith or religious practice. Though he designated him as “the Mahomedan,” Tessin, for instance, did not broach the subject. The duke of Luynes simply noted that Said Efendi abstained from drink for religious reasons, even though his son-in-law did not, which occasioned some tensions between the two men.⁴¹ This silence is probably due to Said Efendi's devotions being conducted in private rather than to



Figure 1. *Entrée de l'Ambassadeur de Turquie* (Paris: Thevenard, 1742). Courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale de France.



Figure 2. Claude Seraucourt, *Portrait de Saïd Mehemet Pacha Begler, Bey de Romélie, Embassadeur Extraordinaire du Grand Seïg en France en 1741*. Courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

his religious observance being lax. We know from an elaborate description of the ambassador's suite that it comprised personnel specifically in charge of the organization of prayers (a muezzin and another person for taking care of prayer rugs).⁴²

A striking feature of these reports on the other hand is the insistence on the ambassador's politeness and even gallantry. This has already been noted by Julia Landweber, who suggests that such comments "demonstrate the self-reflective nature of French interest" in the Ottoman ambassador.⁴³ Yet, the undeniable ethnocentrism of French perceptions should not detract from Said Efendi's agency in conforming to them and from the consequences thereof. An anecdote circulated widely, showcasing Said Efendi's wit and the easy manner of his interaction with women. To a lady who had asked him why Turkish men had so many wives, he answered: "C'est qu'elles ne sont pas si aimables que vous Madame!" [It is because they are not as worthy of love as you are, Madam!]. "Cela n'est il pas du dernier Galant?" [Is this not of the latest gallant], marveled Tessin.⁴⁴ This image, fashioned in equal measure by Said Efendi's repartee and by those who circulated the anecdote, was also conveyed by the means of society theatricals. The playwright Saint-Foix wrote a comedy entitled *Les veuves turques*, which was performed in a salon as part of an entertainment in Said Efendi's honor. Set in Constantinople, it tells of how Osmin manages, by playing one against the other, to wed not one, but two beautiful widows at the same time. A pleasant take on the amorous potential of polygamy for the gallant Turk, it was endorsed by Said Efendi, who accepted Saint-Foix's dedication of the play to him.⁴⁵ There was also a lewd side to this depiction of Said Efendi, satirists having a field day joking about his honorific status as a pasha of three tails (the word in French for the *tugh*, the horse's tail the number of which serves as a badge of distinction for Ottoman dignitaries, is the sexually loaded *queue*) and the pleasurable prospects this afforded Parisian women.⁴⁶

Said Efendi's mastery of the social codes of French polite society went hand in hand with his command of the French language. The chronicler Barbier described him as "un homme de quarante-cinq ans, d'esprit, très poli et sachant parler français aussi bien que nous autres" [a forty-five-year old man, witty, very polite and who speaks French as well as we do].⁴⁷ The *Mercur de France* also insisted on this aspect, linking Said Efendi's fluency to his previous stay in France, in 1721, when it had already been noticed.⁴⁸ After his departure, he had written "letters to his friends in Paris, in French and with his own hand, in a very polite manner."⁴⁹

Later on, in 1727, he had associated with the Hungarian renegade Ibrahim Müteferrika in setting up a new printing press in Istanbul—the first commercial printing press in the Ottoman Empire to publish books in Ottoman Turkish using the Arabic script.⁵⁰ As soon as the abbé Bignon, head of the *Bibliothèque royale*, heard of this, he wrote to Said Efendi in order to ask him for copies of the books that would come out of the new press. Bignon also hoped Said Efendi would provide access to the collections of the Topkapı palace library, which, it was imagined, might hold previously unknown texts by Latin and Greek authors. Said Efendi answered that he was willing to help. He sent two letters to Bignon to that effect, the first in Latin, the second in Ottoman Turkish. The choice of Latin rather than French is surprising; it may be interpreted as a wish on Said's part to claim membership to the Republic of Letters. Bignon was unimpressed by Said's Latin, but on the other hand intrigued by the letter in Turkish, commissioning two independent "literal"

translations (even though Antoine Marianne, the bearer of the letter, had already provided one). He was clearly interested in the exact wording of the letter, affording us, through this “foreignizing” translation by Jean-Baptiste de Fiennes, professor at the *Collège royal*, the rare opportunity to listen to Said Efendi’s own voice:

Mon sincere aimable amy Monsieur L’abbé, vostre lettre scavante étant arrivée a la main nourrie de sincerité nous avons esté davantage oblizez de la parolle scavante qui y est designée, particulièrement, nous avons esté doublement rejouis de vostre faveur au sujet de la manufacture d’imprimerie recemment etablie à la Porte pour laquelle nous sommes commandez.

[My sincere dear friend Monsieur l’abbé, your learned letter having reached the hand filled with sincerity, we have been all the more obliged by the learned discourse thereto consigned, in particular, we have rejoiced doubly at your favor concerning the printing manufacture recently established at the Porte we have been entrusted with.]⁵¹

In line with the customs of Ottoman letter-writing, Said expressed gratefulness at the elaborateness of Bignon’s letter and reciprocated the gift with flourishes of his own. As for Bignon, he was not so much interested in the poetic quality of Said’s prose as in his mode of address, reporting proudly to the minister Jean-Frédéric Phélypeaux de Maurepas that Said had followed “les manières les plus respectueuses des Turcs, telles qu’ils les pratiquent à l’égard des seigneurs du plus haut rang” [the Turks’ most respectful ways, those they use to write to the lords of the most noble rank].

