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# THE 'ORIENTAL' AMBASSADOR IN 17TH CENTURY FRENCH COMEDY



VERITY ELIZABETH IRVINE

Submitted for the degree of Ph.D. in French by research and thesis  
of the University of Kent at Canterbury, October 2004

**ABSTRACT: The 'Oriental' Ambassador in 17th century French Comedy.**

This thesis is concerned with the literary and historical links observable between diplomatic practice and the comic theatre in 17<sup>th</sup> century France. The functions and 'persona' of the *ambassadeur extraordinaire* (as defined in contemporary treatises) are consequently analysed in some detail. The significance of the comic theatre in royal propaganda is considered within the context of the accepted format for the reception and entertainment of a visiting ambassador. Some eleven comedies are shown to be directly connected with the arrival of diplomatic missions from Asia or Africa. There is an examination of the important literary theme of the 'Oriental' ambassador and women, notably with regard to public interest in events concerning the Ottoman and Persian ambassadors. The treatment of this topic by the comic theatre is compared with that appearing in prose fiction. The Muscovite embassy of 1668 is shown to be the first to have firm links with the comic theatre through the personal satire of the Russian ambassador, Pierre Potemkin, in Poisson's *Faux Moscovites*. The literary and historical contexts of the 'turquerie' in Molière's *Bourgeois gentilhomme* are a major concern. A possible new target for Molière's wit is suggested in the person of Hugues de Lionne. An examination of the use of jargon as a comic device by Molière and others follows, emphasis being laid on the exploitation of lingua franca and the rôle of the valet as comic interpreter. Three minor comedies dealing with African themes are examined next, against the historical background of the Ardra embassy of 1670: Boursault's *Mort vivant*, Du Perche's *Ambassadeur d'Afrique* and Bel-Isle's *Mariage de la reine de Monomotapa*. The Siamese embassies of the 1680s are shown to be linked with productions by the Comédie-Italienne; comedies by Fatouville, Regnard and Dufresny contain an 'Oriental' embassy of some description. I conclude with the Persian embassy of 1715 and the comic theatre of the Foires.

*In loving memory of my mother whose generosity made this possible.*

A.M.D.G.

*The 'Oriental' Ambassador in 17<sup>th</sup> Century French Comedy.*



Frontispiece: *Louis XIV recevant l'ambassadeur persan Mehemet Riza Beg dans la grande galerie de Versailles, le 19 février 1715.* Attributed to Antoine Coypel. Musée de Versailles.

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### *Preface*

In the course of background research for an M.A. dissertation on *Molière and the Turks*, it became necessary for me to examine the circumstances surrounding the arrival of the Ottoman embassy of 1669 in some considerable depth. Study of the primary source material appeared to indicate that certain of the commonly accepted theories regarding the nature of the 'turquerie' in the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* might be mistaken and therefore worth closer investigation within the context of a doctoral thesis. According to the historical evidence, there was an unprecedented divergence from the normal diplomatic practice of the day in the case of the Sultan's ambassador, Soliman Aga, a deviation which occasioned considerable adverse comment in diplomatic circles at the time. These events of 1669-70, as well as certain of Covielle's remarks within the text of the play, now lead me to suggest a previously unidentified target for Molière's acerbic wit in the person of the 'ministre des affaires étrangères', Hugues de Lionne. This specific historical episode will accordingly provide a major focus for our study. Though the most significant seventeenth-century comedy to exploit an oriental theme, the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* is far from being the only one that can be shown to have some connection with a historical embassy. There are several others that include an 'Oriental' ambassador amongst the *dramatis personae*, a character who more often than not plays an essential part in the denouement of the plot. Nor is this inappropriate, for the rôle of ambassador is typically compared to that of an actor in Renaissance handbooks of diplomacy.

In the seventeenth century a visiting ambassador would seek to maintain a high profile, arriving in some state and accompanied by a large retinue, in order to enhance his own sovereign's prestige. Processing through France from the point of entry, he would be given a civic welcome and entertained at public expense at all major towns and cities along the route, until he reached the gates of Paris. Here he would pause for a while to recover from the exertions of the journey, before making his formal entry into the city and proceeding to a royal audience. Huge crowds would turn out to watch the procession along the way, the more so since these were also occasions for the distribution of largesse. There are almost as many references in our sources to the size and behaviour of the crowds lining the routes as there are to the splendours of the occasion. The arrival of an ambassador was thus very much a public event and particularly suitable as a comic theme, because these occasions were so often connected with rejoicing, with royal weddings, births and betrothals, or the establishment of peace between warring nations. Exotic embassies from Muscovy, Ardra, Morocco, Siam and Persia all inspire our comic playwrights, though the study of the plays that deal with them has been neglected, in comparison to that of Molière's Turks. Nor, to my knowledge, has there been any attempt at analysis of the ambassador as a stock comic character. The following is an endeavour to remedy these deficiencies.

Solid links have been revealed between the actual practice of diplomacy as it evolved under Louis XIV and the use of the theatre as a political tool.<sup>1</sup> The crowned heads of

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<sup>1</sup> See John Adamson, *The Princely Courts of Europe 1500-1750* (London, 1999); Jean-Marie Apostolidès, *Le Prince sacrifié: théâtre et politique au temps de Louis XIV* (Paris, 1985) and *Le Roi-machine: spectacle et*

Europe vied with one another in the brilliance of their courts and the magnificence of their court entertainments. The exercise of patronage and the ability to attract and retain the leading artists, musicians and men of letters of the day were an important aspect of a sovereign's international reputation. It was above all in France that the theatre was considered one of the principal showcases for the regime, for with Louis XIV the theatre was a passion. Ambassadors visiting or resident in Paris were issued with formal invitations to those theatrical productions most calculated to enhance the monarch's prestige. Dramatic productions provided a golden opportunity for propaganda. Statements could be made of 'position prise' on matters of international policy. Claims for France to inherit the mantle of imperial Rome could be subtly reinforced by an emphasis on themes from Classical antiquity. Reflection could take place, with satirical intent, upon current events and personalities before what literally amounted to a captive audience. Moreover, the importance placed by the regime on the theatre, together with the existence of retroactive censorship, made it unlikely that comment would be made from the stage without at least tacit official approval. For these reasons, it became commonplace for ambassadors to include an account of theatrical productions in their reports on returning home. Those who doubt the power of the theatre in the matter of government propaganda before the age of mass media need look no further than our own William Shakespeare's *King Richard III*. This particular piece of Tudor black propaganda has maintained its ability to persuade even to the present day. Richard of York continues to be cast as a villain in the popular imagination, despite the best efforts of revisionist historians.<sup>2</sup>

I have approached this search for the 'Oriental' ambassador in seventeenth-century French comedy very much as an interdisciplinary exercise, exploring the evidence from an historical as well as from a literary standpoint, the better to arrive at a tentative understanding of the issues at stake. This method seems all the more appropriate, given the intrinsic interest to the reader of many of the historical sources. Chapter One is concerned for the most part with an examination of normal diplomatic practice in the seventeenth century. We begin with establishing the personal qualities and conduct expected of an ambassador, for the extent to which our stage ambassadors conform to, or deviate from, the norm, enhances the amount of humour derived from given comic situations. There will also be found some general reflections upon the nature and purpose of comedy in Molière's day. Case studies of specific plays and individual ambassadors follow in succeeding chapters. These are grouped in chronological and geographical order, the better to demonstrate the development of the literary theme and also the changing nature of state control and censorship of the theatre towards the end of the reign. Those comedies concerned, together with any concomitant satire, are analysed in depth. In addition, two themes emerge as significant throughout the course of this study, namely the use of jargon to represent foreign speech in dialogue and what was perceived to be the 'oriental' attitude to women. Summative chapters are devoted to each, in advance of the general conclusion.

The first diplomatic episode of particular interest to the literary historian, following the assumption of personal power by Louis XIV, is not the highly publicised advent of Soliman Aga in the autumn of 1669, but the unexpected arrival of a Muscovite

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*politique au temps de Louis XIV* (Paris, 1981); Lucien Bély, *Espions et ambassadeurs au temps de Louis XIV* (Paris, 1990); Marie-Claude Canova-Green, *La Politique-spectacle au grand siècle* [Biblio 17] (Paris, 1993); Marie-Françoise Christout, *Le Ballet de cour de Louis XIV, 1643-1672* (Paris, 1967); Ronald S. Love, "France, Siam, and court spectacle in Royal image-building at Versailles in 1685 and 1686." *Canadian Journal of History/Annales canadiennes d'histoire*, XXXI, August/août 1996, pp.171-98; Garrett Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy* (London, 1955), henceforward: Mattingly; Marie-Christine Moine, *Les Fêtes à la Cour du Roi Soleil* (Paris, 1984); C.-G. Picavet, *La diplomatie française au temps de Louis XIV, 1661-1715. Institutions, moeurs et coutumes* (Paris, 1930), henceforward: Picavet.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, the introduction to Desmond Seward's *Richard III, England's Black Legend* (London, 1983).

embassy in late August 1668. This embassy, led by Pierre Potemkin, is closely associated with Poisson's *Faux Moscovites* of the same year.<sup>3</sup> The *Faux Moscovites* is the earliest French comedy that I have been able to trace to feature an ambassador, albeit an impostor, as an essential component of the plot; it also contains elements of direct personal satire of an actual ambassador and members of his staff. It seems that our author felt the Russians had deliberately slighted his theatre by failing to attend a production there and he took his revenge in an appropriate manner. We see many a racial stereotype and popular prejudice against the Russians become firmly established in this play. Ambassador Potemkin must in any case be credited with a special place in theatrical history in his own right, for his reports to Tsar Alexis on his return home to Moscow contain such vivid descriptions of the performances he had attended during his stay in Paris, that he may be considered instrumental in the introduction of the theatre to Russia by that monarch.<sup>4</sup> Potemkin's embassy is relatively well-documented in terms of the history of diplomacy, but there has been little literary analysis offered of the Poisson play in its context, other than Fournel's edition of 1863 and a short study by Jim Gaines.<sup>5</sup> These and other closely related themes are the subject of Chapter Two.

Chapter Three concerns the most significant play that we shall have to study, namely the *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. So significant is it indeed that it will also occupy substantial parts of Chapters Six and Seven as well. It is a work on which a considerable body of literature exists already, both concerning the historical background and the critical analysis of the play as such. In the first place, some of the history of the text itself is problematic. Crucially for our study, aspects of the text of the ballet do not appear in print until a decade after Molière's death, in 1682. In assessing whether they formed part of the original performance, we have followed the consensus of affirmative critical opinion, notably Mesnard's edition of the *Oeuvres complètes* of 1873-93, supplemented by Couton's Pléiade edition of 1971.<sup>6</sup> Where the historical evidence for Soliman Aga's embassy is concerned, we have consulted all the available literature, returning to the original sources wherever possible. The most recent studies of the man himself are those by Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammont, Sinan Kunalalp and Frédéric Hitzel, but evidence for his career in both French and Ottoman sources, other than in so far as concerns this single episode, is somewhat thin on the ground.<sup>7</sup> There has been much critical interpretation of the relation of that history to the Turkish motif in the play itself.<sup>8</sup> The most recent of these is by Michele Longino, whose work we shall have

<sup>3</sup> Raymond Poisson, *Les Faux Moscovites*, ed. Victor Fournel, *Les Contemporains de Molière* (Paris, 1863).

<sup>4</sup> See Zinaïda Schakovskoy, *Precursors of Peter the Great*, trans. J. Maxwell Brownjohn (London, 1964) and *La vie quotidienne à Moscou au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1963), henceforward: Schakovskoy 1 and 2.

<sup>5</sup> Jim Gaines, "Les Faux Moscovites et les vrais: l'image des Russes à l'époque de Louis XIV", in *Le Même et l'autre: Regards européens* [Université Blaise Pascal, Clermont Ferrand, 1998].

<sup>6</sup> Jean-Baptiste Poquelin de Molière, *Oeuvres complètes*, édition Despois et Mesnard, *Grands Ecrivains de la France*, 13 vols. (Paris, 1873-1893), henceforward: Mesnard; *Oeuvres complètes*, édition G. Couton, 2 vols. (Paris, 1971), henceforward: Couton.

<sup>7</sup> Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammont, Sinan Kunalalp, Frédéric Hitzel, *Représentants permanents de la France en Turquie (1536-1991) et de la Turquie en France (1797-1991)* (Istanbul-Paris, 1991), henceforward: Bacqué-Grammont, Kunalalp and Hitzel; Sinan Kunalalp and Frédéric Hitzel, *Ambassadeurs, ministres, chargés d'affaires et envoyés en mission spéciale de la Porte Ottomane et de la République de Turquie auprès de la France de 1483 à 1991* (Istanbul-Paris, 1991), henceforward: Kunalalp and Hitzel.

<sup>8</sup> Adile Ayda, "Molière et l'envoyé de la Sublime Porte." *Cahiers de l'Association Internationale des Etudes Françaises*, no. 9, juin, pp 13-53, 1957; Ali Behdad, "The Oriental(ist) Encounter: The Politics of 'turquerie' in Molière", *L'Esprit créateur*, XXXII, No. 3, pp. 37-49, 1992; Gaston Hall, *Comedy in Context: essays on Molière* (Jackson, 1984), *Molière's Le Bourgeois gentilhomme: Context and Stagecraft*, Durham Modern Language Series FM5 (Durham, 1990); Mary Hossain, "The Chevalier d'Arvieux and *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*", *Seventeenth century French Studies*, XII, 1990, pp. 76-88, henceforward: Hossain 1; Volker Kapp (ed.), *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme: problèmes de la comédie-ballet. Biblio 17-67. Papers on French Seventeenth Century Literature* (Paris-Seattle-Tübingen, 1991), "Le Bourgeois gentilhomme et les problèmes de la comédie-ballet." (In Kapp, *Biblio 17*, pp. 7-8); Françoise Karro, "La cérémonie turque du Bourgeois

occasion to follow closely in so far as it deals with comedy, and to modify and correct in certain aspects with respect to Molière, especially concerning the likely contemporary personal target of his satire. It is in the latter area that my own work has advanced considerably since a previous study.<sup>9</sup>

Two further chapters deal with comic theatrical echoes of African and Siamese embassies in 1670 and 1684 respectively. Here the critical literature is thin by comparison with the diplomatic history. The year which saw the departure of Soliman Aga also witnessed the arrival of an embassy from the West Guinea kingdom of Ardra. No fewer than three of our comedies feature an African ambassador: Boursault's *Le Mort vivant* (1662), Du Perche's *Ambassadeur d'Afrique* (1666) and Bel-Isle's *Le Mariage de la reine de Monomotapa* (1682). Africa may legitimately be considered 'Oriental' by association, for these 'ambassadors' are very Turkish in their attributes and demeanour and North Africa falls well within the Ottoman sphere of influence during our period. The first two pre-date the Ardra embassy, the third appeared following closely on the heels of a Moroccan embassy to Paris in the same year. These comedies are discussed by Lancaster in his *A History of French Dramatic Literature in the Seventeenth Century*, but other than Fournel's edition of *Le Mort vivant*, I have come across no other critical studies either of these plays or of the African as a character in the seventeenth-century theatre.<sup>10</sup> Africa accordingly provides an important focus of interest for Chapter Four.

In Chapter Five, our investigation shifts to the Far East with the arrival of a succession of colourful embassies from Siam in the 1680s. Though there is no play which features a Siamese ambassador as such, Siamese characters do appear in prose fiction and very many productions of the Foires and of the Comédie Italienne display considerable oriental colour. Several of these plays present an embassy as an essential component of the plot. Exoticism was very much the order of the day, fed by the constant coming and going of these fascinating visitors from the East and the extensive coverage in the press. The distance in time between these later embassies, together with the corresponding plays, and those discussed at the beginning of this study allows us to perceive a significant change in the diplomatic as well as the theatrical climate, as represented for example by the newly-founded Comédie-Française. The study is thus able, albeit cautiously, both to take forward the specific interpretation of Molière and to draw some general cultural conclusions from a variety of particular examples about the close rapport between prestigious public theatres and the

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gentilhomme: mouvance temporelle et spirituelle de la foi." (in Kapp, *Biblio 17*, pp. 35-93), henceforward: Karro 1; "L'Empire ottoman et l'Europe dans l'opéra français et viennois au temps de Lully", in *Colloque Lully*, 14-18 septembre 1987, Heidelberg-Saint-Germain-en Laye, henceforward: Karro 2; Patrick D. Laude, *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, problèmes de la comédie-ballet, *Biblio 17*, 67 (Paris, 1991); Michèle Longino, *Orientalism in French classical drama* (Cambridge, 2002), henceforward: Longino; Pierre Martino, "La cérémonie turque du *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. *Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France*, XVIII (i), pp.36-60, 1911; Elizabeth Maxfield-Miller, "The Real M. Jourdain of the *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*." *Studies in Philology*, 5, pp.62-73, 1959; Clarence Dana Rouillard, "The Background of the Turkish Ceremony in Molière's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*." *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 39, pp. 33-52, 1969, henceforward: Rouillard 1; Hartmut Stenzel, "Projet critique et divertissement de cour. Sur la place de la comédie-ballet et du *Bourgeois gentilhomme* dans le théâtre de Molière." (In Kapp, *Biblio 17*, pp.163-183); Albert Vandal, "Molière et le cérémonial turc à la cour de Louis XIV." *Revue d'art dramatique*, XI, pp. 65- 80 (1888), henceforward: Vandal 1; David Whitton, *Molière: Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* (London, 1992).

<sup>9</sup> Material from my M.A. dissertation on *Molière and the Turks* is revisited and included for the sake of clarity in Chapter Three and Chapter Seven.

<sup>10</sup> Henry Carrington Lancaster, *A History of French Dramatic Literature in the Seventeenth Century* (Baltimore-London, 1929-1942, reprint New York, 1966), henceforward: Lancaster. See vol. III i, pp. 305-07 for the *Mort vivant*; vol. III ii, pp. 680-81 for the *Ambassadeur d'Afrique*; vol. IV ii, p. 551 for the *Mariage de la reine de Monomotapa*.

personal political requirements of an absolute monarch in the sometimes delicate matter of relations with foreign powers. Each of our historical embassies took place in a very distinct diplomatic ambience and these distinctions are reflected in our plays.

We close with the embassy of Mehemet Riza Beg at the very end of the reign, though his arrival in 1715 was viewed rather more as a welcome diversion for the ailing monarch, than as a focus for serious diplomatic endeavour. One of Louis's last acts as king was the formal reception of the Persian ambassador. There is a particularly strong literary link here, for Riza Beg was to furnish the prototype for Montesquieu's Usbek in the *Lettres persanes* in addition to appearing in a novel in his own right.

Two major themes emerge from this body of comic literature dealing with the 'Orient'. These are the use of jargon to represent foreign speech in dialogue and the increasingly stereotyped perception of 'oriental' attitudes to women, with the Turk becoming a particular icon. Because they are so revealing of the culture of that epoch, these themes both have a chapter each devoted to them. It is a matter of record that both Soliman Aga and Mehemet Riza Beg were involved in scandals of a sexual nature during their stay in Paris; inevitably they became the object of much prurient interest, reinforcing the received wisdom that the oriental male was unable to resist the attractions of French womanhood. We may readily observe the growing connection between the fictional ambassador and this type of shenanigans, in verse, in song, in prose fiction as well as in dramatic productions. Chapter Six is consequently devoted to the 'Oriental' ambassador and women. Our final chapter examines the use of jargon for comic effect and the importance of the figure of the interpreter, in real life and upon the stage. Though this device can be traced back to Classical antiquity it assumes renewed force in the Grand Siècle.

This thesis thus has a small number of related objectives. My overriding concern has been the comprehensive exploration of the links between diplomacy and the stage in the reign of Louis XIV. I have begun by seeking out instances of ambassadors in seventeenth century comedies with the object of discovering whether such characters are connected to actual personalities and if so, whether any element of satire is involved. I have looked for the existence of a pattern in those comedies which feature an embassy as an element of the plot, in an effort to detect whether they have a common theme and how far back it might be possible to trace this. I have examined the specific function of jargon in these comedies and have sought to establish how far popular perceptions of 'the Orient' were affected by personal contact with embassies from the east, together with the extent to which *vraisemblance* is achieved in the portrayal of ambassadors upon the stage. Lastly, I have investigated the use of the theatre as an instrument of royal propaganda, particularly in so far as concerns foreign policy, and the extent to which individual ambassadors might have experienced this aspect of the theatre during their stay in Paris.

Acknowledgements: My heartfelt thanks are due to Prof. P. E. J. Robinson of the University of Kent at Canterbury for his unfailing kindness, patience and erudition as Ph.D. supervisor and, posthumously alas, to Dr. V. J. Parry of the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London, who first introduced me to the Ottoman Turks. I gratefully acknowledge the advice, encouragement and very practical support that I have received from Professor Graham Anderson, Professor Thea Bynon, Dr. Christopher Chaffin, Betty Farrington, Dr. David Hornsby, Richard Noakes, Maureen Nunn, Donald Warren and Charles Young.

### **Chapter 1: The comic ambassador and the realities of 17<sup>th</sup> century diplomacy.**

*Un Ambassadeur ressemble en quelque maniere à un Comedien, exposé sur le theatre aux yeux du Public pour y jouer de grands rôles, comme son emploi l'éleve audessus de sa condition & l'égale en quelque sorte aux Maîtres de la terre par le droit de representation qui y est attaché, & par le commerce particulier qu'il lui donne avec eux, il ne peut passer que pour un mauvais Acteur s'il n'en fait pas soutenir la dignité; mais cette obligation est l'écueil contre lequel échoient plusieurs Negociateurs, parce qu'ils ne savent pas précisément en quoi elle consiste. François de Callières (1716)*

*An ambassador is an honest man sent to lie abroad for the good of his country.  
[Written in a friend's album] Sir Henry Wotton (1568-1639)*

It is appropriate that we should begin our study of the 'Oriental' ambassador in classical French comedy with a brief examination of diplomatic protocol and practice in France during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. We need to make ourselves reasonably familiar with the office and functions of a real ambassador of the day, the better to compare the comic stage *persona* with the original model and to pronounce with some authority on matters of 'vraisemblance'. Something of the nature of 17<sup>th</sup>-century French comedy also requires definition at this early point, to facilitate a proper understanding of the importance of the part played by the comic theatre in royal propaganda and also of the element of personal satire contained in certain of the plays that we are to examine. As we shall discover, a significant proportion of the comedies produced during the reign of Louis XIV features a comic ambassador and his interpreter as essential elements of the dénouement of the intrigue. In the vast majority of such plots, a roguish valet connives with his rather naïve young master in the deception of an elderly parent figure, be it father or guardian, who considers the youth an unsuitable match for the heroine and wishes to impose another husband of his own choice. Their scheming comes to fruition as one of the pair, be it hero or valet, disguises himself as a visiting ambassador in order to win the hand of the maiden. The "ambassador" overcomes all objections to the union of the happy couple, either by intimidation of the old man with the prospect of a beating, or by appealing to his cupidity, with much elaboration on the tempting possibilities of a royal marriage for the daughter. Much humour is often derived from the plotters' use of a comic jargon, requiring the services of an "interpreter", to the bewilderment of the parent (or elderly lover) and the amusement of ourselves, who are complicitly 'in the know'.

At first glance this seems a rather unlikely scenario, introduced merely for the possibilities of slapstick fun at the expense of foreigners. A playwright is surely asking too much, in expecting his audience to suspend their disbelief that a visitor of such rare distinction should arrive so opportunely upon the scene and concern himself with the petty obstacles set in the way of a pair of young lovers? Yet embassies, like comedy itself, were frequently linked with marriages and other happy occasions such as the birth of a royal prince. The arrival of an ambassador was a matter for public rejoicing and the distribution of largesse. The local population would line the route to watch an ambassador and his suite pass by; an ambassador would often keep open house to show the munificence of his royal master

and throw money to the crowd. There was, in fact, a steady to-ing and fro-ing across Europe of diplomatic missions of one kind or another. Ambassadors would proceed slowly and formally through the countryside, from the moment of first setting foot on French soil, to the time of their arrival in Paris itself, greeted at each stopping point with civic receptions, banquets, gifts, artillery salvos and every formality of welcome. Such colourful spectacles provided a welcome distraction from the monotonous routine of daily life. In these ways, if in none other, the arrival of an ambassador could be said to have much in common with the concerns of the comic theatre, particularly in the case of an exotic embassy from the East. I shall argue that it is possible to link the majority, though not all, of those plays containing such an element in the plot with actual historical embassies and identifiable personalities.

Contemporary theories of the art of diplomacy, the formulae for the reception and entertainment of an ambassador in Paris, together with the usual day to day programmes followed during such a visit, are clearly laid down in the various seventeenth-century treatises on the subject, as well as in letters, memoirs and journals of the period.<sup>11</sup> We are accordingly in the happy state of being able to base our researches on a wealth of primary source material, and thus to conclude very precisely what informed expectation might be, in so far as concerns the character, behaviour and general demeanour, of a foreign ambassador arriving in Paris during the reign of Louis XIV. To this we really ought to add some reflections on the particular significance of a diplomatic visit from one of the so-called 'Oriental' powers. We shall then be in a much better position to assess the extent, if any, to which our comic ambassadors deviate from normal practice of the day and thence the amounts of topicality, realism and personal satire involved in the depiction of these characters. The Ottoman Turks, for example, refused to conform to normal European diplomatic conventions. In traditional Islamic political theory a land is either 'Dar al-Islam', by definition subject to the Sultan, or 'Dar al-Harb', in a state of war against him. Their Sultans could not, therefore, properly send accredited ambassadors to negotiate with other crowned heads as equals without perceived loss of status. It was thus the usual Ottoman practice to despatch temporary envoys (in Turkish, 'çavuş') to Christian powers, as and when circumstances required. These pretensions obviously could not appear to be condoned in any manner, no matter how trivial, by the king of France without a concomitant loss of prestige. An 'envoyé' simply could not be accorded ambassadorial privileges, yet such was the expectation. As we shall see in the cases of Soliman Aga in 1669-70 and of Mehemet Riza Beg in 1715, questions of protocol of this nature can cause considerable complications, when both sides prove equally inflexible. Similar difficulties were liable to arise in the cases of Muscovy, China and Siam, providing fruitful sources of mutual misunderstanding and hostility, all too frequently exacerbated by problems of interpretation and cultural difference. This thesis will therefore take the nature of an interdisciplinary study; though the emphasis will be on literature, as is proper, close

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<sup>11</sup> Our primary sources for the diplomatic protocol of the period will be Th. Godefroy, *Le Ceremonial françois, II, Receptions d' Ambassadeurs* (Paris, 1649), henceforward: Godefroy; Abraham van Wicquefort, *L'Ambassadeur et ses fonctions...Section XLIX, Des Audiances* (Cologne, 1690), henceforward: Wicquefort; François de Callières, *De la Manière de Negociier avec les Souverains, de l'Utilité des Négociations, du Choix des Ambassadeurs et des Envoyez, et des Qualitez necessaires pour réussir dans ces Emplois* (Brussels, 1716), henceforward: de Callières. On the history and practice of diplomacy, see John Adamson, *The Princely Courts of Europe 1500-1750* (London, 1999); Lucien Bély, *Espions et ambassadeurs au temps de Louis XIV* (Paris, 1990); Kunalp and Hitzel; Mattingly; Picavet; Gaëton de Raxis de Flassan, *Histoire générale et raisonnée de la Diplomatie Française ... depuis la fondation de la Monarchie, jusqu'à la fin de la règne de Louis XVI ...seconde édition ...augmentée avec tables... de tous les traités conclus par la France* 7 tom. (Paris, 1811), henceforward: Raxis de Flassan; Sir Ernest Satow, *A Guide to Diplomatic Practice*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (London, 1957), henceforward: Satow.

analysis of the historical background will be given considerable weight. Literary themes will be placed firmly within their proper historical context. A particular study will be made of the increasing use of local colour, in the context of the growth of Orientalism as a respectable field for academic study in France after 1669.

It was during the reign of Louis XIV that codification and regularisation of the ceremonial connected with diplomacy took place. French practice tended to follow that of Rome and the Papal court, while usage elsewhere in Europe, despite local variations from court to court, gradually evolved to follow that of Versailles. It was also at this period that the French language finally came to replace Latin as the international language of diplomacy, a sign of the growing prestige of France. The French had the reputation of being notoriously rigorous and inflexible with regard to diplomatic precedence and etiquette, often to the annoyance and resentment of other heads of state. Over time, distinct levels of diplomatic representation evolved. Pride of place was taken by properly accredited ambassadors, papal legates and nuncios, 'deemed to represent the person and dignity of their sovereign', this is the '*Ambassadeur Ordinaire...celuy qui reside en la Cour d'un autre Prince pour honneur, & pour entretenir reciproquement l'amitié, ou pour negocier les affaires survenantes*'.<sup>12</sup> He alone was entitled to personal access to the sovereign to whom he was accredited (theoretically, ambassadors were accredited only by and to kings or emperors, never lesser rulers or republics). Very few monarchs, however, were willing to maintain permanent embassies abroad until well towards the end of the century, because of the enormous expense involved. In second place came the papal internuncio and the '*Ambassadeur Extraordinaire...celuy qui vient en la Cour d'un Prince pour quelque affaire particuliere, comme pour conclure une paix, un mariage, conduire une Reine, faire des compliments &c.*'. These were also accredited to the head of state and possessed plenipotentiary powers, but did not 'represent the person and dignity' of their own sovereign.<sup>13</sup> This class of diplomatic representation was more usual than the first, for the rather mercenary reason outlined above. Such a visit might last for perhaps a fortnight, not including travel, and all expenses incurred by the embassy would be met by the host nation. Of the third class of diplomatic representation, markedly inferior in status to the other two, were the '*simples Envoyez...qui n'ont point la qualité d'Ambassadeurs*'; according to Furetière, the *envoyé* is simply '*un homme député exprés pour negotier quelque affaire avec quelque Prince ou Republique*'. Lastly, there were the '*chargés d'affaires*', accredited by foreign minister to foreign minister and appointed either *ad hoc* [for a specific purpose] or *ad interim* [temporarily]. Our comic ambassadors are of the second class; that is, they are presumed to have come for a limited period and for a specific purpose. We have seen above that missions of this kind were often, though not exclusively, connected with royal births and marriages. Marriage and fertility have been very much a concern of comedy since Roman times; what could be more natural than that such a figure should feature in so many of our plays?

There were two necessary ceremonies connected with the arrival of an embassy in Paris: the '*audience publique*' and the '*entrée solennelle*'. The first came as the culminating point of a sumptuous procession to the royal palace, letters of accreditation were presented and polite speeches, without particular significance, exchanged; the second was an occasion for the visiting ambassador to display his own magnificence and that of his monarch to the general populace. These were honours reserved for full ambassadors and not accorded to envoys:

<sup>12</sup> Antoine Furetière, *Dictionnaire universel, contenant generalement tous les mots français, tant vieux que modernes et les termes de toutes les sciences et des arts*, 3v, [1690], Slatkine reprint 1970; henceforward: Furetière.

<sup>13</sup> See Satow for this and other definitions of various diplomatic functions and protocol.

On fait des entrées aux *Ambassadeurs*, c'est à dire, qu'on les envoye recevoir avec ceremonie, les carrosses du Roy & des Princes vont au devant d'eux, il y a des charges d'Introducteurs des *Ambassadeurs* chez le Roy & chez Monsieur.<sup>14</sup>

The 'entrée solennelle' was based on the polite fiction that, though actually already in residence for several days, the ambassador had not yet arrived. He had to leave the capital for somewhere close at hand, where he was officially met and welcomed by the 'Introducteur des ambassadeurs' and led into Paris through the Porte Saint-Antoine, through the Place Royale and lodged at either the permanent embassy, should there be one, or else at the Hôtel des Ambassadeurs Extraordinaires in the Rue de Tournon, maintaining the impression that he had only just arrived in France. We learn from van Wicquefort that a particular pride was taken in the receptions accorded to visiting ambassadors:

Les Français croient se faire honneur en faisant civilité à autrui et particulièrement aux étrangers.<sup>15</sup>

The ambassador's suite was important. Its size varied with the status of the ambassador, normally comprising one or two secretaries, a chaplain, an 'intendant', a number of gentlemen to provide an escort, perhaps fifteen or so, and a 'dame d'honneur' if his wife accompanied him, though this was an infrequent occurrence. The appointment of secretary was a more important one than might perhaps be anticipated by the title. It was used as a means of training up promising young men as prospective diplomats and a secretary was often expected to take over should some emergency arise. To these official posts were added an entire domestic staff, which could number as many as a hundred.<sup>16</sup> There would also be a substantial baggage train, saddle horses, and carriages. Silver and livery were important to maintain the whole impression and lavish gifts for the king and his entourage: 'On dit qu'un homme a un train, un equipage d'*Ambassadeur*, pour dire, qu'il a un train, un equipage magnifique' [Furetière]. Of all these, the horses tended to be the greatest expense. An ambassador had to provide much of this out of his own pocket. Heads of state were notoriously tardy in meeting diplomatic expenses. Personal wealth was a very important factor in the choice of an ambassador. It was equally important that an ambassador should be of noble birth, because he would be present at court and would need to maintain his place there as an equal:

Il est encore à souhaiter qu'un Ambassadeur ait de la naissance, sur tout s'il est employé dans les Cours principales, & il n'est pas inutile qu'avec toutes ces qualitez, il ait un noble extérieur & une figure agreable qui lui facilite les moyens de plaire, & qui l'empêche de porter la peine de sa mauvaise mine...<sup>17</sup>

An appointment as ambassador could prove ruinously expensive and was not always eagerly sought after. An ambassador had to dispose of a considerable personal fortune. It was expected that he would give elaborate suppers, balls, and entertainments:

<sup>14</sup> Furetière.

<sup>15</sup> Van Wicquefort (quoted in Picavet, p. 128).

<sup>16</sup> The French ambassador Girardin, for example, took the following household establishment to Constantinople, in order to impress the Grand Turk: 'deux écuyers, trois filles de chambre, trois officiers de cuisine, trois valets d'office, deux pages, seize laquais, un jardinier, deux porteurs de chaise, huit autres laquais, deux portiers, six palefreniers, des janissaires, dix-huit musiciens et un chef pour les diriger, des représentants de tous les corps de métiers, tailleurs, tapissiers, etc.' (Picavet, p. 95.)

<sup>17</sup> De Callières, p. 38.

Une bonne table facilite les moyens de savoir ce qui se passe, lorsque les gens du pays ont la liberté d'aller manger chez l'ambassadeur, et la dépense qu'il y fait est non seulement honorable, mais encore très utile à son maître, lorsque le négociateur le sait bien mettre en oeuvre...la chaleur du vin fait souvent découvrir des secrets importants'.<sup>18</sup>

The individual personality and prestige of an ambassador could play an important part in making the views of his government understood and in making suggestions of his own on policy; given the poor communications of the day, the diplomat had far more extensive discretion and freedom of action than is the case in our own day. The ambassador's person was sacrosanct and embassies enjoyed the right of extra-territoriality: 'C'est pecher contre le droit des gens, de violer la maison d'un *Ambassadeur*' [Furetière]. This immunity extended to servants as well as to diplomatic personnel and often gave cause for trouble. The diplomatic community expected its individual members to be aware of their privileged position and to take action to preserve it when necessary. An ambassador could, for example, give shelter to fugitives; he was also expected to see to the welfare of his fellow citizens abroad. He did not have to pay customs or excise duties, any such payments being reimbursed by the host country. On the whole, these rights were respected, though not, as we shall see, unusually, in the case of the Ottoman ambassador, Soliman Aga. The duties of an ambassador were to negotiate, to conclude treaties of alliance, neutrality, commerce and peace, but an embassy was above all intended to impress. The ambassador was expected to uphold his sovereign's prestige, fulfilling in this manner the function of a royal propagandist, giving way to none. He was also appointed to act as 'un honorable Espion',<sup>19</sup> to keep an ear to the ground and make useful contacts, to keep his own monarch informed by frequent correspondence of what was going on in rival courts. Louis XIV writes to Comminges, his ambassador in London, that 'rien de ce qui se passe dans le monde n'est hors de la portée et de la politique d'un bon ambassadeur.' For this reason, diplomatic correspondence was frequently stolen or otherwise intercepted:

L'on a ici le secret d'ouvrir les lettres plus subtilement qu'en aucun lieu du monde. L'on croit même que cela a le bel air et que l'on ne saurait être grand homme d'état sans arrêter les paquets.<sup>20</sup>

In an attempt to avoid such interference, each embassy had its own cipher. Bankers and merchants were also much used as 'innocent' go-betweens or couriers. An ambassador had to be aware of everything that went on. These are Louis XIV's instructions to Comminges:

Vous ne devez point apprehender de vous écarter trop de votre sujet, en me disant toujours vos sentiments sur quelque affaire que ce soit, car outre que j'en ferai beaucoup de cas, rien de ce qui se passe dans le monde n'est hors de la portée et de la politique d'un bon ambassadeur.<sup>21</sup>

An ambassador must garner precise information on personalities, garrisons, fortifications, and commerce. He must also keep his own secrets. Should war break out, diplomatic immunity

<sup>18</sup> De Callières (quoted in Picavet, p. 105).

<sup>19</sup> 'On appelle un Ambassadeur un honorable Espion; parce que l'une de ses principales occupations est de découvrir les secrets des Cours où il se trouve, & il s'acquitte mal de son emploi, s'il ne fait pas faire les dépenses nécessaires pour gagner ceux qui sont propres à l'en instruire' (de Callières, p. 24).

<sup>20</sup> Comminges, French ambassador in London, writing to Louis XIV in 1665 (Picavet, p. 110).

<sup>21</sup> Picavet, p. 111.

was not, therefore, always respected. An ambassador could be manhandled by the local populace, held hostage, imprisoned or otherwise subject to reprisal, as in the case of the de la Hayes at Istanbul [vide infra, Chapter 3].

François de Callières, one of Louis XIV's chief diplomatic advisers, lists the qualities of the ideal ambassador in his treatise on diplomacy. Pride of place is given, significantly, to linguistic ability; a diplomat must himself be an excellent linguist, to avoid unnecessary reliance on others, who may be of questionable loyalty:

Il seroit encore à souhaiter qu'ils apprissent les langues vivantes, afin de n'être pas exposez à l'infidélité ou à l'ignorance des Interpretes, & d'être délivrez de l'embarras de les introduire aux Audiances des Princes, & de leur faire part de secrets importants. Chaque sujet qui se destine à être employé dans les Negociations pour le service du Roi, devoit savoir les langues Allemande, Italienne & Espagnolle, avec la Latine, qu'il seroit honteux d'ignorer à un homme engagé dans les emplois publics, cette langue étant la langue commune de toutes les Nations Chrétiennes.<sup>22</sup>

He must be aware of the strengths, weaknesses and state of mind of those with whom he is negotiating, must think of what is in their minds as he expresses his own. A liberal education is essential, for the ambassador ought to be a man of culture, able to punctuate his delivery with the appropriate literary or historical allusion, the better to sway his hearers. He should be able to couch his thoughts in appropriate language. The sympathetic touch, simple dignity, and avoidance of affectation in speech are more important than high flown eloquence. For de Callières, the delivery of a message in an appropriate manner is 'the beginning and end of all diplomacy'. The ambassador must be observant, not easily distracted by pleasures and amusements, trustworthy and honest, of sound judgment, going straight to his goal by the shortest path. He must be 'open, genial, civil, agreeable, with easy and ingratiating manners'; should always act in good faith, 'a lie always leaves a drop of poison behind'. He must be a man of peace, 'neither soldier or courtier or lawyer'. He should display ability and natural intelligence, for 'incompetence is the parent of disaster', and his reports be candid and crystal clear. Yet all these qualities are in vain unless he has the confidence of his own government, so that his advice carries weight and those in power are frank with him. A diplomat must therefore follow instructions; when policy is established he must accept that there is nothing he can do to change it, except to offer advice. To the virtues of this paragon, de Callières adds the desirability of some knowledge of science. Social class was particularly important because of the informal "freemasonry" existing within the diplomatic establishment. Off the record communication and a quiet word between equals could avert international disaster on occasion. Such were the expected norms of diplomatic behaviour of the day. In the case of the 'Oriental' embassies that we shall be studying in some detail in the following chapters, that is to say those from Moscow, Istanbul, Ardra, Ayuthia and Isfahan, only Mattéo Lopés of Ardra observed them in their entirety. It is not therefore entirely surprising that certain of these high profile exotic visitors were perceived as haughty and arrogant by the populace at large and resented accordingly. Nor that those who had to suffer the frustrations of dealing with them on a daily basis should not be sorry to see the visitors' foibles exaggerated and pilloried upon the stage.

In the seventeenth century world, there is a strong connection between diplomacy and the theatre. De Callières himself likens the rôle of the diplomat to that of the actor as well as to the spy, all three wear a metaphorical mask and present an ephemeral *persona* to the world. The ambassador must speak for his sovereign as the actor does for the

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<sup>22</sup> De Callières, pp. 49-50.

playwright. Both follow a script. The diplomat can never let his own feelings intrude, he must always be guarded, even in the most intimate moments, for he can trust no-one. After a brief sojourn, the ambassador returns to a semi-nomadic life, he journeys from state to state as the actor from theatre to theatre and production to production. Like a comet or a shooting star, the ambassador flashes across the horizon and is seen no more. His existence appears to lack permanence and substance as much as that of the travelling player does.

As for the theatre itself, it formed an important part of the apparatus of royal propaganda and visiting ambassadors were taken to those performances which it was felt politically expedient for them to see, that is to say, those which presented the French monarchy in the best possible light or which might serve to emphasise territorial or dynastic claims. With this end in mind, tragedy was felt to be inappropriate as a means of expression. Opera, ballet and the comic theatre were the propaganda vehicle of choice. Foreigners being by nature inherently funny, and 'exotic' foreigners by definition few and far between, several 'ambassadors' and their suites feature in the farcical plots of the comic theatre. We have already noted how embassies are regarded as an appropriate subject for comedy because of their strong associations with love and marriage, alliances and peace. The arrival of an embassy was a joyful occasion, though individual ambassadors could be satirised when it was found to be expedient.

French comedy of the period drew much of its inspiration from three distinct and disparate strands; from the broad slapstick of mediaeval farce, from the stock characters and the *lazzi* of the hugely popular Italian Commedia dell'arte and from the fertile field of Greco-Roman New Comedy. New Comedy had first emerged in Athens at some time during the fourth century BC, evolving through Middle Comedy from Old Comedy. It was Old Comedy that was traditionally associated with satire, the cruel lampooning of unpopular politicians like Cleon or of other figures in the public eye, such as Socrates (*Nephele*) or an unsuccessful general like Lamachus (*Acharnes*); it might also parody the work of overly verbose tragedians such as Euripides (*Batrachoi*). The most successful practitioner of the art was undoubtedly Aristophanes (c.445-c.385BC), eleven of whose plays have come down to us, and it is his works that survive in the greatest number. Old Comedy often includes items of pure fantasy, like the country of 'Clouduckooland' (*Nephelokokkygia*) described in Aristophanes' *Ornithes*. New Comedy as a genre was largely the creation of Menander (342-c.292 BC), a defining influence upon the development of comedy in the Renaissance and the Baroque periods, and consequently upon the plays of Molière. Sadly, only one of Menander's plays has passed down to us in its entirety, the *Dyskolos*; the rest of what must have been a corpus of some hundred plays survive only in fragments or are known by title alone.

Under the Roman republic, the genre was further refined, first by Plautus (c.250-184 BC) and later by Terence (c.193-159BC). Plautus, while for the most part copying Greek originals, adapted these to the taste of his Roman audiences, finding fun in anachronism and incongruity, punning and wordplay. A major difference between the Greek and the Roman writers was that Greek drama had a religious significance, the theatre being closely associated with the cult of Dionysus, whereas Roman comedy was written for performance at public games and holidays, drawing its audience from a much wider social background. Plautus made far greater use than his Greek counterparts of the elements of mime, song, dance and musical accompaniment and these aspects of his work in particular were greatly admired in the Renaissance period. Molière drew freely on both Plautus and Terence; *L'Avare*, for example, is loosely based on Plautus' *Aulularia*, *Les Fourberies de Scapin* on Terence's *Phormio*. New Comedy is far gentler in spirit than Old Comedy. Old Comedy can be crude and even obscene in its caricatures. Seventeenth-century France felt New Comedy to be in better taste and more in keeping with the 'bienséances'. It contains no satire, it is a comedy of manners. Its plots are set in the contemporary world and deal in realistic, if exaggerated,

manner with the everyday, domestic concerns of ordinary people, as opposed to high tragedy, which is properly concerned with the affairs of kings and princes. Dialogue is witty and appropriate to the characters, who are usually likeable, even the more villainous ones, and for the greater part an effort is made to approximate to the sounds and rhythms of natural speech. Plots and characters are generally stock ones and tend to fall within a set tradition. There is a pair of young lovers whose path to happiness is thwarted by an insurmountable obstacle, usually but not exclusively the older generation. There may be other complications or unfortunate misunderstandings that render their marriage impossible, and a series of tangled 'péripéties' keep our attention until the young lovers finally emerge triumphant and a wedding takes place.

Like the *Commedia dell'arte* of Molière's day with its Arlecchino, Pantaleone and Columbina, New Comedy employs a range of stock characters and scenes. Plautus in particular is famed for his misers, his boastful soldiers, his cooks, his brothel-keepers, his naïve youths, his crafty but loveable slaves, his prostitutes with a heart of gold. Often the dénouement involves sudden recognition by means of a token, or redemption from foreign captivity. Sometimes the intervention of a 'deus ex machina' is required to set all things right. Unfortunately Plautus came to be considered by the seventeenth century, with its concern for decorum and 'bienséance', to be unacceptably bawdy. Terence's comedies were thought to be more suitable, more worthy of imitation, his dialogue and plots more subtle, more refined in nature. Terence avoids the cruder, farcical, characteristically 'Roman' elements broadly associated with Plautus. Greatly admired in Europe from the Middle Ages onwards, Terence's influence is easy to detect in French comedy of the classical period. During the seventeenth century France was still in the late Renaissance, an era when classical culture was not only prized, but lay at the very heart of the system of education. Greco-Roman values were identified, alongside Christianity itself, as the foundation of European civilisation. Cicero, Virgil, Seneca and their like were the touchstone of excellence, the exemplar for the present generation, worthy of imitation but never to be equalled. No one, be he king or commoner, could lay any claim to cultivation or refinement without a detailed knowledge of the classics. Classical disciplines, such as rhetoric, formed as much a part of normal education as did the great literary works of antiquity. Competence in Latin was expected as a bare minimum from those with any pretensions whatsoever to culture. We know that the young Molière attended the Jesuit Collège de Clermont, which enjoyed an outstanding reputation for excellence, and here he would have benefited from the most advanced methods of education available in his day.<sup>23</sup> It would be astonishing if there were no evidence of this early formation apparent in his works.

In the France of Louis XIV, a playwright was judged on how closely his work approximated to the Greco-Roman original. Innovation was neither expected nor thought desirable. It was in how well a given situation was handled that a poet best showed the mastery of his art, by inventing new twists and subtle nuances to a familiar and well-loved plot. Woe betide him if he fail, for he must anticipate an audience that is critically aware of those originals, having studied and learnt to appreciate them in its youth. Comedy often derives a good deal of humour from those situations where the outcome is known and inevitable, though the characters themselves appear unaware of their fate. This is why so many of the plots seem to be almost identical; in both French and Roman comedy they are written to formula. This formula, refined by Horace in his *Ars Poetica* and elaborated by the Renaissance theorists, was first referred to by Aristotle in the *Poetics*. Though the greater part of his work on comedy must be presumed lost, Aristotle was still immensely influential in establishing the norms for French classical drama of the seventeenth century.

<sup>23</sup> See Virginia Scott, *Molière: A Theatrical life* (Cambridge, 2000) for Molière's early life and education.

The traditional Roman characters of the 'servus callidus' (often, but not always, transformed into the seventeenth-century valet), of the niggardly father and the innocent young lovers

the stock characters of the highly fashionable Italian *Commedia dell'arte*. Plots and subplots constantly recur and intermingle in the manner of musical variations upon a theme. Amongst them, the introduction of sudden and unexpected return from captivity or foreign travel to provide a dénouement, takes much of its inspiration from Roman New Comedy. The device was thoroughly exploited on the stage prior to its adoption by Molière. The theme of capture by corsairs and return from Turkish captivity occurs as a fairly familiar motif in French seventeenth-century comedy. We find it used in 1636 by Georges de Scudéry and Guérin de Bouscal in two comedies with the same title, *L'Amant Libéral*; by Desfontaines in *Orphise* (1638); by Rotrou in *La Soeur* (1645); by Tristan l'Hermite in *Le Parasite* (1654) and again in the same year by Cyrano de Bergerac in *Le Pédant joué* (1654). After the production of *L'Etourdi*, the idea is adopted by Montfleury in *L'Ecole des jaloux* (1662); by Boucher in *Champagne le Coiffeur* (1663); by Quinault in *La Mère coquette* (1665) by De Visé in the same year with a comedy bearing an identical title; and by Montfleury in *Le Mary sans femme* in 1666. Molière uses it in the *Fourberies de Scapin*. The device is closely related to that of the 'Oriental' ambassador, since both provide the opportunity for the introduction of local colour, exoticism and the exploitation of comic jargon as dialogue in addition to a neat dénouement for the plot. Neither of these scenarios is completely unrealistic for the time. Kidnapping into slavery presented a very real danger for the Mediterranean traveller in Classical antiquity, nor was it unknown in the seventeenth century for the Barbary corsairs to descend upon isolated and unprotected coastlines.

It is in the nature of propaganda that it should be subtle as well as persuasive, constantly repeated to as wide an audience as possible in as great a variety of media. It is also in the nature of court entertainments and *divertissements* that they offer an important occasion for the display of wealth and regal dignity. Patronage of the Arts was and remained an important Renaissance value; the more a court could attract great artists and thinkers, the greater the prestige conferred upon that monarch. The courts of Europe endlessly vied with one another, ambassadors and visiting dignitaries were invited to attend theatrical productions for this sole purpose. No expense was spared; these occasions were meant for ostentatious display, rather than for amusement, to impress all who beheld them with a sense of royal power and munificence. It was expected of artists, musicians, playwrights and poets that they work to promote their sovereign's glory.

A consideration in the study of both *Le Sicilien* and the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* must therefore be the possibility that they were intended as royal propaganda and to be viewed as a statement of French interest in the Levant.

There were hostile eyes in Paris, in the form of Imperial agents and those working on behalf of the Protestant powers. France had long been suspected, and with justification, of working in league with the infidel Turks against the Triple Alliance, to promote her own selfish, commercial interests. It was even alleged, in a series of anonymous pamphlets (now known to have been published in Amsterdam by the Habsburg agent, de Lisola), that the whole, sorry episode surrounding Louis's reception of the Ottoman envoy, Soliman Aga, in 1669-70, had been deliberately staged. Apparently this was intended to hide the fact that secret negotiations were in progress – somewhat ironic in view of the fact that Soliman himself stood accused of espionage by the French!<sup>24</sup> The *Bourgeois gentilhomme* and its lampooning of the Turks are presented as part of this "cover-up" operation, to pull the

<sup>24</sup> See Ministère des Affaires étrangères - *Correspondance politique Turquie*, IX, fol. 205-208, henceforward: MAE-CP, published in Karro 1.

wool over the eyes of the public:

L'Ambassadeur Turc ne s'explique que trop, quoy que l'on ait tant fait le difficile avec luy, tandis qu'on le flate en secret, & que l'on regarde les Ottomans comme une des bases de nostre Estat; ce qui c'est vû du passé sous François I, & sous Henry II & de nos jours sous le Roy Regnant...<sup>25</sup>

To be in a position to accuse France of aiding a Muslim power against a Christian was a telling piece of black propaganda for the Habsburgs:

Et nous avons agy avec le Turc sur la conqueste d'Italie, & sur les moyens de l'y faire passer, nostre Ambassadeur insistant fort la dessus aprez avoir esté admis au Conseil Secret de ces Infidelles...

Ce qui marque que le Roy est avide du sang Chrestien, & qu'il n'est plus ce fils aîné si cher autrefois à l'Eglise, puisqu'il l'attaque, & l'oblige à souscrire à une Paix honteuse pour ne faire que des conquêtes contigües...Cela nous a fait lâcher le pied à Gigery, & perdre Candie, l'amitié du Turc nous étant nécessaire pour l'opposer à l'Empereur, s'il se remüe, & entre, comme l'on dit, en la Triple Alliance.<sup>26</sup>

De Lisola was a Spanish national working as an Imperial agent and Habsburg propagandist, though he poses as a loyal Frenchman in *La France démasquée*. It must be remembered that the Turks were still powerful enough to mount a major siege of Vienna in 1683, and any notions of the beginnings of Ottoman decline at this stage are still very much with the benefit of hindsight and were not apparent to contemporaries.

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<sup>25</sup> De Lisola, François-Paul, *La France démasquée, ou ses irregularitez dans sa conduite et maximes*, pp. 21-22 (La Haye, 1670).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 81-82.

**Chapter 2: Pierre Potemkin [Poisson, *Les Faux Moscovites*].**

*King: How madam? Russians?*

*Princess: Ay, in truth, my lord.  
Trim gallants, full of courtship and of state.'*<sup>27</sup>

The arrival of Petr Ivanovich Potemkin and his entourage in Paris, on the 26th August 1668, was doubly important for France, having both diplomatic and literary significance. The Russians were to prove to be only the first in a whole series of 'oriental' embassies to visit the French court throughout the reign of Louis XIV. They aroused enormous public interest and provided the occasion for one of the earliest appearances of a comic ambassador on the French stage.<sup>28</sup> In terms of the strictest accuracy, there were two Russian ambassadors: Potemkin himself, the titular ambassador, and Simeon Roumantsoff, the 'Chancelier de l'Ambassade'. In Russian usage, which differed from that of other European powers, the 'Chancelier de l'Ambassade' was an official whose function it was to take over the embassy should the designated ambassador die or become incapacitated en route. Potemkin was a nobleman, a member of the Imperial household and a 'stol'nik'. The 'stol'niki' were high-ranking courtiers whose function it was to serve the Tsar and his guests at state banquets and similar occasions, they also filled military, civil or diplomatic appointments, as need arose. Roumantsoff held the formal rank of 'd'iak', a powerful position, though not a noble one, which may very roughly be translated as 'secretary of state'.<sup>29</sup> His status was that of a fully accredited ambassador and, unfortunately in this instance, there was a certain antagonism between the two men because of Potemkin's insistence that the young son who accompanied him should take precedence over his colleague. Potemkin's suite also comprised thirty-eight valets, two priests, seven gentlemen, three secretaries, a translator (Ivan Gosens) and a 'truchement', or official interpreter (Romane Yagline).<sup>30</sup> Their visit was of relatively short duration, lasting little more than a month in France, with the 'audience de congé' held on the 23rd September at Saint-Germain-en-Laye. As it happened, the Russians had been expected to attend a theatrical production by the 'Comédiens du Roi' that same day. Their presence was widely promoted by the theatre, in the hope of attracting the general public and thus boosting the takings. Potemkin's subsequent failure to make an appearance at the Hôtel de Bourgogne ought not to have been held against him. A summons to a royal audience could hardly be ignored. Nonetheless, Poisson's troupe

<sup>27</sup> William Shakespeare, *Love's Labours Lost*, Act V ii, 361-63, ed. H. R. Woudhuysen, *The Arden Shakespeare* (London, 1998).

<sup>28</sup> The first being Edmé Boursault's *Mort vivant* (1662), though this comedy is set in Spain and does not appear to be associated with the arrival of an embassy.

<sup>29</sup> A detailed account of Russian administration in the seventeenth century is given by Jacques Margaret in his *Estat de l'Empire de Russie et Grand Duché de Moscovie* (Paris, 1607). See also *The Russian Empire and Grand Duchy of Moscovy. A 17<sup>th</sup>-Century French Account* by Jacques Margaret, translated and edited by Chester S. L. Dunning (Pittsburgh, 1983), henceforward: Margaret.

<sup>30</sup> De Saintot, *Mémoires*, p. 421 [Published as an appendix by Prince Emmanuel Mikhailovich Golitsuin, "Aperçu de l'état social et politique de la Russie, de l'Espagne et de la France à l'époque de l'ambassade de Pierre Ivanovitch Potemkin", in Potemkin, *La Russie du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle...*p. 419 ff.], henceforward: de Saintot, *Mémoires*.



Portrait of Pierre Potemkin, from *La Russie du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle dans ses rapports avec l'Europe occidentale, récit du voyage de Pierre Potemkin envoyé en ambassade par le tsar Alexis Mikailovitch à Philippe IV d'Espagne et à Louis XIV en 1668* [ed. J. B. M. A. Dezos de la Roquette. With a portrait.] (Paris, 1855).

had made elaborate preparations for his entertainment, and exception seems to have been taken:

Les Moscovites, étant à Paris, promirent de venir en nostre Hostel: nos annonces et nos affiches donnèrent avis du jour qu'ils avoient pris pour s'y rendre; mais, ayant été mandés ce mesme jour à Saint-Germain pour leur audience de congé, ils manquèrent à leur promesse, et nous par conséquent à la nostre...<sup>31</sup>

So large an audience was, in fact, attracted to this particular performance, doubtless as much by curiosity and the opportunity to mingle with the Russians as by the merits of the production, that Raymond Poisson decided to profit from the popular interest. In putting his own manufactured Muscovites on stage, he could exact a neat revenge through drawing attention to what he conceived to be the rather boorish behaviour of the visitors:

...néanmoins la foule se trouva si grande chez nous pour les voir qu'il n'y auroit point eu de place pour eux s'ils y fussent venus. Cela m'obligea, avec la sollicitude de quelques-uns de mes camarades, ne pouvant avoir les véritables Moscovites, d'en fagotter de faux...<sup>32</sup>

The perceived slight on the Hôtel de Bourgogne must have seemed all the greater, since the ambassadors and their entire suite had already attended a production of Boisrobert's *Coups de l'Amour et de la Fortune*, 'avec des changemens de Théâtre et des entrées de Ballet qui les réjouirent fort', at the Théâtre du Marais on the 16th September. They were also present at a performance of Molière's *Amphitryon* at the Palais-Royal on the following day. We learn from de Catheux and de Saintot, our major French sources for Potemkin's embassy, that the Russians would have been highly visible to the audience on these occasions, almost certainly seated upon the stage, according to the custom for distinguished visitors, and thus forming part of the tableau. It seems that Molière and his troupe had charmingly made a presentation of fruit and other refreshments to Potemkin during the actual performance:

Le 17, la troupe du sieur Molière représenta l'Amphitryon, avec des machines et des entrées de Ballet, qui plurent extrêmement à l'Ambassadeur et à son fils; à qui on présenta, sur l'Amphitryon, où ils étoient, deux grands bassins, l'un de confitures sèches et l'autre des fruits, dont ils ne mangèrent point; mais ils burent et remercièrent les Comédiens.<sup>33</sup>

The presence of the Russians would have proved most distracting for both players and audience. We know from the same sources that, since the visitors spoke only Russian, Potemkin's protégé, the Dominican Ourbanovsky,<sup>34</sup> had first to translate the dialogue into

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<sup>31</sup> Poisson, *Les Faux Moscovites*, Avis au lecteur.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Catheux, le sieur de, *Une Ambassade russe à la cour de Louis XIV*, ed. A. Galitsin (Paris, 1860), henceforward: de Catheux; de Saintot, *Mémoires*, pp. 429-30. De Catheux had been placed in charge of entertaining the Russians by the king, de Saintot held the post of 'Introducteur des ambassadeurs'. Both are thus of particular interest in our present context and confirm Potemkin's own report of his embassy, written for the tsar on his return to Moscow.

<sup>34</sup> Some years earlier, Potemkin had saved the man's life during a campaign in Poland. Coming across him by chance at Blois, whilst en route to Paris, Potemkin had insisted that Ourbanovsky join the embassy to assist their interpreter because of his fluent command of Latin and French. The official Russian interpreters had only Latin and German between them, and were thus of little use on many occasions (de Saintot, p. 423).

*The 'Oriental' Ambassador in 17<sup>th</sup> Century French Comedy.*

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Nicolas de Saintot, Maître des Cérémonies de France de 1655 à 1691, Introduceur des Ambassadeurs de 1691 à 1709.

Latin before it could be put into Russian by the official interpreter, Romane Yagline - who apparently knew some German, less Latin and no French.<sup>35</sup> All this would have gone on throughout the entire performance, which it must have extended by some hours. We are indebted to Loret for a spirited account of the occasion:

*Mais je ne dois pas oublier,  
 (Car, certe, il les en faut louer)  
 Que Messieurs nos François Comiques,  
 Et, même aussi les Italiques,  
 Les ont, soit effectivement,  
 Soit intentionnellement,  
 Divertis et régalez même  
 Avec une Liesse extrême.  
 Car je sçais qu'effectivement,  
 Et j'en fus témoin mêmement,  
 La Troupe, où préside Molière,  
 Par une chère toute entière,  
 Leur donna son Amphitrion,  
 Avec ample Collation,  
 Pas de Ballet et Symphonie,  
 Sans aucune cacophonie:  
 Et ces Gens aimans les Gratis,  
 Y furent des mieux divertis,  
 Ayans deux fort bons Interprètes,  
 Versez aux langues, et Languètes,  
 Qui leur firent entendre tout  
 Du commencement jusqu'au bout,  
 Dont l'un qui sçait, entr'autre chose,  
 La belle Rime et belle Prose,  
 A Nom terminant en io,  
 C'est A Sancto Aegidio.<sup>36</sup>*

It seems that the tsar himself was extremely fond of the theatre. Alexis was at this time in the process of introducing Western-style theatre to Moscow and his ambassadors were expected to report back in detail on the plays that they had attended.<sup>37</sup> Early in 1672, following the death of the reactionary patriarch Nikon, notoriously hostile to the theatre and other such profane distractions, the Tsar commissioned a colonel von Staden to recruit actors outside Russia, "capables de représenter toutes sortes de comedies".<sup>38</sup> Alas, the Tsar's quest

<sup>35</sup> Difficulties with interpretation and translation seem to have become a feature of Franco-Russian relations during our period. Jean Witlef Wilner, the drogman (official interpreter) attached to Metcherski's embassy of 1654 spoke only Russian and Flemish, having been born to Flemish parents resident in Moscow. Since no Russian speaker could be found in Paris on this earlier occasion either, a retired banker named Frisse, who chanced to be in the capital, had to be pressed into service to translate from French into Flemish so that a three way conversation could then take place. See G.Depping, 'Une ambassade russe à Paris en 1654.' *Revue de Paris*, 1er juillet, pp.140-47,1853.

<sup>36</sup> Loret, *Gazette rimée*. Published as an appendix by Prince Emmanuel Mikhailovich Golitsuin, "Aperçu de l'état social et politique de la Russie, de l'Espagne et de la France à l'époque de l'ambassade de Pierre Ivanovitch Potemkin", in Potemkin, *La Russie du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle...* p. 419 ff., henceforward: Loret.

<sup>37</sup> See Schakovskoy 1, p. 130 ff.

<sup>38</sup> See Schakovskoy 2, p. 268.

*The 'Oriental' Ambassador in 17<sup>th</sup> Century French Comedy.*



Tsar Alexis I from a contemporary oil painting.

was in vain. No foreign actors could be found willing to re-locate to Moscow, because of the well-known difficulties encountered by foreigners who tried to leave Russia, once they had arrived (so valuable an asset were they considered, particularly those able to serve as mercenaries). In any case, the whole substructure of the theatre was lacking. Russia needed professional directors, producers, stage managers and drama teachers as much as actors or musicians. Such was Alexis's eagerness that plans were put in motion to set up a theatre within the Kremlin, well before the return of von Staden. The Tsar's favourite, the boyar Artamon Matveïev, occasionally gave theatrical entertainments in his palace for the entertainment of the royal family, but Alexis was impatient for his own theatre. Work began on the first Russian theatre in 1672. No expense was spared in the matter of carpets and décor. Scarlet and green were the dominant colours, with fabrics brought from England and Hamburg. Directors, producers, actors and suitable plays in Russian, however, were still lacking. In the end, a German Protestant pastor already resident in Moscow, Johann Gregori, was appointed to direct the new theatre. He found his actors amongst the pupils of his own school, in the 'faubourg allemand'. A suitably biblical theme was chosen for their first production, *La Reine Esther*, held to celebrate the birth of the tsarevitch Peter on the 30<sup>th</sup> May 1672. Three other German expatriates, Christian Meissen, Johann Vander and Peter Engler were put in charge of overseeing the creation of the most sumptuous costumes and décor. Both production and theatre were lavish. The organs were purchased from abroad.<sup>39</sup> The Tsar's daughter, Sophia, along with many other members of the Russian royal family at this time, shared her father's enthusiasm both for the theatre and for amateur dramatics. She actually translated Molière's *Médecin malgré lui* into Russian and wrote a French-style tragedy of her own, *Catherine*, which was performed by the family group. The Russian theatre was destined to flourish and grow from strength to strength during the reign of Alexis, but rapidly went into decline with the death of the tsar in January 1676.

The absence of our distinguished Russian visitors from the Hôtel de Bourgogne, the only one amongst the three major Paris theatres not to receive a visit, could hardly have gone unremarked in theatre-going circles. An audience would have come in expectation of seeing these outlandish Russians in a prominent position in the theatre and gone home disappointed. Poisson was left to apply the best gloss that he could upon their absence, and this he did by placing them upon the stage as the objects of good-humoured fun. Loret continues his chronicle with an eyewitness critique of Poisson's own production, retailing the elaborate preparations made for the refreshment and entertainment of the visitors:

*Or, pour achever ce Chapitre,  
Et par là finir mon Epite,  
Les Comédiens de l'Hôtel,  
Dans un Appareil non tel quel,  
Mais beau, je me le remémore,  
Car j'en fus le témoin encore  
Etant en Loge bien posté,  
Ont trois fois dans l'attente été  
Des Moscovites excérences,  
Avec de magnifiques danses,  
De beaux Poèmes, des Concerts,  
Et mêmes de frians Desserts.  
Mais ayans, à lors, des Affaires,*

<sup>39</sup> Details on the history of the Russian theatre from Schakovskoy 2.

Plus que les Ebats, nécessaires,  
 Ils ne pûrent, dont me chaut peu,  
 Se rendre dans le susdit lieu.  
 Mais, toûjours, la Troupe Royale,  
 Ayant préparé son Régale,  
 Les a divertis tout de bon,  
 Du moins dans son intention<sup>40</sup>

However galling the Russians' failure to put in an appearance must have been, Poisson would have been wary of going too far and giving real cause for offence. He is at pains to emphasise from the very beginning, though we may doubt his sincerity, that it is not the ambassadors in person who are lampooned in his comedy:

...et comme cinq ou six jours suffirent à cette façon, chacun vit aisément que c'étoit des Moscovites faits à la haste, et ce sont ceux-là que tu verras dans cette comédie et dans nostre Hostel, si tu veux, puisqu'ils n'y paroistront point qu'on ne t'en avertisse.<sup>41</sup>

Poisson's 'Moscovites' are, as he implies in the title of *Les faux Moscovites*, imitation, ersatz Russians, re-creations, a mocking of accepted stereotypes. His comedy remains, none the less, whatever his protestations, a personal satire in the grand old Aristophanic tradition, with its thinly veiled allusions to the outlandish behaviour of the Russian delegation, whose exotic allure is thereby exploited whilst gratifying the author with a subtle revenge. As the whole episode of the Russian embassy was so very recent, barely a week had gone by, if we are to believe Poisson, there is a good deal of direct allusion in the portrayal of individuals. We are fortunate to have several first-hand accounts of their visit available for purposes of comparison: Potemkin's own 'récit du voyage';<sup>42</sup> the *Journal* of the sieur de Catheux, gentleman of the King's Household and the court official responsible for the reception and entertainment of the embassy; the *Mémoires* of the sieur de Saintot, Louis's 'Grand-Maître des Cérémonies' at the time of the Russian visit; Loret's accounts of the Russians' arrival and royal audiences given in the *Gazette rimée*, a popular rhyming chronicle of the day; lastly, the version in the semi-official *Gazette de France*. We should note, however, that the same material often occurs verbatim in de Saintot and de Catheux. It would seem possible, therefore, that de Saintot used de Catheux as a source, the *Mémoires* being a later composition, put together in retirement.

We are able to deduce from our sources that Potemkin's party followed the usual programme for a diplomatic delegation. After crossing the frontier and until again leaving France, all expenses were defrayed, as was the normal practice, by the French crown. Relays of transport were provided and civic receptions offered at all major stages en route as the visitors made their slow way to Paris. They were met and greeted on the king's behalf by the sieur de Berlise, 'Introducteur des Ambassadeurs', whose duty it was to see to the official welcome and accommodation of visiting diplomats. On arrival at the capital, it was usual for an ambassador to rest for a few days before making a formal entry into the city, in Potemkin's case through the Porte Baudet (at least according to Poisson). Here he would lodge at the Hôtel des Ambassadeurs Extraordinaires, whilst awaiting a royal

<sup>40</sup> Loret, p. 433.

<sup>41</sup> Poisson, *Les faux Moscovites*, avis au lecteur.

<sup>42</sup> Potemkin, Petr Ivanovitch, Ambassadeur à la Cour de Louis XIV, [Russian script....] *La Russie du XVIIe siècle dans ses rapports avec l'Europe occidentale, récit du voyage de Pierre Potemkin envoyé en ambassade par le tsar Alexis Mikailovitch à Philippe IV d'Espagne et à Louis XIV en 1668* [ed. J. B. M. A. Dezob de la Roquette. With a portrait.] (Paris, 1855).

audience. This was a very formal occasion and normally took place outside Paris, at Saint-Germain-en-Laye. The king might, or might not, grant the privilege of subsequent audiences in private. In the case of Potemkin, the formal audience was held on the 4th September and followed by a private meeting on the 7th. A monarch's reputation abroad might hang upon the lavishness of his hospitality. The programme provided for the Russians was thus a full one, carefully arranged for their comfort and entertainment. It is described day to day in our sources. On the 11th September there was a visit to the chateau and park at Vincennes, where a wild beast fight was staged for the edification of the visitors. On their return to Paris, visits had been arranged to the Place-Royale, the Tuileries and gardens. There were outings to the Gobelins and the Louvre on the 13th September, whilst the 15th was fully occupied by an inspection of the menagerie and the grottoes at Versailles. This was followed by an elaborate dinner and a visit to Monsieur, the king's brother, at Saint-Cloud. We have seen that the 16th and the 17th were reserved for the theatre. On the 19th there was a visit to the Eglise du Val de Grâce. The following two days were spent handling diplomatic correspondence. It seems that there were problems with Louis's formal address to the Tsar and the correct Latin translation of the same. These little difficulties were, happily, smoothed over before the formal 'audience de congé' on the 23rd September. The 24th and the 25th passed pleasantly enough in making personal purchases, consisting of 'quelques montres et des brocards d'or, d'argent et de soie, pour environ mille écus', according to de Saintot, and in preparing for the return journey, before finally leaving Paris on the 26th September. There were three deviations from normal diplomatic practice worthy of remark: firstly, the presence of a co-adjutant ambassador; secondly, Potemkin's brusque insistence on pitching camp when first arriving on French soil, rather than accepting the civic hospitality of the nearest town; thirdly, the difficulties with interpretation and an unfortunate contretemps over the Tsar's gifts to Louis, occasioned by the failure of the French to agree upon his correct titles.

*Les Faux Moscovites* itself is a short, one-act farce, written in haste, to exploit a specific situation for commercial gain. We learn the extent of popular enthusiasm for the exotic visitors:

LUBINE: Pour les voir on s'étouffe à la porte des Baudets;  
 Tout le monde déjà s'assomme en nostre rue,  
 Et dedans leur chemin, par ma foy, l'on s'y tue. . (sc. ix)

The plot is simple. Lubine wishes to rid herself of her drunken layabout of a husband, Lubin. Her employer, the prosperous innkeeper Gorgibus, is also unhappy with his lot. For over a week he has been entertaining two Russian interpreters out of his own pocket, has even advanced them a considerable sum of money, but is now beginning to be just a little suspicious because of the long delayed arrival of their masters. We note, *en passant*, that the number of interpreters is actually correct. Such details lend verisimilitude:

J'attens des étrangers, des gens de conséquence,  
 Et j'avance pour eux des sommes d'importance.  
 Leurs interprètes sont chez moy depuis huit jours,  
 Qui lèvent des brocards, des satins, des velours.  
 J'ay donné mille écus à monsieur l'interprète;  
 C'est bien de l'argent seur; mais j'avance, je preste,  
 Puis ces interpréteurs font de forts grands repas.  
 Leurs maistres cependant viennent à petit pas.  
 Je crains bien de passer icy pour une beste (sc. ii).

Apparently this '...grand seigneur, / qui vient de Moscovie avec grand équipage', ought to have arrived four days ago. Gorgibus, with some reason, fears for the virtue of his daughter whom he keeps sequestered. He decides to take action the following day, should the 'great lord' not put in an appearance. Gorgibus bemoans his lot to La Ramée and Sans-Soucy, ex-soldiers down on their luck who, it appears, are plotting a theft to restore their fortunes. The two rogues soon fall in with La Montagne and Jolicoeur, the very 'fourbes interprètes' complained of by Gorgibus. It emerges that the whole story of a Russian embassy is an imposture and Gorgibus is right to be suspicious. La Montagne boasts that the pair of them make rich pickings from their disguise, 'Nous y sommes heureux / Sous ces déguisements...' and rapidly persuades the others to join in the plot. This is, in reality, nothing but a cunning ploy designed to facilitate the elopement of Suson (Gorgibus' beautiful and carefully guarded daughter) with their master, the Baron de Jonquille. There follows some topical badinage about how difficult Paris has become for honest rogues to make a living in, since the recent reform of the police. There is also a good deal of local colour. The gang meets, for example, at the Cabaret des Trois-Maillets, which was in the rue Montorgueil, close to the Hôtel de Bourgogne.<sup>43</sup>

Lubine herself now falls in with Jolicoeur and La Montagne and at once proceeds to complain about her husband. It seems that she, at least, believes them to be the genuine article and has decided to ask the Russian ambassador, when he finally makes his appearance, to pronounce on the dissolution of her marriage to Lubin:

JOLICOEUR.-Mais que veux-tu de nous?

LUBINE.- Vous supplier, Monsieur,

Que je me prostitue aux pieds du grand seigneur,

Quand il sera venu; s'il avoit agréable

De me démarier d'avec ce misérable.

LA MONTAGNE.- Mais il faut des raisons.

LUBINE.- Eh! Messieurs, j'en ay cent...(sc. v)

The 'prostitutue' of the text is very unlikely to represent an innocent slip of the authorial pen, and is doubtless aimed at obtaining a cheap laugh, given the context. The jest is particularly inappropriate, since our sources comment on the unusual continence of the Russian embassy in this respect.<sup>44</sup> It is even acknowledged by Poisson himself in scene xi, to the great disappointment of the prudish Mme Aminte, Gorgibus's wife:

LA MONTAGNE.- Il vous fait signe au moins de ne pas avancer,

Madame. Il dit qu'il est à sa femme fidelle,

Et qu'il ne veut avoir de l'amour que pour elle.

Mme AMINTE.- Comment?

JOLICOEUR.- Il ne faut point vous mettre en courroux:

Il en a refusé d'aussi belles que vous.

Potemkin was noted for his piety and punctilious observance of days of fast and abstinence. Tsar Alexis himself was devout and his court was chaste. Illicit love affairs and any kind of debauchery were frowned upon; the royal women kept in almost oriental seclusion. Though

<sup>43</sup> See Victor Fournel, *Les contemporains de Molière* (Paris, 1875), vol. 1, p. 463, henceforward: Fournel.

<sup>44</sup> De Catheux writes: '...à Orléans, ou quelques belles dames s'étant présentées devant luy, je le priay de me dire ce qu'il en pensoit. Il me répondit qu'il en avoit prise une en son pays, et qu'il ne luy étoit plus permis de regarder assez les autres pour en pouvoir dire son sentiment.' See Fournel, p. 474.

fascinated by anything of Western origin, the tsar strongly disapproved of the loose conduct prevalent at many European courts. The Russians were nevertheless popularly believed to follow far more liberal teachings over the question of divorce than a staunchly Catholic country such as the France of Louis XIV. Apparently it would have been within the competence of the local boyar to act in such a case, though it must remain highly doubtful that these powers could be extended to apply in France! Even here, however, impotence gave grounds for annulment and it is on this that Lubine will base her claim, to Lubin's great discomfiture and humiliation. Fournel suggests that the allusion is topical:

Il y a ... une allusion bien directe aux congrès qui avaient pour but de constater juridiquement l'impuissance du mari pour prononcer la dissolution du mariage. Le dernier avoit eu lieu en 1659, c'est-à-dire quelques années seulement avant la représentation de cette pièce, dans l'intention au marquis de Langey par sa femme.<sup>45</sup>

La Montagne rashly promises that the 'grand seigneur' will do as she wishes. Lubine departs overjoyed. The two rogues continue to plot, and it gradually becomes clear that the gang have been paid the sum of 100 *louis* by the Baron de Jonqueville to carry off the innkeeper's beautiful daughter. Their disguises are ready and the gang is complete when Lubin at last arrives, singing drunkenly. There is the usual exchange of badinage between old soldiers, with plenty of topical references, as they recruit him to their cause, all rogues together... 'Écoute, es-tu d'humeur à gagner vingt pistoles, / Bien vestu, bien nourry?' Ironically, it is Lubin that they select to impersonate the very 'Russian ambassador' to whom his own wife intends to appeal for her divorce: '...c'est pour faire un fort grand personnage / Dans une comédie, et qui ne dira mot.' The villain boasts that he has already gained sufficient acting experience, whilst making a dishonest living on the Pont-Neuf:

J'ay, dessus le Pont-Neuf, joué deux ou trois scènes  
 Dans une comédie au Raviment des Laines:  
 Nous tirions des manteaux...(sc. vii).

Nevertheless, La Montagne knows his man, and carefully explains the part Lubin has to play. The tricksters' identity will naturally be hidden by the costumes and heavy beards, but Lubin is too well known locally. His voice must also be disguised. La Montagne's instructions are very precise:

Un grand de Moscovie...tu diras hio lors que tu parleras;  
 Hio veut dire ouy. Tu baragouineras  
 Quelque étrange jargon (sc. vii).

It seems, moreover, that Lubin will have to go to some trouble and furnish himself with a proper escort to lend an additional air of authenticity to the proceedings, though suitable costumes will be provided and payment promised:

Mais trouve-nous encore  
 Des gens pour t'escorter: la grande suite honore.  
 Tous seront bien vestus et bien payés de nous.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid. p.464, n.2.

In addition to bringing his own interpreters, a genuine ambassador would naturally travel accompanied by a considerable retinue. This was for added security on the road, as well as for reasons of prestige. Potemkin himself brought a train of fifty-six. Such a group would comprise servants, guards, grooms, valets and kitchen staff. Distances were great and travel slow. It was often necessary to pitch camp whilst en route and in some places the roads were not secure. An embassy would be known to carry valuable gifts, suitable for presentation to a monarch.<sup>46</sup> Those arriving from Muscovy or the Middle East were particularly vulnerable to attack by bandits en route. We shall see in the next chapter how the lack of such a following was to give rise to doubts as to the true status of the Ottoman ambassador who arrived little more than a year after the departure of the Russians. We may cite the following comment from Molière's *Bourgeois gentilhomme*, Act iv, sc.v as evidence of popular expectation in the matter of ambassadorial retinues:

COVIELLE.- Comment! Il a un train tout à fait magnifique: tout le monde le va voir, et il a été reçu en ce pays comme un seigneur d'importance.

It was, in any case, important for an ambassador to arrive in state to uphold the reputation of his monarch.

We find, alas, that Lubin is rather more concerned about the state of his stomach, 'Serons-nous bien nourris? j'aime à voir des marmites'. There follows a stereotypical piece of badinage about the Russian visitors, their fondness for liquor, the Gargantuan extent of their appetites and their uninhibited behaviour at table. We must, after all, remember that Poisson is taking his revenge for the ambassadors' failure to attend his play! Lubin warms to this theme, in which he takes a great personal interest. He intends to dine well, at mine host's expense, whatever the cost to his personal dignity:

JOLICOEUR.- Comment! N'as-tu pas veu disner les Moscovites?

LUBIN.- Je les ay veus dix fois.

Peste! Nous serons donc traités comme des rois?

Les cailles, les perdrix, là dedans digérées,

Faudra-t-il faire aussi toutes leurs simagrées?

LA MONTAGNE.- Il les contrefera, c'est un vray singe...

These somewhat barbed references to the Muscovite diet and outlandish table manners reflect French prejudices of the day, but are confirmed by our contemporary sources. Loret relates their behaviour at the banquet given after the royal audience thus:

*Ces Messieurs, qui de telle Chère,  
Souhaiteroient fort l'ordinaire,*

<sup>46</sup> It took no fewer than fifteen valets to carry the Tsar's gifts to Louis, consisting of valuable furs, cloth of gold and silver and a sabre smothered in precious stones, 'tout couvert de Pierrerie, / Sur une riche orfèvrerie' (Loret). Louis repaid the compliment, as was his wont, with greater munificence: 'le sieur de Berlise leur fit apporter les présens du ROY, qui consistoient en tapisseries, tapis, lits; brocards d'or, d'argent et de soie; draps d'écarlate couleur de feu; pendules; montres de toutes sortes; fusils, pistolets, épées d'or; et trois portraits en grand du ROY, de la REINE et de MONSEIGNEUR LE DAUPHIN en habits de Cérémonie, par le plus habile peintre de Paris' (de Saintot, *Mémoires*, p. 431). Alexis was particularly interested in horology and kept a collection of timepieces with the time set to the donor's country of origin.

*Pour tenir leur Ventre en relief,  
A qui le vüide est un Grief,  
Dirent, puisqu' il plaît au Grand SIRE,  
De nous donner tant de quoi frire,  
Mangeons, buvons suffisamment,  
Ce qu'ils firent très-rondement.*<sup>47</sup>

Foreign dignitaries were entertained at royal expense throughout their stay, and the Russians were no exception, being sumptuously lodged at the Hôtel des Ambassadeurs Extraordinaires in the Rue de Tournon. De Catheux, entrusted by the king with their entertainment and also with overseeing the minor details of day to day organisation of their visit, kept a personal journal throughout the period. A good deal is therefore known about the behaviour and reactions of the Russians themselves, and of those Frenchmen with whom they came into contact. We have the details, both of their preferred diet and of their behaviour at table, with which to confirm Poisson's account of the legendary Russian appetite:

Ce même jour, ilz comencerent à manger de la viande, et prièrent qu'on ne leur donnat ny lièvres, ny lapins, ny pigeonneaux, ny veaux jeunes, parce qu'ilz disent que les lievres [sic] et les lapins sont trop comuns, les pigeonneaux trop innocens, et que les veaux ne sont pas bons s'ilz n'ont pour le moins un an; ce qu'ils aiment le mieux sont les oisons, les canards et les cochons de lait.<sup>48</sup>

It was customary for the public to be admitted to watch important visitors at table, on certain formal occasions. The 'hoi polloi' were kept apart from the dignitaries by a balustrade. His audience would thus already be familiar with much of Poisson's material, and his jibes at the Russians' expense the better appreciated by those who had profited from the opportunity to indulge in the favourite Parisian occupation of 'badauderie'. We may deduce from the text of *Les Faux Moscovites* alone that many did in fact attend these occasions:

LUBIN.- Je veux que tout Paris nous rende des visites,  
Car nous allons passer pour de vrais Moscovites:  
Étans vestus comme eux nous serons tous égaux,  
Hors qu'ils seront les vrais et nous serons les faux.  
Que l'on mette un balustre autour de nostre table  
Lors que nous mangerons, car, je me donne au diable,  
Nous serions accablés dès le premier repas (sc. vii).

We may also note in passing La Montagne's approving reference to Lubin's suitability for this task; he is 'un vray singe'. This sadly xenophobic pejorative seems to have been reserved by the Parisian 'badauds' for foreign dignitaries; it was to be extensively applied to the Siamese visitors of 1684.

Scene viii of *Les Faux Moscovites* shows us father and daughter together on stage for the first time. Gorgibus has grown so suspicious of the visitors that he has determined to send for the law, to rid himself of such unreasonable and increasingly demanding guests. Suson reassures him and calms his suspicions. It seems that she has been spying on them through a hole in the door, despite all her father's efforts to keep her away from temptation. The plot deepens. In scene ix Lubine bustles in to announce the imminent

<sup>47</sup> Loret, *Gazette rimée* for the 29th Sept. 1668, published in extenso as an appendix by P. I. Potemkin.

<sup>48</sup> De Catheux, p. 10.

arrival of the Russians:

Et viste le couvert, du foin et de l'avoine!  
Les Moscovites sont au quartier Saint Antoine  
On dit qu'ils sont montés sur de petits bidets.

La Montagne and Jolicoeur arrive opportunely, just in time to instruct Gorgibus on the correct manner in which to greet his exalted visitors. It seems that it is of paramount importance that Suson should also be present, thus we begin to suspect that she is a willing participant in the plot to dupe her father:

LA MONTAGNE.- Les voicy: sçavez-vous les choses qu'il faut faire

Pour les saluer tous et les bien recevoir?

GORGIBUS.- Non, je ne les sçais pas.

LA MONTAGNE.- Mais il les faut sçavoir:

D'abord le grand seigneur me saluera moy-mesme;

Voyez comme je fais, vous ferez tout de mesme.

Votre fille sera surtout avecque vous,

Car après mon salut il vous saluera tous.

D'abord qu'ils ont disné, qu'ils ont fait bonne chère,

Tout ce qu'ils veulent faire il leur faut laisser faire.

Gorgibus demurs, 'Mais si ces choses-là vont à mon déshonneur?' Perhaps he will appear foolish, perhaps something in all this might involve his honour as a father? But La Montagne continues with an account of how the Russians might be expected to behave after table; he carefully appears to reassure, whilst all the time emphasising their warlike and martial disposition to intimidate the reluctant host:

LA MONTAGNE.- C'est après le repas, l'exercice ordinaire;

Tout sera dans l'honneur. Ce que vous devez faire

Est de vous voir d'abord sur un siège un peu haut,

Pour les voir combattre, ou monter à l'assaut,

Où, comme ils sont d'humeur martiale et civile,

Ils représenteront le sac de quelque ville;

Puis chacun va dormir dans son appartement

Gorgibus demurs again, 'Toutes ces façons-là ne se font pas en France.' The visitors should naturally conform to the usage of the host nation. This exchange reflects a popular conception of the quarrelsome nature of the Russian character, when in their cups, which has proved remarkably resilient. Depping relates this anecdote in his account of the Muscovite embassy of 1654:

On apprit qu'il [Metcherski] passait tous les après-midi à s'enivrer avec son secrétaire et un autre attaché; qu'à eux trois ils consommaient huit pintes d'eau de vie par jour, et que, dans leur ivresse, ils se querellaient, et même se battaient comme des laquais. Plus d'une fois l'ambassadeur ivre avait maltraité ses gens; à Amsterdam, l'un d'eux était même, disait-on, tombé victime de sa brutalité. Dans ces rixes, le secrétaire, qui était d'une famille aussi grande que celle du prince, n'était jamais en reste avec lui, et lui rendait coup pour coup. Une fois, s'étant pris aux cheveux, ils firent un vacarme tel, que les Suisses qu'on avait placés dans l'hôtel pour écarter la foule des curieux et des importuns, se

crurent obligés d'accourir pour les séparer. L'ambassadeur et son secrétaire s'apaisèrent enfin, et se remirent à boire jusqu'à minuit, en gardant avec eux ces bons Suisses, qui, probablement, s'acquittèrent de leur nouvelle tâche de manière à justifier leur reputation.<sup>49</sup>

This harsh judgement on the Russian fondness for liquor is confirmed by our sources, in so far as concerns the 1668 embassy. It seems that the Russian delegation themselves were only too wary of the effects of alcohol. De Catheux tells us of Potemkin, whom, let us remember he knew personally:

On avoit proposé à l'Ambassadeur de ne le mener à l'audience du Roy qu' après diner mais il dit que Sa Majesté luy pouvoit marquer telle heure qu'il lui plairoit, et qu'il jeûneroit plutost jusques au soir que de dîner avant son audience, et parce qu'il falloit avoir l'esprit serain pour parler à Sa Majesté, et qu'il ne vouloit pas qu'on put attribuer aux viandes qu'il auroit mangées ou au vin qu'il auroit bu, le bien ou le mal qu'il feroit.<sup>50</sup>

Although the first French playwright to do so, Raymond Poisson was not by any means the earliest writer to present some Russians upon the stage. The device of adopting a specifically Russian disguise, in order to further an amorous intrigue, also occurs in one of William Shakespeare's earlier plays, *Love's Labour's Lost*, Act V, sc. 2 (c. 1594-5):

BOYET.- They do, they do; and are apparel'd  
Like Muscovites, or Russians, as I guess;  
Their purpose is to parle, to court, and dance;  
And ever one his love-suit will advance  
Unto his several mistress...

There are in fact, though I hesitate to posit a link because of the distance in space and time, many other points in common between the two comedies. Shakespeare's play is also built around a foreign embassy, though in this case a French embassy to Navarre: 'Here comes in embassy / The French King's daughter' (I i, 132-3). Indeed there are strong French connotations throughout the plot, which appears to be rather loosely based on the negotiations between France and the kingdom of Navarre in the early 1590's.<sup>51</sup> In Shakespeare as in Poisson, we find the same racial stereotyping; his Muscovites are gluttonous, bellicose and uncouth. Their costume is outlandish, 'Disguised like Muscovites, in shapeless gear...their rough carriage so ridiculous...' (V ii, 303-6). There are similar references to the dress of the Russians in *Les Faux Muscovites*. Contemporary illustrations portray Russians with the heavy beards, the long, skirted robes trimmed with fur, and the boots suited to a cold climate. This is a costume well suited to disguise, for those of a villainous disposition to conceal weapons and loot along with their identity, and that is doubtless the way that we should picture both Shakespeare's and Poisson's Muscovites. We ought to note here, though, that in Shakespeare's play, these 'frozen Muscovites' are in reality great lords, not rogues or valets in disguise as in Poisson. They make a musical entry onto the stage announced by fanfares; hence their costume is all the more incongruous. De Catheux has left us this amusing little anecdote about the Russians and their rather distinctive headgear:

<sup>49</sup> G. Depping, 'Une ambassade russe à Paris en 1654.' *Revue de Paris*, 1er juillet, p.145, 1853.

