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Rothman, E. Natalie. The Dragoman Renaissance: Diplomatic Interpreters and the Routes of Orientalism

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concludes the collection with an essay examining the fluctuating critical fortunes of the San Vitale imperial procession mosaics. Beginning in the Middle Ages, Franzoni's survey ends in the early twentieth century when a loosening of traditional imperatives of artistic naturalism and the positive effects of Riegl's historical relativism created the modern conditions for the mosaics' favourable reassessment.

Ravenna in the Imagination of Renaissance Art offers new scholarship decentring the magnetic poles of Florence, Rome, and Venice and reframing the paradigms of antique exemplarity in the Italian Renaissance. High quality printing and generous colour illustrations make the volume especially attractive and useful. It will be a welcome addition to the library of all scholars of the period.

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Rothman, E. Natalie.
The Dragoman Renaissance: Diplomatic Interpreters and the Routes of Orientalism.
Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021. Pp. xxiii, 419. ISBN 978-1-5017-5849-2 (paperback) US$24.95.

The Dragoman Renaissance will make an important contribution to ongoing debates about early modern Orientalism as a complex, contradictory, dialectical process of both cross-fertilization and the ossification of cultural difference. Whereas most studies of Orientalism lean toward investigating Europeans' views of "the Orient," *The Dragoman Renaissance* demonstrates that cultural brokerage and diplomacy in Ottoman lands operated as a discursive landscape to produce knowledge regarding Ottoman and Muslim culture and history. Focusing on dragomans, "diplomatic translator-interpreters who accompanied ambassadors on their audiences and acted, ritually, as their mouth and ears, mediating the unfolding ceremony" (1), Rothman shows how these individuals, even when operating on behalf of European powers, remained the product of the intellectual and cultural milieux of Ottoman Istanbul. As a result, they were

not Europeans voyeuristically observing and producing the Other in language to meet the tastes of fellow Europeans. Rather, what dragomans "mediated to early modern European publics were elite Ottoman perspectives on politics, language, and society. These perspectives—as refracted by dragomans—lay at the heart of an emergent early modern field of Ottomanist knowledge" (3).

Rothman emphasizes the almost contradictory nature of early modern Orientalism, one that hinges on both fascination with and deep fear of all things Ottoman, by decentring a Eurocentric vision of early modern Orientalism, re-centring Istanbul's court culture, and presenting the dragomans' role in Orientalism as "the culmination of specific communicative circuits and institutionalized genres of knowledge production that entangled Ottoman courtiers and scholars with diplomatic sojourners through complex, multidirectional processes of commensuration" (11). She convincingly illustrates Orientalism's dialectical quality via a wide array of fascinating evidence, which Rothman reads to unpack layers of connections: endogamous kinship practices, gift-giving, education, and the forging of a dragoman caste; diplomatic correspondence known as *relazioni*; visual evidence of dragoman self-representation; language-learning guides such as grammars, dictionaries, lexicons, and vocabularies; methods of translation and intertextual dialogue across and between bureaucratic elites; and dragomans' participation in the Republic of Letters. Rothman's dexterous reading against the grain of these disparate and seemingly unrelated sources is the book's ultimate strength, as it allows her to illustrate how dragomans were not opportunistic renegades but operated as a defined group with a specific role in mediating difference in complex diplomatic, cultural, geopolitical, and intellectual milieux.

In addition to its contribution to early modern studies, *The Dragoman Renaissance* also pushes us to consider Orientalism as more than knowledge of the Orient or a modern phenomenon. Rothman stresses that, while emphasis on Enlightenment knowledge production is important, Orientalism and its epistemologies "have longer routes that meander, inter alia, through the inter-imperial contest of the sixteenth-century Mediterranean and its reworkings over a long seventeenth century" (11). By arguing for Orientalism as "a capacious field of knowledge transcending modern disciplinary boundaries," and that "the resultant systems were 'Europe' and 'the Orient.' Both were—and continue to be—deeply unstable in their valences" (12), Rothman proves that dragomans provide us with an access point to the long genealogy of Orientalism "as the

mutual imbrication of geopolitics and cultural knowledge production in a vital world region whose reverberations are felt to this day" (19).