This history of previous encounter and sustained interaction over the years facilitated Said Efendi’s quick integration into Parisian high society when he arrived in 1742. Tessin probably summed up the general feeling when he wrote that “il est en verité tres aimable et passeroit pour Francois, sans son turban, et cette vilaine perruque sale qu’il a au menton” [he is, in truth, most agreeable and would pass off as a Frenchman, were it not for his turban and the awful dirty wig that dangles from his chin].⁵² At the opposite of the dynamics of othering characteristic of Orientalism in the Saidian sense, a process of naturalization was at work, although the surprise implicit in such statements smacks of condescension and the derogatory remark regarding the physical aspect and attire of Said Efendi marked its limits.

This process was epitomized visually by the extraordinary portrait of Said Efendi by the painter Jacques Aved. It is unclear who commissioned the portrait. Though it has been said that it was Said Efendi himself, who would have intended it as a gift to Louis XV, it is most likely, according to Perrin Stein, that Aved seized on the opportunity of the ambassador’s presence and his willingness to pose, to showcase his skills. This does not mean, however, that Said Efendi did not have agency in choosing the details that would fashion his own image. Pictured full-length in three-quarter view, Said Efendi is standing in front of a gilded desk. In the background on the right, a curtain reveals a snowy Parisian landscape dotted with the white turbans of his retinue on horseback, as they make their way towards the Saint-Antoine gate on the day of his entry. Although the turban, the beard, the caftan and the dagger at the waist mark him out as “exotic,” he otherwise bears all the attributes of the man of the Enlightenment. The position of the hands (the open right hand points at the letters of credential bearing the imperial seal on the



desk while the left seems to be pushing a sealed letter in the pocket of the caftan), along with the books on the desk, impart the idea of the well-read and seasoned negotiator. The globe and the hand-held telescope at his feet mark him out as a learned man and a patron of knowledge. This is emphasized by the open book in the bottom-left corner. Clearly discernible on the left-hand page map is the shape of America, the northern part of the continent cut out. Although this has not been remarked upon previously, this page is undoubtedly plate number 22 of the Mütefferrika edition of the famous *Kitab-i Cihannüma* (*Book of the view of the World*), a copy of which Said Efendi had brought with him along with four other volumes from the Mütefferrika press.⁵³ The eleventh book to come out of the press, it was an updated version of the work left uncompleted at his death by the seventeenth-century scholar Katib Çelebi.⁵⁴ The choice of America among the twenty-seven maps of the printed *Kitab-i Cihannüma*, which resonated with another book published earlier by Mütefferrika, namely the *Tarikh-i Hind-i gharbi* (*History of the West Indies*), a sixteenth-century compilation of translations about the discovery of the New World that also contained two world maps, thus also conveyed the image of an ambassador with a global outlook.⁵⁵ One should note, however, that this might well have elicited a smug reaction on the part of French officials: a few years previously, Jean-Baptiste de Fiennes junior had sent his translation of the *Tarikh* to Maurepas in order to give him some idea of the “ridiculous genius of the Turks” in the field of geography.⁵⁶

It was purportedly in order to combat such well-entrenched prejudices, that a small brochure providing a commentary on Aved's painting was published, just as it was about to be unveiled at the 1742 Salon. The anonymous author started by lamenting the bad reputation still attached to the “Turk” and the “Persian”. “Pourquoi . . . ne sont-ils pas à nos yeux des hommes ordinaires ?” [Why . . . do we not see them as ordinary men?], he asked.⁵⁷ He called for an end to the ethnocentric superiority complex of the French: “reconnoissons que les vertus & les talens sont de tous les lieux & de tous les tems” [let us recognize that virtues & talents belong to all places & all times].⁵⁸ He then went on to praise Said Efendi as a man of the world, learned, polite, far-traveled (he recalled his missions as an envoy of the sultan in Russia, Sweden and Saxony), and enlightened: “il est né pour la société; il est formé pour éclairer les autres; & ce qui vaut encore mieux, pour s'en faire aimer en les éclairant” [he is born for society; he was made to enlighten others; and, even better, to be loved by enlightening them].⁵⁹

Although not devoid of ambiguity, this process of naturalization and the degree of integration Said Efendi had over the years achieved, at least apparently, in French high society, made it all the more difficult to consider giving *Mahomet*. Voltaire himself came to know and appreciate Said Efendi: “J'ay vu l'ambassadeur turc, j'ay dîné avec luy, il me parait que c'est un homme plus franc et plus rond que nos ministres crétiens” [I saw the Turkish ambassador, I dined with him, it seems to me that he is a man more sincere and more honest than are our Christian ministers] (VC, D2592, To Madame Denis, 15 February 1742).⁶⁰





Figure 3. Jacques-André Aved, *Saïd Pacha, ambassadeur de la Porte ottomane*, 1742 (239 x 162 cm). Photo © Château de Versailles, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Christophe Fouin.

THE LAW OF NATIONS AND THE OTTOMANS

Placed on the desk in front of Said Efendi are a volume by Grotius and a compendium of peace treaties. Aved thus represented him as familiar with the two main sources of the law of nations. On the one hand, symbolized by Grotius' *De Jure Belli ac Pacis*, were the writings that had redefined the theory of international relations.⁶¹ On the other were the corpus of treaties that practically governed diplomatic relations between states. A man of the Enlightenment, Said was also depicted as the representative of a polity integrated into the European state system.