<sup>50</sup> De Catheux, p. 19, confirmed by de Saintot, *Mémoires*, p.428.

<sup>51</sup> There is a certain consensus amongst Shakespearean scholars that he derived both his Muscovites and his plot from the poems of Sir Philip Sidney, but this is a minefield in which I fear to tread (see H. R. Woudhuysen's introduction to the Arden edition of *Love's Labours Lost* (London, 1998).

L'Ambassadeur pria en dinant Monsr. le Marechal de Bellefons de luy d'ôner [sic] son chapeau qu'il mit sur sa tete, et mit en même tems son bonet fouré sur celle de Mr. le Marechal pour marquer à ce qu'il dit l'union et le comerce qui devoit être entre les François et les Moscovites, et pour le mieux marquer il ne voulut pas reprendre son bonet et a emporté en Moscovie le chapeau de Monsieur le Marechal qui croyoit d'abord que cete galanterie finiroit avec le repas qui paroissoit en queque [sic] façon en être cause...<sup>52</sup>

Since the story is also related in de Saintot's *Mémoires*, it doubtless enjoyed a wide circulation as a merry jest at the expense of de Bellefonds. On the question of Russian costume, de Catheux also informs us, on a rather sour note:

Ilz donèrent à quelques uns seulement de ceux qui leur avoient rendu service des marques de leur libéralité moscovite par des petits présens de fourures et de bagatelles qui ne valoient pas la peine d'être présentées, et d'après que l'Ambassadeur et le Chancelier m'eurent obligé à prendre chacun une paire de mitaines fourées, l'Ambassadeur me dôna encore un petit couteau à gaine, et me forca à accepter côme un temoignage de son amitié et de son estime particuliere la fourure du colet de sa robe qu'il decousit luy même...<sup>53</sup>

It is sad that de Catheux was so little impressed by the gesture. Potemkin obviously meant to single him out and to do him honour. The gift of fur carried a cultural significance and connotations for the Russians that it obviously would not have possessed for the French. It was customary for the Tsars to entrust their ambassadors with furs of the finest quality destined for the sovereign who was the object of the embassy. Those presented to Charles II, for example, in 1663 were of an extraordinary magnificence, valued at twenty thousand roubles or some two hundred thousand francs. The gift of furs was intimately linked with the Russian practice of diplomacy. On the return of an embassy to Moscow:

Si le tsar était satisfait de la manière dont ils s'étaient acquittés de leur mission, il les compensait, suivant le degré d'importance de leur mission, il les récompensait, suivant le degré d'importance de l'ambassade, par le cadeaux de pelleteries: par exemple, une pelisse en martre zibeline, couverte en drap d'or... le second ambassadeur et tous les attachés de l'ambassade étaient récompensé en proportion.<sup>54</sup>

Both Poisson and Shakespeare lay considerable emphasis on the legendary Russian fondness for hard liquor:

ROSALINE.- We four, indeed, confronted here with four  
In Russian habit; here they stayed an hour  
And talk'd apace; and in that hour, my lord,  
They did not bless us with one happy word.  
I dare not call them fools; but this I think,  
When they are thirsty, fools would fain have drink (V ii, 367-72).

The alcoholic Russian is a persistent stereotype and one that still remains, but let us, having duly noted it, return to scene xi of the *Faux Moscovites*.

<sup>52</sup> De Catheux, p. 25; de Saintot, *Mémoires*, p. 431.

<sup>53</sup> De Catheux, p. 27. If Loret is to be believed, the gift of furs would have been comprised of 'Hermine' and 'Martres Zibelines'.

<sup>54</sup> Potemkin, pp. 73-74.

In scene xi an important new theme emerges. Unfortunately it appears that there exists at least one lacuna at this juncture in the text, since there are gaps in the continuity. The 'Moscovites' have at long last arrived at Gorgibus's inn, with Lubin playing the soi-disant *ambassadeur* and La Montagne as his 'interpreter'. The choice of such a notorious, ill-tempered, amoral drunkard to represent Potemkin himself is naturally far from an innocent coincidence. It is clear that the audience is intended to make the connection between the two. We remember that Potemkin spoke no French and are told of Lubin in the stage directions, 'icy il baragouine' and a few lines later 'il jargonne.' In both instances the character is given dotted lines to denote speech rather than actual dialogue, with the exception of the odd 'Hyo, hyo' or 'yo, yo, yo' to signify agreement. In contrast to Poisson, Shakespeare does not attempt jargon in this instance, the reader must presume a comic accent for the 'Muscovites'. Despite numerous precedents, for example Rotrou in *La Soeur* (1645), Montfleury in *L'Ecole des jaloux* (1662) and *Le Mary sans femme* (1666), Brécourt in *Le Jaloux invisible* (1666), du Perche in *L'Ambassadeur d'Affrique* (1666), Molière in *Le Sicilien* (1667), Poisson does not try to reproduce the sounds of a foreign language in print. Lancaster suggests that the first attempt to present a mock Slavonic language on stage is probably that by Hauteroche in *Le Feint Polonois* (1686), a rather poor play, staged only once and published at Lyons. He gives a sample of the dialogue, which I understand bears no resemblance whatsoever to the Polish language:

LA FRANCHISE.- Cornelik raburac.

DES VALONS.- Nortou graf sormien.

LA FRANCHISE.- Il vous proteste, Madame, qu'il est extrêmement votre serviteur.

ERGASTE.- Cette langue est admirable, elle dit vingt choses en trois parôles (II, vii).<sup>55</sup>

This comedy is obviously written in imitation of the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*, though with the use of a Polish disguise instead of Turkish. Here, also, we may suggest a connection with a fairly exotic embassy. Though no 'ambassador' appears in Hauteroche's script, a Polish embassy did visit Paris in 1685, thus making the Poles as highly topical as a subject for the theatre, as were our Muscovites of 1668. Louis had a magnificent casket encrusted with diamonds made, worth the best part of 22,000 livres, as a gift for the Polish king. Catholic Poland, more obviously Latin in culture than Slavonic, was far better known in France than Russia. Despite Alexis's efforts to cultivate close relations with France, Louis preferred to support Poland in the more or less constant state of hostility between the two Slavonic powers.

Perhaps, since there are grounds for believing that Poisson played Lubin himself, he felt it unnecessary to go into detail over dotting the 'I's and crossing the 'T's of the jargon in the script of *Les Faux Moscovites*. Time was of the essence, because it was important to get the comedy staged whilst the Russians were still a recent memory. It is plain from the *Au Lecteur* that both the production and the script were rushed. As we have observed, the latter is most probably incomplete. Lancaster notes that the play did not remain long in the repertoire after interest in the exotic visitors had evaporated. It does not feature in the *Registre* of La Grange, though Robinet refers to the rôles played by Poisson and Villiers as Lubin and Gorgibus in his letter of October 27th for that year.<sup>56</sup> We can only imagine how the use of jargon gave rise to much hilarity, particularly on those occasions when Lubin can no longer

<sup>55</sup> Lancaster, vol. IV ii, p. 517.

<sup>56</sup> Lancaster, vol. III ii, p. 762.

control himself, as, for example, when greed gets the better of him whilst discussing the menu for the feast, and he lets the mask slip in his anxiety not to lose a succulent morsel:

GORGIBUS.- J'ay de fort bons perdreaux; aime-t-il cette viande?

LUBIN, *il jargonne*. Yo, yo, yo.

GORGIBUS.- Dit-il pas qu'il les hait, et qu'ils ne valent rien?

LUBIN.- La peste! non, je dis que je les aime bien, yo, yo.

His little faux pas does not go unnoticed by Gorgibus, though the innkeeper is still too bemused by La Montagne's glib speaking in his guise of interpreter, to draw the obvious conclusion:

GORGIBUS: Quand il veut francizer on l'entend assez bien,  
Mais quand il moscovize on n'y comprend plus rien.

We find certain close parallels to Molière's *Bourgeois gentilhomme* in this scene. Compare for example: 'Que ce langage est sot / Quoi! parler si longtemps pour ne dire qu'un mot! (sc. xi)' with the following exchange from the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*, Act iv, sc. vii:

MONSIEUR JOURDAIN.- Tant de choses en deux mots?

COVIELLE.- Oui; la langue turque est comme cela, elle dit beaucoup en peu de parôles..

Gorgibus continues to elaborate on his menu, building up the tension he announces that there is to be roast suckling pig and great sirloin steaks. Apparently the former was a particular favourite of the Russians, according to de Catheux: 'Ce qu'ils aiment le mieux sont les oisons, les canards et les cochons de lait.' It is also a particular favourite of Lubin's, who finds it increasingly difficult to avoid bursting into French when he fears this succulent item is about to disappear from the menu, 'Faites-luy donc sçavoir que j'aime tout. J'enrage.' We may picture his paroxysms of anxiety when it seems that his alter ego drinks nothing but water. Lubin can scarcely contain himself:

GORGIBUS.- Il ne boit que de l'eau, rien n'est plus pitoyable.

LUBIN.- Je parleray françois, ou je me donne au diable.

LA MONTAGNE.- L'eau pour le grand seigneur est pire qu'un poison.

Although the link had not yet been made with contamination of the source, the drinking of water was rightly believed to be harmful, at this period and until well into the nineteenth century. Haussmann's reforms were yet to come. The consumption of wine or beer, even for children, was considered far less injurious to the health of the individual. We may be fairly certain that this is not the reason for Lubin's anxiety. He probably suspects a device of his cronies, fearing that he may endanger the whole plan, if allowed to imbibe too freely. The party is summoned to dine. The heavily laden table and the chairs are carried in. The stage directions tell us that 'LUBIN *fait un long jargon en coupant les viandes et les présentant aux autres*' and the scene continues, apace and not without a certain pleasing onomatopoeia:

JOLICOEUR.- Crac.

LA MONTAGNE.- Cric.

LUBIN, *en avalant il baragouine*.

Croc.

JOLICOEUR.- le cochon est, dit-il, admirable.  
LUBIN *baragouine longtemps le verre à la main.*

Fournel suggests, I believe correctly, that in the following exchange Poisson is parodying the Russian practice of accompanying practically every meal with copious toasting, to the health of the assembled company and of their respective monarchs.

LA MONTAGNE, *aux dames.*

Il boit à vos santés.

Mme AMINTE.- Que ce langage est sot!

Quoy! Parler si longtemps pour ne dire qu'un mot!

LA MONTAGNE.- Il vient de boire à vous, il faut faire de mesme;

N'hésitez pas, Madame.

Mme AMINTE.- Ah! La rigueur extrême!

JOLICOEUR.- C'est la marque et le sceau de son affection.

Mme AMINTE.- Parce qu'il m'aime il faut souffrir la question!

Vous croyez que je boive un verre d'eau de vie!

LA MONTAGNE.- C'est l'ordre du pays.

Mme AMINTE.- Hé! Suis-je en Moscovie?

SUSON.- Allez le supplier de vous en dispenser.

*Lubin jargonne(scene xi).*

It appears that this convivial practice of the Russians had been widely remarked upon:

L'Ambassadeur observa une ceremonie qu'il pratiquoit exactement tous les jours en dinant et en soupant, qui estoit de se lever tout de bout, d'oter son bonet, et de faire un assez long discours mêlé de compliments et de prières, qu'un Interprète expliquoit en peu de mots, ensuite desquels l'Ambassadeur beuvoit à la Santé de sa Zare Majesté et du Roy dont tous ceux qui estoient à table tenans en même temps leurs verres à la main luy faisoient raison.<sup>57</sup>

Fournel notes the astonishing consumption of spirits by the Russian embassy. We have already seen that the ambassador who visited in 1654 succeeded in despatching eight pints of brandy *per diem*, in the company of his secretary and one other attaché alone. De Catheux gives us several strong hints that Potemkin followed in his predecessor's footsteps. It is therefore comically appropriate for La Montagne to assign the rôle of 'Russian ambassador' to a notorious drunkard and 'bon viveur'. No wonder that Poisson reserved such a gem of a part for himself.

Scene xii of the *Faux Moscovites* brings the whole cast on stage to prepare for the dénouement as Lubine arrives to plead through the 'interprète' for the great lord to 'unmarry' her:

Mon bon seigneur, je viens icy pour vous prier  
D'obtenir le pouvoir de me démarier  
D'avec un sac à vin, un gueux, un lasche, un traistre,  
Bref d'avec un mary qui ne le sçauroit estre:

<sup>57</sup> De Catheux, p. 18; the observation is confirmed by de Sainctot, *Mémoires*, p. 428. See also Fournel, p. 473.

C'est le plus impuissant de tous les impuissans.

The 'sac à vin' in question has to maintain his false identity with increasing difficulty as Lubine continues to blacken his character. He is limited to expressing his feelings *sotto voce* to the audience. In the end the effort is too much as Lubine, carried away by her own oratory, eventually goes too far with a hint that she has cuckolded him. Lubin throws aside the mask with his 'C'est moy mesme, carogne', giving chase as she flees in disarray. La Montagne tricks Gorgibus into sounding a hunting horn, on the excuse that the whole sorry episode is merely 'pour faire exercice', a common Russian amusement! His fanfare, alas, is the prearranged signal for the villains to break cover and carry off Suson, as well as 'force paquets' whose contents we may only imagine. The innkeeper has conspired in his own downfall. Gorgibus and Lubine are left alone on stage for scene xiii. She is by far the more astute of the pair and proceeds to enlighten the poor father as to the true state of affairs:

Tantarare! ah vrayment! Le marquis de Jonquille,  
S'en va bien autrement tarare votre fille:  
Il l'a fait enlever, car je le viens de voir;  
Tous ces faux étrangers l'ont mise en son pouvoir!

It is a *sine qua non* of French comedy that the servants always have a far better idea of what is going on than their masters do. Fortunately, all ends happily in the final scene. The wicked baron declares his true love for the innkeeper's daughter, the daughter promises her father that nothing untoward has taken place. Gorgibus gives his consent to the marriage, albeit distractedly since he fears rather more for his property than his own flesh and blood; Suson promises to reconcile Lubine with her outraged husband.

The arrival of the Russians had almost immediately given rise, as we have seen, to controversy and questions of protocol. Diplomatic norms naturally differed in Moscow and Istanbul from those in favour in Paris or London. There had been a considerable amount of ill feeling engendered at the French court before the Russians even arrived, by the fact that Potemkin was visiting Paris only on his way home from Madrid. There were sound, practical reasons for this choice of itinerary, but it was felt that by it the Tsar seemed to imply that Louis was a lesser monarch in the eyes of the Russians than the King of Spain, thus giving the Habsburgs precedence over the Bourbons. It emerged that there was also some question as to the exact status of the Russian ruler himself. Was he, as the French insisted, merely Alexis Mikhailovitch, 'Grand-Duc de Moscovie' and thus of markedly inferior standing to the King of France? Or was he in truth his 'ZARE MAJESTÉ', 'CAESARIA MAJESTAS' in the Latin of the interpreters (the 'majuscule' was insisted upon by the Russians in all official correspondence), and therefore as an emperor the superior of Louis, a mere king? Alexis had originally sent Potemkin to gain approval from two of the most influential Catholic powers, France and Spain, for his own candidacy for the throne of Poland (strenuously opposed by the Poles on the grounds of his Orthodox faith). It was also hoped to encourage trade and increase Russian prestige abroad. As we know, the magnificence of an ambassadorial retinue could serve useful purposes of propaganda. Alexis was concerned with the creation of a new image for himself as a great and civilised European monarch, though it suited the European powers better to encourage Russia to see her destiny in the East. One cannot avoid a certain sneaking sympathy for the Tsar in the altercation with Louis; given the comparative size of their subject territories at this period, Alexis's pretensions hardly seem unreasonable. The title had in any case been in general use in Russia since the reign of Ivan the Terrible (1533-84). On no occasion, therefore, would Potemkin allow the lesser title to be used of his master, even refusing to hand over his letters of accreditation when requested, lest it be assumed that

in so doing he was complying with an order from a monarch of inferior standing to his own. In the end, the matter was glossed over by the French, 'par amitié', but the usual lavish presents sent from monarch to brother monarch had to be presented as the personal gifts of the Russian ambassadors to Louis. This was done in order to avoid the use of the words 'Duc de Moscovie' in the preamble that would otherwise have to be pronounced before the king.

I must emphasise at this point that, in so far as the Russians are concerned, we are dealing in the present chapter with an embassy which followed accepted European norms of behaviour for a diplomatic visit. Interaction between Potemkin and his hosts fell into a familiar pattern, however uncouth the manners of the Muscovites might have appeared to an aristocrat like de Catheux or to a hypercritical Parisian audience. Such was not to be the case with Soliman Aga's visit as Ottoman ambassador in 1669-70, and this crucial difference is reflected on the stage. Both the *Faux Moscovites* and the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* are personal satires, written in the wake of a diplomatic visit, pandering to popular prejudices and reflecting racial stereotypes. Each playwright features what he considers to be the outlandish language, costume and marital customs of his victims. In the case of the Russians, their proverbial drunkenness, gluttony and quarrelsome nature are highlighted, in the case of the Turks cruelty, pride and lust, but there are major differences in approach between the two comedies. Raymond Poisson targets the Russians themselves, in revenge for what appears to be a personal slight, on himself and on his theatre. We may assume that Poisson felt his little comedy to be fair comment on the visitors' behaviour and his strictures are borne out, as we have seen, by first-hand contemporary evidence. Molière, in contrast, parodies the French perception of the Turks, not the personal conduct of the Sultan's ambassador, however outrageous this might have appeared to his hosts. The *Bourgeois gentilhomme* was composed in the aftermath of a wholly avoidable foreign relations fiasco. I shall suggest in the following chapter that the whimsical behaviour of the French foreign minister and his acolytes is the real butt of Molière's humour. Poisson acts from motives of personal pique, Molière as royal propagandist and at the direct request of the king.

A further point of difference lies in the state of geographical and historical knowledge of the two regions that existed in France at this point. The Ottoman Empire, an ally of long standing, was also comparatively familiar as a trading partner, although, as a Muslim power with pretensions to world dominion, regarded somewhat warily. Many works of both fiction and non-fiction had been published on the Ottoman Empire and its peoples. Though often portrayed with a kind of fascinated horror, the Turks were, by and large, rather admired by the French. People wanted to understand the reasons that lay behind Ottoman strengths and weaknesses. There was rather a vogue in the theatre (and also in prose fiction) for romantic tales of the Orient. Moralists, such as Montaigne and Bodin, wrote praising the admirable military qualities and religious tolerance of the Turks, implicitly criticising the lax standards and bigotry prevalent in Christian Europe in matters of religion.<sup>58</sup> The Grand Duchy of Muscovy, by contrast, was an unknown quantity. It was far more difficult for a western European to enter or leave Moscow than Istanbul. 'Terra incognita' for the vast majority of Frenchmen, the contemporary image of Russia was a wholly negative one, dating from the reign of Ivan the Terrible in the previous century, despite the enlightened rule of Alexis. Its people were still semi-barbarous in the popular mind, the tsar a bloodthirsty tyrant, the nobility given over to 'drunkenness, cruelty and beastly table manners'.<sup>59</sup> In fact, though representing no conceivable threat to France, Russia was regarded with deep suspicion because of her constant intrigues in Poland. The rivalry between Catholic and Orthodox provided a far greater obstacle to mutual understanding than any latent hostility between

<sup>58</sup> See C. D. Rouillard, "Montaigne et les Turcs." *Revue de Littérature comparée*, XVIII, ii, avril-juin, pp. 235-251, 1938.

<sup>59</sup> See Jacques Margaret for a contemporary account of the state of Russia.

Christendom and Islam. Moscow would later refuse to enter into alliance with France, precisely because of the French monarchy's closeness to the Ottomans. Such an attitude of blatant self-interest was felt by the Russians to be unacceptable in a nominally Christian power. It must be remembered that Russia had long held the front line against expansionist Islam and was notoriously sensitive on this point. She saw herself as 'the Third Rome', isolated, the sole remaining bastion of Christian piety. According to the Patriarch Jeremiah of Constantinople, 'the Tsar alone in all the universe could call himself "Tsar of all the Christians"'.<sup>60</sup> Alexis was personally devout and punctilious in his religious observance. French knowledge of Russia was thus very patchy compared with the wealth of contemporary accounts of the Ottoman Empire. The reader will remember that not one native French speaker of Russian could be found to act as a royal interpreter, neither on the occasion of Potemkin's visit, nor on the earlier mission of Metcherski and Bogdanov in 1654. Until the publication of Jacques Margaret's account in 1607, information on the Grand Duchy of Muscovy had had to be gleaned by the reading public from such works as de Wicquefort's translation into French of Adam Olearius' *Beschreibung der neuen orientalischen Reise...an den König in Persian geschehen*.

We have already commented above upon some of the parallels between the *Faux Moscovites* and the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*. One major difference still to be considered is that, for the most part, Molière uses the device of employing lingua franca for exchanges in 'Turkish', although there are a few words of genuine Turkish occurring as well as a little gibberish. As we have seen, we have no record of what Poisson/Lubin actually says 'quand il moscovize'. Perhaps he may even have varied it from performance to performance, according to the mood of the moment. Molière's ingenious device permitted audience comprehension from the start, whilst enhancing the exotic atmosphere and the comic effect of the dialogue. There is no means of knowing whether Poisson achieved a similar effect. The rôle of the valet/interpreter is of crucial importance to both plays. It is the function of the comic interpreter to form an interface between the comfortably familiar and the bizarrely incomprehensible. He serves to bemuse and outwit the protagonists in the play, and his position is potentially a very powerful one, belying his ostensibly humble social status. It is he who in reality holds the reins of power and who can orchestrate the other *dramatis personae* at his will. The element of disguise makes of him a two faced Janus. The exploitation of this comic device reflects the real life situation in the theatre. Whilst we may well assume the Russian nobility of the Enlightenment to be francophone, such was not the case in the seventeenth-century, nor is it true of our other exotic ambassadors. Certainly it was not the case with Soliman Aga, with whom Molière's *Bourgeois gentilhomme* is so intimately linked and whom we shall meet in the next chapter. The lack of reliable, trained native French interpreters placed far too much power in the hands of the dragomans of the Ottoman Empire. These were notoriously open to bribery or intimidation, and often afraid of upsetting their masters by too literal an interpretation of what might have been said, or twisting the sense of it to suit their own purposes. Naturally, they could rarely be presumed to be working in French interests. This was a sorry situation for the French diplomatic service and was to give rise to a complicated welter of misunderstandings. It could be very dangerous in a time of heightened international tension, if the 'truchement' had a personal axe to grind. We have already observed the lack of properly trained interpreters causing trouble for Potemkin's embassy. Negotiations had to be conducted through the medium of Latin, necessitating a double layer of translation with all the attendant possibilities of error and loss of subtle nuances. It is a wonder that international understanding was not more fraught than it actually was. The Soliman Aga episode was to lead directly to the establishment of the corps

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<sup>60</sup> See Schakovskoy 1, p. 73.

of 'Jeunes de Langue' in France. These were to provide a reliable source of French-born, highly educated, career interpreters for the diplomatic service to call on at need. That this scheme of Colbert's succeeded is evidenced by the lack of similar problems with our later 'exotic' embassies, such as those of the Siamese in 1684 and 1686, or of the Persians in 1715. In the case of China in 1697, the rôle of ambassador was filled by the Jesuit scholar, Joachim Bouvet. It is noteworthy that the motif of the comic interpreter occurs much more rarely in later plays, showing once again that the comic theatre is the mirror of real life. I shall return to the theme in rather more detail in Chapter 7.

**Chapter 3: Soliman Aga [Molière, *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*].**

'Il s'est fait depuis peu une certaine mascarade qui vient le mieux du monde ici...'<sup>61</sup>

The 'turquerie' of the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* is of particular interest to the literary historian when viewed, as it should be, within the context of the delicate state of diplomatic relations between France and the Ottoman Empire in the mid to late seventeenth century.

Nous attendons du Grand Seigneur  
Un bel et bon ambassadeur:  
Il vient avec grande cohorte;  
Le nôtre est flatté par la Porte...<sup>62</sup>

wrote Jean de La Fontaine in July 1669 and the story has often been told of how Louis XIV, smarting at the insolence of this very ambassador, Soliman Aga, ordered Molière to tack a Turkish burlesque on to a comedy that was already well into the process of composition. It seems that the royal pride was to be restored by poking fun at the arrogance and pretensions of the Turks. The 'cérémonie turque' in the last act of the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* has therefore often been undervalued by certain literary critics, particularly in the nineteenth century, as a momentary and wholly regrettable lapse on the part of Molière.<sup>63</sup> Bins de Saint-Victor went so far as to give the following judgement on the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*:

...une comédie enterrée vivante dans un sarcophage turc...les turbans à chandelles nous font aujourd'hui l'effet des luminaires d'un service funèbre...[la] cérémonie semble aussi surannée que la "Messe de l'Ane" du Moyen-Age. On ne connaît plus ces fantoches.<sup>64</sup>

Such a viewpoint fails to take into account the undeniable evidence that Molière intended his comedy to be incidental to the *Ballet des Nations*, which it precedes, and not the other way around. Priorities were different in the seventeenth century. The *Gazette* for the 14th October 1670, referring to the first production of the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* at Chambord, reports that:

Hier leurs Majestés eurent pour la première fois le divertissement d'un ballet de six entrées, accompagné de comédie.<sup>65</sup>

In its day, the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* became a favourite item in the repertory and modern productions that drastically reduce the balletic element are remote from Molière's original

<sup>61</sup> Molière, *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, Act 3, scene xiv.

<sup>62</sup> *Épître à la princesse de Bavière*, vers 43 à 46, *Oeuvres de La Fontaine*, édition Lemerre, t. II, p.176.

<sup>63</sup> See Rouillard, pp. 33-52, p. 34.

<sup>64</sup> Paul Jacques Raimond Bins de Saint-Victor, *Les Deux masques, tragédie-comédie: III Les Modernes*, p.485 (Paris, 1884), henceforward: Bins de Saint-Victor.

<sup>65</sup> Rouillard 2, p. 34.

intentions.

The Turkish motif was neither novel nor unique to Molière. Fifteen tragedies dealing with fairly recent events from Ottoman history had been produced since Bounin's *La Soltane*, the first dramatic production to exploit a more or less contemporary Turkish theme.<sup>66</sup> There were also no less than thirteen comedies with substantial Turkish interest, including Molière's own *Le Sicilien*, some featuring the use of a "Turkish" jargon,<sup>67</sup> a couple on the theme of the visit of a foreign ambassador,<sup>68</sup> and yet others containing a mock ceremonial.<sup>69</sup> A vast quantity of prose fiction works featuring the Ottoman empire had also appeared since Rabelais roasted Panurge in 1532, amongst the most notable of which was Madeleine de Scudéry's *Ibrahim ou l'illustre Bassa*,<sup>70</sup> a four-volume 'blockbuster' running into reprint after reprint and enjoying a vast circulation. Unique to the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*, however, is the underlying significance of the Turkish theme. The 'turquerie' has a serious purpose and is a matter of royal propaganda. I shall also suggest the possibility that it enables Molière to satirise, in Aristophanic mode, the mishandling of certain recent events by a leading statesman of the day, holding him up to public ridicule with the open approval of the king.

The Turks were a highly topical theme. Thought to be in decline earlier in the century, the Ottoman Empire was now entering a period of revival under the Köprülü dynasty of vizirs and was actively reverting to its traditional policy of expansionism.<sup>71</sup> Scarcely a week went by without some mention of Ottoman affairs in the *Gazette*, or one of the rhyming chronicles of the day. Occasionally, whole special issues were devoted to some particularly titillating scandal or a more than usually gory palace revolution. Though France had been an ally of the Ottoman Empire since the reign of François I, French troops had recently seen action against the Turks. In 1664, some 6,000 took part in the battle of Saint-Gothard, defending the Holy Roman Empire, and may well have been the deciding factor in the Ottoman defeat. The story is told of how the Turkish commander, Ahmet Köprülü, saw the French contingent arriving under the command of La Feuillade:

... il s'écria à l'aspect de leurs perruques poudrées: "Quelles sont ces jeunes filles?" Mais les jeunes filles dont il parlait, sans se laisser intimider par le formidable cri d' *Allah!* s'élançèrent sur les Turcs en criant à leur tour: *Allons! Allons! Tue! Tue!* Ceux des janissaires qui eurent le bonheur d'échapper au carnage se rappelaient encore, après de longues années, ce cri: *Allons! Allons! Tue! Tue!* Et le nom de Fouladi (l'homme d'acier) sous lequel ils désignaient le duc de La Feuillade.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Gabriel Bounin, *La Soltane*, Paris, G. Morel, 1561. The *privilège* is dated 1560.

<sup>67</sup> Rotrou, *La Soeur*, 1645; Montfleury, *L'Ecole des Jaloux ou le cocu volontaire*, 1662, re-published in 1755 under the title of *La Fausse Turquie*; Le Mary sans femme, 1666; Le Boulanger de Chalussay, *Elomire hypocondre*, 1670.

<sup>68</sup> Du Perche, *L'Ambassadeur d'Afrique*, 1666; Poisson, *Les Faux Moscovites*, 1669.

<sup>69</sup> Montfleury, *L'Ecole des Jaloux*, 1662; Brécourt, *Le Jaloux invisible*, 1666.

<sup>70</sup> Paris, A. de Sommerville, 1641, reprinted 1644; second edition Rouen, 1655; also the subject of a tragedy of the same title by the author's brother, Georges de Scudéry, in 1643.

<sup>71</sup> For the history of the Ottoman Empire at this period, see H. A. R. Gibb and H. Bowen, *Islamic Society and the West* (London, 1957), henceforward: Gibb and Bowen; Fatma Müge Göçek, *East encounters West; France and the Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, Oxford, 1987); J. von Hammer-Purgstall, *Histoire de l'empire ottoman, depuis son origine jusqu'à nos jours*, traduit de l'Allemand par J.-J. Hellert (Paris, 1835-1843), henceforward: von Hammer; Halil Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire* (London, 1973); Metin I. Kunt, *The Sultan's Servants* (New York, 1983); Robert Mantran, *L'Empire ottoman du XVIe au XVIIIe siècle* (London, 1984) and *Istanbul dans la seconde moitié du XVIIe siècle* (Paris, 1962); V. J. Parry, *A History of the Ottoman Empire to 1730* (Cambridge, 1976); Peter Frigyes Sugar, *Southeastern Europe under Ottoman Rule, 1354-1804* (Seattle, 1977); Dorothy Vaughan, *Europe and the Turk: a pattern of alliances, 1350-1800* (Liverpool, 1954).

<sup>72</sup> Von Hammer, vol. XI, pp.100-101. Though von Hammer's monumental history is largely based on Ottoman

France had also sent military support to the Venetian forces opposing the Turks in Crete. The long-standing alliance between France and the Ottomans thus appeared to be on the point of breaking down, and the French representative in Istanbul, Jean de la Haye Vantelet, was insulted and manhandled as a consequence<sup>73</sup>. Iron handed Mehmed Köprülü had taken a strong personal dislike to de La Haye, French ambassador to the Porte from 1639 to 1661, perhaps because the latter had failed to give him the customary presents on his appointment as Vizir A'zam in 1656. The Turks having intercepted a coded letter from the Venetians to the French embassy in Istanbul, both de La Haye and his son Denis were severely beaten, the latter losing his teeth as a consequence, and thrown into the condemned cell. They were subsequently kept in confinement under constant guard, in the notorious prison of the Seven Towers, as a punishment for refusing to reveal the cipher. Louis XIV's letter of protest was prevented from reaching the Sultan. Eventually expelled by the Turks, Jean de la Haye died a short while after his arrival in Paris.<sup>74</sup> Although Ahmet Köprülü succeeded to his father's office as grand vizir in 1661, while Denis de la Haye took his father's place as French ambassador to the Porte in 1665, the animosity continued. De La Haye *fils* was coldly received by the Turks as *persona non grata* and his reception by the Kâ'im-makâm, Kara Mustafa Pasha, was deliberately insulting in manner.<sup>75</sup> The de la Hayes were held personally responsible financially for the loss of a Turkish cargo, captured by a French privateer. Other French nationals in the Levant were also held to ransom in this manner and French goods were seized in reprisal for Ottoman losses at Candia.<sup>76</sup>

Since it appeared that the Turks regarded the French ambassador as little more than a hostage for his monarch's good behaviour, the decision was taken to recall de la Haye to France for his own safety. A French squadron arrived to escort him back to French soil in January 1669. This course of action was the more urgent since, following the defeat of La Feuillade's volunteers at Candia in 1668, Louis had agreed to comply with an appeal by Pope Clement IX for a further French expeditionary force to support the Venetians. For reasons of his own, however, Denis de La Haye was reluctant to leave the Levant and began to intrigue, to enable himself to remain *in situ*. It seems that he managed to persuade Kara Mustafa that the recall was a bluff. The two of them had a mutual enemy in the person of Ahmed Köprülü, at that moment safely away from court, directing the siege of Candia. Kara Mustafa agreed to write to Louis in the Sultan's name, expressing surprise that the French should recall their ambassador without appointing another in his place. The recall of an ambassador was and remains a very grave matter, one of the usual preludes to a declaration of war. The Sultan would therefore retain de La Haye until an answer should be received. In the end, the decision was made that an envoy would be sent from the Porte to ascertain exactly what French intentions might be, the reasons for French dissatisfaction with the Ottoman alliance, and what could be done to remedy the situation. His arrival was to give rise to serious questions of diplomatic protocol.

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rather than European sources, here he is paraphrasing from pp. 117-18 of du Vignau's *L'Etat présent de la puissance Ottomane, avec les causes de son accroissement et de sa décadence* (Paris, 1687). Du Vignau held the offices of 'Secrétaire d'Ambassadeur de France à la Porte and Secrétaire Interprete sur les Escadres du Roy dans toute la Méditerranée' and may be considered a reliable source.

<sup>73</sup> Von Hammer, pp. 30-31.

<sup>74</sup> Laurent d'Arvieux, *Mémoires*, t. IV, p. 110.

<sup>75</sup> Kâ'im-makâm: the grand vizir's deputy in his absence.

<sup>76</sup> The Köprülüs, father and son, were to become sufficiently notorious in France as to merit a biography by the sieur de Chassepol, the *Histoire des grands vizirs, Mahomet Coprogli pacha et Achmet Coprogli pacha* (Paris, 1676). Kara Mustafa and Sultan Mehmed IV were to provide the subjects for Jean de Préchac's *Cara Mustapha, grand-vizir* (Paris, 1684) and Donneau de Visé's *Histoire de Mahomet IV déposé* (Amsterdam, 1688) respectively.

The circumstances surrounding Soliman Aga's mission and his reception in Paris are crucial to a proper understanding of the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*. It was decided, in view of the insulting treatment meted out to the de la Hayes in Constantinople, that every detail of his audience would be minutely modelled on the reception of a foreign ambassador at the Porte. Here, since the Ottoman sultans claimed world suzerainty, all foreign envoys, regardless of status, were treated as supplicants, the emissaries of tributary powers only admitted to the imperial presence with arms tightly held, lest they should conceal a weapon. Ambassadors were even, as we have seen, occasionally retained as hostages, contrary to all normal diplomatic usage in Europe. The Sublime Porte maintained no embassies abroad, with the reluctant exception of the Habsburg Empire since the signing of the treaty of Zsitva Torok in 1606. The last occasion for the arrival of an Ottoman envoy in France had been some thirty years earlier, in August 1640.

There were several important questions of diplomatic protocol to be resolved in the autumn of 1669. If Mehmed IV had indeed decided to break with precedent and send an 'elchi' (the Ottoman term for a fully accredited ambassador) to the French court, then the Sultan's representative must be permitted to hand his master's letter to Louis in person during the course of a formal audience. Should, on the other hand, the envoy prove to be the usual 'chaoush', he would be required to present his charge to the king's foreign minister, as was the usual practice. Despite all earlier precedents, it was argued that Soliman Aga's letters of accreditation were ambiguous and left his status open to doubt. There was much debate over the exact meaning of the visitor's title of 'müteferrika', literally 'huissier' in contemporary French.<sup>77</sup> Arguments raged over whether the de La Hayes' mistreatment at Constantinople had been the result of their own imprudence and lack of judgement, or was intended by the Turks as a deliberate insult to the French monarchy. Suspicions were aroused that the Porte meant to treat Paris as of less account than Vienna, in sending an envoy rather than an ambassador. Questions of diplomatic protocol, precedence and etiquette were of supreme importance at the French court, perhaps more so than elsewhere in Europe; but in fact the nature of the ceremonial to be observed between France and the Ottoman Empire on the occasion of the reception of an ambassador had never been properly defined. Though the French themselves maintained permanent diplomatic representation in Istanbul, there had been only five occasions of the arrival of an Ottoman envoy in Paris since the reign of Francis I.<sup>78</sup> The difficulty was that, if Soliman Aga were indeed at the head of a formal embassy, then it was important that the Turks should be given no legitimate cause for complaint. If he were not, then it was equally desirable to avoid according him privileges, which Ottoman or Habsburg arrogance might interpret in a sense humiliating for the prestige of France. The Porte had, in point of fact, initially considered breaking with precedent and sending the Capigi Bashi, Ali Aga, with the title of Ambassador, but then abandoned the idea because of de La Haye's unacceptable behaviour.<sup>79</sup> The Kâ'im-makâm, Kara Mustafa Pasha, decided on his own authority to send a lesser dignitary with instructions merely to hand over the Sultan's letter and report back to Istanbul. The Sultan's choice settled on Soliman Aga, a protégé of Kara Mustafa's, and he was invested with the ceremonial 'hil'at', or robe of office. It seems,

<sup>77</sup> For detailed discussion of Ottoman titles and honorifics see Gustav Bayerle, *Pashas, begs and effendis. A historical dictionary of titles and terms in the Ottoman Empire* (Istanbul, 1997) and Gibb and Bowen, pp. 60, 120-124, 349.

<sup>78</sup> Ali Chelebi Mutaferrika was sent to Henri III in 1581; another envoy, the 'çesnigir' Hassan, had in fact already been despatched that year. The two travelled together after Henri had earlier refused to receive Hassan. Henri III was dubbed 'le roi Turc' and 'parrain du fils du grand Turc' because of the alleged closeness of his dealings with the Ottomans. See C. D. Rouillard, *The Turk in French History, Thought and Literature, 1520-1660* (Paris, 1940. Foreword dated 1938), p. 138, henceforward: Rouillard 2. Ottoman envoys also arrived in the reigns of Henri IV (1601 and 1607) and Louis XIII (1618 and 1640).

<sup>79</sup> Laurent d'Arvieux, *Mémoires*, t. IV, p. 122.

however, that there was a certain amount of collusion between Denis de la Haye and the new appointee. On the 9th June the French ambassador:

...alla voir secretement Soliman Aga, & confera avec lui sur le sujet de son voyage. Le 11. Soliman Aga accompagné seulement de quatre domestiques vint lui rendre visite. Ils s'entretinrent pendant une heure, & se separerent avec de grands témoignages d'amitié & d'estime. Son Excellence lui fit present d'une montre d'or.<sup>80</sup>

It is odd, and I think rather suspect, that there should have existed any doubts within the French foreign ministry as to Soliman Aga's exact status. Diplomatic usage is founded on precedent. It was well known that the Ottomans did not despatch embassies to Christian powers. True, Vienna had been an exception, but it was a grudging one, the result of a heavy military defeat. Despite the long-standing alliance, there had been no formal Ottoman embassy to France. Both French and Turkish records show the nature of the Ottoman missions that had arrived in Paris since 1600.<sup>81</sup> They are very few in number, particularly if we except the two unfortunate envoys murdered during an outbreak of anti-Turkish hysteria at Marseilles in 1620.<sup>82</sup>

1.)1601 Barthelemy de Cueur, "renégat de Marseilles", personal physician to Mehmed III, sent to bring a letter from the Sultan and to offer a gift of horses and a diamond studded scimitar.

2.)1607 Mustafa Aga, "chiaoux que l'empereur des Turcs envoya", brought a letter from the Sultan to renew the friendship between France and the Ottoman Empire and to negotiate for the freedom of Turkish slaves held by the French.

3.)1618 Hüseyin Çavuş ("Ureju Chaous"), "envoyé en mission spéciale", sent to announce the accession of 'Osmân II and to present the Porte's excuses for the ill treatment of the French ambassador (Philippe Harlay de Césy) under his predecessor.

4.)1640 "Un chaoux turc" sent by Sultan Ibrahim to offer Louis XIII his congratulations on the birth of the Dauphin and to renew the alliance.

These are all cases of a simple 'çavuş' or 'müteferrika', entrusted to carry written correspondence between king and sultan. They were not empowered to negotiate and were expected to return immediately, on completion of their mission, yet no difficulty was made by either Henri IV or Louis XIII over granting the Sultan's representative a direct audience with the king on any of the above occasions. In the *Cérémonial françois* Godefroy describes Mustafa Aga as handing the Sultan's letter to Henri IV in person:

Ce Chaoux (qui est comme un officier, et Exempt des Gardes du Corps en France) apporta de la part du sultan au Roy une Lettre, laquelle estoit enveloppée dans un petit sac d'un

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. pp. 127-128.

<sup>81</sup> MAE-CP *Turquie* and MAE-MD *Turquie, X, Cérémonial 1597-1795*; Godefroy, pp. 842-843. For Turkey, see Bacqué-Grammont, Kuneralp and Hitzel.

<sup>82</sup> See the *Histoire nouvelle du massacre des Turcs fait en la ville de Marseilles en Provence, le 14 de mars, mil six cens vingt, par la populace de la ville justement indignée contre ces barbares, avec la mort de deux chaoux de la Porte du Grand Seigneur, ou ambassadeurs pour iceluy. Avec le récit des occasions qui les y ont provoquez et les présages de la ruine de l'empire des Turcs* (Paris, 1620) [Reprint 1879, Henri Delmas de Grammont (ed.)].

beau cuir de Levant, attachée avec un lacet de soye à un turban rouge...Cet Ambassadeur turc, avec sa suite, fut conduit...vers sa Majesté...et mettant derechef le genoüil en terre, baisa le bord du manteau du Roy, et luy ayant présenté la Lettre du Grand Seigneur, commença sa harangue à pleine voix en sa langue....<sup>83</sup>

It was tacitly recognised that the Ottomans did not observe the norms of European diplomacy and appropriate allowances were made. Detailed records of the receptions offered to all of the above are still extant and would certainly have been accessible for reference in 1669 had it been so desired. The arrival of a properly accredited, plenipotentiary, Ottoman ambassador, in the European sense of the word, was entirely without precedent in France in 1669 and remained so, until the formal appointment of Yirmisekiz Çelebi Mehmed Efendi as ambassador in 1721.<sup>84</sup> It was most unlikely that Mehmed IV would decide to break with established usage at a moment when relations with France were perceived by the Ottomans to be deteriorating. Not only did Soliman Aga arrive without the usual retinue that would have accompanied a fully-fledged diplomatic mission, but he also came without the customary costly gifts from sovereign to sovereign. The terms 'çavuş' and 'müteferrika' were not unknown in France during the mid-seventeenth century. Examples of their correct use, at this period and earlier, occur with relative frequency in the records of the Ministère des Affaires Etrangères.<sup>85</sup> Advisers with experience of the Ottoman Empire and knowledge of the Turkish language, diplomats, missionaries, scholars, merchants, travellers, were readily to hand if required. When a similar situation arose in 1684, there was no suggestion that the envoys of the King of Siam should not be granted a royal audience or make their formal entry into the city. I am therefore led to conclude that any confusion that existed as to Soliman Aga's exact status was either a matter of deliberate choice, since to be the object of an embassy was more flattering to French susceptibilities, or else the result of a profound ignorance of Ottoman affairs in certain circles in the foreign ministry. Besides, whatever the official standing of Soliman Aga, French kings had received Turkish envoys in royal audience on previous occasions and would do so again.

In support of the latter interpretation, this was the second unfortunate incident involving the Turks within the space of little more than a year. The 'Mahomed Bei' episode would not be quickly forgotten by the Sultan and here again there is a connection with Molière. The name 'Bassa Sigale', Molière's *alter ego* in *Le Boulanger de Chalussay's Elomire hypocondre*, actually refers to a certain Jean Michel Cigala, a Rumanian confidence trickster who went under the alias of 'Mahomed Bei'. This so-called 'Famous Impostor' arrived in Paris in Turkish dress in the January of 1668, ostensibly to seek asylum after being forced to flee the Ottoman Empire. He alleged a recent conversion to Christianity as the reason for his appearance in France – apostasy was and remains a capital offence under Islamic law. He claimed to be a nephew of the unfortunate Osman II, the hero of Tristan l'Hermite's tragedy *Osman*, murdered in 1622. 'Bassa Sigale' was received in France at face value. In other words, the renegade was not only welcomed as first cousin to the reigning sultan Mehmed IV with all the honours appropriate to an Ottoman prince, he was also made much of as a notable Catholic convert. His true identity was uncovered in London, in October of the same year. The whole affair caused considerable embarrassment in Paris. 'Mahomed Bei' had been lionised at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, favoured with no fewer than three personal audiences by the king. He was admitted to the intimacy of the royal family, presented with a

<sup>83</sup> Godefroy, t. II, p. 842. I am indebted to Rouillard for this reference.

<sup>84</sup> Mehmed Efendi Said has left a fascinating account of his experiences in France, in the form of a diary, the *Sefârâtname*, translated into French by Julien-Claude Galland in 1757 and published by Gilles Veinstein as *Le Paradis des infidèles* (Paris, 1981).

<sup>85</sup> MAE-CP *Turquie* and MAE-MD *Turquie*, X, *Cérémonial 1597-1795*.

The Ottoman envoy was even left to cool his heels in the anteroom for eight hours, exactly the same amount of time that Denis de la Haye had been kept waiting, before being admitted to the 'Diwan'. A good deal of unnecessary ill humour was engendered in this manner. This interview with de Lionne took place a very few months before Molière began work on the 'turquerie' of the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*. Detailed organisation of the event itself was given to the chevalier d'Arvieux, recently returned from the Middle East:

Dès que M. de Lionne scût qu'il étoit arrivé à Issy, il m'envoya chercher, afin de s'informer de la maniere dont les Grands Visirs donnent audience aux Ministres Etrangers; & comme il vouloit les imiter, il me chargea de faire tout préparer dans ses offices, & d'instruire ses Officiers & ses domestiques de tout ce qu'ils devoient faire dans cette ceremonie, où il devoit représenter le Grand Visir. Je fis tout de mon mieux, & plus même qu'il ne me demandoit.<sup>89</sup>

According to his own account, d'Arvieux was ordered to be present to keep an eye on the interpreters, but in the end he himself had to serve as 'truchement officiel'. It seems d'Arvieux proved particularly useful, since he had spent time at the Porte and was able not only to moderate Soliman's pretensions but also keep the king and royal family entertained with his comic accounts of their conversations.<sup>90</sup> Nevertheless, he was required to act against his own better judgement in the matter of the mock 'Turkish' ceremony. Subsequent events and misunderstandings were to confirm d'Arvieux's assessment of the situation as the correct one:

Heureux s'il avoit bien voulu suivre les avis que je lui avois donné. La suite le fera voir... Quant à la ceremonie, j'avois pris la liberté de lui dire qu'il ne me sembloit pas fort convenable d'affecter des manieres Turques en France, & qu'il auroit mieux valu recevoir l'Envoyé selon la grandeur Française, que de nous abaisser à prendre les leurs, en abandonnant les nôtres; d'autant que pour garder une juste égalité, il ne falloit agir comme ils agissent; & que comme ils ne quittent ni leurs habits, ni leurs coùtumes quand ils viennent chez nous, il me sembloit que c'étoit donner atteinte à la grandeur de notre Monarque, de nous conformer à des mesures qui nous sont tout à fait étrangères.<sup>91</sup>

Since the chevalier d'Arvieux plays such a crucial part in the story, it seems appropriate at this juncture to digress for a moment to consider his background and early career in the Levant.<sup>92</sup> Laurent d'Arvieux was born into a Marseilles family of Italian origin, at this period named Arviou, on June 21<sup>st</sup> 1635. The family was regarded as noble, but impoverished, and lived in reduced circumstances on a modest estate. Following the death of his father at the hands of one of their neighbours, d'Arvieux entered the Levant trade at the young age of 15, initially working in Marseilles, to learn the business in a company owned by his cousins. His first contact with the Middle East came three years later, at the company's

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gouvernement; qu'il estoit venu pour donner une lettre de l'empereur son maistre à l'empereur de France; qu'il estoit prest à la présenter, sy l'on vouloit la recevoir; que sy l'on ne vouloit point la recevoir, on n'avoit qu'à le luy dire, et qu'il s'en retourneroit.

<sup>89</sup> Laurent d'Arvieux, *Mémoires*, t. IV, p. 130.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. p. 130 and pp. 150-51.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. p. 151.

<sup>92</sup> On Laurent d'Arvieux, see Laurent d'Arvieux, *Mémoires*; Hossain I, pp. 76-88; W. H. Lewis, *Levantine Adventurer* (London, 1962); A. L. M. Pétis de la Croix, *Lettres critiques de Hadgi Mehemed Efendy (Mme la Marquise de G\*\*\* au sujet des Mémoires de M. le Chevalier d'Arvieux. Avec des éclaircissemens curieux sur les moeurs... des orientaux. Traduites de Turc en Français par Ahmed Frengui, Renegat flamand* (Paris, 1735).

base at Smyrna [the modern Izmir] where he was sent to study business and oriental languages, Turkish, Arabic, Greek and Armenian. The experience was a happy one, despite being involved in a maritime battle against the Dutch on the voyage out. Though subject to earthquakes, Smyrna had the reputation of being the best and most peaceful of the French 'Echelles', or trading settlements, and Ottoman rule was tolerant. Here it was that he came to know and to admire the Turks.<sup>93</sup> In 1658 the young Laurent was given more responsibility and moved to Sidon, which he reached by the rather roundabout way of Egypt and Palestine. Despite some unpleasant experiences in Egypt, he had gained a taste for travel and later toured the Holy Land, Lebanon and Syria. Sidon itself, though ruined, seems to have been a pleasant place to live but the idyll was abruptly terminated by a French naval expedition to Gigeri, under the duc de Beaufort. This was intended to put a stop to Algerian piracy, but achieved nothing, save offending the Turks. The little French community was forced to flee Sidon and seek refuge with the powerful Arab emir, Turabey. Here d'Arvieux was able to perfect his knowledge of the Arabic language, to the extent that he was apparently able to pass for a native speaker – a rare achievement for a European. When the hostility subsided, he returned to Sidon, but by May 1665 was facing ruin because of the extortionate practices of the local authorities in the matter of extracting 'avaries', or 'gifts', from the merchant communities. This was money normally well spent in dealings with the Ottomans, in order to be freed from the unwelcome attentions of officialdom, but it seems that in Sidon the practice had got out of hand. Forced to return to Marseilles to raise capital in France, d'Arvieux found himself confronted with legal proceedings for bankruptcy and ruin stared him in the face.

In the end it was d'Arvieux's knowledge of Oriental languages that saved his career. In May 1666, he was offered a post in Tunis, accompanying du Moulin in order to ratify the peace treaty with the Dey and to ransom French prisoners held as slaves. This was no small undertaking, because du Moulin proved utterly incompetent in dealing with the Turks. The Gigeri expedition of 1664 had also created much ill feeling against the French in North Africa. Things did not go well. D'Arvieux lost patience with du Moulin, whose arrogant conduct was endangering the mission. Indeed, the French ships had to escape Tunis ignominiously under fire from the shore batteries, du Moulin having gratuitously attacked an English vessel in what was a neutral port. Nevertheless, the rescued slaves were grateful and sang d'Arvieux's praises to Colbert. He was now urged to present himself at court, arriving on the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1667. Colbert was impressed by his abilities and gave him a warm reception. It was at this juncture that d'Arvieux was introduced to the Maréchale de la Motte, governess to the Children of France, by Mme. du Moulin. He soon won over the five-year-old Dauphin with his tales of the Orient, and also the governess, but as Louis was then absent from Paris on the War of Devolution, he was as yet offered no post. Happily, the Orientalist Melchisedech Thévenot was looking for someone with knowledge of Arabic, to help with the translation of the Arab geographer Abu'l Fida. The two men got on famously, Thévenot offering the younger man a room in his own house at Issy, thus enabling him to maintain his contacts at Court. He also encouraged d'Arvieux to consider an academic career by applying for the chair of Arabic, which had become vacant at the Collège de France, but in this he was unsuccessful. Perhaps the bitterness of rejection may help to account for some of the acerbity in his strictures against armchair academics in the case of Pétis de la Croix. Early in 1668 however, d'Arvieux was offered the post of equerry to Mme de la Motte. This was a particularly useful position for an ambitious young man. One of d'Arvieux's most important functions was now to report to the king and queen every day, first thing in the morning, on

<sup>93</sup> The technical term 'échelles' has a precise meaning in the historical context, referring to the 'Comptoirs commerciaux établis à partir du XVI<sup>e</sup> s. par les nations chrétiennes en pays d'islam. *Échelles du Levant*, en Méditerranée orientale. *Échelles de Barbarie*, en Afrique du Nord' (Larousse).



Portrait of Soliman Aga, from Sinan Kunalalp and Frédéric Hitzel, *Ambassadeurs, ministres, chargés d'affaires et envoyés en mission spéciale de la Porte Ottomane et de la République de Turquie auprès de la France de 1483 à 1991* (Istanbul-Paris, 1991).



Hugues de Lionne, *estampe* by de Larnessin, 1664.

the health and behaviour of the royal children. Thus d'Arvieux was brought into close and intimate contact with the royal circle, constantly placed before the king's eye. It seems that the royal family took an immediate liking to him and to his entertaining anecdotes and so d'Arvieux became established at court as their resident expert on Ottoman affairs. It was thus in late October 1669 that d'Arvieux was chosen by the king to co-operate with de Lionne in arranging the reception of Soliman Aga at Suresnes. Now he had to make daily reports to the king on the conduct and disposition of the Turkish ambassador and his suite, as well as upon those of the royal children.

Soliman Aga landed at Toulon on 4th August 1669 with a suite of twenty. Risen from humble origins, he had originally served as a 'bostanji' [gardener] in the Serail. Although the 'bostanjis, dont l'exercice le plus ordinaire était de planter des choux' did, literally, serve in that capacity, their main function was to act as personal bodyguard to the Sultan's immediate family.<sup>94</sup> They formed what the new ambassador designate, Olier de Nointel, would later describe as a kind of palace militia who, on the occasional outings of the 'sultane-validé' [Queen Mother] from the palace grounds, exchanged spade and hoe for sabre and musket. Again according to de Nointel (French ambassador to the Porte from 1670 to 1680) the bostanjis '... étant aussi bien armés qu'ornés de leurs bonnets gris et blanc en pain de sucre ... faisaient la haie sur le passage du monarque...'<sup>95</sup> It was part of their function to stone passengers in any inquisitive boats which strayed too close to the Sultan's palace on the Bosphorus. Soliman Aga had risen from their ranks to a post at court carrying the title of 'müteferrika'. At this period the term 'müteferrika' is thought to have been applied to those men selected from the Sultan's personal guard to fulfil the function of envoys in addition to their ordinary duties. Distinct from the normal 'çavuş', or 'poursuivant', the corps of 'müteferrikas' never numbered more than some four hundred.<sup>96</sup> They were highly paid, magnificently mounted and accoutred, never leaving the Sultan's side when on campaign, but undoubtedly of servile origin, 'tribute children' of the 'devsirme' levy, though members of the imperial household and of the cultured Ottoman élite. Hence the complicated questions of precedence and protocol which might arise in a European court, where the positions closest to the monarch's person were filled by the nobility.

In the letters of accreditation the Sultan introduces his envoy in these terms:

Nous vous avons envoyé un de nos confidens des plus capables & des plus estimés entre nos serviteurs, nommé Soliman notre domestique, le modele des glorieux & illustres personnages, & l'appui des Grands, dont la gloire soit augmentée avec notre puissante & magnifique Lettre Impériale, de la part de notre haute & sublime Porte.<sup>97</sup>

The Kâ'im-makâm's personal letter to de Lionne also describes Soliman Aga in glowing terms, as 'une personne illustre, digne de louange, pleine de force & de veneration'.<sup>98</sup> But it is clear from these letters of introduction that Soliman Aga was not of noble birth, though the position that he held at the Porte was roughly equivalent to that of a gentleman of the king's household:

<sup>94</sup> *Lettre du marquis de Nointel*, dated 3rd May 1676, Archives des affaires étrangères, Constantinople, vol. XIII, published in A. Vandal, *L'Odyssée d'un Ambassadeur. Les Voyages du Marquis de Nointel (1670-1680)* (Paris, 1900), henceforward: Vandal 2.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> The Ottoman Turkish term 'müteferrika' is derived from the classical Arabic word 'mutafarrika', meaning 'separated, set aside'.

<sup>97</sup> Laurent d'Arvieux, *Mémoires*, t. IV, p.168.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.* p.168.

Soliman Aga ... étoit passé à l' emploi de Mutefaraca. On ne peut gueres mieux comparer cet emploi qu'à celui des Gentilshommes ordinaires de la Maison du Roi ... Le mot Muteferaca signifie un homme distingué.<sup>99</sup>

D'Arvieux's statement is contradicted on matters of minor detail by Chardin and also by Sir Paul Rycaut, but it should be remembered that it was written from memory some thirty years after these events and edited by another hand.<sup>100</sup>

Laurent d'Arvieux has also left us a description of Soliman's physical appearance, character and mannerisms, complementing the contemporary portraits in the almanachs:

Il estoit né dans la Bossine, & selon les apparences enfant du tribut. Il étoit âgé de 57 à 58 ans, d'une taille haute & bien fournie. Il avoit l'air grand, l'humeur sombre, la phisionomie peu agréable, parce ce qu'il paroissoit trop melancolique. Il avoit le visage long, basanné [sic] & marqué de petite verôle, les yeux petits et peu arrêtés, le poil grison, la barbe longue et bien fournie, le corps robuste et vigoureux. C'étoit un homme de bon sens, & d'un raisonnement solide, plein d'esprit, s'énonçant bien en peu de parôles.<sup>101</sup>

Sir John Chardin too knew Soliman personally. In 1673, after the latter's return to Constantinople, he had dealings with him in his official capacity, whilst on his own journey to Persia. Unlike d'Arvieux, Chardin did not form ties of personal friendship and writes less flatteringly:

Ce Turc s'appelloit Soliman, il étoit Muttafar Aga, c'est à dire, Huissier du Grand-Seigneur. Quand on l'envoya au Roi, c'étoit un homme à quinze aspres de gages par jour, c'est à dire, sept sous & demi. Il arriva en France à la fin de l'année 1669, & en partit l'année suivante au mois d'août. Tout Paris l'a vu, & ceux qui l'ont observé, l'ont reconnu aussi fier, aussi brutal, & aussi rusé qu'aucun turc qu'il y ait au monde.<sup>102</sup>

Haughty, arrogant, yet also apparently rather unsure of himself on foreign soil and with extreme susceptibility to any perceived slight, Soliman Aga had been an unfortunate choice of diplomat. Punctilious in his own religious observances, he made no secret of the fact that he despised the casual laxity of his French hosts in this matter. From the very moment of his arrival, he paid no attention whatever to the honours offered him. Whole towns – Toulon, Marseilles, Aix, Lyon, Fontainebleau – might turn out to greet him on his journey through France to Paris, fire their guns in salute, send him gifts, without seeming to make the slightest impression. He caused a scandal at Marseilles by receiving the Echevins without deigning to dismount from his horse.<sup>103</sup> Similar episodes marked his passage everywhere; proud and disdainful, it seemed that nothing could shake his 'gravité insolente'. Part of the confusion over his title had in fact arisen through the conduct of Soliman Aga himself during this journey through France. He did nothing to change the impression of local dignitaries that he was a fully accredited ambassador in order to enhance his personal status, when he knew perfectly well that his instructions were to hand over the Sultan's letter and return at once to Istanbul. Apparently, at least according to his own admission to d'Arvieux,

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. p.125.

<sup>100</sup> D'Arvieux died in 1702 leaving his *Mémoires* in an unfinished condition. They were edited and published in 1735 by the R.-P. Labat, which may account for any errors and inconsistencies.

<sup>101</sup> Laurent d'Arvieux, *Mémoires*, t. IV, p. 125.

<sup>102</sup> Sir John Chardin, *Voyages en Perse et autres lieux*, p. 18 (Amsterdam, 1735).

<sup>103</sup> Laurent d'Arvieux, *Mémoires*, t. IV, p. 175. See also Vandal 1, p. 67; Rouillard 1, p. 43.

he regarded the whole trip as a chance to make his fortune, as others had done in a similar situation.<sup>104</sup> His own retainers disapproved of his actions in this and allegedly threatened to complain to the Kâ'im-makâm on their return. On his arrival at Paris, however, instead of the anticipated official entry into the city he was installed on the outskirts at Issy, because of the element of doubt hanging over his status. Here he was lodged with a M. de la Bazinière, though lavishly entertained at royal expense.<sup>105</sup> Here also large numbers of persons of quality came to visit, or rather to view, him, while preparations were made for his proper reception in the capital. The delay did nothing to improve his disposition.

De Lionne had made up his mind to receive Soliman Aga in audience at his own private residence in Suresnes, observing the ritual in use at the Porte, as had been decided earlier. Everything was to be done in the Oriental style, including the adoption of Turkish dress by the French, even down to the servants. This is well documented by official sources.<sup>106</sup> The court was gratified with the spectacle of a 'turquerie' conceived, prepared and enacted by the highest officials of state in the most absolute gravity. De Lionne, wearing

...une longue robe de satin noir avec la Croix du saint Esprit en broderie d'argent, & avec une Croix d'or du même Ordre couverte de pierreries, attachée à un cordon bleu qui lui pendoit sur la poitrine...<sup>107</sup>

took the lead, as 'grand vizir', while his uncle, M. de Rives, played the part of the 'Kâhya Bey', one of the three leading dignitaries on the grand vizir's staff.<sup>108</sup> It was de Rives who greeted Soliman, as he descended from his carriage at nine o'clock on that morning of the 4<sup>th</sup> November 1669, and took him to an anteroom where he was served coffee, then left to cool his heels for the eight hours that had been decided upon. Laurent d'Arvieux kept the envoy company while he waited, since he spoke Turkish fluently. A certain sympathy seems to have sprung up between them during this long delay.

The main reception room was a triumph of the imagination run riot. Furniture, fabrics and cushions were arranged in imitation of the 'diwan' of the grand vizir. It was known that Ottoman officials did not sit on chairs, but on a kind of dais covered in rich carpets, normally placed in an alcove in the wall, official visitors being received seated. Only fully accredited ambassadors were permitted to join the vizir on the dais. Persian carpets, woven from silk and shot through with gold thread, accordingly covered a low platform in the reception room. A day bed was placed there, draped in cloth of gold, on which de Lionne was seated uncomfortably in the Turkish fashion throughout the interview, his back supported by

<sup>104</sup> Laurent d'Arvieux, *Mémoires*, t. IV, pp. 182-82.

<sup>105</sup> The celebrated doctor, Guy Patin, refers to Soliman Aga in letters to his colleague Falconet at Lyons:

On parle fort ici d'un officier turc qui est envoyé cie par son maître, on ne sait pour quelle affaire il vient en France; il a été quelque temps à Fontainebleau et il est maintenant à Issy, à deux lieues de Paris, chez M. de la Bazinière, ci-devant trésorier de l'épargne (de Paris le 21 nov. 1669).

Guy Patin, *Lettres* (Paris, 1846), p. 717, henceforward, Guy Patin, *Lettres*.

<sup>106</sup> The official ceremonial was published by E. de Barthélemy in the *Bulletin du bibliophile*, septembre – octobre 1881. See also Champollion-Figeac, *Documents historiques inédits*, t. IV, p. 502; d'Arvieux, *Mémoires*, tome IV, p. 133ff. the *Archives des affaires étrangères*, Constantinople, tome IX; the *Journal* of Olivier Lefèvre d'Ormesson, vol. II, p. 576; Vandal I, pp. 68 and 70.

<sup>107</sup> Laurent d'Arvieux, *Mémoires*, t. IV, p. 131-32.

<sup>108</sup> The Kahya Bey acted, at this period in Ottoman history, as the Grand Vizir's general deputy, particularly in home and military affairs. He, together with his two fellow "ministers", the Re'isü'l-Küttâb (the principal secretary of the Chancery, who also managed foreign affairs), and the Çavus Basi (master of ceremonies at the Diwan and vice-president at the Grand Vizir's law-court), provided three of the six Secretaries of State see Gibb and Bowen, p. 60, pp. 120-124, and p. 349.

brocade cushions, in imitation of the imperious manner of the grand vizir holding court. The servants were suitably instructed and attired. Lords and ladies were permitted by special invitation to assemble in a neighbouring gallery to view the spectacle from behind the glass doors. Embarrassingly, it rapidly became apparent that there was a problem with the interpreters. According to d'Arvieux, de Lionne had originally invited him to attend in a listening capacity, to confirm the accuracy or otherwise of translation.<sup>109</sup> This was fortunate, since the 'interprètes attitrés du roi', de la Croix and Dipy, for Turkish and Arabic respectively, patently could not cope. Pétis de la Croix was an academic, who possessed only a reading knowledge of Turkish and had never been required to speak it, not having travelled in the Levant. Pierre Dipy had been brought over by Colbert from Aleppo to interpret Arabic; he only spoke that language and was thus of little use. To make matters worse, de la Croix stuttered and stumbled to such an extent that the Turkish delegation could not make out what he was saying, and asked for him to be replaced with d'Arvieux, who had made a very favourable impression. Soliman Aga, in point of fact, had brought his own interpreter with him, the Sieur de la Fontaine, but de Lionne suspected the latter of acting secretly in de La Haye's interests and would not agree to his use. The wily diplomat, still hoping to avoid recall, had personally paid all the dragoman's expenses in the hope that Fontaine would be able to influence matters at the foreign ministry in his favour.<sup>110</sup> Significantly, according to Chardin, de La Haye also paid Soliman Aga's expenses out of his own pocket:

...Les Provençaux qui étoient en Levant, l'appelloient l'Ambassadeur de Mr. de la Haye; & ils osoient assurer, que Mr. de la Haye avoit fourni l'argent pour son équipage. La vraisemblance qu'ils mettoient en avant pour le prouver, c'est que l'équipage de Soliman étoit bien éloigné de la magnificence des Ambassadeurs Turcs. Mr. de la Haye se défendoit des atteintes qu'on lui faisoit sur cet équipage, en disant que Soliman Aga n'avoit pas eu le tems de s'équiper.<sup>111</sup>

De Lionne's guests were able to watch from a distance as his 'Excellence mahometane' entered with his suite, bowed profoundly three times on reaching the centre of the room and, touching his hand to forehead, mouth and breast, gave the traditional oriental greeting. De Lionne responded by slightly raising his hat, then sat down upon the sofa in the agreed manner, at the same time as the envoy was brought a footstool, covered in Damascene silk and fringed with gold, but pointedly placed off and below the level of the dais. The subsequent interview was, in so far as the audience could judge, somewhat awkward and appeared liable to degenerate into a heated argument from one moment to the next. The Turk displayed a distinct lack of deference and rather more dogged tenacity in insisting that he be granted a royal audience than had been expected. After a suitable amount of time had been allowed to elapse, servants brought in coffee, sherbet and incense burning on a tray, which they offered on their knees to the Secretary of State but turning to the guest, presented to him standing. This was the way that the grand vizir would have signalled that an interview was at an end. Soliman thereupon withdrew, without de Lionne taking a single step to escort him, and was led into the garden where those guests who had been invited joined him, agog with curiosity. Soliman Aga, however, repaid what must have appeared as the studied insult of his reception and dismissal, by turning his back upon them all. The time for prayer having arrived, he sought out a suitable spot, had a carpet fetched, and began the ritual prayers and prostrations.

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<sup>109</sup> Laurent d'Arvieux, *Mémoires*, t. IV, p. 131.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.* p. 132.

<sup>111</sup> Chardin, *Voyages en Perse et autres lieux*, t. I, pp. 18-19 (Amsterdam, 1735).

De Lionne's letter to the king, informing him of the details of the interview is still extant. He confirms having, despite all appearances to the contrary,

...s'être parfaitement bien acquitté de la fonction que Sa Majesté lui avait confiée pour un quart d'heure de son grand vizir.

In the same despatch he mentions the cause of the heated exchange between them. The envoy had brought two letters with him, one from the Kâ'im-makâm de Lionne, one from the Sultan to the King, but:

Je ne pus jamais lui persuader par aucune raison que je puisse dire de me rendre la lettre du Grand Seigneur pour Votre Majesté.<sup>112</sup>

The Turk insisted that he had strict instructions to hold on to his precious charge at all costs and would undoubtedly answer for it with his head, were he to place the sultan's letter in other hands than those of the 'empereur de France' (Louis assumed the title of emperor abroad, for reasons of precedence).

The conflict now began in earnest between the rigid etiquette of the French court, which admitted only properly accredited ambassadors to a formal audience, whereas an envoy might be received informally by the king where deemed necessary, and Soliman Aga's insistence on ambassadorial status. If it were possible, by way of an exception, to give in to his demands for a formal reception, this would have to be done without compromising the dignity of the king of France or establishing an undesirable precedent. Since there was doubt as to Soliman Aga's exact standing, before a proper decision could be reached it was necessary to establish what had happened at Constantinople in similar circumstances and how the Sultan had dealt with French envoys despatched without the title of ambassador.<sup>113</sup> Meanwhile, Soliman Aga continued to be entertained at royal expense at Issy, seeing the usual sights and attending the Comédie on at least three occasions, according to Robinet as guest of the theatres:

Le Turc, Ministre de la Porte,  
 Toûjours, d'une tres-belle sorte,  
 Se divertit, vraiment, Ici,  
 Ayant été, tous ces jours-ici,  
 S'êbaudir à la Comédie  
 Tant de France que d'Italie:  
 Sçavoir à l'Hôtel, aux Marais,  
 Et, puis, dans le Royal Palais,  
 Non, à ses Dépens, d'assurance,  
 Mais, grace à la magnificence  
 De Messieurs les Comédiens,  
 Qui, comme généreux Chrêtiens,  
 Et pour donner au grand Monarque,  
 De leur zèle, une digne marque,  
 Ont bien voulu le régaler  
 D'un petit Plat de leur Métier,  
 Tant lui, que sa longue Sequelle,

<sup>112</sup> Vandal I, p. 71.

<sup>113</sup> Guy Patin, *Lettres*, p. 721: 'L'envoyé turc est toujours ici près, à Issy, et le roi ne lui veut pas donner audience qu'on n'ait nouvelle de Constantinople, où l'on a envoyé un courrier'

Qui, fort peu leste, & fort peu belle,  
 Donne aux Françaises, plus d'éfroy,  
 Qu'à leurs Maris, comme je croy.<sup>114</sup>

On consulting the *Calendrier électronique* for March 1670, we find that Cinthio's *Arlequin esprit aérien* was playing at the Comédie Italienne and Donneau de Visé's *Amours de Vénus et d'Adonis* at the Marais, with music by Charpentier. It is fascinating to speculate that the Turks might easily have been entertained by Molière himself upon the stage, as well as furnishing him with a subject for a later date. *Pourceaugnac* was playing on the 6<sup>th</sup> October 1669, *Les Amans magnifiques* on the 4<sup>th</sup> February 1670, both within the requisite time frame, but sadly there is no record of Soliman Aga's attendance at either.

D'Arvieux accompanied him throughout this period, on orders to report back daily to de Lionne. The records of their conversations, still extant in the archives of the *Ministère des affaires étrangères* for Constantinople (t. IX), make for interesting reading. It soon emerged that there was yet another cause for concern. Soliman had been only too completely fooled by the charade that had just taken place at Suresnes. He had indeed mistaken de Lionne for Louis's 'Grand Vizir', but unfortunately had also assumed that the minister was wielding power in the name of an indolent and *fainéant* king. It was notorious in Istanbul that the youthful Mehmed IV, himself a passionate hunter, left affairs of state in the hands of the Köprülüs while he busied himself in the chase. By contrast, it was equally well known in France that Louis XIV took a particular pride in exercising all the functions of sovereignty personally, and had declared his intention of being his own prime minister. It was injurious to his dignity that anyone, albeit a visiting oriental should assume that he had delegated any portion of his supreme authority. Soliman was accordingly informed that de Lionne was not 'premier ministre', merely on an equal footing with Colbert and Louvois, but it was clumsily done and only made matters worse. The Turk now believed that Louis had been sufficiently irresponsible as to divide power amongst three grand vizirs. De Lionne found himself obliged to grant a further audience to the Turkish delegation, under the same conditions as the first, on the 19th November 1669, in which it was to be made clear that the King of France directed affairs of state in person and shared power with no one. In this way, it was hoped, his superiority to the Ottoman Sultan would be underlined. The interview was once again rather strained, but this time d'Arvieux acted as official interpreter. Soliman Aga had made a formal complaint about the quality of the interpreting at the previous interview. La Fontaine had been incandescent with rage over la Croix in particular, who had proved unable even to translate the letter to de Lionne accurately. Matters came to such a head that d'Arvieux had had to intercede with the king on behalf of the 'interprètes attitrés', who had purchased their posts and would be ruined if dismissed.<sup>115</sup> De Lionne lectured the hapless envoy at length, but unfortunately his lesson on the government of France left its recipient unmoved. 'Je ne suis pas venu ici', we are told that he replied, 'pour m'instruire de la maniere dont la France est gouvernée.'<sup>116</sup>

Obedient to his instructions, Soliman continued to demand a royal audience more insistently than ever. Refusing to let the Sultan's letter out of his possession, he declared that he would place it only into the hands of Louis XIV in person. The resulting impasse hinged upon the vexed question of Soliman Aga's status as envoy or ambassador. According to Chardin, there was some justification for this hesitation on the part of the French. Soliman Aga was a protégé of the Kâ'im-makâm, Kara Mustafa Pasha, and as such had incurred the

<sup>114</sup> *Le Théâtre et l'opéra vus par les gazetiers Robinet et Laurent (1670-1678)* / texts établis, présentés et annotés par William Brooks [Biblio 17] (Paris, 1993), henceforward: Robinet [Brooks].

<sup>115</sup> Laurent d'Arvieux, *Mémoires*, t. IV, pp. 138-40, p. 150.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 146-47, p. 149.



Sultan Mehmed IV from a contemporary portrait.

enmity of the latter's political enemy, the powerful grand vizir Ahmed Köprülü, having been appointed during his absence at the siege of Candia. Again we see the involvement of de la Haye:

...l'équipage de Soliman étoit bien éloigné de la magnificence de celui des Ambassadeurs Turcs...le nom d'Ambassadeur ne s'étoit point trouvé dans les dépêches de Soliman. Il [de la Haye] répondit à cela, que pendant que Soliman attendoit à la Cale Saint Nicolas, proche de Cerigo, que Mr. d'Almeras le vînt prendre, le Grand-Vizir s'assura de la prise de Candie; & que n'ayant plus à ménager la France, ni à craindre ses secours, ce ministre changea les titres, les instructions & les dépêches de Soliman, retirant les premières, & lui en envoyant d'autres. Mais qu'il est très vrai, que Soliman Aga lui avoit été nommé, & donné pour Ambassadeur: que pour preuve de cela, le Grand-Seigneur lui donna la Veste & le Sabre qu'il donne à ses Ambassadeurs, & que la Forteresse de Napoli de Romanie le salua avec le canon à son arrivée.<sup>117</sup>

The vexed question of the royal audience was several times debated in Council:

On agita plusieurs fois dans le Conseil si le Roi donneroit Audience à Soliman comme à un Ambassadeur, ou seulement comme à un Envoyé, & si le Roi le verroit en public ou en particulier. On prétendoit que le mot *Elchi*, qui signifie Ambassadeur, selon nos Interpretes François, ne se trouvoit point dans sa Lettre, & que par conséquent on ne le devoit recevoir que comme Envoyé. Mais ils ne sçavoient pas que le mot *Elchi* signifie également Ambassadeur & Envoyé chez les Turcs qui ne mettent point de difference entre ces deux especes de Ministres, & il paroît qu'il [sic] ont raison; car tout Envoyé est Ambassadeur, & tout Ambassadeur est Envoyé, si on prend ce mot dans sa veritable signification, & qu'il n'y a pas long-tems que l'on a distingué en France ceux qui sont décorés de ces titres, faute d'être instruit de cela, & malgré tout ce que je pûs dire, on voulut contester la qualité de Soliman. Mais après bien des contestations, il fut enfin resolu qu'il auroit Audience du Roi, d'une maniere qui tiendroit le milieu entre les ceremonies que l'on pratique pour les Ambassadeurs, & celles qui sont en usage pour les simples Envoyés.

Il me semble qu'on se seroit épargné bien des embarras, si au lieu de tant de disputes sur sa qualité, on l'avoit reçu & traité comme Ambassadeur: il n'en auroit pas coûté davantage, on auroit ménagé bien des dépenses, & on auroit renvoyé Soliman bien plutôt [sic] chez lui.

M. de Guitri, que son seul voyage en Turquie, & un séjour très-court qu'il y avoit fait, faisoient regarder comme un homme bien au fait de toutes les ceremonies Turques, & qui étoit d'ailleurs extrêmement zélé pour la gloire du Roi, fut chargé de faire préparer tout ce qui convenoit pour l'Audience que Sa Majesté vouloit donner à Soliman. Il s'en acquitta très-bien, comme on le verra par la relation que j'en ferai.<sup>118</sup>

After further hesitation, the request for a royal audience was finally granted for the 5th December 1669. This was to be styled most carefully between the formal reception of an ambassador and the type of interview that had been accorded on previous occasions to an envoy. The practical arrangements were again entrusted to the marquis de Guîtres. On the 3rd December, Soliman Aga was moved to the Hôtel de Venise, now staying within the gates of

<sup>117</sup> Sir John Chardin, *Voyages en Perse et autres lieux*, pp. 18-19 (Amsterdam, 1735).

<sup>118</sup> Laurent d'Arvieux, *Mémoires*, t. IV, pp. 151-53.

Paris for the first time.<sup>119</sup> It was intended to use the occasion to impress upon the Turk the magnificence and state in which the King of France held court. His eyes were to be dazzled by the rays of the sun upon which he had so recklessly insisted on gazing. It was to be hoped that their brilliance would be too much for him to bear. Arrangements were made accordingly. The interview took place at Saint-Germain-en-Laye. Soliman

...étoit vêtu d'une veste de satin blanc, avec une grande robe de drap couleur de feu doublée de martre zibeline; un bonnet de velours rouge entouré d'un turban de mousseline blanche, dont les extrémités avoient un tissu d'or.<sup>120</sup>

The royal household was similarly adorned in its most splendid uniforms; indeed the entire court was present to add lustre to the occasion in a sumptuously decorated gallery. Louis himself appeared sitting on a silver throne:

Son habit de brocard d'or étoit tellement couvert de diamans, qu'il sembloit être environné de lumière; son chapeau avoit un bouquet de plumes blanches, avec une agraffe de gros diamans.<sup>121</sup>

But, alas, the magnificent spectacle of the 'Roi-Soleil' failed to make an impact on the Turks, who were too used to the pomp and ceremony of the Sultan's court. The envoy actually dared to mount the steps to the throne, pushing his lack of respect so far as to expect the King of France to rise to receive the Grand Seigneur's letter from his upraised hands, where it lay in 'un grand Sac de Brocart d'or, & d'argent, d'environ deux pieds de long'. This was scornfully refused. The letter was handed directly to Laurent d'Arvieux, who was ordered to scan it urgently to see whether the term 'Elchi' appeared, or if another word was used, then to translate it at leisure for de Lionne the next day. Meanwhile, Soliman Aga was left to stand with his head bowed and his arms crossed on his breast, in the traditional position of respect amongst the Turks. He had intended to ask for the release of all Turkish prisoners in French hands, as an acceptable gesture of friendship from King to Sultan, but was not given the opportunity and had to retire instead, very discomforted and, according to one eye-witness at least, shrugging his shoulders with a sour face.<sup>122</sup> He himself had affected not to notice the

<sup>119</sup> '...L'envoyé du Grand Turc n'est plus à Issy, il est aujourd'hui logé dans Paris, derrière la Place-Royale, à l'Hôtel de Ville: il a été à Saint-Germain en cérémonie, mais on ne sait encore rien de particulier de ces affaires' (de Paris, le 13 décembre, 1669). Guy Patin, *Lettres*, p. 722.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid. p. 157; but compare the *Journal* of Olivier Lefèvre d'Ormesson on Soliman's costume, pp. 577-578:

Après le disner, chez le roy, et sur la terrasse voir passer le Turc... Sur les trois heures, le Turc arriva à cheval, précédé de vingt Turcs, tous avec des robes vertes de serge et des turbans fort sales, luy avec une veste rouge de camelot au plus (car il n'y parut point d'or ny de soye), entre M. de Berlise, introducteur des ambassadeurs, et un autre, et après suivoient sept ou huit autres à cheval aussy mal vestus que les autres. Rien ne parut si pauvre ny si misérable. Le chef paroist un homme grisonant de cinquante ans, la barbe longue.

<sup>121</sup> Laurent d'Arvieux, *Mémoires*, t. IV, p. 159.

<sup>122</sup> Accounts of the royal audience are to be found in Laurent d'Arvieux, *Mémoires*, t. IV, p. 155 ff. and the *Journal* of Olivier Lefèvre d'Ormesson, p. 578:

Il ne tourna pas la teste à droite ny à gauche pour voir ces troupes; il mit pied à terre à la première porte du chasteau neuf, et, à son retour, y remonta à cheval et retourna à Chatou, d'où il estoit parti. Nous scusmes qu'il estoit entré assez fier dans la gallerie, tenant à deux mains un sac de toile d'or, où estoit sa lettre; il fit trois révérences, baissant seulement la teste, et donna sa lettre au roy et demanda qu'elle fust lue. Le roy la fit ouvrir, et, comme elle estoit longue, il die qu'il la verroit et feroit response. Le Turc se plaignit que le roy ne s'estoit pas levé pour recevoir sa lettre, et dit qu'on le traitoit mal. Le roy répliqua qu'il en usoit comme il avoit accoustumé, et le Turc se retira mal content.



Soliman Aga's audience with Louis XIV. Audience donnée par Louis XIV à Saint-Germain-en-Laye, le 5 décembre 1669, *Almanach royal pour 1670*. H. 0,15 – L. 0, 255. *Bibliothèque nationale*, from Albert Vandal, *L'Odyssée d'un Ambassadeur: les voyages du Marquis de Nointel* (Paris, 1900).

royal splendour, by now under the misapprehension that everything, both the royal audience itself and the two at Suresnes, had been deliberately arranged to offer a gratuitous insult. It was believed that he had ordered his suite to behave in a similar churlish manner, but D'Arvieux contradicts this popular misconception:

On remarqua qu'il sortit avec un air de chagrin. Il s'étoit mis en tête que tout ce superbe appareil n'avoit été étalé que pour braver en quelque sorte le faste Ottoman & il crût s'en venger en ne jettant pas les yeux dessus. On avoit même observé la même chose dans ses domestiques, à qui on prétendoit qu'il avoit défendu de rien regarder. Mais comment auroit-il prévu ce qui lui auroit donné du chagrin, puisqu'il avoit lieu de croire qu'on lui devoit tout accorder, & qu'en effet le Roi avoit beaucoup plus fait qu'il n'a coûtume de faire en pareilles occasions. Il vaut mieux croire que sa fierté et son humeur sombre ne lui avoient pas permis de faire cette reflexion.<sup>123</sup>

The envoy is also said to have salvaged his hurt pride by giving vent to a number of offensive remarks, replying, when the size and magnificence of the jewels adorning the king's robes were pointed out, that his master's horse had better on its harness on ceremonial or state occasions. The Sultan did not wear jewels upon his person, apart from a single, huge diamond in the *agraffe* of his turban, considering such a display to be beneath his dignity. It emerged later that it was the Sultan's custom to rise to receive an ambassador as a mark of respect and to place a robe of honour upon their shoulders. These were valuable, being of gold brocade and jewelled, and were expected perquisites of office. Soliman Aga, unfamiliar with 'Frankish' customs, could not understand why Louis had not done this and took the omission as a personal affront. He was only partially mollified when d'Arvieux pointed out that it was Louis's practice to present valuable gifts, such as gold chains, jewelled miniatures of himself and so forth, on leave-taking. His own rudeness to the king was emphasised, 'que sa mauvaise humeur lui fit faire gestes & des grimaces que tout le monde remarqua...' <sup>124</sup> It was further pointed out that he had brought no gifts himself, as would have been usual for a diplomatic mission.<sup>125</sup> The Turks viewed the giving of gifts as payment of tribute, and therefore had not done so. Interestingly, it does seem that he presented Louis with a quantity of coffee and, although it was known in France, having first been introduced around 1654 as a curiosity, the taste for it had not yet been acquired. It was Soliman Aga's visit that excited great interest in the drink and made it fashionable. The first Parisian coffee-house was opened shortly afterwards by an Armenian in the Foire Saint-Germain. These unfortunate misunderstandings were naturally omitted from the semi-official account of the audience given in the *Gazette* on the 7th and the 19th December, the *Relation de l'Audience donné par*

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Guy Patin confirms, 'Le député du Grand Turc s'en retourne malcontent', *Lettres*, p. 727.

<sup>123</sup> Laurent d'Arvieux, *Mémoires*, t. IV, p. 164.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.* p. 170.

<sup>125</sup> The accounts of the royal audience given by d'Arvieux and Olivier Lefèvre d'Ormesson are flatly contradicted by de Chassepol, writing his *Histoire des grands vizirs, Mahomet Coprogli pacha et Achmet Coprogli pacha* some six years later. Here we are presented with what had by then become the "establishment" version of events:

Soliman Mustafefaga ... fut receu magnifiquement, & demeura tout étonné & surpris d'admiration, à l'aspect de la Majesté & de la Grandeur de l'incomparable Monarque des François, à qui il presenta une Lettre de la part du Grand Seigneur, remplie de Titres les plus pompeux, & de Qualitez les plus magnifiques & les plus honorables que jamais Empereur Ottoman ait données à aucun Potentat. Cet Ambassadeur séjourna quelque temps à Paris, où après avoir admiré la politesse & la magnificence des François, il retourna chargé de riches presens, rendre compte de sa legation au Sultan Mahomet, & au Grand vizir Acmet Coprogli [pp. 266–67].

*Sa Majesté à Soliman Mouta Faraca, envoyé du Grand Seigneur.*

The court had been dumbfounded at the sheer audacity and arrogance of the stranger, which technically amounted to 'lèse majesté' and even, given the belief in the divine origins of royal power, to sacrilege. To reduce the visitor to a more proper frame of mind, orders were given that he should be put under what was in reality a form of house arrest and kept isolated for a while. This gave him leisure to reflect on the likely consequences of failing to carry out an order of the Grand Turk, a rather more serious matter than offending a 'Most Christian King'. Such uncomfortable thoughts, combined with the harshness of a regime intended to underline the unsuitability of his behaviour, threw him into a deep state of melancholy. Prey to depression, he took to his bed and turned his face to the wall, refusing to eat to the point that life and sanity appeared to be equally in danger. When d'Arvieux offered to fetch a doctor, he answered that God alone could help him now. Accused of seeking to help Turkish prisoners escape from France by hiding them in his suite, he pleaded rather pathetically: 'il est naturel aux Esclaves et aux oiseaux de chercher leur liberté'.<sup>126</sup> It was a suitably chastened envoy that now begged for royal clemency and made repeated requests for the long delayed permission to leave:

...étant venus ici sous la bonne foi...Sa Majesté ne souffrira pas qu'on nous traite comme des prisonniers d'Etat, & que nous soyons traités plus rigoureusement que des Esclaves; & quand nous l'aurions mérité, nous ne sommes que des vers de terre, des atômes imperceptibles, indignes de la colère d'un si grand Monarque qui doit mettre sa gloire plutôt à pardonner qu'à châtier.<sup>127</sup>

He did not hesitate to declare how he would deal with those of his entourage who might have given cause for offence: 'Je les pourrais sous le bâton'.<sup>128</sup> We should note here that the bastinado was not a minor punishment: though often inflicted for trivial misdemeanours, it could consist of up to two or even, in some cases, four hundred blows, in either of which events it was a sentence of death. There was nothing more typically Turkish than the bastinado inflicted on M. Jourdain. Indeed, d'Arvieux had earlier had to intervene to suppress the envoy's enthusiasm for the practice:

Je lui dis encore, que lui et ses gens avoient voulu donner des coups de bâton aux Sujets de Sa Majesté...qu'il devoit se souvenir que les Loix de son Païs veulent que tout Chrétien qui a menacé un Turc ait la main coupée, & qu'il soit brulé vif s'il a frappé...qu'il devoit être assuré qu'on en useroit de même avec lui & ses gens...parce qu'en matiere d'honneur et de Religion nous avons autant de délicatesse que les Turcs...<sup>129</sup>

It had long been suspected in government circles that Soliman was profiting from his visit to act the spy and this probably was the case, despite the Turk's vehement denials:

Nous ne sommes pas venus en France pour épier ce qui s'y passe; ce n'est ni notre dessein ni l'intention de notre Maître'.<sup>130</sup>

Espionage was a normal function of a diplomatic mission and indeed we know that Soliman

<sup>126</sup> Laurent d'Arvieux, *Mémoires*, t. IV, p. 190.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.* p. 192.

<sup>128</sup> Karro 1; MAE-CP *Turquie IX*.