These insights notwithstanding, the book could have been in more direct, cogent dialogue with the central arguments of Edward W. Said's *Orientalism*. Rothman mentions Said only briefly in the introduction and then again in passing in the epilogue. As a result, Rothman's treatment of *Orientalism* suggests that Said argued for a rigid Orientalism that was colonially minded and marked by its interrelationship with modern imperialism, which Rothman seems to be partly challenging. For example, Rothman states that Said saw Orientalism as "inextricably linked to modern European imperial power" (11), "often situated Orientalism in the context of nineteenth-century and later imperialisms" (14), and argued for "Orientalism as the handmaiden of colonial rule" (254). However, while Said's focus was overwhelmingly modern, he included quite a few ancient, medieval, and early modern texts to show the ontological and epistemological genealogy of Orientalism, and added the caveat that to study the totality of Orientalism from antiquity onward would mean "there would be virtually no limit to the material I would have to deal with."[1] Said also argued that seeing Orientalism as a rationalization for modern colonialism "is to ignore the extent to which colonial rule was justified in advance by Orientalism, rather than after the fact," which was centuries in the making.[2] And in the Afterword to the 1994 Vintage reprint, Said called critiques that he had essentialized East and West, saw Orientalism as rigidly defined, or presented Orientalism as a synecdoche for the modern West and its imperialisms "caricatural permutations."[3]

My fussiness regarding the minutiae of Said's arguments aside, *The Dragoman Renaissance* is a meticulously researched and engagingly written book. It will give us much to discuss regarding how we view cultural brokerage, conceptions of difference, and how knowledge was made, consumed, and reproduced in the early modern Mediterranean. As was the case with Rothman's award-winning *Brokering Empire* (Cornell University Press, 2012), *The Dragoman Renaissance*'s brilliance lies in its ability to entertain us with thrilling anecdotes that, when taken together, surprise us with untold stories, imperceptible webs, and transcendent processes that tell us as much about the early modern world as they do about the world that inherited it, namely ours.

1. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Reprint, 1994), 16.

2. Said, 39.

3. Said, 331.

Lastly, in addition to paperback, the book is available as an open access eBook on Cornell University Press's website. There is also a mobile-friendly companion website with images that Rothman discusses throughout the book, accessible via links embedded in the eBook. However, no images appear in the printed book. Luddites, traditionalists, and those without internet access may find this somewhat frustrating. That said, the eBook-to-website experience is fantastic.

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Rubin, Miri.
Cities of Strangers: Making Lives in Medieval Europe.
The Wiles Lecture Series. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2020. Pp. 204 + 5 b/w ill., 2 maps. ISBN 978-1-1084-8123-6 (hardcover) $85.95.

Miri Rubin's monograph comes from her 2017 Wiles Lecture at Queen's University in Belfast. By tradition, lectures from the Wiles series are turned into monographs and published by Cambridge University Press with a goal to making the themes accessible to the public as well as to an academic audience. Thus, this book is meant to be an introductory overview on the concepts of foreignness and belonging within European cities in late medieval Europe. It is a short monograph, consisting of ninety-eight pages of text, a testament to its first conception as a lecture. Nevertheless, Rubin goes into a fair amount of detail and covers the breadth of Europe from London to Riga, a testament to her skill as a historian. She lays out a theoretical and temporal groundwork for future historians to refine. As such, *Cities of Strangers* is a synthesis of secondary sources highlighting the changes in perceptions of those living in urban areas in the late medieval period.

By looking at Europe through a comparative lens between cities, Rubin focuses on big ideas and general trends, particularly the social changes of pre- and post-plague Europe. A large pan-European view is rare among historians of urban life, who tend to use one or two cities as a microcosm of urbanity. However, Rubin demonstrates the possibility and the necessity of synthesizing