This integration was a fact. All the major European powers had legations in Constantinople. In 1699, at the peace of Karlowitz, the Ottomans agreed for the first time to a permanent peace with the powers of the Holy Alliance and recognized that they were separated from them by stable political boundaries. Therefore, although the European concept of the law of nations (by contrast with the Islamic law of nations) did not gain currency in an Ottoman context until somewhat later, at the end of the eighteenth century, when it was translated as *hukuk-u milel*, Karlowitz marked a major step in their integration into the European state system.⁶² However, despite the density of diplomatic and commercial relations, the idea that the Ottomans were part of the European state system remained problematic. The European union envisaged by the abbé de Saint-Pierre to establish perpetual peace, for instance, not only excluded the Ottomans but was explicitly geared against them.⁶³ And although this characterization of the Ottomans as infidels was on the wane, it tended to be replaced by their portrayal as governed by despotism.⁶⁴

It was this ambiguous position of the Ottomans, at once in and out, that Voltaire alluded to when invoking the law of nations as the principle forbidding a performance of *Mahomet*: "we Frenchmen respect the law of nations, especially when dealing with the Turks." The irony denoted the apparent paradox of the law of nations' cross-confessional reach and may also have referred to the strong commercial interests binding the French monarchy to the Ottoman empire.⁶⁵ The sentence referred more specifically to the "chief head" of the law of nations according to Grotius, namely the inviolability of ambassadors.⁶⁶ Drawn from Roman law, this principle was elaborated upon by the Dutchman Abraham de Wicquefort in his influential *De l'ambassadeur*, first published in 1680, in which he posited that the "Security of Ambassadors" had been agreed upon "by the universal Consent of all the Nations of the Earth". Interestingly, Wicquefort, who built upon the same statement by the Roman jurist Sextus Pomponius as Grotius ("He that outrages or beats the Ambassador of an Enemy, violates the *Law of Nations*, because the Person of an Ambassador is sacred"), slightly twisted its meaning to add moral insult to physical injury in his definition of the violation of the sanctity of ambassadors.⁶⁷ Eager to prove the universality of this principle, Wicquefort stated that in spite of their "savage Natures" and the fact that they "don't scruple to offend the Ministers of Sovereigns who reside with them," the Turks in fact considered this to be "contrary to their Law, the *Alcoran expressly forbidding to offend the Elchi*, that is to say the publick Minister."⁶⁸

If the Ottomans considered ambassadors as inviolable, it seemed logical to reciprocate. Although religion was not a prominent feature of Said Efendi's public persona, it was nevertheless always an underlying factor in his interactions with the French authorities. He had for example distinguished himself by show-

ing all due respect for Christianity. When the *Corpus Christi* procession had gone by his residence, not only had he bowed to the wishes of the Saint-Sulpice curate by keeping himself and his suite from view, but he had also applauded the sacred music played before his windows, a “laudable” gesture saluted by the *Mercure de France*. Conversely, upon learning that a member of Said Efendi’s suite was ill and on the verge of death, the lieutenant of police Marville had planned, since the man could not be buried in consecrated ground, obviously, to have him interred by night in a “chantier” [yard], but intended to tell the ambassador that he had been given an individual grave, “les Turcs ayant cette superstition de vouloir avoir des endroits particuliers pour être enterrés” [the Turks being superstitious about having their own particular burial places]. In the end, the man did not die, so it was not necessary to have recourse to the subterfuge, but the episode reveals that the authorities’ policy was to accommodate as much as possible their hosts’ beliefs, even if only seemingly so.⁶⁹

In delaying the performance of *Mahomet*, another consideration might also have come into play, at least according to Voltaire, who thought it would have been wrong to “denigrate the prophet while we nourish the ambassador.” This referred to the fact that Said Efendi was the French king’s guest and that he received from him a daily stipend for his personal upkeep and that of his suite. According to Tessin, who was somewhat envious, it amounted to 2,000 livres a day.⁷⁰ This practice of defraying the costs of ambassadors is sometimes referred to as a distinguishing feature of extra-European missions, but it should be noted that it is merely an extension of the ancient usage whereby all extraordinary ambassadors were defrayed.⁷¹ It was only because most European powers had, by the eighteenth century, acquired permanent representatives, who were paid by their home country, that the practice of defraying ended up being reserved for ambassadors from outside of Europe. Be that as it may, these ambassadors therefore also implicitly benefited from the status of guests and from the laws of hospitality as defined by the law of nations.

Mahomet was performed on August 9 at the Comédie-Française, a little more than one month after Said Efendi had left Paris. Yet, the ambassador’s presence had left so strong an imprint that his departure did not prevent the connection from being made. According to police reports, some people in Paris were concerned that the play should not have been authorized “dans les circonstances d’amitié renouvelée avec le grand seigneur et scellée par l’ambassade qu’il a envoyée en France” [in the present circumstances of renewed friendship with the Grand Signior sealed by the embassy he has sent to France]. Rumor had it that the sultan would be liable to complain to the French ambassador were a printed copy of the play to be sent to Said Efendi.⁷² A chronicler for the *Bibliothèque française* concurred, and interestingly invoked the law of nations:

J’ai toujours été surpris qu’à Paris, dans la Capitale de la France, sous les yeux des Ministres, on permît de mettre sur le Théâtre dans un jour désavantageux, chargé de traits noirs & inventés à plaisir, le tableau du Législateur, du Prophète, d’une Nation respectable, amie, & digne de ménagemens. Il me semble qu’il y a quelque chose contre le Droit des Gens dans ce procédé, & sans doute qu’on s’en est aperçu, puisqu’on a supprimé la Pièce. Qu’auroit dit l’Ambassadeur Turc, qui venoit de partir depuis peu de jours, si par hazard il eût assisté à une pareille représentation?