<sup>129</sup> Laurent d'Arvieux, *Mémoires*, t. IV, pp. 179-180.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

Aga was later to provide the prototype for Marana's *Espion Turc* of 1683. Certainly the envoy had been in contact with other Turks resident in Paris, and he stood accused of fomenting unrest amongst the Turkish prisoners of war held there, hence d'Arvieux's strict instructions to furnish daily reports of their conversations to de Lionne, 'J'eus bien-tôt gagné sa confiance, & et je m'en servois selon les ordres que j'avois pour découvrir ce qu'on souhaitait sçavoir, & dont je rendois compte chaque jour à M. de Lionne'.<sup>131</sup> The account of one of d'Arvieux's visits to Soliman, on the 18th December, when the latter was suffering from 'dépression physique et morale' is still extant. Evidently, he at least did not share in the general hostility of feeling towards the Turkish envoy and could show some detachment in his judgements:

Je remarquai dans cette conversation & dans les autres que j'eus avec lui, qu'il étoit plein d'esprit, de bon sens, & d'une politique solide & aisée. Je ne pouvois assez admirer qu'un homme qui avoit passé la plus grande partie de sa vie dans les jardins du Serail, eût tant de lumieres et tant de perfections.<sup>132</sup>

In the end, since Soliman Aga had no powers to conclude an agreement, his mission having been little more than a preliminary enquiry to ascertain Louis' intentions towards the Porte, it was decided to treat him with leniency and to overlook the irregularities in his conduct. He was to be sent back to Constantinople in the company of a duly authorised person to set out French grievances, French demands, and the conditions under which the former alliance could be renewed. To d'Arvieux's bitter disappointment, the king's choice fell upon the marquis de Nointel, who was entrusted with the task and the repatriation of the Turkish delegation in the summer of 1670. But memories of Soliman's haughty disdain were obviously still rankling when Louis dictated a *mémoire du roy* with explicit instructions to his new ambassador. It begins:

Le dit Sieur de Nointel aura sceu l'incident qui arriva dans l'audience que Sa Majesté donna au dit Aga où celui-cy avec une audace extraordinaire et injurieuse à Sa Majesté et par un moyen qui méritoit chastiment prétendit au préjudice de la dignité de Sa dite Majesté et contre la raison et l'usage l'obliger à se lever de son throsne où Elle estoit assise pour recevoir la lettre du Grand Seigneur.<sup>133</sup>

It is interesting to compare contemporary pictorial representations of de Nointel's audience in Constantinople with that of Soliman in Paris [see overleaf].

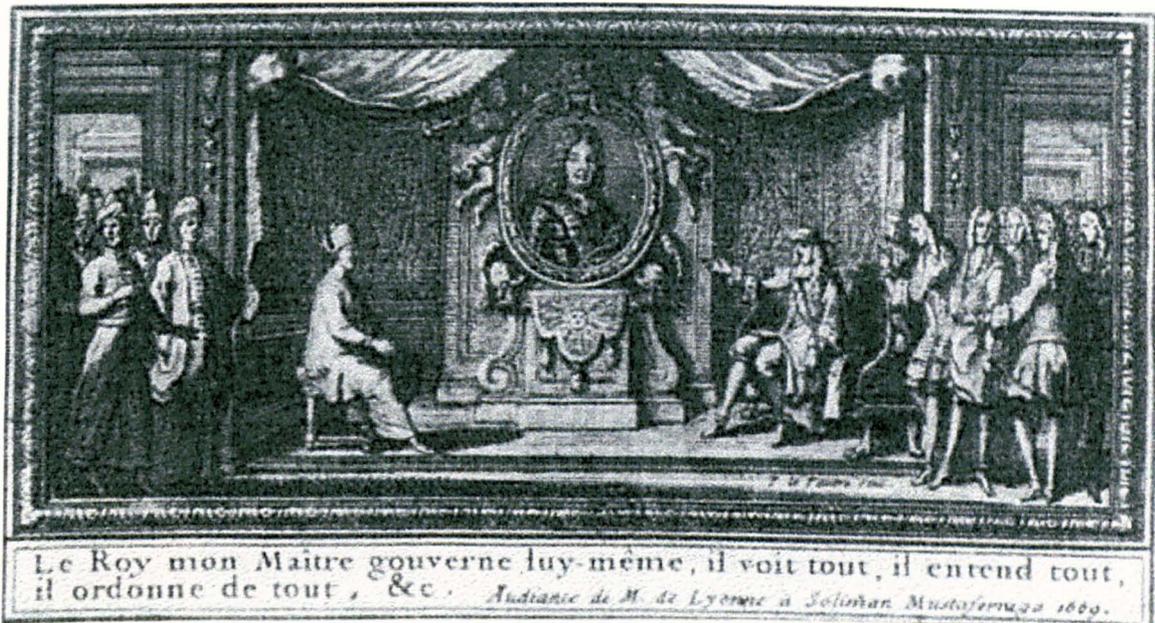
The king had decided to spend the rest of the hunting season that year at Chambord. Amongst the *divertissements* to be offered for relaxation after the chase, there was to be a comédie-ballet, a form of entertainment of which the monarch was inordinately fond. Molière was already in the process of writing the words and Lully the music. Louis, wanting to give the performance an aura of topicality, seems to have suggested that the writers should include a 'turquerie'. Soliman Aga and his entourage had made the Orient fashionable again; its elaborate courtesy, its flowery language, its unshakeable vanity and also its naivety, had rendered it the major topic of everyday conversation. According to the traditional version of events, piqued at Soliman's 'gravité insolente', the king would not have been too unhappy to punish his pride by making him appear an object of ridicule upon

<sup>131</sup> Ibid. p. 143-44; see also *Archives des affaires étrangères*, Constantinople, t. IX, fol. 205-207, published in Karro 1.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> *Recueil des Instructions données aux ambassadeurs et ministres de France, tome XXIX, Turquie, ed. Pierre Duparc, p. 53 (Paris, 1969).*

The 'Oriental' Ambassador in 17<sup>th</sup> Century French Comedy.



Soliman Aga's audience with de Lionne, from Albert Vandal, *L'Odyssée d'un Ambassadeur: les voyages du Marquis de Nointel* (Paris, 1900).



De Nointel's audience with Mehmed IV. Renouvellement des capitulations. Tableau appartenant à M. de Maindreville. Héliog. Dujardin, Imp. Dumas Vorzet (E. Plon . Nourrit & Cie. Edit.), from Albert Vandal, *L'Odyssée d'un Ambassadeur: les voyages du Marquis*

the stage. Great care was taken to make the details authentic. Once a 'cérémonie turque' had been decided upon, Laurent d'Arvieux was naturally chosen to help with the writing because of his recent, personal experience of the Middle East, and as a friend of the royal family whom he had kept entertained with daily reports of his conversations with Soliman after the royal audience:

J'entrai, ils se mirent à table. M. le Maréchal de Bellefond premier Maître d'Hôtel y servoit. Le Roi me commanda de lire mon dialogue, qui leur servit de divertissement pendant le repas, outre les questions & les raisonnemens qu'on me fit sur les manieres de Turquie; & comme mes réponses étoient fort gaies, ils y prenoient beaucoup de plaisir. Le Roi en rioit modérément, aussi-bien que Mme. de la Vallière; mais Monsieur, & Madame de Montespan faisoient des éclats de rire qu'on auroit entendus de deux cens pas. A l'issuë de la table, le Roi entra dans un cabinet avec Monsieur: pendant ce-tems-là, j'entretenois les deux Dames de la maniere dont on se marioit en Turquie, à quoi elles prirent du plaisir.<sup>134</sup>

The Chevalier was even asked to send to Marseilles for his Turkish costumes to lend further realism to his accounts of life in the Orient. It does seem possible, in the light of the above, that the king had been entertaining the idea of some form of 'Turkish' masquerade for several months before it was finally decided to produce a ballet that would commemorate Soliman Aga's visit in suitable fashion.

On the king's orders therefore, d'Arvieux went to find Molière at his home in Auteuil, met with Lully there, and confirms that he gave both of them numerous indications for the 'turquerie' that was now in the process of composition:

Le Roi ayant voulu faire un voyage à Chambort pour y prendre le divertissement de la chasse, voulut donner à sa Cour celui d'un ballet; & comme l'idée des Turcs qu'on venoit de voir à Paris étoit encore toute recente, il crût qu'il seroit bon de les faire paroître sur la scène. Sa Majesté m'ordonna de me joindre à Messieurs Moliere & de Lulli, pour composer une piece de Théâtre où l'on pût faire entrer quelque chose des habillemens & des manieres des Turcs. Je me rendis pour cet effet au Village d'Auteuil, où M. de Moliere avoit une maison fort jolie. Ce fut-là que nous travaillâmes à cette piece de Théâtre que l'on voit dans les oeuvres de Moliere sous le titre de *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, qui se fit Turc pour épouser la fille du Grand Seigneur. Je fus chargé de tout ce qui regardoit les habillemens & les manieres des Turcs... & je demurai huit jours chez Baraillon maître Tailleur, pour faire faire les habits & les turbans à la turque.<sup>135</sup>

Thanks to d'Arvieux's intervention, the costumes and hairstyles created by the troupe's tailor, Baraillon were less fantastic than might be imagined. At Constantinople, the turbans of the higher dignitaries were a good two feet in diameter and those in the comedy were not really so much bigger, as is shown by near contemporary illustrations.<sup>136</sup> Bins de Saint-Victor's carping criticism in *Les Deux masques* is not, therefore, particularly well founded.<sup>137</sup> D'Arvieux also seems to have taught the actors certain of the gestures and formulae in use by the Mevlevi dervish brotherhoods, for the burlesque initiation ceremony with its singing, dancing, whirling Turks.

<sup>134</sup> Laurent d'Arvieux, *Mémoires*, t. IV, p. 185.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.* p. 252-53.

<sup>136</sup> See Rouillard 2, pp. 271-288, on pictorial representations of the Turk.

<sup>137</sup> Bins de Saint-Victor, p. 485.



Turkish costume in the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*. Frontispiece for the 1682 edition of the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* in t.5, *Oeuvres de monsieur de Molière*, Paris, Thierry, Barbin et Trabouillet, 8 vol. in-12 [from Sylvie Chevalley, *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* (Geneva, 1975)].

According to the king's wishes, the 'comédie-ballet' was to be produced at the foot of the great spiral staircase at Chambord on the evening of the 14<sup>th</sup> October 1670. The *Bourgeois gentilhomme* was favourably received, indeed repeated three times in the same week and a further three times in mid-November when the royal family returned to the palace at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, before it went on public performance, in a reduced format, at Molière's Palais-Royal theatre. The court was much gratified by an entertainment which revived in an amusing form the memory of a spectacle which had given rise to a good deal of merriment the year before. More than one comic allusion must have found its mark. The jest would have been all the more piquant if certain people in high places could recognise themselves on stage in costume, speech or gesture. Sadly, a good deal of this particular aspect remains closed to us. Theatrical performance is by its nature ephemeral, but Covielle's allusions in Act III xv: 'Il s'est fait depuis peu une certaine mascarade qui vient le mieux du monde ici' would have hit home to any who had been present, either as participant or as invited guest, at de Lionne's Suresnes house on the 4<sup>th</sup> November 1669. '... Tout cela sent un peu sa comédie'; how applicable these words were to the recent 'turquerie ministérielle'! When M. Jourdain hears of the arrival of a certain Oriental personage we are informed 'il a un train tout à fait magnifique, tout le monde le va voir, et il a été reçu en ce pays comme un seigneur d'importance' (Act IV iii). There must have been a certain irony intended here, for the audience knows that despite having been received at first with every mark of dignity and consideration, the Ottoman envoy had been, on the whole, somewhat shabbily treated. Once it was realised that the visitor was only of the third or fourth rank, even the general public lost interest in him. Turning Soliman into a comic spectacle might appear at first sight to be a fair revenge for his pretensions and his failure to be impressed by the grandeur and magnificence of the French monarchy, but such pettiness was uncharacteristic of Louis XIV at the height of his powers. It cannot have been the main motivation behind the king's request that Molière stage a 'turquerie', because there would have been no point. Soliman was not a captive audience; he had long since departed and hence could never have known that he had been publicly ridiculed on stage.

It was probably fortunate that this ambassador, whose abrasive personality had done so much to confirm the negative stereotype of the Turk in French eyes, had been safely despatched to Istanbul in May 1670, some months before the first performance of the play on the 14<sup>th</sup> October. We may well surmise, yet we do not know what his reaction would have been, or how far the Turkish scenes would have proved offensive, either personally or in his capacity as the Sultan's representative. The extent to which a pious Muslim might consider the 'cérémonie turque' a deliberate and gratuitous insult to Islam is easier to gauge, and it is these religious dimensions to Molière's 'comédie-ballet' that we will now explore. There is firm evidence in the *Registres* that some Turks did attend performances of the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* later in the reign, and this is of particular interest in the present context. One at least, Hadgy Mehemed Effendi, the envoy from Tripoli, appears both to have known Laurent d'Arvieux personally, and to have taken grave exception to the 'turquerie':

... Mais ce que je n'aurois jamais deviné, c'est que le Chevalier eût été l'inventeur des sottises & ridicules scènes Turques du *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, à présent il ne m'est pas permis d'en douter, puisqu'il s'en vante lui-même. J'ai vû cette misérable Piece, on a eu l'impudence de me la donner à mon premier voyage; les plaintes que j'en fis alors ont été cause qu'on ne mène plus les Turcs à la Comédie Française...<sup>138</sup>

<sup>138</sup> Pétis de la Croix, *Lettres critiques de Hadgy Mehemed Efendy à Mme la Marquise de G\*\*\* au sujet des Mémoires de M. le Chevalier d'Arvieux. Avec des éclaircissemens curieux sur les moeurs... des orientaux. Traduites de Turc en Français par Ahmed Frengui, Renegat flamand* [by A. L. M. Pétis de la Croix] p. 153 (Paris, 1735).

Unfortunately for our purposes, "Mehemmed Effendi" proves to be a pseudonym for Alexandre Louis Marie Pétis de la Croix, son of the eminent orientalist François Pétis de la Croix, and grandson of that La Croix who had been ignominiously evicted from his post as dragoman by Laurent d'Arvieux in 1669. The perceived injustice must have rankled and the grudge passed down within the family circle. The *Lettres critiques* in their entirety, while obviously of great historical interest, are little more than a vitriolic personal attack on d'Arvieux and, appearing in 1735, the same year as the latter's *Mémoires*, virtually a page by page refutation of them. Nevertheless, since the author spent the greater part of his life in the Middle East and North Africa and seems to have been both knowledgeable and sympathetic towards Islam, he would have been well aware of those aspects of the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* likely to cause offence. He became acquainted with d'Arvieux during the latter's stay in Tripoli, and his comments are therefore of some value. One wonders if he really did complain about the play during a visit to Paris and just how seriously such representations were taken.

There also exists a manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale, parts of which have been published by Monval and by Deslandres.<sup>139</sup> This is a fragment from the *Journal de l'Envoyé de Tripoli* of Hadgy Mustafa, and appears to be in the handwriting of François Pétis de la Croix. We may speculate that this is where "Hadgy Mehemmed" found his inspiration. We may also speculate, on the grounds of the family connection, that this too is a forgery, but that is a study that remains to be done. On the assumption that the *Journal* is genuine, we find the following entry:

Jun 1704 – Le 13, l'Envoyé fut invité par les Comédiens du Roy d'aller voir la Comédie. On joua le *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, où il prit un fort grand plaisir voyant représenter les manieres de son pais...

The presence of the Tripoli delegation at this performance is confirmed by the *32e Registre de la Comédie, 1704-1705*:

Du Vendredy 13me jour de Juin 1704.  
 Au *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*  
 Les envoyez Turcs y sont venus,  
 Recette... 1242l. 12s.

On the 23rd June the delegation attended the opera *Armide*, and on the 25th June returned to the theatre, where it appears that they greatly enjoyed performances of *L'Inconnu* and *Le Port de Mer*:

Du Mercredy 25e jour de Juin 1704.  
 A L' *Inconnu* et le *Port de Mer*  
 Les envoyez Turcs y sont venus,  
 Recette... 988tt. 19s.<sup>140</sup>

One may presume that no such return visit would have been made if, as ethnic Turks and Muslims, the Tripolitans had taken any great exception to the 'cérémonie Turque' of the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*.

<sup>139</sup> Georges Monval, "La cérémonie turque jugée par un Musulman." *Le Moliériste*, février, 1889, henceforward: Monval; Paul Deslandres, "Un musulman au *Bourgeois gentilhomme* en 1704." *Correspondance historique et archéologique*, pp. 286-289, 1902, henceforward: Deslandres.

<sup>140</sup> Monval, p. 348 and p. 340.

In so far as the 'vraisemblance' of the 'turquerie' is concerned, Hadgy Mustafa makes the following observations:

1). The mufti would never comport himself in so undignified a manner:

...le personnage du mufty ne devoit jamais sortir de la gravité qu'il avoit affectée en entrant sur le Théâtre, parce que les gambades et caracolles ne conviennent point à un mufty.<sup>141</sup>

The mufti was actually a very exalted figure within the Ottoman Empire. Michel Baudier devotes the first chapter of the *Livre Troisième, Du Mufti, souverain Pontife de la Loy de Mahomet* of his *Histoire générale de la religion des Turcs* to the office of mufti, which he equates, erroneously, with that of the Roman Pontiff:

...Or le Chef de son ordre Ecclesiastique, qui se divise en seculier, & regulier, comme nous verrons cy-apres, est appellé par les Turcs *Mufti*: il est parmy eux le souverain Pontife de leur Loy, & le principal Chef de la Justice. Il ordonne souverainement aux choses spirituelles, termine les differends que la diversité des esprits fait naistre en Turquie sur les pointes de la Religion, decide absolument les controverses de sa Loy, avec celles des Juifs & des Chrestiens. Et ses iugemens aux choses temporelles sont tenus pour des oracles indubitables. Ainsi cette supreme autorité qui le rend redoutable au peuple, le fait reverer des Empereurs Turcs.<sup>142</sup>

2). The manner in which the bastinado was given was incorrect. There follows a lengthy description:

Il falloit que deux personnes fissent deux grandes révérences à M. Jourdain, et luy ostassent le Turban avec respect et gravité hors de dessus la teste, et missent le Turban sur un buffet et fissent encore une révérence au Turban, puis que ces deux mêmes personnes levassent les deux pieds de M. Jourdain, luy faisant heurter les fesses à terre et missent ses deux pieds dans une corde attachée aux deux bouts du baston, et tournant le baston lui serrassent les pieds dans cette corde, en sorte que les plantes des pieds fussent tournées vers le ciel; puis un troisième s'avance avec une baguette, et frappe sur la plante des pieds de M. Jourdain, disant en musique *Uno, Doüé, Tré, Quatro, Cinque, Sei*, etc. Cela fait, on deffait les pieds de M. Jourdain et on l'assit sur un fauteuil, puis on salue le Turban et on le luy remet sur la teste, puis on luy fait encore deux révérences, et ainsy finit la ceremonie de la Bastonade.<sup>143</sup>

This account is confirmed by an eyewitness, Père Robert le Dreux, chaplain to Denis de la Haye during his tenure of office in Istanbul. He adds a further detail about the twisting of the stick: 'cela serre tellement la corde, que les jambes se trouvant pressées l'une contre l'autre, les pieds se trouvent joints...ce qui fait quelquefois enfler les pieds et réduit un pauvre homme à être du temps sans pouvoir marcher'.<sup>144</sup> The bastinado was in no sense a minor punishment and was greatly dreaded. It was therefore highly unlikely that it would feature in any ceremony designed to honour the sufferer! Molière included it partly because it was so

<sup>141</sup> Monval, p. 339.

<sup>142</sup> Michel Baudier, *Histoire générale de la religion des Turcs avec la naissance et la mort de leur prophète Mahomet*, pp. 330-31 (Paris, 1641).

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Robert de Dreux, *Voyage en Turquie et en Grèce du R. P. Robert de Dreux, aumonier de l'ambassade de France (1665-69)*, ed. Hubert Pernot, p. 131 (Paris, 1925).

closely associated with things Turkish, but mostly, we must suspect, so that his audience might enjoy the sight of a squirming M. Jourdain as he vainly attempts to disguise his discomfiture, in the spirit of 'no pain, no gain'.

3). The turban should be treated with reverence. Here the colour is of some interest. If it were green, a sacred colour in Islam, it would denote a 'sharif', or descendant of Muhammad. Du Loir refers in his *Voyages* to '...des Emirs qui portent le Tulbent vert, privatement à tous autres par ce qu'ils sont descendants de Mahomet'. Like colour, size and shape were important indicators of office and social standing; Du Loir refers in the same passage to 'Les Caziasquers ... avec leur Tulbents gros, pour le moins d'un pied & demy de diametre...' <sup>145</sup> We learn from the inventory of Molière's effects following his death that M. Jourdain's costume was indeed 'une veste à la Turquie et un turban... verts et aurore', hence, perhaps, the exaggerated respect shown to the garment in the 'cérémonie turque'. <sup>146</sup>

4). '...le Mufty ne devoit pas frapper sur le livre [saint]'. Since for Muslims the Qur'an is the Uncreated Word of God, it is to be treated with the greatest possible respect at all times. It is usually kept wrapped in a cloth on a high shelf when not in use, since nothing must be placed above it. Reading the Qur'an is in itself an act of worship and before touching it a pious Muslim must perform the proper ablutions, and women should cover their heads. The stage directions in the 1682 version, though it is true that these appeared *post mortem*, underline the portion of the Turkish ceremony most guaranteed to give offence:

Deux Derviches l'accompagnent, avec des bonnets pointus garnis aussi de bougies allumées, portant l'Alcoran...ils lui mettent l'Alcoran sur le dos et le font servir de pupitre au Mufti, qui fait une invocation burlesque, fronçant le sourcil, et ouvrant la bouche, sans dire mot; puis parlant avec véhémence, tantôt radoucissant sa voix, tantôt la poussant d'un enthousiasme à faire trembler, en se poussant les côtes avec les mains, comme pour faire sortir ses parôles, frappant quelquefois les mains sur l'Alcoran, et tournant les feuilles avec précipitation, et finit enfin en levant les bras, et criant à haute voix: *Hou...*Après que l'invocation est finie, les derviches ôtent l'Alcoran de dessus le dos du Bourgeois, qui crie *Ouf...* <sup>147</sup>

It is this lack of respect shown to the scriptures that occasions Hadgy Mustafa's most stringent comment, though presumably the genuine article would not have been readily available for use as a stage prop.

5). '...la langue que l'on y parle n'est du tout point turque ny arabe, et ils n'y entendoient rien, excepté *Eyv Allah*'. <sup>148</sup> Use of the divine name in such a secular context, given the Qur'anic strictures on music and dancing, must have been particularly offensive though Hadgy Mustafa makes no direct reference to this. Molière also, knowingly or not, employs the equivalent Turkish term 'Hou' in Act IV v, 'LE MUFTI danse et chante ces mots: *Hu la ba ba la chou ba la ba ba la da*', a word which the near contemporary orientalist, Mouradgea d'Ohsson, defines thus: 'Hou = Ya-hou, ô lui, celui qui est; reconnoissance authentique de son existence éternelle; c'est le Jeovah des Hébreux'. In the *Essai sur les Moeurs* Voltaire

<sup>145</sup> Du Loir, *Les Voyages du sieur Du Loir; ensemble de ce qui se passa à la mort du feu Sultan Mourat, ... les cérémonies de ses funeraillles; et celles de l'avènement à l'empire de Sultan Hibraim son frère; avec la relation du siege de Babylone en 1639, etc.* (Paris, 1654), p. 129.

<sup>146</sup> Published in *Cent ans de recherches sur Molière*, p. 567.

<sup>147</sup> Couton, t. 2, p. 1434.

<sup>148</sup> Monval, p. 339.

also refers to this usage by the Turks: '...la syllabe *Hou*, adoptée enfin par les Turcs, qui la prononcèrent avec plus de respect encore que le mot *Allah*; car ils se servent d'*Allah* dans la conversation, et ils n'emploient *Hou* que dans leurs prières'.<sup>149</sup>

6). '...qu'il trouve tout le reste fort bien', being in particular 'fort charmé du petit balet que l'on dança à la fin de la Comédie, et surtout des demoiselles habillées à l'Espagnole...'  
150

There is a close parallel to Hadgy Mustafa's comments to be found in the following passage from Bruzen de la Martinière's *Nouvelle vie de Molière* (1725). This gives the well known account of Soliman's disobliging remarks on leaving the royal audience, then he continues:

...Mr. Colbert, qui entendit cette réponse, recommanda à Molière celui qui l'avoit faite, & comme il travailloit alors au *Bourgeois gentilhomme*, & qu'il savoit que l'Excellence Turque viendrait à la Comédie, il y fourra le spectacle *Bourgeois Gentilhomme* ridicule qui sert de dénouement à sa Pièce. Je tiens ce fait d'une personne encore vivante qui étoit alors à la Cour. Quant à l'exécution, il est à remarquer que Lulli, qui étoit aussi excellent Grimacier qu'excellent Musicien, voulut chanter lui-même le Rôle du Moufti; en quoi personne n'a été capable de l'égalier. Celui que l'on voulait mortifier par cette extravagante Peinture des ceremonies de sa Nation, en fit une critique fort modérée: il trouva à redire que l'on donnât la bastonade à M. Jourdain sur le dos puis qu'on la lui vouloit donner sans aucune raison. Il le falloit, dit-il, fraper sur les pieds soulevés par une corde entortillée autour d'un bâton que deux personnes tiendroient par les deux bouts. Molière répondit que par là, on auroit privé le Parterre des grimaces de Mr. Jourdain; sans parler de l'indecence de la posture. Il ajoûtait qu'il n'avoit pas prétendu représenter au juste les ceremonies Turques, mais en imaginer une qui fut risible; & il faut avouër qu'il a réüssi.<sup>151</sup>

If this account were ever to be verified, it would be most amusing to speculate about what Molière and the notoriously prickly Soliman Aga could have found to say to one another. It is naturally not impossible that the two might have met during the course of an ambassadorial visit to the theatre, though no contemporary record exists of any such meeting. We know that Molière personally greeted Potemkin, for example, when the Russians attended a performance of *Amphitryon*. The citing of an unnamed eyewitness to the effect that the order to include the 'turquerie' in the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* came from Colbert, and was issued with the deliberate intention that Soliman Aga should be present at a performance, is interesting.<sup>152</sup> However, the fact that Soliman Aga was due to leave France in May 1670, well

<sup>149</sup> Mouradjea d'Ohsson, *Tableau général de l'empire othoman*, p. 632 (Paris, 1788-1824); Voltaire, *Essai sur les Moeurs*, ed. R. Pommeau, t. I, pp. 80-81 (Paris, 1963).

<sup>150</sup> Monval p. 340.

<sup>151</sup> *La Nouvelle Vie...*, pp. 92-93.

<sup>152</sup> Jean Marion suggests that the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* is a thinly veiled satirical attack on Colbert himself who, though ennobled, was of bourgeois origin and is said never to have lost his plebeian accent. Hence, therefore, M. Jourdain's elocution lessons in Act II iv. The case for Colbert as victim is doubtful, however, for Colbert stood high in the king's favour. The 'ministre de la marine' was far too powerful a figure for Molière to risk offending him without the certainty of royal support and for this there is no evidence. Bruzen de la Martinière is one of the earliest sources for the life of Molière, and he explicitly associates Colbert with the suggestion for the 'turquerie': '...Il faut excepter de ces Courtisans Mr. Colbert. C'étoit à lui qu'il auroit falu se prendre des *balachou*, *balaba* & de la ceremonie Turque...' A man of Colbert's stamp would have been highly unlikely to propose himself as sacrificial victim. See J. Marion, "Molière a-t-il songé à Colbert en composant le personnage de M. Jourdain? *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, XLV, pp.145-180, 1938.



Portrait of Mehmed Saïd Efendi (Yirmi Sekiz Çelebi). Published by Sinan Kunalalp and Frédéric Hitzel, *Ambassadeurs, ministres, chargés d'affaires et envoyés en mission spéciale de la Porte Ottomane et de la République de Turquie auprès de la France de 1483 à 1991* (Istanbul-Paris, 1991).

<sup>17</sup> For the career of Hugues de Lorraine, see Lucien Bellé, *Le duc de Lorraine et ambassadeur en France de Louis XIV* (Paris, 1860); François Bligny, *Louis XIV à Rome, 1667*; Marie-Cécile Caron-Carmes, *La Politique étrangère de Louis XIV* (Paris, 1972); Philippe Charrier, *Louis XIV* (Lyon, 1973); Ronald Hutton, *Louis XIV and Europe* (London, 1974); Jean-Claude Mansueti, *Colbert, 1619-1683* (Paris, 1963) and *Louis XIV* (Paris, 1963); Charles-Edouard de Paraclet, *Henri IV* (Paris, 1969); A. Despland, *Paris, 1680*; David J. Sturdy, *Louis XIV* (London, 1964); Jean Valéry, *La Diplomatie française au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1966); Jacques de Lamoignon, *Les ambassadeurs* (Paris, 1967).

before the first performance was scheduled to take place, shows the story to be apocryphal. Colbert would certainly have been aware of his projected date of departure, since it had been decided on the highest authority that Soliman Aga and his party were to travel with the suite of the newly appointed French ambassador to the Porte, Charles-Marie-François Olier, marquis d'Angervillers et de Nointel. The logistics of seventeenth-century transport required that the elaborate arrangements, for what was in effect a substantial expedition, would have to be set in motion some months beforehand. These would have been well under way before any royal hints as to the desirability of a 'turquerie' were made to Molière, and this in itself makes the idea that the personal humiliation of Soliman Aga was the object of the satire entirely unlikely. Records of these travel arrangements exist, both in de Nointel's and in Colbert's correspondence. Orders had to be issued well in advance to the local authorities in those ports that the departing envoy might pass through; he must at all costs be prevented from coming into contact with Turkish galley slaves and thereby embarrassing a government that had denied their existence.

It seems to me that the most likely source for this apocryphal tale, as told by Bruzen de la Martinière, must be Hadgy Mustafa; his remarks on the application of the *bastinado* are almost identical to those appearing in the *Nouvelle vie de Molière*. The story does not ring true. From what we know of Soliman Aga's volatile temperament, he would undoubtedly have reacted with rather more than a 'critique fort modérée', had he been present at a theatrical performance and suspected that he himself was being lampooned. If this famous anecdote, dating some 55 years after the event, is the sole evidence that the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* was written to expose his 'Excellence Turque' to public ridicule on royal command, as a fitting punishment for his arrogance, then that theory must surely rest on very flimsy foundations. We should look elsewhere and closer to home for the true target of Molière's satire, if satire it be. Molière's further remarks, if they are correctly attributed in this little story, would imply that his intention had been simply to create a comic scene for the amusement of his audience: 'qu'il n'avoit pas pretendu représenter au juste les ceremonies Turques, mais en imaginer une qui fut risible.' In that case, d'Arvieux's co-operation would have been superfluous; except perhaps in the matter of costume there would have been no necessity to strive for an appearance of 'vraisemblance'. D'Arvieux's direct participation as advisor on Ottoman customs and interpreter, not only at Suresnes but also on the occasion of the royal audience would, however, make his assistance indispensable to Molière if it were de Lionne's recent diplomatic gaffes that were to be the object of an Aristophanic satire. Accurate detail in that event would add immeasurably to the sting of any parody of de Lionne's cherished 'Turkish' ceremonies. Particularly if the victim himself, easily recognisable as such by friends and colleagues, could be assumed both as courtier and as minister of state to be present at the royal command performance of the play.

Hugues de Lionne had begun his career in public life as a favourite of Mazarin, with whom he kept up a warm friendship until the Cardinal's death in 1661.<sup>153</sup> Maintaining the Italian connection, his first diplomatic post was in Rome. Here he supported Alexander VII's election as Pope. On his deathbed, Mazarin is said to have nominated de Lionne as his successor, recommending him as the only man capable of taking charge of French foreign policy, but despite this accolade he was not appointed Minister of State for Foreign Affairs

<sup>153</sup> For the career of Hugues de Lionne, see Lucien Bély, *Espions et ambassadeurs au temps de Louis XIV* (Paris, 1990); François Bluche, *Louis XIV* (London, 1990); Marie-Claude Canova-Green, *La Politique-spectacle au grand siècle* [Biblio 17] (Paris, 1993); Philippe Erlanger, *Louis XIV* (London, 1970); Ragnhild Hatton, *Louis XIV and Europe* (London, 1976); Georges Mongrédien, *Colbert, 1619-1683* (Paris, 1963) and *Louis XIV* (Paris, 1963); Picavet; Raxis de Flassan; Henri Rochas, *Biographie du Dauphiné* (Paris, 1860); David J. Sturdy, *Louis XIV* (London, 1998); Jules Valfrey, *La Diplomatie française au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Hugues de Lionne, ses ambassades* (Paris, 1881).

until 1663. De Lionne had perhaps been too closely linked with the disgraced Fouquet. He had a similar reputation for fast living and was considered something of a libertine. De Lionne had long enjoyed a reputation as one of the greatest French diplomats, but he seems to have lacked the 'ruse traditionnelle' of the calling, preferring a forceful foreign policy to the more subtle routes of diplomacy, as we see illustrated in the case of the Turks. Amongst his more prominent achievements he is usually credited with the creation of the League of the Rhine, the Treaty of the Pyrenees, the humiliation of Spain, and the negotiations for the return of Dunkirk by Charles II in 1662. All of these, however, took place before his formal appointment as foreign secretary and may with equal justice be attributed to the legacy of Mazarin. The last of them is a good seven years before the Soliman Aga episode. France could have had no possible interest in offending the Turks as allies and it was a clumsy mistake to have done so. It is significant that de Nointel, the incoming French ambassador sent to replace Denis de la Haye in 1670, was given specific instructions that '...le ressentiment possible du Turc ne doit pas peser sur de délicates negociations'.<sup>154</sup>

Hadgy Mustafa's *Journal* was published in the *Mercure* for July 1704.<sup>155</sup> If genuine, we have in it the reactions of a distinguished Muslim visitor to a performance of the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*. There is a certain element of doubt as to the authenticity of the document because, unfortunately, it was François Pétis de la Croix  *fils*, attached as dragoman to the embassy, who edited and translated the manuscript; the original Arabic text has not survived. We should note that the Tripoli 'envoyé' was specifically invited to attend the performance. The fact that he not only accepted such an invitation but visited the Comédie-Française again a bare two weeks later, must cast doubt on Voltaire's account, in the *Essai sur les mœurs*, of the indignant reaction to the same play in 1741 of the then Turkish ambassador, Saïd-Effendi. The *Bourgeois gentilhomme* was not in fact playing during the latter's stay in Paris.<sup>156</sup> Now this is the third false account of an adverse reaction by a visiting Turkish ambassador to the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*. It is ironic that the author of *Mahomet ou Le Fanatisme*, one of the most offensive documents to Islam ever written, should prove so tender of Muslim susceptibilities. There is an interesting historical puzzle here and it is one that will bear further investigation. These are the facts:

1). In 1704, the delegation from Tripoli, led by Hadgy Mustafa, attends a performance of the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*. Their presence is confirmed by the *Registres*. His personal reactions to the play, as expressed in his *Journal* and translated by François Pétis de la Croix  *fils*, seem somewhat anodyne and there are no expressions of outrage.

2). In 1721, the then Turkish Ambassador in Paris, Mehmed Saïd Efendi Yirmisekiz, wrote an account of his experiences in France, under the title of the *Sefâratnâme*. This was several times printed in Istanbul, appearing in a French translation by Julien Galland in 1757, as the *Relation de l'Ambassade de Mehémet Effendi à la cour de France en 1721*.<sup>157</sup> Saint-Simon met him, and wrote of their meeting at length.<sup>158</sup> The *Bourgeois gentilhomme*, according to the *Registres*, played only once during the summer of 1721, on the 8<sup>th</sup> August. It is therefore improbable that Mehmed Saïd ever saw it, since he left Paris to return home on the 3<sup>rd</sup> August. His single attendance at the Comédie-Française is recorded for the 25<sup>th</sup> May. He makes no reference to the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* in his *Sefâratnâme*, though discussing

<sup>154</sup> *Recueil des Instructions données aux ambassadeurs et ministres de France, tome XXIX, Turquie*, ed. Pierre Duparc (Paris, 1969).

<sup>155</sup> The *Mercure*, quoted in Deslandres, p. 186.

<sup>156</sup> Mesnard, vol. VIII, pp. 16-17.

<sup>157</sup> Published as *Le Paradis des infidèles*, with notes by Gilles Veinstein (Paris, 1981).

<sup>158</sup> Saint-Simon, *Mémoires*, t. VI, pp. 704-08.

Scarron's *Don Japhet d'Arménie*, his visits to the Opéra to see *Thésée* and *Omphale*, and also a ballet that he attended at the Louvre, in considerable detail. Even on the unlikely assumption that the *Registres* are inaccurate and it was in fact the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* that he saw on the 25<sup>th</sup> May, he would presumably have recorded his impressions of it, as he did his reactions to those other performances.

3). In 1725, the *Nouvelle Vie de Molière* gives an account of a Turkish Ambassador offering a detailed critique of the play to Molière in person, making observations suspiciously almost identical to those of Hadgy Mustafa. This ambassador cannot have been Soliman Aga, who never saw the play. No further Turkish embassy arrived in Paris until that of 1697, sent to announce the succession of Sultan Süleyman II. Since Molière died in 1673, the anecdote is plainly apocryphal.

4). In 1735, A. L. M. Pétis de la Croix published the following under a pseudonym: *Lettres critiques de Hadgy Mehmed Efendy (Mme. La Marquise de G\*\*\* au sujet des Mémoires de M. la Chevalier d'Arvieux. Avec des éclaircissemens curieux sur les moeurs...des orientaux. Traduites de Turc en Français par Ahmed Frengui, Renegat flamand* (A. L. M. Pétis de la Croix was a 'Jeune de Langue' and a competent linguist, like his father, François Pétis de la Croix fils). It contains a vitriolic personal attack on Laurent d'Arvieux and criticises the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* in the most excoriating terms as 'cette misérable Piece'.

5). In 1741, Voltaire quotes the indignant reaction of a Turkish ambassador, whom he calls "Saïd-Effendi", to the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*, which was not in fact playing that season:

L'ambassadeur turc, Seïd Effendi, voyant représenter *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* et cette cérémonie ridicule dans laquelle on le fait Turc, quand il entendit prononcer le nom sacré Hou avec dérision et avec des postures extravagantes, il regarda ce divertissement comme la profanation la plus abominable.<sup>159</sup>

Saïd Mehmed Efendi's attendance at the Comédie-Française is recorded in the *Registres*, but it was not at a performance of the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*:

mercredi, 24 janvier, 1742,

Ce jourd'hui Son Excellence Zaïd Effendy, ambassadeur extraordinaire de la Porte Ottomane, nous a honorés de sa présence.

According to the *Registres*, they were playing *Le Fat puni*, *Les Trois cousines* and *L'Oracle* on that date. A second visit was made by the ambassador on Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> February, but this time to see *Amour pour amour* and *Pourceaugnac*. It seems to me that what we have here are two cases of confusion of similar names, dates and titles; transliteration from the Arabic script was always a very haphazard affair and the same name may appear with many variants. Saïd Mehmed Efendi, Beglerbeg of Rumelia, was the Francophile son of Mehmed Saïd Efendi Yirmisekiz. He was a fluent French speaker and had accompanied his father on the earlier visit in 1721; both men were highly cultured career diplomats, unlike the hapless Soliman Aga. Now Voltaire, writing in 1753, refers to a "Seïd-Effendi", the Turkish ambassador, attending the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* in 1741, when it was not playing, and records his indignant reaction to the 'turquerie'. I suggest that Voltaire has not imagined the

<sup>159</sup> Voltaire, *Introduction*, xxii, to *Essai sur les moeurs*, t. I, p. 103. Quoted in Mesnard, vol. VIII, p.15.

episode quoted, but that there has been a careless confusion of names and also of dates, perhaps through a compositor's error, transposing 1714 into 1741. This should become clear from the following table:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Origin</u>	<u>Mémoires</u>	<u>Saw BGH</u>
1670	Soliman Aga	Müteferrika	Constantinople	None	No
1704	Hadgy Mustafa	Çauş	Tripoli	Publ. 1704	Yes
1714	'Hadgy Mehemed'	'Drogman'	Tripoli	Publ. 1735	Yes
1721	Mehmed Saïd	Ambassador	Constantinople	Publ. 1721	No
1741	Saïd Mehmed	Ambassador	Constantinople	None	No

If we then allow for the casual practice of referring to the Tripolitans as "Turks", Voltaire is at least partially vindicated. "Hadgy Mehemed's" condemnation of the comedy for reasons of personal spite has been wrongly attributed to Mehmed Saïd, widely known to have written an account of his stay in France. His name has been further confused with that of his son; 'Mehemed' and 'Mehmed' are in fact the same name. There was no standard form of transliteration from the Arabic to the Latin alphabet at this period.

Our major concern, however, remains to determine whether and, if so, how far and whom, the Turkish ceremony of the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* was calculated to offend. Hadgy Mustafa, whose presence at the Comédie-Française in his official capacity as 'envoyé' is on record, does not appear to have taken offence, but merely to have offered a few pertinent observations. As we have already noted, Molière himself is quoted in the *Nouvelle vie de M. de Molière* as saying:

...qu'il n'avait pas prétendu représenter au juste les cérémonies turques mais en imaginer une qui fût risible.

The remark may, or may not, be apocryphal, but, even if falsely attributed, it is evidence of what more or less contemporary informed opinion believed to have been the case. D'Arvieux explicitly states in his *Mémoires* that he was ordered to co-operate with Molière and Lully, '... pour composer une piece de Théâtre où l'on pût faire entrer quelque chose des habillemens et des manieres des Turcs.' He proudly goes on to tell us that, following the first production at Chambord:

Sa Majesté eut la bonté de dire qu'Elle voyoit bien que le Chevalier d'Arvieux s'en étoit mêlé; à quoi M. le Duc d'Aumont & M. Dacquin répondirent: SIRE, Nous pouvons assûrer Votre Majesté qu'il y a pris un très-grand soin, & qu'il cherchera toutes les occasions de faire quelque chose qui lui puisse être agréable. Le Roi leur répliqua qu'il en estoit persuadé, & qu'il ne m'avoit jamais rien commandé que je n'eusse fait à sa satisfaction, qu'il auroit soin de moi, & qu'il s'en souviendroit dans les occasions.

Ces parôles obligeantes sorties de la bouche d'un si grand Monarque m'attirèrent les complimens de toute la Cour. C'est une eau benîte dont les Courtisans ne sont pas chiches.<sup>160</sup>

The king's kind comments imply that he was entirely satisfied, both with the production itself and with d'Arvieux's own contribution. His instructions to Molière must therefore have been fulfilled with regard to satire, authenticity and comic effect or he would not have reacted in so

<sup>160</sup> Laurent d'Arvieux, *Mémoires*, t. IV, p. 252-53.

positive a manner. D'Arvieux refers to the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* as a 'divertissement', an entertainment both given by the King and his own idea. He tells us:

...comme l'idée des Turcs qu'on venoit de voir à Paris étoit encore toute recent, il crût qu'il seroit bon de les faire paroître sur la scène...

This statement infers that the Turks were no longer in Paris to be offended, when the 'turquerie' was suggested to Molière. The term 'divertissement' implies that the purpose was to entertain. It will be remembered that d'Arvieux had come to the King's notice precisely because of his amusing anecdotes of Turkish life and that this was how he rose to favour and made his way at court. If there had been some question of exposing Soliman Aga to public ridicule, would he not have mentioned it and his own prominent rôle therein, as a point worthy of attention in his memoirs? The Chevalier did have rather a reputation as a self-publicist and had been accused of promoting himself as co-author of the comedy. Instead, we find a rather sympathetic, if gently exasperated, portrait of the Ottoman envoy. During Soliman's period of confinement d'Arvieux had been the Turk's sole confidant, as well as his link with the outside world and a certain friendship had sprung up between the two men. This emerges from the official reports to de Lionne as well as the more personal *Mémoires*. He writes of Soliman Aga as 'un homme de bon sens et d'un raisonnement solide, plein d'esprit, s'énonçant en peu de paroles'.

All of this rather points us to the conclusion that the personal amusement of the King and his court was the object of the exercise, not the offering of gratuitous offence to a visiting diplomat. There was a long and hallowed tradition in France of representing the Turks on stage in royal entertainments, yet at no point do we find ethnic Turks depicted in the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*. On the contrary, it is Frenchmen who are portrayed, young Cléonte, in company with Covielle and his actor cronies, masquerading as the genuine article. For this reason alone, it is unlikely that the hapless Soliman Aga and his suite were the targets of a satire. It is the French perception of the Turks that Molière parodies, and a particular, specific perception at that. If the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* is to be interpreted as a satirical commentary on recent events, I suggest that it was not written in mockery of the Turks. Unlike the Ottoman envoy now long departed, Louis could be certain that the most eminent men of the day would vie with one another to attend the first production of one of Molière's 'comédie-ballets' at Chambord and to occupy the seats of honour. The king could therefore enjoy the satisfaction of watching his victims squirm as the topicality of the parody gradually sank in. Identities would be clear to those in the know and could be underlined by costume, mannerism or gesture. The character of the cynical Dorante, for example, is known to have given as much offence in certain quarters as the 'petits marquis' of the *Misanthrope* had done on an earlier occasion. The parasitic manner of life and the calculated exploitation and betrayal of M. Jourdain's friendship do not present the figure of the courtier in a very good light.

Very many of the invited Chambord audience would also have been present at one or the other of Soliman Aga's interviews with de Lionne at Suresnes, present at de Lionne's own invitation. There is a particularly compelling piece of evidence that this unhappy episode provided the likely inspiration for the 'cérémonie turque' in Covielle's statement at the end of Act III iv:

Il s'est fait depuis peu une certaine mascarade qui vient le mieux du monde ici, et que je prétends faire entrer dans une bourle que je veux faire à notre ridicule. Tout cela sent un peu sa comédie; mais avec lui on peut hasarder toute chose, il n'y faut point chercher tant de façons, et il est homme à y jouer son rôle à merveille, à donner aisément dans toutes les

fariboles qu'on s'avisera de lui dire.

It is a plausible speculation that the words, 'toutes les fariboles qu'on s'avisera de lui dire' refer to Hugues de Lionne's enthusiastic acceptance of de Guित्रy's suggestion, the 'certaine mascarade' to the unfortunate attempt to recreate the Grand Vizir's Divan at Suresnes. We know that influential people with direct experience of the Ottomans, including de Nointel, the ambassador-designate, felt the whole episode to have been most ill advised, and to have compromised the regal dignity of the King of France. D'Arvieux himself was unhappy with his instructions:

...s'il m'avoit été permis de dire à M. de Lionne que la plus grande partie de son discours étoit tout à fait hors d'oeuvre, par rapport à l'Envoyé Turc, je n'aurois pas manqué de le faire; mais je crois que c'étoit une espece de satisfaction qu'il avoit crû donner à ses collegues, qui s'étoient formalisés de ce qu'il faisoit la figure de Grand Visir.<sup>161</sup>

The 'Grand Visir' certainly failed to impress Soliman Aga; de Lionne's aping of Turkish manners was merely taken by the Turks as proof that the French could have little confidence in their own diplomatic protocol. The whole affair was widely reported and discussed; there had been a large attendance of the curious at both the first and the second Suresnes audiences. Special issues of the *Gazette* were published because of the public interest. The spectacle must have appeared equally bizarre to French and Turkish spectators alike, the fact that a second audience had to be held at all proves that the first was a shambles and seriously mismanaged. Even the interpreters were farcically incompetent. The Dutchman Abraham van Wicquefort, in his contemporary treatise on diplomacy, *L'Ambassadeur et ses fonctions*, section XIX *Des Audiances*, gives a detailed description of the audience given to Soliman Aga, which he castigates as a particularly telling example of bad practice:

Le Roy, qui sçait bien faire voir ce qu'il est en effet, le fit parfaitement bien en cette audience. Mais Lionne, qui n'estoit qu'un des quatre petits secretaires, à ce qu'il disoit, ne devoit pas faire le Vizir Azem, le premier Ministre de la Porte, qui a une autorité, sans comparaison plus absolue que celui de France, a raison de traiter les Ambassadeurs des Princes estrangers avec hauteur, puisque les Cardinaux le font bien: mais Lionne, qui n'estoit ni Cardinal ni premier Ministre, jôtoit un assés meschant personnage en cette comedie. Il y a apparence qu'elle estoit de sa façon, & qu'elle tenoit de la Turquie...<sup>162</sup>

We ought to make careful note of van Wicquefort's turn of phrase, for his choice of words is careful and heavily loaded: de Lionne 'jôtoit un assés meschant personnage en cette comedie'. If this is how the episode was widely seen, as a comic performance, how appropriate it would be for Molière to immortalise it on the stage. Though we should be wary of van Wicquefort as a hostile witness, since he wrote for the Habsburgs, this is evidence that stories of the episode must have circulated throughout Europe, to Louis's discomfiture and embarrassment. It was not just in the Ottoman Empire that the French monarch had been made into a laughing stock by his secretary of state for foreign affairs.

Sir Paul Rycaut, Charles II's ambassador to the Porte, writes in 1668 of the difficulties of bargaining with the Turks. He cites the example of de la Haye's ineptitude in feuding with the Köprülüs as a warning to others, then sets out the principles by which such negotiations ought to be conducted. A king must always deal with the Turks from a position

<sup>161</sup> Ibid. p. 150.

<sup>162</sup> Wicquefort, p. 252.

of strength, founded upon his armies and alliances, but even more important is his personal reputation and the honour in which he is held abroad:

Cette réputation si importante s'acquiert & se conserve principalement par une manière sage & adroite de négocier les affaires; ce qui dépend ordinairement de la prudence & de la conduite de celui à qui le Prince les confie.<sup>163</sup>

It was in this that de Lionne had so badly served his master. There is no doubt that he severely compromised Louis's reputation in the eyes of the Turkish delegation by insisting on the adoption of Ottoman garb and ceremonial at Suresnes, despite all informed advice to the contrary. It is hardly surprising that Soliman Aga subsequently mistook Louis for a weakling, since he allowed his minister to behave with such a lack of proper dignity. This is sufficient explanation in itself for the arrogant conduct of the Turkish delegation at the royal audience, finally granted after so much delay and hesitation. De Lionne had broken the most fundamental principle for dealing with the Turks:

Un Ambassadeur... doit estre fort prudent, & éviter sur toutes choses les occasions où on peut donner quelque atteinte à son honneur, ou faire violer le respect qui est dû à sa personne. Car quand cela arrive, il est méprisé, & considéré comme un mal-habile homme, il perd en mesme tems tout son crédit, & toute l'estime que l'on faisoit de luy, & à la première rencontre, l'insolence des Turcs ne manque jamais de s'en prévaloir, & de le pousser à bout.<sup>164</sup>

These words of advice are meant for the guidance of an ambassador newly resident at the Porte, but how much more certainly should such principles have been heeded by a minister of state. The attempt to avenge the de la Hayes on the person of Soliman Aga was in itself misplaced:

De vouloir répondre à l'orgueil ou à l'ignorance d'un Turc d'une manière emportée, c'est souffler du feu pour l'allumer...<sup>165</sup>

For these reasons I believe it possible that Hugues de Lionne is the intended victim of the Turkish burlesque, given the historical context and also Covielle's statement, 'Il s'est fait depuis peu une certaine mascarade qui vient le mieux du monde ici... Tout cela sent un peu sa comédie' (Act III, xv). 'Mascarade' is a word that cannot be applied with any justice to Soliman Aga, unless we allow for his little touch of vanity in allowing himself to be termed 'ambassadeur' when the title was inappropriate. It may very well be applied in all its senses, as defined in Larousse, to the proceedings at Suresnes:

**Mascarade** n.f. (it. *Mascherata*). 1. Réunion ou défilé de personnes déguisées et masquées. 2. Déguisement étrange, accoutrement ridicule. 3. Mise en scène trompeuse, comédie, hypocrisie. *Ce procès n'a été qu'une mascarade.*

We must remember that this was the third occasion within two years on which the king had been caused considerable embarrassment by his foreign secretary's failure to handle negotiations with the Ottoman Empire in a properly efficient manner. Diplomatic relations

<sup>163</sup> Sir Paul Rycout, *Histoire de l'état présent de l'Empire ottoman, contenant les maximes politiques des Turcs de... Traduite de l'Anglois de Monsieur Rycout par M Briot* (Paris, 1670), pp. 164 -65.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.* p. 165.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

with the Porte were actually on the point of breaking down, following the appointment of Denis de la Haye to succeed his father as French ambassador in Istanbul. It may have appeared to de Lionne as a statement of French intention to take a firm hand with the Turks over their mistreatment of Jean de la Haye, but that had been very largely the ambassador's own fault. Denis de la Haye was known to be *persona non grata* at the Porte and was therefore a poor choice. The whole embarrassment of his subsequent recall in January 1669 could thus have been avoided. There had also been the matter of the 'Bassa Sigale' debacle, barely two years earlier and a very recent memory. Now the dignity of the French monarchy had again been compromised in the eyes of the international community by de Lionne's dogged insistence, despite all advice to the contrary, on the unnecessary play-acting at Suresnes. There would be a very definite point to Molière ridiculing de Lionne, a well-known public figure, and this victim would be there to witness his humiliation. The point would be incontrovertibly and publicly made, were it so desired, that the king was displeased with the manner in which his minister had handled the matter of the Turkish ambassador. It may well, therefore, be Hugues de Lionne, de Guity and their circle, rather than the Turkish delegation, who are lampooned in the 'cérémonie turque'. Perhaps it is de Guity whom we see portrayed in Covielle, the 'agent provocateur' of the 'turquerie', de Lionne in the Bourgeois himself, so easily duped through his own vanity into adopting Turkish dress and manners. The exact identifications would not matter; for de Lionne's 'turquerie', his diplomatic 'masquerade', would be the true target of Molière's satire.

Louis, concerned with maintaining royal prestige abroad, must have feared with some reason that he was in danger of becoming an object of ridicule throughout the courts of Europe, through the culpable ignorance of his foreign secretary in matters concerning the Porte. We have already read what van Wicquefort has to say about the episode in his influential treatise on diplomacy. These were mistakes for which there really was no excuse. It seems possible that, de Lionne being an elder statesman of long and valued service, the king would not wish to humiliate him by open dismissal. Louis could make his displeasure obvious to those who needed to know, by permitting, if not encouraging, Molière to lampoon the proceedings at Suresnes: 'le ridicule déshonore plus que le déshonneur'.<sup>166</sup> Significantly, in the pictorial representation of the second Suresnes interview [following page 59], de Lionne and his entourage appear in normal court dress, not in the elaborate oriental robes described in our written sources, nor does the background of the engraving reveal any attempt to reconstruct the Turkish Divan; that was not how Louis chose to have his government's manner of conducting diplomatic proceedings preserved for posterity. It would seem that the historical record is being whitewashed, that a decision has been taken in high places to airbrush an unfortunate episode from the record, as it were (much as Stalin was to remove Trotsky and other high ranking Bolsheviks from official photographs in the twentieth century). The reader will recall how the officially approved accounts in the *Gazette* differ from our other sources, which points are emphasised, which glossed over because they detract from the king's majesty.

Critical scholarship has recently given rise to various suggestions concerning the identity of M. Jourdain. Michèle Longino speculates that Molière may have based his 'Bourgeois' on a certain Jean-François Roboly. Roboly was a successful Marseilles merchant who had acted as French chargé d'affaires at Istanbul during Jean de la Haye's imprisonment, continuing to do so until the arrival of Denis de la Haye as his father's official replacement. Roboly returned to his trading post in 1665, but his period of tenure ended under a cloud. He was accused of the embezzlement of embassy funds, though nothing could be proved, the relevant documents having been destroyed in a suspiciously convenient fire. Roboly I think

<sup>166</sup> La Rochefoucauld, *Maximes*, ed. J.Truchet, n. 326, p. 80.

an unlikely candidate for Molière's M. Jourdain. As early as 1640, he is referred to in the records of the Capuchins as being resident in Istanbul and negotiating to buy property on their behalf.<sup>167</sup> It would seem, from the few references that we have to him, that Istanbul was his main place of residence. Robert Mantran quotes a *Mémoire* from Roboly himself, written in his official capacity from Istanbul on the 5<sup>th</sup> March 1670, listing the French houses of commerce and the names of other French nationals resident there, including three surgeons, an apothecary, three tailors, 'un faiseur de ressorts', clockmakers and engravers.<sup>168</sup> He refers to his own establishment as 'Roboly, de Marseilles, et son adjoint Caullet, établi depuis 30 ans', i.e. since 1640 (AN B1 376, fos. 71-72). Roboly's establishment was actually the first French trading post to be established in that city. In the same report, he complains that trade with the Turks was hampered by the poor quality of the goods sent out from France. French products also attracted a higher rate of duty, so they were not competitive. All this does not imply the existence of a flourishing textile business that would have enabled Roboly to amass a fortune on the same scale as that of M. Jourdain. Even granted that an ambitious merchant might wish to make regular visits to the French capital, given what must have been Roboly's fairly advanced age by 1670 combined with the undoubted rigours of the journey (which could take between five and six months in unfavourable conditions, not to mention the quarantine requirements in a time of plague), it is unlikely that he could have become sufficiently well known in Paris to merit a personal satire by Molière. The date of Roboly's Istanbul letter, March 1670, makes it altogether unlikely that he was to be found in Paris at or around the time of composition of the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*.

Longino also suggests that Molière based the character of Covielle on Laurent d'Arvieux, making fun of him simply because he disliked the man. There is no evidence for such an assumption. We may not even assume that the two men had met prior to their co-operation on the play, let alone any element of personal antagonism, because this is nowhere suggested in the contemporary sources. D'Arvieux was immensely proud of his connection with Molière and would have been sure to mention any prior acquaintance when he tells the story of his own contribution to the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* in his *Mémoires*. Logic dictates that Molière must have been working on the comedy for some time prior to the arrival of d'Arvieux to advise on 'les habillemens et les manieres des Turcs'. The 'turquerie' was an afterthought of the king's and therefore the last section to be written, whereas Covielle makes his appearance in Act III. The lovable rogue is a congenial character and one who invites audience complicity in the plot; if Molière had really wished to satirise d'Arvieux from motives of personal spite, there were far more effective weapons in his armoury. We cannot so easily equate d'Arvieux's reporting of the king's pleasantries in his *Mémoires*, "N'oubliez pas vos langues Orientales, car je pourrai vous employer pour mon service dans ces Païs-là" with Covielle's "Ce sont façons de parler obligeantes de ces pays-là" [Act IV, iv] and make this the basis for an identification between the two.<sup>169</sup> D'Arvieux did not publish in his own lifetime, let alone during that of Molière; the *Mémoires* were drafted in old age and appeared post mortem in 1735, edited by another hand. The *père* Labat was notorious for the inaccuracy of his editing, particularly when he disapproved of the subject matter. D'Arvieux was thus never able to correct the editing of his work, since it went to press some years after his own death and this is usually held to account for any inconsistencies. How then could Molière possibly allude to these *Mémoires* in a comedy produced in 1670? Covielle is a comic stereotype, straight from the *Commedia dell'arte*. He is the 'valet rusé' beloved of French comedy, the direct descendant of Plautus's crafty slave resorting to all manner of

<sup>167</sup> P. Bruno, "Ambassadeurs de France et Capucins français à Constantinople au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, d'après le journal du P. Thomas de Paris", *Etudes franciscaines*, XXIX, pp. 232-259, 1913.

<sup>168</sup> Robert Mantran, *Istanbul dans la seconde moitié du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1962).

<sup>169</sup> Laurent d'Arvieux, *Mémoires*, t.IV, p. 110.

underhand trickery as he furthers the romantic designs of his master

Neither is it safe to speculate that d'Arvieux provided the prototype for M. Jourdain. Granted the common mercantile background, this is the only resemblance between the two. D'Arvieux was a dashing young man with the bulk of his career in front of him, whereas M. Jourdain is a stout, middle-aged *paterfamilias*, who has made his fortune and is now looking to spend it. While not from the upper echelons of the nobility, d'Arvieux was admitted as 'chevalier' to an order of chivalry as early as 1660, the 'Ordre du Saint-Sépulchre'. He would certainly have had to produce evidence of noble birth and good character before the ceremony of initiation, and was consequently a person of quality, entitled to bear the particule. Indeed, according to Mary Hossain, the nobility of the d'Arvieux family may be traced back as far as the early sixteenth century in Artefeuil's *Histoire heroïque et universelle de la noblesse de Provence* and Aubert de la Chesnaye des Bois's *Dictionnaire de la Noblesse*.<sup>170</sup> D'Arvieux was an educated and well-travelled man, sufficiently polished and urbane to make his way in the treacherous environment of the court. He was thought suitable to be admitted to the intimacy of the royal family and later to a second order of chivalry, the *Ordre de Notre-Dame du Mont Carmel et de Saint-Lazare de Jérusalem* in 1673. Our M. Jourdain is of humble 'roturier' background; however much he might wish to conceal his origins, he constantly betrays himself when he attempts to ape his betters and we cannot imagine him at court without a chuckle. There are other, more likely, candidates for M. Jourdain and we must remember that the bulk of the comedy was completed before d'Arvieux appeared upon the scene.

On the basis of the elocution lesson in Act II iv, Jean Marion suggests that Molière based the character on Colbert, who, though ennobled, was of bourgeois origin and is said never to have lost his plebeian accent.<sup>171</sup> But Colbert was high in the king's favour and far too powerful a figure for Molière to risk an attack on him without the certainty of royal support and for this there is no evidence. Furthermore, Bruzen de la Martinière, one of the earliest sources for the life of Molière, explicitly associates Colbert with the suggestion for the 'turquerie':

...Il faut excepter de ces Courtisans Mr. Colbert. C'étoit à lui qu'il auroit falu se prendre des *balachou*, *balaba* & de la ceremonie Turque...<sup>172</sup>

A man of Colbert's stamp was highly unlikely to propose himself as sacrificial victim. Elizabeth Maxfield-Miller argues somewhat more convincingly that Molière could have based his 'Bourgeois' on a genuine M. Jourdain, a self-made draper who flourished in Paris during the early years of the century. This is certainly possible, given the coincidence of name and trade, but I agree with Gaston Hall that it is an unlikely scenario, if only because of the time lapse from the death of this M. Jourdain in 1608 to the first production of the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* in 1670. The theory is an attractive one, but, as in the case of Roboly, we must question whether Guillaume Jourdain could have been sufficiently well known to become a byword for a certain class of parvenu and thus merit an eponymous appearance upon the stage in 1670. Molière normally preferred to disguise his victims under a

<sup>170</sup> Hossain 1, pp. 76-88; Artefeuil, *Histoire heroïque et universelle de la noblesse de Provence*, 3 vols (Avignon, 1757-59); Aubert de la Chesnaye des Bois, *Dictionnaire de la Noblesse*, 19 vols (Paris, 1863-76) 1, p. 861.

<sup>171</sup> Jean Marion, "Molière a-t-il songé à Colbert en composant le personnage de M. Jourdain?" *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, XLV, pp. 145-180, 1938. See also E. Maxfield-Miller, "The Real M. Jourdain of the Bourgeois Gentilhomme." *Studies in Philology*, 5, pp. 62-73, 1959 and H. Gaston Hall, *Molière's Le Bourgeois gentilhomme: Context and Stagecraft*. Durham Modern Language Series FM5 (Durham, 1990).

<sup>172</sup> *La Nouvelle Vie...*, see pp. 92-93.

pseudonym, however perfunctory, for example the 'bel esprit' Cotin/Trissotin of *Les Femmes savantes*. Other names have been suggested: the hatter Gandorin or the tax-collector Montauron for example, were widely reputed to share some of the characteristics of M. Jourdain. Montauron also makes an appearance in the *Historiettes* of Tallement des Réaux. It seems more feasible however, until some evidence should emerge to the contrary, to conclude that Molière intended M. Jourdain to represent a social type, rather than any specific individual.

In so far as the fraught issue of religious symbolism is concerned, I think it probable that no direct parody of Islam was intended. Molière's 'turquerie' bears no resemblance to any known orthodox Muslim ceremonial. Most commentators have seen in it rather a loose, but nonetheless recognisable, adaptation of the Mevlevi (or "Whirling") Dervish rites and d'Arvieux's *Mémoires* are frequently quoted in support of this interpretation. The accuracy of his recollections may be confirmed by reference to Mouradgea d'Ohsson's *Tableau general de l'empire othoman*.<sup>173</sup> There is also an earlier account to be found in Baudier's *Histoire generale de la religion des Turcs*, t. III, p. 369:

Ils se mettent en rond, l'un de leur troupe commence à battre melodieusement un petit tambour, & à se manier luy-mesme en cercle, les autres le suivent, & vont d'une telle vitesse en leurs tournoyemés, qu'il est impossible à ceux qui sont spectateur de ceste mommerie, de discerner si ce sont des hommes, ou des statuës, qui sont agitées en rond. Pendant ce mouvement violent ils proferent d'une voix lente, & doucement poussée certaines oraisons de leur Religion, iusques à ce que les forces leur défailans, ils tombent à terre come morts. On les couvre de quelque drap iusques à ce qu'ils ayent beu leur sueur. .

D'Arvieux tells us that he personally attended dervish ceremonies in 1660, during his visit to Tripoli. Given the close parallels between his descriptions and the 'cérémonie turque' itself, the analogy is an obvious one and all the more likely since it was he who acted as adviser on matters oriental during the composition of the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*. The rôle of the Mufti, for example, could well be based on that of the dervish 'Dédé':

...Dervich Ali...a la tête toute chargée de plumes de differentes sortes, & une veste composée de tant de pieces de différentes couleurs, que c'est un vrai mascarade [sic]. Sa ceinture large d'un bon pied, est agrahée par un grand nombre de boucles de cuivre. Il porte toûjours une douzaine de longs bâtons, dont les bouts sont ornez de quantité de guenilles, de cornes de biches sauvages, de haches, de marteaux, d'armes & de banderolles. Tous ces bâtons sont passez entre la veste & la ceinture, & lui environnent le dos & l'estomac. Dans cet état, il se fait connoître de loin, marche gravement, & marmotte continuellement sur un gros chapelet de deux à trois brasses de longueur. Il a toûjours les pieds nus, & tous les doigts des mains chargez d'autant d'anneaux qu'ils en peuvent contenir, & ses oreilles percées en plusieurs endroits, avec forces anneaux, plumes et autres babilles...Les Turcs...le respectent encore comme un Saint. Plus les extravagances sont grandes, & plus ils ont de vénération pour ceux qui les font. Les imbeciles, les lunatiques, les épiléptiques, sont chez eux des Saints, à qui Dieu se communique d'une maniere ineffable dans les tems de leurs accès.<sup>174</sup>

The word 'Muphty' was doubtless chosen by Molière to denote a senior Muslim cleric, rather than what would have been the more accurate 'shaikh al-Islam', because it was already so

<sup>173</sup> Mouradgea d'Ohsson, *Tableau general de l'empire othoman*, tome IV, pp. 629-657.

<sup>174</sup> Laurent d'Arvieux, *Mémoires*, t. I, p. 324-25.

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*The Habit of Dervises*



*The Prior over a Convent of Dervises*

Dervish costume; from Paul Rycaut, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (1668).



*Aga Bajin Lanterorum primus  
ac summus dux*

*Cadi Ismet omnium causarum  
index apud Turc.*

*Supremus Ismael Parsar M. Dux*

*Solimanus Turcorum Imp.*

Seventeenth-century Turkish costume; from C. D. Rouillard, *The Turk in French History, Thought and Literature* (Paris, 1941).

familiar to French theatre audiences from the numerous tragedies with a Turkish theme that had appeared on the stage. This is precisely the difficulty raised by Hadgy Mustafa. In reality, a 'mufti' is a jurist-consult in Islamic law and in no respect the equivalent of a Catholic priest or bishop.

Any parody of Sufi dervish practices would be unlikely to offend the Muslim establishment in Constantinople, who considered them not only a dangerously heretical sect but a public nuisance.<sup>175</sup> The decision to imitate a dervish ceremony in the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*, given this context, would probably have been a deliberate one. It suggests a detailed knowledge of Ottoman affairs and careful orchestration on the part of the author. Dervish ritual must have seemed particularly suitable for the 'turquerie', providing as it did the opportunity for creating a ballet from the whirling motion used to induce a trance-like state in the devotees, accompanied as it was by the music of flute and drum. Yet if we examine contemporary descriptions more closely, we realise that the words 'gravité', 'modestie', 'les yeux baissez' frequently recur and the reality is nothing like the burlesque carnival atmosphere of Molière's 'turquerie':

...Le discours fini, ils se levent tous en même tems avec gravité & modestie, & toûjours les yeux baissez, ils se mettent à tourner tantôt sur un talon & tantôt sur l'autre, avec une rapidité qui feroit tourner la tête à tout autre qu'à des gens comme eux, qui sont instruits dans cet exercice dès leur jeunesse... Ils continuent ce pénible exercice pendant près d'une heure. Quand les flûtes et les timbales cessent de jôuer au signe que fait le Superieur, il descend aussi-tôt avec gravité, & tenant toûjours son Alcoran à la main, il se met à tourner comme les autres ont fait; mais personne ne lui tient compagnie. Ils forment un cercle autour de lui debout, les yeux baissez & les bras pendans sur leurs côtez. Quand il a tourné environ autant de tems que les autres, il fait un signe et aussi-tôt les instruments cessent.<sup>176</sup>

As we know, Molière possessed a copy of Du Loir's *Voyages* which contains detailed descriptions of dervish ritual, including an attempt at the musical notation of a hymn. Couton argues with reference to the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* that Molière also appears to have had access to a copy of the 1669 French translation, by Briot, of Sir Paul Rycaut's *Present State of the Ottoman Empire*; this again provides a detailed account of Mevlevi music and ceremonies.<sup>177</sup> For the sake of interest, I have included relevant excerpts from both Rycaut and Du Loir in the Appendix.

The question of whether the 'turquerie' includes material of more covert religious significance was hotly debated, particularly during the nineteenth century. If we are prepared to accept that the 'cérémonie turque' does not parody any specific Muslim ritual, orthodox or otherwise, and that the Ottoman empire possessed neither order of chivalry nor 'noblesse d'épée' to which M. Jourdain could be admitted on becoming a 'mamamouchi', then there remains the possibility that Molière had a different target in mind. Christendom has both. The careful and detailed inquisition as to whether an initiate is free from all taint of heresy, of good character and of noble birth, is distinctly reminiscent of admission into an order of chivalry. It is also reminiscent of Catholic ceremonial, notably the rites of baptism, confirmation and the consecration of a bishop. Theatrical allusions to the Catholic hierarchy might, to a limited extent, pass muster under the cover of French resistance to the Pope's

<sup>175</sup> See, for example, Halil Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire* (London, 1973) and Robert Mantran, *L'Empire ottoman du XVIe au XVIIIe siècle. Administration, économie, société* (London, 1984).

<sup>176</sup> Laurent d' Arvieux, *Mémoires*, t. II, p. 394-95.

<sup>177</sup> *Histoire de l'état présent de l'Empire ottoman traduite de l'anglais de Ricaut... par Briot*, published June 1669. This was copiously illustrated and would have been the most recent work to appear on the Ottoman Empire.

political powers; Gallicanism remained an issue during the reign of Louis XIV. It seems strange that the parallel does not appear to have been drawn during Molière's life-time and the cry of blasphemy raised, given the furious controversies sparked by earlier plays such as *L'Ecole des femmes*, *Tartuffe* and *Dom Juan*.<sup>178</sup> René de Semallé first noted the striking resemblance to the rite of ordination in 1884. He relates his attendance at the consecration of a close, personal friend as bishop in 1865:

Les belles prières de l'église et l'ordre des cérémonies me frappèrent vivement. J'étais des plus recueillis, quand ma ferveur fit place, pendant quelques instants, à une douce hilarité.

C'est que je vis mon reverend ami prosterné et ayant sur le dos un énorme livre d'évangiles maintenu avec peine en équilibre par deux chapelains. Cette partie de la cérémonie me rappelait complètement la réception du Mamamouchi, quand le Muphti impose le Coran sur le dos de monsieur Jourdain. Je me dis d'abord que cette analogie était purement fortuite, et que probablement les musulmans avaient une consécration analogue pour les Ulémas ou les Muphtis, ou que je retrouverais cette imposition d'un gros livre dans le sacre des Rois, la prise d'habit des Religieux, ou l'armement des Chevaliers.

J'ai lu attentivement tout le cérémonial du sacre des Rois, j'ai assisté à des ordinations et à des prises d'habits, je n'ai trouvé nulle part cette cérémonie que dans le sacre d'un Evêque et la réception du Mamamouchi. Un de mes amis de Constantine, parlant arabe, m'a assuré qu'on ne mettait le Coran sur les épaules ni des Ulémas ni des Muphtis... J'ai retrouvé pareille cérémonie dans un rituel à l'usage des Templiers, mais c'est encore pour la consécration d'un Evêque.<sup>179</sup>

De Semallé then offers the following analogies for comparison: there is a formal inquisition and profession of faith; a large book is placed upon the shoulders of the initiate from which the officiating clergy read; a white band / turban is placed on the head during the ceremony; crosier and scimitar are bestowed as symbols of office, with the injunctions '*Accipe baculum pastoralis officii...*' and '*Pigliar schiabbola...*'

The argument was further developed by J.-J. Weiss in the *Journal des Débats*, for March 1885, reaching the conclusion that there had indeed been sacrilegious intent. Molière was also held by certain of his contemporaries to have been a dangerous freethinker. It was this aspect to his writing, allegedly revealed in such plays as *Tartuffe*, *Dom Juan* and *L'Ecole des femmes*, that provided one of the more telling thrusts of Boulanger de Chalussay's vindictive personal satire, *Elomire hypocondre* (1670). Here the hapless playwright is literally threatened with the stake:

ELOMIRE: Mon salut? Je suis donc dans un péril extrême?  
 FLORIMONT: Oui, grâce aux saletés de ta *Tarte à la crème*;  
 Grâce à ton *Imposteur*, dont les impiétés  
 T'apprentent des fagots déjà de tous côtés (Act IV, ii).<sup>180</sup>

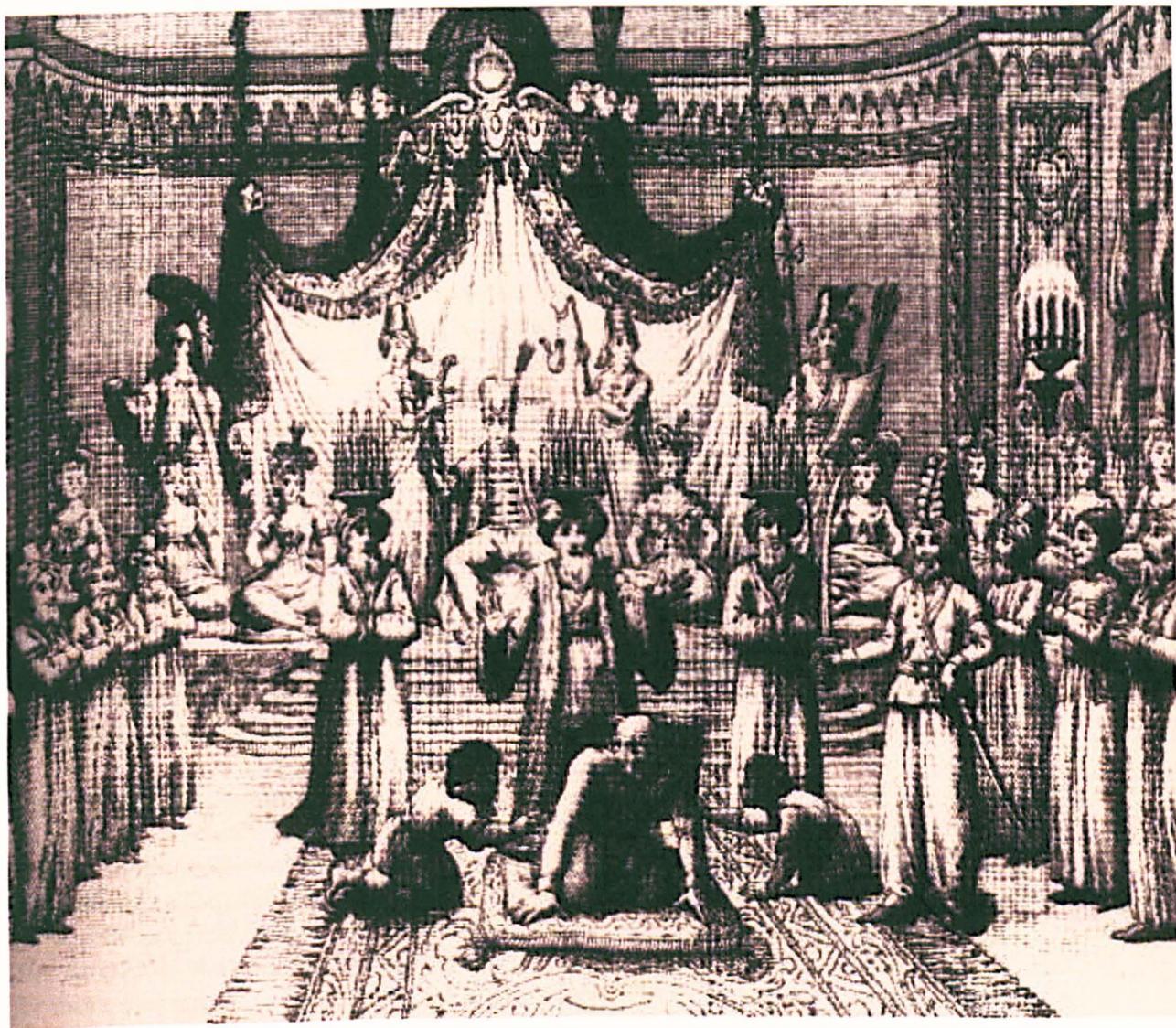
The use of the terms 'impiétés' and 'fagots' could not be more explicit. The threat is a real one, though Elomire affects to make light of it, 'Ces gens ont les bras longs, et les coups fort pesants. Garde de les sentir' [ibid.]. Molière reveals that he himself was not unaware of the danger, in the *Premier placet présenté au roi sur la comédie du "Tartuffe"*:

<sup>178</sup> See A. Calder, *Molière. The theory and practice of comedy* (London, 1993).

<sup>179</sup> René de Semallé, "Comme quoi la lecture de la "Vie des Saints" et la connaissance du cérémonial romain sont utiles à l'intelligence de quelques comédies de Molière." *Le Moliériste*, pp. 181-187 (1885).

<sup>180</sup> Published in Couton, t. 2, pp. 1231-86.

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The Mufti reading from the Alcoran in an early production of the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*.

...je suis un démon vêtu de chair et habillé en homme, un libertin, un impie digne d'un supplice exemplaire. Ce n'est pas assez que le feu expie en public mon offense, j'en serais quitte à trop bon marché...<sup>181</sup>

The belief that the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* contained a parody of Catholic ceremonial was also advanced as the motive behind Grimarest's anecdote of Louis's apparent displeasure at the Chambord première of the play and its subsequent cool reception at court.<sup>182</sup> Yet it must remain highly debatable whether Molière would have dared to stage such a scene before Louis XIV with the explicit intention of mocking the Catholic Church. Quite simply, given the hostility of the 'dévots', he could not afford to lose the protection of the king in this manner.

The 'cérémonie turque' in its familiar form does not appear in print until 1682, some nine years after the death of its author. In the earliest printed edition, that of March 1671, Molière restricts himself to furnishing the stage directions, which accompany a lingua franca dialogue and there is little to cause offence to those of a pious disposition. In this shorter, less controversial, version the 'inquisition' precedes the bestowal of the turban and the cast are instructed as follows:

Le Mufti demande, en même langue, aux Turcs assistants de quelle religion est le Bourgeois, et ils l'assurent qu'il est mahométan. Le Mufti invoque Mahomet en langue franque...(Act IV, sc.v)

The 'Alcoran' is then offered to the Mufti, 'qui fait une seconde invocation' and presents the initiate with a sword. There are no indications as to what use is to be made of the volume. The ceremony ends with the 'ultima affronta' of the bastinado, the imposition of which we presume to be the object of the exercise, and the Turks leave the stage 'en dansant et chantant avec plusieurs instruments à la turquesque'. There was plenty of scope for the 1682 edition of the 'turquerie' to evolve over the intervening eleven years; it is considerably longer and also far more prescriptive of the details for the ceremony. It is in the second version that we find the unfortunate resemblances to Catholic ritual, though heretical sects such as the Anabaptists, the Puritans and the followers of Zwingli, Huss and Luther rub shoulders with pagans and Brahmins in strange litany. It is here also that we find the imposition of the Qur'an on the unfortunate M. Jourdain's shoulders and the misuse of sacred names referred to by Voltaire, in the repeated cries of 'Hou', 'Alla ekber' and 'Alli'. It may well be the case that this later version is faithful to the author's original intent, he himself being reluctant to publish during his lifetime for fear of having his fingers burnt, but it appeared posthumously and we cannot be certain that Molière approved it, though both Mesnard and Couton argue that he did on the grounds that it reflects the established practice of the cast.<sup>183</sup>

Rouillard suggests what is to my mind by far the most likely source for the imposition of the scriptures in the illustrations for the ballet costumes of the *Bal de la Douairiere de Billebahaut* (1626). Here we find a mufti, clad in a ridiculously large turban, reading from a Qur'an carried on the backs of two acolytes [see overleaf].<sup>184</sup> By 1670, there was a long and venerable tradition at the French court of staging Turkish scenes in the 'ballets de cour' and other 'divertissements'.<sup>185</sup> The Turks had figured prominently in royal

<sup>181</sup> Ibid. vol. 1, pp. 889-91.

<sup>182</sup> Grimarest, *La Vie de M. de Molière*, édition critique par Georges Mongrédien, p. 7 (Paris, 1955).

<sup>183</sup> Mesnard, vol. VIII, p. 183; Couton, t. 2, p. 701.

<sup>184</sup> Rouillard 1, pp. 33-52.

<sup>185</sup> On the representation of Turks in the ballet prior to Molière, see Marie-Françoise Christout, *Le Ballet de*

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Turkish ballet costumes c.1626. Entrée of the Sultan and entrée of Mahomet, *Grand Bal de la Douairiere de Billebahaut*; from C. D. Rouillard, *The Turk in French History, Thought and Literature* (Paris, 1941).

entertainments for at least eighty years. Lully himself had composed a Turkish ballet a decade earlier. This has not come down to us, yet it may well be that echoes survive in the libretto of the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*. We read in the *Muze historique* for the 18th December 1660 of his:

...Balet  
 Peu sérieux, mais très folet,  
 Sur tout dans un récit Turquesque.  
 Si singulier et si burlesque,  
 Et dont Baptiste étoit Auteur,  
 Que, sans doute, tout spectateur  
 En eut la rate épanouïe,  
 Tant par les yeux que par l'ouïe.<sup>186</sup>

This is Beauchamps' *divertissement* of the 15th December, presumably performed as an impromptu in the royal apartments, though Loret gives no further details. The 'ballet de cour' was not then so far removed from the theatre as the ballet might be today. There was a dramatic and also a literary element to it, since the *livret* formed an essential part of the performance. Paquot defines the ballet de cour as 'un spectacle où la danse traduirait le rythme des vers chantés selon l'indication métrique'. Music and costume were used for various exotic effects and the dancers would also act parts in pantomime. Paquot gives no fewer than nineteen examples of ballets where Turks are featured, produced between the *Ballet des Turcs* of 1600 and Lully's 'turquerie' of 1660.<sup>187</sup> The *Ballet des Janissaires* was performed before Henri IV in 1604. The Turks were already appearing in the ballet with some frequency by the reign of Louis XIII (1610-1643). Under Louis XIV ballets with Turkish motifs were performed in 1643 (*Le Librairie du Pont Neuf*), 1645 (*Ballet des Vrais Moyens de parvenir*), 1646 (the *Boutade des Comédiens*), 1653 (the *Ballet de la Nuit*), 1654 (the *Ballet des Proverbes*), 1657 (*Les Plaisirs troublés*) and 1659 (the *Ballet de la Raillerie*). A *Ballet des Muets du Grand Seigneur* was performed in 1667. We find the same theme occurring in the *carrousel*, a mounted performance to music. The *Grand Carrousel* of 1662, depicted in the engravings of Chauveau and Silvestre, features both Turks and Persians. Like his father before him, the youthful Louis XIV was particularly fond of the dance and enjoyed appearing on stage, often along with other members of the royal family. The sobriquet of

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*cour de Louis XIV, 1643-1672* (Paris, 1967); Paul La Croix, *Ballets et Mascarades de Cour de Henri III à Louis XIV, 1581-1652* (Geneva-Turin, 1868-1879); Marcel Paquot, "Les Etrangers dans le Ballet de Cour." *Revue du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, XV, p.43 ff. (1928), XVI, p. 21 ff. (1929) and *Les Etrangers dans les divertissements de la Cour de Beaujoyeux à Molière (1581-1673)* (Brussels, 1932); John S. Powell, *Music and Theatre in France, 1600-1680* (Oxford, 2000); Rouillard 1 and Rouillard 2. On the ballet and Molière, see Claude Abraham, *On the structure of Molière's comédies-ballets* [Biblio 17, 1984]; Volker Kapp (ed.), "Le Bourgeois gentilhomme et les problèmes de la comédie-ballet." (In Kapp, *Biblio 17*, pp.7-8) and *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme: problèmes de la comédie-ballet* [Biblio 17-67]. *Papers on French Seventeenth Century Literature* (Paris-Seattle-Tübingen, 1991); Patrick D.Laude, *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme, problèmes de la comédie-ballet*, [Biblio 17, 67] (Paris, 1991); Robert McBride, "The triumph of Ballet in *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*" (In *Form and Drama: aesthetic coherence in seventeenth-century French drama*, edited by I. D. McFarlane, W. D. Howarth and M. M. McGowan (Amersham, 1982) and *The Triumph of Ballet in Molière's Theatre* (New York, 1992); Margaret M. McGowan, "La danse: son rôle multiple" (In Kapp, *Biblio 17*, pp. 163-183); Charles Mazouer, *Molière et ses comédies-ballets* (Paris, 1993); Maurice Pellisson, *Les Comédies-ballets de Molière* (Paris, 1914); Hartmut Stenzel, "Projet critique et divertissement de cour. Sur la place de la comédie-ballet et du *Bourgeois gentilhomme* dans le théâtre de Molière." (In Kapp, *Biblio 17*, pp. 163-183).

<sup>186</sup> *La Muze historique*, tome III, p. 293, quoted by Paquot, *Les Etrangers dans les divertissements de la cour*, p. 160 (Brussels, 1932).

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.* p. 41.

'Roi-Soleil' is said to derive from the ballet costume that the young Louis wore, dancing the part of the sun in the *Ballet de la Nuit* of 1653. As Monsieur Jourdain himself is only too well aware, music and the dance are necessary accomplishments for the 'gens de qualité'. Nevertheless, the *Grand Bal de la Douairière de Billebahaut* of 1626 remains the most notable of all; it comprised an elaborate 'turquerie', with a *Ballet du Grand Turc & Peuples d'Asie* of which the libretto, drawings and descriptions are preserved, together with verses by Sorel and Imbert.<sup>188</sup> The *Bourgeois gentilhomme* is neither an isolated example nor was it a particular novelty at the time, but part of a long tradition of representing the Turks in dance, as Molière himself had already done in *Le Sicilien*.

Pierre Martino suggests that the 'cérémonie turque' parodies the ritual for admission into an order of chivalry, rather than those of the Catholic Church.<sup>189</sup> Such an interpretation seems to me to be entirely reasonable, given the context of the play. M. Jourdain seeks ennoblement and this would be the usual path for a commoner attempting to enter the ranks of the aristocracy. Significantly, the name 'Jourdain' indicates an association with the Holy Land, then part of the Ottoman Empire. Nomenclature is part and parcel of the crazy logic of comedy. It had happened that the young Laurent d'Arvieux's arrival at court took place at a particularly propitious time. Louis and Colbert were preoccupied with the maintenance of French influence in the Levant and the delicate balance to be kept between the desirability of the Ottoman alliance against the Habsburgs and the notion that it was the duty of all Christian princes to unite against the Infidel Turk. The Ottoman Empire was currently undergoing a process of military revival and expansionism after a period of internecine strife. The Turks now posed a significant threat to central Europe. Soliman Aga had been sent to Paris precisely because Franco-Turkish relations were at a low ebb and the Sultan wished to clarify the situation. Louis was thus in a most awkward position. As 'Roi Très Chrétien', he could not afford to be seen to ignore a personal appeal from the Pope to join together with other Catholic powers in an effort to halt Ottoman aggression. Such a course would have rightly earned him considerable opprobrium both at home and abroad. Yet French commercial, strategic and dynastic interests required the Ottoman alliance. Colbert was anxious to confirm the position of France as the major European power in the Levant, for French commerce to be given the same privileges as the English and the Dutch, and for the Ottomans to co-operate in the suppression of piracy. Louis maintained a precarious equilibrium, sending just sufficient help to the Venetians and Hungarians to avoid criticism from the religious party at home, whilst at the same time reassuring the Sultan in secret that France had no real hostile intentions. It was actually rumoured that the French troops sent to reinforce Candia against the Turks had been given covert instructions to avoid military action. In this poisonous atmosphere of mutual suspicion, all European powers (amongst whom we may include the Ottoman Empire) maintained an elaborate network of spies and informers in each other's major cities. When Pope Clement IX finally called for a Crusade, there was a considerable weight of opinion in France in favour of such an enterprise.

As part of this scenario and to reinforce Louis's crusading credentials, it was decided to institute a new order of chivalry. We read in d'Arvieux's *Mémoires*:

Le Roi songeoit depuis quelque tems à instituer un Ordre de Chevalerie à l'imitation de ses augustes Prédecesseurs, et il vouloit qu'il fût destiné au service de l'Eglise contre les infideles, et à celui de l'Etat.

