

B. Lewis, *A Middle East Mosaic. Fragments of Life, Letters and History* (New York 2001)..... Book Review by Maria Vaiou, Istanbul, Turkey.

This book consists of thirteen parts made up of excerpts from a wide range of Middle Eastern writings arranged by themes. The selection of themes reflects personal choice and includes various sources on prejudices and stereotypes of Westerners about the Middle East and *vice versa*, loan words of Middle Eastern origin; aspects of public and private life such as travellers, diplomats, women, government, war, commerce, arts and science, food and drink, wisdom and prophecy. All sources are drawn on the period between the advent of Islam and the coming of modernity.

Each part is preceded by a brief introduction. The sections are particularly interesting for the bulk of information they display on particular themes and for making useful texts which can be taken as references for potential research on relevant subjects accessible in English. The reader familiarises himself with existing readings on certain areas and can draw his own conclusions on issues of continuity and change in certain practices.

On the theme of diplomats, Lewis provides extracts on the function and role of diplomat, sheds light on diplomatic practices in different periods, and reflects on Western views of Middle Easterners. For the period of early Islam, Lewis gives a selection of rules on the conduct of ambassadors drawing on the ninth-century Arab manual of statecraft of Pseudo-Jâhiz's (probably al-Taghlabî / Tha'labî, d. 250/864) *Kitâb al-Tâj*, and the eleventh century 'mirror for princes' of Niẓâm al-Mulk (d. 485/1092).<sup>1</sup> On the protocol of writing letters to foreign rulers, such as to the Byzantine emperor, he draws on al-Qalqashandî's (d. 821/1418) *Şubḥ al-a'sha*, a fifteenth-century manual on the formal composition of documents.<sup>2</sup> On the themes of reception and negotiation,

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<sup>1</sup> Ch. Pellat, *Le Livre de la couronne*, tr. *Kitâb al-Tâj*, (Paris 1954), 141–2; *The Siyar al-Mulûk or Siyasat-nama of Niẓâm al-Mulk*, tr. H. Darke, *The Book of Government or Rules for Kings* (London 1960), 94–6, 98.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Qalqashandî, *Şubḥ al-a'sha*, VIII (Cairo 1334/1910), 42–4; on the formula for the title of the Byzantine emperor, which is corroborated by Greek translations of letters for the 14<sup>th</sup> century, al-Qalqashandî draws on al-'Umarî's (d. 750/1349) *al-Ta'rîf bil-muštalaḥ al-sharîf*, a work which contained the formulas of official letters of the Mamlûk chancery in Cairo; the same formula was used later by Nâẓir al-Jaysh (d. 786/1384) in his *Kitâb tathqîf al-Ta'rîf bil-muštalaḥ al-sharîf*; see al-Qalqashandî, *Şubḥ al-a'sha*, vol. 8, 45–6; for examples of Mamlûk-Byzantine

Lewis draws on a number of sources mainly for the Ottoman period in the form of memoirs and travel accounts of foreign statesmen to Turkey such as Sir Paul Rycout and A. Slade and the memoirs of Sir James Porter, British ambassador to Turkey in 1746 on audiences with Ottoman ambassadors and sultans, receptions of foreign ambassadors and on advice on negotiations with the Turks and interpreting of treaties.<sup>3</sup> The author uses archival evidence in the form of state papers and foreign office documents from the Public Record Office in London on the letter from an Ottoman Grand Vizier to Queen Elizabeth in 1583 and on the function of dragoman system in the Levant respectively.<sup>4</sup> All sources inform us about diplomatic practices and procedures in the Ottoman court and reflect on Western views of Ottoman practices and the Ottomans. The latter are not positive except perhaps for some praise on the Ottoman adherence on the protocol of negotiations being experts in the wording of political treaties.<sup>5</sup> Lewis also cites accounts of eighteenth century Ottoman historians such as Na'îma', and Vasif Efendi (latter half of the eighteenth century), on the appointment of Ottoman ambassadors to India in 1653 and Spain in 1787, which reflect on Ottoman views of

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correspondence, see M. Canard, 'Une lettre du Sultan Malik Nâşir Hasan à Jean VI Cantacuzène (750/1349)', *AIEO* 3 (1937), 27–52.

<sup>3</sup> See S. D. Anderson, *An English Consul in Turkey: Paul Rycout at Smyrna, 1667–78* (Oxford 1989); A. Çırakman, 'Sir Paul Rycout and his influence on 18<sup>th</sup> century thought on the Turks', in *Historical Image of the Turk in Europe: 15<sup>th</sup> Century to the Present Political and Civilisational Aspects*, ed. M. Soykut (Istanbul 2003), 227ff; Sir A. Slade, *Records of travels in Turkey, Greece and of a cruise in the Black Sea, with the Capitan pasha, in the years 1829, 1830, and 1831* (London 1832); for memoirs and biographies of Ottoman statesmen and members of the sultanate as sources for diplomacy, see *Ottoman Diplomacy: Conventional or Unconventional?*, ed. A. Nuri Yurdusev (New York 2004), 179, n. 49; on travelogues as sources for the study of Ottoman diplomacy, see *ibid.*, 180–1. Travel accounts of European diplomats in the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries discussed elsewhere should also be taken into account for a better understanding of the expressed themes and attitudes; see Suraiya Faroqhi, *Approaching Ottoman History. An Introduction to the Sources* (Cambridge 1999), 112–4; for biographies and memoirs of foreign ambassadors and statesmen as sources for diplomacy, see *Ottoman Diplomacy*, 179, n. 50.