[I have always found surprising that permission be given in Paris, the Capital of France, in the presence of Ministers, to put on the stage, cast in an unfavorable light, under black and gratuitously fictitious features, the Legislator, the Prophet of a Nation at once respectable, friendly and worthy of consideration. It strikes me that this violates in some way the law of nations, and it seems that this soon became apparent, since the play was suppressed. What would the Turkish Ambassador, who had left just a few days previously, have said if he had attended such a performance?]⁷³

Perhaps this was due to the Jansenist sympathies of the journal, but it is striking that the anonymous chronicler here attributes the interruption of the run of the play entirely to the offense to the Ottoman empire.

About fifteen years later, after *Mahomet's* successful second run in 1751, the problem of its appropriateness was raised once again. Interestingly, this discussion took place in the columns of the *Encyclopédie*, in the emblematic “*Fanatisme*” article. The work of the ex-Jesuit and maverick Alexandre Deleyre, a friend of Rousseau’s as well as of Diderot’s, this article is a long, rambling, and at times obscure piece.⁷⁴ Apocalyptic in tone, it is a summary of universal history as seen through the never-ending cycle of violence produced by religious fanaticism. The passage on Islam starts with a discussion of the figure of Muhammad. Was he a fanatic, or merely an impostor? To this by then classic question, Deleyre answered by introducing the age factor. A young fanatic to start with, Muhammad had ended up an impostor as he lost the enthusiasm of youth. Deleyre then proceeded to change tack, however, begging the reader’s forgiveness for having asked this fundamentally ethnocentric question in the first place. Indeed, the *Encyclopédie’s* mission was to speak broadly “pour toutes les nations & pour tous les siècles” [for all nations & all centuries], and adopting the perspective of “une legere portion de la terre” [a small part of the earth], would risk antagonizing a great number of readers:

Il est peut-être contre le droit des gens, & contre les égards que les nations se doivent entr’elles, de jeter de pareilles imputations sur les législateurs mêmes qui les ont séduites . . . Ainsi, loin d’approuver celui qui mettroit sur la scene un prophete étranger pour le jouër ou le combattre; tandis que le spectateur bat des mains & applaudit à son heureuse audace, le sage peut dire au grand poète: *si votre but avoit été d’insulter un homme célèbre, ce seroit une injure à sa nation; mais si vous ne vouliez que décrier l’abus de la religion, est-ce un bien pour la vôtre?*

[It may be against the law of nations and against the regards nations owe to one another, to cast such imputations on the very legislators who seduced them . . . Therefore, far from approving the playwright who would put on the stage a foreign prophet to mock or combat him; as the spectator claps his hands and applauds his winning audaciousness, the sage says to the great poet: *If your aim was to insult a famous man, it would be an insult to his nation; but if you were only aiming at decrying the abuse of religion, is it a good thing for yours?*]

Behind the somewhat cryptic formulation, it seems clear that Deleyre is referring here to Voltaire and his *Mahomet*, castigating the “great poet” for gratuitously putting on the stage a “foreign” prophet. Because of this, the play, were it really about Muhammad, was an offense to the Ottomans, and were it an indirect attack

on fanaticism more generally, simply missed its target. Instead of meddling with foreign fanatics, Deleyre advocated concentrating on those at home: “Ne balancez pas à détester le *fanatisme* par-tout où vous le verrez, fût-il au milieu de vous” [Hate fanaticism everywhere you shall see it, be it in your midst].⁷⁵

Deleyre was not the only one to consider *Mahomet* to be a blot on Voltaire’s record. In a footnote of the chapter dealing with the spread of Islam of his *magnum opus*, Edward Gibbon castigated Voltaire for his portrayal of Muhammad: “Some reverence is surely due to the fame of heroes and the religion of nations,” he wrote, adding that he had been “informed that a Turkish ambassador at Paris was much scandalized at the representation of this tragedy.”⁷⁶ This, we know, is not what happened. That Gibbon should recall the episode as if the scandal had not been averted is both ironic and significant.

In 1994, theatre practitioner Hervé Loichemol’s project to have *Mahomet* staged in Geneva failed after the city authorities decided to withhold funding. The reason for this decision is contested. Loichemol would later blame it on the influence of the Swiss academic Tariq Ramadan, who had voiced his concern at the prospect of the play hurting Muslim sensibilities, were it performed without any explanation. Ten years later, in 2005, Loichemol was finally able to give two readings of the play, one in the French town of Saint-Genis-Pouilly and the other in the Swiss town of Carouge, near Geneva, even though local Muslim representatives denounced an “insult towards the Muslim community.”⁷⁷ The ensuing debate revolved around issues of censorship and freedom of expression, whose defenders were quick to point out the supposed absurdity of a literal understanding of the play. Yet, as this article has demonstrated, it was envisaged from the moment of its creation that *Mahomet* had the potential to hurt Muslim feelings. More than other early modern texts, plays, because of their inherent “mobility” between the stage and the page, were not endowed once and for all with a stable meaning.⁷⁸ Their understanding depended on the context and setting of performance as well as the social and, in this case, confessional identity of spectators. Voltaire’s negative portrayal of Muhammad, although it was aimed at fanaticism in a general way, went against the tide of an ever more favorable European understanding of Islam, which he would soon come to embrace himself.⁷⁹ Ottoman ambassador Said Efendi’s stay in France from the fall of 1741 to the summer of 1742, just as *Mahomet* was being prepared for performance, suddenly cast a crude light on the potentially injurious meaning of the tragedy, all the more embarrassing as Said Efendi established himself as the model of the enlightened Ottoman. By connecting these two events and bringing to bear on the reception of *Mahomet* the historiography of Ottoman presence in eighteenth-century Europe, this article contributes to the project of placing “negotiations with otherness and boundary crossings at the very center of French literary history.”⁸⁰ It reveals how the episode set in motion a discussion, framed in the language of the law of nations, on the specific form of toleration, variously characterized as “consideration,” “regards,” or “reverence,” that was due to an extraneous faith such as Islam. In so doing, it makes the case for taking heed of the complexity—to the point of contradiction—of the Enlightenment’s legacy. Though freedom of expression and the art of satire are part of this legacy, so are mindfulness to religious difference and the commitment to mutual understanding embodied in the notion of the law of nations.