Le père Ferrier alors confesseur du Roi m'en avoit communiqué quelque chose avant

<sup>188</sup> See Rouillard 2, p. 630 ff. for a detailed description with excerpts from the libretto.

<sup>189</sup> P Martino, "La cérémonie turque du *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*." *Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France*, XVIII (i), 1911, pp. 37-60; henceforward: Martino.

mon Voyage à Constantinople.<sup>190</sup>

In 1664 and again in 1672, royal edicts were promulgated to regulate and revive the military orders of the *Hospitaliers de Saint-Lazare* and of *Notre Dame du Mont Carmel*, though in a combined form as the *Ordre Royal de Notre-Dame du Mont Carmel et de Saint-Lazare de Jerusalem*. According to Martino, the young Laurent d'Arvieux was still plain Laurent Arvieu when he was sent to Constantinople as 'envoyé extraordinaire' in the wake of de Nointel.<sup>191</sup> But this time scale, as Mary Hossain argues, is not strictly accurate.<sup>192</sup> D'Arvieux had already been admitted into the Order of the Holy Sepulchre and taken the *particule* as the Chevalier d'Arvieux. On his return from Constantinople he was initiated into a second order of chivalry as a reward for services rendered. He was therefore sufficiently familiar with the ceremonial for knighthood to give a detailed description of it to Molière in 1670. D'Arvieux has left us an account of his initiation and the resemblance to the 'cérémonie turque' will at once become apparent:

...Il faut encore produire trois Gentilshommes qui témoignent la pureté de la race, et qu'on n'a aucune tâche de Judaïsme ou de Mahometisme...M. le marquis de Sauleux Maître des Cérémonies nous conduisit à la Chapelle. Le Père Toussaint de S. Luc Carme, Aumônier de l'Ordre, revêtu des ornemens Sacerdotaux, nous fit lire & signer notre Profession de Foi, & nous en donna une copie. Il benit ensuite nos épées, & puis les croix qu'on nous devoit donner, & les Livres qui contenoient les regles de l'Ordre & l'Office de la Sainte Vierge.....Après cela on nous fit passer dans la chambre de M. de Louvois. Nous le trouvâmes assis dans un grand fauteuil, nous lui fîmes une profonde reverence, & chacun à son tour, selon qu'il étoit appelé par le Heraut, s'approcha de lui, tira son épée, la lui presenta, & s'étant mis à genoux à ses pieds, en reçût trois coups sur les épaules, pendant qu'il prononça ces parôles: AU NOM DU DIEU VIVANT: Je vous fais Chevalier de l'Ordre Royal de Notre-Dame du Mont-Carmel & de Saint-Lazare de Jerusalem. Amen. Il nous rendit nos épées, & nous donna la croix que nous attachâmes à nos pourpoints, & enfin un Livre qui contenoit l'Office de la Sainte Vierge ...La cérémonie achevée, nous remerciâmes M. notre Grand Vicaire, & nous nous retirâmes.<sup>193</sup>

The parallels with Molière's Turkish ceremony, noted by Martino, are at once obvious: the presence of witnesses, the proof of birth and suitability: 'ti non star furba? Non star forfanta?'; the profession of faith: 'Mahametana, Mahametana'; the conduct of the ceremony by a leading cleric, not by king or sultan; the blessing of the sword; the blow on the shoulder; the presentation of the insignia of the Order: 'donar turbanta' and of the sword: 'pigliar schiabola'; the necessity for a holy book. 'Paladin' or 'knight errant' is a chivalric term, the equivalent of 'chevalier'; the very word is resonant with echoes of Charlemagne, of Godefroi de Bouillon and the Crusaders. The initiate is finally exhorted to defend Palestine, 'deffender Palestina', and this last point is perhaps the most significant in the light of my previous remarks. It seems to me that the decision to mimic the ceremonial of initiation into a crusading Order, leaving aside any personal connotations for d'Arvieux, was deliberate and intended to establish a connection between France and the Holy Land in the minds of the audience. The 'turquerie' bears the unmistakable stamp of Colbert and it is also a matter of

<sup>190</sup> Laurent d'Arvieux, *Mémoires*, t. V, p. 28.

<sup>191</sup> Martino, p. 54.

<sup>192</sup> Hossain I, pp. 76-88.

<sup>193</sup> Laurent d'Arvieux, *Mémoires*, tome V, p. 32-34.

*Ostpolitik*. For reasons of national prestige, France desired formal recognition of her rights of protection over the eastern Christians and claim to guardianship of the Holy Places; de Nointel was despatched to Constantinople with this very brief. Louis was rightly suspected in certain quarters of continuing to cherish the 'Grand Dessein', that is to say the establishment of a new "Monarchie universelle" founded on the ruins of Byzantium and restoring Christianity to its cradle.

Though it must take its place within a long tradition of court entertainment, it cannot be denied that the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* is extraordinarily complex in its origins, drawing on material from many and diverse sources. It is undeniably a social satire containing universal truths, yet it is also specific to a time and place. Our remit has confined us to the 'turquerie', yet of all the comedies that we shall be discussing in the course of this study, the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* is the one most directly linked to the exigencies of foreign policy, to questions of protocol and to the historical person of a visiting ambassador. It is certainly the best known and was for a long time somewhat tactlessly considered the most suitable form of official entertainment for visitors from abroad - we have already noted the reactions of one or two of them. Such was its popularity indeed that Molière's 'cérémonie turque' was to establish the paradigm for many a comic situation in the years to come. His imitators are legion and a representative sample of their works is considered in succeeding chapters, though only those with an ambassadorial as well as an 'Oriental' theme are featured. Amongst them are Bel-Isle (*Le Mariage de la reine de Monomotapa*), Fatouville (*L'Empereur dans la Lune* and *Le Banqueroutier*), Regnard (*Arlequin homme à bonne fortune* and *Le Divorce*) and Delosme de Monchenay (*Mezzetin Grand Sophy de Perse*).

**Chapter 4: Mattéo Lopés [Du Perche, *L'Ambassadeur d'Affrique*].**

'Garre l'Ambassadeur d'Affrique!' <sup>194</sup>

The *Ambassadeur d'Affrique* of 1666 is the only one of our comedies to privilege the term 'ambassadeur' by featuring it in the title, yet the reader will be sorely disappointed should s/he look to find any trace of personal satire here, in the manner of Poisson or Molière. Du Perche has given us little more than a short, one-act farce of eight scenes, written in octosyllabic verse. According to Lancaster, the author was probably the actor Jacques Crosnieur, sieur Du Perche, who borrowed money from Molière in 1667. We hear of him at Dijon (1670), Orléans (1674), joining Condé's troupe in 1677, forming the 'Troupe of the Dauphin' at Rouen around 1684 and playing at Lyons in 1689. Well known as a provincial actor and also the author of a comedy of manners, *Les Intrigues de la Vieille Tour* (Lyons, s.d.), he seems never to have achieved success in Paris.<sup>195</sup> We have been fortunate so far in our search for connections between the comic theatre and actual historical events. There can be little doubt that Poisson's *Faux Moscovites* is closely linked with Pierre Potemkin or Molière's *Bourgeois gentilhomme* with the furore surrounding Soliman Aga. We may have to accept that there is no such obvious lead in this third case and that in *L'Ambassadeur d'Affrique* we have an example of New Comedy, pure and simple, without topical reference. There was no 'ambassadeur d'Affrique' visiting the French capital in 1666, nor, as a matter of historical accuracy, could there have been. 'Afrique' was no more than a geographical term applied to the continent as a whole. 'Afrique' did not exist as an independent state, had not done so since the days of Carthage, when it was the term used by the Carthaginians for the area surrounding that city. The name 'Africa' was retained by the Romans for the province created after the Third Punic War in 146 BC and extended, as the Empire expanded, to cover the whole of the territory from Cyrenaica to the Atlantic. A province known as 'Ifriqiyah' was subsequently created in North Africa after the Arab conquest of Egypt in 640 AD, but this was not an independent entity engaging in diplomatic activity in Europe. By the time of Louis XIV, the area in question was controlled by the Barbary corsairs, under the nominal suzerainty of the Ottoman sultan. We do indeed find embassies arriving in Paris from Algiers, Morocco and Tripoli, but they are designated as such in our sources, and do not occur until rather later in the reign. Besides, in the text of his play Du Perche is very clearly describing black Africans from the sub-Saharan regions, not the Arabs, Turks or Berbers of the North. The West African kingdoms of the day, collectively known as 'Guinée', never as 'Affrique', were not well frequented by Europeans, despite the prevalence of the slave trade, owing to the unsuitability of the climate.

Interestingly, there are contemporary accounts of the arrival in December 1670, of a black African ambassador from Ardra (Allada), one of the petty kingdoms along the Guinea coast.<sup>196</sup> It seems scarcely to be contemplated that the monarch of such a tiny state

<sup>194</sup> Du Perche, *L'Ambassadeur d'Affrique*, sc. vii (Moulins, Vernoy, 1666).

<sup>195</sup> Lancaster III ii, pp. 680-81.

<sup>196</sup> The Sieur d'Elbée, *A voyage to Ardrah and Travels to the capital Assem, in 1669 and 1670. By the Sieur d'Elbée, sent by the French West India Company. To which is added, An Embassy from the King of Ardrah to Louis the Fourteenth. Now first translated from the French* (inserted in the second volume of the Chevalier de Marchais's *Voyage to Guinea*, in vol. 3 of *A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels*. (London, 1745),

could expect to negotiate on equal terms with the king of France, but that was indeed the case [see map for location of Ardra, in present day Dahomey]. His gifts were graciously received, though far removed from the splendid objects that were normally exchanged by sovereigns on the occasion of an embassy:

The Presents which the King of Ardrah sent to the King of France, were rather valuable for their Novelty, than any Thing else. They consisted in two Hangars wrought in this Country; two *Assagayes* neatly wrought; a Vest; and a Carpet made of the Bark of Trees, the Fineness and Ornaments of which were highly finished, and in a good Taste.<sup>197</sup>

The Ambassador himself, known by the Portuguese name of Mattéo Lopés though of African descent, seems to have made a more agreeable impression on the French than either the Turks or the Russians. He was eminently well suited to the appointment:

...the Ambassador ... was of a great Age, as appeared by the Whiteness of his Hair and

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henceforward: d'Elbée. See also the Chevalier des Marchais, *Voyage en Guinée et à Cayenne*, t. II, ch. X, p. 283 ff., and ch. XII, pp. 342-64, *Du Royaume d'Ardres*, ed. J.-B. Labat (Paris, 1730), henceforward: des Marchais, and John Barbot, *A Description of the coasts of North and South-Guinea; and of Ethiopia Inferior, vulgarly Angola: being a new and accurate account of the Western maritime countries of Africa in six books* (London, 1732). Des Marchais's *Voyage en Guinée et à Cayenne* was produced in collaboration with the same reverend father Jean-Baptiste Labat who published the *Mémoires* of Laurent d'Arvieux. Des Marchais, a sea captain of the Compagnie des Indes Occidentales, left his papers with Labat, who abridged and edited the journals for publication in 1730, that is, some sixty years after Lopés' visit to France. He inserts d'Elbée's description of Ardra and his account of the subsequent embassy into the second volume, of which they form Chapters Ten and Twelve respectively. D'Elbée held the office of Commissaire ordinaire de la marine du Roi, as well as that of commodore of the Compagnie des Indes Occidentales expedition to Ardra in 1669-70, and was thus a person of some consequence. Since Lopés travelled to France on board d'Elbée's ship, the *Concorde*, and d'Elbée acted as his escort and interpreter during their stay in Paris, his account of the visit is of considerable historical value. We do not know how his papers came into des Marchais's possession, but both were officers of the Compagnie des Indes Occidentales and it is not inconceivable that they were acquainted. Labat writes of des Marchais:

...le hazard me procura la connoissance du Chevalier des Marchais, grand homme de mer, qui dans les voyages qu'il a faits en Afrique, en Amerique & dans bien d'autres lieux, s'est acquis de vastes connoissances de tous ces Païs...Rien n'est plus détaillé que ce que le Chevalier des Marchais nous rapporte. Il semble qu'on soit sur les lieux, qu'on y traite, qu'on y commerce avec tous ces differens peuples...avec le soin & l'exactitude d'un homme curieux, habile, entendu, bon Dessinateur, bon Geometre, bon Pilote, excellent Capitaine [p. 279].

According to Labat, des Marchais was a gifted linguist and spoke several West African dialects. Thomas Astley, publishing his *magnum opus* in 1746, relies heavily on des Marchais and d'Elbée for his account of Guinea, as he acknowledges in his Preamble:

THE following Voyage and Embassy are inserted in the second Volume of the Chevalier *des Marchais's* Voyage to *Guinea*, and contain sixty-two Pages. They are both curious Pieces in their kind. The first affords the best Account extant of *Assem*, and the State of the King of *Ardrah*. The second, besides the Singularity of a Negro Embassy, gives a lively View of the Manners and Genius of the Blacks of Rank and Figure, intermixed with a Variety of entertaining Incidents peculiar to an Event of that Nature...

Astley is of interest to us here, despite his rather heavy editorial hand, because he supplements his material with observations taken from various English voyagers, footnotes, illustrations and personal comment, all of which are scrupulously acknowledged: '...our Method gives such an advantageous Change to the Relations of this Kind, as to make them appear new even to those who have read them often before, by stripping the Journals of all their Redundances, and forming a regular Description of Countries out of the scattered Remarks of several put together, our Collection must be no less acceptable to those who are already possessed of the Originals, whether in our own or a foreign language, than those who have them not'.

<sup>197</sup> D'Elbée, p. 74; des Marchais, p. 338.



Beard; yet he walked upright, had good Eyes, an Air of Quality, and an agreeable Countenance. He was very polite and spoke the *Portugueze* with great Elegance. His Office of Interpreter Royal was joined with that of Secretary of State. He had been instructed in the *Romish* Principles, and promised to be baptized, as soon as the King, his Master, admitted Missionaries... He was a wise Man, who spoke little himself, but asked many Questions; writing-down exactly what he saw or heard. He had been several Times Ambassador at the Courts of *Benin* and *Oyko*, and seemed well acquainted with the Manners and Customs of the States adjoining to the Kingdom of *Ardrach*. He carried with him but three of his Wives, and three of his youngest Sons, with seven or eight Domestics.<sup>198</sup>

Two of these small children were left behind, when the embassy returned, to be educated as wards of the King of France. They did not remain alone, for des Marchais tells us of the presence of another young West African at the court. This was the prince Aniaba, younger son of king Zena of Issini, who accompanied one of the Dominican missionaries on his return to Paris. Aniaba was also brought up in the royal household and eventually given command of a company of cavalry. Great hopes were centred on Aniaba, who was baptised by the celebrated preacher Bossuet in the church of the Missions étrangères on the 1<sup>st</sup> August 1691, with Louis XIV as godfather. It is Aniaba who is pictured in Notre-Dame, putting Guinea under the protection of the Madonna prior to his return home in 1701. Louis tried in vain to set Aniaba on his father's throne, though he was not the legitimate heir.<sup>199</sup>

Though the Portuguese had long regarded the Guinea coast as their exclusive preserve, the French *Compagnie des Indes Occidentales*, founded in 1664, was taking an active interest in the area by 1670 and had established fortified posts with a view to engaging in the slave trade. There were good reasons for Louis to consider the Negro kingdoms of West Africa a promising field for French missionary activity. Two missions had already been sent to the state of Ouidah, neighbouring Ardra, the first led by the Capuchins in 1667, the second by the Dominicans, though both were ultimately unsuccessful ending in martyrdom. Commerce, as always, followed hard on the footsteps of the missionaries. In 1669 the *Compagnie des Indes Occidentales* despatched an expedition to Ardra, under the command of the sieur d'Elbée and consisting of two vessels, the *Justice* and the *Concorde*. It was intended to establish a French fort and factory on the coast there, despite the hostility of the Dutch to any outside influence. The French were favourably received, arriving at Assem, the capital, on January 19<sup>th</sup> 1670, and were accorded the honour of a royal audience by King Tozifon on the 27<sup>th</sup>. D'Elbée has left us a vivid pen portrait of this king, which I have reproduced for interest in the Appendix.<sup>200</sup> It seemed that Tozifon, given his Portuguese education, might readily turn to Roman Catholicism, setting an example to the other petty monarchs in the area and providing a counterpoise to the Protestant Dutch, who were cordially disliked:

*Tozifon*, King of *Ardrach*, who was bred in a *Portugueze* Convent at *St. Thomas*, and seemed in no Way inclined to the Religion of his Country, might possibly have been brought over to the *Romish* Faith, if it were not through Fear of the High Priest; whose Authority is so great, that he might dethrone him if he attempted to introduce a new Religion. It is this Priest who assigns every Family the *Fetishes*, or Idols, they must worship, to save them from the Evils of this Life.<sup>201</sup>

<sup>198</sup> D'Elbée, p. 74; des Marchais, p. 339.

<sup>199</sup> Des Marchais, pp. 228-47.

<sup>200</sup> C.f. des Marchais, p. 309 ff.

<sup>201</sup> D'Elbée, p. 72. The fetish and emblem of the kingdom of Ardra was the crocodile. Barbot refers to the ruler of Ardra as Tezy, so presumably Tezy or Tozi was the proper name and 'fon' a royal title [p. 325].

The 'Oriental' Ambassador in 17<sup>th</sup> Century French Comedy.



Dom Matheo Lopes ambassadeur du roi d'Arda de Guinée en France en 1670. Nicolas Larmessin (vers 1638-1694)

D'Elbée's visit had been intended as a courtesy and was in no sense of the word a formal embassy, but it suited the king of Ardra to regard it as such, for reasons of personal prestige and aggrandisement. It would provide a useful tool in handling the Dutch and other aggressive neighbours, if he could present himself as an ally of the powerful king of France. For this reason he was particularly delighted with d'Elbée's gift of firearms and hopeful of obtaining more:

...the Sieur d'Elbée made his Majesty a Present of a Fowling-Piece, and a pair of Pistols mounted with Silver. The King received this Present very agreeably...<sup>202</sup>

The decision was accordingly taken by the king and his counsellors to send a 'return' embassy to France, carrying suitable gifts for Louis, selected with much care from the best that Ardra had to offer. The little group were to travel with d'Elbée on the *Concorde*, despite the six hundred or so slaves, destined for Martinique, who made up the bulk of her cargo. Since the rulers of the Guinea states were themselves active participants in the slave trade, there was nothing here to strike a sour note. Tozifon had provided d'Elbée with the captives in a business transaction that was regarded as equally profitable for both parties. It was anticipated that, if Lopés's mission were favourably received in Paris, this lucrative trade would shortly expand to the mutual benefit of France and Ardra.

The arrival of the Ardra delegation in Paris on December 13<sup>th</sup> caused a sensation at the French court and quite properly so. It was indeed a unique occasion. The appearance of a properly accredited embassy from the coast of West Africa in a European capital was not only completely unprecedented, it was an event not to be repeated until the twentieth century. The royal audience was held at the Tuileries, on the 19<sup>th</sup> December, at ten in the morning. In view of the weather, which had taken its toll of their health, the visitors had been presented with clothing better suited to the climate:

As Winter approached, and the dress of the Ambassador and his Family was no way suited to so cold a Climate as *France*, the general had Cloaths made for them in the *French Mode*... The Company ... caused very rich Cloaths to be made for him, his children, and Wives, he said to those who presented them, "I see that *France* intends to show its Wealth by thus adorning those, whose Lot is Poverty."<sup>203</sup>

We are indebted to the sieur d'Elbée for his lively account of the royal audience, confirmed in every detail by the *Voyage* of the chevalier des Marchais. Early in the morning of the appointed day Berlise, Master of Ceremonies, came to conduct the ambassador to court in the king's own coach, his wives and children were to travel in the queen's. As they passed through the serried ranks of the French and Swiss Guards and the King's Musketeers into the inner court,

The Ambassador greatly admired the good Air of these Troops, their rich Uniform and Arms. He was then conducted into an Hall of the lower Apartments, where he was showed the Curiosities and immense Riches of the King, which were placed in Order on large Tables. He beheld these with Attention, and being asked what he thought of them, replied, "I think I am going to see the King, who is far beyond them."<sup>204</sup>

<sup>202</sup> D'Elbée, p. 70.

<sup>203</sup> D'Elbée, p. 75.

<sup>204</sup> D'Elbée, p. 71 ff; des Marchais, p. 345.

On entering the first antechamber, Lopés actually had to push his way through, so great were the numbers of people of distinction who crowded in to see the spectacle. Even when he and his companions reached the great gallery, they could scarcely get to the King who, 'distinguished by the prodigious Number of Diamonds which covered his Cloaths', was seated on his throne at the upper end, with the dukes and peers of France 'forming a shining Circle around him'. Louis seems to have lavished as much care and attention to detail on the reception of this Ardra embassy, from whose good opinion France had in truth comparatively little to gain, as he had done some months earlier with Soliman Aga, who embodied the might of the Ottoman sultan in his person. Was this perhaps in itself intended to convey a message to the Porte, or was it simply a case of 'noblesse oblige'? D'Elbée gives us a vivid description of the scene:

The Ambassador, when he reached the Middle of the Gallery, made a low Reverence; a second, a little further on; and a third, when he reached the Foot of the Steps. He then mounted the Estrade, and prostrated himself at the King's Feet, his Children doing the same a little behind him. He began his Compliment by raising his Head a little; and speaking in *Portugueze*, told *Louis XIV.* That the King of *Ardrach*, his Master, having learnt the Wonders [sic] Fame reported of his Majesty, had sent him to assure him how much he desired to gain his Favour, by offering himself and his Kingdom at his Service. *Louis* made him rise, and observing the Ambassador, who was in some confusion, held a Paper in his Hand, asked what it was? The *Sieur d'Elbée*, who officiated as Interpreter, replied, That the Ambassador, fearing that the Awe of His Majesty's Presence might disorder the Speech he designed, had wrote it the Day before, and bid him translate it into *French*, that it might be read if his Majesty thought proper. The King consented, commanding *d'Elbée* to read it aloud.<sup>205</sup>

We wonder what must have been the thoughts of those two small boys on hearing their father add the following words if, indeed, they understood them:

"the King...has commanded me to present your Majesty my two sons here before you, and beseech you to accept them favourably; which I shall esteem as the greatest Happiness can befall me, by the Advantages they must receive in serving so great a Prince: Likewise, to join with them two Hangers, two *Assagays*, a Vest, and Carpet. He earnestly entreats your Majesty to accept of these, and to believe, that if his Country produced any Thing more curious, or that he thought could be agreeable to your Majesty, he would send it with great Joy..."<sup>206</sup>

The gifts also included a tiger [apparently the local name applied to a form of leopard], a panther and two lions for the royal menagerie, a golden pheasant and a dwarf for the Queen.<sup>207</sup> Even the royal mistress was not forgotten. There were pearls, bracelets and a magnificent sapphire for the 'second wife' of the king, Madame de Montespan, 'maîtresse en titre'. Louis replied kindly:

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> D'Elbée, p. 71 ff; des Marchais, p. 350. The hanger was a light, curved riding sword [Enc. Brit.].

<sup>207</sup> Exotic animals were not altogether unheard of as ambassadorial gifts. An embassy from Tripoli brought four ostriches in 1715. These must have provided an extraordinary spectacle as they were herded on their journey through provincial France. In a particularly poignant example, the Siamese ambassadors of 1680 embarked a pair of young elephants and a rhinoceros with the intention of presenting them to the Dauphin. Sadly, sufficient allowance had not been made for the animals' growth on the lengthy voyage; they panicked in their restricted quarters and ran amok during a severe storm off the coast of Africa, trampling through the timbers of the hull and causing the loss of the ship with all hands.

That he was much obliged to the King of *Ardrah*, his Master, for his Compliments, as well as for sending him for his Ambassador, whose person was very agreeable to him: That he accepted the Offer he made of his two Sons, who should stay with him while he resided at Paris, after which he would take care of them himself.<sup>208</sup>

Lopés and his family had made an excellent impression. They were accorded two royal audiences and all the usual diplomatic courtesies, following the same programme of excursions and entertainments as those that we have seen offered to Pierre Potemkin and Soliman Aga. On this occasion, and in fact uniquely amongst our exotic embassies, there were no difficulties of interpretation. Mattéo Lopés was able to converse freely with foreign secretary de Lionne in Portuguese, whilst the latter replied in Spanish.<sup>209</sup> This simultaneous use of two languages apparently proved no obstacle to mutual understanding. In any case, the king of Ardra gave very short shrift to incompetent or treacherous interpreters:

The Office of Interpreter here is very considerable, but the least Mistake or Falsification is as much as their Lives are worth.<sup>210</sup>

D'Elbée gives us a full account of the interview between Lopés and de Lionne. It seems the lessons to be drawn from the mishandling of Soliman Aga had been thoroughly learnt. The arrogance manifested towards the Turks at Suresnes is no longer in evidence. Now the secretary of state comes forward to greet his visitor, escorts him to the audience chamber with every courtesy and seats him on a level with himself. There is no more play acting or foolish costume; when the audience is over de Lionne himself accompanies the visitor to his coach:

He had an Audience of M. *de Lionne*, Secretary of State for foreign Affairs. This Minister received him in the Midst of the fine Stair-Case of the magnificent Hotel he had built; and through rich Apartments of State conducted him to his great Closet. There they sat-down each in Arm-Chairs next the Chimney, surrounded by a great Number of Persons of Distinction, who had desired to be Witnesses to this Audience.<sup>211</sup>

The contrasts between the warmth of this welcome extended to the representative of a tiny African principality and the insulting coldness of the reception accorded to the Ottoman envoy, heavily underline the incongruity and the unsuitability of de Lionne's behaviour on the former occasion.

It was the custom to entertain visiting ambassadors with a theatre performance, as we have seen earlier in the case of both the Muscovite and the Ottoman embassies. According to our sources, Mattéo Lopés and his suite were invited to attend a special production of the *Festin de Pierre* by the 'Comédiens du Roi'. If correct, this statement of Astley's is well worth careful note by the literary historian:

The King's Comedians entertained him with the Representation of *le Festin de Pierre*, and the Novelty of this Spectacle much delighted him'.<sup>212</sup>

<sup>208</sup> We ought to note here that it was the common practice in sub-Saharan Africa for children of eminent families to be left to serve as pages in foreign courts, offering a guarantee of the continued friendship and good behaviour of their fathers. Presumably this was meant to be understood as something of the sort [see des Marchais, p. 351].

<sup>209</sup> D'Elbée, p. 78.

<sup>210</sup> D'Elbée, p. 68.

<sup>211</sup> D'Elbée, p. 78; des Marchais, t. II, ch. XII, pp. 354-57.

The source is des Marchais's *Voyage en Guinée et à Cayenne*, into which d'Elbée's account of the Ardra embassy is inserted. He writes:

Il [Lopés] rendit visite aux premiers Ministres du Roi & au plus Grands Seigneurs de la Cour. Il reçût aussi quantité de visites & toutes les honnêtetez imaginables. Les Comédiens du Roi lui donnerent la représentation du Festin de Pierre; ce spectacle qui lui étoit très nouveau le charma.<sup>213</sup>

From the context, this performance would have taken place shortly after Lopés's audience with the Queen on the 20<sup>th</sup> December, 1670, very possibly on the following day, since the rest of the ambassador's programme was already full. The reader will recall that Molière's play *Dom Juan ou le festin de Pierre* had been withdrawn early in 1665, the last performance being held on Friday, 20<sup>th</sup> March. A mere fifteen performances had taken place.<sup>214</sup> Our references cannot be to a production of Thomas Corneille's bowdlerised version, since that did not appear in print until 1677 and was not performed until 1682. Nor does it seem likely that Louis would have ordered, as part of the royal Christmas festivities, that Molière's own troupe give a rendering of either of the relatively obscure versions by Dorimon or de Villiers, both entitled the *Festin de Pierre ou le Fils criminel* and published in 1659 and 1660 respectively, for that could well have been interpreted as a deliberate slight. It is true that there were versions of the Dom Juan legend in the repertoire of the 'Italiens' under the title of 'Il Convitato di pietra', but our sources are specific: a comedy entitled *Le Festin de Pierre* was staged by the 'Comédiens du Roi' presumably, therefore, at the Palais-Royal. The words 'lui donnerent la représentation' imply that this was not a public performance, but one staged for the benefit of the visitor. The king had shown open support of Molière, despite the hostility of the 'dévots' and his own suppression of *Tartuffe*, by appointing his troupe as 'LA TROUPE DU ROY, au pallais Royal' with a pension of 6,000 livres, in August 1665.<sup>215</sup> A further alternative would be the version by Rosimond, but the references that I can find to this suggest that though it appeared in November 1669, it did not run in 1670.

No less a scholar than Virginia Scott writes in her *Molière: A Theatrical Life*: 'Dom Juan was never performed for the court and there is no evidence that the king ever saw it'.<sup>216</sup> If he did not, then, as an amateur of the comic theatre, Louis may well have been consumed with curiosity and resentment at the necessity to appease a pressure group against his own inclination. Similar statements concerning the suppression of *Dom Juan* in 1665 appear in all the major editions of the comedy, but if d'Elbée and des Marchais are correct in what they say, and I see no reason why either should concoct such a story or d'Elbée mistake

<sup>212</sup> D'Elbée, p. 77; on d'Elbée's reliability as a source see p. 84, n. 196.

<sup>213</sup> Des Marchais, t. II, ch. X, p. 354. Barbot does not mention the occasion in his account of the embassy :

About the same time that prince sent over to France, in the ship *Concord*, Matteo Lopez, a Black, one of his ministers of state, and interpreter, as his ambassador to the king of France; who accordingly took shipping at Offra, with three of his wives, and as many of his children; a retinue of six or seven other Blacks, and the king of Ardra's presents, of a very small value; and was set ashore at Dieppe in France, on the third of December. Thence proceeding to Paris, with his retinue, he was admitted to the audience of the king, at the palace of Les Thuilleries, and afterwards maintained all the while he staid at Paris, at the charge of the French company, with whom he concluded a treaty of commerce at Ardra; and was sent back to that country by the way of Havre de Grace, in the ship *St. George*, with considerable presents for his master from the king of France...he landed at Ardra on the first of October 1671 [p. 325].

<sup>214</sup> See Mesnard, vol. V, p. 39 ff.

<sup>215</sup> La Grange, *Registre I*, p. 78.

<sup>216</sup> Virginia Scott, *Molière: A Theatrical Life*, pp. 170-71.

the title of a theatrical production at which he must have been present, since he was acting as interpreter to the ambassador and accompanied him on all official occasions, then scholarly opinion may need to be revised. It is not inherently unlikely that Louis could have decided to use the occasion of an ambassadorial visit as an excuse to ask Molière to stage a private performance of the banned play for the royal family and their guests. He had already done something similar in the case of *Tartuffe* in May 1664, when, anticipating that he would shortly have to ban it, he had had Molière stage the first performance during the course of an elaborate celebration held at Versailles.<sup>217</sup> Nor would it have been an isolated incident; in 1684, for example, Louis gave instructions for Lully and Quinault to mount a single production of the opera *Roland* for the sole benefit of the Siamese embassy, some eleven months before this was officially due to open [see below, p. 127].

There was even a precedent for diplomatic attendance at *Dom Juan*. We know that an unnamed ambassador had seen a performance of the *Festin de Pierre* on an earlier occasion because of the following remark in the highly polemical *Observations sur le Festin de Pierre*, published by 'B. A., s[ieu]r. d[e] R[ochemont].' in 1665: 'Les étrangers mêmes en ont été très scandalisés, jusque-là qu'un ambassadeur ne put s'empêcher de dire qu'il y avait bien de l'impiété dans cette pièce'.<sup>218</sup> Visiting ambassadors would normally attend the comedy by special invitation, so it is probably safe to assume that the reference is to the controversial first performance before any censorship had been put into place. We do not know which version of the play was presented before Mattéo Lopés, but it was perhaps thought that any dubious references would not be understood. There were difficulties of language and the Ardra delegation were animist by religion, not baptised Christians, despite any sympathies that Lopés may have professed to hold for the Catholic Church. Thus they were unlikely to be offended on either count. Perhaps the truth is simply that the king wished to invite distinguished visitors, who had no French, to a performance which all could enjoy, and that this particular comedy was selected for its spectacular special effects which could be guaranteed to entertain. Tremendous sums had been expended by the troupe on décor and stage machinery, which had only seen a few weeks of use. We are specifically told of Lopés that: 'the Novelty of this Spectacle much delighted him'. A great deal of trouble was always taken in arranging the programme of entertainments for a visiting embassy, particularly during a great religious festival such as Christmas. The king's reputation abroad could depend upon it.

The above remain the only references that I have been able to uncover to any performance of the *Festin de Pierre* between 1669 and the expurgated version of 1682. Significantly, however, Robinet describes a visit by Lopés and his family to the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* in his letter for the 27<sup>th</sup> December:

...on traite cét Ambassadeur  
Avecque beaucoup de splendeur:  
Et que tant lui, que sa Famille,  
Laquelle, en Gens, point ne fourmille,  
Sont régalez & divertis,  
Par les Comédiens, *gratis*,  
L'ayans, l'autre-jour, chez Molière  
Eté de façon singulière,  
Par son Gentil-homme Bourgeois,  
Demi Turc, et demi François,

<sup>217</sup> See Andrew Calder, *Molière: The Theory and Practice of Comedy*, pp. 178-9.

<sup>218</sup> Published in Couton, t. 2, p. 1207.

Et par de bonnes Confitures,  
 Pour moi d'agréables Pâtures.  
 J'en fus Témoin, & j'en vaux dix,  
 Lors que j'ai vû ce que je dis.<sup>219</sup>

The coincidence of dates between this performance and the presumed date, just before Christmas, of that of the *Festin de Pierre*, means that it may be argued that des Marchais, relying on d'Elbée and followed by Astley, has confused the two plays. This is certainly possible, given the sixty-year interval before the publication of des Marchais's *Voyage* in 1730 and the likelihood of editorial intervention (Labat had a notoriously heavy hand). Yet d'Elbée attended the performance with Lopés as his interpreter; the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* was then at the height of its popularity and very well known; there is also the difference in genre to take into consideration. Since we have neither a firm date of composition for d'Elbée's account of the embassy, however, nor independent corroboration of this story the matter must remain unproven and open to doubt.

Our sources have left us a detailed account of the few weeks that Lopés spent in Paris. If it seems unduly full, we must remember that this was the normal course of an ambassadorial visit. Entering Paris on December 13<sup>th</sup>, the party were accommodated at the Hotel de Luines as the guests of the Compagnie des Indes Occidentales. The first few days before the royal audience on the 19<sup>th</sup> were spent in recuperating from the rigours of the journey. On the 20<sup>th</sup> there was an audience for the entire family with the queen in her private apartments, followed by a visit to the Dauphin at the Louvre. The next day or so were filled with visits to the king's ministers and leading members of the nobility. Many visits were also received. It was said that the ambassador often took pleasure in hearing Mass at the principal churches. The directors of the Compagnie des Indes Occidentales laid on a particularly lavish reception at Rambouillet in honour of Lopés, which he attended accompanied by his wives and sons:

The Hautboys played during Dinner. Everyone admired the Politeness, good Sense and Sobriety of the Ambassador. After Dinner he was diverted with some Tricks played by Monkeys, and thence conducted to *Vincennes*, where he seemed highly pleased with the Apartments, as well as the Richness and Taste of the Furniture. On this Occasion he said, "After seeing a small Part of *France*, it was needless to see the rest of the World".<sup>220</sup>

The few days remaining before departure were spent in paying or receiving visits and in seeing the sights of Paris, then came the audience with de Lionne (mainly concerned with trade) and the formal 'audience de congé' with the king.<sup>221</sup> Lopés finally left Paris for home about the middle of January, arriving in the Road of Ardra on the 1<sup>st</sup> October. Despite its promising start, the whole affair ended badly for France. Astley tells us that according to Jean Barbot's *Description of the coasts of North and South-Guinea*, Louis's gifts for the king of Ardra were entrusted to a certain Carlof, a factor of the Compagnie des Indes Occidentales despite his Dutch nationality. Carlof was to travel with them on board the *St. George*, the vessel in which the embassy made the return voyage. Apparently Lopés, however:

...pretended they ought to be put into his Hands, that he might deliver them. This *Carlof*

<sup>219</sup> *Le Théâtre et l'opéra vus par les gazetiers Robinet et Laurent (1670-1678) / textes établis, présentés et annotés par William Brooks* (Paris, Biblio 17, 1993)

<sup>220</sup> D'Elbée, p. 77. Astley adds the sour footnote: 'Let the *French* alone for crying-up themselves, their Country, and their grand Monarch'. See also des Marchais, p. 354.

<sup>221</sup> For an account of the audience with de Lionne, see des Marchais, pp. 354-57.

would not consent to, suspecting he would divert some Part to his own Use, as it afterwards appeared he had intended. His Refusal so incensed the black Ambassador, that he employed all his Interest in the Country against the *French*, and much distracted their Affairs'.<sup>222</sup>

Nevertheless, Louis seems to have retained a certain affection for the peoples of Africa. Despite continued French involvement in the slave trade, the promulgation of his 'Code Noir' in 1685 did much to improve conditions for slaves in the West Indies where the majority of African slaves in French hands lived and worked. It was an enlightened document for the times and, given the historical context, a great humanitarian measure.

These events are four years too late, unhappily, for us to suggest with confidence any direct connection between the Ardra embassy and Du Perche's *Ambassadeur d'Affrique*, published in 1666 according to the frontispiece, unless there should prove to be an error in the dating of the play. Both play and playwright are obscure; I can find no certain reference to any production of the *Ambassadeur d'Affrique*, which could be used to confirm a date of publication. Yet printers' errors were not uncommon; the Roman numerals M. DC. LXVI appearing on the imprint would have required only the minor compositing error of one letter, for 'X' to be transposed into 'V', giving us M. DC. LXXI as the date of publication. This would then accord with the diplomatic chronology and give a real *raison d'être* to our play, but must remain a very tentative, if tempting, hypothesis.

The scene of *L'Ambassadeur d'Affrique* is set in Paris, under the heading 'ACTEURS' we find 'TIRBAUTES, Valet en habit Affriquain' and a 'suite d'Affriquains', indicating from the very beginning at least an attempt at providing a little authenticity in the search for exoticism. The plot contains the familiar amorous intrigue. The hopes of a pair of young lovers, Lélie and Lucesse, appear to be blighted by the selfish plans of the older generation, in the persons of Lucesse's 'Tuteur', Géronte and his crony Ariste, the Docteur. There is the usual supporting cast of stock characters, the valet Crispin, cleverer by far than his master, and Lucesse's own perky confidante, her maid Beatris. In the first scene we meet Beatris, who has come to inform Lélie that he has an unexpected rival. Lucesse's guardian has decided to marry her off for money, but Beatris is able to reassure Lélie that her mistress still loves him. It is all Géronte's idea, because he hates the young man. Lucesse and Lélie must hurry up and sort out a plan of action whilst Géronte is away, visiting his estates. It seems the other suitor is an elderly pedant, who has fallen violently in love with Lucesse. He cuts a ridiculous figure, 'Il avoit la teste pelée', but on being teased about this, the 'vieil satyre' has bought himself a ridiculous blond wig, providing 'un original / De masque en temps de carnaval'. Beatris goes off, leaving Lélie and Crispin alone to plot.

Scene 2 sees Lélie appealing to Crispin for help, but his valet favours the rather drastic method of murdering the rival. That course of action could entail very unfortunate consequences, the penalties are severe and Lélie is shocked. There is some banter between the two. Lélie thinks it would be far more effective to ruin his rival's reputation than to resort to violence, then he has a sudden inspiration:

Une entreprise merveilleuse  
Que ie viens de me figurer  
M'en fait beaucoup esperer  
Un Ambassadeur de l'Affrique  
Touchant quelque affaire publique

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<sup>222</sup> D'Elbée, p. 79.

Est icy depuis quinze iours.  
Je puis, ayde de ton secours  
M'en servir en cette occurrence.

Crispin is reluctant to co-operate and refuses his help in no uncertain terms:

Je nay point de Correspondance  
En Affrique, & ne veux avoir  
Rien a faire à cette Homme noir.  
Vuidez vos affaires vous mesme.

Lélie threatens suicide, but hard hearted Crispin does not care. Our hero quickly changes his mind, however, reflecting that then another might replace him in Lucesse's affections. He returns to his original idea of making his valet impersonate the 'ambassadeur'. Crispin affects to be shocked, 'Moy! puis-je aux despens de l'Affrique, / trâmer quelque sourde pratique?' His real reason is that he thinks he will never be able to disguise himself effectively as a black man. Lélie reassures him, though with no little damage to Crispin's ego. It seems that there exists a certain 'ressemblance de vos traits / Car ie n'ay iamais veu portrais / Mieux imitez.' Crispin is outraged at the very idea, but Lélie hastens to reassure him:

CRISPIN.- Estes vous sage  
Monsieur de tenir ce langage  
Moy je ressemble a ce demon  
Ah! je gagerois bien que non  
LÉLIE.- Je dis par les traits & la taille.  
Non pas en couleur.

Persisting in his intentional misunderstanding, Crispin refuses to become involved in the deception. Lélie now whispers the whole of the plan, in which we are not privileged to participate, in Crispin's ear. The young gallant has seen the Docteur approaching and time is of the essence. He will try to keep the pedant busy and find out what he is really up to, whilst Crispin slips away to make his own arrangements. The Docteur enters on cue, muttering to himself, with much use of the Latin jargon in which lies the humour of the scene. He cannot understand what is wrong with him, but is convinced that he will prove irresistible to his intended. Surely there is no need to worry, when he is endowed with such a fine nose? Lélie, who can no longer bear to listen to such smug self-adulation, has to interrupt. He asks the pedant why he is so happy and it is revealed that love alone could be the cause of such a rapture. Our hero rapidly decides to disillusion the poor fool by invoking his beloved's imminent marriage to the African ambassador:

LÉLIE.- Vous pouvez changer de rubricque.  
LE DOCTEUR.- Pourquoi?  
LÉLIE.-L'Ambassadeur d'Affrique,  
La doit espouser aujourd'uy.  
LE DOCTEUR.- Qui vous la dit?  
LÉLIE.-Estant a luy,  
Je sçay si la chose est certaine.

It seems that Lélie has been appointed the Ambassador's 'Intendant', or steward, and has taken the opportunity of the latter's stay in France to learn his master's tongue, 'la

langue du pays, / Que i'ay pourtant apprise en France'. This is how he knows for certain that the nuptials are due to take place that very day, Lucesse's guardian 'ravy d'avoir, / Un si recommandable gendre' having apparently agreed to the marriage the previous night. The Docteur would be well advised quietly to make himself scarce for his own good. The Ambassador is on his way, a man of high rank and influence, notorious for his terrible temper:

C'est un homme de grand courage  
Et son credit en cét Estat  
Luy donnant rang de Potentat,  
Il n'est aucune resistance  
Qui ne le cedde a sa puissance:  
C'est pourquoy, craignant son courroux  
Vous ferez bien de filer doux.

Almost on cue, enter 'Crispin en habit d'affriquain & sa suite' from the wings of the theatre. There is some rôle-playing badinage between valet and master; Crispin affects to be in a black humour and threatens to eat the pair of them, 'Si...iamais en pareil mistere, / Vous me faittes mettre en colere, / Je vous avalleray tous vifs.' The 'Ambassadeur' then menaces Ariste in very undiplomatic fashion:

CRISPIN.- *Kamdem SKoreille*  
*Horleam scanem tourtoury.*  
LE DOCTEUR.- Que dit-il?  
LÉLIE.- Il est fort marry  
De vous avoir veu tant d'audace,  
Et veut qu'a l'instant on vous chasse....

If the pedant wishes to appease his tormentors, he will have to humble himself and hold his peace. Of a naturally cowardly disposition, Ariste decides that discretion is the better part of valour and fawns on his persecutor. Crispin, thoroughly enjoying himself, affects not to understand. Perhaps the Docteur wishes to enter the ambassador's employment as a 'Suisse'? There follows a comic interrogation about the old man's suitability for various duties in the kitchen and elsewhere. Can Ariste keep a secret? Is he suitable to send on an errand of amorous intrigue? Certainly, for he is too old to represent a threat! The Docteur decides to give up women for good, since love has brought him nothing but trouble. From now on he will devote himself to his studies. There is a further bantering exchange over the significance of the Docteur's name. Crispin begins to get himself into a tangle, so resorts to jargonning in self-defence with Tirbautes, 'UN VALET, En habit d'Affriquain'.

TIRBAUTES.- *Bend'harleK*  
CRISPIN.- *Gooth danKem cum vir,*  
*Salcardy bucdemeK satir*  
*Et voldrecam.*

The Docteur becomes somewhat suspicious, 'Qu'est-ce qu'il chante / Par ces mots?' Lélie does not help matters:

LÉLIE.- Il s'impatiente  
De ce qu'il ne voit point venir

Lucesse, & l'envoye querir  
 LE DOCTEUR.- Pour conclure le mariage?  
 LÉLIE.- Sans doute  
 LE DOCTEUR.- Ah! derechef j'enrage.  
 LÉLIE.- Taisez-vous.

Fortunately Lucesse and Beatris arrive at this juncture. Crispin rather maliciously directs the unhappy Ariste to speak for him to Lucesse, 'lasez animal chassieux', a rather unpleasant image of the old man with rheumy eyes, still maintaining the fiction that he believes him to be a 'Suisse'. Ariste protests in vain, but does as he is told, with many an 'hélas':

Ouy cet Ambassadeur illustre,  
 Pour multiplier vostre lustre,  
 Et prouver à tout l'Vnivers,  
 Qu'il fait gloire d'estre en vos fers,  
 Veut que ma débile eloquence,  
 Vous extolle la violence,  
 Du désir qu'il â [sic]d'estre a vous,  
 Et de devenir vostre espoux...

Crispin, becoming impatient with such shilly-shallying and the constant sighs, decides that he will show him how such things should be done, ending with this tour de force:

...pour montrer que ie respecte  
 Vos yeux frippons qui m'ont vaincu,  
 Je mets mon ambassade à cul,  
 Aouf...Et bien vous en semble.

Lucesse very wisely declines the honour on the grounds that the 'ambassadeur' is too far above her in rank, for her even to contemplate marriage. This is too much for Ariste, he intervenes only to be told very unceremoniously to keep quiet. In scene vii there is real cause for alarm. Beatris has spotted L'Allemand coming. He is valet to Geronte, Lucesse's guardian, and if his master has returned, the plotters are undone. Speaking in a 'Teutonic' French, which gives rise to much humour, L'Allemand brings good news for the young lovers. Geronte is dead. It seems that he fell out of a tree whilst bird-nesting and got impaled upon a stake. Serve him right, we may very well feel! His demise leaves Lucesse free to keep her promise to marry Lélie, while Crispin takes advantage of the happy moment and the general euphoria to carry off Beatris:

CRISPIN.- On ne fait pas ainsi la nicque  
 Aux Ambassadeurs de l'Affricque  
 Qu'il aille au diable j'y consens  
 Mais pour moy ma foy ie pretends  
 Que Beatris paye ma peine  
 Et que i'en fasse une Affricqaine.

Our play ends in the time-honoured manner with a double wedding.

Within the *Ambassadeur d'Afrique*, as we saw earlier was also the case with the *Faux Moscovites* and the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*, much humour is derived from racial stereotyping. Du Perche's villainous academic is clearly Jewish, 'un vieil pedagogue / Issu de

quelque Sinagogue...', echoing the virulent anti-Semitic prejudice of the day. Reference is made to his distinctive nose in scene i. As for the Africans themselves, they are openly linked with the devil and cannibalism is hinted at in scene v, 'Je vous avalleray tous vifs'. The connection between ferocity and the colour black in popular culture is heavily underlined. A dark skin is also associated with inferior social status, implying that its owner is employed in outdoor manual labour; Crispin magnanimously forgives Lucesse for her refusal to marry him with the words, 'Noir comme un diable, il m'est bien doux / D'esperer estre aymé de vous'. The belief that a black complexion might have diabolic connotations also appears in Boursault's *Le Mort vivant*, where Gusman pleads, 'Mais, beauté printaniere, apprenez qu'il m'est doux / D'être noir comme un Diable, & d'être aimé de vous'. The pseudo-scientific belief that character could be read from a subject's physiognomy was prevalent in Europe and the Middle East, from early antiquity until well into the nineteenth century. It was a popular superstition that blackness of face was a sure sign of an evil disposition. Du Perche's 'servante', Beatris, is rather frightened of the self-appointed 'ambassadeur' and his suite. In scene vi, she exclaims, 'Madame les plaisans mâtins, / Voyez-vous tous ces diabolins, / Ils me font peur'. Her choice of words is not insignificant, because black was widely believed to be the colour of the devil. Even the Bible could be cited to confirm this prejudice, in the cursing of Ham, son of Noah (Genesis IX). Reasonably enough, the opposite belief was held in West Africa. D'Elbée has left us the following anecdote in illustration:

At the Corner of this Gallery was a Figure the Bigness of a Child of four Years old, and all white. D'Elbée asking what Image it was, the Priest told him it was the Devil's: *But the Devil is not white, says d'Elbée. In making him black, answered the Priest, you commit a Mistake; for I can assure he is very white, having seen and spoken with him several Times. It is six Months since he informed me of the Design you had formed in France to open a Trade here. You are obliged to him, added he, since, pursuant to this Advice, we have neglected the other Europeans, that you might the sooner have your cargo of Slaves.* D'Elbée believed what he thought proper, but would not dispute the Point with the Priest.<sup>223</sup>

In *L'Ambassadeur d'Afrique*, as in *Les Faux Moscovites* and the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*, we find the use of jargon, 'calembours' and 'jeux de mots' to represent a specific exotic language and an interpreter is needed to underscore the humour of the situation. The presence of an interpreter would naturally also be true of a real embassy and is a realistic touch. Du Perche further adds a comic German character, to exploit the device of a silly accent. His pedant also slips in many a characteristic Latin tag to add weight to his discourse. There is exoticism in the *Ambassadeur d'Afrique* and attempted authenticity in costume and makeup. The false ambassador finds it necessary to arrive with a proper retinue, as well as an interpreter and valet, to maintain the fiction of his high office. We have seen this search for authenticity also occurring in the *Faux Moscovites* and the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*. It would be a happy coincidence if we could link this third play, in the same manner as we have done with its predecessors, to an actual diplomatic visit.

Lancaster, following Fournel, suggests that Du Perche clearly borrowed both the plot and a substantial amount of dialogue from an early comedy by Edmé Boursault, *Le Mort vivant*, published in 1662 when its author was 24.<sup>224</sup> According to Lancaster, Du Perche chose to take his borrowings from a popular play by a well-known author. *Le Mort vivant*, however, does not figure in the collective edition of Boursault's plays dated 1694, a few years

<sup>223</sup> D'Elbée, p. 71.

<sup>224</sup> Lancaster, III ii, pp. 680-8; see Fournel, vol. 1.

before the author's death in 1701. It does not, in point of fact, appear in Boursault's *Théâtre* until the posthumous publication of that author's works by Hiacinthe Boursault and the Boursault family in 1725. Here it is presented as Boursault's first experiment in comedy, and is referred to, somewhat apologetically, in the *Avertissement*: 'Ce fut dans sa première jeunesse que M. Boursault donna au Public, *Le Mort vivant: Les Cadenats: Le Médecin volant: Les Nicandres*'.<sup>225</sup> Now, had the play met with the noted success mentioned by Lancaster, we may presume that the author would have insisted on its appearance in his collected works. The fact that it was not so included suggests that possibly the playwright was slightly embarrassed by his own youthful exuberance and chose to suppress it. The humour is more than a little risqué in places. The success or otherwise of a comedy may easily be judged by the number of performances that took place; there were few, if any, of *Le Mort vivant*. Fournel believes that Boursault had himself adapted the plot of an Italian play, the *Morti vivi* of Sforza d'Oddi, though Lancaster disputes this attribution on the entirely reasonable grounds that the works bear no resemblance to each other beyond the title.<sup>226</sup> There were also two Spanish plays of remarkably similar title in existence, Lope de Vega's *Muertos vivos* and the *Muerto vivo* of Juan de Paredes. Spanish and Italian comedies were alike highly fashionable in France and dramatists frequently borrowed their plots. There would be nothing unusual in this.

Whatever its ultimate derivation may have been, *Le Mort vivant* has too many points in common with Du Perche's *Ambassadeur d'Afrique* for the similarities between them to be coincidence. This is beyond dispute, as a rapid glance at the extracts below will confirm. I am suggesting that Du Perche chose to adapt Boursault's play for the provinces, precisely because the comedy was an obscure one (though by a well-known author) and some years old. Perhaps he hoped that the plagiarism might pass unremarked, if the play were performed before unsophisticated, provincial audiences. Du Perche was not, after all, a professional writer, but an actor. The text of *Le Mort vivant* was presumably available, possibly already to hand. If the African theme of the *Ambassadeur d'Afrique* were indeed topical (i.e. the play appeared in 1671 rather than 1666), as I have argued very well might be the case, then Du Perche would have needed to work quickly. The embassy from Ardra, like the Muscovites before them, remained a bare month in France, the usual duration of an 'ambassade extraordinaire'. Perhaps Mattéo Lopés and his entourage had passed through the very towns in which it was intended to present the comedy. We know from d'Elbée that the Africans were honoured with a civic reception in Dieppe, and that 'by the King's Order his Charges were defrayed, and all Honours imaginable paid him on the Road'.<sup>227</sup> The theatre-going public was and remains notoriously fickle in its enthusiasms. It would be far quicker to adapt an existing play for the purpose of exploiting such exotic visitors whilst the topic was still fresh, than to produce one from scratch. We remember the speed with which Poisson had to write in order to stage the *Faux Moscovites* within the few days that Potemkin and his entourage were scheduled to remain in Paris, or Molière to compose the 'turquerie' of the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* at the king's command, in time for the Chambord performance.

Naturally, there are also significant differences between the two comedies currently under discussion. *L'Ambassadeur d'Afrique* is a one-act farce, *Le Mort vivant* has three acts. Du Perche replaces Boursault's alexandrines with octosyllabic verse, a device which makes his dialogue rather snappier. His play also benefits from discarding Boursault's rather implausible third act. The action of *L'Ambassadeur d'Afrique* takes place in France,

<sup>225</sup> Edmé Boursault, *Théâtre. Nouvelle édition revue corrigée et augmentée de plusieurs pièces, qui n'ont pas paru dans les précédentes*. Tomes I-III, p. 9 (Paris, 1725) Slatkine Reprints (Geneva, 1970).

<sup>226</sup> Lancaster, III i, pp. 305-07; Fournel, vol. I, p. 94.

<sup>227</sup> D'Elbée, pp. 75, 79.

'*La Scene est à Paris*', Boursault sets *Le Mort vivant* in Spain, '*La Scene est à Seville*'. Boursault does not respect the unity of place, switching from '*Un jardin*' to the bedroom of a nearby inn with some aplomb. The time is assumed to be the present for both comedies, but this is nowhere specified. The device of importing a valet as co-conspirator in the intimidating disguise of 'African ambassador' is in fact far more plausible for Boursault's Spanish context, than Du Perche's France of 1666/71; in Spain there is a long-standing and uneasy connection with the Moors of North Africa. A French audience could be relied upon to have recollections of *Le Cid* and the relentless threat of invasion from across the straits of Gibraltar. In Andalusia the term 'Afriquin' all too easily equates with 'More'; it carries disquieting connotations of fear, resurrecting buried memories of the Berber armies massing over the narrow waters. An 'African' ambassador in a Spanish context would be a powerful figure, one that it might be prudent to placate, one whose whims would have to be appeased. Even in the mid to late seventeenth century, the corsair states of North Africa remained a force to be reckoned with, turbulent and uneasy neighbours given to piracy.

In Boursault's version of the play, young Stéphanie has been brought up by her guardian, Ferdinand. She has entered into an engagement with Lazarille, though secretly she prefers his friend, Fabrice. The wily Ferdinand has plans to marry her himself, however, in the manner of Molière's Arnolphe. Fabrice has not yet dared to declare himself as a suitor and confides his unhappiness to his valet, Gusman. The latter is not very sympathetic despite his master's threats of suicide. A sudden inspiration gives Fabrice the idea of disguising a reluctant Gusman as the 'African ambassador'. The valet can then declare himself in love with Stéphanie and demand her hand in marriage, thus effectively frightening away both Lazarille and Ferdinand. 'L'Ambassadeur d'Afrique est ici...sa personne à peu près est égale à la tienne'. It will be easy for Gusman to impersonate him. The ensuing dialogue in which Gusman tries to back out of it will immediately be familiar to anyone who has read *L'Ambassadeur d'Afrique*. The valet argues he emphatically does not want to be involved: 'Moi, que je vous oblige aux dépens de l'Afrique'; '...dans l'Afrique ai-je quelque pouvoir?'; '...a-t-elle eu le bon-heur de me voir?'; '...De l'Afrique ai-je de la dependance?'; '...Fléchet-elle à ma moindre ordonnance?'. Unfortunately for the plotters, Lazarille insists on remaining in Seville to protect his beloved from such a dreadful fate. Gusman then has to resort to the drastic expedient of pretending to be the ghost of Lazarille's supposedly dead father, Henriquez, but is foiled when the father turns up alive and well that very evening. It emerges that Henriquez is also Stéphanie's long lost father. A marriage between the two is therefore impossible. Ferdinand's guardianship naturally lapses and Stéphanie is free to marry her beloved Fabrice.

We should note here a departure from the common pattern of New Comedy by our two authors on this point: the impersonation of an ambassador is not, in either comedy, the inspired suggestion of the traditional 'valet rusé'. Gusman and Crispin are forced into their impersonations. Lélie and Fabrice are worldly wise, not naïve 'ingénus'. For both Boursault and Du Perche, it is the young master himself who acts as 'agent provocateur'; Fabrice does not emerge as a very pleasant character in his sustained betrayal of Lazarille's friendship. As for the valets, Crispin revels in the rôle of ambassador once adopted, but Gusman is a coward and requires rather more bullying into the part. For me, *L'Ambassadeur de l'Afrique* is the slicker and the more sophisticated of the two comedies, with its faster pace and simplified plot reflecting the travelling actor's lifetime of experience on the stage. Taken as a whole, Du Perche's version is rather more in the anarchic spirit of New Comedy where the rôles of master and servant are, as often as not, reversed. Both plays contain the same stock characters: the unsuitable elderly lovers, Ferdinand / Ariste; the tyrannical guardians, Ferdinand / Géronte; the ingénues, Lucesse / Stéphanie; the young lovers, Lélie / Fabrice / Lazarille; the cunning valets, Crispin / Gusman. Several scenes in the two plays bear

a marked resemblance to each other, as we have already noted, though Du Perche appears to have decided to adapt only the first and second acts of the *Mort vivant* for his *Ambassadeur d'Afrique*, omitting the rather clumsy Act III. A comparison, for example, of the following extracts, taken at random, will show the closeness of the relationship between the two comedies: -

From *Le Mort vivant*, Act I, sc.vi and *L'Ambassadeur d'Afrique*, scene ii:

FABRICE.- Ah ! Gusman, souviens-toi que j'aime Stéphanie ?

Qu'elle doit à mon sort par l'Hymen être unie;  
Et que dans le malheur qui tallonne mes pas,  
N'en pas être l'époux, c'est souffrir le trépas.

GUSMAN.- Trépassez.

FABRICE.- Mais mourir, après tant de souffrance,  
C'est donner à ma peine une foible allégeance.

GUSMAN.- Ne trépassez donc pas [Boursault].

LÉLIE.- Ah? Crispin la beauté que jayme

A pour moy de si doux appas  
Que je souffriray le trepas  
Si quelqu'autre en fait sa conquête  
Ouy Crispin, ouy ma mort est preste  
S'il la faut ceder.

CRISPIN.- Trépassez.

LÉLIE.- Hélas! Quand nos sens sont blesses

Mourir pour finir sa souffrance,  
Est une petite alegeance.

CRISPIN.- Ne trepassez pas [Du Perche].

From *Le Mort vivant*, Act I, sc.vi and *L'Ambassadeur d'Afrique*, scene ii:

GUSMAN.- Car enfin quoi que j'aye un rapport fort sincere

Avec un qui peut- être est bâtard de mon pere,  
D'icy jusqu'en Afrique un chemin racourci,  
Ne peut être plus long que de là jusqu'icy;  
Et puis qu'à vous convaincre il faut que l'on s'exerce,  
Gusman avec l'Afrique ayant peu de commerce,  
Pour raison concluante il conclud de bon cœur,  
Que toujours de l'Afrique il sera serviteur [Boursault].

CRISPIN.- Tout coup vaille.

Quand j'auerois la taille & le port  
D'un qui peut sans luy faire tort  
Estre bastard de feu mon pere  
Cela ne fait pas vostre affaire  
Et de l'Afrique iusqu'icy  
Le Chemin le plus racourcy  
N'est pas plus long si je m'esplique  
Que d'icy jusques en Affrique  
Or donc pour vous convaincre mieux

Par vos raisons & par vos yeux  
 Crispin n'ayant point de commerce  
 En Affrique ny dans la Perse  
 Conclud concludant de bon coeur  
 Qu'il est bien fort son serviteur [Du Perche].

From *Le Mort vivant*, Act I, sc.iii and *L'Ambassadeur d'Affrique*, scene vi:

GUSMAN.- Holà, quasi ma femme, & presqu'Ambassadrice,  
 Venez ; car je vous aime, & je suis cependant  
 Ambassadeur d'Afrique, & bien Ambassadant ;  
 Mais contre vos attraits n'ayant point de parade,  
 Pour vous faire l'amour je me des-Ambassade:  
 Car des Ambassadeurs étant fort au dessous,  
 L'Ambassade est à câ quand on parle avec vous [Boursault].

CRISPIN.- Hola future ambassadrise  
 Je vous ayme & suis cependant,  
 Ambassadeur ambassadant,  
 Pour estre votre camarade,  
 Faut que je me desambassade  
 Car un illustre ambassadeur,  
 Ne peut sans trahir sa grandeur  
 Vous aymer en ligne directe,  
 Donc pour montrer que ie respecte  
 Vos yeux frippons qui m'ont vaincu,  
 Je mets mon ambassade à cul [Du Perche].



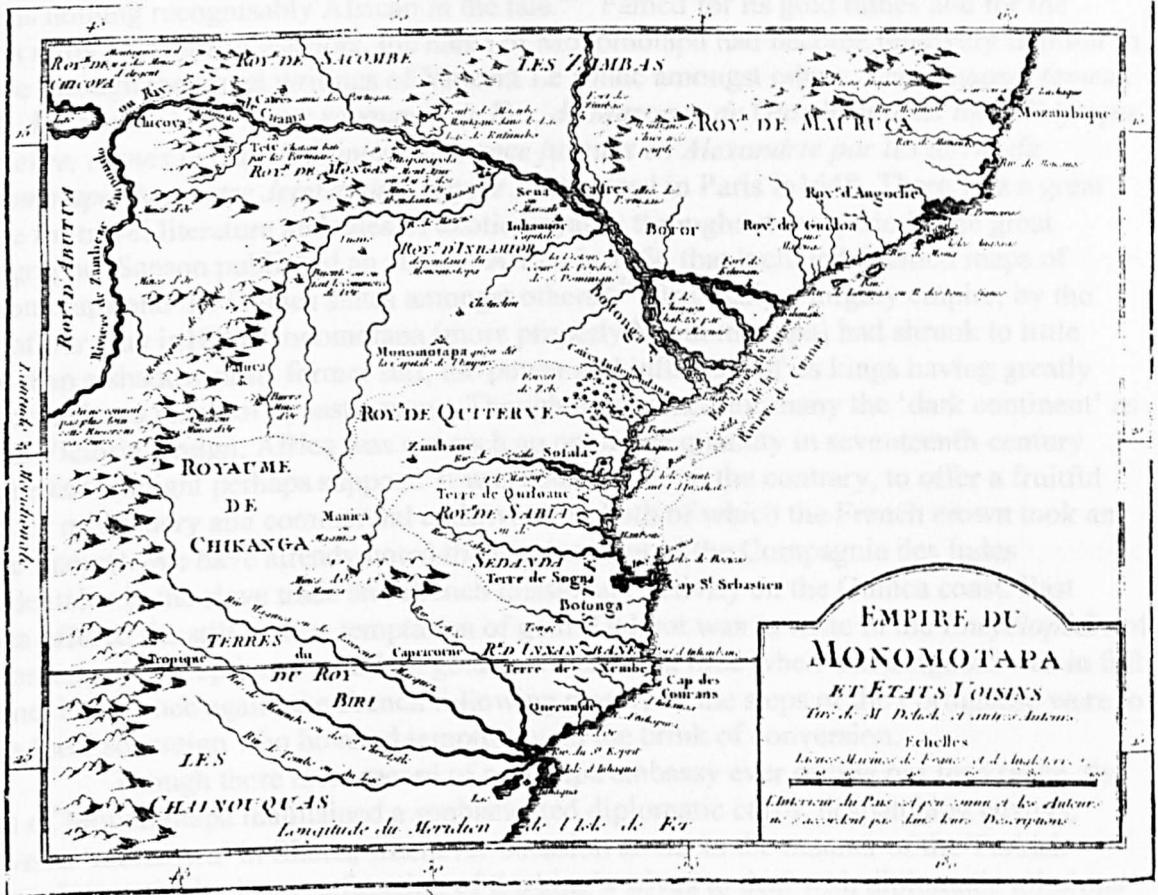
Some twenty or so years after the production of *L'Ambassadeur d'Affrique*, another minor playwright, Bel-Isle, was to feature an 'African ambassador', in his *Marriage de la reine de Monomotapa* (1682). This play, too, remained in the provinces and seems never to have been produced in Paris. Appearing at the beginning of the next reign, and therefore outside our remit, there also exists a *Reine du Monomotapa* by Fuzelier and Legrand, dated 1718. The following notice appears in the *frères Parfaict, Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire des spectacles de la foire*, tome ii (1743):

LA REINE DU MONOMOTAPA [sic]<sup>228</sup>, qui parut le même jour, tomba, & merita bien son sort, puisque ce n'étoit qu'une farce grossiere & mal digérée, plus propre pour une parade, que pour le Théâtre de l'Opéra Comique.

Such words of condemnation could never have applied to the *Marriage de la reine de Monomotapa*, at least according to the proud author. Bel-Isle claims in the dedication to a certain M. Ruys of Leyden that his little comedy is 'un divertissement honneste' in which nothing will be found to offend the delicate ear. Monomotapa is also the setting of a fable by La Fontaine, *Les Deux amis*: 'Deux vrais amis vivoient au Monomotapa: / L'un ne possédoit rien qui n'appartint à l'autre. / les amis de ce pays-là / Valent bien, dit-on, ceux du nôtre...' In this instance, the name seems to have been chosen largely for its alliterative qualities, for

<sup>228</sup> The partitive is not used incorrectly in this instance because 'Monomotapa' [Shona: Munhumutapa] was the title of the king as well as the name of the state.

The 'Oriental' Ambassador in 17<sup>th</sup> Century French Comedy.



The Empire of Monomotapa and surrounding countries by l'Abbé Prévost, Paris, 1748.

Map to show the location of Monomotapa, from W. G. L. Randles, *The Empire of Monomotapa* (1981).

there is nothing recognisably African in the tale.<sup>229</sup> Famed for its gold mines and for the king's army of Amazon warriors, the name of Monomotapa had become relatively familiar in France through the travel writings of Vincent Le Blanc amongst others. The *Voyages fameux du Sr. Vincent Leblanc...aux royaumes de Fez, de Maroc et de Guinée et dans toute l'Afrique intérieure, depuis le Cap de Bonne Espérance jusques en Alexandrie par les terres de Monomotapa du prestre Jean et de l'Égypte...* appeared in Paris in 1648. There was a great vogue for travel literature and tales of exotic voyages throughout our period. The great cartographer Sanson published an atlas of Africa in 1656 that included detailed maps of Monomotapa and the Guinea states amongst others.<sup>230</sup> Originally a mighty empire, by the year of our play in 1696 Monomotapa [more properly Munhumutapa] had shrunk to little more than a shadow of its former self, the power and influence of its kings having greatly diminished as a result of dynastic wars.. Though it remained for many the 'dark continent' as late as Victoria's reign, Africa was not such an unknown quantity in seventeenth-century Europe as we might perhaps suppose. It was considered, on the contrary, to offer a fruitful field for missionary and commercial endeavour, in both of which the French crown took an active interest. We have already noted the involvement of the Compagnie des Indes Occidentales in the slave trade and French missionary activity on the Guinea coast. East Africa offered the still greater temptation of gold. Diderot was to write in the *Encyclopédie* of Monomotapa's exceptional wealth in gold and ivory, at a time when that kingdom was in full decline. Here, once again, the French following closely in the steps of the Portuguese were to find a local sovereign who hovered temptingly on the brink of conversion.

Though there is no record of a Mutapa embassy ever setting out for France, the kings of Monomotapa maintained a sophisticated diplomatic corps, despatching envoys, known as 'mutumwa' in Shona, whenever occasion arose, in the manner of the Turkish sultans. Interestingly, it was a function of the king's wives to deal with diplomatic missions between Monomotapa and other states, the chief wife or 'Mazvarira' conducted negotiations with the Europeans, the second wife, or 'Nehanda' dealt with the Muslims. It is a matter of historical record that formal embassies were sent from the court of Monomotapa to the Portuguese and to other African rulers on a regular basis. We learn from Portuguese sources that Mutapa embassies were normally comprised of four ambassadors, chosen specifically for each particular mission. One represented the king's person and it was expected that he would be shown the same reverence and respect as the sovereign himself. A second was known as the 'muromo', or the king's mouth. It was he who would speak for the embassy and he was therefore a polished and eloquent speaker. A third was the king's eye, or 'meso', his function was intelligence gathering, to watch all that was done and relate it to the king on his return. The fourth was the king's ear, or 'zheve'. His office was to note and remember all that was said on both sides, and most particularly whether the 'muromo' had added or subtracted from the king's message. Memory plays a particularly important function in traditional, preliterate societies. These ambassadors enjoyed considerable discretionary powers, but were not plenipotentiary and had to refer any important matters back to the Mutapa for a final decision. In place of letters of diplomatic accreditation, they carried a special staff, the 'mibhadha'; even in wartime, possession of this conferred immunity. An envoy could not be harmed while carrying the 'mibhadha'; it would have to be removed by stealth, should it be desired to kill him. An ambassador's entourage could amount from three to as many as a couple of hundred in number, depending on the status of the host nation. Wearing their splendid costumes of leopard skin and ostrich plumes, the arrival of a Mutapa embassy must have provided a magnificent spectacle:

<sup>229</sup> La Fontaine, *Fables*, Livre VIII, xi, p. 253 ff. (Paris).

<sup>230</sup> Nicolas Sanson, *L'Afrique en plusieurs cartes nouvelles et exactes; et en divers traittez de geographie & d'histoire*, etc. (Paris, 1656).

First come, in front, certain drummers and players of other instruments, together with certain dancers, all singing and playing as they march, deafening the surrounding country with their harsh and discordant voices, their heads ornamented with cock's-tail feathers. After them come the other Kaffirs in single file, and after them the four mutumes in their proper order, he who represents the king coming last.<sup>231</sup>

We shall be sadly disappointed if we look to find such fascinating details in Bel-Isle's little comedy.

Like Du Perche's *Ambassadeur d'Afrique*, the *Marriage de la reine de Monomotapa* is a short, one-act farce, in this case consisting of some eighteen scenes and written in alexandrines. The plot is highly derivative and, apart from one or two original touches, somewhat reminiscent of the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*. It need not detain us long. There are only six *dramatis personae* and the villain does not make a personal appearance. As the play opens, young Lizandre reveals to his valet, Mascarille, that Isabelle's miserly father has ordered his daughter to break her promise of marriage to Lizandre. It seems that he is now seeking an excuse to end the e but the unsympathetic Mascarille retorts that he is far more likely to run the risk of confinement in a lunatic asylum than to succeed in ending his life. Wine, not death, is the great consoler and Lizandre would do better to seek consolation in the tavern. Our young hero manfully refuses to abandon hope; Isabelle loves him and it is more than likely a question of avoidance of paying the dowry. Since neither of them has noticed a rival in the offing, Mascarille will try to find out how matters really stand by questioning Lizette, Isabelle's 'souvante'. The canny girl quite rightly does not trust Mascarille's motives, but she slowly relents as the two of them find common ground in grumbling together about how they are exploited by their respective employers. Mascarille promises to keep it quiet, if she will only tell him the real reason behind Acante's sudden opposition to the marriage. It seems that the old man is so obsessively secretive by nature that he will not even discuss the matter with his wife, but Lizette has a shrewd suspicion that it is something to do with the 'bon rustre's' morbid interest in astrology and magic. Acante's crony, Abranton, is widely suspected of dabbling in the black arts. Bel-Isle's characterization of the villain of the piece as a soothsayer is a highly topical detail.<sup>232</sup>

Astrology and the occult had become fashionable in Paris in the 1670's, particularly in court circles. Thomas Corneille produced a comedy on the theme, *La Devineresse ou les Faux Enchantements*, at the beginning of 1680, the very year in which the notorious 'affaire des poisons' burst like a bombshell on the 25<sup>th</sup> January.<sup>233</sup> In a scandal whose ramifications were to reach the steps of the throne itself, Athénaïs de Montespan, 'maîtresse en titre' to the king, was implicated in dealings with an unsavoury crew of occultists and black magicians centred around a woman known as 'La Voisin', her daughter, a fortune-teller named Le Sage, and two renegade priests, Mariette and Guibourg. A whole industry had grown up around them of fortune telling, love-philtres, spells, charms and abortion. Influential figures at court were named as suspects, arrested and closely

<sup>231</sup> Historical details and quotation from *A Political History of Munhumutapa* (Harare, 1988), the citation is from J. dos Santos's *Ethiopia Oriental*. See also W. G. L. Randles, *The Empire of Monomotapa* (1981) for an account of the Mutapa state. Thomas Astley's *New General Collection of Voyages and Travels*, vol 3, (London, 1746) contains 'An Account of the Empire of Monomotapa' translated from De Faria y Souza's *Portuguese Asia*, which is also of interest.

<sup>232</sup> See Micheline Grenet, *La Passion des astres au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, de l'astrologie à l'astronomie* (Paris, 1994), heceforward: Grenet.

<sup>233</sup> Corneille's comedy is clearly based on contemporary events; no-one in the audience could fail to identify his 'Mme. Jobin' as La Voisin. He had already featured her in his *L'Inconnu* of 1675.

interrogated; several wealthy women were openly accused of poisoning their husbands. A commission of inquiry was appointed because of the number of suspicious deaths and heard evidence in secret at the Arsenal. Led by La Reynie, police investigations soon revealed that the activities of the group did indeed extend to the supply of poisons and also to infanticide. Conscious that her looks were beginning to fade and that a new rival for Louis's affections had appeared upon the scene in the shape of Marie-Angélique de Fontanges, it emerged that 'La Montespan' had been in the habit of secretly administering aphrodisiacs to the king on a regular basis, this to such an extent that Louis's physicians had noticed a distinct deterioration in his health. She had also assisted at a Black Mass, said by the abbé Guibourg, at which a young child had had its throat cut. She was further accused of attempting to kill her latest rival, by means of impregnating her clothes with arsenic and other poisons supplied by La Voisin. These were all capital charges, but given her position as mother of seven of the king's legitimised children, a trial in open court was unthinkable. Louis intervened to save her and personally burnt the verbatim records of the court proceedings, though La Reynie's summary of the evidence survives in the Bibliothèque Nationale (MSS. *Fonds français* 7608, 477 *et seq.*). There is no doubt that Louis, despite the irregularities of his private life, was personally pious and deeply shaken by the affair. As for Abranton in the play, this 'vieux bouc', a revolting figure, 'qui ressemble à un magot', has actually tried to seduce Lizette herself, after tricking her into visiting him at his consulting rooms in the faubourg St. Victor; the revelation provokes Mascarille into declaring his love for her.

We next encounter our hero Lizandre bewailing his prospective father-in-law's shabby treatment of him to Isabelle; does his beloved, at least, still care for him? It seems that she does, for though her father is pressing her to go out in society a little more, she is not interested in finding a better match. Lizandre's happiness is all that matters to her. Enter Acante, who views the pair suspiciously. What are they up to? Why, nothing at all. They are engaged to be married and have much to discuss before the wedding. Acante sneers that they should not count upon the marriage. Isabelle swears that she will never give up Lizandre, especially when her father himself approved their betrothal, but Acante retorts that if Lizandre really loved her, he would never ruin her prospects by standing in her way. He insists that his daughter can do a lot better for herself if she tries, but Isabelle angrily refuses to discuss the matter. At least she can be sure that Lizandre loves her for herself alone and not for outside appearances. They will not stoop to go behind his back and her father should be thoroughly ashamed of himself. At this point Acante loses his temper and shouts for a stick. Isabelle calls for Lizette to come and help her. Lizette reminds the old man that they are now two against one. They will retaliate and then everyone will laugh at him. She sings the refrain from a popular song as Acante becomes apoplectic with rage.

Mascarille now makes an appearance. He is dressed very oddly and explains his costume by saying that he is selling almanacs, another reference to the popular fascination with astrology. Since Acante has taken the opportunity to make a strategic withdrawal, Mascarille thinks it safe to tell the girls that he has discovered what the old man is really up to. Alas for our curiosity, they decide that they do not trust the valet either and prefer to risk Acante's wrath at home. At this juncture, Lizandre arrives and is angry with Mascarille, because he suspects that the latter has been drinking instead of attending to his master's affairs. Mascarille readily agrees that perhaps he has been imbibing a little, but it is all in a good cause. It emerges that he has been drinking all day with the astrologer Abranton, after Lizette has tipped him the wink that the two old men are plotting something together. He has now found out what is really going on and has hit upon a cunning plan to foil the pair of them, but he refuses to tell Lizandre what it is. His master will just have to trust him. As Acante has just this minute hove into sight again, Lizandre goes off, though very doubtfully. It is now Acante's turn to accuse Mascarille of being the worse for drink. This time, the

valet's excuse is that it is only because he has heard such good news from the soothsayer, concerning the honour that is about to befall Acante's family. Naturally, his listener presses him to tell more, just as the wily Mascarille has foreseen. It seems that the stars have foretold that Lizandre will lose his Isabelle to a king, no less!

...un Roy, de qui le nom eschape à ma mémoire,  
Par ses Ambassadeurs vous combleroit de gloire...  
Il ma [sic] dit que, peut-estre, il viendrait de la Chine,  
Qu'il seroit Moscovite, ou Tartare, ou Persan,  
Mais pour toute remarque il aura le Turban...

Mascarille has taken it upon himself to bring the good news. An embassy is already on its way to ask for her hand. Acante is much obliged to him for his consideration, but suddenly unsure that his daughter is quite up to marrying a monarch:

....ma fille est-elle belle  
Assez pour mériter l'amour d'un Potentat,  
Et dignement répondre à ce pompeux estat...'

Mascarille hastens to reassure the proud parent and Acante gratefully insists on bestowing some beer money upon him as he bustles off to prepare for the important visitors.

We find Isabelle and Lizette again, as they complain to each other of Acante's unreasonable behaviour. Since Acante has just announced that his daughter is to marry a prince, Isabelle is considering the merits of a pre-emptive elopement. Lizette wisely counsels caution; she should find Lizandre and talk it over with him first. They agree that there is no future in waiting for Mascarille to sort matters out. After all, Acante might become suspicious and shut them both up in a convent, for good. It emerges in the course of conversation that Mascarille has already tried to seduce Lizette, but that she has wisely insisted upon marriage first. Isabelle begins to worry about her own reputation and wishes to wait until nightfall, in case she should be recognised. Lizette opines that they should let the gossips have their field day. What does public opinion matter, if Lizandre and Mascarille think well of them? Isabelle may be frightened of the dark, but Lizette is more concerned about the possibility of a beating. Our heroine now begins to worry about her jewellery box; she had better go and fetch it. The practical Lizette has already packed. At this juncture, Mascarille re-appears, in another bizarre costume. He tells Lizette she must not worry; everything has been arranged for both weddings. Whatever he says or does, she and her mistress must play along with him. It is imperative that Isabelle should pretend to obey her father:

Qu'Isabelle obeisse en tout à son papa,  
Nous vous emmenerons à Monomotapa.  
LIZETTE.- Où diable est ce pays ?  
MASCARILLE.- Ne t'en mets pas en peine.

Lizette insists that it is high time that they started to consider their own future together, but Mascarille pretends innocence. She will have to wait her turn for a wedding and must leave now, at once, because Acante is coming and it is vital that he should not suspect them of collusion.

We have now arrived at the thirteenth scene and this is the key scene in which our third 'ambassadeur d'Affrique' makes his appearance. All begins to become clear as a heavily disguised Mascarille accosts Acante. He introduces himself as the messenger and

interpreter of a great prince, presenting his astonished listener with an elaborate missive from the very hand of 'LE GRAND SULTAN ALY BASSA TABULISPA / SUPREME SOUVERAIN DE MONOMOTAPA' himself. It seems that his master wishes to ally himself by marriage with Acante:

Je ne balance point à vous dire la chose,  
 Monsr. Prenez vostre aise & lisez cette prose,  
 C'est le tiltre honoraire, avec le billet doux  
 D'un Prince, qui prétend de s'allier à vous.  
 Je l'ay mis en François, estant son interprete.

Acante is highly flattered; for a moment he is suspicious, 'Comme quoy ce grand Prince a-t-il pû me connoistre?' but is too easily reassured. He is persuaded to read the letter, which explains all: 'Je lis avec respect ce sacré caractère'. We learn that Aly Bassa is sending a formal embassy to ask for his daughter in marriage. The ambassador himself is close at hand. Acante is wonderstruck at the accuracy of Abranton's prediction, yet he worries about the correct mode of address for such a dignitary. His house is not fine enough to receive him. Should he make a speech of welcome? Mascarille hurriedly reassures him that this is not necessary and gives further instructions on how to behave. It appears that His Excellency can be a little short of temper:

Non, cét [sic] Ambassadeur n'entend pas vostre langue.  
 Il ne vous parlera que par ses actions  
 Faites-luy seulement trois génuflexions;  
 Bas, bas; qu'il ne vous donne un coup de cimetéree...

Acante begins to worry about his painful knees (a touch of arthritis, perhaps?): 'Je me romps les genoux', but Mascarille insists that such elaborate ceremonial is a necessary evil: 'C'est un mal nécessaire, il le faut trouver doux'. They have brought their own Notary with them, competent both in French and in their native tongue, to perform a marriage by proxy. Given the difficulties of travel in the seventeenth century and the prevalence of arranged marriages, this was not such an unusual proceeding. Here we may well remember the case of our own Henry VIII, Ann of Cleves and Holbein's famous portrait. For a marriage to be valid, it was not necessary under canon law that the contracting parties meet, though the consent of both was mandatory. Be that as it may, the Notary has the marriage contract to hand, already drawn up and ready for signing. Mascarille bustles Acante into summoning Lizette and Isabelle. In a moment of sanity, Acante wonders briefly how on earth a foreign embassy could possibly know the name of his daughter's maid servant, but Mascarille assures him that his master knows everything about the household, even down to the little dog, Brusquet.<sup>234</sup> An ambassador, it will be recalled, also fulfils the function of intelligence gatherer. The notion of being under such close surveillance proves a little unnerving for the old man, so Mascarille goes hurriedly on to specify the type of wine to be provided. It seems that His Excellency will drink only vintage Spanish, of the very best. As Acante hurries off to make his preparations, Mascarille and Lizandre are left to gloat over the success of their deception. Happily, Lizandre has managed to remember the ring. A valet enters bearing four large bottles of the precious wine, but Mascarille, enjoying his new rôle, insolently demands that biscuits be brought as well.

<sup>234</sup> Lancaster notes that this detail too is borrowed from Molière; in *Dom Juan* (sc. 14) M. Dimanche has a dog named Brusquet (Lancaster IV ii, p. 551).

At long last Acante returns with the girls, busily engaged in giving young Isabelle some fatherly advice on marriage; a diadem will suit her, but she must not ever think of deceiving so great a king. The horoscope has proved accurate in every detail, and she will thank her father in the end for ridding her of a worthless suitor. Isabelle admits she is a little frightened of marrying a king and of giving him cause for anger, but that notwithstanding, she will always love Lizandre. Her father attempts to comfort her:

Quand tu seras passée en Monomotapa  
 Entre les bras d'Aly Bassa Tabalipa [sic]  
 Il ne te souviendra jamais de ton Lizandre.

Lizette agrees that as a dutiful daughter Isabelle should comply with her father's wishes. Acante is gratified and tells her that in her position, as the future queen's lady-in-waiting, she should not give that clown Mascarille a second thought. She might well marry a marquis at the very least, if she would only set her mind to it, '...ton sot Mascarille / N'est qu'un pauvre bouffon, & qu'un malheureux drille'. But the Ambassador is coming in from the garden, Isabelle must be gracious to him. On Mascarille's prompting, she kisses him and at last recognises her own Lizandre: 'Elle peut s'approcher de nostre Ambassadeur, / Et sans cérémonie embrasser sa Grandeur'. Acante is shocked by such free and easy manners: 'Est ce là parmy vous comme on recoit les filles?', but Mascarille as always is ready with an explanation: 'C'est de l'honneur qu'on rend aux illustres familles, / Des peres à genoux il se fait adorer, / Et puis en leurs enfans il les sçait honorer'. Now the Notary presents the marriage contract to Acante for his signature, but Acante has forgotten his glasses. Isabelle asks him directly if she ought to sign the document as well, and he very foolishly orders her to, at once! At this point, still in his rôle of 'African Ambassador', Lizandre enquires if he too should sign, but by speaking in French he gives the game away and is instantly recognised. Despite all the deception, however, the contract is legally binding and must stand. He and Isabelle plead with Acante to forgive them, and naturally so does Mascarille: 'Monsr. de bonne grace excusez l'Interprète'. Acante grudgingly admits that they seem to have got away with it, but he will get his own back in the end by re-marrying and presumably disinheriting his daughter and his son-in-law. The Notaire breaks in to enquire whether there are not still two more signatures to add to the document. Mascarille at last asks Lizette to marry him. She agrees with alacrity, Isabelle gives her permission and her blessing. They wed and, as is proper in a comedy, all four live happily ever after.

We ought not to look for authentic detail nor the depiction of a genuine East African embassy in the *Marriage de la reine de Monomotapa*. It is, after all, highly unlikely that the intricate details of East African diplomatic practice outlined above should be widely known in provincial France. Financial considerations could also weigh heavily against the large and elaborately costumed cast that accuracy would require, particularly in the provinces. Despite references in the text to interpreters and outlandish attire, no mention is made in the text of 'blacking up', unlike our two other African plays. What such costumes might consist of remains unspecified, but Bel-Isle clearly has a Muslim monarch in mind, for the king of Monomotapa is provided with an Arabic name and the Turkish titles of 'Bassa' and 'Sultan', his ambassador brandishes a scimitar. Such details would in reality have been an anachronism, already two centuries out of date, for Monomotapa had long since passed from the Arab to the Portuguese sphere of influence. None of the names cited in Aly Bassa's letter to Acante appear on the tables of the kings of Monomotapa given in the histories of the area and it is probably not too far from the truth if we suggest that Bel-Isle must have chosen the name of Monomotapa purely for its exotic connotations. Given the Arabic savour of the text, its author doubtless drew his inspiration from North, rather than East Africa. The



*Marriage de la reine de Monomotapa* opened in 1682 and it is almost certainly no coincidence that this is the year in the January of which Paris saw the arrival of the first ambassador to be sent to France by a ruler of Morocco. Known to his subjects as 'al-Samīn', 'the Bloodthirsty', the notorious Sultan Muley Ismaël (1672-1727) would have been an absolute gift to the comic theatre. The scope of his sexual appetites and the size of his harem were as legendary as his cruelty and his irascible disposition; he was popularly credited with several hundred wives and children too numerous to count. Muley Ismaël's ambassador, Hadgi Mohammed Temin, came to Paris to secure a much coveted commercial agreement with France and was also empowered to negotiate an exchange of prisoners.<sup>235</sup> In the Mediterranean area the enslavement of prisoners of war to man the galleys, or the taking of captives to hold for sale or ransom, had long been routine on both sides of the religious divide, but the dreadful mistreatment of French prisoners in North Africa gave constant cause for anxiety. Colbert's correspondence is full of references to such incidents.<sup>236</sup> Mohammed Temin was nonetheless received with all the usual diplomatic courtesies and he was royally entertained in accordance with what had become the established programme for visiting ambassadors. Following the 'audience officielle' on the 9<sup>th</sup> February, there were the usual banquets, receptions, outings to places of interest and visits to the theatre. There exists a delightful portrait of the Moroccan delegation visiting the Comédie Italienne by Antoine Coypel (now at the Musée de Versailles), which I reproduce overleaf for the sake of interest. Since the painting is dated February 1682, the performance in question is presumably of Fatouville's *Lingère du Palais*. In the *Marriage de la reine de Monomotapa*, an 'African ambassador' seeks Isabelle's hand on behalf of his king Abu Aly Tabalispā, who has heard of her beauty from afar. However far fetched this element of the plot might seem, it was not too far removed from reality. Indeed, Bel Isle's little scenario proved to be prophetic, for a second Moroccan embassy arrived in 1699, proposing marriage on behalf of Muley Ismaël to Mlle. de Blois, daughter of Louis XIV by Louise de la Vallière and widow of the Prince de Conti. This second Moroccan embassy, led by Abdala Ben Aisha, was rather more unsuccessful than the first, but given such a precedent there can be little wonder that the comic theatre was to link the theme of marriage with ambassadorial visits for many years to come.

