

copyist, and the distinction between one's own copies of authoritative texts and those of other copyists. Thanks to the study of the contents of the *Ultimate Ambition*, the careful reading of al-Nuwayrī's biographies, and the analysis of the autograph manuscripts of this multivolume encyclopedia preserved in European libraries, Muhanna sheds light on the production process of this kind of work during the fourteenth century.

The last chapter brings us from the fourteenth to the twentieth century, and from Egypt and the Levant to Europe. It is devoted to the reception of the *Ultimate Ambition* by contemporaries and later European Orientalists, mainly Dutch. Muhanna raises questions such as: which volumes were most read; who was interested in this book (only Muslim or also non-Muslim readers?); and was the work edited, printed, or translated? Muhanna's original and essential book provides the reader with an in-depth understanding of the cultural and intellectual history of Mamluk times.

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Empress of the East: How a European Slave Girl Became Queen of the Ottoman Empire. Leslie Peirce.

New York: Basic Books, 2017. viii + 360 pp. \$19.99.

Interest in the life story of Roxelana has existed since the early modern period in Europe, when travelogues and diplomatic reports discussed the rise to power of the concubine turned queen, whose political trajectory broke with Ottoman dynastic tradition. As the current popularity of this intriguing figure is due to the recent Turkish soap opera *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* (Magnificent century), which aired from 2011 to 2014, a well-researched book exploring the life of Roxelana is timely. While Peirce's biographical study is grounded in historical reality, and eloquently written, it also appeals to an audience extending far beyond scholars of the Ottoman Empire. Peirce is well known in the field of Ottoman history for her groundbreaking studies of Ottoman dynastic politics in *The Imperial Harem* (1993), and her use of court records to reconstruct early modern social history in *Morality Tales: Law and Gender in the Ottoman Court of Aintab* (2003). She draws on the breadth and depth of her knowledge in writing her new work and translates the Ottoman historical context in which Roxelana's biography unfolds for a general audience of readers.

Peirce's exploration of the life story of Roxelana is divided into three sections, "Beginnings," "Challenges," and "Politics," each containing five chapters. The opening section describes the Ottoman political and dynastic practices that may be unfamiliar to a nonspecialist audience, such as the Ottoman palace's administrative structures and politics of reproduction, which hinged on institutions of slavery and the inculcation of young female slaves into Ottoman palace culture, which would have shaped Roxelana's early years. This section seems to have been written for an audience familiar

with the customs of the ruling houses of Europe, as Ottoman practices are often explained in contrast with European conventions.

Section 2, "Challenges," details the brutal complexities of the fight for succession to the Ottoman throne, exploring the competition between brothers that ended almost without exception in bloodshed. The fratricidal history of Ottoman dynastic politics influenced Sultan Suleyman's choices regarding marriage and family, Peirce argues, resulting in the formation of a nuclear family of several children with Roxelana, in a distinct break with the tradition of reproduction with concubines who were not permitted to bear more than one son with the sultan. Peirce goes on to examine the question of marriage between a former concubine and a sultan in the context of the rhythm and spatiality of life in the Ottoman palace, exploring the areas of the palace that Roxelana occupied and discussing the meaning of the term *harem* in the Ottoman Empire of the sixteenth century.

A thread that runs throughout the work is Peirce's examination of the popular myths surrounding Roxelana's life, as she attempts to deconstruct these legends and temper them with historical research. An example is the legendary narrative of Roxelana causing the execution of the Ottoman grand vizier, Ibrahim Pasha, as famous for his brilliant success as a statesman as for his arrogance. Peirce provides detail about the story of Ibrahim's downfall, seeking to either verify or problematize the popular myth of the rivalry between the sultan's two favorites, Roxelana and Ibrahim, which has scant evidence in historical sources yet features prominently in the popular mythology of Roxelana's life. The final section of the book, "Politics," provides a description of the most important events of the reign of Sultan Suleyman, exploring their impact on Roxelana's life, as well as tracing the rise of Roxelana's public prominence through her architectural patronage and charitable work. Peirce emphasizes the importance of Roxelana's intervention in the urban landscape of the imperial capital, while also surveying the expansion of her architectural program, such as her endowment of hostels for pilgrims in the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, demonstrating the visibility and prominence of Roxelana's legacy in the religious topography across the empire.

This work is a sensitive exploration of the life of Roxelana and an accessible introduction to Ottoman dynastic politics of the sixteenth century for an audience familiar with European history. The work contains a helpful glossary relating to the complex terminology of Ottoman government, religious practices, and politics. While the bibliography could be more extensive, if the book is aimed at a general readership, it is understandable that it remains concise. The only criticism that can be made is that the work relies almost entirely on European-language sources, although it must be said that these are the richest in biographical detail. While much of the narrative of Roxelana's life has historically hinged on well-informed speculation, Peirce manages through a careful reading of the sources to paint a

plausible picture of the emotional and political life of this ubiquitous yet still enigmatic figure.

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The Teaching and Learning of Arabic in Early Modern Europe. Jan Loop, Alastair Hamilton, and Charles Burnett, eds.

The History of Oriental Studies 3. Leiden: Brill, 2017. xii + 354 pp. \$115.

This volume is intellectually intriguing, to say the very least. It engages a subject that is not only relevant to our times in terms of shared humanity, and humanities, but also thought provoking in terms of understanding the future of language pedagogy. It brings to light the long history of connectivity between East and West in one of its less studied dimensions. The studies and investigations have a geographic and thematic range that is studiously selected by the editors. Editing a volume can be a thankless job, but the editors of this volume have diligently held to their proverbial guns and produced a volume that I consider seminal in its overall effect; germinal in the potential it offers for future studies, including the comparative branches of the study; and temporally germane. It was a tremendous amount of fun (a harrowing adjective for a philologist) to read, as the essays followed one another with careful consideration for the reader—and were obviously meticulously thought through by the editors as to what order they should appear in.

The first chapter, “Arabic Studies in the Netherlands and the Prerequisite of Social Impact,” by Arnoud Vrolijk, a top-notch and prolific scholar of Arabic philology, was a prudent choice to be first in the colophon, as it defines the boundaries of not only the book, but also our objective grasp of Oriental studies in the West. It also highlights the Netherlands’ tremendously strong history in Oriental studies and demonstrates the herculean efforts given by Dutch scholars in keeping alive Oriental studies and, thereafter, disseminating its importance far and wide—much like the effort Vrolijk has given in his productive career. Although every single chapter in this book satisfied my urge to know and opened up a whole new world to me in terms of the extent of what is missing in the study of this particular niche, I particularly liked the chapter “Teaching and Learning Arabic in Early Modern Rome: Shaping a Missionary Language.” In it, I particularly liked the story of a Giovanni Battista Eliano (1530–89), who, even prior to establishment of the Congregation of the Propaganda, by Pope Gregory XV, was, at the Collegio, a teacher of Arabic and Hebrew. This chapter emphasizes the importance given language due to ecclesiastical (political) motivations. This scholar and translator of Arabic was eventually dispatched to Egypt to “promote the union of the Coptic patriarchate with the Roman church” (195).