NOTES

1. Frédéric Joignot, "Le 'Traité sur la tolérance,' best-seller inattendu," *Le Monde* (9 April 2015).
2. Nicholas Cronk, "Preface," *The Complete Works of Voltaire*, 20B (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2002), xxi.
3. Voltaire, *Correspondence and Related Documents*, ed. Theodore Besterman, 51 vols. (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1970), 8:249–250, D2653, Chesterfield to Crébillon, 6 September 1742, henceforth cited parenthetically in the text as VC, followed by letter number, recipient and date. All quotations in French retain the original spelling.
4. On the convulsionists, B. Robert Kreiser, *Miracles, Convulsions, and Ecclesiastical Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1978). On Joly de Fleury's reading, Paul-M. Bondonio, "Le procureur général Joly de Fleury et le 'Mahomet' de Voltaire," *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 36, no. 2 (1929): 246–59. On the dedication, Pierre Martino, "L'interdiction du *Mahomet* de Voltaire et la dédicace au pape (1742–1745)," *Mémorial Henri Basset*, 2 vols. (Paris: Geuthner, 1928), 2:89–103 and the notes to VC, D3210, From Benedict XIV, 19 September 1745.
5. On Voltaire's evolution on Islam, see René Pomeau, *La religion de Voltaire* (Paris: Nizet, 1956); Magdy Gabriel Badir, *Voltaire et l'Islam* (Banbury: Voltaire Foundation, 1974); Alexander Bevilacqua, *The Republic of Arabic Letters: Islam and the European Enlightenment* (Cambridge, Harvard Univ. Press, 2018): 177–87.
6. On Emet Ulla, see Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Correspondance complète de Jean Jacques Rousseau*, ed. R.A. Leigh, 52 vols. (Geneva: Institut et Musée Voltaire, 1966), 3:177–179.
7. See, among others, Natalie Zemon Davis, *Trickster Travels: A Sixteenth-Century Muslim Between Worlds* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006); Natalie E. Rothman, *Brokering Empire: Trans-Imperial Subjects Between Venice and Istanbul* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2012); Jürgen Osterhammel, *Unfolding the East: the Enlightenment's Encounter with Asia* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2018).
8. Alexander Bevilacqua and Helen Pfeifer, "Turquerie: Culture in Motion, 1650–1750," *Past and Present*, no. 221 (2013): 75–118, here 75. On architectural Turquerie, see Nebahat Avcioglu, *Turquerie and the Politics of Representation, 1728–1876* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).
9. Bernard Vincent and Jocelyne Dakhliya, *Les musulmans dans l'histoire de l'Europe*, 2 vols. (Paris: A. Michel, 2011–2013).
10. See e.g. Fatma Müge Göçek, *East Encounters West: France and the Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987).
11. Mathieu Grenet, "Muslim Missions to Early Modern France, c.1610–c.1780: Notes for a Social History of Cross-Cultural Diplomacy," *Journal of Early Modern History* 19 (2015): 223–44.
12. On Mehmed Efendi's 1720–1721 mission, see Göçek, *East Encounters West* and Gilles Veinstein, "Introduction," in Yirmisekiz Çelebi Mehmed Efendi, *Le paradis des infidèles : relation de Yirmisekiz Çelebi Mehmed efendi, ambassadeur ottoman en France sous la Régence*, ed. Gilles Veinstein (Paris: F. Maspero, 1981): 7–51.
13. Previous studies of Saïd Efendi's stay are Perrin Stein, "Exoticism as Metaphor. *Turquerie* in Eighteenth-Century French Art" (Ph.D. diss., New York Univ., 1997), 129–58, John Whitehead, "Royal Riches and Parisian Trinkets: The Embassy of Saïd Mehmet Pasha to France in 1741–42 and Its Exchange of Gifts," *The Court Historian* 14, no. 2 (2009): 161–175 and Julia A. Landweber, "How can One Be Turkish? French Responses to Two Ottoman Ambassadors," *Europa und die Türkei im 18. Jahrhundert / Europe and Turkey in the 18th Century*, ed. Barbara Schmidt-Haberkamp (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2011): 403–415. For a visual history of such diplomatic encounters, see the work of Meredith Martin, e.g., on the embassy from Siam, "Mirror Reflections: Louis XIV, Phra Narai, and the Material Culture of Kinship," *Art History* 38 (2015): 652–667. See also the catalogue of the recent exhibit at Versailles and the Metropolitan Museum, Daniëlle O. Kisluk-Grosheide and Bertrand Rondot, eds., *Visitors to Versailles: From Louis XIV to the French Revolution* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2018).