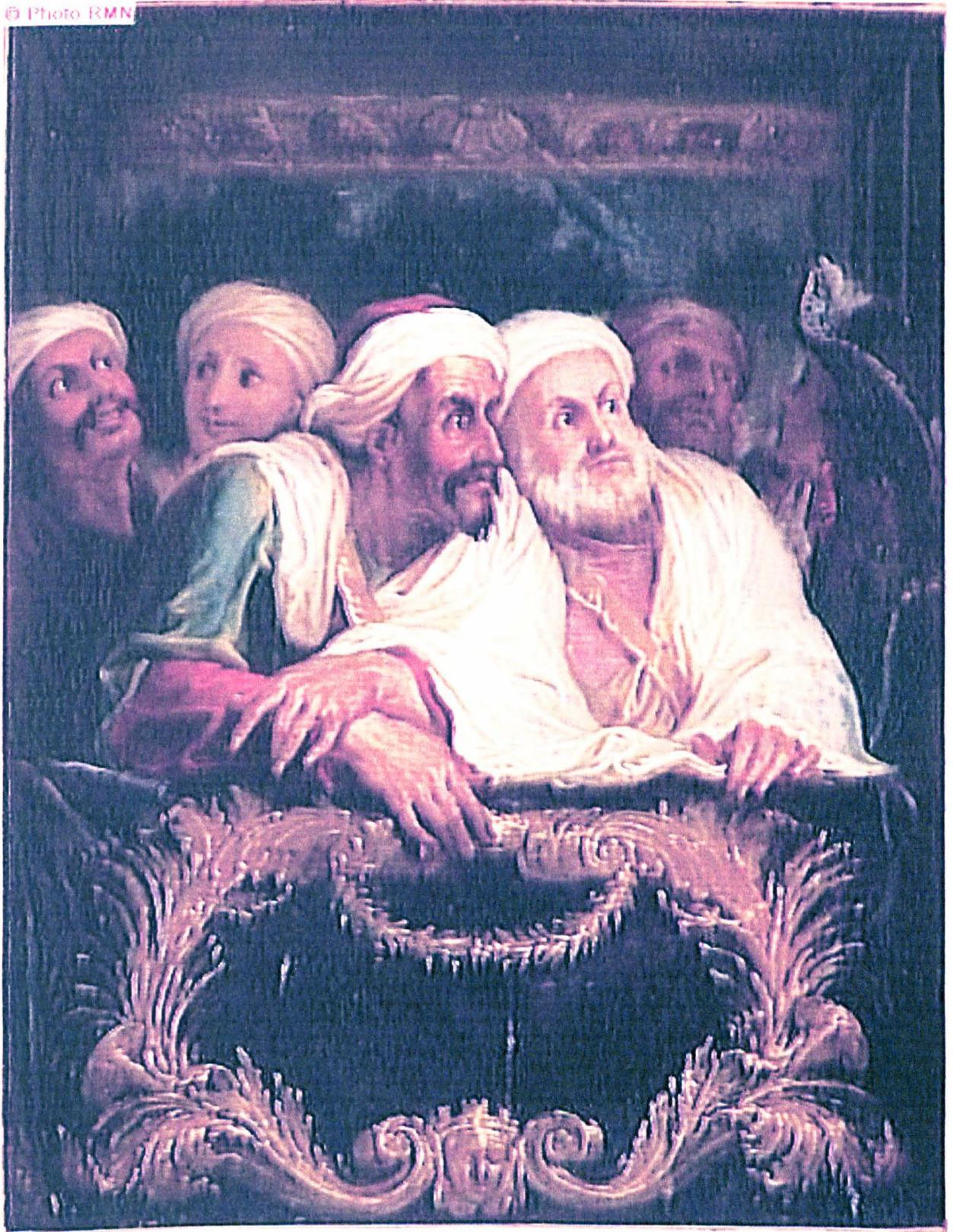
We return to the Guinea coast of Africa with Regnard and Dufresny's *Foire Saint-Germain* of 1695. Here the audience is treated to a scene set in the 'Sérail de l'Empereur du Cap Vert', but this is far more appropriate to an oriental context than to a West African one and is more or less pure fantasy, in the manner of the "embassy" from Monomotapa. The Cape Verde islands themselves, a Portuguese possession since the fifteenth century, were relatively well known in Europe as an important entrepôt for the slave trade. Since Regnard and Dufresny make no reference to an ambassador of any description, the play need not detain us.

We are now in a position to draw up a table of comparisons for the comedies that we have studied to date and to reach some tentative conclusions about their nature:

<sup>235</sup> On this embassy see Charles Penz, *Les Émerveillements parisiens d'un ambassadeur de Moulay Ismail (janvier-février 1672)* (Casablanca, 1949); on Muley Ismaël see Père Dominique Busnot, *Histoire du règne de Mouley Ismael* (London, 1715); Eugène Plantet, 'Mouley Ismaël, Empereur du Maroc, et la Princesse de Conti', *Revue d'histoire diplomatique* (1912) and Younès Nekrouf, *Une Amitié orageuse. Moulay Ismail et Louis XIV* (Paris, 1987).

<sup>236</sup> Colbert, tome 3, *Marine et galères*.

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*Mohammed Temin, ambassadeur du Sultan du Maroc, assistant à un spectacle dans une loge de la Comédie Italienne à Paris, février 1682. Antoine Coyvel (Versailles).*

*Table of comparisons*

<b>Title:</b>	<i>Le Mort vivant.</i>	<i>Les Faux Moscovites.</i>	<i>Le Bourgeois gentilhomme.</i>	<i>L'Ambassadeur d'Affrique.</i>	<i>Le mariage de la reine de Monomotapa.</i>
<b>Author:</b>	Edmé Boursault.	Raymond Poisson.	Molière.	Jacques Crosniet, sieur du Perche.	Bel-Isle.
<b>Published:</b>	Paris, Pépingué, 1662.	Paris, Quinet, 1669.	Paris, Robert Ballard, 1670.	Moulins, Vernoy, 1666.	Leyden, Félix Lopés, 1682.
<b>Type:</b>	Three-act comedy, written in alexandrines.	One-act farce of fourteen scenes, written in alexandrines.	Five-act comédie-ballet, written in prose.	One-act farce of eight scenes, written in octosyllabic verse.	One-act farce of eighteen scenes, written in alexandrines.
<b>Who plays the ambassador?</b>	Gusman, a valet.	Lubin, a rogue, 'crieur de noir à noircir'.	N/A - the son of the 'Grand Turc' is played by Cléonte.	Crispin, a valet.	Lizandre, the young hero.
<b>Are costume and behaviour appropriate?</b>	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.	Not really, any attempt at this is minimal.
<b>Is he properly escorted by a train of followers?</b>	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.	No.
<b>Is jargon employed?</b>	No.	Yes, but written into the stage directions, not specified in the text.	Yes, lingua franca is also explicitly incorporated into the text.	Yes, explicitly incorporated into the text.	Communication is by gesture alone.
<b>Is there an interpreter?</b>	No.	Yes, Montagne and Jolicoeur, 'fourbes interpretes des Moscovites'.	Yes, the valet Covielle.	Yes, Lémie, the young master.	Yes, the valet Mascarille.
<b>Is there 'vraisemblance'?</b>	Yes, but minimal.	Yes, sustained.	Yes, elaborately sustained.	Yes, a certain amount.	Yes, but minimal.
<b>Purpose of the 'embassy'?</b>	To frighten away rival suitors.	As a cover for an elopement and a robbery.	To arrange a marriage contrary to a father's wishes.	To disrupt the plans for an arranged marriage.	To obtain signatures on a marriage contract by deception.
<b>Is there an element of personal satire in the play?</b>	No.	Yes, of Pierre Potemkin.	Yes, of Hugues de Lionne.	No, but we suggest a historical connection with Mattéo Lopés's embassy.	No.

From the consideration of *Les Faux Moscovites* alone, we were able to deduce a fair amount of what were popularly considered to be the nature and functions of an ambassador. Bearing in mind the caveat that Molière does not attempt to represent the Ottoman ambassador himself on stage, but rather to satirise misconceptions about the Turks prevalent in certain exalted circles surrounding the 'ministre des affaires étrangères', there is also much to be gleaned on those topics from a close examination of the text of the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*. There is certainly a good deal of useful material contained in the *Ambassadeur d'Afrique* and the *Mort vivant*. We have by now examined three one-act farces, a three-act comedy, a comédie-ballet and four historical embassies in some considerable detail and may usefully reach a few, tentative, conclusions on the nature of the comic ambassador before we proceed to a study of the theme in the Comédie-Italienne and the 'Faires'. Does the comic theatre truly reflect the impact of diplomatic activity on the daily lives of the ordinary people, who for Aristotle are the primary concern of comedy? It seems that only 'exotic' ambassadors feature upon the stage and these were of their very nature few and far between. There is a considerable lacuna occurring between the departure of the Ardra embassy in 1671 and the arrival of the Siamese in 1684. This provides a natural staging-point for us to pause and take stock.

We learn from Poisson and from Molière of the tremendous popular interest in the arrival of an ambassador and how his formal 'entrée' into the city of Paris would draw the crowds. Poisson makes specific mention in *Les Faux Moscovites* (scene ix) of the people flocking to the Porte Baudet in the rue Saint-Antoine to watch Potemkin's procession: 'Pour les voir on s'étouffe... Tout le monde déjà s'assomme en nostre rue'. It is also he who adds the interesting detail that the general public were admitted to watch the visitors eat: 'Comment! N'as-tu pas veu disner les Moscovites? ...Je les ay veu deux fois.' (scène vii). Molière tells us of Soliman Aga: '...il a un train tout à fait magnifique, tout le monde le va voir, et il a été reçu en ce pays comme un seigneur d'importance' (*Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, Act IV iii). A retinue of some magnificence always accompanies our comic ambassadors. Its presence is expressly stated in four out of five of our plays and, as we have already learnt in Chapter 1, this detail reflects the historical reality. An ambassador would most certainly travel in state, escorted by his retainers. It was a matter both of national prestige and of security. Poisson makes reference in scene ii of *Les Faux Moscovites* to: 'un grand seigneur, / qui vient de Moscovie avec grand équipage, / Grand train'. The following instructions are given in scene vii: 'Mais trouve-nous encore / Des gens pour t'escorter: la grande suite honore. / Tous seront bien vestus et bien payés de nous'. An ambassador and his suite were distinctively and magnificently dressed; this detail also is noted, occurring in the stage directions or referred to in the text of our plays. The sheer foreignness of these exalted visitors is emphasised by all, with the exception of Boursault, by the inclusion of an interpreter in the ambassador's suite, necessitating some approximation in the text to the sounds of an exotic language. This is a favourite comic device and one that is exploited to the full by Molière, Du Perche, Rotrou and Montfleury amongst others.

The following concepts are generally associated with ambassadorial status by our writers: he is a great nobleman: 'si vous voulez le rappaiser / Il faut estre humble' [Du Perche]. The words 'potentat', 'pouvoir', 'ordonnance', 'respect', 'estime', 'grandeur', 'rang', 'vertu' commonly appear in juxtaposition with 'ambassadeur'. If 'potentat' seems to be a little much and rather overstating the case, let us recall that Potemkin, for one, was a prince. An ambassador is 'amoureux', 'courageux', 'magnanime', 'illustre', 'grave et majestueux', 'son crédit est rare', 'chacun le respecte...l'estime':

FABRICE.- Comme il est courageux, comme il est magnanime  
 Que chacun le respecte, & que chacun l'estime,  
 Que son crédit est rare, & que dans cet état  
 Il tient & sçait garder le rang d'un Potentat,  
 En vain à ce qu'il veut tu ferois résistance [Boursault].

He is an 'ame accomplie', possesses 'la science en un degré suprême' [Boursault] 'cette science supreme / Ces vertus, & tous ces appas' [Du Perche]. An educated interest in science is one of the qualities that François de Callières cites as desirable in an ambassador.<sup>237</sup> Our impostors are correctly addressed by their co-conspirators as 'votre Excellence', 'votre grandeur'. In what is obviously a reference to the well-known Oriental practice, Boursault even goes so far as to suggest that shoes should be removed in their presence: '...car un Ambassadeur / En parlant avec vous abaisse sa grandeur; / Tirez vos chausures, vite; ou bien-tôt par la tête...' Our ambassador appears as a paragon of all the virtues, but no more and no less was expected from the aristocracy of the day. The ambassador should epitomise the qualities of the nobility, of the 'parfait gentilhomme', because at all times and in all places he represents the person, the power and the prestige of his sovereign: 'ce rare esprit à qui l'on rend hommage...d'un grand potentat represente l'Image' [Boursault]. These qualities must be manifest in his person:

STEPHANIE.- Je temble[sic].  
 Pour connoître aisément votre rang glorieux,  
 Il ne faut qu'un moment regarder dans vos yeux,  
 On y remarque un air qui de votre Excellence  
 Découvre les vertus, & fait voir la naissance,  
 Aussi, d'un rang si haut je sçai trop le pouvoir,  
 Pour vouloir abuser du bonheur de vous voir.  
 ...d'un honteux amour vous souillez votre gloire.  
 Songez, Seigneur, songez que mon rang est trop bas... [Boursault].

And who is chosen to impersonate such a paragon of all the virtues? Why, with the single exception of Bel-Isle's Lizandre, it is those lovable rogues, the duplicitous valets Gusman, Crispin and Mascarille, or some other lowborn hero such as Lubin, old soldier and 'crieur de noir à noircir'. These are the plum rôles which Poisson or Molière, as actor/author/managers, reserve for themselves. The humour lies in the contrast between what we, the audience, know to be the cowardly, boastful, lustful, gluttonous nature of the impostor and what was expected of the conduct of an ambassador, 'si noble, si hault & si grand' [Du Perche].

Yet the capricious nature of power is everywhere noted: our ambassadors are to be feared, their character is irascible, their temper uncertain. They are all too apt to take offence. 'Je suis grand personnage, & malheur à qui m'outré' [Boursault, sc. iii]; 'Je sçai que votre force égale une tempeste, / Et que le rang suprême où le ciel vous a mis, / Donne de la terreur à tous vos ennemis...' [Du Perche]. Acante fears the wrath of Aly Bassa Tabulispa in Bel-Isle's comedy. Is this scenario 'vraisemblable' and was it prudent to be wary of giving offence to an ambassador in a chance encounter? Let us remember that Potemkin and Metcherski were notorious when in their cups; their servants were beaten, disgraceful scenes of fisticuffs and drunken brawling amongst the Russian embassy staff were reported on an

<sup>237</sup> *De la Manière de Negocier avec les Souverains, de l'Utilité des Négociations, du Choix des Ambassadeurs et des Envoyez, et des Qualitez necessaires pour réussir dans ces Emplois* (Brussels, 1716).

almost daily basis. The Turkish envoy, Soliman Aga, felt free to allow his servants to mistreat the Parisian crowds, even to the point of threatening execution or the bastinado, 'Je les pourrais sous le bâton' [see Chapter 3]. In such cases of violent attack, or, indeed, of any misdemeanour committed by ambassadorial staff, the guilty party could invoke the legal concept of extra-territoriality. It is in fact a realistic picture for our comedies to present diplomats as effectively above the law. An ambassador was everywhere accompanied by a retinue of some considerable size, including his own guards and a military escort furnished by the French crown. An armed escort was all too necessary in a period when conditions of travel were precarious and the roads often insecure. Given these circumstances, a diplomat could effectively behave as he liked, should he be of a malevolent disposition. His person was sacrosanct. Declaration as a 'persona non grata' and subsequent expulsion, to the wrath of his own sovereign, were the only real sanctions against misbehaviour, and these were very rarely invoked. We shall see in the following chapter what happened in the case of the Siamese embassy of 1684 and all the subsequent ramifications.

### **Chapter 5: The Siamese ambassadors and the Comédie-Italienne.**

*'...Si ceux qui viennent à Paris avec les ambassadeurs osaient publier, quand ils sont retournés chez eux, des relations aussi libres que celles que les Français publient touchant les pays étrangers, je ne doute pas qu'ils n'eussent bien des choses à dire.'* Bayle, *Pensées sur la comédie* (1682)

In keeping with our focus upon the depiction of the 'Oriental' ambassador in French comedy during the reign of Louis XIV, we are concerned in the present chapter with the various links opening up between France and the Far East in the last two decades of the seventeenth century and with the reflection of those links upon the stage. Of particular relevance to the theme is the exchange of embassies that took place between Louis XIV and Phra Narai, king of Siam. The arrival of Siamese ambassadors in 1684, the first representatives of their nation ever to be seen in France, was not without its literary repercussions, particularly in the realms of comedy and satire. The exotic visitors also provided a fruitful subject for philosophical speculation, appearing in Jean de la Bruyère's *Caractères de Théophraste*, where he muses upon the wisdom of much of the missionary activity in the East. Dufresny's *Amusemens sérieux et comiques d'un Siamois*, an early forerunner of Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes*, features a Siamese visitor in Paris. Stories of the doings of the ambassadors dominated the pages of the French press throughout 1684, 1685 and 1686, culminating with Donneau de Visé's publication of his *Journal des ambassadeurs de Siam en France* as a special number of the *Mercure galant* in 1687. We may well be particularly fortunate in respect of the theatre since 'Kosapan', leader of the 1686 embassy from Siam, is known to have kept a journal of his impressions of France. Compiled for the personal information of Phra Narai, to be read to him on their return, this has [arguably] survived and contains accounts of no fewer than eight theatrical visits.<sup>238</sup> In addition to the surviving historical material, there are many literary references to the Siamese ambassadors and several comedies exist with Far Eastern themes, notably Fatouville's *L'Empereur dans la lune* (1684) and *Le Banqueroutier* (1687); Regnard's *Le Divorce* (1688) and *Arlequin homme à bonne fortune* (1690). Regnard and Dufresny produced *Les Chinois* in collaboration in 1692. Such an impression did the Siamese make upon the literary establishment, that Voltaire was still writing of them as late as 1751 (*Le Siècle de Louis XIV*) and 1769 (*Essai sur les moeurs*).

There were altogether no fewer than three Siamese missions to France in the relatively short period between the years 1680 and 1686, together with two French return embassies to Siam. An embassy also arrived from the Chinese emperor K'ang-Hsi (1661-1722) in 1697, led by the French priest Joachim Bouvet, the pragmatic Chinese customarily leaving their diplomatic negotiations with Europe in the hands of the Jesuit Order. The sudden vogue for the Far East amongst the chattering classes, arising from the intense diplomatic and missionary activity in the area, had the unfortunate result of a certain amount

<sup>238</sup> Chaophraya Kosathibodi Pan, *The Siamese embassy to the Sun King. The personal memoirs of Kosa Pan*, ed. Michael Smithies (Bangkok c.1990); henceforward: Kosapan. A detailed assessment of their value as source material appears later in this chapter.

of confusion between Siam and China in the popular imagination, and this we see reflected upon the stage. Popular interest in the kingdom of Siam itself proved to be largely ephemeral in nature and quickly faded. Though comic references to the Siamese persist on the stage as late as 1692, the comic theatre soon returned to its perennial pre-occupation with that troublesome neighbour, the Ottoman Empire. Perhaps these more exotic visitors from the other side of the earth did not seem quite so relevant as the Turks, though they provided the subject for several plays and farces. We shall find that a good proportion of our later comedies also contain important references to contemporary scientific advances. I would argue that the astronomical and medical observations in Fatouville's satire, *L'Empereur dans la lune* (and elsewhere), deliberately hint at a link between French diplomatic endeavours in the Far East and the promotion of the interests of the Jesuit Order. For many years the Society of Jesus were the only Christian missionaries permitted to enter China, because of their importance to the Chinese administration as imperial astronomers, mathematicians and horologists. The Confucian tradition has always held scholarship in the greatest respect, and for this the Jesuits were (and are) renowned. Louis's unstinting support for Jesuit missionary and scientific activity in the Far East in the latter years of his reign is thus of considerable interest to our investigation, because it is echoed in the literary as well as in the historical source material.

As we have elsewhere seen to have been the case with Pierre Potemkin, Soliman Aga and Mattéo Lopés, the first Siamese embassy (i.e. that of 1680) was dispatched on the initiative of the Oriental power, neither at the instigation of France nor as a result of French concerns in the respective geographical area. It had, indeed, come to be considered one of the particular glories of the French court that it was the object of so many unsolicited and varied visitations from the East. If the Russian, the Turkish and the Ardra embassies had been deemed exotic in their day, these latest visitors seemed to be almost from another world, so strange and unfamiliar did the civilisation and culture of Siam appear to European eyes. Though all Paris was agog with curiosity at their arrival, the Siamese envoys of 1684 were sadly subject to racial insult and even physical attack by the general populace, as a result of their unwillingness to adapt to European norms of social behaviour, and there were scenes of public disorder. Overall, the Siamese made a most unfavourable impression, to the extent of being referred to as apes or monkeys in certain quarters, because of their physical appearance. We read in a despatch from Seignelay to La Reynie, 'lieutenant de police', on the 18th August 1684:

Le roi ayant été informé que la populace s'amasse pour voir l'ambassadeur de Siam, qu'on lui dit des injures et qu'il y a eu quelques insolents qui ont osé arrêter un des carrosses qui lui servent et battre le cocher, Sa Majesté m'ordonne de vous écrire que son intention est que vous preniez des mesures pour empêcher ce désordre, et si vous croyez qu'il soit nécessaire de publier quelque ordonnance pour cela et de faire punir quelques-uns de ceux qui pourraient tomber en pareille faute, Sa Majesté se remet à vous de faire ce que vous estimerez le plus convenable.<sup>239</sup>

<sup>239</sup> Quoted by Van der Cruysse, *Louis XIV et le Siam*, p. 387 (Paris, 1991), henceforward: Van der Cruysse. See also Pierre Clément, *La Police sous Louis XIV*, p. 90 (Paris, 1866):

Ce serait une erreur de croire que la population parisienne fût alors plus facile à administrer que de nos jours. Dans maintes circonstances, elle échappait complètement à l'action de ses magistrats. Au mois d'août 1686, elle insulta l'ambassadeur de Siam, arrêta un de ses carrosses, battit son cocher. Le roi, fort mécontent, fit écrire à La Reynie de prévenir le retour de ces désordres, et de publier, si c'était nécessaire, une ordonnance à cet égard.



*La Mission Siamoise à Paris 1684*. Jacques Vigoureux-Duplessis (1680-1732). The bearded priest is Artus de Lionne.

Such a thing had never happened before, not even with the Ottoman envoys visiting Paris, though one might have expected the Turks, as traditional enemies of Christendom, to be viewed with rather more hostility and suspicion.<sup>240</sup> The xenophobic attitude displayed towards the Siamese was persistent and recurred in 1686. Nor was it the case in Paris alone. Dangeau writes of the third embassy in his entry for the 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 'Ils n'étaient pas si contents quand ils arrivèrent à Paris, parce que sur leur route il y avait des lieux où ils n'avaient pas été trop bien traités, surtout à Orléans'.<sup>241</sup> Donneau de Visé chides his readership in the columns of the *Mercure galant*:

...Si l'éloignement des lieux nous faisait regarder comme barbares des peuples que de vastes mers séparent de nous, nous ne devrions pas l'être moins à leur égard, puisque nous sommes aussi éloignés d'eux qu'ils le sont de nous ... La couleur noire, brune ou blanche ne fait rien au coeur de l'homme.<sup>242</sup>

In marked contrast to popular antipathy, the diplomatic climate in France had undergone something of a sea change between 1670 and the 1680s, with the death of de Lionne and the appointment of Colbert de Croissy as foreign minister. The appropriate lessons had been drawn from the Soliman Aga episode and rather more of an effort was now made to accommodate Oriental susceptibilities (regardless of how little this could be said to apply to the Parisian mob). The atmosphere at court also subtly altered as Louis aged and began to take an increasing interest in religion under the influence of Mme. de Maintenon and his Jesuit confessor, the Père La Chaise. Any ambitions that France might have in the Orient were beginning to be dictated by the needs of the missions as much as by those of *Realpolitik* or commerce; these now came in as rather a poor second. Besides, Siam possessed little that was of direct economic value to France, other than the opportunity to frustrate the ambitions of the English and the Dutch. Evangelisation of the Far East was a project close to Louis's heart, as he came more and more to contemplate his own mortality, but it was one that was to prove fatal to French interests in the area. The Siamese revolution of 1688 and the ensuing bloodbath that culminated in the hounding to death of his brother monarch, Phra Naraï, were the direct consequences of Louis's interference, the sad end of Phra Naraï the tragic result of his own decision to enter into negotiations with France. Conservative elements in Siam, fearing the expansion of European imperialism, were by this time highly resentful of missionary activity. Rumours of the king's imminent conversion, combined with the arrival of French troops bringing artillery to fortify the European trading posts, were the final straw beginning the conflagration that shattered French hopes in the area.

The story of the three Siamese embassies to France is a fascinating one and very well documented; it is certainly worth the telling. The Compagnie des Indes orientales and the Société des Missions Étrangères, both relying on royal support and frequently sharing the same infrastructures and finance, were particularly active in Indochina during the early 1680s. In May 1680 the director-general of the Compagnie des Indes orientales, now operating from bases in Surat and Bantam, was persuaded by Mgr. Laneau of the Missions

<sup>240</sup> Two Ottoman envoys were murdered during an outbreak of popular hostility towards the Turks in Marseilles, but this was exceptional and the result of corsair activity. See the *Histoire nouvelle du massacre des Turcs fait en la ville de Marseilles en Provence, le 14 de mars, mil six cens vingt, par la populace de la ville justement indignée contre ces barbares, avec la mort de deux chaoux de la Porte du Grand Seigneur, ou ambassadeurs pour iceluy. Avec le récit des occasions qui les y ont provoquez et les présages de la ruine de l'empire des Turcs* (Paris, 1620) [Reprint 1879, Henri Delmas de Grammont (ed.)].

<sup>241</sup> Dangeau, *Journal*, tome 1: p. 395-6.

<sup>242</sup> *Mercure galant*, septembre 1686, II, pp. 2-3, 5.

Étrangères to send his agent André Deslandes-Boureau to Ayuthia, then the capital of Siam, to evaluate the situation there. Goods for Siam were loaded on board the *Vautour* and the vessel arrived at the bar of Siam in September of that year, with Claude Gayme of the Société des Missions Étrangères acting as interpreter. This was the first time that the French flag had appeared on those waters. The king of Siam was delighted, both with the letters and the gift of crystal chandeliers sent by the Compagnie des Indes orientales. Crystal was virtually unknown in Siam and he was fascinated by the stories of life at the French court. Unfortunately, he seems to have chosen to regard what was in reality little more than an exploratory trade mission as an official embassy from the king of France himself. Siam was then at a crossroads, coming under increasing pressure from the expansionism and high-handed behaviour of the English, the Dutch and the Portuguese. A traditional and profoundly Buddhist nation, the Siamese also perceived themselves to be under threat from powerful Muslim influences in the area. A highly publicised alliance with such a renowned monarch as Louis XIV would, at the very least, provide them with a breathing space. Nothing, therefore, was done to clear up the original misunderstanding; it suited both interested parties to maintain the illusion that this was indeed an official French embassy. The visitors were treated with unprecedented honours, granted long, private audiences with the king, feasted like royalty, loaded with valuable gifts. Phra Narai was an intelligent and enlightened monarch; he would talk for hours with the missionaries Gayme and Laneau, both fluent Siamese speakers, on subjects such as astronomy, geography and mathematics as well as on theology. He became increasingly obsessed with the idea of sending a return embassy to France. It was decided that Gayme should take overall charge of the party and act as interpreter; they would travel on Deslandes-Boureau's ship for Siam possessed no ocean-going vessels capable of such a long sea voyage.<sup>243</sup>

It was Claude Gayme who was also entrusted with the selection of gifts suitable for presentation to the king of France. He decided on some exquisite examples of Chinese and Japanese lacquer work, well aware that Louis already had more than enough gold and silver to be any longer impressed with such things. Phra Narai, unconvinced that these would be acceptable and unwilling to appear niggardly, insisted on adding some miniature rhinoceroses and a pair of young elephants, without considering the length and rigours of the voyage and the difficulties that feeding and watering such large animals would pose on board ship. There were, in addition, over fifty cases of gifts for other members of the French royal family. Three of the most senior and experienced mandarins of the court were chosen to serve as ambassadors, Pya Pipat Kosa, previously Siamese ambassador to China, Luang Sri Wisan and Khun Nakhon Vichai. They were to take letters to the Pope as well as to the king of France, translated by Laneau, engraved upon sheets of gold and enclosed together with the

<sup>243</sup> On the history of Franco-Siamese relations, see M. J. Burnay, "Notes chronologiques sur les missions Jésuites du Siam au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle", *Archivum Historicum Societatis Jesu*, 1953, vol. XXII, pp. 170-202 and "Sur le Voyage de Siam de Choisy..." *Journal of the Siam Society*, 24, pt. 1 (1930) pp. 82-83; Etienne Gallois, *L'expédition de Siam au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle et Constance Phaulkon* (Paris, 1862); E. W. Hutchinson, *Adventurers in Siam in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1940); Michel Jacq-Hergoualc'h, *L'Europe et le Siam du XVI<sup>e</sup> au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Apports culturels* (Paris, 1993); Lucien Lanier, *Etude historique sur les relations de la France et du royaume de Siam, de 1662 à 1703, d'après des documents édités...* (Versailles, 1883), henceforward: Lanier; Adrien Launay, *Siam et les missionnaires français* (Tours, 1896), henceforward: Launay; Charles Lemire, *La France et le Siam, nos relations de 1662 à 1903* (Paris, 1903); Ronald S. Love, "France, Siam, and court spectacle in Royal image-building at Versailles in 1685 and 1686." *Canadian Journal of History/Annales canadiennes d'histoire*, XXXI, August/août 1996, pp. 171-98; M. L. Manich Jumsai, *The Story of King Narai and his ambassador to France in 1686, Kosaparn* (Musée de l'Orangerie, 1986); Louis Pauliat, *Louis XIV et la Compagnie des Indes orientales* (Paris, 1886); Pinya, "A History of the French Missions to Siam", *The Imperial and Asiatic Quarterly Review*, 3<sup>rd</sup> series, 1901, XI (pp. 331-43); XII (pp. 120-33) and XIII (pp. 91-105); Dirk Van der Cruysse, *A resounding failure. Martin and the French in Siam 1672 – 1693* (Chiang Mai, 1998) and *Louis XIV et le Siam* (Paris, 1991).

translations in caskets of sandalwood. These coffers were then covered in gold brocade, red for Louis and violet for the Pope, placed on a valuable Persian carpet and carried on board the *Vautour*, where they were ensconced on a dais on the highest part of the deck and illuminated at night with a great number of torches. The sailors were required to bow every time they passed them, which caused considerable resentment. Last of all, the elephants were brought on board. The sheer volume of the gifts would have created a hazard for the crew in the cramped accommodation on board, let alone the two elephants and the quantities of fodder and extra water required.<sup>244</sup> It very soon became evident, even to the lay observer, that the *Vautour* was far too small to carry such a weight of cargo, the more especially given the fact that the ambassadors and their suite were travelling as so many extra passengers. The royal astrologers predicted the most dreadful catastrophe: the 'Farang' ship would prove fatal for the Siamese. Nevertheless, the *Vautour* set sail for France on the 1<sup>st</sup> December 1680.

Given that the embassy was entirely unsolicited, the missionaries felt it preferable that the Siamese should not arrive in France unannounced and risk meeting with an 'unsuitable' reception. Mgr. Laneau took advantage of the presence of a much faster English ship to write privately to the Archbishop of Paris, begging him to inform the king of the departure of the Siamese delegation and even suggesting that the Société des Missions Étrangères should provide funds to help with the costs of hospitality. He emphasised the importance of as splendid a reception as possible for the sake of Louis's reputation in the East, where a king was judged by the magnificence of his hospitality.<sup>245</sup> Great things were prophesied for French commerce in South-east Asia, and perhaps Laneau also allowed

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<sup>244</sup> These difficulties are documented in a letter in the archives of the Compagnie des Indes orientales:

Les trois ambassadeurs du roi de Siam sont chargés de beaucoup de présents ... Tous ces présents consistent en comptoirs, buffets et cabinets, coffres, tables et boîtes curieuses du Japon, robes de chambre du Japon, ouvrages de soie et vases d'or et d'argent, abat-vent de la Chine de différentes grandeurs et plusieurs autres pièces ... Tout cela occupe beaucoup de place dans un navire, outre deux jeunes éléphants mâle et femelle. Le fils du premier ambassadeur suit cette ambassade avec vingt hommes de service. Un missionnaire (Claude Gayme) et un jeune ecclésiastique (Emmanuel Picaredo) accompagnent les ambassadeurs. Tant de victuailles pour tout ce monde qui y portent leurs ragoûts avec eux, de même que les provisions qu'il faut pour les deux éléphants avec la quantité d'eau qu'il leur faut, demandent un navire bien fourni et bien équipé de monde et de victuailles. Tout cela manque au navire le *Vautour*... (*Lettre du 29 janvier 1681, de Bantam*. B. N., Ms. NAF 9380, f. 87-91) [from the sieur de Guilhem to the directors of the C.F.I.].

Quoted in Van der Cruysse, p. 240.

<sup>245</sup> Letters from Mgr. Laneau and M. Gayme to the Rue du Bac, headquarters of the Missions Étrangères:

...le bon accueil que ce roi espère de la magnificence de notre grand monarque s'étendra d'autant plus dans tous ces pays, que c'est ici le seul endroit où tous les orientaux viennent en plus grand nombre, et y demeurent en liberté (Laneau, *Lettre du 16 novembre 1680 à François de Harlay-Champvallon*, Arch. M. É. P, vol. 859, p. 446).

Comme ce sont gens de l'autre monde, vous n'aurez pas peine à obtenir que le Roi les défraie. Les dépenses ne seront pas grandes; ce ne sont pas gens à festins ... La nouvelle de cette ambassade va être répandue dans tout le monde; ... elle ne manquera pas de courir dans les gazettes (Gayme, *Lettre du 18 novembre 1680*, Arch. M. É. P, vol. 858, p. 446).

...comme les ambassadeurs que ce monarque envoie dans la Chine et au Grand Moghol sont défrayés aussitôt qu'ils entrent dans les États de ces princes, il serait de la grandeur du Roi qu'il donnât ordre qu'ils ne fussent traités moins favorablement en arrivant en France... (Gayme, *Copie ancienne d'une lettre de M. Gayme sans destinataire ni date*, B. N., Ms. NAF 9380, f. 150 ro).

Quoted in Van der Cruysse, p. 238.

himself to be carried away by his enthusiasm in promising the imminent conversion of Phra Narai to be followed by that of his subjects, *cuius regio, eius religio*. For some time now there had existed an unfortunate rivalry in the mission field between the Jesuits, who regarded the Far East as their own particular preserve, and the secular missionaries of the Missions Étrangères. The conversion of the kingdom of Siam would have been a tremendous coup for the latter. It was also a splendid prospect for Louis's newfound missionary zeal. Alas, all such hopes were to prove vain, for the embassy was dogged by ill luck from the very beginning.

The *Vautour*, as anticipated, proving much too small, the company were forced to put in at Bantam, to await the arrival of a larger ship, causing several months' delay. One of the ambassadors became seriously ill in the interim and was attacked by a form of paralysis, causing yet further difficulties. Eventually they set sail in the *Soleil d'Orient* at the end of August 1681, but the eight months that had been allowed to drift by in Bantam and the arrival of the summer monsoons caused them to miss the safest period for rounding the Cape of Good Hope.<sup>246</sup> The *Soleil d'Orient* was last seen in November 1681, as she made for the Cape after putting in at Mauritius to take on fresh provisions and water. News that the embassy had failed to arrive in France and that the worst was to be feared did not reach Siam until late in 1683.<sup>247</sup>

This misfortune put Phra Narai in a most difficult position. The predictions of the court astrologers, bitterly hostile to the establishment of the Catholic missions in Siam, had now patently been fulfilled. The king had therefore lost face and this was serious. Strong Muslim interests in Siam, as much as those of the Buddhist establishment, were now militating against any further involvement with France, whatever difficulties there might be with the English, Dutch or Portuguese. The king seemed unaware that his flirtation with the missions and the Compagnie des Indes orientales was a direct cause of this increasing alienation from his intensely nationalistic people. The sending of the embassy, together with all those lavish gifts, had almost emptied the treasury and it was out of the question to repeat it so soon. Besides, the first mission might yet turn up and it would prove most embarrassing for two Siamese ambassadors to meet at Versailles. It was therefore decided to send a second, smaller delegation to enquire after the first and to carry Phra Narai's congratulations on the birth of the Duc de Bourgogne, Louis's first grandchild (on the 6<sup>th</sup> August, 1682), news of which had only just reached Ayuthia. Two mandarins of the lesser rank of 'khunnang' were appointed, Khun P'ichai Walit and Khun P'ichit Maïtri, with the missionary Bénigne Vachet acting as escort and interpreter. The little group comprised in addition four Siamese boys, who were to be sent to France to study European architecture, the making of fountains, goldsmithing and other allied trades. A second missionary, who had found it difficult to acclimatise and been given permission to return home, also joined them. Vachet himself was

<sup>246</sup> Under normal conditions the entire voyage from Siam to France could be expected to last some seven months, given favourable conditions; for example, de Choisy's ship, the *Oiseau*, left France on the 1<sup>st</sup> March 1685 and arrived off the coast of Siam on the 24<sup>th</sup> September.

<sup>247</sup> Letter from Mgr. Laneau to the Propaganda at Rome, dictated from his deathbed:

Pères Éminentissimes, muni des derniers sacrements de notre Mère la Sainte Église, sentant la mort proche et prêt à rendre à Dieu mon âme et des comptes de mon intendance, ayant déjà écrit tant de lettres à Vos Éminences, j'y ajoute cette dernière afin d'exprimer mes derniers sentiments et la profonde tristesse de mon coeur ... Certains vont jusqu'à dire que les ambassades siamoises en Europe ont fourni l'occasion de répandre de sinistres soupçons à notre sujet. Plût à Dieu que la première - celle qui a fait naufrage - fût arrivée, ou que Vos Éminences eussent pu apprendre la vérité de la bouche de celles qui ont survécu! ... Mais une faiblesse extrême m'empêche d'en dire plus... (Lettre latine du 16 mars 1696, d'Ayuthia. Arch. M É P., t. 863, p. 413; Launay, I, pp. 335-336).

suffering from kidney stones and in atrocious pain for which he hoped to find a remedy in France. The operation of 'cutting for stone' was one of the very few surgical procedures available at the time with a good survival rate. Our own Samuel Pepys has left us with an all too vivid description.<sup>248</sup> For this reason alone, the responsibility was too great. Poor Vachet was unable to give his full attention to his charges, who caused him constant anxiety with the arrogant and uncouth behaviour that they displayed throughout their stay in France. Travelling on an English ship, the group arrived in London in September 1684, where they were presented to Charles II before proceeding to Paris. John Evelyn records the event in his journal.<sup>249</sup> Apparently there was some confusion, since they were mistakenly welcomed as representatives of the Chinese emperor.

We should remember that this was not intended as a formal embassy, but rather as a mission of enquiry after the fate of that sent in 1680. The Siamese in this instance were therefore neither of noble birth nor properly accredited diplomats, but functionaries of relatively humble rank. They were out of their depth when they were so suddenly thrust into the limelight. Khun P'ichaï Walit and Khun P'ichit Maïtri had no idea how to behave in a European court, nor did they bring the gifts that had been so lovingly described in Laneau's letter. Phra Naraï's official representative was Bénigne Vachet and only he had the quality of 'envoyé', only he was empowered to speak in the name of the king of Siam. French diplomatic protocol, however, forbade a French national to act as the representative of a foreign power. Vachet was therefore disregarded and left upon the sidelines. The Court had been expecting a Siamese embassy since 1681 and a Siamese embassy they were determined to have. It is scarcely surprising that the whole affair turned out to be a diplomatic disaster, compounded by the raised expectations engendered by Bishop Laneau's correspondence with the Société des Missions Étrangères. The long delay in the arrival of the Siamese also had its repercussions upon the stage. It must have seemed to many during this period that the eagerly anticipated ambassadors were mythical, mere will o' the wisps, figments of the imagination that had no concrete existence. On March 5<sup>th</sup> 1684, a full seven months before any Siamese set foot on French soil, Fatouville staged his farcical *Empereur dans la lune*. I suggest that this is no coincidence and that there is a connection to be traced between this comedy and the non-arrival of the Siamese.

With Fatouville's comedies and those of Regnard and Dufresny, we pass into the realms of the Théâtre Italien and the popular Commedia dell'arte. We shall find them a little different in nature from those works that we have examined so far. The most obvious difference is that a good proportion of the dialogue is in Italian. Here we are dealing, for the most part, with a certain number of scenes in French inserted into an Italian framework, with the Italian scenes themselves being more or less improvised *ad-lib* by the cast. If we should attempt to read such texts as a continuous whole, as they appear in Evariste Gherardi's collection for example, they will appear to consist of little more than a series of disconnected scenes. The action consequently seems to suffer from a lack of continuity, which would not have been evident in performance. Generally speaking, the plots are more farcical, even 'surrealistic' in nature, than their French equivalent. They also tend to be highly topical, and offer daring comment on current events and thinly disguised personalities. Far greater use is made throughout of 'lazzi' and of stock characters such as Arlequin, Polichinelle, Pierrot and Colombine, than in the more sophisticated repertoire of the Comédie-Française.<sup>250</sup> There is less concern for 'bienséance' or the unities. The parody of well known tragedies and operatic productions is more audacious. The limits are pushed further and further until, in 1697, the

<sup>248</sup> See Pepys' *Diary* entry for 26<sup>th</sup> March, 1659. He himself had been suffering from a bladder stone the size of a tennis ball.

<sup>249</sup> John Evelyn, *Diary*, vol. 4, p. 388 (ed. Beer, OUP, 1955).

<sup>250</sup> Created in 1680 by uniting Molière's troupe with that of the Hôtel de Bourgogne.

'Italiens' were finally banned on the grounds of indecency, having gone so far as to attempt a personal attack on Mme. de Maintenon with *La Fausse Prude*.

Since, by the spring of 1684, it would obviously be widely known that the expected embassy had failed to put in an appearance and that all the elaborate preparations put in hand for its reception were most probably in vain, the topic would be a suitable one for satirical comment. Further, it is evident from the choice of title alone that in *L'Empereur dans la lune* Fatouville wishes to lay stress upon an astronomical theme. It is not an innocent choice. The study of the stars was a passion in the Far East, used both in China and Siam for scientific investigations as well as for the casting of horoscopes. In Europe, we are at a transitional point between the two disciplines.<sup>251</sup> Astronomy is rapidly replacing astrology as a proper subject for academic study, the latter having been widely discredited as a result of the 'affaire des poisons' discussed in the previous chapter. The connection with the Far East is this. We have already touched on the regrettable rivalry between the Jesuit missions in that geographical area and those of the Société des Missions Étrangères. A major cause of difference was that of method. The Missions Étrangères preferred direct evangelisation of the local population, whereas it was the Jesuit experience that better progress was made by targeting key personalities in the administration. Jesuit scholars had by this time made a tremendous impression in China, where they had been established for many years. They had adopted Chinese dress and manners, learnt to speak the language fluently, expressed open admiration for Chinese culture and ancestral values. They had not aroused hostility by attempting overt conversion, but rather gained the respect and admiration of the emperor for their scholarship, notably in the fields of astronomy, optics and mathematics. They had made themselves indispensable, to the extent of acting as representatives of the Chinese government when it was desired to send envoys abroad.<sup>252</sup> It was therefore considered in certain ecclesiastical circles that the Jesuit Order had 'gone native' and was far too tolerant of pagan practices such as ancestor worship; their activities in the East were accordingly regarded as suspect. Nevertheless, Jesuit methods had proved to be the more successful in these highly conservative societies, because of the respect that was shown to Buddhist or Confucian values. It came to be perceived that Christianity had something of real value to offer.<sup>253</sup>

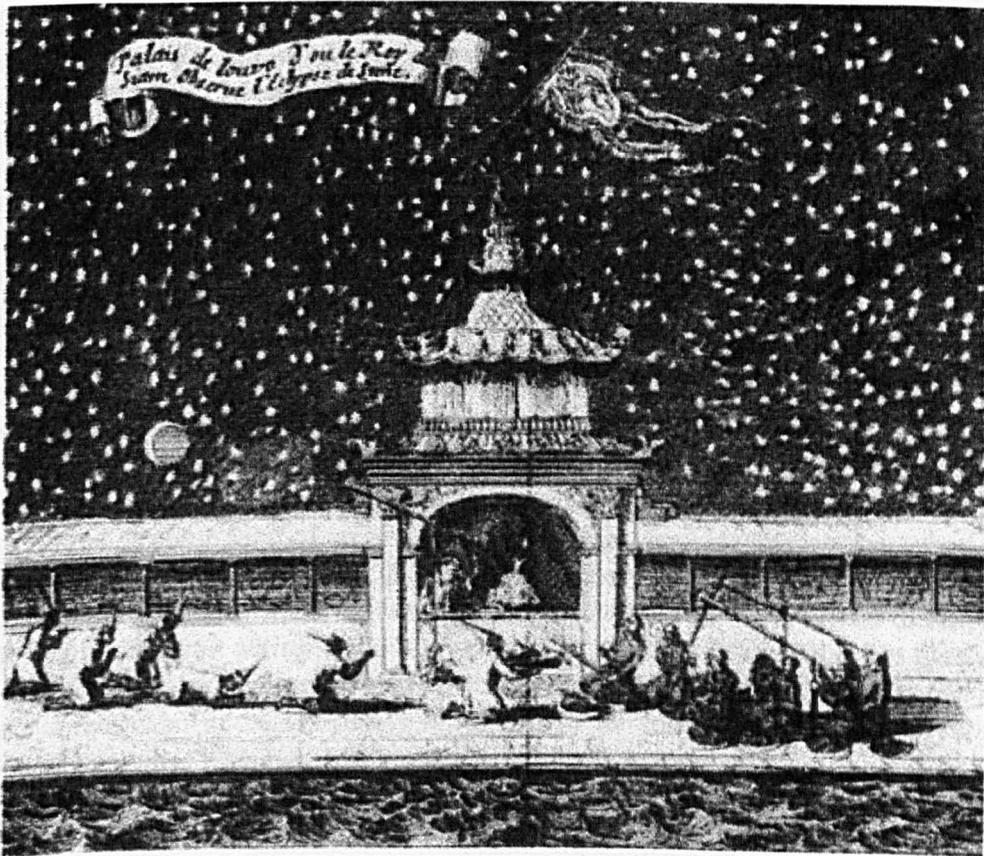
I suggest that this ecclesiastical controversy concerning the acceptability of

<sup>251</sup> On the importance of astronomy in this context see Grenet, Launay and Van der Cruysse.

<sup>252</sup> J. Dehergne S. J., "Un envoyé de l'Empereur K'ang-Hi à Louis XIV, le Père Joachim Bouvet, 1656-1730." *Bulletin de l'Université l'Aurore*, Shanghai, 1943, pp. 652-83, henceforward : Dehergne.

<sup>253</sup> There is a wealth of primary source material on French missionary activity in the Far East, amongst which see: le Père Joachim Bouvet, *Voyage de Siam* (ed. J. C. Gatty, 1963); Claude Céberet, *Journal ou Relation du voyage de Siam* (ed. Michel Jacq-Hergoualc'h, 1992); Robert Challe, *Mémoires, Correspondance complète* (Droz, 1996) and *Journal du voyage des Indes Orientales...Relation de ce qui est arrivé dans le royaume de Siam en 1688 (MS olographe par Jacques Popin & Frédéric Deloffre)* (Geneva, 1998); Alexandre de Chaumont, *Relation de l'ambassade de Siam* (Paris, 1686); François-Timoléon de Choisy, *Journal du voyage de Siam fait en 1685 & 1686 par M. l'Abbé de Choisy. Précédé d'une étude par Maurice Garçon* (Paris, 1930) and *Journal du Voyage de Siam*, ed. Dirk van der Cruysse (Paris, 1995), *Mémoires de l'abbé de Choisy*, ed. Georges Mongrédien (Paris, 1966); Claude, comte de Forbin, *Mémoires*, éd. Michèle Guénin (Paris, 1993) and *The Siamese memoirs of Count Claude de Forbin, 1685 - 1688*; introduced and edited by Michael Smithies (Chiang Mai, 1996); Adrien Launay, *Histoire de la mission de Siam - Documents historiques [documents tirés des archives de la rue du Bac]* (Paris, Société des Missions Etrangères, 1920); Simon de la Loubère, *Du royaume de Siam* (1691); le Père François Martin, *Mémoires, 1685-1696* (published 1931-1934); le Père Guy Tachard, *Voyage de Siam des Pères Jésuites envoyés par le Roi au royaume de Siam* (Paris, 1686) and *Second voyage du Père Tachard et les Pères Jésuites envoyés par le Roi au royaume de Siam* (Paris, 1689); le Père Bénigne Vachet, *Mémoires... Manuscrits*, Archives M.É. P., 110-113. Secondary studies include: Lanier; Launay; Charles Lemire, *La France et le Siam, nos relations de 1662 à 1903*, 3e. éd. (Paris, 1903); Paul Masson, *Histoire du commerce français dans le levant au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1911); Van der Cruysse; Raphaël Vongsuravatana, *Un jésuite à la Cour de Siam* (Paris, 1992).

The 'Oriental' Ambassador in 17<sup>th</sup> Century French Comedy.



The King of Siam observes the solar eclipse of April 1688, from Guy Tachard, *Voyage de Siam des Pères Jésuites* and Dirk van der Cruysse, *Louis XIV et le Siam* (Bibliothèque nationale, Cabinet des estampes).

Jesuit practice in the mission field may well be ridiculed in Fatouville's *L'Empereur dans la lune*. The jockeying for position between the French Jesuits and the Société des Missions Étrangères of the Rue du Bac, to which Père Vachet belonged, for overall control of the Siamese missions was a little more open than was perhaps seemly. It is significant that Vachet was ordered to report to the King's influential confessor, the Jesuit La Chaise, as well as to his own superiors. Certainly it was known that Phra Naraï took a keen interest in astronomy, and it was decided that, following their successes in China, an observatory should be built for him under the guidance of Jesuit scholars. Vachet notes that his Siamese had been enjoined to return with 'une machine pour voir les éclipses, facile à déchiffrer' as well as some huge mirrors destined for the royal audience hall, though no-one had remembered to supply them with any money to make these purchases.<sup>254</sup> In the end, no fewer than six Jesuit priests, all noted mathematicians and astronomers, were appointed to accompany the embassy back to Siam for this purpose, with the result that the Missions Étrangères were superseded in that country. The theme of other worlds existing amongst the heavenly bodies is not unique to Fatouville, what is unique is the coincidence of this theme with such ecclesiastical rivalry, a theme also combined with the rumour of an embassy from a fabled land. In 1656 Cyrano de Bergerac published a work entitled *L'Autre monde ou les états et empires de la Lune* (1656), followed by the *Histoire comique des états et empires du Soleil* (1661), from which Fatouville may have drawn his inspiration. These are not comedies, however, but romances in which the author describes the inhabitants and customs of these mythical realms, thus providing the opportunity for social comment and satire. Molière himself satirises the passion for astronomy amongst other extravagances in his *Femmes savantes* of 1672. Chrysale advises Philamète: 'Vous devriez brûler tout ce meuble inutile... / Cette longue lunette à faire peur aux gens, / Et cent brimborions dont l'aspect importune; / Ne point aller chercher ce qu'on fait dans la lune...' and 'On y sait comme vont lune, étoile polaire, / Vénus, Saturne et Mars dont je n'ai point affaire; / Et dans ce vain savoir... on ne sait comme va mon pot, dont j'ai besoin' [Act II, vii]. Indeed, Fatouville has Colombine and Isabelle actually refer to Molière's diatribe against the 'précieuses' (the latter being one of them herself).

The astronomical theme of Fatouville's own play is heavily underscored by the presence of a giant telescope on stage at the very beginning of the play, as the Docteur proves that the moon is inhabited, and again at the end. *L'Empereur dans la Lune* is topical on more than one level, containing as it does the arrival of an exotic embassy from a celestial empire as well as what I suspect may be covert references to a current ecclesiastical controversy. The reader will recall that the term 'celestial' was used by the Chinese to refer to their own empire. There existed a certain amount of confusion in Europe, in all but the most enlightened circles, concerning the separate identities of China and Siam. The peoples of the Far East featured as some kind of amorphous mass in the popular imagination, when they were thought of at all. For the reasons outlined above it seems to me that Fatouville's *Empereur dans la Lune* may make reference to the diplomatic overtures from Siam whilst also reflecting upon Jesuit activities in the Far East. I should add that this is not the first time that Fatouville introduced the arrival of an 'ambassador' to resolve the plot. Mercury appears as Jupiter's ambassador in the *Mercure galant*, though the reference here is clearly to Classical Antiquity; the framework is a satire of the well-known journal of the same name and there is neither an oriental nor a diplomatic context.

In *L'Empereur dans la lune*, Fatouville devotes a lengthy scene to the arrival of an embassy from the moon. The plot is simply told. Arlequin wishes to marry Isabelle but is regarded as an unsuitable suitor by her father. Various attempts at disguise fail. In despair, he

<sup>254</sup> Bénigne Vachet, *Mémoires...* Manuscrits, Archives M.É. P., 110-113, published in part by Groupy et Cie. (1865) and in part in Launay, henceforward: Vachet, *Mémoires*. Also available online from: [mapage.noos.fr/memoires-de-siam](http://mapage.noos.fr/memoires-de-siam).

loses hope of succeeding by ordinary methods and decides to win the hand of his beloved with Pasquariel's aid. The two resort to the adoption of an extraordinary disguise: '*...Arlequin désespéré, reste. Pasquariel arrive qui le console, & qui le concerte en ambassadeur de l'empereur du monde de la lune*'. He, Arlequin, will pose as an extraterrestrial ambassador, and at the same time take his revenge on Isabelle's miserly father by exposing his gullibility to ridicule. In common with all our embassies, historical or otherwise, we are dealing with an 'ambassadeur extraordinaire' and as such Arlequin expects a formal reception:

ARLEQUIN. Ah, monsieur, soyez le bien trouvé. Faites-moi bien des compliments, & bien des reverences. Je suis ambassadeur extraordinaire, envoyé par l'empereur du monde de la lune, pour vous demander Isabelle en mariage.

He calms any misgivings by reassuring his victim that there really is an empire on the moon, ruled by a proper sovereign: 'Oui, ma foi un empereur, & un empereur de qualité; il est noble comme le roi'. What better commendation could there be? The pedant is completely taken in by this tomfoolery: 'Cela pourroit bien être: puisque la lune est un monde comme le nôtre, apparemment qu'il y a quelqu'un pour la gouverner.' Arlequin embarks on a long and convoluted tale of his arrival in the country of the Moon. It seems that he has gone to Vaugirard with three friends to eat a goose. Six vultures snatch the bird, but Arlequin will not let go of their prize so he is carried off, up, up into the sky and far away. A whole regiment of vultures join their fellows, but the neck of the goose will not stand such rough treatment. It gives way and Arlequin is catapulted into a lake, whence he is retrieved by some fishermen who mistake him for a fish. They load this magnificent specimen upon their shoulders and take him to their emperor. After some debate as to whether their catch is a toad or an anchovy, orders are given that it should be cooked and served up at table, but to the great astonishment of the emperor and all assembled, the fish begins to cry: 'Comment, dit-il, est-ce que les poissons parlent?' The fish replies intelligently and to the point, 'Toutes les fois qu'on veut nous faire frire, nous avons le privilege de nous plaindre, monseigneur'. On learning that his lunch is not a fish but a man, the emperor enquires whether he is acquainted with 'le Docteur Grazian Balouard' and his daughter Isabelle. The reply being in the affirmative, the emperor immediately appoints Arlequin as his ambassador, to ask for her hand in marriage, 'Eh bien je veux que tu me serves d'ambassadeur, & que tu ailles la lui demander en mariage de ma part'. Balouard frets about the dangers of the return journey to earth, but is magnificently reassured with details guaranteed to allay suspicion, appealing both to the pedant and to the hypochondriac:

Je lui repondis: mais monseigneur, je ne pourrai jamais trouver le chemin de m'en retourner, car je ne sais pas par où je suis venu. Que cela ne t'embarrasse point, ajouta-t-il, je t'envoyerais à Paris dans une influence que j'y envoie, chargée de rhumatismes, de catharres, de fluxions sur la poitrine & d'autres petites bagatelles de cette nature-là.

The medical profession had long suffered at the hands of the comic writers and here we find a sly reference to the superstitions of a trade which still took astrology into account. Other details are cunningly calculated to appeal to the pedant's cupidity as Arlequin goes on to picture his own selfless intercession on the Docteur's behalf:

Mais, monseigneur, lui dis-je alors, que ferez-vous du docteur Grazian Balouard; car c'est un homme de merite, un homme qui a étudié, qui fait la rhétorique, la philosophie, l'orthographe. Ho, ho! me repondit-il, le docteur! Je lui garde une des meilleures places de

mon empire.

Naturally, Balouard cannot contain his curiosity as to the nature of the position that awaits him. It seems that one of the twelve signs of the Zodiac is recently deceased. The Docteur is to take the place of the Scorpion and become one of the greatest men in the empire. Hypocritically, he pretends not to be interested in such an honour but nevertheless evinces a certain curiosity as to conditions of life on the moon. Arlequin assures him that he will dwell in the most beautiful city on the moon, 'C'est une des plus belles villes du monde, belle, bien faite, d'une belle taille, d'un beau teint... ', though the houses are very different from those on earth: 'les maisons de ce pays-là sont meublées par dehors, & par dedans il n'y a rien. Les toits de chaque maison sont faits de reglisse; & quand il pleut, il pleut de la ptisanne par toute la ville'. There follows a description of the imperial palace, fashioned of crystal and supported by columns of tobacco, 'le toit d'un fort bon bourracan de Flandres, & les fenêtres d'un des plus fins points de France qu'on ait jamais vu.' They pass to the important question of food. On the moon, they eat the same delicacies as on Earth, but the emperor always sits down to an empty table, 'Monsieur l'empereur, par exemple, quand il veut manger, se met à une table vuide, sur laquelle on ne met jamais rien pendant que le repas dure'. Balouard cannot understand how he nonetheless manages to eat a hearty meal, but Arlequin helpfully is at hand to enlighten us once more:

Je m'en vais vous y faire comprendre. Pendant que monsieur l'empereur est à table, il a à sa droite vingt personnes qui tiennent chacun un albalêtre d'or massif, chargée d'un beccafig, d'une andouillette, d'un petit pâté, & autres. Et à sa gauche sont vingt autres personnes, avec des seringues d'argent aussi massif, dont l'une est pleine de vin d'Espagne, l'autre de vin de Canarie, de vin muscat, vin de Champagne, & *sic de coeteris*. Quand monsieur l'empereur veut manger, il se tourne à droite, ouvre la bouche, & l'arbalétrier d'abord, crac, lui décoche un petit pâté, une andouillette, un boeuf... et quand il veut boire, il se tourne à gauche, & celui qui tient la seringue, vts [sic], lui seringue du vin de saint Laurent, du vin de Canarie, du vin de Normandie, ou autre, selon ce qu'il veut boire.

The Docteur is most impressed until Arlequin tells him a cautionary tale. It seems that there was once the most terrible accident:

Monsieur l'empereur avoit envie de manger des oeufs fricassez au beurre noir. Un arbalétrier mal-adroit, lui en décocha un; mais au lieu de le viser à la bouche, il le visa à l'oeil, dont il fut tres long-tems incommodé. Ses medecins crurent qu'il en deviendroit borgne; mais par bonheur ce ne fut rien, & il en fut quitte pour porter quelques jours une emplâtre sur l'oeil. Ce qui a été cause que depuis on a toujours appelé ces oeufs-là, des oeufs pochez.

However extravagant and ridiculous the detail, it never seems to occur to the Docteur for a moment that he is the object of an elaborate practical joke. He considers himself something of a musical aficionado, and turns the conversation towards a discussion of music. Arlequin solemnly assures him that on the moon this is superior to any available in Paris. The Docteur begs to differ: 'Ho, pour cela, monsieur, vous voulez bien que je n'en croye rien; il n'y a point d'orquestre dans le monde qui vaille celui de l'opera de Paris, & ce au dire de tous les connoisseurs.' He asks which musical instruments they have on the moon and goes through a long, long list, 'Des violons? des flutes? des basses de violes? des theorbes? des clavecins? des bassons? des haut-bois? des trompettes? des timbales? des

tambours? des fifres? des harpes? des timpanons? des psalterions? des consonnantes? des guitares...' but to each item Arlequin always replies in the negative. It is not until the Docteur visibly loses patience that his tormenter comes out with this particular gem of information:

Les gens de ce pays-là ont le nez extrêmement long, ils attachent une corde à boyau d'un bout du nez à l'autre, posent la main gauche sur le petit bout du nez, & avec un archet qu'ils tiennent de la main droite, ils vous jouent du nez, tout comme nous autres jouons du violon... Cela fait un nazonnement enchanté. Ovide en jouoit en perfection. C'est de là qu'on l'a appelé Ovide Nazon.

Even that little item is not enough to give rise to the slightest suspicion. They pass to a discussion of language on the moon. Balouard wonders how on earth Arlequin managed to understand so much of what was said, but it appears that 'Monsieur l'empereur parle françois comme vous & moi, & mieux même', French which he has learnt by means of the marvellous device of 'une trompette parlante, & d'un maître de langue, qui tous les jours à minuit lui donnoit le leçon sur le pont-neuf'. He convinces his by now doubtful hearer that the sound actually can be heard so far away with some pseudo-scientific mumbo jumbo:

Qui en doute! Cela se fait par la répercussion de l'air, qui frappant à plomb la concavité de la colonne qui pèse sur l'orifice de la base, & qui venant à être poussé par l'impulsion de la voix, forme ce son aigu, qui pénétrant les nue, se fait entendre par...Voilà ce qui s'appelle de la plus fine phisique.

The Docteur will shortly be able to try the marvellous instrument for himself and use it to converse with the emperor in person, to discuss the impending marriage with Isabelle. Arlequin promptly disappears and returns with a trumpet. The Docteur rejoices prematurely: 'quel bonheur pour ma fille! & quelle confusion pour ces ignorans qui ne veulent pas que la lune soit un monde habitable comme le nôtre'. He removes his hat on Arlequin's instructions, 'out of respect for the emperor', and bows deeply. So does Arlequin, but somewhat to the front. As the Docteur bends lower and lower, Arlequin's rear rises simultaneously higher and higher until it is on a level with his nose, entailing consequences that the less fastidious amongst us may imagine. Arlequin lifts the trumpet into the air and pretends to speak into it, 'monsieur l'empereur, j'ai parlé au Docteur du mariage. Il en est ravi, monseigneur: Mais si vous vouliez ordonner qu'il me donnât six louis d'or pour mes peines, je vous serois bien obligé, monseigneur'. A mysterious voice is heard: 'Docteur, donne six louis d'or à Arlequin; c'est l'empereur qui te l'ordonne'. The crafty Arlequin hastens to reassure his companion that it is indeed the emperor's very voice that he hears. Overwhelmed, the poor man extracts his purse, ready to give the rogue his gold in gratitude for the good luck that he has brought him, but as he does so Arlequin spots the diamond ring on his finger. Miraculously the magical trumpet orders Balouard to add it to the gift.

At this, the Docteur finally rebels; it had been the property of his late lamented wife and, after all, is worth a good sixty louis. It seems that the emperor is very generous with the property of others and even fonder than the doctors of prescribing what others should do! Arlequin promptly threatens to complain to the emperor. The marriage contract will most certainly be annulled and the Docteur lose his place as one of the twelve constellations. He makes as if to speak into the trumpet, but the Docteur has thought better of it. His wife would have understood: 'Faire perdre la fortune à ma fille pour une bague de soixante pistoles! Non, ma chere femme le trouveroit mauvais'. Alas, as he removes the ring, Arlequin spots something else in the Docteur's pocket and asks what it is. Foolishly the Docteur gives an

honest answer: 'Ce sont les cordons de ma bourse.' There were fifty-four louis in it, he has given the 'ambassador' six, so forty-eight remain. Dreamily Arlequin reaches for the trumpet one last time, but the Docteur clutches at him, and pushes at him to make him go away. The laughing Arlequin makes off with his ill-gotten gains. Even now, the Docteur does not realise how thoroughly he has been duped, and looks for his daughter to tell her the good news:

Et où est donc Pierrot à present. Je voudrois bien qu'il eût été present à la conversation que je viens d'avoir avec monsieur l'ambassadeur. Il ne seroit plus si incredule sur le chapitre de la lune. Mais allons donner cette bonne nouvelle à ma fille.

Fatouville's comedy appeared in March, the long awaited Siamese finally arrived in Paris on the 5<sup>th</sup> October, though sadly not the embassy which had embarked amidst so many high hopes on the *Soleil d'Orient* in 1681. The Marquis de Dangeau notes the event in his journal:

Le jeudi 5 octobre 1684 – Les envoyés de Siam arrivèrent à Paris pour négocier quelque chose sur le commerce avec les ministres du roi, à qui seuls ils étoient envoyés. Leurs ambassadeurs périrent l'année passée et ceux-ci n'auront point d'audience de S.M.<sup>255</sup>

It is clear from the entry that at this early stage the Siamese were not regarded as accredited ambassadors, but merely as 'envoyés', that is, sent from foreign minister to foreign minister rather than from crowned head to crowned head. They were not, therefore, to be accorded the honour of a royal audience. This is confirmed by a later entry, for 27<sup>th</sup> November 1684:

Lundi 27 novembre 1684 – Le roi en allant à la messe vit dans sa galerie les envoyés de Siam, à qui il ne donna point d'audience; ils se prosternèrent en terre dès qu'ils virent de loin paroître S. M.<sup>256</sup>

It was unfortunate that higher authority had seen fit to demote Vachet from his position as 'premier envoyé', though retaining his services as interpreter and adviser, for this meant that he was all too frequently at the mercy of the 'humeur brusque et fâcheux de mes compagnons qui se croiraient libres de faire leur volonté lorsqu'ils n'auraient plus de supérieur'.<sup>257</sup> We must spare some sympathy for the Siamese who, unused either to European ways or to the rigours of a northern winter, had been subjected to a rude cultural awakening. They were irritated by the noisy crowds of gaping onlookers that accompanied them everywhere they went, the French cuisine did not agree with them and they could not stomach it; they felt that Europeans lacked any proper sense of dignity and were profoundly shocked by the prominent position given to women. With no common language nor any understanding of Western culture, they found themselves unable to communicate and, quick to take offence at imagined slights, took refuge in seeking to cut themselves off from their hosts, scarcely bothering to conceal their antipathy. Vachet writes:

C'est une chose de dure digestion lorsqu'on est avec des gens qui se froissent des actions les plus honnêtes, qu'il faut aiguillonner comme les bœufs pour les disposer à une civilité, et qui se choquent aussi facilement que les autres s'étudient simplement à leur

<sup>255</sup> Philippe Dangeau, Marquis de Courcillon, *Journal*, tome I, p. 59, éd. MM. Soulié, Dussieux, etc. (Paris, 1854 – 1860), henceforward: Dangeau, *Journal*.

<sup>256</sup> Dangeau, *Journal*, tome I: p. 74:

<sup>257</sup> Vachet, *Mémoires*.

donner du plaisir. Peut-être que je répéterai plusieurs fois cette chanson...<sup>258</sup>

All too frequently the Siamese would refuse to greet important visitors or use the excuse of a headache or some other indisposition to avoid functions and entertainments that had been specifically provided for them. They behaved insolently at Mass and Vachet had to force them to bow to the king at their first meeting in the Galerie des Glaces. Such incidents helped to create an unfavourable climate of opinion towards the Siamese on the part of the general population. The unfortunate result of all this unpleasantness was that the official embassy from Siam, that is to say the one making its solemn entry into Paris on the 12<sup>th</sup> August 1686, met with overt hostility in the streets. This was a form of behaviour that had not been much in evidence before the arrival of Vachet's Siamese, even towards the Turks; visiting ambassadors and their entourages were, on the whole, warmly and enthusiastically greeted by the crowds thronging the streets.

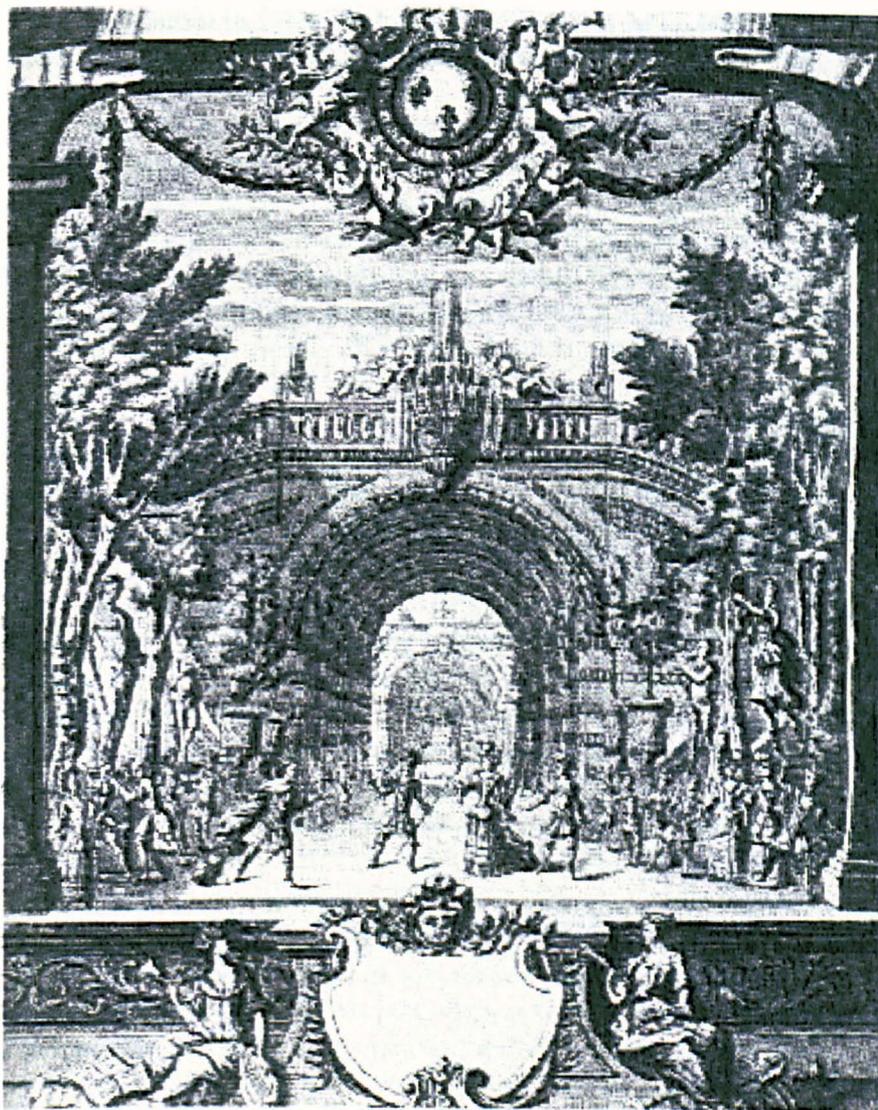
Despite the increasingly boorish behaviour and indeed the insolence of the Siamese representatives during their visit, or, as is more likely, sheltered from an awareness of it by those around him, it was Louis's wish to set before them the glories of the French theatre. We have already noted that attendance at one or more theatrical performances would form part of the normal programme of excursions and entertainment provided by the host nation for diplomatic visitors. It happened that the opera *Roland* was due to be staged for the first time in November 1685. As a mark of especial favour towards the Siamese, Vachet reports that Louis gave orders for Lully and Quinault to bring forward the first performance of their new lyric tragedy to December 1684; it was now to be staged in the manège of the Grande Ecurie at Versailles. We may imagine with what enthusiasm the hapless cast greeted this particular fancy of the king's. The winter season notwithstanding, it was also decided that the Siamese should be taken to view the gardens at Versailles before the performance, and the fountains were turned on in their honour. Seated in 'chaises roulantes', pulled by members of the king's Swiss guard, Vachet and his mandarins were given the tour of the gardens (of which the king was inordinately proud), but far from impressed by the leafless trees of a European winter, the Siamese barely bothered to stifle their yawns. Vachet writes:

Ces merveilles, qui font l'admiration de toute la terre, mes Siamois les regardaient avec une indolence qui me glaçait le cœur; et comme s'ils s'en fussent dégoûtés, ils me disaient à chaque représentation nouvelle: 'C'en est assez, allons-nous-en'. Par bonheur, il n'y avait que moi à m'apercevoir de leur goût dépravé.<sup>259</sup>

The king, who was to attend the opera himself, had given orders that the Siamese were to be seated directly opposite, as a particular mark of esteem. Unfortunately, news of the performance had been allowed to leak out and a large crowd had gathered, many being attracted to make the journey from Paris. This caused considerable difficulty for the guards, who did not know who was to be admitted and seated, and who was to be turned away. A dreadful crush resulted at the entrance and Vachet's party were kept waiting on the pavement for a good quarter of an hour. The Siamese were most displeased, muttering between themselves and on the point of departing in high dudgeon. Vachet had to intervene physically to restrain them, appealing to the officer of the guard on the grounds that the king would be sure to hold him personally to blame, if the visitors left without attending a performance that had been specifically laid on for them. The guards then forced them a passage through the crowd, but unable to get them to their designated seats, seated the Siamese in the places

<sup>258</sup> Vachet, *Mémoires*

<sup>259</sup> Vachet, *Mémoires*; on this episode see Van der Cruysse, pp. 276-7.



Performance of Lully's *Roland* at Versailles.

reserved for their own major and the royal bodyguard. Unfortunately, these seats were at floor level. It was the custom in Siam for the seats of honour to be the highest and, before the unfortunate soldiery could rectify their mistake, Vachet tells us despairingly:

Les Siamois, qui ne savaient pas que le rang d'en-bas fût le plus noble et le plus commode... crurent qu'on leur faisait affront, et sans vouloir m'écouter, ils furent à pied comme des brutaux à l'hôtellerie où les carrosses nous attendaient, et revinrent à Paris, malgré toutes les remontrances, et les avis, et les menaces que je leur fis... Dieu sait ce que je dis ou ne dis pas à ces Siamois qui croyaient avoir fait une grande merveille. Je les menaçai que je m'en plaindrais au roi de Siam; mais ils hochèrent la tête en me disant: «Que pourra-t-il nous faire? Au pis aller il nous condamnera à la mort: notre vie nous est moins chère que l'honneur.»<sup>260</sup>

The Siamese had left before the entry of the king, so Louis was unaware of the altercation. The moment he was seated, however, seeing that they were not there, he sent to enquire after them. On being told that they had left, he could only conclude that somebody had deliberately upset them. Vachet had had to leave in a hurry, to follow the Siamese, and thus been unable to inform the marquis de Seignelay, in charge of organising the whole event, what had actually happened. To cover himself, de Seignelay blamed the guards and insisted on an exemplary punishment. The king was so angry that he proposed to execute those held directly responsible and to send the rest to the galleys. In the end, Monsieur, the king's brother, managed to intercede on behalf of the prisoners, he and Vachet having concocted the story that one of the mandarins had been taken ill and forced to leave by a pressing call of nature. This little fiction meant, however, that a further command performance was immediately arranged for the benefit of the reluctant Siamese, which poor Vachet now had to persuade them to attend voluntarily and with good grace. This they resolutely refused to do, unless directly so ordered by the king himself in person.

Obviously, it was out of the question for a humble priest personally to involve the monarch in such a manner. Louis had long regarded the theatre as one of the major glories of his court and was determined that all visiting diplomats should include a theatrical performance as part of their normal programme. It was highly unlikely that the king could be persuaded to abandon the idea in the present case, and it was decided by those in a position to do so that it should not even be tried. The long-suffering Vachet was once more forced into duplicity by the unreasonable attitude of his charges. Together with de Seignelay and Colbert de Croissy, the following stratagem to ensure the attendance of the Siamese was concocted. The formal audience de congé, which the embassy could not refuse to attend, would be scheduled for the morning after the performance was due to be held. The Siamese were to be told only that they were to sleep at Versailles that night, for the sake of an early morning start, and that they must wear formal court costume for the journey in case they should meet someone of importance on their way. No sooner had they finished their supper – the end of the meal being deliberately timed to coincide with the beginning of the opera – than they were forcibly seated in sedan chairs by an officer and six guards and bodily transported to the performance before they could find the words to protest. This time a balcony had been prepared for them, to spare their susceptibilities over the height of their seating arrangements. Pretending that such a procedure was no more than a common civility in France, the guards seized the visitors by the arms and hustled them into their places shortly before the arrival of the king. No sooner were the Siamese seated on their red and gold velvet chairs than they realised that they had been deceived:

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<sup>260</sup> Vachet, *Mémoires*.

...ils se dirent l'un à l'autre que je les avais trompés, et que tout ce qui se passait par rapport à eux n'était qu'un jeu de mon invention ; de sorte qu'il me fallut leur dire deux fois de se tenir debout, lorsque le Roi entra, lequel eut la bonté de se tourner de leur côté, pour les saluer. Monseigneur [the Dauphin] et toute la cour en firent de même, et ce ne fut qu'à force de remontrances qu'ils rendirent le salut. L'on ne croira pas aisément que, pendant toute l'action, ils ne jetèrent les yeux ni sur le Roi ni sur les acteurs, les tenant baissés, si ce n'est pour les tourner de temps en temps vers la porte.<sup>261</sup>

The sulking Siamese did not, however, dare to walk out and return to Paris as on the previous occasion, and were forced to remain until the performance ended at nine o'clock in the evening. There was some understandable difficulty in persuading them to attend the audience de congé on the following day, which they were by now convinced was a further ruse designed by Vachet to trick them, but in the end this too passed without further disagreeable incident. Quinault's work certainly seems to have been a particular favourite in so far as regards the official entertainment of visiting ambassadors at this time. The Russian embassy of 1685 was treated to a production of *Amadis de Gaule*, a further fruit of the collaboration with Lully. Unfortunately, the Muscovites, unused to sophisticated stage effects, attributed them to witchcraft, took fright, and had to be reassured by the king in person that it was safe to remain in the theatre.<sup>262</sup> Interestingly, we have an account by Kosapan, leader of the Siamese embassy in 1686, of a trip backstage to view the mechanisms of the stage machinery:

...The Marquis of Congis, the commander of the Tuileries...led us through this palace and shewed us the theatre in which the rehearsals of His Majesty's Operas take place...but there was too great a crowd accompanying us, nay watching us, for us to examine everything with the attention it deserved... We saw the Machine Room where the theatrical machines, which produce lifelike and sometimes frightening effects of verisimilitude, are held, and descended the grand staircase, observing the façade and thanking the Marquis of Congis for his pains...<sup>263</sup>

There is another amusing incident with a theatrical connotation connected with our first visitors from Siam, inspired, like so many comedies, by the 'turquerie' of Molière's *Bourgeois gentilhomme*.<sup>264</sup> It seems that the elderly abbé Michel de Saint-Martin, professor emeritus at the University of Caen, was noted for the eccentricity of his costume and behaviour. He had even had his bed built above a stove and covered in furs, after the manner of the Chinese 'kang', and thus was known to his mischievous nephews as the "Roi des poêles". The young men took advantage of all the publicity surrounding the arrival of the Siamese delegation to play an elaborate practical joke on their uncle. An official-looking letter was forged, purporting to come from P'ichaï Walit, the senior of the two Siamese ambassadors. It announced that the King of Siam, having heard tell of the famous professor,

<sup>261</sup> Vachet, *Mémoires*.

<sup>262</sup> Schakovskoy 2.

<sup>263</sup> Kosapan, p. 60. The anecdote is confirmed by Donneau de Visé, *Voyage des Ambassadeurs de Siam en France, contenant la réception qui leur a été faite dans les Villes où ils ont passé, leur Entrée à Paris, etc.* pp. 351, 354-55 (Paris, 1686), henceforward: Donneau de Visé. He remarks, 'les Machines en estoient si grandes, & si surprenantes, qu'il y en avoit qui enlevoient jusqu'à cent Personnes à la fois'.

<sup>264</sup> Charles-Gabriel de Porée, *La Mandarinade, ou histoire comique du mandarinat de Monsieur l'Abbé de Saint-Martin, etc.* [By Censorinus Philalethes, pseud.] (Les démêlés de Monsieur l'Abbé de Saint-Martin, etc.) (la Haye, or rather Caen, 1738 – 1739). Reprinted in *Le Temps*, no. du 14 octobre, 1932; the issue dated 4 janvier 1936 contains further references to the above.

wished to appoint him 'Inspecteur general des Poêles et Fourrures de Siam' and had even given orders that his statue should be erected in the great temple at Ayuthia. A second letter, following close on the heels of the first, revealed that the Siamese were actually on their way to Caen, intending to convey him directly to Siam, where he would be created a 'Talapoin de la Première Classe' and 'Marquis de Miskon'.<sup>265</sup> Flattered and worried, the poor old man had no desire to leave his comfortable bed and sought advice from his friends. Unfortunately, they were also in on the plot and suggested that he make a direct appeal for protection from Louis XIV. A royal letter signed "Louis" arrived shortly afterwards, suggesting that the professor should remain calm and try to distract his visitors by treating them to an elaborate dinner at the best hostelry in Caen, the 'Croix de Fer'.

The fake Siamese arrived in the evening of the same day, bearing a ceremonial triple tiara on a velvet cushion. They confiscated the king's letter, 'to show to their royal master', placed the tiara on the abbé's head, saluted him with humble prostrations whilst gabbling in "Siamese", hit him on the back of the neck with a sword a few times by way of conferring ennoblement, then graciously consented to accompany the new 'talapoin' to the 'Croix de Fer'. There the abbé was required to make an elaborate speech, proposing the healths of their majesties of France and Siam. Glasses were drained time after time and the evening was concluded in a state of inebriation, with the tipsy abbé deposited in the famous bed by his "Siamese" visitors. The next day the incident appears to have been quietly forgotten, doubtless to the relief of the elderly clergyman.<sup>266</sup> Interestingly, Kosapan's journal records that a certain abbé de Saint-Martin of Normandy visited the 1686 embassy whilst they were still staying in Brest, recovering from the long sea voyage prior to commencing the journey to Paris. It would make rather a neat ending to our story, if this could be shown to be our professor, unable to resist meeting some genuine Siamese.<sup>267</sup>

For various reasons outlined above the Siamese had failed to make a good impression at court. It was nonetheless agreed that France should send an official embassy to Ayuthia with the returning mandarins, in accordance with the formal request made by Phra Naraï in his letter to Louis XIV:

Lettre de la royale et insigne ambassade du Grand Roi du royaume d'Ayuthia, qu'il envoie à vous, ô Très Grand Roi et Très Puissant Seigneur des royaumes de France et de Navarre, qui avez des dignités suréminentes, dont l'éclat et la splendeur brillent comme le soleil ... Le bruit et la renommée de vos victoires se répandent par toutes les nations de l'univers ... Nous envoyons des présents à vous, ô Très Grand Roi, afin qu'entre nous il y ait une véritable intelligence, une parfaite union et amitié, et que cette amitié puisse être ferme et inviolable dans le temps à venir ... De plus, je vous supplie, ô Très Grand et Puissant Roi, de nous envoyer des ambassadeurs, et que nos ambassades puissent aller et venir sans manquer, vous priant que notre amitié soit ferme et inviolable pour toujours. Et je conjure la toute-puissance de Dieu de vous conserver en toutes sortes de prospérités.<sup>268</sup>

<sup>265</sup> A 'talapoin' was a Buddhist monk.

<sup>266</sup> See Dirk Van der Cruysse, *Louis XIV et le Siam* (Paris, 1991).

<sup>267</sup> Chaophraya Kosathibodi Pan, *The diary of Kosa Pan, Thai Ambassador to France- June-July 1686*, introduction and annotation by Dirk van der Cruysse, translation of the diary by Visudh Busyakul, editing of the text, translation of the introduction and footnotes by Michael Smithies, pp. 73-74 (Chiang Mai, 2002).

<sup>268</sup> Letter from Phra Naraï to Louis XIV (*Arch. M. E. P.*, vol. 86, p. 465) in Dirk Van der Cruysse, *Louis XIV et le Siam*, p. 237 (Paris, 1991) and Adrien Launay, *Siam et les missionnaires français*, I, pp. 110-112 (Tours, 1896).

A major consideration that lay behind the French decision to open diplomatic relations with Ayuthia was the unfortunate suggestion, made by Vachet in an excess of enthusiasm, that the King of Siam was on the point of being received into the Catholic Church. It was decided that such a notable conversion, which would necessarily entail the adherence of that whole country to the Roman faith, could not any longer be safely left in the hands of the Société des Missions Étrangères. A French Jesuit mission, composed of noted scholars and under the leadership of Jean de Fontaney, was accordingly nominated to accompany Alexandre de Chaumont, the newly appointed ambassador to Siam, to take control of the mission field there. De Chaumont was himself an austere and pious man, a recent convert appointed for the fervency of his faith rather than his diplomatic skills and a poor choice for such a delicate mission. Second in command was the abbé de Choisy, who would take over as ambassador in the event of the death or incapacity of de Chaumont himself, and was entrusted with the formal religious instruction of the king.<sup>269</sup>

The party set sail for Siam on board the *Oiseau* and the *Maligne*, leaving Brest amidst much pomp and ceremony on the 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1685. We are much indebted to de Choisy for his lively account of their voyage to Siam by way of the Cape and the fascinating observations that he makes of life in the East in his *Journal du voyage de Siam*. He took his appointment as 'ambassadeur adjutant' very seriously and set himself the task of learning both the Siamese and the Portuguese languages during the long journey out, also profiting from the opportunity to study mathematics and astronomy with the Jesuit fathers, in case these should prove useful in gaining the confidence of Phra Naraï. De Choisy likewise attempted to cultivate the friendship of 'ces vilains Mandarins, qui ne beuvoient, ni ne mangeoient, ni ne parloient', trying to converse with them in his fractured Siamese, but receiving little encouragement for his pains. With its avowed aim of the conversion of Siam, the French embassy contained no fewer than twelve priests: de Choisy himself; the six Jesuits, de Fontaney, Gerbillon, Le Comte, Tachard, Visdelou and Bouvet; Vachet together with three other missionary priests of his own order, Basset, Manuel and du Cayla; the ship's chaplain, le Dot, and de Chaumont's chaplain, the abbé de Jully. With such a large clerical component the humble matelots received little peace, being required to attend daily mass and refrain from drunkenness, quarrelling and swearing. The few Huguenots present on board apparently finished the voyage as baptised Catholics, though whether from conviction or sheer exhaustion we are not in a position to judge. The arrival of the French was viewed with the gravest suspicion by the Protestant Dutch, who had fought the English for the Far Eastern trade and had no intention of giving way to France. Their chief agent in Ayuthia, Joannes Keys, reported to the Hague on the 17th December that he had 'essayé en vain de se renseigner sur les véritables intentions de l'ambassade de Chaumont. Selon certains, le seul but des Français est de convertir le roi au catholicisme, ce que l'auteur ne prend pas au sérieux'.<sup>270</sup> The peace of Nijmegen (1679) had done little to appease Franco-Dutch enmity in the Far East.

They also encountered hostility from another quarter. By a strange twist of fate, the arrival of the French embassy in Ayuthia coincided with one sent by the Shah of Persia on

<sup>269</sup> Dangeau, *Journal*, tome 1, p. 86:

Le samedi 30 décembre 1684 - Il fut déclaré que l'abbé de Choisi iroit à Siam avec le chevalier de Chaumont, y porteroit des patentes d'ambassadeur, dont il prendroit la qualité, en cas que le chevalier de Chaumont vînt à mourir, ou qu'il fût jugé à propos par eux et par les évêques françois qui sont à Siam, qu'il y demeurât un homme de la part du roi après le départ du chevalier de Chaumont, qui doit ramener les ambassadeurs que le roi de Siam doit envoyer ici.

<sup>270</sup> See Van der Cruysse, *Louis XIV et le Siam* (Paris, 1991).

a similar mission: the conversion of the king of Siam to Islam. De Choisy writes in his *Journal du voyage de Siam*:

... l'Ambassadeur de Perse est arrivé à Madraspatan avec un grand train, & des présens magnifiques qu'il apporte au Roi de Siam de la part du Sophi. Mais, ce qui est assez plaisant ... cét [sic] Ambassadeur vient proposer au Roi de se faire Mahometan: si cela est, je suis d'avis que nous nous battons en champs clos.<sup>271</sup>

Unwilling to cause offence by open disagreement, in the Siamese manner, Phra Naraï had given encouragement to Muslims and Christians alike, constantly appearing on the point of conversion to both faiths. In reality, there was probably very little prospect of his adherence to either religion, for in the end he remained true to his Buddhist roots. Interestingly, the Persian embassy also kept a detailed chronicle of their visit; compiled on the orders of Shah Sulaiman by Muhammad Ibrahim Muhammad Rabi; this survives in the British Library under the title of *Safina 'i Sulaimani* or *The Ship of Solomon*.<sup>272</sup>

There is little need for us to relate the voyage or the mission to Siam in any detail. Most of the major participants have left their own accounts and these make for interesting reading. We have the ambassador's official report, Alexandre de Chaumont's *Relation de l'ambassade de Siam* to be supplemented by the infinitely more readable works of his 'coadjuvant', de Choisy, the *Journal du voyage de Siam fait en 1685 & 1686 par M. l'Abbé de Choisy*, the *Mémoires de l'abbé de Choisy* and his *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de Louis XIV*, published in 1727. The comte de Forbin, left behind in Siam as a hostage whilst the others returned to France, also wrote his *Mémoires*. Amongst the ecclesiastical contingent, Guy Tachard published his *Relation du naufrage d'Occum Chamnan, mandarin siamois, au cap des Aiguilles...*, en 1686. *Publiée par le Père Tachard, d le Voyage de Siam des pères Jésuites* (1686) and the *Second voyage du Père Tachard et les Pères Jésuites envoyés par le Roi au royaume de Siam* (1689). Joachim Bouvet composed a *Voilage de Siam*. Bénigne Vachet, as we know, left extensive *Mémoires* covering all three of the Siamese embassies as well as the French expedition to Siam. Each of these gives us his own individual slant on the proceedings, whilst broadly confirming the narratives of the others. De Choisy's account is generally acknowledged to be the more informative as well as the most agreeable to read, though he is allowed to be rather naïve in his assessment of character. I reproduce, for the general interest of the reader, his description of the welcome accorded to the French contingent and of their audience with Phra Naraï in the Appendix. It is an interesting exercise to compare these proceedings with the reception of an ambassador at Versailles or at the Porte.

