

Andrei Pippidi. *Visions of the Ottoman World in Renaissance Europe*. London: Hurst, 2012. ix + 284 pp. £39.99. ISBN: 978-1-84904-199-7.

Visions of the Ottoman World is divided into three parts: two introductory chapters that propose to survey late medieval and sixteenth-century European Christian representations of the Ottomans; chapters 3–5, which assess the positions of Renaissance scholars (especially Erasmus, Luther, and Machiavelli) on the nature of and possible responses to Ottoman expansion; and a somewhat disparate chapter 6 on travel literature and the political and commercial relations of England with the sultan's empire. While not without insight and the display of significant knowledge, the author's framing of visions of the Ottomans and Ottoman-English relations is somewhat dated and could benefit from reference to scholarship on reception of the Turks, such as Bronwen Wilson's *The World in Venice* (2005), Nabil Matar's *Islam in Britain* (1998), or Linda McJannet's *The Sultan Speaks* (2006), and from Ottomanist historiography, such as Daniel Goffman's *Britons in the Ottoman Empire* (1998). That said, those concerned with representations of the Ottomans deriving from the Christian kingdoms of Europe will find much here to interest them. The audience for this work is, in general, a scholarly one. For although Pippidi, in chapter 3, provides a clear framework for his analysis of a humanist network of writers on the Ottomans, many of the scholarly protagonists he addresses receive little or no introduction. Intellectual contexts tend to be taken for granted rather than elucidated. Historians, particularly those not conversant with Latin, will be grateful for the author's distillation of evidence from various

Latin works. Those interested in European travel narratives will find useful the references to resonances between the writings of those who sojourned to the East and those who stayed behind.

In some ways Pippidi's work is reminiscent of Lucette Valensi's *The Birth of the Despot: Venice and the Sublime Porte* (1993), which looks at the evolution of early modern political philosophy as applied to the Ottoman sultanate. Pippidi, however, is primarily concerned with the development of Erasmian thought and its diffusion through a European-wide network of humanist scholars and travel authors. He points out, for example, the influence of Erasmus's *Consultatio de Bello Turcico* on a figure like Ogier Ghislen de Busbecq, Hapsburg ambassador to the court of Süleiman I (r. 1520–66). He traces the diffusion of imagery, such as that of Christian slaves brutalized by the Turk, from one sixteenth-century narrator to another. Like Nancy Bisaha's *Creating East and West: Renaissance Humanists and the Ottoman Turks* (2004), Pippidi is interested in the extent to which understanding of or hostility toward the Ottomans was reflected in the writings of Renaissance scholars. He suggests that notions of "slow rapprochement" in this regard are naive: "The old image [of the Ottoman empire] changed only when, for practical reasons, a new one was needed" (55). Change came in three stages, ranging from the initial shock of Ottoman conquests in the later fifteenth century, through a mobilization and counterattack that coincided with the Reformation, to a "balance of power" (3) and period of stabilization in the seventeenth century. The threat of the Ottomans was a constant, but "religious and political cleavages within the West produced different reactions" (117). The heart of the author's scholarly contribution lies in the middle chapters of this book where he explores the language of various of those reactions. Pippidi synthesizes a large and diverse body of secondary source material, which he juxtaposes to an intriguing set of primary materials (principally in Latin, Italian, and English). The most compelling of these are the letters of a web of humanists, such as Roger Ascham, "schoolmaster" to Queen Elizabeth, who were reading and amending each other on the question of the Ottomans (142).

The work is essentially narrative in its approach, well written but episodic. It is marked in some places by penetrating commentary on genre and relationships and in others by apparently offhand judgments on questions such as the "factual" nature of particular travelers' narratives (56). Inexplicably, various quotations included in the work do not include page citations, and English glosses are provided for some of the Latin and Italian quotations but not for others. In sum, *Visions of the Ottoman World* may be fruitfully mined for its presentation of intellectual connectivity. But it requires scrutiny for the validity of its assertions, such as those on the transformation of emphasis in seventeenth-century history writing about the Ottomans (128).

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