14. On the law of nations, see Dan Edelstein, “War and Terror: The Law of Nations from Grotius to the French Revolution,” *French Historical Studies* 31, no. 2 (2008): 229–262. For a recent perspective stressing the importance of Roman law to the detriment of natural rights and focusing on the case of Gentili, Benedict Kingsbury and Benjamin Straumann, eds., *The Roman Foundations of the Law of Nations: Alberico Gentili and the Justice of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010).

15. Antoine-Gaspard Boucher d’Argis, “Droit des gens,” in *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, etc.*, eds. Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d’Alembert, 35 vols. (Paris: Briasson, 1751–1780), 5:126–129.

16. Jennifer Pitts, *Boundaries of the International: Law and Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 2018): 20; 28. The case for the inclusiveness of the law of nations was made in the 1950s and 1960s by the international lawyer Charles Henry Alexandrowicz. See Charles Henry Alexandrowicz, *The Law of Nations in Global History*, eds. David Armitage and Jennifer Pitts (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2017).

17. Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2007): 8. For an overview of the recent historiography on religious toleration, see Juan Pablo Domínguez, “Introduction: Religious Toleration in the Age of Enlightenment,” *History of European Ideas* 43, no. 4 (2017): 273–87.

18. Henri de Boulainvilliers, *La vie de Mahomed* (London, 1730). Voltaire does not seem to have drawn on Humphrey Prideaux, *The True Nature of Imposture Fully Displayed in the Life of Mahomet* (London: W. Rogers, 1697) on the other hand. See Ronald W. Tobin, “The Sources of Voltaire’s *Mahomet*,” *The French Review*, 34, no. 4 (1961): 372–78.

19. VC, D2386, To Frederick II, 20 December 1740.

20. Voltaire, *Le fanatisme ou Mahomet le prophète*, ed. Christopher Todd, *The Complete Works of Voltaire*, 20B (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2002), v.244–245 (author’s translation).

21. *Ibid.*, v.1479–80.

22. Lauren R. Clay, *Stagestruck: The Business of Theater in Eighteenth-Century France and its Colonies* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2013): 118, cites this Lille performance of *Mahomet* as a rare instance of a première on a provincial stage, as “playwrights generally preferred the royal stages as the most professionally advantageous, as well as the most lucrative, places to debut.”

23. On the composition of the play, see Christopher Todd, “Introduction,” *The Complete Works of Voltaire*, 20B (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2002), 7–139.

24. On the approval system and the role of the assembly of players, see Gregory S. Brown, *A Field of Honor: Writers, Court Culture and Public Theater in French Literary Life from Racine to the Revolution* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2001). On censorship by the police, see Victor Hallays-Dabot, *Histoire de la censure théâtrale en France* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1862) and Gregory S. Brown, “Reconsidering the Censorship of Writers in Eighteenth-Century France: Civility, State Power, and the Public Theater in the Enlightenment,” *The Journal of Modern History* 75, no. 2 (2003): 235–268, who characterizes the censorship of plays as “personal and sporadic,” as is apparent here. The story of Crébillon’s 1741 negative report is told by Hallays-Dabot, *Histoire de la censure*, 66 and Bondoio, “Le procureur-général,” 247, who do not give any evidence, however. It seems to be borne out by a letter by Marville where he explains having “allowed the performance of the play without the police censor’s approval” and alludes to Fleury’s support of Voltaire (Claude-Henri Feydeau de Marville, *Lettres de M. de Marville, lieutenant général de police au ministre Maurepas (1742–1747)* 3 vols. (Paris: H. Champion, 1896–1905), 1:61, Marville to Maurepas, 14 August 1742).

25. Todd, “Introduction,” only mentions Dufresne, but Voltaire was more affected by the departure of mademoiselle Quinault, whom he had been corresponding with on a regular basis. On her role as a go-between, see Judith Curtis, “*Divine Thalie*”: *The Career of Jeanne Quinault* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2007).

26. French authorities had expected him to land in Marseille. On the logistics deployed by the French state to welcome Said Efendi, see “Correspondance politique Turquie” vols. 110–111, Archives du ministère des affaires étrangères, La Courneuve.



27. Registre des actes consulaires, 1741, BB 306, fol. 143, Archives municipales de Lyon. On the “Generous Turk”, see Larry Wolff, *The Singing Turk: Ottoman Power and Operatic Emotions on the European Stage from the Siege of Vienna to the Age of Napoleon* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2016), chapter 2.

28. *Mercur de France dédié au Roy. Contenant l’Ambassade solemnelle de la Porte Ottomane à la Cour de France* (Paris: June 1742): 980–81.

29. R104, 28 February 1742, Bibliothèque-Musée de la Comédie-Française, Paris (consulted online at www.cfregisters.org).

30. Voltaire, *La philosophie de l’histoire*, ed. J.H. Brumfitt (Geneva: Institut et Musée Voltaire, 1969): 167–68. On performances at the Comédie-Française, see the database at www.cfregisters.org.

31. Alexandre-Louis-Marie Pétis de La Croix, *Lettres critiques de Hadgi Mehmed Efendy à Mme la Mise de G. au sujet des mémoires de M. le Chevalier d’Arvieux* (Paris: Quillau, 1735), 153, cited by Mary Hossain, “The Chevalier d’Arvieux and ‘Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme,’” *Seventeenth-Century French Studies* 12, no. 1 (1990): 76–88, here 83. According to Hossain, Pétis “makes his fictional envoy disapprove of the play” because he was defending the memory of his grandfather, François Pétis de La Croix, who was attacked in d’Arvieux’s memoirs for the inadequate knowledge of Oriental languages he had displayed in the course of the French visit of Ottoman envoy Suleiman Aga in 1669.