It soon became apparent that de Chaumont was temperamentally unsuited to the post of ambassador because of his rigid inflexibility and unwillingness to adapt to Siamese custom, even in minor matters, this to the point of direct rudeness. He insisted on taking every opportunity to preach at the king, despite the obvious inappropriateness of certain occasions and the open irritation of the Siamese. The hapless interpreters rapidly lapsed into the habit of failing to translate him accurately, to avoid giving offence. Most of his diatribes were therefore heavily edited as were, per force, the king's replies to him. He was, in short, sidelined and can have had little idea as to the true state of affairs or the progress of negotiations. Both the king and his chief minister, the 'Barkalon', preferred to deal with the urbane de Choisy or with the Jesuit Tachard, who was beginning to emerge as the 'éminence grise' of the expedition. The true power behind the throne was a Greek adventurer from

<sup>271</sup> Choisy, François-Timoléon, l'abbé de, *Journal du voyage de Siam fait en 1685 & 1686 par M. l'Abbé de Choisy*. Précédé d'une étude par Maurice Garçon, p. 162 (Paris, 1930).

<sup>272</sup> Translated by John O'Kane in 1972 and published under that title.

*The 'Oriental' Ambassador in 17<sup>th</sup> Century French Comedy.*



Phra Narai receives Louis's letter from the chevalier de Chaumont, 18th. October 1685. Nineteenth-century oil painting from a print in the Cabinet des estampes, Bibliothèque Nationale.

Cephalonia, Constantine Phaulkon by name, a man of the most dubious antecedents, at one time suspected of piracy, who had nevertheless risen to high office as the king's favourite.<sup>273</sup> It was clear that Phra Naraï had never had any serious intention of converting. His interests lay in persuading Louis to send troops and military engineers to Siam in order to provide a deterrent to the hated Dutch, but in fact both monarchs had been systematically duped by Phaulkon in the cynical furtherance of his own ends. Seeing his influence fading, detested by the mandarins and by the powerful Muslim merchants, only too well aware that his fall from office would mean his death, Phaulkon intended to remain in power with French support. The whole affair of the king's "conversion" was Phaulkon's concoction from beginning to end; the Missions Étrangères had been deceived in this matter, without the knowledge of the king, the better to facilitate the opening of diplomatic negotiations with France. Phaulkon's best hope of survival lay in the attraction of a substantial French expeditionary force to take control in Siam and crush those forces opposed to him. This was a course of action which Louis could be expected to prove most reluctant to undertake without that bait of the king's conversion, if only for reasons of cost and distance, since no French interests were directly involved, commercial or otherwise. De Chaumont's brief was merely to return a diplomatic courtesy whilst overseeing the reception of Phra Naraï into the Catholic Church, *ad maiorem Dei gloriam*. He had no powers to discuss colonial ventures and there is no evidence that Louis had even considered such a move. Bypassing both de Choisy and de Chaumont, as well as his own adopted sovereign, Phaulkon therefore began to meet secretly with Tachard, whom he proposed to send as his private emissary to Père La Chaise, Louis's influential Jesuit confessor. If once this most powerful man could be persuaded that it was in his Order's interests to support their scheme, then the King's consent was already *fait accompli*.

Elaborate preparations for a third Siamese embassy to France, to return with de Chaumont's party on board the *Oiseau*, were put under way almost immediately after the latter's arrival at Ayuthia in September 1685. This time, in an effort to undo the poor impression made by P'ichai Walit and P'ichit Maïtri, representatives of the highest calibre were selected, polished, urbane, experienced diplomats. In accordance with Siamese custom, three ambassadors were appointed, accompanied by a suite of twelve. De Choisy, cooped up with each of the Siamese embassies in turn, for some months at a time, in the cramped living conditions on board ship, writes approvingly of the contrast between these men and the mandarins who had been sent to France in 1684:

Il y a trois mois que j'étudie, & que je songe assez peu à nos Ambassadeurs. Je m'en vais recommencer à leur faire ma cour: ce sont de fort bonnes gens, commodes, sans façon, & qui ont bien de l'esprit. Le premier, comme je vous l'ai dit si je ne me trompe, a fait longtemps les affaires du royaume de Siam sous son frere le Barkalon; les deux autres ont esté Ambassadeurs, l'un à la Chine, & l'autre au Mogol. Vous aurez bien des questions à leur faire. Ho ce sont d'autres phisionomies que ces vilains Mandarins, qui ne beuvoient, ni

<sup>273</sup> The son of an innkeeper, Phaulkon had run away to sea at an early age, beginning his career as a cabin boy in the service of the British East India Company. A gifted linguist, he rapidly made his way through the ranks, eventually betraying his masters to enter the service of Siam. Here he managed to become indispensable to the king, but made himself many enemies in the process. On Phaulkon, see Claude de Bèze, *Mémoire sur la vie de Constance Phaulkon, premier ministre du roi de Siam, Phra Naraï, et sa triste fin*, éd. Jean Drans et Henri Bernard (Tokyo, 1947); le Père Pierre Joseph d'Orléans, *Histoire de M. Constance premier ministre du roi de Siam, et de la dernière révolution de cet état* (Paris, 1960); A.-Fr. Deslandes-Boureau, *Histoire de M. Constance, premier ministre du roi de Siam* (Amsterdam, 1756); de Choisy's *Journal du Voyage de Siam*; Etienne Gallois, *L'expédition de Siam au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle et Constance Phaulkon* (Paris, 1862); Luang Sitsayamkan, *The Greek Favourite of the King of Siam* (Singapore, 1967), together with the works of Hutchinson, Lanier, Launay and Van der Cruysse. There is also a highly romanticised biography by Axel Aylwen, *The Falcon of Siam* (London, 1988).



**From a contemporary print:** MESSIEURS LES AMBASSADEURS DU ROY DE SIAM. OCC.PRAVISOVTSONTHOON RAATCHATHOUD, est le 1er des trois Ambassadeurs, que le Roÿ de Siam Envoÿe au tres Puisst. Monarque Louÿs le Grand Roÿ tres Chrestien de France. C'est un homme d'un tres grand Jugement, et tres digne de cet employ, il est frere du defunct Barcalon, ou premier ministre d'Estat, c'est luÿ quÿ a receu Monsr. Le Chevalier de Chaumont, Ambassadeur de France, à l'entrée de la riviere de Siam, et l'a partout accompagné. Le Second Ambassadeur son Adjoint est OCC. LOVANG CALAYANARAA TCHAMAITRIOVPATHOVD, homme fort agé, qui a beaucoup d'esprit et a esté Ambassadeur a la Chine, dont le Roy son Maistre fut fort content, le troisieme Ambassadeur son Adjoint est, OCC. COVNSRIVISÂRAVÂKIAA TRITHOVD, jeune homme, agé d'environ 25 ou 30 ans, son Pere est a present en Ambassade en Portugal; au reste ses trois messieurs sont tres honnestes, les meilleurs gens du monde, doux, civils et complaisans, de tres bonne et agreable humeur; ce sont les temoignages qu'en donne Mr. le Chevalier de Chaumont avec lequel ils sont venus. Ses trois seigneurs sont des plus considerables Mandarins du Royaume, ils apportent au Roy la lettre, et les presens, du Roÿ de Siam leur Maistre, ils sont partis de Siam le 22<sup>bre</sup> 1685, et sont arrivez a la rade de Brest le 18 de juin 1686, et ont fait leurs entrée à Paris, le 12 d'Aoust ensuivant, ils furent receus par Mr. le Marechal, duc de la Feuillade, qui les accompagna dans les carosse du Roy, de madame la dauphine, et des princes et princesses, qui formoit un tres beau cortège iusqu'à l'hostel des Ambassadeurs extraordinaires, et le 1er de 7bre ils ont eu audience publique de sa Majesté à Versailles auquel ils ont presenté la lettre du Roy de Siam.

Paris chez la veuve Bertrand rüe St. Jacques à la Pomme d'or proche St. Severin, Avec privilege du Roy.

ne mangeoient, ni ne parloient. Ils ont toujours des tablettes à la main; & si vous leur faites quatre questions, ils vous en feront six.<sup>274</sup>

This verdict is confirmed by the abbé de Lionne, a priest of the Missions-Etrangères, who served as official interpreter to the third embassy:

Nos ambassadeurs contentent ici tout le monde au-delà de ce que je puis vous en mander. Ils sont honnêtes gens, courtois, polis; enfin, ils sont diamétralement opposés dans leur conduite, dans leurs manières, aux deux premiers mandarins qui vous ont donné tant de peine.<sup>275</sup>

Given the unhappy atmosphere surrounding Soliman Aga's mission of 1669-70, it is a pleasing coincidence for us to note the presence of Artus de Lionne with this embassy. The younger son of Secretary of State Hugues de Lionne, he abandoned a military career to enter holy orders and trained for the mission field. Working for the Missions-Etrangères in Siam from 1681 onwards, he soon emerged as a gifted linguist, rapidly becoming fluent in more than one form of Siamese. He was appointed official interpreter to Kosapan and the 1686 embassy, returning to France much against his will. De Choisy writes of him:

Dieu veuille que M. l'abbé de Lionne soit du voyage ; ce serait une grande consolation pour moi. Il m'apprendra bien des choses que je ne sais point, et je n'aurai pas de peine à me soumettre à sa direction: il a tout l'esprit qu'il avait en France avec une humilité angélique. M. l'ambassadeur, M. l'évêque, les Français, les Siamois, tous voient clairement qu'il est à propos qu'il fasse le voyage: lui seul s'y oppose. Il a peur peut-être que dans sa patrie sa grande barbe ne lui attire des respects qu'il méprise beaucoup et ne veut pas voir que Dieu en tirera sa gloire. S'il persiste à être opiniâtre, nous lui ferons commander par le roi d'accompagner ses ambassadeurs. Il sait leur langue et fera un interprète illustre.<sup>276</sup>

Artus de Lionne returned to his beloved Siam with the 1687 embassy, led by Céberet and La Loubère. Forced to leave Siam for good in November 1688, we last hear of him in China, where he was ordained bishop in 1700.<sup>277</sup>

After an uneventful voyage, chronicled for us by de Choisy and Tachard, the party arrived at Brest on the 18<sup>th</sup> June 1686. They were to be delayed in France a good six months, far from the usual couple of weeks that an embassy might last, because of the king's protracted illness, diagnosed as quartan fever. The journey towards Paris was intentionally a

<sup>274</sup> De Choisy, *Journal du Voyage de Siam*, p. 284, entry for 9. Mai 1686.

<sup>275</sup> M. l'abbé de Lionne à M. Vachet, 19 août 1686. Arch. M.É.P., vol. 879, p. 389 [published in A. Launay, *Doc. Hist.*, I, 185]. De Chaumont names the mandarins for us in his *Relation de l'ambassade ... à la cour de Siam*:

Nous avions avec nous trois ambassadeurs des plus considérables de Siam. Le premier, nommé Ocpra Visut Jurithora, est frère du défunt Barcalon ... homme d'esprit, et qui ayant toujours été auprès de son frère, a eu grande part dans toutes les affaires durant son gouvernement. Il était venu me recevoir à la entrée de la rivière de Siam lorsque j'y arrivai, et il m'a depuis accompagné partout où j'allais. Dès aussitôt que je l'eus vu, il me parut très honnête homme et d'un esprit fort aisé...

Le second des ambassadeurs, nommé Ocluang Calaya Rayomaytry Ockkhun Arucha Rarsa, est un homme fort âgé, qui a beaucoup d'esprit et a été en ambassade à la Chine, dont le roi son maître fut fort content...

Le troisième, nommé Ockhun Jurin Ocman Viset Ppubaan, est âgé de vingt-cinq ou trente ans, dont le père est maintenant ambassadeur en Portugal... (quoted in Van der Cruyssen, *Louis XIV et le Siam*: pp. 374-75).

<sup>276</sup> De Choisy, *Journal du Voyage de Siam*, entry for 20. Novembre 1685.

<sup>277</sup> Details on the career of Artus de Lionne from the Société des Missions Étrangères and online from [mapage.noos.fr/memoires-de-siam/lionne](http://mapage.noos.fr/memoires-de-siam/lionne).

slow one and the embassy did not make their formal entry into the city until the 12<sup>th</sup> August, when they were finally lodged at the Hotel des Ambassadeurs Extraordinaires. The solemn audience had to be postponed until the 1<sup>st</sup> September on account of Louis's continuing ill health. Further delays in negotiations were occasioned for the same reason, from mid-October to the end of November, with the 'audience de congé' delayed until the 14<sup>th</sup> January. Some weeks were spent in a tour of the northern provinces to view the fortifications, but nevertheless the embassy still had to be entertained throughout these long waiting periods whilst in Paris. The usual ambassadorial programme of visits and hospitality began, filling every moment of waking time. The period of their stay is well documented by Donneau de Visé's *Mercure galant*,<sup>278</sup> by the *Journal* of the marquis de Dangeau, by the *Mémoires* of the baron de Breteuil, by the diary of Kosapan and in the archives of the Missions Etrangères.

In accordance with custom, the Siamese were taken to attend various theatrical performances, and of these visits Kosapan's diary gives us several lively accounts. Sadly, the attribution of these memoirs to Kosapan by their editor, Michael Smithies, *et al.* is highly controversial. Dirk van der Cruysse considers them a forgery, since they survive only in the form of a 'contemporary English translation' of a French translation from a Siamese original (see his *Louis XIV et le Siam*). He argues that there are no details presented that could not have been gleaned from a careful reading of Donneau de Visé's *Voyage des ambassadeurs de Siam en France*. Their provenance is also somewhat fraught and this alone would incline me towards Van der Cruysse's view of the matter, though I suspect an English origin, given the loss of both the French and the Siamese "originals". The reader will remember the close interest taken in Louis's Siamese visitors by Charles II, as recorded by John Evelyn and Père Vachet. A close study of the text will also reveal what I suggest is a covert Protestant and anti-French bias. Certainly Siam was an area in which the British East India Company had interests vulnerable to French intervention and any such interference would be deeply resented in London. Officially, the jury remains out. The text is nevertheless of considerable curiosity value and has much to say of relevance to our theme. There is no doubt that Kosapan, in cooperation with the other mandarins, kept a journal of the embassy. This is confirmed independently by de Choisy and by Donneau de Visé.<sup>279</sup> A further document, consisting of some sixty-eight pages, written in Siamese and covering the first two weeks of Kosapan's stay in France, has recently come to light in the archives of the Missions Etrangères and been published in English translation.<sup>280</sup> It bears little obvious resemblance in style to the first version and, unfortunately for us, contains no theatrical references. There also exist the *Phra Ratcha Phonsavadam Krung Kao*, the Royal Siamese Annals, of which the sections covering the Siamese embassies to France and purportedly containing Kosapan's official report have been translated by L. Bazangeon in the *Bulletin de la Société de géographie de Rochefort*, 1890-91.<sup>281</sup> Sadly, these also are of little use to the literary historian, being fantastical in style, highly inaccurate and most likely of nineteenth-century composition. The originals were reputedly destroyed in the sacking of the city of Ayuthia by the Burmese in 1767.

According to Donneau de Visé, the ambassadors were taken incognito to a performance of the tragedy *Clovis* at the Jesuit Collège de Louis le Grand, probably that of

<sup>278</sup> See Dirk van der Cruysse, "Donneau de Visé et l'ambassade siamoise (1686): entre histoire et littérature" *Actes de Columbus, Biblio 17, Suppléments aux Papers on French Seventeenth Century Literature*, 59 (1990), pp. 199-208.

<sup>279</sup> Donneau de Visé pp. 27-28.

<sup>280</sup> *The diary of Kosa Pan, Thai Ambassador to France – June-July 1686*, introduction and annotation by Dirk van der Cruysse; translation of the diary by Visudh Busyakul; editing of the text, translation of the introduction and footnotes by Michael Smithies (Chiang Mai, 2002).

<sup>281</sup> Available online from [mapage.noos.fr/memoires-de-siam](http://mapage.noos.fr/memoires-de-siam).

the 7<sup>th</sup> August, that is to say some days before their official entry into the capital on the 12<sup>th</sup>, hence the need for discretion:

Ils étoient encore à Berny lorsqu'ils furent priés par le Pere de la Chaise de venir à la Tragedie du College de Louïs le Grand, intitulée *Clovis*. Ils lui répondirent *qu'ils ne croyoient pas qu'ils dussent voir personne, ny aller en quelque Maison que ce fust avant que d'avoir rendu leurs respects au Roy; mais que puisqu'une Personne aussi sage les assuroit que cela se pouvoit, ils y assisteroient avec plaisir, ne doutant point qu'allant au College, ils ne fissent une chose agreable aux deux grands Roys*. Le jour que la Tragedie se devoit représenter, ils partirent de Berny dès six heures du matin dans des Carrosses dont les rideaux estoient tirés, & vinrent *incognito* se reposer à l'Hostel des Ambassadeurs, qui estoit tout meublé pour les recevoir le jour de leur Entrée. Estant arrivez au lieu qui leur estoit destiné, ils furent surpris de la grandeur & de la beauté du Theatre où l'Action se devoit représenter, & ils ne furent pas moins étonnez de la grande multitude de personnes de la premiere qualité, & d'une infinité de peuple qui s'y trouva, sans qu'il y eust la moindre confusion. Ils admirerent l'air dégagé des Acteurs, & la beauté des Danses, & ils prirent un tres-grand plaisir à voir danser les Enfans...qui charmerent toute l'Assemblée.<sup>282</sup>

These theatrical productions by the pupils of the Jesuits were highly regarded and it is interesting to note the personal involvement of La Chaise with the Siamese at this early stage; even before their arrival in Paris we find him anxious to establish friendly relations.

We next hear of the Siamese delegation attending a production of the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*. It is an interesting exercise to compare the account given by "Kosapan" in the Smithies text with that of Donneau de Visé in the *Mercure galant*:

At the theatre, to see the comedy of the "Middle-class Gentleman", Mr. La Grange, who directs the company, paid a right gracious if lengthy compliment, expressing the hope that even if our familiarity with the French language did not permit of complete understanding, our interpreters would remedy the situation, and the play would contribute to our divertissement during our stay in Paris. In fact, the situation of the characters was easy to follow, the actors having the habit of exaggerating gesture and voice as in our popular theatre. As we were leaving the theatre, after the performance, I said to Mr. La Grange in the French tongue, "Thank you, my lord Marquis", because he had acted the part of the marquis in the play.<sup>283</sup>

Donneau de Visé confirms both the presence of the Siamese at this production, which he dates as taking place on the evening of the 12<sup>th</sup> September, and the conversation with the actor Charles de La Grange, doyen of the Comédie-Française:

Ayant vû jouer la Comedie du Bourgeois Gentilhomme, il [Kosapan] comprit tout le sujet de la Piece sur ce qu'on luy en expliqua, et dit à la fin qu'il auroit souhaité qu'il y eust eu dans le dénoüement de certaines choses qu'il marqua. Mr. de la Grange dit dans son Compliment, *Qu'ils avoient esté souvent honorés de la presence de plusieurs Ambassadeurs, qui poussez par leur curiosité estoient venus admirer leurs Spectacles,*

<sup>282</sup> Donneau de Visé, *IV., et dernière partie du Voyage des Ambassadeurs de Siam en France. Contenant la suite de leur voyage de Flandres depuis Valenciennes jusqu'à Paris, etc.*, pp. 102-07 (Paris, 1687), henceforward: Donneau de Visé, 4e partie. The play is probably that by Père Joseph de Jouvancy.

<sup>283</sup> Kosapan, p. 55.

*mais qu'ils n'avoient jamais eu l'avantage de voir chez eux des Personnes, dont la qualité de l'Ambassade dans toutes ses circonstances eust plus attiré d'admiration, & que c'estoit ce qui leur arrivoit ce jour-là par leur présence que toute la France estoit pleinement informée de l'estime particuliere que nostre Auguste Monarque faisoit de leur merite, & qu'aussi s'empressoit-on à leur rendre de toutes parts les honneurs dûs à leur Caractere, chacun allant au devant de ce qui leur pouvoit estre agreable, qu'il auroit esté à souhaiter pour la Troupe, qu'un peu d'habitude de la Langue Françoisse leur eust rendu la Piece intelligible, afin qu'ils en eussent pû sentir la beauté, ce qui leur auroit fait mieux comprendre le zele avec lequel ils s'estoient portez à leur donner quelque plaisir; qu'ils prioient leurs Interpretes de le leur faire entendre, aussi bien que le desir qu'ils auroient de contribuer encore à leur divertissement pendant leur sejour à Paris. Ce discours receut beaucoup d'aplaudissemens, & l'Ambassadeur ayant rencontré M. de la Grange lors qu'il sortoit de la Comedie, luy dit en François, Je vous remercie, Mr. le Marquis, parce qu'il avoit joué le rôle du Marquis dans la Piece.<sup>284</sup>*

As we see, the two versions are indeed quite close and there are no extra details to be gleaned from the English text, Donneau de Visé's account being the longer of the two by a considerable amount. It is interesting to note that, according to La Grange at least, the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* seems to have been thought particularly suitable for the entertainment of visiting ambassadors. He also refers to the frequency with which the diplomatic corps attended the theatre. On this particular occasion, we are subtly made aware of the personal intervention of the king in order to ensure a memorable performance for his guests. We again note the presence of interpreters to explain the action, as had been the case on other similar occasions.

We learn that Kosapan and his colleagues also visited the Théâtre Italien and this is certainly of interest to us, though no date or details of the performance are given, either by "Kosapan" or by Donneau de Visé; perhaps it was regarded as of minor interest; from the context it must have taken place after the visit to the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*:

At the Italian Comedy, a mighty fine building, we were addressed in the Italian language by Mr. Cinchio, who had obviously enquired of us, noting that our country is divided into eleven principalities as large as kingdoms. His compliment, as long as that of Mr. La Grange and giving rise to the sentiment that loquacity is the professional deformation of actors, was done into French by Mr. Vaneroni, the Royal Interpreter of Italian, who, we learned, speaks Portuguese as well as our interpreter born in Siam of a Portuguese resident there.<sup>285</sup>

Tragedy was represented on their programme by a performance of *Bajazet* at Saint-Cloud, forming a part of the entertainment arranged for the Siamese visitors by Monsieur, the king's brother, whilst the monarch was still indisposed:

[24<sup>th</sup> November, at St. Cloud.] The ball finished at seven-thirty, and the brilliant

<sup>284</sup> Donneau de Visé, pp. 275-79.

<sup>285</sup> Kosapan, p. 56. I do not know for certain to which interpreter Kosapan refers here. Artus de Lionne was the official interpreter to this embassy, but the reference is most unlikely to be to him. Given the family details, the interpreter in question must have been Antonio Pinto, "Monsieur Antoine", a priest of the Missions-Etrangères who spent some time with the Siamese during their stay in Paris (see Chaophraya Kosathibodi Pan, *The diary of Kosa Pan, Thai Ambassador to France – June-July 1686*, introduction and annotation by Dirk van der Cruysee, translation of the diary by Visudh Busyakul, editing of the text, translation of the introduction and footnotes by Michael Smithies, p. 49 (Chiang Mai, 2002).

company then proceeded through the illuminated Orangery to the Theatre, which was all lit up for a performance of the tragedy "Bajazet" by Mr. Racine, Treasurer of France. We were again placed to the right of the Dauphin and in the intervals chose to speak of the beauty of the subject and the fine acting of the performers, so our judgement was much praised. We learned that this play had been written but fourteen years before and as it was in verse we understood but little, but methinks the subject may have been selected for our benefit, since the story concerns the jealous fury of the concubine Roxana in a Turkish harem.<sup>286</sup>

"Kosapan's" diary may once again be confirmed by reference to Donneau de Visé:

On y representa Bajazet, de Mr Racine, Trésorier de France. Les ambassadeurs eurent le mesme rang qu'ils avoient eu au Bal, & toujours à la droite de Monseigneur le Dauphin. Ils comprirent si bien le noeud de la Piece, par les choses qu'on leur expliqua, qu'ils entrèrent dans la beauté du sujet, dont ils parlerent juste, aussi bien que du jeu des Acteurs; ce qui fut plusieurs fois rapporté à Monseigneur le Dauphin, à Madame la Dauphine, à Monsieur & à Madame, pendant la Comedie. Cela leur fit donner beaucoup de loüanges & admirer la justesse de leur goût, & la penetration de leur esprit.<sup>287</sup>

If we compare "Kosapan's" account of the production with that of Donneau de Visé, a certain amount of anti-French prejudice will be revealed. "Kosapan" continues with this rather acid comment: 'The actors have a fashion of declaiming their lines which is far from natural, in a similar fashion to our *kohn* recitals', whereas in Donneau de Visé's version of events the Siamese: '... entrèrent dans la beauté du sujet, dont ils parlerent juste, aussi bien que du jeu des Acteurs'. It is perfectly possible that the real Kosapan disliked the French style of tragic declamation, but it is throwaway remarks such as this that make me suspect an English origin for the text. The presence of the ambassadors at *Bajazet* is attested by the marquis de Dangeau in his *Mémoires*, though he dates the festivities as being held on Tuesday, the 26<sup>th</sup> November. Now this is the second performance of substantial Turkish interest to which our Siamese were invited within a relatively short space of time. One wonders whether it were not through some mental process of subsuming all exotic visitors together under the category of "Turk" that these particular productions were selected as the most appropriate for the entertainment of visiting oriental ambassadors, without any regard to their country of origin. We recall that the Ottoman ambassador Mehmed Saïd was, notoriously, expected to attend a performance of the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* in 1721. In support of such a theory, we find the following observations in "Kosapan's" report of a visit to the exhibition of waxwork figures by the painter and sculptor Antoine Benoist:

We were also taken to see the wax figures at the Royal Circle; in the room where the two circles, of Paris and Constantinople, are arranged, we were much amazed at seeing all kinds of different persons, superbly dressed in such natural positions. Turks for the French represent the east and the exotic, whereas for us they represent the west and the banal, the Europeans being more passing strange. We were shown the portraits of ambassadors from distant nations who have come to France in the past ten or so years, and among them were ourselves, dressed in our ceremonial attire and bonnets as on our first audience, shown both in wax and in painting.<sup>288</sup>

<sup>286</sup> Kosapan, pp. 114-15.

<sup>287</sup> Donneau de Visé, *4e Partie*, pp. 174-75.

<sup>288</sup> Kosapan, p. 130. His account is confirmed by Donneau de Visé, *4e Partie*, pp. 320-23.

There are further contemporary references to the practice of making of wax effigies of persons of note in La Bruyère, *Les Caractères de Théophraste, Des Jugements*, 21 v, ed. Servois, p.279 (Paris, 1923), in the *Lettres de Mme de Sévigné* (ed. Mommerqué-Régner, VI, 120-211) and in de Choisy (*Mélanges historiques*). Benoist's *Cercle* rapidly came to be quite a Parisian institution and he amassed a considerable fortune in this manner, also maintaining a travelling exhibition for the provinces. The *Lettres patentes* issued by the king are still extant; they make specific reference to the regular depiction both of 'ambassadeurs extraordinaires de Siam, Moscovie, Marocq, Alger...' and of the Ottoman court.<sup>289</sup> The artists must have worked rapidly indeed to produce and complete these portrait figures whilst the embassies remained in Paris, given the obvious constraints on the time at an ambassador's disposal. Here we have yet further evidence of the enormous public interest aroused by such exotic visitors. Portraits of visiting ambassadors of sufficient importance were often also commissioned in oils, in addition to the popular prints appearing in contemporary almanacs and suchlike. Commemorative medallions might well be issued and in the case of the Siamese a huge bronze was commissioned from Coysevox. The specific reference in the *privilège* to that depiction of the 'cour du grand seigneur' which had so caught Kosapan's attention is worthy of note.

It is interesting for us to observe how very much Molière still remained in favour, for the Siamese were also taken to a production of *L'Avare* at the Comédie-Française and "Kosapan" notes the affection in which the playwright was still held by the king:

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<sup>289</sup> Louis par la grace de Dieu, roi de France, etc. Par nos lettres patentes du 23 septembre 1668, nous aurions permis à Antoine Benoist, nostre peintre et sculpteur ordinaire de cire, de faire transporter et exposer en publicq dans tout nostre royaume, pays, terres et seigneuries de notre obéissance, par telles personnes qu'il voudra choisir, pendant trois années, la représentation qu'il a faite en cire des princes et princesses, duchesses et autres personnes considérables de nostre Cour qui avoient accoustumé de composer le cercle de la feue reyne, nostre très-chère et très-aymée espouze, avec deffense à toutes personnes de quelque qualité et condition qu'elles puissent estre de rien entreprendre au préjudice de ladite permission, sur les peines portées par nosdites lettres. Et d'autant que l'approbation qu'un ouvrage aussi industrieux a reçue dans le publicq a donné l'émulation à l'exposant d'en inventer de nouveaux qui seront composées de mêmes personnes et autres de nostre Cour qu'il désire placer selon leur rang, et de faire aussi les portraits non-seulement des personnes qualifiées de l'Europe, mais encore des ambassadeurs extraordinaires de Siam, Moscovie, Marocq, Alger, doges de Gennes, cours estrangères en figures et de faire des masques de cire; il nous a très-humblement supplié qu'en confirmant et amplifiant à cet effet sondit privilège, il nous a plust le prolonger pour un tems considérable, en sorte qu'il se puisse dédommager par le petit bénéfice qu'il en retirera des dépenses qu'il a esté et sera nécessité de faire et lui accorder à cet effet nos lettres sur ces nécessaires; à ces causes, voulant gratifier et traiter favorablement ledit exposant et luy donner moyen de jouir du fruit de son invention et de son travail, lui avons permis et accordé par ces présentes signées de nostre main, permettons et accordons audit Benoist d'exposer ou faire exposer à la veue du publicq dans nostre bonne ville de Paris et autres lieux de nostre royaume, pays, terres et seigneuries de notre obéissance, que bon luy semblera, ledit cercle de la feue reyne, cours de l'Europe, cour du grand seigneur, ambassadeurs extraordinaires de Siam, Moscovie, Marocq, Alger, doges de Gennes, et autres figures extraordinaires en cire, par telles personnes qu'il voudra choisir, et ce pendant le tems de trente années, à commencer du jour et datte desdites présentes. Deffendons à cet effet très-expressément à toutes personnes de quelque qualité et condition qu'elles puissent estre de faire ny contrefaire les représentations en cire du Cercle de France et cour du grand seigneur, ambassadeurs extraordinaires de Siam, Moscovie, Marocq, Alger, doges de Gennes, et autres cours de l'Europe, Asie et Afrique et figures de masque au naturel en cire, sous prétexte de nouveauté et augmentation, correction, changement de nom ou de modèle ou autrement, en quelque sorte et en quelque manière que ce soit sans le consentement exprès dudit Benoist, à peine de confiscation desdits modèles contrefaits ou autrement, cire et instrumens qui auront servi à les faire, de tous despens, dommages et intérêts, et de 6,000 liv. d'amende applicable, un tiers à nous, un tiers à l'Hostel-Dieu de nostre ville de Paris, et l'autre tiers à l'exposant. Si vous mandons, etc. Donnée à Versailles, le 31<sup>e</sup> jour de mars 1688, et de nostre règne le 45<sup>e</sup>, Signé : Louis. Registrées à Paris au Parlement, le 21<sup>e</sup> jour de janvier, 1689 (Reg. du Parlement X14 8683), published in *Les Spectacles de la foire d'Emile Campardon*, vol. I (1877). I am indebted for these references to Barry Kite's web site at <http://www.cesar.org.uk>.

Our time was not to be our own on our return from Flanders, and we were offered divertissements. At the Comedy we saw a play called "The Miser". I guessed what would happen; the miser's money-box would be stolen. This comedy was written by one Molière, now departed this world some thirteen years, but who when living caused much mirth to his Sovereign, who rewards him after his death by still causing his plays to be performed. "The Middle-Class Gentleman", which we were taken to see shortly after our formal audience at Versailles, was written by the same author.<sup>290</sup>

Once more this account is suspiciously close to that of Donneau de Visé, in fact almost a paraphrase in places:

Comme chacun s'empressoit à leur donner des divertissements après leur retour de Flandre, & qu'on leur offroit l'Opera & la Comedie, ils allerent à l'*Avare*, & ce qu'il y eut de surprenant, c'est que l'Ambassadeur dit pendant la Piece, *qu'il gageroit que la cassette où estoit l'argent de l'Avare seroit prise, & que l'Avare seroit trompé*; ce qui estant arrivé selon sa pensée, dût luy faire beaucoup de plaisir, & fit connoistre dans le mesme temps combien la penetration de son esprit est grande pour les choses qui sont de son usage.<sup>291</sup>

There remained one final visit to the theatre before the Siamese were due to depart; this time it was to Thomas Corneille's *L'Inconnu*. Again we find the choice made of an older play, by a well known writer, rather than a more recent production. Perhaps it was chosen for the stage effects, on which, indeed, "Kosapan" passes favourable comment. As on the previous excursion to the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*, the mandarins were presented to La Grange:

Our last theatrical entertainment was at the Comedy to see the play "The Unknown", by one Thomas Corneille, a much younger brother of a better known playwright, and written some eleven years previously. The subject, of a person whose true identity had yet to be revealed, was easy to understand, and the play was much embellished with visual tricks that made it interesting. Mr. La Grange, the director of the company, thanked us at considerable length for honouring his troupe with our first and last visits; methinks these actors talk far too much and could benefit by listening more.<sup>292</sup>

His account of their theatre visit should once more be supplemented by reference to that of Donneau de Visé:

La dernière Comedie qu'ils ont veuë, a esté celle de l'*Inconnu*. Ils prirent beaucoup de plaisir aux ornemens dont cette Piece est remplie, & sceurent en démesler le sujet. Mr. de la Grange les remercia de ce que leur Troupe avoit esté la première & la dernière honorée de leur presence; & marqua la joye qu'ils devoient avoir de remporter une reputation si universelle, & d'avoir plû dans une Cour qui sert de modele à toutes les autres, & où l'on a bien-tost découvert le faux merite. Il dit encore beaucoup d'autres choses qui seroient trop longues à rapporter.<sup>293</sup>

It is hardly surprising that Donneau de Visé should report these appreciative remarks, since he co-authored the play, but once more there is an unflattering comment in the English

<sup>290</sup> Kosapan, p. 116.

<sup>291</sup> Donneau de Visé, *4<sup>e</sup> Partie*, pp. 184-85.

<sup>292</sup> Kosapan, p. 130.

<sup>293</sup> Donneau de Visé, *4e Partie*, pp. 319-20.

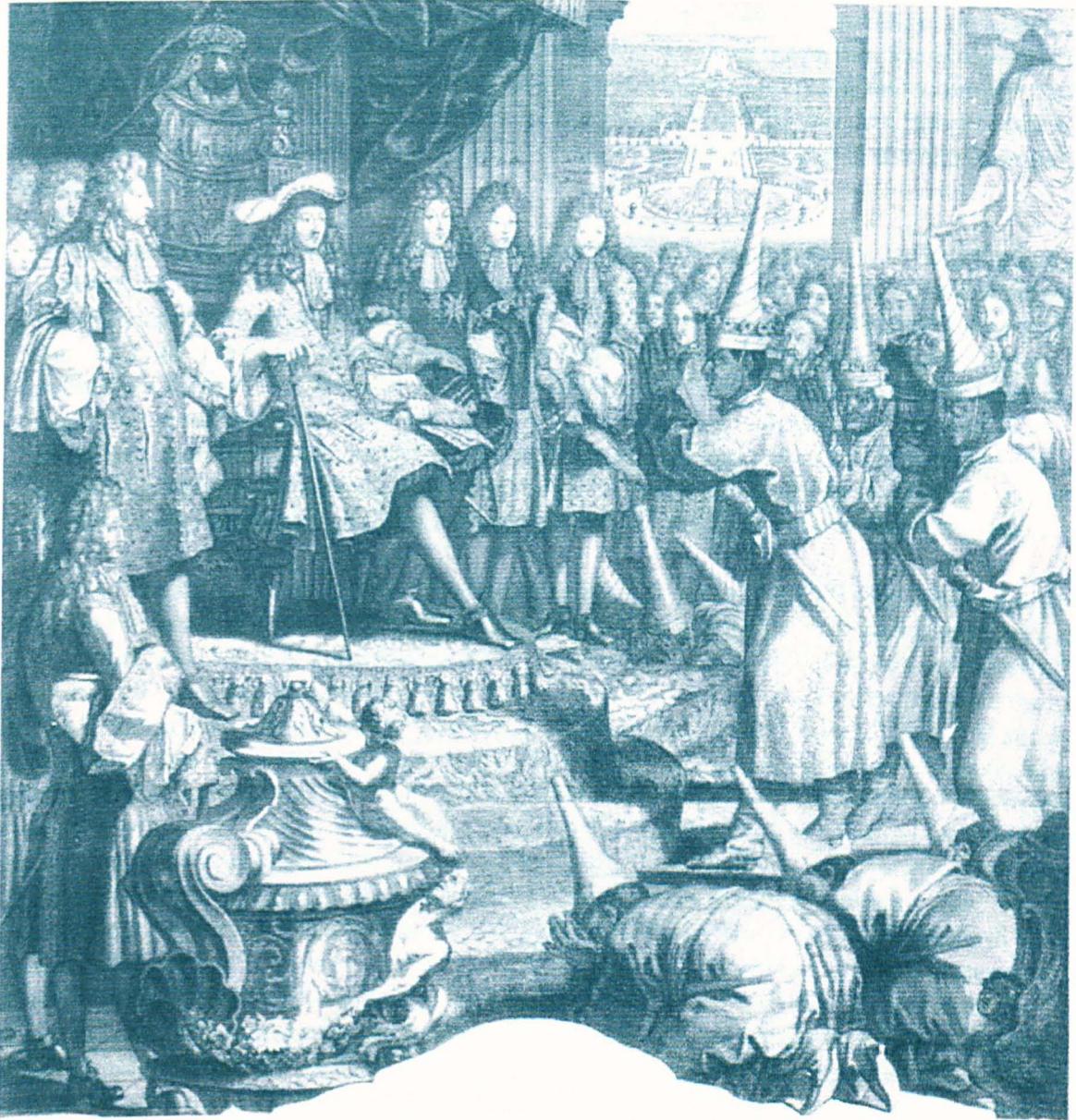


*The 'Oriental' Ambassador in 17<sup>th</sup> Century French Comedy.*



Solemn procession of the Siamese Ambassadors at Versailles, 1<sup>st</sup> September 1686  
(Bibliothèque nationale, Cabinet des estampes, coll. Hennin, t. LXIII 5550 and 5551).

*The 'Oriental' Ambassador in 17<sup>th</sup> Century French Comedy.*



Louis XIV receives the Siamese Ambassadors at Versailles, 1<sup>st</sup> September 1686  
(Bibliothèque nationale, Cabinet des estampes, coll. Hennin, t. LXIII 5550 and 5551).

language version which is absent from the French. Whether these observations and reflections are indeed those which Kosapan recorded for the information of his sovereign, or whether they are a historical fantasy produced in England (and we have noted that these memoirs must be approached with caution, despite their accuracy in matters of detail), they none the less contain much of interest to the literary historian. Donneau de Visé and de Choisy confirm that the historical Kosapan did keep a detailed journal of his stay. We read in the *Mercure galant* that the ambassadors:

... s'enferment tous les soirs après le souper avec plusieurs secrétaires. Ils se relisent les uns aux autres tout ce qu'ils ont remarqué, et les uns pouvant se souvenir d'une chose que les autres peuvent avoir oubliée, ils font ainsi jour pour jour un journal exact de ce qu'ils ont vu; ... ils ont même compté jusques aux arbres des lieux qu'ils ont visités ... Non seulement ils font tous les soirs des mémoires de ce qu'ils ont vu pendant la journée, mais il y a même un mandarin avec eux qui écrit leur voyage en vers siamois... Ces trois messieurs sont fort doux, honnêtes et complaisants, et d'une humeur très agréable. Ils écrivent jusqu'aux moindres petites choses qu'ils voient; je m'imagine qu'ils auront de quoi s'exercer en France où ils rencontreront tant de choses dignes de leur admiration ...<sup>294</sup>

The third Siamese embassy had arrived in France on the 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1686, reaching Paris on the evening of the 29<sup>th</sup> July with the solemn entry into the city taking place on the 12<sup>th</sup> August and the royal audience on the 1<sup>st</sup> September. They did not depart until the 18<sup>th</sup> January 1687, negotiations having been much delayed by the king's illness; this was the year of the fistula. Fatouville's *Banqueroutier* was produced on the 19<sup>th</sup> April, 1687. It is surely no coincidence that this is the second of that author's plays to feature an exotic embassy. The doings of the Siamese had been filling the columns for the *Mercure* for months. No topical satire that was worth its salt could hope to ignore them and *Le Banqueroutier*, an attack on shady financiers and the cynical practice of fraudulent bankruptcy, commonly held to be one of Fatouville's masterpieces, is nothing if not topical.<sup>295</sup> As with our previous play, Fatouville's *Empereur dans la lune*, we are again dealing with an item from Gherardi's *Théâtre Italien*, that is to say, we are presented with a certain number of French scenes, taken from their proper setting in an Italian comedy, and should not therefore expect to find a flawless seam of continuity between them. Unless the real-life reference of the character of Persillet can be properly identified, this must remain a social satire, a 'comédie de mœurs', written very much in the style of Molière's *Bourgeois gentilhomme*. There are scathing references to the *précieuses* and *préciosité*, a termagant of a wife, Eularia, a hilarious scene with a music master, marriage of the daughter of the house to her beloved, disguised as a prince from some exotic realm far away. There is again a good deal of barbed reference to the superstitious practice of astrology. The miserly villain of the piece receives his just deserts and a well-merited beating at the end. As the Italian scenes of the play are missing, we have not been presented with the usual comic plot of an elderly parent or guardian attempting to coerce a reluctant daughter into an unsuitable marriage, nor have we seen the course of true love cruelly interrupted. We do not know why Aurelio has been forced to adopt the stratagem of disguise and must therefore assume, perhaps erroneously, that Fatouville has followed the common pattern of New Comedy. But the details of the plot, with all its 'péripiéties' need not detain us here, since they have little relevance to our chosen theme of the comic ambassador; we do not hear anything of the anticipated arrival of an embassy until the penultimate scene. Here Mezzetin enters, to inform Persillet that two ambassadors are approaching:

<sup>294</sup> Donneau de Visé, pp. 27-8, 92-3.

<sup>295</sup> See Lancaster, vol. IV ii, pp. 621-24.

MEZZETIN. Il n'y a point de tems à perdre, monsieur: Faites-vous raser, & prenez du linge blanc, car vous êtes à la veille du plus grand honneur qui vous puisse arriver...un prince avec tout son pays, n'est qu'à cent pas d'ici qui demande votre fille en mariage. Voilà deux de ses courtisans qu'il envoie pour savoir s'il sera bien reçu.

We learn from Colombine that this is exactly what Isabelle's horoscope has predicted. 'Oh, monsieur, il faut que cela soit vrai, car l'horoscope de votre fille l'a prédit mot à mot'. Persillet approves whole-heartedly, for his plan to educate his daughter has been vindicated, 'Vous voyez, ma femme, ce que c'est de donner de l'éducation aux filles. Tôt ou tard cela leur fait du bien'. On enquiry, he is told that their prospective son-in-law is no less than the Prince of Chimere. It seems that Mezzetin has been at some pains to discover this piece of information:

MEZZETIN. J'ai bien eu de la peine à le découvrir, car tous les gens ne parlent que par signes. Ils m'ont pourtant dit, que c'est le prince de Chimere. Ah, monsieur, la belle noblesse qu'il a à sa suite. Ferai-je entrer ses deux envoyés?

The delighted Eularia trots off to use her powers of persuasion on her daughter, 'Je m'en vais disposer ma fille à cette entrevue'. The wayward Isabelle must not be allowed to ruin her chances of such a promising match! Meanwhile, sly Colombine extracts the maximum advantage from the occasion. Persillet will listen to her advice and take her predictions more seriously in future, 'Oh ça, monsieur, une autrefois prendrez-vous de mes almanachs, & n'est-il pas vrai que vous êtes né coëffé? car à vue d'oeil le ciel se mêle de vos affaires. A peine gagnez-vous un million par une banqueroute, que voilà un prince qui demande votre fille en mariage'. Still, some residual doubts remain; Persillet had meant to bestow his daughter's hand upon a lawyer or civil servant, someone more suited to the family's station in life, 'J'avois pourtant résolu de la donner à un homme de robe...' But the naughty girl employs all her considerable powers of persuasion to good effect:

COLOMBINE. La belle emplette que vous auriez fait là! Hé mort de ma vie, songez-vous au plaisir que vous aurez quand on vous dira: Monsieur, c'est un page de son altesse votre fille qui vient savoir comme vous avez passé la nuit? Ma foi, c'est quelque chose de bien doux d'avoir de pareils messages à son réveil. Vous avez beau dire, jamais secretaire du roi n'est parvenu là.

As Isabelle enters, dressed like a queen and followed by three lackeys, all Persillet's doubts are dispelled: 'Ma fille, à vos airs & à vos manieres, j'ai toujours remarqué que le sang des Persillets étoit destiné à quelque chose de grand. Un prince vous veut avoir pour femme. Si j'y consens, ma mie, vous ne m'en dédirez pas?' With Isabelle's modest consent to the match, her father allows himself to be carried away on the wings of fantasy:

PERSILLET. Mon dieu! commençons toujours par là, dans la suite si vous devenez veuve, nous ferons quelque chose de mieux.<sup>296</sup>

In the following scene, appropriately enough entitled the 'SCENE DES AMBASSADEURS' the embassy finally makes its entry. We learn from the stage directions that Pasquariel and Mezzetin arrive, '*en Ambassadeurs montés sur deux animaux*

<sup>296</sup> Gherardi, *Le Théâtre Italien*, tome I, pp. 456-58.

*extraordinaires. Ils descendent & font une scene de postures, & après plusieurs grimaces, ils dansent autour de Persillet*'. Colombine, as usual, cannot resist a comment, 'Si le prince ressemble aux ambassadeurs, votre fille sera trop heureuse; ces gens-là n'aiment que la joie'. We may deduce that the entry was accompanied by an appropriate piece of music since we next read that: '*Les ambassadeurs recommencent à chanter*'. Persillet is certainly impressed: 'Voilà des corps bien agiles' and Colombine continues to press home her advantage: 'A votre place je ne balancerois point, je marierois ma fille en ce pays-là', but Persillet remains enough of a businessman to consider the financial settlement that he might be required to make upon his daughter: 'Il est bon de savoir à quelles conditions'. She realises that she has perhaps gone a little too far, and hastily reassures him: 'A leur phisionomie je ne les crois pas intéressés. Apparemment ils n'en veulent qu'au mérite d'Isabelle'. This consideration removes the last lingering doubt from a bourgeois father's heart: 'Sur ce pied-là, ils sont les très-bien venus...Ma femme, voilà un grand honneur pour notre famille'. We can guess from the dialogue that there has been some elaborate gesticulation going on, because Persillet continues, in an aside to Colombine, 'Mais comment savoir ce que ces messieurs-là veulent dire?' She replies: 'Il n'y a qu'à les regarder. Par leurs gestes, ils parlent aussi bon François que vous'. Both Isabelle and her father are impressed by the answer. It seems that this language conveys everything by sign and gesture, 'Tu entends donc par signe tout ce qu'on veut dire?' Colombine confirms that this is indeed so and that it is a considerable advantage, 'C'est la plus mignonne de toutes les langues, & qui épargne plus des sottises à l'oreille'.<sup>297</sup> Persillet is quite convinced by this final argument: 'Que les hommes seroient heureux, si toutes les femmes parloient cette langue-là!'

In his naivety, Persillet is curious to know more of the land of Chimere and its inhabitants: 'Ne sauroit-on savoir par qui le pays de Chimere est habité?' Perhaps Colombine begins to run out of inspiration at this point, for she has to resort to leaving it all to Mezzetin and Pasquariel to explain, perhaps a little maliciously, for it must all be done by signs: 'Oh, ils vous le diront de reste'. We learn with mounting astonishment that the land of Chimere is inhabited by Germans, Frenchmen, Spaniards and Italians: *Les ambassadeurs font entendre, par signe, qu'il est habité par des Allemands, par des François, par des Italiens, & par des Espagnols*. It seems that Persillet shares our astonishment (we must presume a prolonged and elaborate pantomime, perhaps a trifle gross) from the *soi-disant* ambassadors, 'Que diable cela veut-il dire?' but the resourceful Colombine, never at a loss, has as always a ready rejoinder:

COLOMBINE. Ah! la jolie langue! *Se tournant vers Persillet*. Ils disent, monsieur, que leurs états ne sont peuplés que d'Allemands, de François, d'Italiens, d'Espagnols, & d'autres nations fantasques & visionnaires.

Eularia, less credulous than her husband, is not deceived, 'Oh, tu te mocques'. Colombine treats us to an exhaustive explanation, though we, at three centuries' removal, are reduced to picturing the hilarious scene for ourselves:

Nenni, ma foi, je ne me mocque point. Quand ils étendent comme cela leur bras, c'est pour montrer qu'il leur vient des gens de tout pays & de toutes professions. Tenez, vous voyez bien qu'ils en conviennent. En faisant comme cela de la main, ils figurent des Allemans qui ont des cheveux droits comme des chandelles. Quand ils badinent de leur peigne, & remettent brusquement leur chapeau, ce sont les François qu'ils copient; les

<sup>297</sup> Could we have a possible covert reference to Molière here? There seems to be a distinct echo of Agnès's belief in conception through the ear, in the *École des femmes*

Italiens avec la guitare, & les Espagnols qui menacent le ciel. Bon! un enfant d'un an entendroit cela.<sup>298</sup>

Certainly we have national stereotypes pictured here that persist to the present day. We are all familiar with such mental images as the Prussian haircut, characteristically 'en brosse' in the approved military style, the musical Italians and the eternal Spanish preoccupation with 'machismo' and honour. It must have been a pleasing picture, for Persillet concludes, 'Je suis charmé de leur jargon'. Colombine assures him that it is easy enough to learn, 'Vous en saurez autant que moi dans un quart d'heure'. Persillet finds all this fascinating, notices that the 'ambassadors' have started to converse again, and wonders what they are saying, 'Prens garde, Colombine, voilà ces messieurs qui reparlent'. This time she refuses to interpret, 'Pour cette fois-là, vous ne saurez point ce qu'ils disent'. Persillet can think of only one explanation, 'Sont-ce des ordures?' Colombine pretends to be shocked at the very idea, 'Oh, que non'; but Isabelle, too, now insists upon an explanation, 'Pourquoi donc ce mystere?' we wonder what on earth these signs could be, for the following dialogue now takes place:

COLOMBINE. C'est que ce gros joufflu me demande...

PERSILLET. Quoi?

COLOMBINE. Il me demande, si...

PERSILLET. Hé bien...

COLOMBINE. Si je veux l'épouser.

Persillet is practical as always in his advice, if not overly tactful; we can understand why Colombine proves so willing to participate in his downfall: 'Allez, sotté, ils vous font trop d'honneur. Il n'y a pas à barguigner là-dessus, faites leur connoître que vous en êtes ravie'. With Eularia's consent to the match all lingering doubts are removed. There is to be a double wedding. Colombine hurries the 'ambassadors' away to fetch their prince and we learn from the ever helpful stage directions that: '*Les ambassadeurs sortent en faisant des grimaces*'. Colombine may congratulate herself on a successful conclusion, 'C'est ma foi ce coup-ci, mademoiselle, que vous serez mariée à votre gré. Mais qu'avez-vous, vous me paraissez toute chagrine?' Poor Isabelle is not *au fait* with the plan and has seemingly not realised that this is no more than an elaborate charade, nor that she is in reality to marry Aurelio. She laments her fate; though she will dutifully conform to her father's wishes, the life of a princess in foreign climes is not all gaiety and amusement:

Je ne suis point chagrine; mais j'apprehende d'avoir de méchantes heures dans un pays où je ne connois personne. Chez mon pere j'ai le plaisir d'assembler des gens d'esprit deux fois la semaine.

Worldly wise, Colombine is able to reassure the innocent girl. All Isabelle will need to do to attract a circle of friends in her new kingdom, is to be lavish in her distribution of silver on all occasions: 'Voulez-vous savoir un secret infailible pour attirer les habiles gens à coup sûr: vous n'avez qu'à distribuer des jettons d'argent à chaque assemblée'. This in itself will be enough to bring them flocking from a hundred leagues away, for silver is 'l'éperon des beaux esprits'.

Now the long awaited embassy makes its entry. There are some indications as to its appearance, for we read in the stage directions: *Le prince & les ambassadeurs entrent avec des instruments ridicules...Le char du prince avance* and Isabelle exclaims to her mother,

<sup>298</sup> Gherardi, *Le Théâtre Italien*, tome I, p. 461.

'Madame, le bel équipage!' Thus we may picture the husband-to-be arriving in an elaborate carriage of some description, drawn we know not how, surrounded by a motley crew of capering musicians in exotic costume, the sound of 'Oriental' modes discordant on the Western ear. Mime and dancing commonly feature in comedies, yet in so far as the historical Siamese embassy is concerned, these musical fancies are not quite so fantastical as might be supposed, but an authentic and topical detail. De Chaumont was ordered to compose a *mémoire* for Louis on his return from the East. Louis wished to be informed of the exact nature of the King of Siam's reception of the French ambassador, so that he might replicate it. De Chaumont writes in his *Relation de l'ambassade ... à la cour de Siam*:

...il y avait beaucoup d'instruments comme des trompettes, tambours, timbales, musettes, des manières de petites cloches, et de petits cors dont le bruit ressemblait à ceux des pasteurs en France.<sup>299</sup>

A detailed description of his own reception at the court of Siam follows. There was also a *mémoire* sent to Seignelay, to underline the importance laid by the king on this particular point.<sup>300</sup> The Marquis de Sourches notes the use of music when the Siamese were received at their royal audience in his *Mémoires*:

... ils y montèrent au son des trompettes et des tambours, pour imiter la manière du roi de Siam qui ne descend jamais à la salle des audiences qu'avec cette musique.<sup>301</sup>

On this occasion 24 trumpets and 36 drums were employed. We have seen that something similar happened in the case of Soliman Aga, though with the Turks this was done with negative intent and resulted in several unfortunate misunderstandings. Twenty years later, more care was taken in the imitation of the usage of foreign courts, lest offence be unwittingly given. In this case it was done in compliment to the Siamese.

Now Mezzetin and Pasquariel make the necessary introductions and Persillet bows low. The fond father has heard that his highness values noble birth more than riches in a bride. Though Isabelle's dowry may be small, it is honestly acquired and she will make a worthy princess. Yet it seems that this paternal discourse has angered the prince, we read: *Le prince se met en colere*. Colombine is again forced to act as interpreter: 'Ah, monsieur, que dites-vous-là! vous offensez le prince: Ne voyez-vous pas qu'il se met en colere quand on lui parle d'argent?' Persillet naively takes this to mean that he will marry Isabelle without a dowry, but is sadly mistaken. Colombine hastily explains the general drift of the prince's

<sup>299</sup> Quoted in Dirk Van der Cruyssen, *Louis XIV et le Siam*, p. 389 (Paris, 1991).

<sup>300</sup> *Mémoire de M. de Chaumont de ce qu'il faut faire pour rendre les mêmes honneurs aux ambassadeurs de Siam, que le roi de Siam en a faites à son égard*, A.N., Col. C/1/23, f. 12; B.N., N.A.F. 9380, f.197. It was important that the king of France should not be seen to be outdone by the Siamese in matters of courtesy. De Chaumont makes detailed suggestions as to the form that the welcome given to the Siamese should take:

L'on pourrait envoyer des carrosses du Roi pour les ambassadeurs jusq'à Brest, et dans toutes les provinces où ils passeront, leur faire les mêmes honneurs qui m'ont été faits, en les complimentant tous les jours où ils dîneront et souperont..., et les faire loger dans les maisons les plus propres, puisque je n'ai pas logé dans une seule maison qui ne fût faite exprès et magnifiquement meublée ... Il faudrait aussi faire tirer le canon dans les villes où il y en aurait, et quand ils arriveront à Paris, leur faire une très belle entrée, car on ne peut pas en avoir fait une plus belle que l'on m'a faite.

Quoted in Dirk Van der Cruyssen, *Louis XIV et le Siam*: p. 384 (Paris, 1991).

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 388-9.

gestures, naturally he will require money: 'Par toutes les marques qu'il fait sur les coutures de son habit, il dit qu'il se contente de cent mille écus pour acheter des livrées à la française. Vous voyez bien que c'est prendre votre fille pour rien...'. Isabelle thinks it sad that she is marrying a man who cannot speak to her of love, but again Colombine smoothes over the difficulty. The prince can express himself quite adequately by gesture; it seems that in the land of Chimere men are wiser than they are in France, where men babble endlessly of love until the day of the wedding, but once the knot is tied find nothing further to say to their wives. In the Orient, by way of contrast, 'On ne parle point pendant qu'on fait l'amour: mais le contrat n'est plutôt signé, que la tendresse joue son jeu sans discontinuation'. Isabelle is most impressed and exclaims, 'L'aimable coutume!' Colombine continues to orchestrate the action. She is well aware that time is of the essence, lest their little charade be exposed before Persillet has signed the all-important and legally binding marriage contract; she hustles him along, working on his cupidity, 'Allons, monsieur, ne manquez pas cette affaire-ci; on n'a pas toujours des princes sous sa coupe. Avec trois cens mille francs, votre fille n'étoit le fait que d'un homme de robe'. Persillet acknowledges the justice of this observation and signs. No sooner is this done, than Aurelio leaves his chariot and, without revealing his identity, returns Persillet's lost casket, in which he has concealed all his worldly wealth in order to hide it from his creditors, 'Ma cassette! Ah! le digne gendre!' It is just as well, for at that precise point the Docteur arrives with an escort of archers, to imprison Persillet for debt. Now Aurelio must at long last remove the mask. This is the true dénouement and our author tells us, '*Aurelio se fait connoître, & dit au Docteur son pere, qu'il vient d'épouser la fille de monsieur Persillet, & qu'ainsi leurs intérêts sont communs. Le Docteur renvoie les archers, & tout le monde se retire fort content*'. In what may very well be an intentional link with our Siamese ambassadors, the play closes with a song: *Mezzetin chante les parôles suivantes, sur l'air de l'entrée des pastres de l'opera de Roland*. The reader will recall that it was their enforced attendance at the opera *Roland* that had given the first Siamese embassy their imaginary *casus belli* and so much grief to Père Vachet.

Though so close in time to its production, the Siamese embassy was not the prime target of *Le Banqueroutier*, that much is clear from the title alone; it is the world of high finance that is under siege here. The discerning audience is only too well aware that Fatouville's comedy owes as much of its inspiration to Plautus's *Aulularia* and Molière's *L'Avare*, as to the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*. Nevertheless, we are presented with an 'oriental embassy' which, entering at the high point of the play, forms a crucial factor in the dénouement. The negotiation of a royal marriage is the declared objective of this fictional embassy, an outcome which had never been given the slightest consideration in the recent negotiations between France and Siam, yet there are the astronomical references, the musical references, the costumes, the elaborately formal postures and gesturing, the singing and dancing. All these things are intentionally reminiscent of the Orient. The entry of Pasquariel and Mezzetin on stage as 'ambassadors', where it is specified that they are riding upon exotic animals, reminds us of the baby elephants and the miniature rhinoceros selected by Phra Naraï as suitable presents for the royal princes of France. Above all, the giveaway mention of *Roland* links this play indissolubly with the Siamese. Louis cannot have been left forever unaware of that whole embarrassing incident, which was very public. Obviously it must have been an affair that the king would have preferred quietly forgotten, yet here we have a sly reminder from the stage. It is the closing number that lingers longest in the mind and is the most privileged musical moment of any production; by virtue of its prime position alone the choice of a melody from *Roland* cannot have been without significance. Little references such as this signpost the increasing boldness of the comic theatre in the matter of subversive comment upon political realities.

Fatouville's *Banqueroutier* appeared some few months after the departure of the

Siamese; the performance of Regnard's *Le Divorce*, first acted on 17<sup>th</sup> March 1688, shows that nearly two years later audiences at the Théâtre Italien had not yet tired of the ambassadorial theme, so great was the impression left by our exotic visitors. Like its predecessors that we have covered in this chapter, *Le Divorce* is both satirical and farcical in nature; as in *Le Banqueroutier*, crooked financiers and the legal profession are the main targets. This time, young Isabelle is trapped in a loveless marriage to the elderly tax-collector Sotinet; she is barely eighteen years of age, he is approaching his seventies. Matrimony does not, however, prevent her from having many suitors. Her brother Aurelio decides to intervene to help his sister gain her freedom from the tyrannical old man and enlists the aid of the latter's valet, Mezzetin. He, in turn, secures the active cooperation of Arlequin and of Isabelle's own maid, Colombine. There are various farcical scenes until the whole thing culminates in a mock trial before Aurelio, disguised as the god Hymen, in which Isabelle gains her liberty together with the return of her dowry and a substantial amount of alimony, leaving her free to marry Arlequin. Poor Sotinet is relegated to the lunatic asylum. One of the many devices that Arlequin uses to gain access to Isabelle is a disguise as the ambassador of the emperor of China. Thus, in this particular instance, our ambassador is not to function as an instrument for the dénouement of the plot but makes his appearance as early as Act II (scenes iv, v and vi), he is then not heard of again, providing merely one of several farcical episodes. We read in the stage directions for Act II iv that as Pasquariel and Mezzetin enter, '*Ils disent qu'ils ont concerté Arlequin en Ambassadeur du Roi de la Chine, et font une scène de culbutes, où ils ne parlent presque point. Cette scène est toute dans le goût Italien; c'est à-dire-point susceptible de raisonnement*'. This is the case with several other scenes in the play, which are given only in resumé and left to our imaginations. Dialogue referring to this 'Chinese ambassador' does not occur until Act II v, when a lackey appears to announce to Colombine: '*C'est l'ambassadeur du roi de la Chine qui demande à vous parler*'. In scene vi, Arlequin enters Colombine's apartments dressed as a Chinaman, but not unaccompanied, he arrives escorted, like Aurelio in *Le Banqueroutier*, '*avec un cortège d'instruments burlesques et de violons*'. A musical entourage now appears to be an inseparable part of the comic ambassador's train of followers.

The scene continues in a not very original manner, unless this little episode is intended as a specific parody of the work of so many of Regnard's predecessors. It seems that the Emperor of China has heard of Isabelle's beauty and wishes to marry her. His proposal is couched in appropriately Oriental style:

L'Amour est un diable, madame, et j'aimerais mieux être mordu d'un chien enragé que d'être piqué du moindre de ses dards. Le roi de la Chine, mon maître, tombe en charpie pour vos divins appas, et les traits de vos yeux sont autant de lardoires dont son coeur est piqué, qui le rendent le plus fin gibier qui pende présentement au croc de l'amour. Cela supposé, madame, il dit qu'il veut vous épouser, et il le fera comme il le dit; car mon maître est un gaillard qui n'entend point de railleries là-dessus.

This time Isabelle is no longer so naively trusting as we found her to be in Fatouville's play a year earlier, '*Le roi de la Chine m'épouser! Il m'aime! Il ne m'a jamais vue*'. Arlequin is ready as always with a logical, if highly unlikely, explanation: the emperor has seen her portrait in Renaudot's *Gazette* and is actually in Paris at this very moment, '*Il ne vous a que trop vue, de par tous les diables. Il vient presque tous les jours dans la Gazette pour l'amour de vous, et il est cloué toute la journée sous les Charniers, dans l'espérance de vous y voir passer*'. Colombine raises the more practical objection that her mistress is already married, but it seems that this obstacle can be readily overcome. Arlequin reassures the pair that '*... il faudra que le mariage soit diablement dur, s'il ne le fait casser. En tout cas, nous avons la*

voie de la mort-aux-rats qui ne nous peut manquer'.<sup>302</sup> Even without recourse to such drastic measures, a separation is easily to be obtained and there is always the natural process to be hoped for. After all, Sotinet is of quite an advanced age.

The *soi-disant* 'ambassador' now cheekily proceeds to question Isabelle as to her suitability to be wife to a great potentate. He insists on examining her teeth to verify her age, as though she were to be a brood mare, 'Mais voyons la dent, car je me défie diablement des femmes sur l'article de l'âge'. He next interrogates her on the length of time she has been married, yet on being informed that this has been for a mere five or six months, has the insolence to enquire how many children she has. Isabelle is astonished, 'Monsieur l'ambassadeur veut rire. En six mois combien d'enfants!' Arlequin is cynical in reply, 'Oh, ne vous y trompez pas. Je connais des filles qui sont bien aises d'être équipées de tout en entrant en ménage'. It seems that ladies of quality in China have a far superior method of bearing children. Rather than go to the trouble of carrying the infant for the full term of nine months, they delegate the task to their chambermaids. Colombine is most impressed by this latter detail, 'Ah, madame, voilà un merveilleux pays!' More marvellous still is the extraordinary length of life expectancy in the Chinese Empire and the total lack of disease or degenerative illness. It seems that there is a simple explanation, '*sublata causa tollitur effectus*'. The Chinese, very wisely, have no doctors. Hence, no-one dies of natural causes; the elderly have to be put to death. Poor Colombine cannot conceive of such a society, 'Point de médecins! Mais il faut que ces gens-là ne soient point chrétiens'. Arlequin assures her that he is telling the truth, elaborating on his story with the following anecdote:

Pendant que j'y étais, il en vint un dans un petit carrosse, traîné par une mule, et l'empereur de la Chine, voyant ces deux animaux-là qu'on ne connoissoit point dans le pays, les fit mettre dans sa ménagerie, et les Chinois qui les allaient voir prenaient souvent la mule pour le médecin et le médecin pour l'enfant de la mule.

This Colombine can well understand, 'Sans leur robe et leur barbe je m'y tromperais, ma foi, le plus souvent'. The medical profession has long provided a favourite butt for the comedians. Its absence from China is the crucial factor in deciding Isabelle and Colombine in favour of a life in the Orient. The 'ambassador' salutes their new resolve in suitably diplomatic parlance:

Madame, je vois dans vos yeux que vous brûlez d'envie d'être reine de la Chine; j'en avertirai le roi mon maître et je ne doute pas que les étincelles de vos yeux ... venant à tomber ... sur le bassinet ... de son coeur ... la poudre de son amour ... madame ... je vous donne le bon jour.

We now learn that, in conformity with the approved manner, this embassy has brought presents from their imperial master. Alas, these are far from suitable gifts to offer to a young lady of quality such as Isabelle:

*Il appelle ses gens qui apportent deux bassins qu'il présente à Isabelle; l'un plein de pipes et l'autre de tabac en cordes. Elle les refuse, disant que cela n'est pas de son usage. Il ôte son chapeau, qui est un cabaret garni de tasses à café pleines, et il lui en offre; ce qu'elle ne veut pas non plus accepter.*

<sup>302</sup> This is a more or less open allusion to La Voisin and the celebrated 'Affair des Poisons' of 1680 that we have already come across in the previous chapter. Such a reference shows that the Théâtre Italien was already skating on very thin ice, long before its enforced closure in 1697.

Curiously, Regnard has chosen articles of Middle Eastern provenance for the King of China to send to Isabelle rather than something more typical of the Far East. The Turks were well-known for their love of the 'nargile' and it was Soliman Aga himself who had introduced coffee to France, and made it fashionable with his gift of some coffee beans to Louis XIV. Neither caffeine nor nicotine were known as Chinese addictions of the day and caffeine is still regarded there as particularly deleterious to health. Arlequin notes the girl's reluctance to accept, and therefore suggests a different, but equally unsuitable, gift:

Eh bien, je vais vous faire un présent qui sera bien de votre goût; c'est une demoiselle du pays, qui chante, qui danse et faite à peindre. Holà, faites venir Mademoiselle Dorotée.

But Mademoiselle Dorotée is none other than Mezzetin, '*habillé en Naine*', despite being presented to Isabelle as 'une fille de qualité, et des meilleures familles du pays'.<sup>303</sup> We may only guess at his appearance from this distance in time, but it must surely have given occasion for much merriment. We are told in the stage directions that '*Mezzetin fait la révérence grotesquement... Mezzetin fait un discours en galimatias, et en bégayant*'. Arlequin next persuades 'her' to regale the company with a song, upon which Mezzetin '*... chante un air Italien toujours en bégayant*'. The scene ends in the usual slapstick farce with the arrival of none other than the outraged husband, Sotinet himself, accompanied by Pasquariel also '*habillé en femme*'. On seeing these exceedingly strange people gathered in his house, the master quite rightly wonders, 'Quels carême-prenants sont-ce là? Est-ce qu'on donne le bal chez moi?' But Arlequin is ready with a cutting retort, 'A qui en a ce vieux fou-là, avec sa gueuse?' The outraged Pasquariel has recourse to violence, 'Comment impudent? A une personne de ma qualité, gueuse!' A whole series of *lazzi* follows, for which this exchange of insults has provided the excuse and is more than probably the *raison d'être* for the entire scene... '*Elle donne un soufflet à Arlequin, qui se jette sur elle et appelle au secours. Ses gens accourent, et entr'autres Mademoiselle Dorotée qui fait un combat très plaisant avec Pasquariel, l'une étant fort petite et l'autre très grand. Après quoi ils s'en vont*'. This scuffle marks the end of the second act and we hear no more of Regnard's Chinese ambassador. It is a fair assumption that the writer had our Siamese visitors in mind, for no embassy was to arrive from China itself until 1697.

Regnard returns to the theme of the 'Oriental embassy' in January 1690, with his *Arlequin homme à bonne fortune*. Again there are references to the opera *Roland*, which must have become indelibly linked with the Siamese after the unfortunate little contretemps of 1684. The writer's debt to Molière's *Bourgeois gentilhomme*, which serves as the inspiration for so many of these farces, is evident.<sup>304</sup> Arlequin seeks to win Colombine's hand by pretending to be an Oriental potentate. On this occasion, the embassy purports to come from the far Eastern state of Tonkin [in the north of modern day Vietnam], another field of French missionary endeavour on the borders of China and Siam. There are farcical special effects and elaborate costumes. As with our other plays from the Théâtre Italien, we have been left with a series of French scenes extrapolated from the context of their Italian framework and thereby suffering from an apparent lack of continuity. Our ambassador arrives in scene ix, accompanied by his suite and with a parrot as interpreter (the two are soon to be revealed as Arlequin and Mezzetin in disguise). Despite its many original flourishes, the plot is yet

<sup>303</sup> Mezzetin was noted for his short stature.

<sup>304</sup> There are also echoes here of the *Précieuses ridicules* and, most especially, of the *École des femmes*. Colombine proudly declares, 'Vous croyez donc parler à une petite fille? Vous vous trompez. Je sais déjà bien des choses. J'ai déjà lu cinq ou six comédies de Molière; & j'en suis au troisième tome de Cyrus. Je fais du point à la turque, & j'apprens à chanter'. Regnard even added a *Critique de l'homme à bonne fortune* in parody of Molière's *Critique de l'école des femmes*.

another variation upon a familiar theme. Brocantin, widowed father of Colombine and Isabelle, wishes to remarry and, to further his own ends, is threatening to betroth Isabelle to an elderly doctor. The medical profession never appears to good advantage in the comic theatre. Colombine, meanwhile, is engaged in a flirtation with Arlequin, whom she saves from imprisonment by donating her jewellery to pay his debts. Both sisters are forced to adopt male disguise to further their cause, Colombine as Arlequin's lawyer, Isabelle as a young gallant. In this rôle the latter is able to rid herself of her father's choice of suitor by posing as her own lover, so that the Docteur will imagine that he has been deceived and leave in high dudgeon. The stratagem is a great success. Arlequin now returns on the scene in his guise of the 'prince Tonquin des curieux', bringing with him not only the ubiquitous Mezzetin, but also Isabelle's lover, Octave. Colombine announces the arrival of the gaily caparisoned troupe in scene viii, 'Mon papa, il y a là-bas une troupe de carême-prenants qui veulent entrer'. Brocantin, however, is not in the mood for guests, 'Qu'on les renvoie; je ne veux point...', but the motley crew enter regardless of the father's wishes. Proudly Colombine is able to inform her reluctant parent that: 'On dit que c'est l'ambassadeur du prince Tonkin des curieux qui veut m'épouser'.

The stage directions to scene ix, the surreal 'scène des curiosités', tell us of the manner of his entry on scene: 'ARLEQUIN *prince des curieux, porté par quatre hommes dans une manière de panier; MEZZETIN en perroquet...suite du prince des curieux*'. Overwhelmed, poor Brocantin is forced to address the parrot politely, 'Le prince des curieux épouser ma fille! Je suis bien obligé à son altesse tonkinoise'. Mezzetin merely cackles in reply and tries to kiss the girl, but she takes fright, 'Ah! Mon Dieu, la vilaine bête!' and runs to Brocantin's valet, Pierrot, for protection. He cynically reassures her, 'Oh! Pardi, ne craignez rien avec moi; il n'a qu'à venir. Ah! Mademoiselle, la jolie queue! Perroquet mignon; tôt, tôt, déjeuner'. The mischievous Mezzetin cackles again, to the great annoyance of Brocantin, who cannot for the life of him understand what is going on: 'Quel diable de jargon! Qu'est-ce donc qu'il dégoise-là?', but the bird breaks into song and all is made clear. He has accompanied his prince on such a long and arduous journey merely in the hope of marrying Colombine. She, however, will have none of it: 'Moi? oh! Je ne veux point épouser un perroquet'. Our feathered friend has a ready retort:

*Hé! morguenne de vous! Quelle fille! quelle fille!  
Morguenne de vous! quelle fille êtes-vous?*

Pierrot knows a rogue when he sees one, if nobody else does, 'Voilà l'ambassadeur du Pont-Neuf.'<sup>305</sup> The valet's suspicions are duly confirmed as Mezzetin becomes carried away by his own eloquence, 'Le friand morceau! J'aurai bien du plaisir d'en faire une perroquette. Qu'elle est belle!' This kind of remark is not very reassuring for the poor girl, who desperately tries to interest the disreputable bird in her sister or her cousin instead:

Oh! vous vous moquez. J'ai ma soeur qui est bien plus jolie que moi; et si vous aviez vu ma cousine Gogo, c'est tout autre chose... Oh! je ne veux jamais rester seule; j'ai trop peur.

Not in the least abashed, the parrot merely begins to sing its chorus again:

*Hé! morguenne de vous! quelle fille! quelle fille!*

<sup>305</sup> We have already come across references to the activities of the Pont-Neuf in the *Faux Moscovites*.

*Morguenne de vous!...*

At this precise moment, Arlequin's head emerges from the basket, doubtless intended to represent the 'oriental' palanquin, and he finishes the couplet. The violins play an *entrée* as Arlequin leaves his rather confined quarters altogether and performs a little dance, before embarking on the following discourse on the benefits of matrimony:

Ce n'est pas sans raison que nos anciens modernes ont dit ingénieusement que le mariage était d'une très grande ressource pour de certaines gens, et que les aigrettes dont quelques femmes galantes faisaient présent à leurs maris, étaient semblables aux dents, qui font du mal quand elles percent, et nourrissent quand elles sont venues. Cela présupposé, voyons un peu le tendron qui est destiné pour mes plaisirs; car vous ne voudriez pas me faire acheter chat en poche.

Brocantin hastes to proffer one of his daughters for the honour. The prince has only to choose between them and can examine the girls at leisure as they are trotted out before him. Perhaps he will take them both, but the father shall stand as guarantor for the quality of the 'merchandise'! Poor Colombine is forced to submit to the indignity of inspection, for all her protests, 'Pour vous, petite blonde d'Égypte, levez le nez, regardez-moi fixement, marchez, trottez. Beau-père, n'y a-t-il rien à refaire à cette fille-là?' Arlequin makes it clear that he will have no inferior goods foisted upon him. Father and daughter are equally taken aback and a somewhat risqué piece of dialogue ensues, full of double-entendre:

BROCANTIN.- Oh! monsieur, je vous la garantis tout ce qu'on peut garantir une fille.

COLOMBINE.- Je me porte bien, et je n'ai jamais eu d'autre maladie qu'un mal d'aventure: mon pouce devint gros comme ma tête.

ARLEQUIN.- Diable! méchant mal. Les filles sont terriblement sujettes aux maux d'aventure; mais l'enflure ne les prend pas toujours au pouce.

Arlequin concludes the exchange with his proposal of marriage. Colombine wisely remains on her guard, 'Moi! votre femme? bon! bon! vous vous moquez: est-ce que je suis capable de cela?'. Her admirer retorts rather ungallantly, 'Malepeste! vous l'êtes de reste'. He proceeds to embark on 'quelques petits avis en vers que j'ai faits pour servir de niveau à la femme qui tombera sous ma coupe'. These consist of a rather long-winded parody of the 'Maximes du mariage' from the *L'École des Femmes*, Act III, sc. 2, and need not concern us further, for the Docteur, to whom Isabelle is promised, now puts in an appearance. He imagines that the whole elaborate scene has been laid on for his benefit, but is swiftly disillusioned. Brocantin dismisses the unhappy suitor as Arlequin pretends to draw up his horoscope, predicting his imminent execution at the place de la Grève. Once more we encounter the astrological motif. Isabelle's father will have no such disgrace in his family. The Docteur departs in high dudgeon, leaving the 'Prince' to propose a better match. Isabelle shall marry her Octave, who has been present throughout the whole proceedings in Tonkinese disguise. To her great delight, Isabelle recognises her future intended, who addresses her in Italian, thus arousing Brocantin's suspicions. In an exchange highly reminiscent of Covielle's rôle in the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*, Act IV, scenes 5 and 6, Arlequin is able to explain all away:

BROCANTIN. -Qu'est-ce qu'il jargonne-là?

ARLEQUIN. -C'est un compliment tonkinois. Il dit qu'elle est une étoile resplendissante de perfection, et que, si la queue de son manteau était plus longue, il la prendrait pour une comète. (*Isabelle répond en italien au compliment d'Octave.*)

BROCANTIN. -Quoi! ma fille sait déjà le tonkinois?

ARLEQUIN. - Bon! c'est une langue qui s'apprend par infusion; et s'il vous épousait, vous sauriez le tonkinois dans deux heures.

Brocantin, all suspicions finally laid to rest, at last agrees to the marriages and there is a grand finale in which Pasquariel emerges from a cabinet, disguised as a monkey. He performs some acrobatic manoeuvres to Brocantin's great admiration. Arlequin, still in character, suggests that the little animal give a performance on the guitar:

Voyez-vous bien ce singe? Il s'accompagne de la guitare on ne peut pas mieux. Je m'en vais vous le faire voir. (*Au singe.*) Quiribirichy? (*le singe répond en faisant une grimace, et en même temps se jette sur une guitare qu'un homme de la suite d'Arlequin a entre les mains.*)

Arlequin disingenuously inquires whether Brocantin has understood the ape's reply, thus giving himself the opportunity for a final insult as a departing shot:

ARLEQUIN.- Avez-vous entendu ce qu'il a dit?

BROCANTIN.- Non. Est-ce que j'entends le langage des singes, moi?

ARLEQUIN.- Vous avez pourtant la physionomie d'une guenon....

The play then ends with Pasquariel's song. The relevance of this particular detail will become apparent, if we recall that the Siamese envoys were commonly described as monkey-like in appearance and insulted as such in the streets.

The diplomatic negotiations with Siam left a lasting impression on the French literary consciousness. It is fairly safe to say that of all the embassies arriving in Paris during the reign of Louis XIV, the Siamese ambassadors were given the highest profile. There was the wide publicity and the sense of popular anticipation surrounding their arrival; the air of mystery that shrouded the ill-fated embassy of 1681; the atmosphere of hostility aroused by the inexplicably boorish behaviour of the second embassy; the extended stay, the truly oriental glamour and the polished urbanity of the third. There was also the matter of the despatch of two fully accredited and high profile French embassies to Siam itself, followed in short order by an expeditionary force, all within the space of two years. Such intense diplomatic activity was unusual and the negotiations with Siam were highly publicised. Theatrical references are legion and continue for many years after the departure of the visitors, yet we have no play overtly built around the Siamese as such. The Russians and the Ottomans had provided an irresistible temptation to the comic theatre, so why not the Siamese? It seems to me that the answer is probably connected to the existence of state censorship, for this is a case in the manner of Sherlock Holmes and the dog that barked in the night - the significance lies in the fact that the dog was silent. French censorship was both reactive and retroactive in nature, but none the less effective. It was never possible to write in open criticism of royal policy and the truth is that, for all its promise at the start, French involvement in Siam had been a terrible failure. There were no high profile conversions to the Catholic Church nor had there ever been any serious prospect of any. The French expeditionary force was compelled to evacuate the country in an ignominious withdrawal shortly after its arrival. The hounding of a friendly monarch to the grave and the murder of his prime minister in the most horrific circumstances were the direct results of Louis's interference. One presumes that these consequences did not become widely known in France for some considerable time, but nevertheless, it would better suit those in authority that their involvement in Siam should be quietly forgotten, rather than paraded in the theatre for all to



Phra Narai, from a contemporary print.

be reminded of a most unfortunate episode. Louis had invested men, money and more importantly his royal prestige, in the Siamese venture. The whole affair had been a complete and costly failure, but it was the king's honour that suffered most. No wonder there was little but covert reference to the episode from the stage. We may deduce from this very silence that it had been quietly indicated from on high that it was a topic that would be better avoided. It was best for all concerned that Siam become the 'pays de Chimere', the land of dreams.

As for the writers of the comic theatre, it is quite evident that they had not lost interest in the Siamese. It is highly probable that there are direct links with no fewer than four of the plays produced by the Théâtre Italien in the 1680s; two by Fatouville, *L'Empereur dans la lune* and *Le Banqueroutier*, and two by Regnard, *Le Divorce* and *Arlequin homme à bonne fortune*. There are also Siamese references in other comedies. Siam and China were commonly confused in France, both being far away on the other side of the world, exotic in culture, governed by a highly educated class of mandarins and inhabited by racially diverse peoples speaking strange, tonal languages. Regnard and Dufresny refer to 'pagodes' by way of local colour in *Les Chinois* (1692), yet pagodas were regarded as one of the distinguishing marks of Siamese culture, not of Confucian or Taoist China. Bearing in mind that at this period the French word 'pagode' is used to refer both to the temple itself (i.e. what we understand as the Buddhist 'pagoda' in English) and to the statue or idol within, we find the following references in Act II, scene 4 of *Les Chinois*. Arlequin, dressed as a Chinese doctor, has been hiding in a 'cabinet de la Chine'. The stage directions tell us that:

Le cabinet de la Chine où il étoit s'ouvre, & on le voit rempli de figures chinoises grotesques, composant une académie de musique, mêlée de violins, & de figures qui representent la rhétorique, la logique, la musique, l'astrologie, &c. & on voit une grosse pagode au milieu de ces figures.

Quite rightly, there is some debate as to what a 'pagode' actually is:

ROQUILLARD. Mais que signifie cette figure, là-bas?

ARLEQUIN. C'est une pagode.

ROQUILLARD. Une pagode! Qu'est-ce que c'est qu'une pagode?

ARLEQUIN. Une pagode, est ... une pagode. Que diable voulez-vous que je vous dise?

The second act concludes with a song. The stage directions specify: '*On apporte Mezzetin vêtu en pagode, qui chante l'air suivant*'. But the first line of this song is enough to confirm the confused state of geographical knowledge amongst the general population, for Mezzetin, wearing what is obviously intended as Chinese costume, sings: 'Je viens exprès de Congo, ho, ho, ho...' I believe it more likely that these sly references are to the Siamese, rather than to China. Diplomatic relations between France and China were yet to be opened and contact between the two was very limited. Joachim Bouvet did not leave Peking on his mission to France until the 8<sup>th</sup> July 1693, arriving at Brest on the 1<sup>st</sup> March 1697, or some five years after the first production of *Les Chinois*. A Chinese embassy was entirely unexpected and 'chinoiserie' not yet in vogue. As Phra Narai earlier with his appointment of Bénigne Vachet, the Chinese emperor K'ang-Hsi had felt it more prudent to employ a French priest as 'Kin tchai' or 'envoyé de l'empereur'.<sup>306</sup> This embassy was not, therefore, regarded by the French court as an 'ambassade d'éclat', though Bouvet could not be sidelined, as had been the case with Vachet and the Siamese, because in this instance there was no alternative choice of ambassador available. The object of his mission was the recruitment of French Jesuit

<sup>306</sup> On Bouvet, see Dehergne.

scholars, in both the arts and the sciences, to serve in China where great store was set upon their learning. Highly skilled European craftsmen and engineers were also sought, particularly in the fields of optics and hydraulics. Bouvet's arrival in Paris started the usual fad amongst the fashionable set. No sooner had he been required to appear before the king, 'habillé a la chinoise', than the craze began for all things Chinese. Apparently a tapestry of the episode hangs in Le Mans cathedral:

Versailles et Paris ne parlaient plus que de la Chine ; partout où devait se rendre le missionnaire, il était précédé par une foule de curieux qui ne tardaient pas à l'accabler de questions graves ou frivoles. C'est pour répondre à tout le monde à la fois qu'il publia le Portrait historique de l'Empereur de la Chine.<sup>307</sup>

Here Bouvet confidently predicts the imminent conversion of K'ang-Hsi, but as with Phra Narai before him, all such pious hopes were vain. Bouvet left La Rochelle for China on board the *Amphitrite*, accompanied by a party of eight Jesuits and two other priests, only to find on his return to Peking in April 1699 that there had been certain changes during his prolonged absence. The climate of opinion had turned decisively against the Catholic Church and though Bouvet was appointed Chinese ambassador to the Holy See, he was never sent.

Delosme de Monchenai refers to 'pagodes' in *Les Souhairs* (1693), though something far different to the modern English understanding of the word is again envisaged, both here and in other plays where they are featured: 'Et remuant la tête avec art & methode / Copier mot pour mot le ticq d'une pagode?' [p. 38] and '...les pagodes se multiplient sur les cheminées' [p. 61]. In *Le Défenseur du beau Sexe* of 1694, 'M. de B\*\*\*' twice makes mention of 'pagodes': '...ces colifichets, ces poupées, ces pagodes, ces chiens' [p. 258] and 'Où l'on réduit de jeunes femmes, à se jouer avec des poupées, à faire remuer leurs pagodes. Elles remuent au moins ces pagodes, & font un signe de contentement' [p. 270]. In Regnard and Dufresny's *Foire St. Germain*, produced at the Hôtel de Bourgogne in December 1695, we learn that merchants are still offering the distinctive Siamese hats for sale, some ten years after the event, 'Les marchands crient...Des bonnets à la Siamoise' [p. 205]. Delosme de Monchenai also mentions these famous Siamese bonnets in *Les Souhairs*: 'Ne me chargeront-ils point encore de la banqueroute de ce beau commis qui avoit inventé l'ordre des bonnets à la siamoise, pour s'accoutumer, peut-être, au bonnet vert qu'il prévoyait de voir être le terme salutaire de ses dépenses monstrueuses?' [pp. 7-8]. Donneau de Visé has left us a vivid description in his *Voyage des ambassadeurs de Siam en France*:

Ils mirent ensuite les bonnets qui marquent leur dignité, et dont je vous ai déjà parlé. Ils ont au bas de ces bonnets des couronnes d'or larges de deux à trois doigts, d'où sortent des fleurs faites de feuilles d'or très minces, au milieu desquelles sont quelques rubis à la place de la graine. Comme les feuilles d'or qui forment ces fleurs sont fort légères, elles ont un mouvement qui les fait paraître toujours agitées. Le troisième ambassadeur n'a point de ces fleurs autour de sa couronne, il n'a qu'un cercle d'or large de deux grands doigts et ciselé. Lorsqu'ils faisaient travailler à ces couronnes par un orfèvre de Paris, cet orfèvre leur ayant dit qu'elles étaient bien légères, le premier ambassadeur répondit qu'ils les faisaient faire pour des hommes, et que si elles étaient lourdes, il les faudrait donner à porter à des bêtes...ceux à qui ces marques de dignité ont été données n'oseraient paraître devant le roi de Siam sans les avoir.<sup>308</sup>

<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

<sup>308</sup> Quoted in Guy Tachard, *Le Voyage de Siam*, t. 2 (i), p. 15 n. 6, available online at [mapage.noos.fr/memoires-de-siam3/relationtachard](http://mapage.noos.fr/memoires-de-siam3/relationtachard).

*The 'Oriental' Ambassador in 17<sup>th</sup> Century French Comedy.*



The three Siamese ambassadors (Bibliothèque nationale, Cabinet des estampes, coll. Hennin, t. LXII 5495). The portrait at the top left is of Kosapan.

These bonnets were tall and pointed, made of white muslin and tied under the chin. The amount of ornamentation varied with seniority. They were in fact a badge of office, conferred by the king, and worn only on ceremonial occasions. We may very well wonder on what kind of occasion the average Parisian might wear such a confection, but they were probably meant for an occasion like carnival or perhaps the Christmas festivities.

