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The Representation of “Orient”

at the court of Duke of Anjou and Burgundy of the House of Valois in the 15th century

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This thesis consists of two parts; a study on how the European nobilities built their image of the Eastern world, and an analysis on how this image was depicted during aristocratic feasts.

The first part is divided into three sections. Section One describes how a pagan image of the Orient was built through two historical events: the experience of the Crusade of Nicopolis by the Duchy of Burgundy, the visit of the Byzantine Emperor and his delegations at the surrender of Constantinople by the Ottoman Empire. Philippe le Bon expresses his will to launch a new crusade against the Turks due to its fall. In addition, his collection of books shows his interest in the Eastern world. His library consists of a great number of books about the Orient, such as geography and history of Eastern territories, oriental tales, heroes of the Ancient world and ancient Christian Crusaders.

Section Two describes the interest and the influence of the Orient in the court, when the title of the King of Jerusalem was given to the Duke of Anjou, René d’Anjou of the House of Anjou. He insists on using his title of King of Jerusalem and creates the Order of the Croissant to obtain the Kingdom of Naples from Alfonse V. Moreover, analysis of the accounts at the Court of René reveals a large possession of exotic objects such as garments, furniture, armor and slaves acquired through trading with Mediterranean countries. Marseille, part of the County of Provence at the time, plays a major role in that commerce.

Section Three analyses the oriental costumes depicted by Bertrandon de La Broquiere, a traveller sent « outre-mer » (overseas) by Philippe le Bon, Duke of Burgundy, for pre-crusade reconnaissance. He makes drawings of a wide variety of oriental costumes and brings some of them back, providing the Court of Burgundy with a more vivid image of Oriental culture. An example of how the influence of that travel influences the transmission and the acceptance of Oriental culture can be found, when the Duke of Burgundy orders clothes which are inspired by those brought back by La Broquiere.

The second part is made of three sections as well. The first section analyses the use of colors and their symbolism at the Court of Burgundy “banquet du faisan” described in the “Mémoires” by Olivier de La Marche. This analysis deduces that green symbolises pagan Turks’ vice, white with black Christian virtue, grey with black and red the Duke of Burgundy. By the use of these colors at the “entremets” – a banquet entertainment – Philippe le Bon convinces his guests that his crusade project towards is under the protection of God.

The following section looks into three feasts at the Court of Anjou. At the first one, the Nancy tournament with the King of France, René d’Anjou introduces himself as the King of Jerusalem accompanied by pages in Turk costumes. He emphasises that title especially after the loss of the territory to the Kingdom of Naples. The second feast is a “pas d’armes” in Saumur where aristocrats and influential people from his territories get together. The author reports the event, where Moorish slaves and lions are presented, and compares knights to heroes of Antiquity like Hercules and Alexander the Great. Those Moors and lions imply a danger knights would face.

The third feast was “Le Mystère du roy Avenir”, a play by Jehan du Prier, author at the Duke’s Court. This play presents oriental characters and reflects the taste of René d’Anjou for Eastern cultures. This drama plays a major role in spreading his taste and inspiring other artists like the painter Georges Trubert, who portrays people with oriental costumes in his paintings.

This paper focuses on the representations of the Orient in the courts of Western Europe during the 15th century. In this period, the Orient was an object of curiosity for the nobility and the presentations of those cultures served their political interest.