32. On the role played by Villeneuve, Albert Vandal, *Une ambassade française en Orient sous Louis XV: la mission du marquis de Villeneuve 1728–1741* (Paris: E. Plon, 1887). For a more recent view, Virginia H. Aksan, “Ottoman-French Relations 1738–1768,” *Studies on Ottoman Diplomatic History*, ed. Sinan Kunalalp (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 1987), 75–82.

33. On the publishing history of the account, Göçek, *East Encounters West*, 139. For a reappraisal of Sa’dabad putting stress on the importance of the Persian model against a tendency to overplay the role of Westernization, Shirine Hamadeh, *The City’s Pleasures: Istanbul in the Eighteenth Century* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 2008), 226–237.

34. Yirmisekiz Çelebi Mehmed Efendi, *Relation de l’ambassade de Mehemed-Effendi, a la cour de France, en M.DCC.XXI. écrite par lui-meme, et traduite du turc* (Constantinople: Ganeau, 1757) and Yirmisekiz Çelebi Mehmed Efendi, *Le paradis des infidèles*.

35. Carl Gustaf Tessin to Ulrika Lovisa Tessin, 8 December 1741, in Carl Gustaf Tessin, *Tableaux de Paris et de la Cour de France, 1739–1742: lettres inédites de Carl Gustaf, comte de Tessin*, ed. Gunnar von Proschwitz (Göteborg: Université de Göteborg, 1983), 252.

36. Tessin to his wife, 26 January 1742 in *Ibid.*, 281.

37. *Mercur de France dédié au Roy. Contenant l’Ambassade solemnelle de la Porte Ottomane à la Cour de France* (Paris: June 1742) and *Mercur de France dédié au Roi. Contenant la suite de l’Ambassade solemnelle de la Porte Ottomane à la Cour de France* (Paris: December 1743). A large part of the latter issue is composed of a translate of Mehmed Efendi’s embassy account by Said Efendi and his team of Armenian interpreters, according to the author of the *Mercur*. This translation thus predates by about fifteen years the translation published in 1757 by Julien-Claude Galland. Its existence emphasizes the continuity between the two missions.

38. On this visual aspect, Perrin Stein, “Exoticism as Metaphor,” 129–58.

39. *Ibid.*, 136.

40. On the culture of celebrity and its reliance on technologies of print, Antoine Lilti, *The Invention of Celebrity: 1750–1850* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2017).

41. Charles-Philippe d’Albert duc de Luynes, *Mémoires du duc de Luynes sur la Cour de Louis XV (1735–1758)*, 17 vols. (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1860–1865), 4:103.

42. *Mercur de France* (June 1742): 1013.

43. Landweber, “How Can One Be Turkish,” 403.

44. Tessin to his wife, 5 January 1742, in *Tableaux de Paris*, 270.



45. Germain-François Poullain de Saint-Foix, *Ceuvres de théâtre de M. de Saintfoix*, 2 vols. (Paris: Prault fils, 1748). On gallantry as specifically French, see Alain Viala, *La France galante: essai historique sur une catégorie culturelle, de ses origines jusqu'à la Révolution* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2008).
46. See the songs on Said Efendi in *Recueil dit de Maurepas. Pièces libres, chansons, épigrammes, et autres vers satiriques sur divers personnages des siècles de Louis XIV et Louis XV*, 6 vols. (Leiden, 1865), 6:3–7 and 11–12.
47. Edmond Jean-François Barbier, *Chronique de la régence et du règne de Louis XV (1718–1763); ou Journal de Barbier*, 8 vols. (Paris: Charpentier, 1857–1866), 3:327.
48. *Mercure de France* (June 1742): 989.
49. October 1721 issue of the *Mercure de France* as translated by Göçek, *East Encounters West*, 70.
50. For a reappraisal, based on probate records, of Mütefferika's printing press, see Orlin Sabev, "The First Ottoman Turkish Printing Enterprise: Success or Failure (A Reassessment)," *Ottoman Tulips, Ottoman Coffee: Leisure and Lifestyle in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Dana Sajdi (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007), 63–89. For a critique of the Eurocentric assumptions underlying the exclusive focus on Mütefferika, see Kathryn A. Schwartz, "Did Ottoman Sultans Ban Print?," *Book History* 20 (2017): 1–39. See Henri Omont, "Nouveaux documents sur l'imprimerie à Constantinople au XVIII^e siècle," *Revue des bibliothèques* 36 (1926): 1–10 for evidence that Said Efendi rapidly fell out with Ibrahim Mütefferika.
51. "Traduction Litterale de la lettre de Said Aga a Monsieur l'abbé Bignon par M. de Fienne, le 30^{xbre} 1727," Nouvelles acquisitions françaises 5384, fol. 24–25, Bibliothèque nationale de France. The volume also contains the original letter in Ottoman Turkish. Henri Omont, *Missions archéologiques françaises en Orient aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles*, 2 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1902), 2: 396–401, provides the nonliteral translations of the letters to Bignon.
52. Tessin to his wife, 9 March 1742, in *Tableaux de Paris*, 296.
53. *Mercure de France* (June 1742): 987.
54. Stein, "Exoticism," 147, identifies the book as an "atlas . . . the first book printed in Constantinople." The *Kitab-i Cihannüma* was in fact the eleventh book printed by Mütefferika. For a list, see Sabev, "The First Ottoman Turkish Printing Enterprise." On the *Kitab-i Cihannüma*, see Emily Zoss, "An Ottoman View of the World: The *Kitab-i Cihannüma* and Its Cartographic Contexts," *The Islamic Manuscript Tradition: Ten Centuries of Book Arts in Indiana University Collections*, ed. Christiane Gruber (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2010), 195–219, which focuses on the American plates. For a photograph of plate 22, which exactly matches the one in the Aved painting, *Ibid.*, 203.
55. On this book, see Thomas D. Goodrich, *The Ottoman Turks and the New World: A Study of "Tarib-i Hind-i garbi" and XVIth-century Ottoman Americana* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1990).
56. "Histoire du nouveau monde, c'est-à-dire des Indes occidentales, traduite du turc en françois, par le sieur Jean-Baptiste de Fiennes, fils, à Constantinople, 1732," Supplément turc 901, n.p., Bibliothèque nationale de France.
57. *Lettre au sujet du portrait de son excellence Saïd-Pacha, ambassadeur extraordinaire du Grand-Seigneur à la Cour de France, en 1742 Exposé au Salon du Louvre le 25 Août de la même année* (Paris: Pierre Prault, 1742), 2–3. On the association of the Ottoman empire with despotism in French public opinion and government circles from the seventeenth century and on how it started changing in the early eighteenth century, Thomas Kaiser, "The Evil Empire? The Debate on Turkish Despotism in Eighteenth-Century French Political Culture," *The Journal of Modern History* 72, no. 1 (2000): 6–34.
58. *Lettre au sujet du portrait*, 4.
59. *Ibid.*, 9.
60. See also VC, D2618, To Everard Fawkener (then British ambassador in Constantinople), June 1742: "J have seen here our ottoman minister, Saÿd bacha; j have drank wine with his chaplain and reason'd with Laria, his interpreter, a man of sense who knows much, and speaks well."