On an altogether different tone we find the Siamese beginning to appear in works of serious moral content. La Bruyère reflects on the recent embassy and the whole cherished project for the conversion of Siam in his *Caractères de Théophraste* (March 1688). Here Phra Narai rightly figures as a model of religious toleration:

Si l'on nous assurait que le motif secret de l'ambassade des Siamois a été d'exciter le Roi Très-Christien à renoncer au christianisme, à permettre l'entrée de son royaume aux *Talapoins*, qui eussent pénétré dans nos maisons pour persuader leur religion à nos femmes, à nos enfants et à nous-mêmes par leurs livres et par leurs entretiens, qui eussent élevé des *pagodes* au milieu des villes, où ils eussent placé des figures de métal pour être adorées, avec quelles risées et quel étrange mépris n'entendrions-nous pas des choses si extravagantes! Nous faisons cependant six mille lieues de mer pour la conversion des Indes, des royaumes de Siam, de la Chine et du Japon, c'est-à-dire pour faire très sérieusement à tous ces peuples des propositions qui doivent leur paraître très folles et très ridicules. Ils supportent néanmoins nos religieux et nos prêtres; ils les écoutent quelquefois, leur laissent bâtir leurs églises et faire leurs missions. Qui fait cela en eux et en nous? Ne serait-ce point la force de la vérité?<sup>309</sup>

This is a critical note that it would not have been permitted to utter from the stage, particularly in the growing climate of religious bigotry that was beginning to emanate from around the throne. The king of Siam does not consider that the presence of other religions in his dominions reflects upon his personal glory. Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity alike in their many varied forms, all are regarded with an equal and amused benevolence, the very benevolence that led Père Vachet to believe that monarch ripe for conversion. We learn that there are further lessons to be drawn from the East:

...Si l'on m'oppose que c'est la pratique de tout l'Occident, je réponds que c'est peut-être aussi l'une des choses qui nous rendent barbares à l'autre partie du monde, et que les Orientaux qui viennent jusqu'à nous remportent sur leurs tablettes: je ne doute pas même que cet excès de familiarité ne les rebute davantage que nous ne sommes blessés de leur *zombaye* et de leurs autres prosternations.<sup>310</sup>

The reference is to gambling, a habit of which La Bruyère particularly disapproves, and the unseemly behaviour of players around the card tables. He is sadly mistaken in the belief that gambling is frowned upon in the East, where it is in fact an exceedingly popular form of amusement. The *zombaye* itself is a form of genuflection. He concludes with some critical reflections on the characteristic French arrogance displayed towards their foreign guests:

Si les ambassadeurs des princes étrangers étaient des singes instruits à marcher sur leurs pieds de derrière, et à se faire entendre par interprète, nous ne pourrions

<sup>309</sup> La Bruyère, *Les Caractères de Théophraste, Des esprits forts* 29 (1) p. 379-80, ed. Antoine Adam (Paris, 1975), henceforward: La Bruyère.

<sup>310</sup> La Bruyère, *Des biens de fortune* 71 (VI) p. 137.

pas marquer un plus grand étonnement que celui que nous donne la justesse de leurs réponses, et le bon sens qui paroît quelquefois dans leurs discours. La prévention du pays, joint à l'orgueil de la nation, nous fait oublier que la raison est de tous les climats, et que l'on pense juste partout où il y a des hommes. Nous n'aimerions pas à être traités ainsi de ceux que nous appelons barbares; et s'il y a en nous quelque barbarie, elle consiste à être épouvantés de voir d'autres peuples raisonner comme nous.<sup>311</sup>

Charles Rivière Dufresny writes of the Siamese visitors some thirteen years later, in his *Amusemens sérieux et comiques d'un Siamois à Paris* (Paris, 1699).<sup>312</sup> These 'amusemens' are not presented in fashionable format as the 'memoirs' of a Siamese visitor to Paris, nor do they take the epistolary form chosen by Marana and Montesquieu. Rather, Dufresny imagines a Siamese visitor at his side as they sample the various amusements available to the man of leisure in the capital:

Paris est un monde entier; on y découvre chaque jour plus de païs nouveaux & de singularitez surprenantes, que dans tout le reste de la Terre ... Imaginez-vous donc combien un Siamois y trouveroit de nouveautez surprenantes; quel amusement ne seroit-ce point pour luy, d'examiner avec des yeux de voyageur toutes les particularitez de cette grande Ville? Il me prend envie de faire voyager ce Siamois avec moy; ses idées bigeares & figurées me fourniront sans doute de la varieté, & peut-être de l'agrément.

Je vais donc prendre le genie d'un voyageur Siamois, qui n'auroit jamais rien vû de semblable à ce qui se passe dans Paris ... j'entreray dans les idées abstraites d'un Siamois; je le feray entrer dans les nôtres ... je donneray l'essor à mon imagination & à la sienne.<sup>313</sup>

A whole section of this little book, the 'cinquième amusemen', is dedicated to a trip to the opera, a theme chosen, very possibly, in reminiscence of the unfortunate contretemps that had ensued over the mandarins' enforced attendance at *Roland* in 1684.<sup>314</sup> They did not record their impressions, though we do have [with the customary caveat] "Kosapan's" account of visits by the third Siamese embassy to performances of *Acis et Galathée* and of *Armide* in the autumn of 1686:

Mr. de Lully, the court musician, called on us that day [14<sup>th</sup> September], and we retained him for dinner as soon as we heard in what esteem the King holds him. Then we went to the Opera, where Mr. de Lully was waiting to greet us; to be played that night was "Acis and Galatea", which used no machines, so it was explained that ordinarily the spectacles were grander than this night's. We understood the import of the spectacle easily enough; a swain loves a nymph of whom an ogre is enamoured, and who succeeds in killing him, but Love turns him into a babbling fool forever speaking of his nymph. After the performance, Miss Rochoir, one of the actresses, came to visit us at our Residence, and we paid an appropriate compliment to the person who had represented the daughter of the god of the sea.<sup>315</sup>

This was certainly not one of the better known operas and it does seem a little odd that it

<sup>311</sup> La Bruyère, *Des jugemens*, 22 (1), pp. 279-80.

<sup>312</sup> Charles Rivière Dufresny, *Amusemens sérieux et comiques d'un Siamois à Paris*, ed. John Dunkley (Exeter, 1976), henceforward: Dufresny.

<sup>313</sup> Dufresny, *Amusemen Troisieme*, p. 9.

<sup>314</sup> Dufresny, pp. 14-15.

<sup>315</sup> Kosapan, p. 63.

should have been selected for the initial visit, but the omission was remedied when the Siamese were subsequently taken to a performance of *Armide*, widely considered a masterpiece and one of the finest results of the collaboration between Quinault and Lully.<sup>316</sup> Perhaps the Siamese had been eager to view a production after their earlier visit backstage and Campistrion's *Acis et Galathée* was all that was immediately available. It seems that they went as Lully's guests rather than on an official occasion.

Dufresny muses on the reaction of his Oriental visitor to the Opéra.<sup>317</sup> The first thing to catch his attention is the shabbiness of the entrance, his friend has been anticipating a magnificent portico, 'En voicy l'entrée, luy répondis-je, en luy montrant du doigt un guichet fort sombre. Et où donc, s'écria-t-il? je ne voy là qu'un petit trou dans un mur, par où on distribuë quelque chose'. As always, there are the crowds: 'il nous faut au moins une heure pour traverser la foule qui en assiege la porte'. The visitor has trouble understanding the function of the ticket, 'Que veut cecy? quelle folie, donner un Louïs d'or pour un morceau de quarton! Mais je ne m'étonne plus qu'on l'achete si cher, j'apperçois sur ce quarton des caracteres qui ont apparemment quelque vertu magique'. Dufresny reassures him that he is not mistaken in so far as concerns the magical properties of the ticket, 'c'est un passeport pour entrer dans le païs des enchantemens'. He makes to hurry his companion into the theatre, 'entrons-y donc vite, & plaçons-nous sur le Theatre'. There is an unfortunate misunderstanding: 'Sur le Theatre, repartit mon Siamois, vous vous moquez; ce n'est pas nous qui devons nous donner en spectacle, nous venons pour le voir'. This would give us to understand that Dufresny may be referring to the benches that were sometimes placed upon the stage for the benefit of spectators, but I have come across no other reference to this being a custom at the Opéra. The reader will recall the resentment of the first Siamese embassy at the constant presence of curious onlookers and their growing suspicion that they themselves formed part of the spectacle. These crowds of raucous spectators were one of the major reasons for their frequent refusal to leave their lodgings and surly lack of cooperation. It must indeed have been wearying for those used to the absolute silence and gravity that surrounded the person of an oriental monarch. Dufresny ushers his companion forward and it seems that there is some discussion over the choice of seats, 'N'importe, luy dis-je, allons nous y étaler: on n'y voit rien, on y entend mal; mais c'est la place la plus chere, & par consequent la plus honorable'. Here it is hard to avoid recalling the whole unfortunate episode of *Roland* and that unseemly dispute over the seating arrangements. The reference is surely intentional. Dufresny goes on to explain that there are pleasures to be had at the opera which have little to do with the merits of the production, 'Cependant comme vous n'avez point encore d'habitude à l'Opera, vous n'auriez pas sur le Theatre cette sorte de plaisir qui dédommage de la perte du spectacle...'

The two companions eventually settle themselves in a 'loge', which would belie the earlier remarks about a place upon the stage, but perhaps they changed their seats. Dufresny does not enlighten us, but while they wait for the curtain to rise, he explains the true nature of the Opera to his astonished listener. It is no more nor less than an enchanted realm, the 'païs des metamorphoses', where mortal men may become gods and heroes, where in the twinkling of an eye the traveller may pass from one end of the earth to another, or from heaven to hell. A blast on a whistle, a mere 'coup de sifflet', is sufficient to transport the spectator to fairyland. The fairies of the Opera can work enchantments like the usual kind, but 'leurs enchantemens sont plus naturels, au vermillon prés'. It seems that their magical transformations come about as a result of make-up. As in the days of old, tales are told of the fairies of the Opera, tales which 'ne sont peut-être pas plus vrais, mais ils sont plus vrais-

<sup>316</sup> See Donneau de Visé, pp. 186-87.

<sup>317</sup> Dufresny, pp. 14 -15.

semblables'. 'Vraisemblance' is naturally a quality sought by the theatre, the proof of its attainment in this particular instance lies in the natural benevolence of these magical beings, very thoughtfully 'elles n'accordent point à ceux qu'elles aiment le don des richesses, elles les gardent pour elles', thus relieving their swains from the temptations of avarice. We further learn that the natural inhabitants of this land are 'un peuple un peu bigares [sic]: ils ne parlent qu'en chantant, ne marchent qu'en dansant, & font souvent l'un & l'autre lorsqu'ils en ont le moins d'envie'. The Opéra also has its monarch. Could this be a picture of Lully in performance? 'Ils relevent tous du souverain de l'Orquestre, Prince si absolu, qu'en haussant & baissant un Sceptre en forme de roulau qu'il tient à sa main, il regle tous les mouvemens de ce peuple capricieux'. Let us not forget that Dufresny was himself a man of the theatre and knew of what he wrote. He bids us (and his Siamese) take our leave of its denizens with the following thought:

Le raisonnement est rare parmi ces peuples; comme ils ont la tête pleine de Musique, ils ne pensent que des chants, & n'expriment que des sons; cependant ils ont poussé si loin la science des Notes, que si le raisonnement se pouvoit noter, ils raisonneroient tous à livre ouvert.

"Kosapan" also records his impressions of the opera and for me, whatever the caution with which one has to approach the work, the following comments at least have the ring of truth about them:

We were taken the day after to the Opera to see "Armide", by the court composer Mr. Lully, who comes from Italy but has turned French. This opera is new, being but composed this year, so we were told by Mr. Veneroni, who explained the plot to us. I asked about the charms Armide devised to engage the attentions of Renaud, and if she was French. Being told she was not, but the niece of the King of Damascus, I said, "If she were French, she would not need magic to be loved, for Frenchwomen do so naturally". At this the ladies nearby giggled, the courtiers nodded approval, and by such foolish flattery one pleases these simple French. But the opera was, for the eye if not the ear (the screeching of the singers is sometimes unbearable), impressive; seeing the Palace of Armide ruined and burnt on the stage was most realistic, and I was afraid for the theatre.<sup>318</sup>

Here once more is the constant subtext of criticism of the French theatre that runs throughout the English language version of our text, yet it must be said that Western modes struck as unharmoniously upon the oriental ear as did theirs upon the European. In both cases, the spectacle may have been pleasing, but the musical aspects of the entertainment proved far less easy to appreciate. In his eagerness to repay French hospitality in an appropriate manner, Phra Naraï arranged for de Chaumont and his entourage to view a performance of the Chinese opera. De Choisy recorded his impressions of the occasion in his journal entry for 2<sup>nd</sup> November:

Après le dîné une foule de plaisirs assez peu plaisirs mais qui avaient la grâce de la nouveauté. D'abord il y a eu une comédie à la chinoise. Les habits sont beaux, les postures assez bonnes; ils sont alertes: la symphonie détestable, ce sont des chaudrons qu'on bat en cadence. Ensuite est venu un opéra siamois: le chant est un peu meilleur que le chinois. Les comédiennes sont bien laides, leur grande beauté est d'avoir des ongles d'un demi-pied de long. Les danseurs de corde ont fait merveilles. Ils mettent de longs bâtons l'un au bout

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<sup>318</sup> Kosapan, p. 116.

de l'autre, hauts comme trois maisons et se tiennent debout au-dessus sans contrepoids, quelquefois les pieds en haut. Ils se couchent sur des pointes d'épées et de gros hommes leur marchent sur le ventre à nu.

Les Pégouans ont une danse assez plaisante. La fête a fini par une tragédie chinoise: car il y a des comédiens de la province de Canton et d'autres de la province de Chincheo. Les Chincheo sont plus magnifiques et plus cérémonieux.<sup>319</sup>

It takes time to become accustomed to different musical conventions and time was a luxury afforded neither to Kosapan nor to de Choisy. The comment on the efficacy of the stage effects is interesting and bears out what we have read elsewhere. The constant need to flatter the ladies and their intrusive presence was, as we may recall, the subject of the astonished indignation of the earlier mandarins, though it does not appear to have caused Kosapan quite so much unease as his predecessors.

Dufresny's 'roman-journal' is a short one and need not concern us further, for his reflections have little bearing upon either the theatre or the historical embassy and contain nothing further of relevance to our theme. We note in passing that there seems to have been a sequel in existence, but this was presumably destroyed in the pious holocaust of his works perpetrated by the family after the writer's death in 1724.<sup>320</sup> There is no record of its content. Siamese visitors to France were to re-appear in literary format as late as 1751, in Joseph Landon's *Lettres siamoises ou le Siamois en Europe*. Marie-Louise Dufrenoy notes in her *Orient romanesque en France 1704-1789* (Montreal, 1946) that the 1761 re-edition of these '...s'accompagnent d'un important appareil d'érudition. Il ne faut pourtant point se laisser imposer par les notes et explication de termes dont s'ornent presque toutes les pages. En effet, on remarque surtout une affection d'orientalisme verbal, qui se manifeste aussi dans le choix des noms bizarres donnés aux correspondants de Nazadir: La-Za-Ky-ha, Ta-Soo-Pra-Poat, Ze-Kioe-Ymy, mais la peinture des moeurs des Orientaux ne marque pas de progrès sensible sur celle des Lettres Persanes'.<sup>321</sup>

<sup>319</sup> De Choisy, *Journal du voyage de Siam fait en 1685 & 1686 par M. l'Abbé de Choisy*. Précédé d'une étude par Maurice Garçon (Paris, 1930).

<sup>320</sup> Dufresny, *Introduction*, p. xxx.

<sup>321</sup> M.-L. Dufrenoy, *L'Orient romanesque en France 1704-1789*, t. 1, p. 192 (Montréal, 1946).

**Table of comparisons: Evariste Gherardi's Théâtre Italien.**

<b>Title:</b>	<i>Le Mercure galant</i>	<i>L'Empereur dans la lune.</i>	<i>Le Banqueroutier.</i>
<b>Author:</b>	Fatouville.	Fatouville.	Fatouville.
<b>Published:</b>	1681.	1684.	1686.
<b>Type:</b>	French scenes from an Italian farce. Prose. Satire.	French scenes from an Italian farce. Prose. Social satire.	French scenes from an Italian farce. Prose. Social Satire.
<b>Who plays the ambassador?</b>	Arlequin.	Pasquariel.	Pasquariel and Mezzetin.
<b>Are his costume and behaviour appropriate?</b>	Yes.	Yes, within the logic of the play.	Yes, though burlesque.
<b>Is he properly escorted by a train of followers?</b>	No	Yes.	Yes.
<b>Is jargon employed?</b>	No. Italian is used for exotic effect	No.	No, sign language is used as required.
<b>Is there an interpreter?</b>	No.	Yes, Pasquariel acts in this rôle.	Yes, Colombine acts in this rôle.
<b>Is there 'vraisemblance'?</b>	Only within the logic of the play.	Yes, within the logic of the play.	Yes, a certain amount.
<b>Purpose of the 'embassy'?</b>	Unclear, the play survives in fragmented form.	The marriage of himself, as 'emperor'.	The marriage of Isabelle to Aurelio.
<b>Is there an element of personal satire in the play?</b>	Yes, of the journalist Donneau de Visé.	No.	Possibly, but more likely of a social class.

<b>Title:</b>	<i>Le Divorce.</i>	<i>L'Homme à bonne fortune.</i>	<i>Le Phénix</i>
<b>Author:</b>	Regnard.	Regnard.	Delosme de Monchenay
<b>Published:</b>	1688.	1690.	1691
<b>Type:</b>	French scenes from an Italian farce. Prose. Satire.	French scenes from an Italian farce. Prose. Social satire.	French scenes from an Italian farce; alternating prose and alexandrines.
<b>Who plays the ambassador?</b>	Arlequin.	Arlequin.	Arlequin.
<b>Are his costume and behaviour appropriate?</b>	Yes.	Yes, within the logic of the play.	Yes, he is 'déguisé en ture'.
<b>Is he properly escorted by a train of followers?</b>	Yes.	Yes.	No.
<b>Is jargon employed?</b>	Yes, 'un discours en galimatias, et en bégayant'.	Yes, 'Qu'est-ce qu'il jargonne-là ?'	No.
<b>Is there an interpreter?</b>	No.	Yes, Mezzetin disguised as a parrot.	N/A.
<b>Is there 'vraisemblance'?</b>	Yes, a certain amount.	Yes, within the logic of the play.	Minimal.
<b>Purpose of the 'embassy'?</b>	The marriage of Isabelle to the emperor of China.	The marriage of Isabelle and Octave.	To test a wife's fidelity.
<b>Is there an element of personal satire in the play?</b>	No.	Possibly, but more likely of the medical profession in general.	Yes, a good deal - occasioning physical attacks on the author.

**Chapter 6: The 'Oriental' Ambassador and Women.**

*A mon mari je suis fidèle,  
 Mais je tremble pour mon honneur.  
 J'ai nuit et jour dans la cervelle  
 Les trois queues de l'ambassadeur.*<sup>322</sup>

No consideration of the Oriental ambassador in France, or indeed of the theatre itself, could be complete without giving some thought to the rôle of women, both in society and upon the stage. The conclusion of a happy marriage in the teeth of all opposition lies at the very heart of comedy and the comic ambassador plays a vital part in achieving this end. In the everyday reality of the seventeenth century, the arrival of an embassy was also associated with royal marriage alliances, betrothals and births. This was an age in which the monarch was the literal embodiment of the state and a princely marriage set the seal upon the alliance of nations. Negotiations for peace or the conclusion of a marriage alliance being fundamentally unsuitable subjects for tragedy, it naturally fell to the lot of the comic theatre to reflect, often with satirical intent, upon the rôle of ambassador. The close connection between the theatre and the monarchy is revealed in the willingness with which members of the royal family and those of their immediate entourage would appear upon the stage, in selected private productions, and the affection in which writers such as Molière were held by the king. With Louis XIV, the theatre was a passion and as a natural corollary of this enthusiasm, the programme of theatre visits came to form a part of every ambassador's stay in Paris. We have had several occasions to remark on the growing association of the theatre with royal propaganda and the consequent emphasis placed on a diplomatic presence at chosen productions.

In reality, by attending a theatrical production of any kind, be it ballet or opera, comedy or tragedy, an ambassador himself became part of the performance through the fact of his presence. Important visitors would be seated in a prominent position, sometimes even upon the side of the stage itself, and publicly presented to the actors, producer and playwright. Pierre Potemkin, for example, was offered refreshments by the cast during the course of a performance of *Amphitryon*. Productions which an 'exotic' ambassador was known to be attending therefore attracted vast crowds and were always sold out. The unsophisticated reactions of some of these visitors formed part of the performance as far as the general public were concerned; we recall the behaviour of the Siamese at *Roland* or of the Russians at *Amadis de Gaule*. The stubborn insistence that the Siamese should visit the opera, despite their obvious reluctance and distaste, did not spring purely from a laudable desire to provide for their entertainment. The ability of the French court to attract more foreign embassies than its nearest rivals had to be publicly displayed and for this the theatre provided the ideal showcase. Since it was to be anticipated that the majority of the diplomatic corps present in Paris at any one time would sooner or later attend the theatre, regular play-going also offered a useful opportunity for each individual ambassador to note the presence or absence of another in the city and to draw conclusions about the significance of it before his

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<sup>322</sup> Raunier, *Chansonnier du XVIIIe siècle*, III, p. 263. The three tails are the horse tails flown from an Ottoman pasha's personal standard to indicate his rank – the greater the number, the higher his standing.

regular report home. For this reason alone, diplomats tended to be regular playgoers. Did the presence of an envoy from a certain power imply, for example, that the formation or rupture of an alliance was being given serious consideration by the French? The connection between diplomacy and the stage is thus a close and a natural one, but not simply for the reasons outlined above. In his treatise on diplomacy François de Callières likens the rôle of the ambassador to that of an actor:

Un Ambassadeur ressemble en quelque maniere à un Comedien, exposé sur le theatre aux yeux du Public pour y jouer de grands rôles, comme son emploi l'éleve audessus de sa condition & l'égale en quelque sorte aux Maîtres de la terre par le droit de representation qui y est attaché, & par le commerce particulier qu'il lui donne avec eux, il ne peut passer que pour un mauvais Acteur s'il n'en fait pas soutenir la dignité; mais cette obligation est l'écueil contre lequel échoient plusieurs Negociateurs, parce qu'ils ne savent pas précisément en quoi elle consiste.<sup>323</sup>

Our concern is with the 'Oriental' ambassador whose stay in France had to be of short duration because of the vast distances involved in travel. Until well into the next century, ambassadors arriving from the east held temporary appointments for the duration, either as 'ambassadeur extraordinaire' or else as 'envoyé'. Even the Ottomans did not maintain a permanent embassy in France until 1742, and they were the first oriental power to do so. We have not been dealing with the polished, urbane, permanent 'ambassadeur ordinaire', the denizen of European courts envisaged by de Callières, though many of his remarks and strictures still hold true. In nearly all of the cases that we have examined so far, whether the ambassador in question be Muscovite, Turk, African, or Siamese, there has appeared an element of what may best be described as 'culture shock' or 'dépaysement'. The free and open association of women with men to whom they were not married, the culture of 'galanterie', and above all the influence and the very real power that certain women were observed to wield, were peculiarly shocking to the oriental mindset. The participation of women in social and public life was particularly difficult to accept. The Ottoman ambassador of 1721, Mehmed Efendi, writes in his report:

In France, esteem for women prevails among men. The women can do what they want and go where they desire. To the lowest, the best gentleman would show more regard and respect than necessary. In these lands, women's commands are enforced. So much so that France is the paradise of women. They have no hardships or troubles at all - it is said that they obtain their wishes and desires without any resistance whatsoever.<sup>324</sup>

He grumbles that Paris, unlike Istanbul, always seems crowded because women never stay demurely in their homes but go around visiting from house to house, thus unnecessarily increasing the numbers on the streets. Even the Muscovite embassy of 1668, originating from what was in essence a European power, were only able to deal with this facet of French society by holding themselves aloof from it. The Tsar himself cordially disapproved of flirtation; in respectable Russian society women lived in comparative seclusion. We have seen in Chapter One how Pierre Potemkin's abstinence in the matter of women was commented upon, de Catheux writing of him, 'quelques belles dames s'étant présentées devant luy, je le priay de me dire ce qu'il en pensoit. Il me répondit qu'il en avoit prise une en son pays, et qu'il ne luy étoit plus permis de regarder assez les autres pour en pouvoir dire

<sup>323</sup> De Callières, pp. 18-19.

<sup>324</sup> Mehmed Efendi, *Sefaretnâme-i Fransa*. Quoted in Fatma Göcek, *East encounters West, France and the Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1987).

son sentiment.' Such a commendable attitude would not have found favour with the pragmatic de Callières who, warming to his theme, advises the potential diplomat that he may the more easily achieve his ends by flattery and flirtation with those women who associate themselves with powerful men:

Si l'usage du Pays où il se trouve lui donne un libre commerce avec les Dames; il ne doit pas négliger de se les rendre favorables en s'attachant à leur plaisir & à se rendre digne de leur estime, le pouvoir de leurs charmes s'étend souvent jusqu'à contribuer aux résolutions les plus importantes d'où dépendent les plus grands événements; mais en réussissant à leur plaire par sa magnificence, par sa politesse & même par sa galanterie, qu'il n'engage pas son cœur; il doit se souvenir que l'amour est d'ordinaire accompagné de l'indiscrétion & de l'impudence, & que dès qu'il se laisse assujettir aux volontés d'une belle femme, quelque sage qu'il soit, il court risque de n'être plus le maître de son secret; on a vû arriver de grands inconveniens par cette sorte de foiblesse...<sup>325</sup>

We shall see how readily this advice was to be taken by our 'Oriental' visitors and judge the extent to which the interaction between 'ambassadeur' and 'jeune ingénue' upon the stage reflects a social reality.

If the free and easy manners prevalent at the court in sexual matters, combined with the social prominence accorded to women in France, seemed shocking to the Muscovites, how much less acceptable must they have been to the bemused traveller arriving from Siam, the lands of the Ottoman Empire or Iran. Such behaviour was completely outside their cultural experience, and that is the source of so many of the 'unfortunate misunderstandings' that arose. There is a vast difference between the public and the private spheres in the Far and Middle East. New arrivals from these areas tended to react to French society in one of two ways, either a disgusted withdrawal from social interaction, as was the case with the Siamese in 1684, or else a wholehearted self indulgence in the delights on offer, as in the case of Soliman Aga or the Persian ambassador of 1715, Mehemet Riza Beg. It was these two who did so much to establish the traditional literary stereotype of the 'Oriental' for the next two centuries, with all its characteristic qualities of 'hauteur', 'cruauté' and 'lasciveté'. Soliman Aga furnished ample proof of the latter during his stay at Issy, where he and his suite drew vast quantities of admirers of the female sex. Laurent d'Arvieux's *Mémoires* confirm the assiduity with which the sensation seekers sought Soliman out:

Il recevoit les visites de quantité de gens des deux sexes, que la curiosité y attiroit de Paris & de ses environs. On le suivoit à la promenade, on le voyoit manger, prier Dieu; & il faut avouer que les Parisiens ont tort de se plaindre quand on les appelle Badauts; en vérité je n'ai jamais tant vu d'actes de Badauderie... La foule des curieux devint à la fin si grande, qu'on fut obligé de mettre des Suisses pour empêcher le désordre.<sup>326</sup>

The Ottoman ambassador's amorous proclivities provided the theme for much doggerel verse as well as many a comic situation. We are indebted to Mayolas for his depiction of 'le ministre du Grand Seigneur' enjoying the royal hospitality at Issy:

En mangeant sur un beau tapis,  
Sur ses genoux il est assis.  
Des seigneurs les plus remarquables

<sup>325</sup> De Callières, pp. 20-21.

<sup>326</sup> Laurent d'Arvieux, *Mémoires*, t. IV, p. 144-45.

Des Dames les plus agréables  
 De la Cour ou de la Cité,  
 Il est quelquefois visité,  
 Dont son Ame estant fort ravie,  
 Il confessa que la Turquie  
 Jointe avec plusieurs autre Roys  
 N'a rien de pareil aux François.<sup>327</sup>

Two months later another bulletin from the same source describes how even more ravishing admirers came flocking when Soliman moved to the Hôtel de Venise and became the willing object of their attentions:

Leur aspect et leur agrément  
 Ne luy déplaisent nullement...<sup>328</sup>

Robinet records that Soliman fell for the charms of a young Parisienne, to the extent that he attempted to purchase her from her father, suggesting that she might eventually rise to occupy the position of honour in the harem of the Sultan himself:

L'envoyé de la Porte ici  
 Ayant rencontré dans Issi  
 Entre les belles de Lutèce  
 Qui le lorgnaient illec sans cesse,  
 Une brune dont l'oeil fendant  
 A sur les coeurs grand ascendant,  
 Se fit informer en peu d'heure  
 Des qualités, noms et demeure  
 De ce charmant Objet Bourgeois.  
 Ensuite comme un franc Turquois,  
 Il la fit marchander au père,  
 Sans en faire plus de mystère,  
 Pour la conduire au Grand Seigneur,  
 L'assurant qu'elle aurait l'honneur  
 De recevoir de sa Hautesse  
 Le cher signal de sa tendresse,  
 C'est, cela s'entend, le mouchoir  
 Qui veut dire; "Bonjour, bonsoir.  
 Je désire, ô belle pouponne,  
 Que vous joignant à ma personne,  
 Nous puissions faire à communs frais,  
 Un petit sultanin tout frais."  
 Mais le bourgeois tout en colère  
 Luy respondit: lere lan lere.<sup>329</sup>

The handkerchief was the one traditionally dropped before whichever beauty the Sultan intended to honour with his presence that night. Perhaps it was this very incident that

<sup>327</sup> Rouillard I, p. 47, quoting Mayolas, *Les Continueurs de Loret...*

<sup>328</sup> Ibid.

<sup>329</sup> Robinet, *Lettres en vers...* 21 décembre 1669 (*Les continueurs de Loret*, t. III).

furnished Molière with the idea of creating his own rather more gullible 'Bourgeois', who eagerly accepts a similar offer from the sultan's son on behalf of his daughter.<sup>330</sup> Providing a theme for Molière also meant providing it for his many imitators and we have seen 'Soliman Aga' cropping up in the guise of various 'ambassadeurs' throughout this study, whether we recognised him or not, so lasting was the popularity of the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*, that it became the paradigm for all who followed. At least one anonymous prose writer also found the temptation to exploit the theme irresistible, publishing a clandestine romance entitled *Les Amours de Soliman Musta-Feraga, Envoyé de la Porte près de sa Majesté en M.DC.LXIX*. The author may very well have known Soliman personally, whom he describes as, '...pas capable d'un amusement tendre, ni d'un commerce galand, tant à cause de son âge et de sa mélancholie naturelle que des moeurs grossières de sa Nation'. According to Rouillard, the work had to be kept secret for some years, finally appearing at Grenoble in 1675. Apparently this was done to protect the reputations of certain well-known ladies, in whose conduct 'il avoit paru un peu trop de licence' and whose charms Soliman finally renounced as he left for home, protesting with some eloquence that in Turkey the institution of the Seraglio, far from banishing gallantry, refined and added piquancy to it: 'C'est cette contrainte qui sert à subtiliser les Esprits et dénouer les plus engourdis...' <sup>331</sup>

The Ardra embassy, like the Russian, was free from sexual scandal. Even the fact that Mattéo Lopés was accompanied by no less than three of his wives did not occasion great adverse comment. The first two Siamese envoys to arrive withdrew in shock from interaction with court society and were thus beyond suspicion. Kosapan, by contrast, was an experienced diplomat. He retails with gusto many of his encounters with the fair sex.

The governor's daughter [of Douai], the Mistress Repaire, seemed after our imbibing sufficiently beautiful for me to suggest she went to Siam to marry one of my sons, since, I added, he would assuredly one day be a great lord. "You need not worry," I told her, "about him taking other wives, for you are sufficiently beautiful to stop my son wanting to have others". The remark was greeted by smiles and applause; My Liege, it requires little wit to pronounce the gallantries expected of us.<sup>332</sup>

An account of this conversation also appears in Donneau de Visé, *IVe Partie*, p. 29. We may well surmise that widely publicised exchanges of this sort provided the source for the plot of one or two of our comedies.

Love and marriage, as we have remarked, are the proper concerns of comedy, though it is permissible to wonder whether the majority of the scenarios that have been set before us in the context of an 'Oriental' embassy truly warrant the suspension of disbelief by an audience. It is for us to decide for ourselves, on the strength of the evidence, if such items are reasonably in keeping with the realities of seventeenth century diplomacy and the demands of 'vraisemblance', or purely fantastical in nature. *Les Faux Moscovites* sees Lubine failing to recognise her own husband Lubin in his disguise as Russian ambassador; she treats him with the respect due to his office, addressing him as 'mon bon seigneur'. He affects indifference to women, as did Potemkin himself. Since he has no French there is no flirtation,

<sup>330</sup> *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, Act IV iii:

M. Jourdain: Le fils du Grand Turc m'honore beaucoup, et je vous prie de me mener chez lui pour en faire mes remerciements (p. 767).

<sup>331</sup> Rouillard 1, p. 47.

<sup>332</sup> Kosapan, p. 105.

the elopement of Suson is the sole reason behind the impersonation, the side issue of the divorce we have already discussed. There is no issue here of the 'ambassador' attempting to find a bride for himself or for his sovereign. In so far as concerns the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*, the son of the 'Grand Turc' arrives in person to court Lucile in the final act, there is therefore no stage embassy involved in this case.

In the *Ambassadeur d'Affrique*, it seems that a visiting ambassador will insist on marrying Lucesse. In this case, the 'ambassador' seeks a bride for himself; he is impatient, arrogant and ill tempered yet he hopes to attract her love rather than to force it, 'il m'est bien doux / d'esperer estre aymé de vous'. Lucesse has the courage to refuse him, though his very appearance is frightening. In spite of the fact that the 'ambassador' is in reality Crispin, her lover's valet, both Lucesse and her maid Beatris again fail to see through the disguise. The African ambassador in the *Mort vivant* is similarly played by the hero's valet, Gusman, and demands Stéphanie's hand in marriage for himself. Once more the heroine, Stéphanie, fails to recognise him. In keeping with the lowborn character of a valet, the dialogue in these two plays is sexually explicit. Both ambassadors in the closely related comedies profess themselves willing to lay aside their rank to marry the heroine; both are libidinous in nature and make no secret of their intentions in that direction.

In the third of our 'African' plays, *La Reine de Monomotapa*, an ambassador seeks Isabelle's hand for his king, Abu Aly Tabalispa, not on his own account. Such a scenario was not in truth too far removed from reality, for an embassy arrived from Morocco in 1699, led by Abdala Ben Aisha, to ask for the hand of a French princess of the blood royal, Mlle. de Blois, daughter of Louis XIV by Louise de la Vallière and widow of the Prince de Conti. On this occasion Muley Ismaël was rather more unsuccessful than he had been with his embassy of 1682, but given such a notorious example, there can be little wonder that the theme of marriage continued to be indissolubly linked with ambassadorial visits by the comic theatre. Once more our comedy sees a heroine, in this case Isabelle, failing to recognise either her own lover Lizandre who plays the 'ambassador' or his valet Mascarille in the familiar guise of interpreter. She realises the true identity of the youth only when she is forced to be gracious and kiss him. He addresses her gallantly, she him with respect. In these plays we note the close, warm, confidential relationship between heroine and 'suivante', master and valet as opposed to the formal, cold, power-based interchanges between the young and the parental generation. This reflects a social reality in which the upbringing of children was normally entrusted to the servant class by well to do families. Fathers were distant authoritarian figures, mothers remote; children were often sent away to the country to be reared during their early years because it was healthier than the city. The early mortality rate for women, given the rigours of childbirth in those days, meant that a man might wear out several wives; stepmothers were therefore common. Men too were at risk from war, both civil and foreign, travel was dangerous, disease endemic. Women were powerless in law, being in the position of perpetual minors, hence the existence of a legal guardian for a young girl was not so uncommon an occurrence. Living in intimate proximity with the family for many years, the trusted retainer was often far closer to the younger generation providing a kind of emotional stability. It was natural for a young man to consult his more worldly-wise valet in matters of the heart, a young girl her maid.

As for the *Comédie-Italienne*, in our first example Fatouville's Arlequin, in the guise of ambassador, demands a bride for the Emperor of the Moon but there is no scene where ambassador and heroine meet. *Le Banqueroutier* sees Pasquariel and Mezzetin in the rôle of ambassadors. They dance, sing and are joyful. Colombine is a willing participant in the plot, the pretence is to marry Isabelle to the Prince of Chimere, in reality her lover Aurelio in disguise. Her mother Eularia is not deceived, but Isabelle is completely unaware of what is going on and has to be reassured by Colombine that all is well. She is greatly impressed by

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Audience donnée à Meknès par le sultan du Maroc Moulay Ismaïl à François Pidou chevalier de Saint-Olon, ambassadeur extraordinaire de Louis XIV, 11 juin 1693 Martin Pierre Denis (1663-1742)

© Photo RMN



Les ambassadeurs de l'Empereur du Maroc : Abdala Ben Aischa, Amiral de l'Empire, Mahomet Touziris, Capitaine de vaisseaux., lieutenant de l'ambassade, Achmet Soussin, Docteur de la Loi, Secrétaire, esclaves maures, formant l'ambassade de l'Empereur du Maroc près de Louis XIV en 1699.

the courtly behaviour of the prince, who can only express himself by means of signs. Regnard's Emperor of China has heard tales of Isabelle's beauty and has sent his ambassador to court her in *Le Divorce*. She, alas, is trapped in a loveless marriage to old Sotinet and we are not enlightened as to how she might be expected to gain her freedom, unless annulment on grounds of non-consummation is a possibility. Here Arlequin appears as 'ambassador'; he is both cynical and impudent, demanding to examine her teeth to establish her age and quizzing her on the number of her children. At the same time he courts Colombine for himself. The Prince of 'Tonquin des curieux' wishes to marry Colombine and this is the reason for the arrival of the embassy in *Arlequin homme à bonne fortune*, a plot largely based on the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*. Here Arlequin plays both the prince and the ambassador, but has Isabelle's lover Octave hidden in his suite. Mezzetin is the interpreter on this occasion. The atmosphere is flirtatious, the dialogue risqué and in the end Isabelle recognises and is united with Octave. Such scenarios may seem far-fetched and inherently unlikely to the modern day audience, but they have their roots in reality for, as we know, we are in an age of arranged marriage in Europe as much as in Asia. Matrimonial alliances are concluded for reasons of finance, politics or diplomacy, rarely if ever for romance. That comes afterwards and is all too frequently sought outside wedlock by both parties.

The unfortunate behaviour of certain embassies must have played a considerable part in establishing the stereotype of the 'Oriental' ambassador. It is noteworthy that all the examples that I have just cited are derived from comedies produced in 1670 or later, following the departure of Soliman Aga. There are no occurrences of this sort in *Les Faux Moscovites* (1668), where the rôle of the ambassador is simply to preside over a divorce. We have seen how Soliman Aga clumsily attempted to purchase a young French girl for the Sultan and we may be certain that such an episode would not be allowed to pass unremarked or be quickly forgotten. The incident was rapidly transformed into literary cliché; it did much to support the popular perception of the lascivious Oriental, lending an air of reality to all those risqué tales of harem life, a genre well established since the days of the Scudéry's. Time and again our sources comment on the number of women of good birth who flocked to greet and stare at the oriental embassies. We may certainly suspect an element of sexual 'frisson' and not a few daring flirtations in many of these encounters. The arrival of the embassy from Ardra in 1670, the same year as Soliman Aga's departure from France, saw an ambassador actually accompanied by women from his seraglio. This would have done more than enough to confirm the general myth. As for the Siamese, the first embassy may have been outraged by the free and easy manners of the French in the matter of light flirtation, but "Kosapan" learnt the art of 'galanterie' fairly rapidly, however much he affects to despise it:

One day when the company was many indeed, and a circle of vivacious ladies had formed therein, we were asked why we had not brought our wives with us. We in turn asked if among them there were those who would wish to make the journey back to Siam with us, and have their husbands follow. The more coquettish asked if they could return and place themselves among our wives; we replied with pleasure, and promised them the finest apartments at our disposition. They wished to chastise me for having upwards of twenty-two wives, and I said that the usages of a country become habit, and if it were the custom of the women of France to have twenty-two husbands, they would adapt to it and find it no more curious than a Siamese man having as many wives ... We gave up our armchairs to the Princesses and served them ourselves, as befits their rank, and drank their health. They proposed a toast to my twenty-two wives, and asked me if the number was not excessive. I replied, "They were satisfied with me", and added, to one of the gentlemen present, "I could give you, Sir, the secret of having so many but I fear it would not please

your lady"... Such foolish conversation passes for great wit in France.<sup>333</sup>

Peculiarly shocking examples of this kind of thing were associated with those embassies that were exchanged between France and Persia towards the end of the reign. Diplomatic relations between France and Persia seemed fated to be dogged by scandalous behaviour of one sort or another. The first diplomatic contact was initiated by Iran in 1699; the Shah was anxious to send an ambassador to France, to establish trade relations and seek a mutually beneficial alliance against the Muscat Arabs.<sup>334</sup> The French were offered two military bases on the Gulf and substantial commercial concessions in return for troops and a naval squadron. For reasons that have never been clear, Louis was slow to respond to these overtures, and the decision to send a French ambassador to Isfahan was not taken until 1703. The Marseilles merchant Jean-Baptiste Fabre was selected to head the mission by Pontchartrain, the influential 'ministre de la Marine', with Pidou de St. Olon, Bishop of Babylon, to succeed him in the event of death or incapacity. Fabre was chosen because he had already spent many years in the Ottoman Empire and was believed to have influential contacts as well as extensive knowledge of the Levant. Unfortunately Fabre was also deeply in debt and unsuited to the position, regarding it primarily as a means of escaping his creditors. Charles de Ferriol, French ambassador to Constantinople and knowing Fabre only too well, was appalled at the appointment and put forward instead the name of his own secretary, Pierre Victor Michel. His protests were ignored, possibly because he was widely known to be conducting an affair with Fabre's wife, who had openly taken up residence in the embassy. As for Fabre himself, he was so short of cash that he had to be supported by his mistress, a certain Marie Claude Petit employed as a *croupière* at a gaming house in the Rue Mazarine. Fabre was actually reduced to borrowing money from her to equip himself for his new post. He did not set out for Persia until March 1705, accompanied by Marie Petit disguised as a man and posing as his valet.<sup>335</sup> Their route lay through the territory of the Ottoman Empire but the Grand Vizir, doubtless influenced by de Ferriol, refused to allow them to proceed. The Turks and the Persians were old enemies and the Sultan must in any case have suspected the Shah's sudden decision to seek the French alliance. Fabre and Petit were detained in Istanbul for some weeks, during which time she succeeded in scandalising the Turks by her outrageous conduct and arousing the open hostility of the Jesuit missions.

<sup>333</sup> Kosapan, p. 33-34.

<sup>334</sup> On the historical background to Mehemet Riza Beg's embassy to Louis XIV, see: Olivier Bonnerot, *La Perse dans la littérature et la pensée françaises au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1988); Blandine Bouret, "L'Ambassade persane à Paris en 1715 et son image", *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, octobre 1982, pp. 109-30; *Cambridge History of Iran, vol. VI, The Timurid and Safavid Periods*, ed. Peter Jackson and Laurence Lockhart (Cambridge, 2001); Jeanne Chaybany, *Les Voyages en Perse et la pensée Française au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Tehran, 1971); Muriel Dodds, "The Persian background of the *Lettres persanes*", *Durham University Journal*, 29, pp. 77-158; Paul Gaulot, "Un Ambassadeur persan à la cour de Louis XIV", *Revue hebdomadaire*, LI, 1896, pp. 728-39; Ahmed Gunny, *Images of Islam in Eighteenth Century Writings* (London, 1996); Maurice Herbette, *Une Ambassade persane sous Louis XIV* (Paris, 1907); M. H. Karimi, "Persia in the writings of Montesquieu", *Durham University Journal*, 69:2, pp. 231-37; Anne Kroell, « Billon de Cancerille et les relations franco-persanes au début du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle » *Le Monde iranien et l'Islam*, 1974, vol. ii, pp. 127-56 and *Louis XIV, la Perse et Mascate [Le Monde iranien et l'Islam, 1976-77, vol.iv]* (Paris, 1977); Laurence Lockhart, *The Fall of the Safavi dynasty and the Afghan occupation of Persia, 1634-1730* (Cambridge, 1958), henceforward: Lockhart; Francis Richard, "Aux origines de la connaissance de la langue persane en France", *Luqman, Annales des Presses universitaires d'Iran*, 3e année, 1, automne-hiver 1986-87, pp. 23-42; Roger Savory, *Iran under the Safavids* (Cambridge, 1980); Sir Percy Sykes, *A History of Persia*, 2 vols. (London, 1970).

<sup>335</sup> On Marie Petit's adventures, see Henri Aurenche and Louis Coquet, *La Brelandière ambassadrice du Roi Soleil* (Paris, 1934); Léo Claretie, *Marie Petit. Roman d'aventures, 1705* (Paris, 1904); Yvonne Grès, *La Belle Brelandière, ambassadeur en Perse* (Paris, 1973); L. Lockhart, "Marie Petit's Persian Adventure", *The Asiatic Review*, July 1946; René-Alphonse-Marie de Maulde la Clavière, *Les Mille et une Nuits d'une ambassadrice de Louis XIV* (Paris, 1896).

Eventually the Ottomans gave way and the two of them were allowed to proceed, reaching the Persian frontier town of Erivan in January 1706. Here they were welcomed as guests of the governor, Muhammad Khan, while word was sent to inform Shah Sultan Husain of their arrival. Unfortunately, the Khan became deeply infatuated with Marie and it seems that his affections were returned. Without warning, Fabre fell violently ill and died shortly before the couple were due to depart for Tabriz, where the court was in temporary residence. It was widely believed that Fabre had been poisoned.<sup>336</sup> Marie now proclaimed herself leader of the mission, giving herself the title of "Déléguee des Princesses de France" and taking possession of Fabre's papers and personal effects as well as Louis's valuable gifts to the Shah. Nobody dared to stop her, 'elle se faisoit craindre et ... menaçoit tout le monde de baton et des fers, attendu la protection du Kan, qu'elle s'étoit attirée pour avoir esté plusieurs fois dans son harem'.<sup>337</sup> All that could be done was to write urgently to Pidou de St. Olon, but it was in the depths of winter; the bishop was old and infirm and could not travel.

Meanwhile, the news reached de Ferriol in Constantinople. He accordingly sent Michel to take charge of the embassy and return Mlle. Petit to Istanbul under close arrest. As luck would have it, Michel arrived too late; the little group had left for Tabriz before he even reached the Persian frontier. The French mission by now comprised Marie Petit herself, Fabre's fourteen year old son Joseph, awarded the title of 'Elchi' (ambassador) by Marie, Fabre's nephew, Jacques and the embassy's chaplain, the Jesuit Léonard Mosnier, whose life Marie had saved by pleading on her knees after the Khan had condemned him to execution. She had also acquired the notorious Armenian renegade Imam Quli Beg as interpreter.<sup>338</sup> Travelling light, Michel caught up with them at Nakhichevan but was unable to detain Marie, her Persian lover having provided her with a substantial escort and bodyguard. Forestalled at every turn, Michel went on ahead to Tabriz where he sought the advice of the Capuchin mission. It was agreed by all that the honour and dignity of France were being seriously compromised by Marie's escapades and that she could not possibly be left to represent herself as heading the French embassy. Imagine the insult of sending a woman of a certain class to negotiate with a Muslim ruler accorded semi-divine status by his followers. However great their indignation, Michel remained powerless to act, for Marie soon attracted the amorous attentions of the powerful Khan of Tabriz and put herself under his protection, threatening to turn Muslim and have all missionaries expelled from Persia when Michel demanded that she hand the official presents for the Shah over to him. All he could do in the end was to write to the Shah explaining that he had orders to arrest Marie and escort her back to France for trial, denouncing her as an impostor. The letter naturally failed to arrive. Since Marie was in possession both of Louis's gifts and of Fabre's letters of accreditation, the Persians concluded that it was Michel who was the impostor and refused him access to the Shah. He was left with little option but to borrow money from an English merchant and return to Erivan, where he was thrown into prison for his pains on the orders of Imam Quli Beg.

As for Marie Petit, at least according to her own account, she was admitted to the royal harem, making it appear [falsely] that she had become the wife of the Shah.<sup>339</sup> There was also a story going the rounds that she had attempted to marry Vakhtang VI, king of Georgia, during a short stay en route in Tiflis. Perhaps foolishly, given the hostility that she had aroused amongst the missions, Marie agreed to return to France, accompanying a Persian delegation, with the title of 'ambadress of the princesses of Persia to the princesses of France'. On her way home in 1707, however, she became gravely ill and fearing herself to be on the point of death, asked to be left in Erivan at the Capuchin mission. Here she sought

<sup>336</sup> See Pidou de St. Olon, letter from Erivan, 9th July 1707, in *A Chronicle of the Carmelites*, I, pp. 535-36.

<sup>337</sup> *MS Fonds français 7200*, B.N. Paris, p. 2; quoted in Lockhart.

<sup>338</sup> He was well known in Europe as a confidence trickster, styling himself the 'Comte de Zagly'.

<sup>339</sup> AEP, ii, fols. 282 b, quoted in Lockhart.

forgiveness from Michel, who had recently been released from prison. Now entirely on her own, under orders to leave Persia, she was reduced to asking her old enemy for an escort and her travelling expenses back to France. Completely lacking in generosity, he cheated her, extracting a bond for 12,000 livres together with all Fabre's papers in exchange for a mere 200 écus. His influential patron, de Ferriol, hated her to the extent that he wrote to Michel, 'Si vous l'aviez tuée, ce ne serait qu'une p..... de moins'. These tactics meant that in the end it was Michel who was graciously received in audience as French ambassador by Shah Sultan Husain in June 1708. He arrived back in France in August 1709, in time to play a leading part in Marie's trial, together with Père Mosnier. She, alas, had been denounced by de Ferriol even before her disembarkation at Marseilles and was imprisoned under 'lettre de cachet'. The prosecution demanded burning at the stake in expiation of her crimes. Not only had this extraordinary woman gravely embarrassed the French crown by causing scandal abroad, but she also stood accused of involvement in the poisoning of Fabre; of the deaths of several Frenchmen; of causing the arrest and bastinado of certain missionaries; of misappropriating a number of Louis's presents to the Shah, which were never recovered; of giving herself false titles and of renouncing Christianity to adopt the Muslim faith.

From the beginning, Marie was badly treated in prison. Yet her story must have been considered worth the telling, for many society ladies came to visit her and tried to make her life a little easier. Marie herself used her time of imprisonment to write her memoirs, but these have since disappeared. It seems that they were confiscated by the prison authorities and sent to Pontchartrain. They must have made interesting reading, for Pontchartrain in turn passed them on to the comic playwright Alain-René Le Sage with an invitation to see what he could make of them. The theme would have been an appropriate one. Le Sage was known to be interested in matters to do with the Orient and had at one stage (in 1708) co-operated with the great Arabist Galland on his translation of the *Mille et une Nuits*. Le Sage having earlier trained in the law, Pontchartrain also entrusted him with the relevant legal documents and gave specific instructions that he should interview Marie in person. Oddly, after the visit was made, Le Sage systematically destroyed all his notes and the tale was never told. A very high proportion of his 'opéra-comiques' that were subsequently written for the Foires have an oriental intrigue, though the majority of them, coming into the next reign, fall outside the scope of this study. Marie's extravagant adventures may have provided the inspiration for various episodes, but what a subject for the comic theatre was lost. He himself says in his letter of refusal (which is still extant) that it was primarily because he was fearful of implicating de Ferriol, Michel and the Jesuits, making powerful enemies if his version seemed to portray her in a favourable light, as he would wish to do in all fairness, now that he had met her.<sup>340</sup> De Ferriol, having been primarily responsible for Marie's arrest, himself became the subject of a notorious scandal, having purchased the beautiful slave girl Aïssé in Istanbul and brought her back to France to set up house. As for Marie Petit, the reader may be glad to know that although the prosecution dragged on and despite the weight of the evidence against her, she was eventually pardoned and freed in 1713 on the orders of Pontchartrain orders, though her health was broken as a result of her imprisonment and she died in poverty around the year 1720. Certainly she was alive in 1715 and able to greet the Persian ambassador Mehemet Riza Beg, whose acquaintance she had made whilst in Erivan.<sup>341</sup> Such

<sup>340</sup> Published in L. Clarétie, *Le Sage, romancier, d'après de nouveaux documents*, pp. 53-55 (Paris, 1890).

<sup>341</sup> The *Journal historique sur les matières du temps* mused « Riza Beg est le nom de famille de l'ambassadeur persan. Si de ce nom on voulait tirer une anagramme française en retranchant la lettre g, on trouverait le mot *bizarre* et sans faire nulle application de ce mot au caractère respectable dont ce seigneur persan est revêtu, on trouvera que le terme de *bizarre* convient assez à plusieurs circonstances qui se sont passées à son occasion par la différence qu'il y a des manières de son pays avec ce qui se pratique ordinairement dans les plus illustres cours



*L'entrée de l'Ambassadeur de Perse, à Paris, vue dans la Place Roiale, le 7 Févr. 1715.*  
Gravure sur cuivre anonyme, vers 1715. 435 x 555 mm. B.N., Est. : Hennin, t. LXXXV, no. 7497 et Qb I 1715. Musée Carnavalet. Cabinet des Dessins du Louvre, Coll. Rothschild.

L'Ambassadeur de Perse arrive dans Paris.  
Crainte qu'à la renverse son Excellence tombât.  
Sur un cheval d'Espagne il était bien monté.  
Comme sous Charlemagne l'on vit pareille entré.  
Du jeudi à dix heures, M. de Matignon.  
Avec l'introducteur furent dans sa maison.  
En pompeux équipage suivis de leur laquais.  
Avec Messieurs leurs pages qui avaient des plumets...  
En habit manifique la marche commença.  
Mais par malheur tragique, la pluie sur eux tomba.  
Adieu la mascarade, adieu les beaux habits.  
Ce n'est plus ambassade, ce sont de vrais chien-lits.

*Chansonnier Clairambault, 1711-1715, t. 10. p. 483.*

was the eccentricity of the latter's behaviour and the paucity of his presents to the king, that he was suspected to be an impostor and Marie Petit was closely interrogated regarding him. Happily she was able to confirm his identity.

Mehemet Riza Beg, whose embassy arrived in Paris a few short weeks before Louis's death, was, like Soliman Aga before him and the Siamese mandarins of 1684, a relatively minor official and not a career diplomat. He was a last minute, spur of the moment, *ad hoc* appointment, because the duly accredited ambassador Mirza Sadek refused to go, fearing palace intrigues against him in his absence, the Shah thereupon ordering him in a fit of ill-temper to find his own replacement. The office held by Mehemet Riza Beg as Kalantar of Erivan being roughly equivalent in rank to the chief of police in a provincial town in France, he was out of his depth and completely unsuited to the rôle that he was suddenly called upon to play. His depiction in contemporary French literature, as for example in de l'Hostelfort's *Amanzolide, nouvelle historique et galante qui contient les aventures secrètes de Mehemed-Riza-Beg, Ambassadeur du Sophi de Perse à la Cour de Louis-le-Grand en 1715*, and Joseph Bonnet's epistolary novels, the *Lettre écrite à Musala, homme de loy à Hispaham* (1716) and the *Seconde lettre écrite à Musala, homme de loy à Hispaham. De Louis XIV, de l'ambassadeur du Roy de Perse...* (s.l.n.d.) very closely mirrors the literary portrayals of Soliman Aga some forty years earlier. Even as late as the 1960s Riza Beg makes an appearance as a romantic hero in Sergeanne Golon's *Angélique et le Roi*, a modern day 'bodice ripper' in which the figure of the Persian Ambassador Bakhtiari Beg is in truth an amalgam of himself and Soliman Aga. The case of the Persian ambassador, who was in his fifties and neither young nor handsome to judge from his portraits, is a rather odd example of the vogue for oriental men amongst women of fashion.

It was fitting that the Sun King's reign should end with a last 'ambassade d'éclat' from the land of the Lion and the Sun. In contrast to Soliman Aga, who had come when Louis was at the height of his power and glory, the Persian embassy arrived at the end of the reign in 1715, when the king was already gravely ill. The unexpected arrival of the Persians provided a most welcome distraction for the court, from what had become a palace of gloom and mourning. It was a reminder of the days of glory when Louis had been at the height of his powers and popularity, courted by all the world:

...le Roi s'en fit une grande fête, et Pontchartrain lui en fit fort sa cour. Il fut accusé d'avoir créé cette ambassade, en laquelle en effet il ne parut rien de réel, et que toutes les manières de l'ambassadeur démentirent, ainsi que sa misérable suite et la pauvreté des présents qu'il apporta. Nulle instruction ni pouvoir du Roi de Perse, ni d'aucun de ses ministres. C'étoit un espèce d'intendant ... que Pontchartrain travestit en ambassadeur, et dont le Roi presque seul demeura la dupe... Pontchartrain n'avoit rien oublié pour flatter le Roi, lui faire accroire que que cette ambassade ramenoit l'apogée de son ancienne gloire, en un mot le jouer impudemment pour lui plaire. Personne déjà n'en étoit plus la dupe que ce monarque.<sup>342</sup>

Some of us may well believe that Pontchartrain meant to do the old king a kindness in flattering his vanity a little. We must remember that Saint-Simon was no friend of the minister, whom he goes on to castigate as 'ce détestable cyclope', nor was he an admirer of Louis XIV.<sup>343</sup> It was grist to the mill to depict minister, embassy and king alike with a

de l'Europe. » Tome XXII, avril 1715. Maurice Herbette, *Une Ambassade Persane sous Louis XIV* p. 229 (Paris, 1907), henceforward: Herbette.

<sup>342</sup> Louis de Rouvroy, duc de Saint-Simon, *Mémoires*, t.IV, 1712-15, éd. Gonzague Truc, Pléiade edition pp. 631 and 633 (Paris, 1952).

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.* p. 891.



Mehemed Rizabeg, nommé par  
le Sultan Hussein Sophy Roy de  
Perse, pour Ambassadeur de  
Perse, en France en 1715.

Portrait de Mehemed Riza Beg. Gravure sur cuivre anonyme, 1716. frontispice, p. 1 dans *Amanzotide, nouvelle historique et galante qui contient les aventure secrètes de Mehemed-Riza-Beg, ambassadeur du Sophi de Perse, à la cour de Louis-le-Grand, en 1715*, Paris, 1716. Avec la lettre suivante : *Mehemed Rizabeg, nommé par le Sultan Hussein Sophy Roy de Perse, pour Ambassadeur de Perse, en France en 1715.* 120 x 65 mm. B. N. Impr. : Y2 6946 (in-12). [B.B. 130]

jaundiced eye. There can be no doubt whatsoever that the embassy was genuine, despite the waspish diarist's dismissive comments: 'Le Roi, à qui on la donna toujours pour véritable, et qui fut presque le seul de sa cour qui le crût de bonne foi, se trouva extrêmement flatté d'une ambassade de Perse sans se l'être attirée par aucun envoi. Il en parla souvent avec complaisance...' <sup>344</sup> The official audience, 'de la dernière magnificence', was held in the great gallery at Versailles on the 7<sup>th</sup> February. The occasion was immortalised for posterity, on Louis's own orders, by the painter Coypel who was stationed at the steps of the throne. Saint-Simon tells us in a homely detail that the ailing Louis could not resist watching Riza Beg's arrival from the window of his private apartments: 'Les cours, les toits, l'avenue, fourmilloient de monde, à quoi le Roi s'amusa fort par ses fenêtres, et y prit grand plaisir en attendant l'ambassadeur'. <sup>345</sup> Pontchartrain's assessment of the situation was the correct one. The king had rallied sufficiently to rise from his sick-bed, because it was his wish to greet the new ambassador standing unsupported. As on that long ago occasion in 1669, when he donned it to bedazzle Soliman Aga, the Roi-Soleil wore the famous diamond covered doublet, but he was a mere shadow of his former self:

Il avoit un habit d'étoffe or et noir, avec l'Ordre par-dessus...son habit étoit garni des plus beaux diamants de la couronne ; il y en avait pour douze millions cinq cent mille livres; il ployoit sous le poids, et parut fort cassé, maigri et très méchant visage. <sup>346</sup>

It had been intended that the audience de congé should be equally magnificent, but the king's health had markedly deteriorated over the intervening months. Louis was to die within three weeks of Riza Beg's departure. Saint-Simon tells us:

Le mardi 13 août, il fit son dernier effort pour donner, en revenant de la messe, où il [se] fit porter, l'audience de congé, debout et sans appui, à ce prétendu ambassadeur de Perse. Sa santé ne lui permet pas les magnificences qu'il s'étoit proposées comme à sa première audience; il se contenta de le recevoir dans la pièce du trône, et il n'y eut rien de remarquable. Ce fut la dernière action publique du roi... Cette audience, qui fut assez longue, fatigua fort le Roi. Il résista en rentrant chez lui à l'envie de se coucher... Il envoya le lendemain force présents et quelques pierreries à ce bel ambassadeur... <sup>347</sup>

Widely separated in time, the Persian and Ottoman embassies have much in common. For the most part, the visitors largely followed the same itinerary, with the mandatory visits to the Opéra, the Comédie, the Gobelins, the Tuileries and the normal tourist sights in Paris. Like Soliman Aga before him, Riza Beg affected to disdain the civic honours offered him on his progress through the provinces, and gave ample evidence of dissatisfaction with his reception at Court. Both men exploited their position as ambassador for personal profit, both made completely unreasonable demands of their hosts, both threatened violence when these were unsatisfied. Both were under suspicion at one time or another of imposture. The gifts that Riza Beg brought were parsimonious in the extreme, consisting solely of 'cent quatre perles fort médiocres, deux cents turquoises fort vilaines, et deux boîtes d'or pleines de baume de mumie, qui est rare, sort d'un rocher renfermé dans un antre, et se congèle un peu par la suite des temps ; on le dit merveilleux pour les blessures'. <sup>348</sup> The offering was so paltry, from one sovereign to another, that suspicions of malversation were aroused, though

<sup>344</sup> Ibid. p. 631.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid. p. 632.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid. p. 632.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid. pp. 878-79.

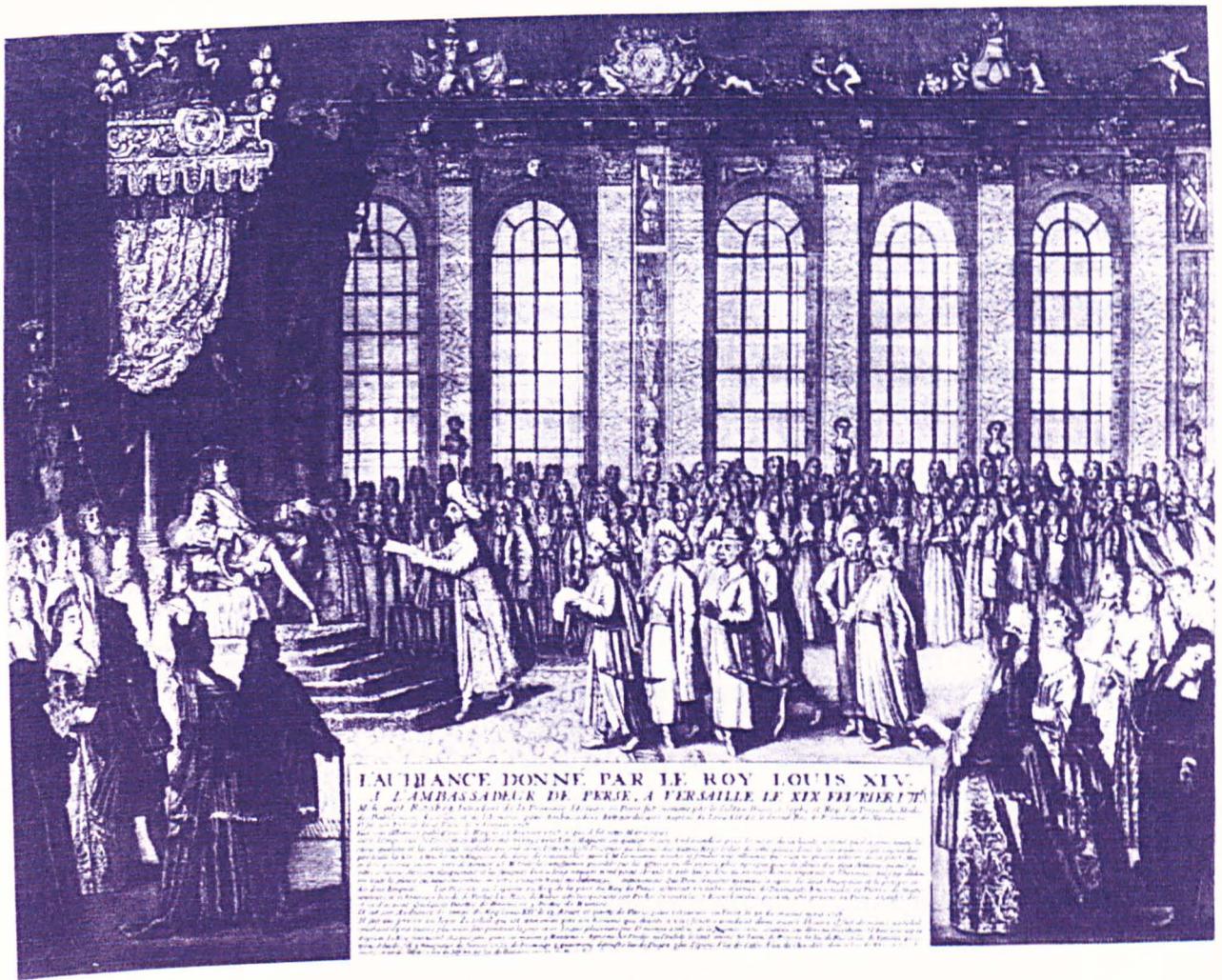
<sup>348</sup> Ibid. p. 633.

The 'Oriental' Ambassador in 17<sup>th</sup> Century French Comedy.



Arrivée de *Mehemet Riza Beg* à Versailles, le 19 février 1715. Gravure sur cuivre anonyme, vers 1715...283 x 193 mm. B.N, Est. : Hennin, t. LXXXV, no. 7505 et Qb 1 1715. [B.B.117-18]

The 'Oriental' Ambassador in 17<sup>th</sup> Century French Comedy.



Réception de *Mehemet Riza Beg* à Versailles, le 19 fév. 1715. Gravure sur cuivre anonyme, éditée par Langlois, vers 1715. Au-dessous, dans la marge: *A Paris chez Langlois, maistre Peintre; sur le petit Pont, à la Coupe d'Or, avec Privilege du Roy.* 550 x 440 mm. B.N., Est.: Hennin, t. LXXXV, no. 7507 et AA3 Langlois (Jacques). [B.B. 122-3]

Louis himself appeared to notice nothing.<sup>349</sup> Both Turk and Persian, as we have already noted, inspired some rather dubious works of fiction. The Persians were as much the objects of 'badauderie' as the Turks had been, though with more reason. When he was taken to the Opéra for a performance of Quinault's *Amadis de Gaule*, Riza Beg insisted on behaving as though he were at a private performance, sitting on cushions and a mattress together with his interpreters, smoking his pipe and calling for tea and coffee. He even invited two of the dancers who had particularly pleased him to accompany him back to his lodgings, promising them a gift of sable furs in return for their favours.<sup>350</sup> On returning to the Opéra a few days later for a performance of *Bellérophon* and noticing that the same two girls were wearing hats made from those very furs in an effort to please him, though he had meant them for mufflers, he made the girls a further present of gold coins and Persian brocade. Riza Beg did not, as in Soliman's case, clumsily attempt to purchase a young Parisienne, but was himself the object of pursuit of a certain Mlle. d'Épinay. This seventeen year old became so enamoured of him that she allowed herself to be smuggled out of France in an ornamental chest with air holes (ostensibly containing devotional literature and therefore not subject to investigation), determined to accompany her lover back to Isfahan, despite her mother's attempts to appeal to the law and make her a ward of court. Unfortunately, it was widely rumoured that the outraged parent had herself been seduced by the ambassador and that this was the source of her ire.

Like that of Soliman Aga some forty-five years earlier, Mehemet Riza Beg's mission ran into difficulties largely because of the envoy's own destructive personality. His official escort, François Pidou de Saint-Olon, brother of the bishop of Babylon and 'gentilhomme ordinaire de la chambre', was afraid of him, writing in his report to the marquis de Torcy, secrétaire d'État des Affaires étrangères:

Il se passé tous les jours ici des scènes nouvelles et si extraordinaires de la part de notre ambassadeur qu'il n'y a pas de patience, si complaisante soit-elle, qu'elles ne mettent à bout ... On ne sait comment s'y prendre pour le contenter: si on lui accorde ce qu'il demande, il le reçoit avec dédain; si l'on y hésite un moment, il entre en fureur et ce n'est plus un homme. L'opium, dont il use, le met quelquefois en un si dangereux état qu'on le peut regarder dans ce temps-là comme une espèce de fou qui mériterait plutôt d'être enfermé que traité en ambassadeur.<sup>351</sup>

There were many such incidents. He provoked a riot by violently kicking a young girl who had wanted to look more closely at his diamonds and setting his servants on the onlookers when they protested. At La Bresle his lodgings were not to his liking and he tried to establish himself in the local church, which had to be barricaded against him. In passing through Moulins, Riza Beg came upon the corpse of a criminal who had been recently broken on the wheel. After contemplating the spectacle for some time, he demanded that an execution be laid on for his entertainment. On being told that there were no more condemned prisoners, he proffered one of his own servants for the privilege, flying into such a terrible rage and bellowing like a bull when this was refused that he literally made himself ill. He refused to

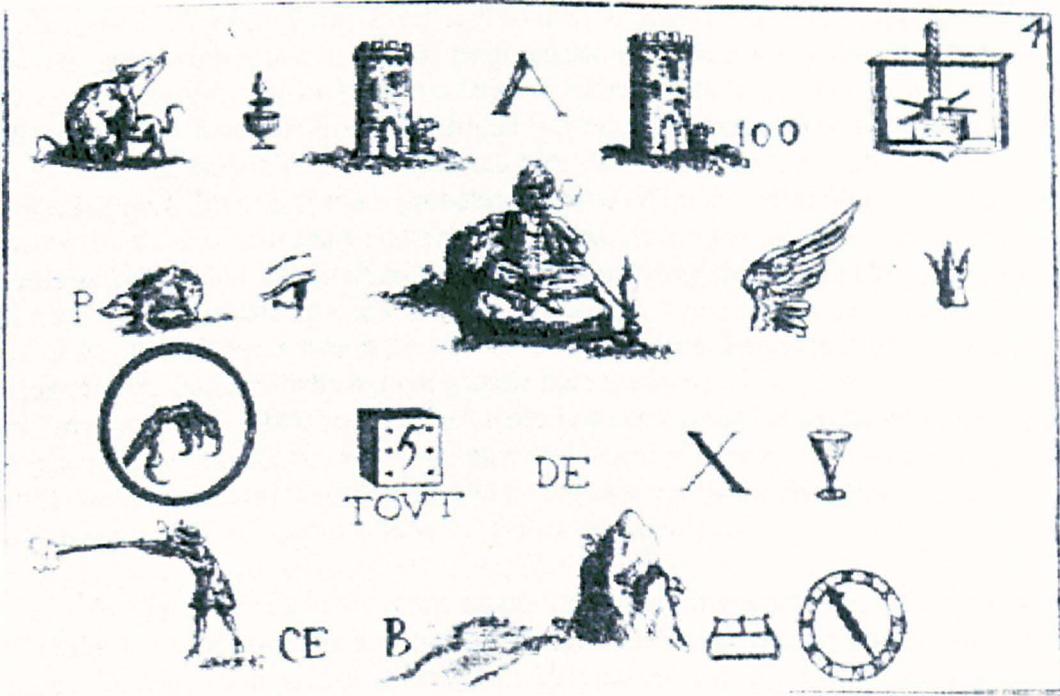
<sup>349</sup> Many people, including Saint-Simon and Montesquieu, believed him to be an impostor: 'Il parait ici un personnage travesti en ambassadeur de Perse qui se joue insolemment des deux plus grands rois du monde. Il apporte au monarque des Français des presents que le nôtre ne saurait donner à un roi d'Imirette ou de Géorgie et par sa lâche avarice il a flétri la majesté des deux empires' [Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, no. XCI, ed. P. Vernière, p. 189 (Paris, 1960)]. 'Momia' was a rare medicament highly valued as a panacea throughout the Middle East. Though the gift was unappreciated in France, it was in fact a costly one.

<sup>350</sup> Herbette, pp. 50-51.

<sup>351</sup> AE Perse, I, 3, fos 194 et sq., quoted in Herbette, p. 59.



Le repas de *Mehemet Riza Beg*. Gravure sur cuivre anonyme, éditée chez Guérard, vers 1715. 300 x 200 mm. B. N., Est. : Qb 1 1715. « On étendit devant lui une nappe d'étoffe d'or et vert, dont les bordures étaient de cramoisi et or ; et on mit un cabaret de la Chine, sur lequel étaient son pain, qui est comme une grande galette; trois grands plats de riz à l'eau, avec du mouton et du safran, qu'il mange sans cuiller ni fourchette; et 10 ou 12 autres sortes de plats, apprêtés par son cuisinier. Les ragoûts étaient des andouillettes de viande au sucre, enveloppées dans des poires et du beurre: il mange des confitures avec de la viande et du fromage. Il fit passer par honneur tous les plats devant les personnes qu'il avait invitées; et après avoir bu dans un grand vase de porcelaine (comme sont aussi tous les plats) il l'envoya à la table, afin que chacun bût à la ronde dans le même vase. » (La Quintessence des Nouvelles..., 7 février 1715). [B.B. 126-27]



L'Ambassadeur et les Dames de Paris, no. 4 dans une feuille de rébus. Eau-forte par J.-B. Oudry. La clef signifie : «Les Dames, tour à tour, s'empressaient pour voir l'Ambassadeur de Perse la pipe à la bouche, assis sur un carreau les pieds croissés ; elles dansèrent en rond dans le dessein surtout de divertir ce beau monsieur ». 101 x 160 mm. B.N., Est.: Db 23 fol., p. 131 (Robert-Dumesnil, no. 17). [B.B.127]

make his formal entry into Paris on the agreed date because of an unfavourable horoscope and further tried to insist that he should be given the exclusive use of the king's own coach on this occasion, claiming (falsely) that his religion forbade him to sit in close proximity to a Christian. Only the baron de Breteuil, official 'introduceur des ambassadeurs', could deal with his outbursts, though Riza Beg attacked him with a sabre and had also threatened him with a loaded gun. Despite or more probably because of his dreadful reputation, Riza Beg attracted more than his fair share of female attention, making considerable inroads amongst the 'grisette' population. De Breteuil noted that even during the stay in Charenton, coaches would form a queue outside the ambassador's lodgings. Once comfortably lodged in the official ambassadors' residence in the Rue de Tournon, Riza Beg actually held separate receptions for the ladies at which, laying aside his religious scruples for the occasion, he was the only man present. Coffee and sherbert would be served and he would sit in the middle of them upon his Persian carpets, smoking the ever present pipe from which he refused to be parted. It was only natural that there should be much speculation about these sessions in the press. The *Journal de Verdun* recounts the following anecdote:

Une assez jolie fille de la moyenne reputation fut offrir ses services à l'ambassadeur. On lui fit faire la proposition par son interprète. Son Excellence répondit qu'il trouvait la femme tellement à son goût qu'elle n'avait qu'à passer dans une chambre voisine où l'un de ses gens lui couperait la tête pour la porter en Perse comme une rareté française. Il n'en fallut pas davantage pour faire prendre la fuite à la donzelle et à l'entremetteuse.<sup>352</sup>

From what was known of his character, it was not worth taking the risk that he had been jesting.

The most assiduous attenders at these all-female gatherings were a certain Mme. Roussy and her young daughter, the marquise d'Épinay. The girl soon became a particular favourite and the pair of them fell into the habit of taking their meals with Riza Beg, often staying as late as midnight or two o'clock in the morning unchaperoned. During the day they could be seen openly removing their footwear and reclining on the cushions of the ambassador's private bedchamber, just as in the popular prints of an oriental seraglio, open to the view of any casual visitor. After 8pm, when the outside doors were locked, mother and daughter remained alone with Riza Beg in shameless fashion, though they knew not a word of Persian, nor he of French. Poor Breteuil, forced to live in close proximity with Riza Beg, found this rather delicate situation difficult to deal with, the more particularly since Riza Beg was also defrauding the king to pay for his carnal pleasures. He comments sourly:

Joignez à cela l'horreur naturelle qu'a une chrétienne de se livrer aux transports amoureux d'un mahométan. Pour moi j'ai vu cent fois ce commerce sans pouvoir le concevoir; cependant la mère que l'avidité de l'argent avait engagée dans une commerce si indigne, ne trouvait pas trop de quoi se satisfaire. L'ambassadeur ne pouvait lui donner que ce qu'il épargnait sur les 500 francs qu'il touchait du roi tous les jours. La vérité est qu'il faisait mourir de faim ses domestiques, pour fournir à cette mère qui, suivant les dires des gens qui étaient auprès de Mehemet Riza Beg, n'a pas tiré plus de 15,000 ou 16,000 francs de lui, somme modique pour tant de beauté et pour une aventure si affreuse. Il y avait cent hommes d'affaire à Paris qui lui en eussent donné dix fois davantage, et l'infamie en eût été beaucoup moins publique et moins grande.<sup>353</sup>

<sup>352</sup> Tome XXII, avril 1715, quoted in Herbette, p. 224.

<sup>353</sup> De Breteuil, *Mémoires*; préface, notes et commentaires par Evelyne Lever (Paris, 1992). Quoted in Herbette, pp. 227-28.

Both ambassadors provided the subject for many an engraving, so we possess comprehensive pictorial as well as literary records. Each returned to comparative obscurity, Soliman Aga to resume his proper post in the Sultan's household but Mehemet Riza Beg to die by his own hand. Having deceived the Shahinshah and caused that monarch a certain amount of embarrassment, Riza Beg preferred suicide to the certitude of the bowstring on his return to Isfahan. Mlle. d'Épinay promptly found consolation by marrying his brother in lieu. Perhaps the ambassador might have found some small consolation in his misfortunes, had he known that he was to inspire one of the greatest of French writers. Montesquieu is widely believed to have taken Riza Beg as his model for Uzbek in the *Lettres persanes*, an epistolary novel in the 'Turkish Spy' tradition. Marana had previously drawn upon the controversial figure of Soliman Aga. Our two ambassadors are linked full circle.

The prospect for scandal was thus for good reason closely connected with ambassadorial visits, particularly those from the Middle East. Society ladies, fascinated by the mysterious glamour of the Orient, vied in calling upon a new ambassador, offering a constant source of temptation to those unused to female company in such abundance. Soliman Aga's amorous escapades were surpassed only by the adventures of Mehemet Riza Beg. We find our comic ambassadors similarly linked with romantic interest. Their libidinous natures are clearly indicated, as demonstrated by the following extracts from *Le Mort vivant*:

GUSMAN.- Je sçai que je m'abaisse;  
 Mais l'esprit le plus ferme est sujet à foiblesse...  
 Si c'est une folie, il en est des plus fous.  
 Sur tout, à Stéphanie étalez l'Ambassade;  
 Poussez lui des soupirs, affectez la boutade,  
 Et faites-lui sçavoir par un terme attractif,  
 Que l'honneur de ma Couche est un bien sensitif (Acte 2, sc. ii).

GUSMAN.- Mais si pour m'obliger vous vouliez vous resoudre  
 A m'aimer tant soit peu, nous pourrions en découdre,  
 Et dés ce même jour l'un & l'autre conjoints  
 A grossir notre race appliquer tous nos soins.  
 LAZARILLE *bas*.- Quel brutal !

The comic theatre is in little doubt that no innocent and impressionable young girl could hope to escape unscathed from the presence of one of our 'Oriental' ambassadors. Far from being unrealistic, our comic playwrights are if anything restrained in their portrayal.

Plays with ever more exotic oriental themes proliferated in the following reign, amongst them many from the pen of Alain-René Le Sage. In the first volume of Le Sage and d'Orneval's *Théâtre de la Foire* published in 1737 (the only volume where the productions of the Foires fall within the reign of Louis XIV and therefore within our remit), there are five comedies of substantial oriental interest. *Arlequin Roy de Serendip* is the earliest of these, playing at the Foire Saint-Germain in 1713. Arlequin is shipwrecked on the coast of Serendip. This is the present day island of Sri Lanka, at the time a Buddhist kingdom largely controlled by the Dutch and the Portuguese, though our comedy features a Grand Vizir, eunuchs and a serail in what is obviously intended to represent a Muslim state. There is no ambassador, but the play is remarkable for its extended use of jargon. *Arlequin invisible*, produced at the Foire Saint-Laurent of the same year, also has an oriental setting, the palace of the 'Roy de Chine'. I should note here that there were two 'foires' held in Paris each year, the Foire Saint-Germain from the 3<sup>rd</sup> February until Easter Sunday, and the Foire Saint-Laurent from the 9<sup>th</sup> August until the end of September. From 1713 until the eventual merger

with the Comédie-Italienne in 1762, the Théâtre de la Foire had permission to stage comedies interspersed with songs, the beginnings of the 'opéra-comique'. There was bitter rivalry between the Théâtre de la Foire and the Comédie-Française, who tried unsuccessfully to maintain a monopoly in the face of the greater popularity of the Foires. In 1714 there were again two plays produced of Middle Eastern interest, *La Foire de Guibray* sees Arlequin and Scaramouche disguised as Arabs, playing members of an unlikely troupe of Arabian actors arriving to give a performance at Falaise. The somewhat politically incorrect *Arlequin Mahomet* is set in the cities of Surate and Basra; Arlequin plays a false Mahomet and the romantic hero is a Persian prince. This play is remarkable for the accuracy of its local colour and detail. Both of these played at the Foire Saint-Laurent. *Arlequin Sultane favorite* followed at the Foire Saint-Germain in 1715. Set in the sérail of the Grand Seigneur this play features the Grand Turk himself. One of the characters is listed as a 'Bostangi', the very office held by Soliman Aga. Attributed to a 'Monsieur le T\*\*', the play is once more very accurate on points of detail. *Arlequin Hulla* (vol. 2), a story of divorce and remarriage set in the Levant, reveals a considerable knowledge of Muslim law on the part of its author. All of these plays have substantial Oriental interest and are evidence of the lasting value of the author's collaboration with Galland. We can only speculate as to the extent to which they were also influenced by the anecdotes of Marie Petit; I suggest that her input may well have been substantial, given much of the subject matter. Unfortunately for our present purpose none of these feature an ambassador and only *Arlequin Roy de Serendip* exploits the use of jargon as a comic device. They therefore fall outside our remit and must remain the object of a later study.

Such had been the impact of Soliman Aga, the Turks were to remain the personification of all things oriental to the vast majority of theatre-goers for a generation. It could hardly be otherwise, since Molière had immortalised the events of 1669-70 in the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*. The 'lascivious Turk' persisted as a favourite motif and a stock comic stereotype until well on into the next reign, whilst the Siamese passed into the realms of philosophy and aphorism, this despite the fact that no formal Ottoman embassy was received in France until that led by Saïd Mehmed in 1742. Shifts in diplomatic focus towards the further east, with the slow decline of the Ottoman Empire, failed entirely to displace the image of the Turk upon the stage as the Oriental *par excellence*. Thus it is that as late as November 1691 the 'Oriental' ambassador appearing in Delosme de Monchenay's *Le Phénix* is still characterised as a Turk. A typical offering from the Comédie-Italienne, *Le Phénix* consists of a short series of French scenes outside their proper Italian framework and therefore seemingly disconnected; some are in prose, some in alexandrines, some in free verse. The play, a 'comédie en trois actes', was highly personal and satirical in nature, creating its author some bitter enemies. The playwright was actually subjected to physical attack on the streets as a result. France is depicted in a state of war and the plot sees Arlequin in the rôle of Turkish ambassador. The opening scene shows us a prince (left unnamed), who is about to leave for the wars and is doubtful of his wife's fidelity. His mistress, the ever-helpful Colombine, suggests the ruse of disguising herself as a man in order to put the poor girl to the test. In the following scene, the 'Scène des adieux', Arlequin pretends to be going off to join the army and bids farewell to Colombine, but soon returns disguised as a Turk in the 'Scène de l'ambassade' of Act 2. He now proceeds to inform the startled princess that the 'Bacha' is on his way to woo her and paints the following irresistible portrait of his master:

Le bacha constipé du désir de vous plaire,  
A vainement recours à son apotiquaire.  
Si vous ne lui donnez des pilules d'amour...  
Mahomet l'en preserve. Il est gras, potelé,

Dodu, frais, un œil vif, un menton redoublé,  
Un vermeil de corail sur ses levres éclate:  
Ses oreilles sur tout font honte à l'écarlatte,  
Tout, jusqu'à sa moustache aiguise l'appetit.  
Je voi que votre cœur palpite à ce recit.  
Que je tâte, madame ?

To the pure, all things are pure. The princess cannot imagine what the Bacha's intentions might be and fails to understand the drift of the conversation. Arlequin assures her that she will soon be enlightened, 'Si vous n'entendez pas la chose, / Madame, le bacha vous fournira la glose'. Once all is made clear and there is no further possibility of doubt, she very properly declares that she prefers death to dishonour, '...si je suis tombée en ses perfides mains, / Un poignard de la mort m'ouvrira les chemins'. Her husband's suspicions are cruel and unjustified, doubtless the fruit of a guilty conscience, considering his own relationship with Colombine. Given the reputation of the Turks, however, she feels she has reason to fear physical assault in the absence of her lord and master, '...peut on être assez brute / Pour vouloir emporter un cœur de haute lutte: / C'est là le procédé d'un turc & d'un tyran'. Arlequin is unimpressed by her protests and paints a graphic picture of contemporary morals:

Hé, madame, de grace, épargnez l'alcoran...  
Les belles passions ne sont plus à la mode.  
Tous les coeurs à present sont des coeurs de rocher,  
On regarde l'amour comme une hotellerie,  
Où l'on ne fait qu'une gîte, & puis, touche, cocher.

The princess must cease her protests and do like everybody else, for such is the way of the world.

The 'Bacha', none other than Colombine in disguise, makes his entry in the following scene, appropriately enough entitled the 'scène du bacha'. S/He now proceeds to pay court to the princess, explaining how the Turkish attitude to 'galanterie' differs from that in vogue in France. There is no place for flowery compliments here and courtship is inclined to be short:

...vous vous attendez sans doute à vous voir demander le coeur, comme un voleur demande la bourse. Les Turcs coupent assez court sur la tendresse; & chez eux une galanterie ressemble aux orangers, où l'on voit la fleur & le fruit tout ensemble.

Arlequin, still with us in this scene, is evidently impressed by the brusque Turkish way of dealing with such matters, 'Voilà ce qui s'appelle de la plus fine "turquerie"'. The princess, quite naturally, is not:

....votre prétendu amour se sent encore du vice du terroir! & que vos feux portent bien tous les caracteres du climat où vous avez pris le jour! Mais comment osez-vous couvrir du mot d'amour un brigandage ordinaire parmi vous autres? prendre pour les mouvemens d'une affection réglée le desordre d'un cœur vraiment esclave des irruptions de son temperament [sic].

The 'Bacha' excuses his behaviour with the excuse that men have used to justify themselves in such moments throughout the ages. 'Être né turc, se voir dans le bouillant de l'âge; sentir auprès de soi une jolie femme, & encore la femme de son ennemi...' It is therefore her fault.

The time has come. He has been more than patient, 'Les turcs d'ordinaire ne font point de montre...le terme est échu, madame, il faut payer'. The princess has only verbal protest left with which to preserve her honour, 'Seigneur, ce que vous faites-là est bien turc'. This is a telling phrase, which well sums up French beliefs concerning the Turks and their sexual *mores*. This is but one scene in an apparently disconnected series in which the main characters adopt various disguises to test the heroine's fidelity to her husband. The 'Bacha' and his 'ambassador' reappear in the 'scène de la folie' towards the end, a scene in which the princess is costumed '*en auteur, avec une robe noire*' and it seems that she has written a play. On realising that it is he, she merely exclaims, 'Voici l'indigne bacha qui en veut à ma vertu...' which seems a mild reaction given the circumstances of their earlier meeting. Oddly, she proceeds to offer her play to the Turks, 'Je donnerois ma pièce à des comediens turcs, plutôt qu'à vous autres', but they play no further part in the plot and we hear no more of them. The play derives its rather curious title from its cynical conclusion:

Arlequin ...j'appelle phenix, une femme fidelle...Comme il n'est qu'un phenix, il n'est donc qu'une femme, qui puisse prétendre à l'honneur.

This is not Delosme de Monchenay's first comedy with an oriental theme; that honour must go to *Mezzetin Grand Sophy de Perse* (1689), but it is the only one of his to feature an oriental ambassador. Clearly, the time frame means that neither production can have been directly inspired by Riza Beg, but *Le Phénix*, more than any other, oddly prefigures the kind of behaviour that was typical of the man, behaviour that did so much to confirm all existing prejudice against the 'oriental'.