<sup>4</sup> For a summary of primary sources on Ottoman diplomacy, see *Ottoman Diplomacy: Conventional or Unconventional?*, 167–193; on archival sources on diplomacy outside Turkey, see *ibid.*, 181. See also G. R. Berridge, 'Dragomans and Oriental Secretaries in the British Embassy in Istanbul', *ibid.*, 151–66, who discusses attempts to anglicise the dragomanat of the British Embassy in Istanbul in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>5</sup> See *Historical Image of the Turk in Europe*, 21–36.

the others and whose reading will be of great interest to historians dealing with these periods of Ottoman diplomacy.<sup>6</sup> Reflections on modern diplomacy are particularly fascinating. The author draws on reports which express views of Middle Easterners of the West and *vice versa*: of Persian missions to England in the period between 1838–9, the British Council in Damascus of the Syrians and French in 1934, of the British views of the campaign of 1941 against Rashîd ‘Alî in Baghdad, of American reports of Baghdad in 1944, and Henry Kissinger’s impressions of President Nasser of Egypt and King Hussein of Jordan.

Texts should be interpreted as individual references in their contexts. The text cited by Lewis on the theme of prejudices by Constantine Porphyrogenitus should in no case represent Byzantine views of the Prophet Muhammad, but should be seen in its context. It is a piece of Byzantine polemical literature, a commonplace about the origins of Islam which considered it as a form of paganism, and shows the superficial character of the Byzantines’ acquaintance with Islam. It refers to the invocation *Allahu akhbar* (God is greatest) and identifies the *Akhbar* (lit. greater/greatest) with Koubar and with Aphrodite: hence ‘God and Aphrodite’.<sup>7</sup> The well-known Greek theologian of the eighth century, John of Damascus, refers to the *Koubar* as a pre-Islamic Meccan cult of Aphrodite named  $\chi\alpha\beta\alpha\rho$  by the Arabs, which survived in the form of veneration of the sacred stone, the Ka’ba.<sup>8</sup> In the second half of the eighth century, an active interest in Islam was expressed in the writings of the Arabic-speaking bishop Theodore Abû Qurra;<sup>9</sup> a better

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<sup>6</sup> *EF*, 7, Na’imâ’, 917–8. For examples on the role of Ottoman ambassadors, see Virginia H. Aksan, *An Ottoman Statesman in War and Peace: Ahmed Resmi Efendi, 1700–1783* (New York 1995).

<sup>7</sup> C. Porphyrogenitus, *DAI*, 14/31–6; The association of God and Aphrodite dates back to Herodotus; see C. Porphyrogenitus, *DAI*, vol. II, Commentary (London 1962), 72; W. M. Watt, ‘Belief in a “High God” in pre-Islamic Mecca’, in *The Arabs and Arabia on the Eve of Islam*, ed. F. E. Peters (Aldershot 1999), 307–12.

<sup>8</sup> *PG*, 94 Cols.764 b, 769 b; John of Damascus discusses Islam in the last chapter of his treatise on heresies – it is heresy 100; see A. Th. Khoury, *Les theologiens byzantins et l’Islam* (Louvain-Paris 1969), 62–3, 47–82; J. Meyendorff, ‘Byzantine views of Islam’, *DOP* 18 (1964), 115–32 at 116–120. The Ka’ba was a centre of polytheism and idolatry in the centuries before the coming of Islam. Restored by Muhammad as the place of worship of the one God; see *EQ*, 3 ‘Ka’ba’, pp. 75–80; U. Rubin, ‘The Ka’ba: aspects of its ritual functions and position in pre-Islamic and early Islamic times’, in *The Arabs and Arabia on the Eve of Islam*, 313–47.

<sup>9</sup> Khoury, *Les theologiens byzantins et l’Islam*, 83–105; Meyendorff, ‘Byzantine views of Islam’, 120–1.

knowledge of its doctrines is evident in Niketas Byzantios<sup>10</sup> (mid-ninth century) treatises, which were allegedly written for the emperor Michael III (842–67) as a response to the Abbasid caliph al-Mutawakil's (847–61) letters against the Christian doctrine of Trinity and showed the direct encounter between the Byzantines and the Muslims on the religious level.<sup>11</sup> Parallel with Byzantine anti-Islamic polemics, a deeper understanding and a mutual appreciation of one other was reached at the governmental level, as a result of the frequency of diplomatic exchanges between the Byzantines and the Arabs, and the development of a diplomatic protocol of methods and procedures e.g. the dispatching of envoys, their qualifications, the attendance of interviews, receptions, written communication, signing of treaties, exchange of gifts and handling of negotiations.

The book is an impressive compilation of writings on diverse themes which are permeated by the perceptions of the West of the Orient and of the Orient of the West and also of the people of the Orient of themselves. It is a useful introduction to individual themes and issues explored in some important writings. The selection of the anthology of texts is entertaining and instructive. Throughout the book Lewis aims to show aspects of communication and contact between peoples in the West and Europe.

It is a recommended book for specialists as they familiarise with texts and see a broader view of the respective subjects. An appendix at the end contains information on the main personalities mentioned in the book. However it would perhaps be useful for a historian if there were references to the works cited in addition to their authors, some background information of the given texts, and an explanation of the culture and interaction with its literature, and arts and music with their history, in order to appreciate it more.

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<sup>10</sup>Khoury, *ibid.*, 110–62; Meyendorff, *ibid.*, 121–2, 127–8.

<sup>11</sup>On the Islamic-Christian dialogue and relative Greek texts on Islam in the period between the 8<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, see Khoury, *ibid.*, 38–44.