61. On Grotius, see Richard Tuck, *The Rights of War and Peace: Political Thought and the International Order from Grotius to Kant* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999): 78–108, who considers him in the light of the “humanist” tradition. Indeed, though Grotius had come to epitomize law of nations theory by the middle of the eighteenth century, the foundational character of his work has been repeatedly nuanced in recent years.

62. On Karlowitz, Rifaat A. Abou-el-Haj, “The Formal Closure of the Ottoman Frontier in Europe: 1699–1703,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 89, no. 3 (1969): 467–475. On the law of nations in an Ottoman context, Mustafa Serdar Palabiyik, “The Emergence of the Idea of ‘International Law’ in the Ottoman Empire before the Treaty of Paris (1856),” *Middle Eastern Studies* 50, no. 2 (2014): 233–251.

63. Tomaž Mastnak, “Abbé de Saint-Pierre: European Union and the Turk,” *History of Political Thought* 19, no. 4 (1998): 570–598.

64. Pitts, *Boundaries*, 28–67.

65. Edhem Eldem, *French Trade in Istanbul in the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

66. Hugo Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, 3 vols. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005), 2:898–924, Book II, chapter 18.

67. The original Latin phrase (“*si quis legatum hostium pulsasset*”) was rendered as “If any one shall strike an Ambassador” by Grotius’ English translators.

68. Abraham de Wicquefort, *The Ambassador and his Functions* (London: Lintott, 1716): 246–248. He uses the Turkish word for envoy, *elçi*. The first versions of Wicquefort’s treaty purported to quote the saying in Turkish as “*Elchi Zaval Goketer*” (Abraham de Wicquefort, *Mémoires touchant les ambassadeurs et les ministres publics* (La Haye: J. & D. Steucker, 1677), 120). This identifies Wicquefort’s source of information as Paul Rycaut, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire . . .* (London: J. Starkey and H. Browne, 1668), 83. On this so-called saying, John-Paul Ghobrial, *The Whispers of Cities: Information Flows in Istanbul, London, and Paris in the Age of William Trumbull* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2014), 36.

69. Marville, *Lettres de M. de Marville*, 1:53, Marville to Maurepas, 21 May 1742.

70. Tessin to his wife, 6 April 1742, in *Tableaux de Paris*, 307.

71. Wicquefort, *The Ambassador*, 168.

72. “Chronique du règne de Louis XV, 1742–43,” *Revue rétrospective, ou Bibliothèque historique, contenant des mémoires et documens authentiques, inédits et originaux* 4 (1834): 465–466.

73. *Bibliothèque française ou Histoire littéraire de la France* 36 (Amsterdam: H. Du Sauzet, 1743), 181.

74. On Deleyre, Franco Venturi, “Un enciclopedista: Alexandre Deleyre,” *Rivista Storica Italiana* 77, no. 4 (1965): 791–824.

75. Alexandre Deleyre, “Fanatisme” in *Encyclopédie*, eds. Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d’Alembert, 6:393–401.

76. Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 6 vols. (London: A. Strahan, 1790), 3:308.

77. On these events, François Jacob, “D’un siècle à l’autre: Mahomet sur la scène genevoise,” *Cahiers Voltaire* 5 (2006): 165–72.

78. Roger Chartier, *Publishing Drama in Early Modern Europe* (London: British Library, 1999).

79. However, Voltaire expressed very different views of the Ottomans several years later in the letters he sent to Catherine the Great in the context of the Russo-Turkish war (1768–1774). See for example VC, D16575, To Catherine II, 11 August 1770: “I wish I had at least contributed to killing you a few Turks. It is said that a Christian may regard this as a deed agreeable to God. It goes against my maxims of tolerance, but men are full of contradictions” (author’s translation).

80. Christie McDonald and Susan Rubin Suleiman, eds., *French Global: A New Approach to Literary History* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2010): x.

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