**Chapter 7: The use of jargon in comedy and the rôle of the comic interpreter.**

'*Qu'est-ce qu'il jargonne-là?*'<sup>354</sup>

One of the more important issues to emerge from de Lionne's mishandling of the Soliman Aga affair was the question of the training and employment of interpreters in France. It was all too painfully obvious that this was now a matter that had to be addressed with some urgency. The unfortunate business at Suresnes, widely known and discussed as it must have been in court circles, provided manna from heaven for the comic theatre for years to come. In the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* Molière extracts much hilarity from a denouement involving the Turks, requiring the clever use of jargon and the presence of an interpreter. This may just possibly be rather more than a coincidence, happening as it does so shortly after Soliman Aga's departure and with the 'turquerie' inserted at the request of the king. It would have caused a certain amount of embarrassment for the foreign minister to have the shortcomings of the French diplomatic service parodied in public manner upon the stage and, as I have argued earlier, Covielle's remark in Act III xv, 'Il s'est fait depuis peu une certaine mascarade qui vient le mieux du monde ici', does seem to indicate a possibility that this was Molière's intention.<sup>355</sup> The language problem in dealing with oriental ambassadors was a longstanding one and it had not been addressed. We have already seen in the case of Pierre Potemkin's embassy how the lack of properly schooled interpreters caused difficulties for both the Russians and the French in 1668. Of the two translators that Potemkin had seen fit to bring with him on a diplomatic visit to Paris and Madrid, the one spoke only German, the other rather poor Latin. Though Russia was beginning at this period, under the first Romanov tsar, to open her doors to Western European culture, the French language was not yet widely known there, even by the educated classes. Polish was the second language of choice. Equally, no French speaker of Russian was readily to be found in Paris. Russia was still considered by most of Europe to be in a semi-barbarous condition. Muscovy was less well-known than the Ottoman Empire, nor did it seem to have as much to offer in the way of opportunities for commerce. The study of Russian was therefore regarded as unproductive and neglected accordingly. Similar problems did not arise with the embassy from Ardra because the Guinea coast of Africa had long been in the Portuguese sphere of influence. Mattéo Lopés spoke fluent Portuguese, having been mission educated. Though not ideal, it was at least possible for de Lionne to converse with him directly in a mixture of Spanish and Portuguese. The Romance languages did not present difficulties of interpretation comparable to those found in the case of Russian or of Turkish, nor were there such major differences in religion and culture to be taken into account. In the case of the western European powers, Latin could usually be resorted to should difficulties arise, having been the international language of diplomacy until the early years of the seventeenth century when French gradually superseded it.

Oriental languages, particularly Arabic, Persian and Turkish, were the object of academic study in France at this time.<sup>356</sup> Indeed, French scholars were eminent in the field,

<sup>354</sup> Regnard, *Le Divorce*.

<sup>355</sup> See Chapter Three.

<sup>356</sup> On the study of oriental languages in France, see Rouillard 1 and 2; Olivier Bonnerot, *La Perse dans la*

but in Molière's day there was no provision for practical schooling in interpretation to meet the needs of diplomacy and commerce. Within the Ottoman Empire itself, translation and interpretation were the traditional and jealously guarded preserve of the Phanariot Greeks. The learning of "Frankish" languages (i.e. those spoken by Christians of the Latin rite) was as much beneath the contempt of the Muslim Turks as would have been the study of the languages of their own 'zimmi' minorities; it was from these polyglot, non-Muslim, subject communities that the dragoman class had evolved. Discriminated against and to a considerable extent disadvantaged because of religion, they were none the less subjects of the Sultan and their interests were closely bound up with those of the Porte. They were also, as Orthodox Christians or Jews for the most part, hostile to what they perceived as French furtherance of the ambitions of the Roman Catholic Church in the Middle East. The Phanariots could never safely be regarded as acting in a disinterested manner and were not trusted as intermediaries by those European powers that had to resort to them. It was observed that in interpretation the Ottoman dragomans would frequently embroider, tone down or add their own bias to diplomatic exchanges. Clearly, this was unacceptable though it was argued that, because of the dangers of mutual misunderstanding through cultural difference, the practice was necessary to avoid offending Ottoman susceptibilities. The latter could entail dire consequences for the unfortunate diplomat in question as, for instance, in the recent case of the de la Hayes at Constantinople; both father and son had been severely beaten and imprisoned. It was for this reason thought undesirable to allow Soliman Aga's personal dragoman to interpret alone at the Suresnes audience. Despite his surname, Fontaine was not of French extraction, but a Phanariot Greek. No one had been able to pronounce his name and it had therefore been familiarised into the nearest French equivalent.<sup>357</sup>

De Lionne insisted that the 'interprètes attitrés du Roi', François Pétis de la Croix and Pierre Dipy, be brought in to the audience to translate, with Laurent d'Arvieux also present as a further safeguard in the spirit of 'quis custodiet custodes?' The presence of Dipy and Pétis de la Croix swiftly became a bone of contention with the Turks. Fontaine was incandescent with rage at what he regarded as a personal slight, and the episode did little to improve the disposition of Soliman Aga himself towards the French. Unfortunately, it rapidly emerged from the inadequacy of the interpreting during the first audience on November 4<sup>th</sup>, that the academic study of oriental languages was insufficient on its own, without practical experience of the spoken idiom. Even to translate the Kâ'im-makâm's letter, de la Croix had had to return home to consult his dictionaries, as d'Arvieux scornfully relates in his account of the interview.<sup>358</sup> To complicate matters further, both of the French interpreters had purchased their posts and would now be difficult to remove once in office. Such appointments were often passed from father to son, and this was the case within the family of Pétis de la Croix. We find Dipy still in position as royal interpreter and professor of Arabic at the Collège Louis le Grand at the time of his death in 1715, shortly before the arrival of the

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*littérature et la pensée françaises au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1988); Jeanne Chaybany, *Les Voyages en Perse et la pensée Française au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Tehran, 1971); Henri Dehérain, "Jeunes de Langues et Interprètes Français en Orient au XVIII<sup>e</sup> Siècle." *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie d'Alger et de l'Afrique du Nord*, 1922, pp. 574-96; Fatma Müge Göçek, *East encounters West; France and the Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, Oxford, 1987); Mary Hossain, "The Employment and Training of Interpreters in Arabic and Turkish under Louis XIV in France." *Seventeenth-Century French Studies*, XIV, 1992, pp. 235-46; Kunalalp and Hitzel; Lisa Lowe *Critical Terrains, French and British Orientalism* (Cornell, 1991); Picavet; Francis Richard, "Aux origines de la connaissance de la langue persane en France." *Luqman, Annales des Presses universitaires d'Iran*, 3e année, 1, automne-hiver 1986-87, pp. 23-42.

<sup>357</sup> In fact Fontaine seems to have been rather shabbily treated by the French overall. De Nointel refers to the 'drogman Fontaine' being cheated out of his rights by the Marseilles merchants in Istanbul; see Robert Mantran, *Istanbul dans la seconde moitié du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, p. 565 (Paris, 1962).

<sup>358</sup> Laurent d'Arvieux, *Mémoires*, t. IV, p. 150.

notoriously irascible Mehemet Riza Beg. Given the fiasco with Soliman Aga, the uncharitable might consider his demise timely, for Saint-Simon informs us that a last minute replacement acquitted himself particularly well:

Dans ce même temps, Dipy mourut qui étoit interprète du Roi pour les langues orientales. Il fallut faire venir un curé d'auprès d'Amboise, qui avoit passé plusieurs années en Perse, pour remplacer cet interprète. Il s'en acquitta très bien, et en fut fort mal récompensé. Le hasard me le fit fort connoître et entretenir. C'étoit un homme de bien, sage, sensé, qui connoissoit fort les mœurs et le gouvernement de Perse, ainsi que la langue, et qui, par tout ce qu'il vit et connut de cet ambassadeur, auprès duquel il demeura toujours tant qu'il fut à Paris, jugea toujours que l'ambassade étoit supposée, et l'ambassadeur un marchand de fort peu de chose, fort embarrassé à soutenir son personnage, où tout lui manquoit.<sup>359</sup>

This was the abbé de Gaudereau, who subsequently remained attached as interpreter to the 'introducteur des ambassadeurs', Louis-Nicolas le Tonnelier, baron de Breteuil. Gaudereau, later to become well known as an orientalist, is an outstanding example of the kind of interpreter that the diplomatic service so desperately needed in 1669.<sup>360</sup>

Clearly, the matter called for Colbert's urgent attention if France were not to be severely handicapped in future negotiations with the Ottoman Empire.<sup>361</sup> There can be no coincidence that on the 18<sup>th</sup> November 1669, within a fortnight of the Suresnes audience, a royal edict was promulgated inaugurating the corps of the 'Jeunes de Langue'. Many distinguished Orientalists were later to serve their apprenticeship here; it was to be the forerunner of the Ecole Nationale des Langues Orientales Vivantes. Significantly, the 'Jeunes de Langue' came under the auspices of the Ministère de la Marine rather than those of the secretary of state for foreign affairs. This was Colbert's own office, later to be held by Pontchartrain, the proviso reflecting the personal interest that he took in this project, which actually predates the establishment of the Compagnie du Levant of 1670. The 'Jeunes de Langue' (a direct translation of the Turkish 'dil oghlan') were selected at the age of eight and admitted to the Collège Louis le Grand where they formed a separate establishment. The 'bourses' were eagerly competed for. Taught by the leading scholars of the day, the 'Jeunes de Langue' benefited from the most advanced educational techniques available. The boys received the normal humanist education, with particular attention paid to training in Latin and

<sup>359</sup> Louis de Rouvroy, duc de Saint-Simon, *Mémoires*, t.IV, 1712-15, éd. Gonzague Truc, Pléiade edition p. 631 (Paris, 1952).

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.* n. 56, p. 1205.

<sup>361</sup> Colbert was not the only one to recognise the problems of interpretation at the Porte. The issue was also brought to the attention of Charles II of England, Sir Paul Rycout writes:

Mais sur tout un Ministre public doit avoir un Interprète courageux, eloquent & avisé. Je dis courageux, parce qu'il doit souvent parler devant des personnes eminentes en dignité, & qu'il ne doit pas s'étonner des regards furieux d'un tyran: on a vû souvent l'Ambassadeur obligé de se mettre entre le Premier Visir & son Interprète, pour empescher ses emportemens, quoiqu'il n'eût fait autre chose que de rapporter fidèlement ce que son Maître luy avoit ordonné. Il y en a eu quelques-uns neantmoins qui ont esté mis en prison, ou que l'on a mesme fait mourir pour cela seulement ... Cette tyrannie & cette presumption des premiers Ministres Turcs, vient de ce que la plupart de ces Interprètes sont nez sujets du Grand-Seigneur; ce qui fait qu'ils ne peuvent souffrir qu'ils disent les moindres choses qui approchent de l'égalité & de la contestation, ne faisant aucune différence entre la pensée de l'Ambassadeur & l'explication de son Interprète. C'est-pourquoy, à mon avis, il seroit tres-avantageux pour ceux de nostre nation, de faire un seminaire de jeunes Anglois qui eussent de l'esprit, dans lequel ils apprissent parfaitement la langue Turque, afin de les revêtir de cette charge; parce qu'ils pourroient avec moins de péril, & avec plus d'honneur pour leurs Maîtres, & plus d'avantage pour le public, exprimer hardiment & sans bassesse, comme font ordinairement les autres Interprètes, tout ce qu'on leur feroit dire. [*Histoire de l'état présent de l'Empire ottoman...* (Paris, 1670), pp. 166-67].

Rhetoric, but with the addition of Arabic and Turkish. At around the age of sixteen or eighteen, they were sent to the Capuchin convent at Saint Louis de Péra, near the French embassy in the diplomatic quarter of Constantinople. Here they perfected their oriental languages under the guidance of Turkish 'hojas'. This was a title of respect given to the tutors of the Sultan's children and denotes a learned man. Baudier refers to them approvingly in glowing terms:

Les Precepteurs des Empereurs appelez Ogyas, arrivent souvent à cette dignité que la main du Prince leur donne pour recompense de leur probité, & de leurs travaux. Car les Monarques Othomans rendent toute sorte d'honneur à ceux qui ont par les lettres orné leurs ames d'une nouvelle lumière.<sup>362</sup>

No pains were spared in the training of the 'Jeunes de Langue'. They were given the very best available education in Istanbul, as they had been in Paris. Persian, as the major cultural and literary language of the Middle East, was added later. They also received instruction in Modern Greek and Italian. These children were for the most part the sons of fathers with commercial or diplomatic links with the Ottoman Empire, following in the family tradition and thus at home in the Levant; those from other backgrounds tended not to last the course. There were initially twelve places for Armenian boys, who for the most part spent their time in religious instruction, and ten for French, who concentrated rather more on linguistic training. Jean Baptiste de Fiennes was the first master. In his description of Istanbul towards the end of the seventeenth century, the Ottoman historian Robert Mantran confirms the importance of the part played by the 'Jeunes de Langue' in the French diplomatic service:

L'ambassadeur est assisté, dans ses fonctions, par un secrétaire et par des drogman d'une part, par des représentants des marchands de l'échelle (les députés de la nation) d'autre part. Le secrétaire est généralement le premier drogman de l'ambassade; c'est obligatoirement un Français; c'est lui qui dans certains cas, remplace l'ambassadeur, intervient auprès des marchands et des autorités turques, procède aux formalités de chancellerie. Les drogman, ou interprètes, sont soit d'origine française métropolitaine, soit issus des familles françaises installées dans la capitale, soit (mais le fait est rare à Constantinople, plus fréquents dans les consulats des Échelles) recrutés parmi les minoritaires, surtout des Grecs. A l'exemple des Vénitiens, on institua un corps des "Jeunes de Langue" en 1669, de recrutement français (de France ou du Levant), d'où sortirent par la suite les drogman de l'ambassade et des consulats.<sup>363</sup>

It is possible for us to link the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* with this expansion in the study of oriental languages in France. If de Lionne had not insisted on playing the Grand Vizir for his own amusement, the shortcomings of the 'Ministère des affaires étrangères' might well never have been brought to the attention of the king or, as I suggest, become the object of theatrical satire. As matters stood, Laurent d'Arvieux was an intimate of the French royal family, and it was part of his remit to report daily to the king on everything concerning the Ottoman ambassador. The king was therefore fully aware of the extent to which the question of interpretation had been mishandled at Soliman Aga's audience; Colbert was instructed to take matters in hand personally as a direct result. Since Molière's 'turquerie' was known to be written with the full knowledge and approval of Louis XIV, negative publicity of such a nature would also have conveyed a strong hint to those who needed to know that prompt

<sup>362</sup> Michel Baudier, *Histoire generale de la religion des Turcs*, pp. 335-36 (Paris, 1641).

<sup>363</sup> Robert Mantran, *Istanbul dans la seconde moitié du XVIIe siècle*, pp. 558-59 (Paris, 1962).

action should be taken. What we have here may well be an example of the comic theatre exerting influence on an aspect of government policy.

The *Bourgeois gentilhomme* is complex in nature and the intricacies of the satire operate upon more than one level. This issue of language and translation has significance because language can be as powerful a source of division as it is of unity. M. Jourdain learns to his cost that speech is an important indicator of class and social status as well as of geographical origin. As a merchant, he will have been well aware that the different trades have jargons designed to reinforce their exclusivity and to confuse the outsider. To pass muster as a gentleman, M. Jourdain must now acquire the subtleties and nuances of the language and manners of the court, which are as foreign to him as were those of the Turks to de Lionne, or those of the French to Soliman Aga. If we look closely enough, it is possible to discern the devious figure of the Levantine interpreter in Covielle, twisting language, adding a gloss, giving a new slant, as best suits the purpose of the moment. The 'valet rusé' appears to orchestrate the action of neo-Plautine comedy, acting like a catalyst, much as the dragoman controls and manipulates the language of diplomatic exchange in real life. In the everyday world and in its mirror image upon the stage, valet and dragoman have an importance that far outweighs their relatively humble social positions. In *Le Sicilien* and in the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* Molière exploits "Turkish" jargon and the concomitant need for interpretation to great comic effect. That he should have chosen to do so in two 'comédie-ballets', so close together in time, is evidence of the success of the device in performance and of the considerable significance that he himself must have attached to its use. No study of Molière's plays can afford to overlook a detailed examination of his use of "Turkish" jargon. We need to define the comic effect produced by jargon upon an audience and to consider how far its use furthers the development of the plot in a given play. It is of obvious importance to establish whether this jargon is meaningful *per se*, or is merely a form of gibberish that reflects what were perceived by the writer to be the sound patterns of Turkish speech; if the former, then the jargon ought to be capable of analysis so that we may produce a translation and assign a proper linguistic description where possible. We need to establish precisely what information was available on the Turkish language to an educated readership in seventeenth-century France, before deciding whether it would have been feasible for Molière and his fellows to set about the inclusion of some authentic Turkish in their scripts, should they have felt this to be desirable.

The nature and accuracy of French sources of information on the Middle East during the seventeenth century are important to us because they would have affected audience expectations in the matter of 'vraisemblance'. Whilst remaining exotic, the Turks were not an unknown quantity to the average theatregoer to the same extent as the Russians or the Siamese. Contacts between France and the Ottoman Empire had been sustained and extensive from the sixteenth century onwards, comprising diplomatic, commercial and missionary activity, and, under Colbert's direction, the dispatch of archaeological missions and of scholars to oversee the systematic collection of oriental manuscripts for the royal library. The sheer abundance of academic and literary works on the Ottoman Empire extant from the period prior to 1670 is sufficient proof that the Turks had already captured the public imagination.

We know from Laurent d'Arvieux's accounts of his dealings with Soliman Aga and from many other primary sources that there are recorded instances of Turks resident in Paris at this time. These would have included craftsmen, merchants, captives, renegades and freed slaves making their way home. Some interaction must have taken place between these expatriates and the indigenous population, however limited in extent that contact might have been, or however temporary their stay in France. They were to be found not only in Paris, but also in Marseilles, Toulouse, Lyon, and Toulon. There were Turks serving in the royal

bodyguard and Marie de Médicis, who was particularly fond of oriental craftsmanship, imported a number of embroiderers and weavers to work in the Luxembourg palace.<sup>364</sup> It is certainly not inconceivable that the Poquelin family, perhaps even Molière, would have come into contact with these craftsmen in their official capacity as 'tapissiers du roi'. There was a flourishing luxury trade between France and the Ottoman Empire, Turkish horses had an excellent reputation and were particularly sought after. All of this implies the presence of merchants. Turks in France in the seventeenth century were neither as uncommon as might perhaps be supposed, nor confined to the *chiourme* of the galleys, where Turks were preferred as rowers because of their stoicism and physical powers of endurance. Hundreds of Turkish captives were held in the main naval bases and apparently allowed a certain liberty to trade or work on their own behalf when on shore. Soliman Aga is referred to in the sources as receiving frequent visits from his countrymen resident in the French capital and requests to help with repatriation.<sup>365</sup>

Colbert issued explicit instructions that Soliman Aga must be embarked immediately on arrival at Toulon, 'l'intention de Sa Majesté estant qu'il n'y fasse aucun séjour et qu'il ne voye, ni recoive avis des forçats turcs qui sont sur les galères.'<sup>366</sup> Appeals for the liberation of galley slaves are a recurrent theme in diplomatic correspondence with the Porte, but were usually evaded on some spurious excuse, despite the alliance. Turkish captives were too valuable a commodity to give up; other nationalities sickened and died too easily. Certain religious orders, such as the Pères Trinitaires and the Redemptorists, made it a practice to ransom young Turkish prisoners from the wars between the Ottoman and Holy Roman Empires for the purpose of conversion. Charitable individuals would also purchase captive children from the slave markets and return with them to France, often integrating them into their own families. Merchants and diplomats, such as the marquis de Ferriol, notoriously returned from the Levant with Turkish women. There are records of Turks resident in France applying for naturalisation, though this was only granted on conversion. The King himself had acted as godfather in one such case in 1654. Turkish prisoners who escaped from Spanish galleys were granted asylum in France. There were many Turkish merchants resident in Marseilles, not to mention a considerable population of ex-galley slaves, freed and allowed to settle in France on conversion. The baptismal records exist, though one must wonder at the genuineness of such new found religious fervour. In 1682 Louis found it necessary to publish an edict that all Muslims resident in France should be instructed in the Catholic faith (this included those who had already converted to Protestantism), implying that Muslims were present in some number. The quantity of such forcible baptisms was sufficient to lead to complaints from the Dey of Tunis.<sup>367</sup>

All of this, combined with the high profile maintained by Soliman Aga, meant that there was good reason for Molière to have to anticipate an informed audience, an audience that would demand accurate local colour in works of Turkish interest. Since Molière is known to have worked on the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* in collaboration with Laurent d'Arvieux on the instructions of the king, it is therefore only reasonable for us to expect authentic Turkish vocabulary in the context of the 'Mamamouchi' ceremony. The use of Turkish would lend an air of authenticity to the proceedings, even though the audience knows, as the hapless M. Jourdain does not, that here are only Covielle and Cléonte in disguise and not the genuine article. There were also theatrical precedents. Rotrou included

<sup>364</sup> See J. Mathorez, *Les Éléments de population orientale en France: Les Turcs en France du XIV<sup>e</sup> au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris, 1919), henceforward: Mathorez and Jean Baptiste Colbert, *Lettres, instructions et mémoires*, 9 tomes, (Paris, 1861-1882), henceforward: Colbert.

<sup>365</sup> Laurent d'Arvieux, *Mémoires*, t. IV, p. 190.

<sup>366</sup> Colbert, (Dép. conc. la mar.), p. 248.

<sup>367</sup> Mathorez.

some Turkish phrases in *La Soeur* in 1645, phrases which, in combination with the judicious use of lingua franca, were later employed by Molière in *Le Sicilien* (1668). Molière's exploitation of this hybrid "Turkish" jargon in *Le Sicilien* and later in the *Bourgeois Gentilhomme* is of particular interest, because it adds so much to the quality and the sparkle of the dialogue. Jargon invites a sense of complicity between audience and players. It makes us feel comfortably superior. We share in the hilarity, from which Dom Père and M. Jourdain are excluded, as we gradually come to realise that we are able to understand 'ce langage Turc qui dit beaucoup en deux mots' while they are not. Montfleury also uses this device of combining these two languages to good effect in the *Ecole des Jaloux* (1662) and *Le Mary sans femme* (1666).

Accurate information of a more academic nature was also readily available. It was possible for interested persons to attend the courses in oriental languages, including Turkish, held at the Jesuit Collège Louis le Grand, however unlikely that a leading playwright should have done so. A Turkish-French vocabulary appeared in print as early as 1519. In 1544, Bartholomew Georgiewitz, who had spent thirteen years as a slave in Turkey, published *De Turcarum moribus epitome*. This later appeared in French as *La Maniere et ceremonies du [sic] Turcs*, attaining phenomenal popularity and re-printed with illustrations as late as 1652. Georgiewitz describes the treatment of Christian captives by the Turks and there is much else of interest for the curious reader on food and drink, Turkish customs, religious ceremonies, ritual, and the keeping of Ramadan. He records a great variety of Turkish words and phrases together with a list of technical terms, notes on grammar and a working vocabulary with definitions. A love song and some examples of poetry are also given, with parallel translations. Particularly interesting is the sample conversation between a Christian and a Turk, which, as Rouillard notes, contains phrases extraordinarily close to Rotrou's 'Ghidelum Baba' in *La Soeur* (I have reproduced this dialogue in the Appendix for interest).<sup>368</sup>

Guillaume Postel, later to become the first professor of Arabic in the Collège de France, published an extensive account of the Ottoman Empire in 1560, drawn from first-hand observation.<sup>369</sup> To this he added a twenty-page grammar and vocabulary entitled *Instruction des motz de la langue turque les plus communs*, including the conjugation of the verb 'Ben Belmen' (cf. *La Soeur* Act III iii) and a Turkish-Latin version of the *Pater noster*. More in the nature of a religious polemic than Georgiewitz's work, Postel nevertheless gives a detailed description of the Ottoman manner of government with the appropriate use of terminology and analysis of words such as 'bostangi' and 'chaoush' which we have already encountered in the case of Soliman Aga. Jean de Palerne's *Peregrinations* of 1606 includes a practical Turkish vocabulary together with a helpful list of insults in five Middle Eastern languages for the use of pilgrims to the Holy Land.<sup>370</sup> The first formal Turkish grammar to appear in a European language was also published in France, by André Du Ryer, the *Rudimenta Grammatices linguae Turcicae*.<sup>371</sup> All of the works detailed above contain accurate information on the Turkish language, enjoyed a relatively wide circulation in their day, and would not have proved too difficult of access for Molière, should they have been required for purposes of consultation.

<sup>368</sup> Bartholomew Georgiewitz, *Les miseres et tribulations que les Chrestiens tributaires et esclaves tenuz par le Turcz seuffrent...* (Antwerp, 1544); *La maniere et ceremonies des Turcs* (Antwerp, 1544), published together as *De Turcarum moribus epitome* (Paris, Lyons, Geneva, Rome, 1553) pp. 69-75. On Georgiewitz, see Rouillard 2, p. 195; cf. also Rotrou, *La Soeur* Act III v.

<sup>369</sup> Guillaume Postel, *De la République des Turcs; et là où l'occasion s'offrera, des moeurs et loys de tous Muhamédistes par...* (Poitiers, 1560).

<sup>370</sup> Jean Palerne, *Peregrinations* (Paris, 1606).

<sup>371</sup> André du Ryer, *Première grammaire turque. Rudimenta grammatices turcicae...* (Paris, 1630).

The public fascination with the Turks was such that there was never a gap of more than three years during the period from 1610 to 1640 without a new publication or re-edition of books of travel and description of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>372</sup> The field was dominated by Michel Baudier, with his *Inventaire de l'histoire generale des Turcs*, his *Histoire generale du Serrail* (full of salacious detail and embellished by rather risqué illustrations which ran it into numerous re-prints in the period), and his *Histoire generale de la religion des Turcs*.<sup>373</sup> The second of these, in particular, contributed a great deal to French conceptions of the exotic nature of the Ottoman court. After 1640 the frequency of publications on the Ottoman Turks actually doubled in France. Vincent Stochove,<sup>374</sup> La Boullaye le Gouz<sup>375</sup> and Du Loir, a fluent Turkish speaker, led the field. Du Loir's work, *Les Voyages du sieur Du Loir; ensemble de ce qui se passa à la mort du feu Sultan Mourat, à les cérémonies de ses funeraillles; et celles de l'avènement à l'empire de Sultan Hibraim son frère; avec la relation du siege de Babylone en 1639*, was first published in Paris in 1654. It took the form of a series of letters addressed to members of Gaston d'Orléans' entourage, shortly before he became Molière's patron. This work is of particular relevance for our present study because of the range, accuracy and depth of the information that it contains on the Turks. Given their mutual connection with the house of Orléans, Molière may even have known Du Loir personally. Amongst other matters of interest, the *Voyages* discuss the manner of the Sultan's formal reception of an ambassador in considerable detail, giving a phonetic transcription in Turkish of part of the ceremonial. This is of considerable importance to us, because it serves to underline the irregularities of de la Haye's conduct in Istanbul whilst at the same time emphasising the farcical nature of de Lionne's dealings with Soliman Aga at Suresnes. Du Loir also gives a detailed description of dervish ceremonies, together with the transcription and translation of one of their hymns in an early attempt to transcribe Turkish musical notation. As we have seen, a copy of the *Voyages* is listed in the *Inventaire* as forming part of Molière's personal library at the time of his death. We do not know when Molière acquired it, but it is not unreasonable to conjecture that a copy might well have been in his possession as early as 1655 and could have furnished one of his major sources of information on both the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish language. Given the delightful Turkish colour of the ballet music in the 'turquerie', I have tried to trace a musical link between Du Loir's dervish hymn and Lully's libretto, but so far without success.

We may therefore conclude that sources of information in the French and Latin languages were not only readily available, but more than adequate for the purposes of drama and prose fiction. Writers were able, should they so desire, to give genuine Turkish historical, linguistic and local colour to their works from the late sixteenth century onwards, even without the benefit of the personal contact that Molière enjoyed through his co-operation with Laurent d'Arvieux. Indeed, given the more or less constant coverage in the Press, and in

<sup>372</sup> Extensive bibliographical surveys of works of oriental interest in the early modern period have been completed for France, notably Pierre Martino's *L'Orient dans la Littérature Française* (New York, 1906); Marie-Louise Dufrenoy's *L'Orient romanesque en France, 1704-1789* (Montreal, 1947); and Clarence Dana Rouillard's admirable *The Turk in French History, Thought and Literature to 1660* (Toronto, 1941), to which my debt will be obvious.

<sup>373</sup> Michel Baudier, *Histoire générale de la religion des Turcs avec la naissance et la mort de leur prophète Mahomet* (Paris, 1625); *Histoire générale du serrail et de la cour du Grand Seigneur empereur des Turcs. Ensemble l'histoire de la cour du Roy de la Chine* (Paris, 1624); *Inventaire de l'histoire générale des Turcs depuis l'an 1300* (Paris, 1617).

<sup>374</sup> Vincent de Stochove, *L'Othoman, ou l'Abrégé des vies des Empereurs Turcs* (Cologne, 1667); *Voyage du Levant (1630-1632)* (Brussels, 1643).

<sup>375</sup> François de La Boullaye le Gouz (Ibrahim Bey), *Les Voyages et Observations du Sieur de F. de M. de La Boullaye Le Gouz... où sont décrites les religions, gouvernements et situations des Etats et royaumes d'Italie, Grèce, Anatolie, Syrie, Palestine, Karaminie, Kaldée, Assyrie, Grand Mogol, Bijapour, Indes Orientales des Portugais, Arabie, Egypte...* (Paris, 1653).

particular in the *Gazette*, of Ottoman affairs and the steady stream of pamphlets,<sup>376</sup> *Mémoires* and *Voyages* dealing with the Turks, the latter were not only topical, but a subject of absorbing interest to the general public. An informed and critical theatre audience would have to have been anticipated by the playwright. Whether this familiarity would have extended to the sounds of Turkish speech is perhaps rather more debatable, but the information was nonetheless accessible to dramatists, should it be required for verisimilitude.

It is of no less importance for us to consider the setting of these two Turkish comedies in their proper literary context. As we have seen, the inclusion of "Turkish" jargon in dialogue is not unique to Molière, nor was he the first to employ it for comic effect. I now propose to examine its occurrence in other comedies of the period for purposes of comparison in order to establish to what extent, if any, Molière's use of it was derivative. The influence of the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* on the comic theatre was to be so far reaching and extensive that plays based upon its theme were still being written and produced some forty years later. At the end of the reign and even beyond, it remains the exemplar of this genre and it is fitting that we should spend some time in searching for its roots.

As is well known, both Molière and his contemporaries derive a substantial number of plots from Graeco-Roman New Comedy. The device of using jargon to represent barbarian speech is exploited by Aristophanes. An appropriate example, given our particular interest in oriental ambassadors, occurs in *Acharnians* (425 BC). In Act I the Persian ambassador, Pseudartabas, makes his entrance and addresses the Athenian assembly. His observations are variously interpreted for the benefit of the audience, to hilarious effect, by the Athenian envoy to Persia and also by the farmer Dikaiopolis. The episode is obviously intended to be highly comical and certain remarks on the sexual practices of the Athenians are quite decidedly *risqué*. Line 100, 'Yartaman esharshsa sapitchona satro', is noteworthy as perhaps the earliest surviving example of jargon in the comic theatre.<sup>377</sup> There is still much scholarly debate as to whether it represents a corrupt example of Old Persian, and is therefore capable of translation, or is merely an attempt at the sounds of Persian speech for comic effect. The line has been variously interpreted, but corruption of the text renders the question a peculiarly difficult one, and the jury remains out. Plautus, on the other hand, introduces a fairly lengthy Punic speech of some ten lines into the fifth act of his *Poenulus* (c. 194 BC), though the Carthaginian character, Hanno, is a grieving father seeking his daughters, and no ambassador.<sup>378</sup> The text is capable of interpretation and has been variously translated.

The theme of *Poenulus*, that is to say of capture and sale into slavery followed by recognition and redemption, was a favourite motif of Roman New Comedy. Terence's *Phormio* (161 BC) is known to have furnished Molière with elements of the plot for the *Fourberies de Scapin* and *Le Sicilien*, but the theme of return from captivity or foreign travel had already been thoroughly exploited on the French stage prior to its adoption by Molière. We find it used in 1636 by Georges de Scudéry and Guerin de Bouscal in two comedies with the same title, *L'Amant Liberal*; by Desfontaines in *Orphise* (1638); by Rotrou in *La Soeur*

<sup>376</sup> See Rouillard 2, Appendix I, pp. 646-665; no less than two hundred and ninety-one pamphlets had been published between 1481 and 1660.

<sup>377</sup> Aristophanes, *The Acharnians*, trans. Alan H. Sommerstein (London, 1973); see also Stephen Colvin, *Dialect in Aristophanes and the Politics of Language in Ancient Greek Literature* (Oxford, 1999); K. J. Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy* (Berkeley, 1972); John Aveline, "Aristophanes' *Acharnians* 95-97 and 100: Persians in the Athenian Assembly", *Hermes*, CXXVIII (iv), 2000, pp. 500-01

<sup>378</sup> Titus Maccius Plautus, *Poenulus*, ed. G. P. Gould, Loeb Classical Library 260 (London, 1996); see also Louis H. Gray "The Punic passages in the 'Poenulus' of Plautus" *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*, XXXIX (ii), 1923, pp. 73-88; A. S. Gratwick, "Hanno's Punic Speech in the *Poenulus* of Plautus" *Hermes*, XCIX, 1971, pp. 25-45; J. Wight Duff and A.M. Duff, *A Literary History of Rome* (London, 1960); Charles Krahmalkov, "The Punic Speech of Hanno", *Orientalia*, 39, 1970, pp. 52-74; "Observations on the Punic Monologues of Hanno in the *Poenulus*", *Orientalia*, 57, 1988, pp. 55-66.

(1645); by Tristan l'Hermitte in *Le Parasite* (1654); by Boucher in *Champagne le Coiffeur* (1663); by Quinault in *La Mère coquette* (1665) and by De Visé in the same year with a comedy bearing an identical title; by Montfleury in *Le Mary sans femme* in 1666. Cyrano de Bergerac also drew upon *Phormio* for *Le Pédant joué* (1654). Molière's great rival, Montfleury, twice exploited the theme of capture by the Turks, in 1662 with *L'Ecole des jaloux* (republished in 1755 as *La Fausse Turquie*), and then again in 1666 with *Le Mary sans femme*. The theme of capture by corsair and the subsequent return of the captive, with all its attendant consequences in the disruption of a carefully planned marriage or the loss of a coveted inheritance, became a stock situation in seventeenth century French comedy, providing an ideal opportunity for the exploitation of jargon as a comic device. This notion of kidnap by pirates, as a feature of the comic plot, was actually more topical and less inherently unlikely a reference than might be supposed by a modern day audience. The Ottoman corsairs operating from their bases on the North African coast had been the scourge of the Mediterranean since the days of Barbarossa.<sup>379</sup> Fear of capture by Barbary pirates, who still occasionally raided the coasts of Italy for slaves, even daring to make incursions into Provence, lurked deep in the national consciousness of all Christian nations bordering the inland sea, especially those with maritime interests such as France.

The first occurrence of "Turkish" dialogue in a French comedy is to be found in Rotrou's *La Soeur* in 1645, though the play is very closely based on Della Porta's *La Sorella*. Much of the dialogue is extracted verbatim and therefore not original. It seems that our young hero speaks only Turkish after being kidnapped by corsairs and sold into slavery as a child. According to Rouillard,<sup>380</sup> Horace's words are authentic Turkish and capable of translation, though Ergaste, the 'valet rusé', is quite naturally talking gibberish. Rouillard offers us a detailed commentary on Rotrou's use of Turkish vocabulary and the following examples occur:

Act II ii:

ERGASTE: Pour Catalamechis, qui sont gens de neant...

ERGASTE: Et, si je m'en souviens, on appelle en ces lieux,  
Urchec, ou gens d'esprit, ceux qui raillent le mieux.

Rouillard identifies 'Catalamechis' as probably a corruption of 'Karamigiz', a term of abuse equivalent to 'maquereau' and 'Urchec' as 'shâqâ', meaning 'moqueur' (op.cit.).

ERGASTE: Ils appellent Tubalch, cette ardeur fraternelle,  
Ou Boram, qui veut dire intime et naturelle...

Here, again according to Rouillard, 'Tubalch' is probably 'toplânmeş', 'serré', and 'Boram' probably 'burma', 'fortement lié' (op. cit.).

Act III iii:

GERONTE: Mem.

HORACE: Bel sem (Rouillard: Turkish bilsün, perhaps).

<sup>379</sup> Appointed 'Kapudan Pasha' or Lord High Admiral in 1533. By the mid-seventeenth century, these sea-robbers were well past their heyday and largely independent of Ottoman control, though still a danger to shipping and vulnerable maritime populations.

<sup>380</sup> Rouillard 1, pp. 33 – 52.

Act III iv:

ERGASTE: Eh bien, lui parlant Turc, je sçay bien le confondre.  
 Cabrisciam ogni Boraf, embusaim, Constantinopola?  
 HORACE: Ben Belmen, ne sensulez.  
 ERGASTE: Carigar camboco, ma io ossansando?  
 HORACE: Bensem, Belmen.  
 ERGASTE: Ossasando, nequei, nequet, poter lever cosir Nola?  
 HORACE: Sachina, Basumbasce, agrir se.

In this exchange, Ergaste's words are again nonsense, but the phrase 'oqui boraf', which is very close indeed to Rotrou's 'ogni Boraf', occurs in Act IV iv of the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*. Rouillard offers the following linguistic observations: 'Constantinopola' has a Turkish dative ending, though technically it should be 'Istanbola'; Horace's line is probably 'Ben Bilmin ne sen soïliz', 'I don't know what you are saying'. 'Carigar camboto' (sic) also occurs in the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*. 'Bashunbasce' resembles 'bashunbash', or 'bigshot'.<sup>381</sup> A little further on, we find:

ERGASTE: Siati cacus naincon catalai mulae?  
 HORACE: Vare hecc (probably for 'veer haqq': 'you are right')

The following piece of dialogue also bears a strong resemblance to the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*. Compare:

ANSELME: T'en a-t-il pô tant dire en si peu de propos?  
 ERGASTE: Oüy, le language Turc dit beaucoup en deux mots.

with:

M. JOURDAIN: Tant de choses en deux mots?  
 COVIELLE: Oui, la turque est comme cela; elle dit beaucoup en peu de parôles.

Further Turkish exchanges occur in Act III vi:

GERONTE, à Horace: Soler?  
 HORACE: Man.  
 GERONTE: Jerusalas, adhuc moluc acoceras maristo, viscelei  
 Huvi havete carbulach.  
 HORACE: Eracercheter biradam suledi, ben belmen, ne sulodij.  
 ANSELME: Que vous dit-il encor?  
 GERONTE: Qu'il n'a pu rien comprendre  
 A ce qu'un de vos gens lui vouloit faire entendre...  
 GERONTE: Acciam sembiliir bel mes, mic sulmes?  
 HORACE: Acciam bien croch soler, sen belmen, sen croch soler.

According to Rouillard, the last two lines represent the following dialogue in Ottoman

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<sup>381</sup> *ibid.*

Turkish:

GERONTE: Akhcham sen bilir bilmis, mis sölmez.  
(Tonight thou mayest know).

HORACE: Akhcham ben khoch seuiler.  
(Tonight thou knowest that thou speakest well).

And finally the farewells:

GERONTE: Ghidelum anglan Cic!  
HORACE: Ghidelum Baba.

These excerpts from *La Soeur* bear a strong resemblance to an example of genuine Turkish, the specimen dialogue to be found in Bartholomew Georgiewitz (see Appendix). Rotrou's Turkish exchanges also merit comparison with Molière's 'Acciam croc soler ouch alla moustaph gidelum', translatable as, "Tonight you speak well, bravo! Moustafa, let us depart."<sup>382</sup> I note, in passing, a reference in Act III, v. 1289 of *La Soeur* to the 'Maistre du Serail, ou Bostamgirassy'; this is a corruption of the term 'Bostanji-başı', the 'officier du sérail qui a la charge des jardins', by coincidence the office held by Soliman Aga himself.<sup>383</sup>

Montfleury too makes extended use of Turkish dialogue in *L'Ecole des jaloux ou le cocu volontaire* (1662), republished in 1755 under the title of *La Fausse Turquie*, and in *Le Mary sans Femme* (1666). According to Lancaster,<sup>384</sup> *Le Grand Turc*, staged in 1683-85 but subsequently lost, is Montfleury's *L'Ecole des jaloux* under a new name, suggested by the most comic scene in the play, and revived after the creation of the Comédie-Française in 1680. The following "Turkish" phrases occur in *L'Ecole des jaloux*, followed in each case by a translation from the interpreter:

ACT II v:

GUSMAN: *Biradam dermak fourk galera gourdini.*  
SANTILLANE: Que vous dit-il?  
FABRICE: Il veut que vous soyez puny.  
SANTILLANE: Encore, que vous dit-il? Qu'il paroist en colère!  
FABRICE: Il dit que promptement on vous mène en galère,  
A grands coups de gourdin.<sup>385</sup>

ACT II vi:

GUSMAN: *Cascadruga lek bruk sem bulmek soch varé.*  
SANTILLANE: Que diable dit-il là?  
FABRICE: Qu'elle est fort à son gré  
Qu'il s'en veut divertir.<sup>386</sup>

ACT III iv:

<sup>382</sup> Rouillard 2, p. 195.

<sup>383</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>384</sup> Lancaster, vol. IV ii, p. 596.

<sup>385</sup> Fournel, vol. 3, p. 280-281.

<sup>386</sup> *Ibid.* p. 282.

GUSMAN: *Mic moluc mok sin croch.*  
 SANTILLANE: Que jargonne-t-il tant?  
 Que vous dit-il encor?  
 FABRICE: Qu'on vous perde en sortant,  
 Si vous n'y faites rien.<sup>387</sup>

While the meanings of 'galera' and 'gourdini' are obvious from the following words: 'on vous meine en Galere. A grands coups de gourdin...' Lancaster suggests that many other phrases are direct borrowings from *La Soeur*, for example: 'Bitadam', 'bensem', 'vare', 'mic', 'moluc', 'sen croch', with 'Cascadraya' possibly being an amplification of 'carigir'.<sup>388</sup> Though the resemblance is perhaps not close enough to be conclusive, we may well speculate as to whether Georgiewitz provides a common source of "Turkish" phrases to all three playwrights: Rotrou, Montfleury and Molière.

In Montfleury's *Mary sans Femme*, the song in the final scene very closely resembles material in the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*, Act IV v, and also in *Le Sicilien*:

O Giornata  
 Fortunata!  
 Rin grasciar Mahometa  
 Mi donnar la libertà,  
 Di tornar in Patria  
 Allegria [etc.].<sup>389</sup>

Precise directions are not given as to who sings it – we find 'On chante' in all editions, but evidently it is the Algerians who are singing under Fatiman's direction. This is presented as Turkish, but is actually lingua franca, phrases of which can be easily identified by anyone with a good knowledge of Latin or one of the Romance languages. Montfleury's use of it may be compared with Molière's usage in *Le Sicilien*; for example, Montfleury's 'mi donar... ti donar' with Molière's 'Mi servir... Mi levar... Ti non comprara... Ti voler comprara?' Montfleury here privileges the lingua franca by giving it pride of place in the final scene of his comedy, but there are also 'mots turcs' to be found elsewhere in the play, for example lines 81-85:

Un gros coquin de Turc dont le diable auroit peur,  
 Disant cent *Carachou*, se montrant à ma vûë,  
 De dix coups de Gourdin sans façon me saluë...  
 Disant *sursa cauvé*, *sursa*, de son ton grave...

The "Turkish" words quoted here by Tomire do not correspond with any linguistic reality and closely resemble the formulae in *le Sicilien* or *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, 'Chiribirida ouch alla' or 'Hu la ba ba la chou ba la', nonsense meant to sound like Arabic or Turkish. Nevertheless, there are certain echoes; 'Carachou' sounds like 'kharaj', or the capitation tax paid by all non-Muslim subjects of the Ottoman empire; 'sursa' and 'cauvé' are very close to the lingua franca for "Get up!" and "prisoner". Three distinct strands are thus clearly emerging in "Turkish" dialogue, as used by the comic playwrights of the period: genuine

<sup>387</sup> Fournel, p. 290.

<sup>388</sup> Lancaster, III i, p. 290.

<sup>389</sup> Montfleury, *Le Mary sans femme*, éd. crit. par E. Forman, p. 95; see also pp. 118-119 for Forman's translation of the verse (University of Exeter Press, 1985).

Turkish words and phrases, lingua franca, nonsense syllables. The first appears to be used for purposes of 'vraisemblance' and local colour, the second where audience complicity is required, the third for purely comic effect.

Montfleury and the Comédiens du Roi at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, following the earlier example set by Rotrou, were Molière's immediate predecessors in adding both music and lingua franca to comedy. The final scene from Montfleury's 'comédie-ballet', *Le Mary sans femme*, may very well have given Molière the idea of producing another with a Turkish theme, in time for *Le Sicilien*. Indeed, the musical element in *Le Mary sans femme* is probably its main interest and this represents a major development in French comedy, with the music no longer an isolated element, like the odd serenade or a dance or two, incorporated as an afterthought to the plot. Montfleury deliberately tries to evoke the exotic, oriental atmosphere of Algiers in his final scene and music naturally plays a vital part in such a representation. Twenty years earlier, Georges de Scudéry, in adapting his sister's massive novel *Ibrahim, ou l' illustre Bassa*, with its wealth of local colour, as a tragedy,<sup>390</sup> had set the musical precedent for the stage in specifying the presence of a 'Troupe de Ioûteurs de Haut-bois à la Turque & d'Ataballes' amongst the cast. There were also many more recent examples of pieces with an "oriental" flavour for Montfleury and his composer to follow, in the numerous 'ballets de cour'. Lully, too, probably found inspiration here, though the musical motifs can rarely have been fully authentic! In 1667 the 'deux Baptistes' followed Montfleury's example, mingling musical with linguistic exoticism in *Le Sicilien*.

Attempts at musical exoticism appeared in France as early as 1626, with the famous *Ballet de la Douairière de Billebahaut* which had a Turkish theme. According to Obelkevitch,<sup>391</sup> until the seventeenth century composers did not try to reproduce the actual sound of Turkish musical instruments or to follow Oriental modes or tone patterns in composition, which sounded discordant and harsh to the Western ear, but rather attempted to capture something of the exoticism of its spirit. The martial strains of the Janissary bands would have been familiar to those who had been unfortunate enough to hear them on the battlefield, but that would have been all. The introduction of exotic vocabulary on the other hand was still comparatively rare. Montfleury was an innovator in putting that element to the forefront of his play and in consecrating the final, culminating scene to it; in this matter he paved the way for Molière and Lully. The use of linguistic exoticism in his work provides for a vigorous and entertaining style, even if the effects are largely artificial, and the audience have to accept from the very beginning that Algerians and Spanish speak French to each other!

Rotrou, Montfleury and Molière created their own adaptations of sabir or lingua franca from the jargon, largely derived from Italian and Arabic, currently in use in the Mediterranean ports, as it had been for centuries. Savary de Brève, French ambassador to the Porte from 1589 to 1605 and a competent linguist, offers the following description of lingua franca in his *Relation*:

...Les citadins des villes marchandes parlent quasi tous Italien, mais un parler corrompu, ou pour mieux dire un jargon, que la pratique des marchands de cette nation, avec les Italiens & François, par le besoin de leur commerce, leur a fait apprendre: Il est bien composé de termes italiens, mais sans liaison, sans ordre, ny syntaxe, ne gardant és noms la concordance des genres, meslans les masculins avec les feminins, & ne prenant des verbes, que les infinitifs, pour tous tems & personnes, avec les pronoms, mi & ti: neantmoins on les entend aussi bien que s'ils y observoient toutes les regles de grammaire, & pour ceux

<sup>390</sup> Scudéry, Georges de, *Ibrahim, ou l' Illustre Bassa* (Paris, 1643).

<sup>391</sup> See Obelkevitch, "Turkish Affect in the Land of the Sun King." *Musical Quarterly*, LXIII, 1977.

qui ont affaire avec eux en usent de mesme, s'ils veulent estre entendus.<sup>392</sup>

Sabir is a 'langue de relation', a mutually intelligible mixture of the different languages, Romance, Greek, Arabic and Turkish, in use in the Mediterranean seaports of the sixteenth century. Its use seems to date from the thirteenth century and the time of the Crusades, hence the term 'lingua franca', the language of the Franks. Lingua franca became the normal language of diplomacy and commerce of the Deys of Algeria and Tunis, and also that used between masters and slaves, it was a 'langage de la chiourme, composé en grande partie d'imprécations et de menaces'.<sup>393</sup> Traces of it still remain in the popular speech of North Africa today. Phonetically, it is very close to the Italian of Genoa. Grammar is rudimentary: there is only one form for singular and plural; no article; a very basic system of pronouns, *mi, ti*; only two tenses of the verb, future/present *mi andar* and past *mi andato*; a few imperatives; a passive form is possible by combining the verb with *star*. Syntax is very simple; vocabulary is mainly of Italian or Castilian origin, with the addition of some Turkish, Arabic, Provençal and French. D'Arvieux himself most probably acquired his own familiarity with lingua franca during his three-month stay in Tunis from June to August 1666, accompanying M. du Moulin, the King's envoy.

...Hagi Mehemed [le Day de Tunis] me reçût avec ce compliment d'un Italien corrompu, qu'on appelle Langue Franque, dont on se sert ordinairement à Tunis: Ben venuto, como estar, bono, forte, gramercy. Je ne sçavois pas assez ce jargon pour m'en servir en lui parlant. Je lui parlai en Turc...Le bon homme fut ravi de m'entendre parler sa Langue...Je lui dis que je l'avois apprise à Smyrne, où j'avois demeuré quelques années.<sup>394</sup>

Montfleury, Molière and others of their generation made an informed choice to exploit the possibilities of lingua franca, rather than to employ an equally authentic Turkish or Arabic, because lingua franca could denote exoticism whilst still permitting communication with the audience. The 'turquerie' in the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* itself is defined by Perego, in his article on sabirs, as 'en langue franque plus ou moins stylisée'.<sup>395</sup> Had Molière wished to introduce genuine Turkish dialogue into his play it would have been open to him to do so, but in the earliest printed edition of the 'cérémonie turque', that of March 1671, he makes explicit reference to lingua franca:

Le Mufti demande, en même langue, aux Turcs assistants de quelle religion est le Bourgeois, et ils l'assurent qu'il est mahométan. Le Mufti invoque Mahomet en langue franque ...(Act IV, sc.v)

In 1666 Brécourt, who had earlier belonged to Molière's troupe, introduced a similar kind of musical composition in his *Le Jaloux invisible*, which bears a strong resemblance both to Hali's song in *Le Sicilien* and to the Turkish ceremony of *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, though this is here intended simply as a magical incantation and is not presented as Turkish speech:

Bondi Cariselli,  
Sanita,  
Allegressa,

<sup>392</sup> See Karro 2, p. 265, n. 30.

<sup>393</sup> Perego, P., "Les Sabirs", in André Martinet, *Le Langage*, pp. 597-607 (Paris, 1968).

<sup>394</sup> Laurent d'Arvieux, *Mémoires*, t. III, pp. 418 and also 430-31.

<sup>395</sup> Perego, Pierre, "Les Sabirs", in André Martinet, *Le Langage*, pp. 597-607 (Paris, 1968).

Quanto vivra  
 Questo guidon in Sanita  
 D'alla beretta,  
 Ogni cosa aspetta,  
 Ho! ho! ho! ho! ho!  
 Il grande becco  
 Cornuto,  
 Tic tac, tic tac, tic tac.  
 Toc tic, toc tic.  
 Tac, tic tac, tic tac.  
 Ba, ba, ba, ba, ba, ba, ba, ba tu,  
 Cariselli,  
 Becco Cornuto.<sup>396</sup>

Brécourt's play is important because Molière may well have used it as a source. There are certain parallels to be found with the *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, such as the use of jargon and the inclusion of a mock initiation ceremony, though there is no Turkish colour here since it is not called for as an integral part of the plot.

Molière's own first use of lingua franca occurs in *Le Sicilien ou l'Amour Peintre*, which was first staged in February 1667 as an addition to two other short plays in the *Ballet des Muses*, *Mélicerte* and the *Pastorale comique*, being thus by definition a 'comédie-ballet', in which the comedy is defined by the need to introduce singing and dancing into the plot. As we have seen, the use of sabir is not an innovation of Molière's, and it is probably introduced here in imitation of his personal rival Montfleury and of Rotrou, whose work *Le Sicilien* so closely resembles. Two of the characters have Turkish (or Moorish) names, Hali ('Turc, esclave d'Adraste') and Zaïde ('esclave'), and Moorish dancers conclude the play with their ballet-entry in the masquerade. Hali disguises himself and sings to win the girl for his master. His song and Don Pèdre's riposte anticipate in many ways the burlesque of the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*:

Hali amène trois musiciens turcs...  
 L'esclave turc musicien chante: ...chiribirida boucha la.

HALI:	Chiribirida ouch alla! Star bon Turca, Non aver danara: Ti voler comprara? Mi servir a ti, Se pagar per mi. Far bona cucina, Mi levar matina Far boller caldara, Parlara, parlara; Ti voler comprara?	(jargon sans signification) [Moi] être bon Turc, Ne pas avoir un denier: Toi vouloir acheter? Moi te servir. Si [toi] payer pour moi. Faire bonne cuisine, Me lever matin, Faire bouillir chaudière. Toi parler, parler; Toi vouloir acheter?
DON PEDRE:	Chiribirida ouch alla! Mi ti non comprara,	Moi pas acheter toi;

<sup>396</sup> Brécourt, *Le Jaloux invisible*, ed. Fournel, p. 314; Lancaster, III ii, p. 704.

Ma ti bastonara,  
Si ti non andara.  
Andara, andara,  
O ti bastonara

Mais bâtonner toi,  
Si toi pas t'en aller.  
Aller, aller  
Ou moi bâtonner toi.<sup>397</sup>

A major difference that should be noted here is that in scene vi of *Le Sicilien* we have "real" Turks to sing and dance for us, not masqueraders like those in *Le Mary sans femmes*. Incidentally, this appears to be only the second appearance of a Turk *per se* in French comedy, rather than as a character from within the plot, perhaps a suitor seeking to deceive a guardian or a crafty valet, acting the part in disguise. Hali is not presented as an unsympathetic character and neither is Montfleury's Fatman. It is somewhat unusual to find Turks depicted in a positive light at this period, compared with the usual stereotypical portrayal of the "cruel" or the "lascivious" Turk of fiction. Perhaps it would be a mistake, however, to make too much of this aspect of Hali, since in all probability what we have here is merely a variation on the theme of the traditional comic figure of the loveable 'valet rusé' from the Commedia dell'Arte. Nevertheless, it is interesting to speculate on the reasons that might lie behind Molière's decision to present him as a Turk.

The above example should be compared with the following extract from the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*, Act IV v:

LE MUFTI:	Se ti sabir, Ti respondir; Se non sabir, Tazir, tazir. Mi star Mufti: Ti qui star ti? Non intendir: Tazir, tazir.	Si toi savoir, toi répondre; si non savoir, taire, taire. Moi être Mufti: toi qui être, toi? Non entendre: taire, taire. <sup>398</sup>
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A marked resemblance will at once be noted in grammar, style and vocabulary; it is not at all difficult for a French speaker, particularly one with any grounding in Latin, to construct a meaning and follow the text. This is Molière's personal rendering of lingua franca, but lingua franca it is, nonetheless. The same holds true for most of the rest of his "Turkish" dialogues; they remain intelligible to the hearer, despite the addition of a few genuine Turkish phrases and a little gibberish and nonsense syllables to add colour to the play. There seems to have been no good reason why, given the collaboration with d'Arvieux, the Turkish language could not have been employed throughout the scene to lend authenticity to an ostensibly "Turkish" ceremony. Had Molière considered it desirable to do so, then that would undoubtedly have been the more authentic choice. At some point, therefore, he must have made a conscious decision against it, presumably because of the need for audience comprehension. To extract the maximum amount of humour from the situation, his hearers must be able to understand the dialogue. It would in any case have been extremely unrealistic, within the internal logic of the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*, for Covielle and Cléonte to be presented as fluent Turkish speakers; this is not required by the plot, at least not in the sense that knowledge of the Turkish language would be needed by the leading characters in *La Soeur*, for example. Here we know, because we are told, that Horace has been brought up to

<sup>397</sup> Translations from Couton, t. 2, p. 1358 n.2 and 1359 n.1.

<sup>398</sup> Translation from Couton, t. 2, p.1435 n.1.

speak nothing but Turkish and that Géronte has spent many years in captivity in the east. In this play it is only Ergaste who speaks gibberish, and this is what we would expect from his type of comic character in this kind of stock situation. It would simply not be credible to present a valet as a Turkish speaker. With these caveats in mind, we note that Covielle does insert a small number of Turkish words into his exchanges with his employer, towards the end of the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*. They are present only in very limited amounts and occur within a framework of gibberish, being used when the rascal is addressing M. Jourdain directly, in order to emphasise the latter's stupidity, as in Act IV iii:

COVIELLE: Acciam croc soler ouch alla moustaph gidelum amanahem varahini oussere carbulath, c'est-à-dire: "N'as-tu point vu une jeune belle personne, qui est la fille de M. Jourdain, gentilhomme parisien?"

COVIELLE: "Ah! me dit-il, marababa sahem"; c'est-à-dire: "Ah! Que je suis amoureux d'elle!"

For the most part, the audience easily understands the banter exchanged between Covielle and Cléonte. A translation is offered, ostensibly for M. Jourdain's comprehension, but in reality for ours. It is Molière's intention that we shall understand, as well as delight in, the comic sounds of his dialogue and thus he gives us every facility; where lingua franca is not employed we find a translation provided, so that we shall not miss the joke, for example, from Act IV iii:

MONSIEUR JOURDAIN: Cacaramouchen veut dire "Ma chère âme"?...

And again

COVIELLE: Oui, Mamamouchi; c'est-à-dire, en notre langue, Paladin...

And from Act IV iv:

CLEONTE: Ambousahim oqui boraf, Jordina, salamalequi.

COVIELLE: C'est-à-dire: "Monsieur Jourdain, votre coeur soit toute l'année comme un rosier fleuri." Ce sont façons de parler obligeantes de ces pays-là.

Spectators would immediately recognise the well-known Muslim greeting, "Al-salaam 'alaikum" or "Peace be upon you", in Covielle's 'salamalequi'. Molière had already used this Arabic formula in *Le Médecin volant*, scène iv, with Sganarelle's 'Salamalec, salamalec...' The traditional, elaborate, oriental courtesies, much in vogue amongst the Ottomans (and indeed they still are throughout the Middle East), are also to be recognised in the 'rosier fleuri' and in the following exchange:

COVIELLE: Carigar camboto oustin moraf.

CLEONTE: Oustin yoc catamalequi basum base alla moran.

COVIELLE: Il dit " que le Ciel vous donne la force des lions et la prudence des Serpents!"

Sadly, the use of jargon was not appreciated by all. Bruzen de la Martinière tells the well-known story, doubtless originating in Grimarest's *Vie de M. de Molière*, of the unfavourable reception of the first production at Chambord:

Jamais piece n'a été plus malheureusement reçue que celle-là, & aucune de celles de Molière ne lui a donné tant de déplaisir... tous les Courtisans la mettoient en morceaux. "Molière nous prend assurément pour des Gruës, de croire nous divertir avec de telles pauvretés", disoit M. le Duc de \*\*\*. "Qu'est-ce qu'il veut dire avec son balaba, balachou?" ajoûtoit M. le Duc de \*\*\*, "le pauvre homme extravague: il est épuisé; si quelque autre Auteur ne prend le Théâtre, il va tomber: Cet homme-là donne dans la Farce Italienne"... Il Faut excepter de ces Courtisans Mr. Colbert. C'étoit à lui qu'il auroit falu se prendre des *balachou, balaba* & de la ceremonie Turque...<sup>399</sup>

Despite such carping criticism, the exploitation of jargon as a theatrical device has obvious comic potential and is also endowed with a respectable Greco-Roman ancestry. We find it employed on a fairly regular basis from around 1645 (*La Soeur*) up to about the year 1670, though it features far more rarely after this date and we must wonder why. The first example of jargon being used to represent an oriental language on the Parisian stage occurs, as we have already noted, in Rotrou. The dialogue in *La Soeur* contains genuine, if somewhat garbled, Turkish phrases that may well have provided Molière with a source for a few of his own. Some years later, in 1662, we find Montfleury introducing a jargon composed of a combination of lingua franca and Turkish in *L'Ecole des jaloux*, a play based like *La Soeur* on the theme of capture by corsairs, but Boursault's *Le Mort vivant* of the same year, whilst featuring an 'African' embassy, has neither jargon nor interpreter. The year 1666 sees Montfleury once more offering dialogue in a combination of lingua franca and Turkish in *Le Mary sans femme*, with Brécourt also exploiting the possibilities of lingua franca in *Le Jaloux invisible*. As we know, Molière himself features lingua franca in 1668 with *Le Sicilien*, but with the single exception of Boursault, none of the above introduce a comic ambassador. Poisson writing *Les faux Moscovites* in 1669 is the first to provide a pair of interpreters together with an ambassador and his train. This is in accordance with historical reality, for the Muscovites arrived in France armed with two translators and it is the Russian ambassador himself who is (arguably) the subject of the satire. Jargon is specified in the stage directions, but the form it takes must be left to the discretion of the individual actors since it appears nowhere in the dialogue. The play was composed in great haste and this would account for the omission. The language of the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* itself we have already examined in some considerable detail in the course of this chapter.

Du Perche's *Ambassadeur d'Affrique*, which played in the provinces in 1666, contains specifically 'African' dialogue and an 'ambassador' [Crispin] who is provided with an interpreter, in this instance the young master, Lélie:

CRISPIN.- *Kamdem SKoreille*  
*Horleam scanem tourtoury.*  
 LE DOCTEUR.- Que dit-il?  
 LÉLIE.- Il est fort marry  
 De vous avoir veu tant d'audace,  
 Et veut qu'a l'instant on vous chasse....

Our ambassador is not the only character to resort to jargon. Though he has only one spoken line in the entire play, Du Perche gives Crispin a partner in crime; his fellow valet Tirbautes,

<sup>399</sup> See Grimarest, Jean Léonor Gallois Sieur de, *La Vie de M. de Molière, édition critique par Georges Mongrédien*, pp. 112-13 (Paris, 1955) and Bruzen de la Martinière, *Les Oeuvres de Monsieur de Molière. Nouvelle édition, revue, corrigé & augmentée, d'une nouvelle vie de l'Auteur*, pp. 92-93 (La Haye, 1725).

'en habit d'Affriquain' participates in the whole elaborate deception:

TIRBAUTES.- *Bend'harleK*  
 CRISPIN.- *Gooth danKem cum vir,*  
*Salcardy bucdemeK satir*  
*Et voldrecom.*  
 LÉLIE.- Il s'impatiente  
 De ce qu'il ne voit point venir  
 Lucesse, & l'envoye querir.

This jargon used in the *Ambassadeur d'Affrique*, patently has no connection with lingua franca nor does it resemble the 'Turkish' dialogue of the earlier plays. The use of the capital 'K' and the apostrophe is actually rather reminiscent of some of the African 'click' languages, though this would naturally not be apparent to a theatre audience unless pronounced in that particular way, and we have no way of telling if such was the case. The form of the dialogue here is original to Du Perche and shows no borrowing. The roguish Mascarille features as the interpreter in our third African play, *Le Mariage de la reine de Monomotapa* of 1682, but in this instance communication is by sign language and gesture; there is no attempt at jargon.

With Fatouville's *L'Empereur dans la lune* of 1684, we move into the realm of the Comédie-Italienne. In this play communication provides no problem for it seems that French is spoken on the moon. When the pedant Balouard wonders how Arlequin manages to understand what is said, it appears that the emperor has learnt to speak French like a native by means of 'une trompette parlante, & d'un maitre de langue, qui tous les jours à minuit lui donnoit le leçon sur le pont-neuf'. The throwaway reference to the Pont-Neuf is interesting and one must wonder which songs from that particularly subversive source Fatouville had in mind, amongst those current at the time of production. We have already noted mention of the Pont-Neuf by Poisson in *Les Faux Moscovites* and are thinking in a satirical context. Be that as it may, with the use of some pseudo-scientific mumbo jumbo Arlequin manages to convince his doubtful hearer that the melodious sounds really can be heard from so far away. Perhaps Fatouville felt that the introduction of a third "language" would have made things unnecessarily complicated for his audience. Given the theatrical context of French scenes set in an Italian framework, he could always provide exotic effect whenever necessary by the judicious exploitation of that language. In *Le Banqueroutier* of 1686 he offers us the delectable Colombine in the rôle of interpreter, but this time, as in the *Mariage de la reine de Monomotapa*, the language is one of gesture. Persillet wonders in an aside to Colombine, 'Mais comment savoir ce que ces messieurs-là veulent dire?' She replies: 'Il n'y a qu'à les regarder. Par leurs gestes, ils parlent aussi bon François que vous'. This is therefore a language that conveys everything by sign and gesture, 'Tu entends donc par signe tout ce qu'on veut dire?' Colombine confirms that this is not only possible, but even a considerable advantage: 'C'est la plus mignonne de toutes les langues, & qui épargne plus des sottises à l'oreille'. I cannot help wondering if it is remotely possible that in the appearance of sign language in the French comic theatre in the 1680s we do not have some allusion to the elaborate system of sign language current amongst the Native American peoples, which famously enabled direct communication between tribes of widely disparate language groups. This is, after all, the golden age for travellers' and explorers' tales, which are becoming increasingly popular and in great demand from the reading public.

In 1688 *Le Divorce* introduces a change of author from Fatouville to Jean-François Regnard. Isabelle, we recall, is trapped in a loveless marriage to Sotinet and Arlequin appears as an ambassador sent on behalf of the emperor of China to obtain her

freedom. He adopts this disguise in order to gain access to the girl, whilst also courting Colombine for himself. We have a 'discours en galimatias' specified in the stage directions, but little indication as to its form. Two years later Regnard's *L'Homme à bonne fortune* sees Arlequin at various junctures impersonate both the prince of 'Tonquin des curieux' and that monarch's ambassador. He manages to smuggle in Isabelle's lover, Octave, disguised as a member of his suite. Mezzetin makes his appearance in the rôle of interpreter, dressed, appropriately enough, as a parrot. The dialogue is flirtatious and not a little risqué. In this case the text gives quite specific references to jargon: 'Quel diable de jargon' and '...qu'est-ce qu'il jargonne-là?' but all we have is a little Italian, used to represent 'Tonkinois'. Though we may suspect the actors of ad-libbing to milk the situation for maximum humour as the opportunity arose, we cannot know what form this might have taken, since in the nature of things it is not recorded. The audience are certainly complicit, we laugh at the stupidity of old Brocantin to be so taken in. He, for his part, cannot understand for the life of him what is going on: 'Quel diable de jargon! Qu'est-ce donc qu'il dégoise-là?' But Brocantin is not a sympathetic character and need not detain us. The last of our plays from the Comédie-Italienne to feature an 'Oriental' ambassador is Delosme de Monchenay's *Le Phénix* of 1691, and here we have neither jargon nor interpreter. Our Turkish Bacha is perfectly well able to convey his meaning in good French.

From 1670 until the emergence of Alain-René Le Sage as a writer for the Théâtre de la Foire, there is very little attempt to exploit the use of comic jargon. The lingua franca, adopted to such good effect by Molière and his generation of writers, more or less evaporates with the appearance of the first French language scenes of the Comédie-Italienne. Probably it was felt that lingua franca, with its strong Italianate base, was too close to the Italian language of the comedies themselves and would thus lose its comic impact. If a good part of the play is in a foreign language to begin with, the inclusion of jargon in the 'scènes françaises' might well prove an irritant to the spectator or pass unnoticed. Perhaps, quite simply, the idea just seemed rather dated. The theme of the 'Oriental' embassy and any associated use of jargon are absent from the stage of the rival Comédie-Française. The comic theatre changed focus in the years following the death of Molière in 1673. It was becoming obvious that the king himself, until now its major patron, had lost interest. The players of the Comédie-Française, formed from the combination of the Compagnie de Guénégaud with the Comédiens du Roi in 1680, came to be associated with the more rigid classical forms of high literary comedy in verse. Though there are topical allusions to the Turks on occasion, there are no works of oriental fantasy in the repertoire at this period. This 'comédie noble' favoured laid heavy emphasis on moral instruction and tales of an improving nature. It did not draw large audiences. The merging of the two troupes had meant that the Hôtel de Bourgogne was now free to accommodate the rival Comédie-Italienne. These were able to flout, quite openly, the monopoly of theatre performances granted to the Comédie-Française in Paris because they played in Italian. The increasing inclusion of the popular 'scènes françaises' was in fact a direct infringement of the rights of the Comédie-Française and greatly resented as the latter lost their potential audiences to the foreign troupe. Even with the expulsion of the Italians in 1697, the Comédie-Française failed to recover their audiences, for the theatre-going public simply moved further downmarket to attend the congenially subversive productions of the Théâtre de la Foire.<sup>400</sup>

<sup>400</sup> On the history of the French comic theatre at this period see Lancaster; Claude Alasseur, *La Comédie-Française au 18<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1967); Jean-Marie Apostolidès, *Le Prince sacrifié: théâtre et politique au temps de Louis XIV* (Paris, 1985); Gustave Attinger, *L'Esprit de la commedia dell'arte dans le théâtre français* (Paris, 1950); Geoffrey Brereton, *French Comic Drama from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1977); Roger Guichemerre, *La Comédie classique en France* [Coll. *Que sais-je?*] (Paris, 1978); A. Joannidès, *La Comédie-Française de 1680 à 1900* (Paris, 1901); Pierre Mélése, *Le Théâtre et le public à Paris sous Louis XIV*,

*Arlequin Roy de Serendip* is the only one of Le Sage's pre-1715 comedies to feature the use of jargon. Of the five plays of substantial oriental interest produced at the Foires during this short period prior to the death of the king, *Arlequin Roy de Serendip* is the earliest, playing at the Foire Saint-Germain in 1713. Arlequin is shipwrecked on the coast of Serendip and later crowned king. This is the present day island of Sri Lanka, at the time a Buddhist kingdom largely controlled by the Dutch and the Portuguese, though our comedy features a Grand Vizir, eunuchs and a harem in what is obviously intended to represent a Muslim state. Since we also have references to Greek slave girls and even a "Greek" song in Act 3 iv, set in the *Sérail*, there is more than a remote possibility that we are meant to have the Ottoman empire in mind as the true setting, for the Turks ruled in Greece:

Air 149. (*Sçais-tu la différence.*)

Keleos, kidasie,  
Kilaspé, Karpeïa,  
Kina:  
Kaclicos, Kidarie,  
Kikinnou, Kastana,  
Kasta,  
Keleos, Karpeïa.

We will find no ambassador listed amongst the *dramatis personae*, but the play is remarkable for its extended use of jargon in Act I vi. Le Sage is the first playwright to employ written jargon to represent an oriental language since Molière's *Bourgeois gentilhomme*. In this case, it is patently derived from half remembered schoolboy Greek, with the introduction of words such as 'Basileos' and mock conjugations such as 'tiptomen, tiptete, tiptoussi. In the following scene, the jargon performs a mock religious function and is presented to us in the form of a litany with what is can only be interpreted as a daring parody of the 'Kyrie eleison' from the Catholic Mass in 'Tou crizou, i crizi'. The refrain of 'kecaca' in this context would be particularly offensive with all its scatological connotations:

ARLEQUIN, le GRAND SACRIFICATEUR, & ses suivans.

*Le Grand Sacrificateur & ses suivans se laissent tomber sur le cul; Arlequin fuit la même chose. Ils se relévent. Alors le Grand Sacrificateur prend un livre, il lit, & les Suivans répondent.*

Le Gr. SACRIFICATEUR, *lentement.*- Basileos, alifi, agogi, aformi.

Les SUIVANS.- Basileos.

Le Gr. SACRIFICATEUR, *plus vite.*- Bibli, bondromi, bebrofi.

Les SUIVANS. Basileos.

ARLEQUIN, *arrachant un poil de la barbe du Gr. Sacrificateur.*-Basileos.

Le Gr. SACRIFICATEUR, *très-vite.*- Mineo, milea, mileni, malisxi.

Les Suivans.- Basileos.

ARLEQUIN, *lui passant la queue du Loup sous le nez.*- Basileos.

Le Gr. SACRIFICATEUR, *lentement.*- Pollaxi, piretos, pephili, pepomsi.

Les SUIVANS.- Basileos.

Le Gr. SACRIFICATEUR.- Tou crizou, i crizi, tiptomen, tiptete, tiptoussi.

Les SUIVANS.- Basileos.

ARLEQUIN, *crachant au visage du Gr. Sacrificateur.*- Basileos.

Le Gr. SACRIFICATEUR, *posant le turban Royal sur la tête d'Arlequin.*- Tragizo, trapeza, porphyra, Kecaca.

Les SUIVANS.- Kecaca.

Le Gr. SACRIFICATEUR.- Porphyra, pisma, Kecaca.

Les SUIVANS.- Kecaca.

*Arlequin croit par ce dernier mot que le Gr. Sacrificateur & ses Suivans lui disent qu'il est de la cérémonie de se servir de son turban comme d'un pot de chambre, se met en devoir de leur obéir; mais ils font tous un cri d'indignation Basileos. Le grand Sacrificateur remet le turban sur la tête d'Arlequin. Ils remportent leur Roy, & par-là finit le premier Acte.*

What we are presented with here is plainly intended to represent a coronation ritual. This is made clear from both text and context; 'βασιλευς' is Greek for king and Arlequin is solemnly crowned, albeit with a turban. The mock ceremonial is obviously meant to appear ridiculous and would have been played for laughs with many lazzi. There are distinct echoes of Molière's 'turquerie' in the use of a holy book and the 'Grand Sacrificateur' fulfils the function of the mufti. Yet the mere fact that a farce of this subversive nature could even be produced in France shows us how far we have come from the days of the Sun-King's glory. A comic playwright dares to mock royal majesty and the solemn rituals of the Church in a particularly crude manner, and he does so openly and with impunity. Such a thing would have been unthinkable some forty years earlier. Le Sage would not have written in the expectation that his play would pass unnoticed, or in the belief that the Théâtre de la Foire was attended only by the vulgar and the ignorant. On the contrary, the Foires were highly fashionable amongst certain circles at court in a reaction against what had become the rigid formalism of the Comédie-Française. These signs of disaffection in the comic theatre are indicative of a growing weakness in royal government and the declining popularity of the king, concomitants of decades of war, religious persecution, poor harvests and ill-thought out fiscal policies.

### Conclusion.

*La comédie forme l'esprit, élève le cœur, annoblit les sentimens, c'est le miroir de la vie humaine, qui fait voir le vice dans toute son horreur, & représente la vertu avec tout son éclat. Le théâtre est l'école de la politesse, le rendez-vous des beaux esprits, le pied-d'estal des gens de qualité. Une petite doze de comédie prise à propos, rend l'esprit des dames plus enjoué, le cœur plus tendre, l'oeil plus vif, & les manières plus engageantes, & c'est le lieu où le beau sexe brille avec le plus d'éclat. (Regnard and Dufresny, *Les Chinois*)*

During the course of this study it has emerged that the links connecting the 'Oriental' ambassador with seventeenth-century French comedy are strong; they are literal, fictional, metaphorical, and comical in nature. Such links are literal, because of the theatre's function as a means of royal propaganda; visiting 'ambassadeurs extraordinaires' are taken to selected performances as part of their official programme. Resident members of the Paris *corps diplomatique* therefore attend the comedy on a regular basis, as much to see who is present and to observe the demeanour of their colleagues as for their own entertainment. In the case of the Grand Duchy of Muscovy, the Tsar's ambassadors were given direct instructions to attend theatrical productions wherever they might happen to find themselves and to present a detailed report on their return. Thus we may say that in Russia the connection between ambassador and stage is particularly solid, for their diplomatic service played an instrumental part in Alexis Romanov's establishment of the theatre there. Fictional links undoubtedly exist between the 'Oriental' ambassador and the theatre because he and his suite appear upon the comic stage as stock characters and are frequently instrumental in the dénouement of the plot. We have observed this tendency in the vast majority of the plays that we have studied. Metaphorical links are to be found in the perceived similarity between the craft of the actor and that of the ambassador. It is received wisdom that each presents a carefully crafted *persona* to the world whilst hiding his true sentiments behind the mask. Travelling player and 'Ambassadeur extraordinaire' alike are obliged to ply their nomadic trade far from home. Lastly, humorous links may be said to exist because of the specific connection with the comic theatre and the latter's predilection to farce, parody and satire.

Over the course of Louis's long reign, there is a perceptible change in the nature of the comic theatre and this may be observed in the portrayal of the 'Oriental' Ambassador upon the stage. In 1668 *Les Faux Moscovites* offers us an Aristophanic satire on the theme of the Russian embassy. Probably this was the result of a personal grudge on the part of Poisson, but the play could not have appeared without a nod and a wink from the appropriate authorities. Pierre Potemkin had caused a certain amount of irritation in court circles by his insistence upon the Tsar's imperial title and (by implication) precedence over Louis, a mere monarch. The Russians behaved in what was considered to be an unseemly manner at court. In the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* we have a further instance of personal satire connected with a visiting embassy, but one that operates on many levels of complexity, at several stages removed from Poisson's short farce. Molière is to provide the touchstone for his own and the following generation. We have seen in the course of Chapter 3 how extraordinarily subtle Molière's *Bourgeois gentilhomme* is, once we slip below the surface and analyse this comedy in depth. We have advanced a stage further in satire, for Molière now writes on direct royal

command, no longer simply with royal approval. The king is the main instigator of the 'turquerie'. We are not considering a mere comic burlesque here, however excellent an example of the genre the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* may be, but a work of direct propaganda and all that is entailed in the context of French ambitions in the Levant and Bourbon prestige in Europe. A study of the complex diplomatic background of the seventeenth century is essential to a proper understanding of this play, its genesis and purpose. The element of Aristophanic satire is an important aspect of the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*. I suggest once more that its proper object is Hugues de Lionne, not Soliman Aga, nor any of the other candidates that have been suggested to date. Nor must we forget the "Turkish" jargon that Molière uses to such comic effect and fail to set it in its proper context. It is sufficient evidence of the pains that Molière took to achieve 'vraisemblance' within the internal logic of the comedy. The religious dimensions to the 'turquerie' are also highly significant, given the theological concerns of the day during a period of Counter-Reformation, and must be given their due weight.

The three African plays that we have considered may well seem relatively insignificant, should we choose to compare them with the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*. There is nothing controversial here, save a certain crudity of language, and no obvious attempt at satire. They are none the less topical, reflecting as they do the diplomatic realities of the day, and relevant as evidence of the continuing popularity of the ambassadorial theme. The 'Siamese' plays, however, which begin to appear in the 1680s with Fatouville and the *Comédie-Italienne*, are not only implicitly critical of royal policy in the Far East but also of Louis XIV's close involvement with the Jesuit Order. Such covert criticism reflects a profound change in the nature of the comic theatre which began with the creation of the *Comédie-Française* in 1680 and the granting of its monopoly. Louis himself, once such a fervent patron, had lost interest in the theatre and court circles followed the king. The *Comédie-Française* chose to confine its productions to the plays of Molière and neo-Plautine comedies of strictly classical format. Exclusive by its very nature, being a subscription theatre, it soon became deeply unfashionable. There are neither comic ambassadors nor foolish jargon here. This loss of popular esteem is reflected in the corresponding growth of the *Comédie-Italienne*, which now appealed to a far broader public as it began to include key scenes in French.

It is evident that we are no longer comparing like with like, should we consider the works of Molière together with the later plays of the Théâtre Italien and the Foires. Even before the expulsion of the Italians in 1697, the comic theatre had begun to shift decidedly downmarket. Writers had once taken pride in depicting at least a semblance of reality and some appearance of 'bienséance', now they ventured deeper into the realms of exotic fantasy with the emergence of the Théâtre de la Foire. Plays with an oriental theme were very much in vogue. The change in genre is significant, as we move from the rarefied air of the 'comédiens du roi' into the popular theatre, for comedy has become slyly insubordinate in nature. Satire no longer originates with the authorities, nor is it approved by them. The lower down the social scale we move, the more subversive the material becomes until at the last we reach the musical subculture of the vaudeville. There is a cultural significance here that we must not fail to take account of. Louis is beginning to loosen his grip on the theatre. The Roi-Soleil propaganda is gradually clouding over and losing its lustre as the king ages and sickens. By the end of the reign the comic theatre is becoming thoroughly subversive and anti-state. No longer under firm control, comedy is changing focus. With the move to lesser theatres, there is more discontent and covert criticism of the regime. Here things can remain safely anonymous, especially where the 'vaudeville' is concerned. Naturally, satire is implicit and understood, because it cannot be overt, but it is thereby far less easy for the state to control. Direct political attack had been more difficult in the mainstream theatres, against

which the threat of closure was always effective. There is evidence of far greater scepticism regarding royal policy. It would be an error to believe the audiences of the Théâtre de la Foire to be confined to the general mass of the population. There was a distinct fashion amongst disaffected circles at court and certain elements of the bourgeoisie for their productions. With this growth of the Foires, we no longer find our 'Oriental' Ambassador on the stage, for he has undergone a transformation. Riza Beg and his successors have metamorphosed into a theme for the philosopher and the epistolary novelist, rather than the humble comic playwright whose concerns are now with harem escapades and a little mild pornography.

## GLOSSARY OF ARABIC, RUSSIAN, SHONA, SIAMESE AND OTTOMAN TURKISH TERMS

Systems of transliteration vary between the different European languages and modern Turkish. In the seventeenth century there seem to have been no standard systems. Proper names also occur with several variants in the original texts. Muhammad, for example, appears as Mahomet, Mehmet, Mehemet, Mehmed, Mehemed, Mohammed or Mahound.

**Ağa** (also **Agha**) (Turkish): a title of respect bestowed upon persons of high rank or social position and placed after the name. It formed part of the official title borne by the chief officers of the janissaries and of the cavalry, by the principal members of the Sultan's household and by the eunuchs controlling the harem.

**Bairam** (Turkish): the great feast held to celebrate the end of Ramadan.

**Balon** (Siamese): elaborately decorated barge.

**Barcalon**: see **Phra Khlang**.

**Bey** (also **beg**) (Turkish): a district governor; the ruler of an independent principality.

**Beylerbeg** (Turkish): provincial governor.

**Beyran**: see **Bairam**.

**Bostanci** (Turkish): lit. 'gardener', a member of the Sultan's personal guard, later of the police. Recruited from the **acemi oclan**, they performed manual labour in the palace gardens, but were fighting troops and part of the Janissary corps.

**Capigi**: see **kapuci**.

**Çavuş** (Turkish): palace poursuivant, equerry, sent to convey and execute imperial orders.

**Çavuş Başı** (Turkish): head **Çavuş**.

**Chaoush, chiaoux**: see **Çavuş**.

**Dede** (Turkish): lit. 'grandfather', title of respect given to the head of a dervish community.

**Defterdâr** (Turkish): a director of finance, senior treasury official.

**Dergâh-i âli** (Turkish): the Ottoman government, the Sublime Porte.

**Derviş** (Turkish): Member of a Muslim religious brotherhood, rather like a Christian monastic order. These fraternities were Sufi in origin, following a defined spiritual path and gathering around an individual of noted sanctity. The main devotional exercise is the **Dhikr**, Arabic for 'remembrance' (that is, of God). The ritual stresses the emotional aspect of religion, lending itself to hypnotic phenomena and ecstatic trances, leading to physical states which have earned devotees the soubriquets "howling", "whirling", "dancing" etc. There are also lay members, including women, mostly drawn from the lower orders of society, as well as resident members of the **tekke** or lodge. They played a vital rôle in the religious, political and social life in the Muslim community in the Middle Ages, but their theological standing has always been disputed by the orthodox.

**Devşirme** (Turkish): the levy of Christian children taken for training and service in the Palace or the **kapikulu** [military] corps. The best of them, known as the **iç oğlan**, were highly educated and served as pages in the imperial household.

**D'iak** (Russian): the rank of **d'iak** may very roughly be translated as 'secretary of state'.

**Dîvân** (Turkish): council.

**Dîvân-i Hümâyûn** (Turkish): the Imperial Council.

**Dragoman**: see **tercūman**.

**Effendi** (Turkish): the Ottoman equivalent of the French 'monsieur'.

**Elchi** (Turkish): ambassador, plenipotentiary, representative of a foreign state. Their arrival at the Porte was considered as evidence of homage to the Sultan by their ruler. They were expected to offer substantial gifts, which were viewed as the payment of tribute. In return, European ambassadors were given stipends and protection as guests of the Ottoman

government. The Sultan, claiming world suzerainty, did not employ **elchis**. Envoys, usually a **çavuş** or a **müteferrika**, would be sent as required to carry diplomatic correspondence from the Porte. These did not have power of negotiation and would be expected to return immediately. The Ottomans did not send ambassadors, as such, before 1699, and even then did not remain in permanent residence until 1789.

**Fetvâ** (Turkish): a written ruling on a point of Islamic law, issued by a **müftî**.

**Giaour** (Turkish): infidel.

**Hadgi** (Arabic): a Muslim who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca.

**Hammam** (Turkish): Turkish bath.

**Hil'at** (Turkish): a robe of honour presented by the Sultan to Ottoman dignitaries and also to foreign ambassadors on the presentation of their credentials.

**Hoca** (Turkish): (also 'hoja', 'hvaca') a teacher, tutor.

**Iç Oglani** (Turkish): page, a **devşirme** boy training in the Palace school.

**Ilchi**: see **Elchi**.

**Janissary**: see **Yeniçeri**.

**Kadi** (Arabic 'qadi') a judge, a magistrate administering both secular and religious law.

**Kahya bey** (Turkish): the grand vizir's personal agent and general deputy.

**Kâ'im-makâm** (Turkish): the grand vizir's deputy in his absence.

**Kalantar** (Persian): intendant, very roughly equivalent to a chief of police.

**Kapikulu** (Turkish): slaves employed as household troops or elsewhere in the Palace service.

**Kapu** (Turkish): lit. 'gate', the Porte, the Ottoman government.

**Kapuci** (Turkish): guards placed at the main gates of the imperial palace, the "gatekeeper" companies formed part of the Janissary corps.

**Kapudan Paşa** (Turkish): Grand Admiral of the Ottoman fleet, though often a graduate of the palace school without any maritime experience.

**Khan** (Turkish): a tribal leader; lord.

**Kizlar Agasi** (Turkish): chief black eunuch serving in the Palace.

**Khun** (Siamese): honorary title.

**Khunmuen** (Siamese): a mandarin of the lower rank.

**Khunnang** (Siamese): a mandarin of the middle rank.

**Kul** (Turkish): slave of the Sultan, educated in the Palace school.

**Levend** (Turkish): brigand, corsair.

**Luang** (Siamese): honorary title.

**Mazvarira** (Shona): chief wife of the Monomotapa. It was a function of the king's wives to deal with diplomatic missions between Monomotapa and other states, the Mazvarira conducted negotiations with the Europeans.

**Meso** (Shona): the third member of a Mutapa embassy, literally 'the king's eye'. His function was intelligence gathering.

**Mevlevî**: (Arabic: 'Mawlawiya') the Sufi order of dervishes following the teachings of Jalâl ad-Dîn Rûmî, of respect and love for all God's creation. Known in Europe as the 'Whirling Dervishes', they are distinguished by their conical hats and the musical **sama** ceremony, their means of achieving union with God through ecstasy.

**Mibhadha** (Shona): staff carried as a Mutapa ambassador's insignia of office, conferring immunity in hostile territory.

**Müftî**: (Arabic) jurist-consult, an expert in the **Şeri'at** or Islamic law. He had the competence to issue **fetvas** and advise the local **kadis** in his area. A **müftî** was appointed for life and received no official salary.

**Muromo** (Shona): the second member of a Mutapa embassy, literally 'the king's mouth'. It was his function to speak for the embassy.

**Müteferrika** (Turkish): a member of an élite group within the Palace corps, the Sultan's

personal mounted escort. Recruited from the sons of dignitaries and also from the **bostanci** corps, they were used for special missions by the Sultan

**Mutumwa** (Shona): envoy.

**Nargile** (Turkish): water pipe, hubble-bubble.

**Nehanda** (Shona): second wife of the Monomotapa. It was a function of the king's wives to deal with diplomatic missions between Monomotapa and other states, the Nehanda dealt with the Muslims

**Okkhun** (Siamese): honorary title.

**Okluang** (Siamese): honorary title.

**Okphra**: (Siamese): honorary title.

**Oya**: (Siamese): honorary title.

**Osmanli** (Turkish): Ottoman.

**Paşa** (Turkish): (variants: bassa, bassaw, basha, pasha) an honorific title, superior to that of bey, bestowed upon persons of high rank and placed after the name. Originally military in origin, it could be given to any person whom the Sultan desired to honour. A pasha who was also a provincial governor was entitled to display a number of horsetails on his personal standard as his insignia of office. The number varied according to seniority.

**Phongsawadan Krung Kao** (Siamese): *Chronicle of the ancient capital*.

**Phra** (Siamese): honorary title.

**Phra Khlang** (Siamese): the Barcalon or chief minister, in charge of crown revenues and foreign relations.

**Phra Ratcha Phongsawadan** (Siamese): the Royal chronicles.

**Pîr** (Turkish): lit. 'old man', the spiritual head of a dervish order.

**Qiblah** (Arabic): the direction to which Muslims address their prayers, the Ka'bah in Mecca.

**Queblé** see **Qiblah**.

**Ratchathut** (Siamese): chief ambassador.

**Re'aya** (Turkish): at this period the term referred to Ottoman taxpayers in general, it did not come to denote non-Muslims until the nineteenth century.

**Reis ül-Küttâb** (Turkish): head of the secretariat, later the minister of foreign affairs.

**Sama'** (Turkish): the music and dance forming part of a **mevlevi** ceremony.

**Saray** (Turkish): palace, seraglio, Serrail.

**Sefâratnâme** (Turkish): travel journal.

**Şerî'at** (Turkish): Islamic law (Arabic: **shar'ia**).

**Şeyh** (Turkish): the Arabic '**shaikh**', lit. 'old man', a popular religious leader; a tribal leader.

**Şeyh ül-islâm** (Turkish): chief **müftî** of Istanbul and institutional head of the **ulemâ** hierarchy. The final authority in legal matters, it was he who appointed the senior **kadis**. His **fetvâ** was necessary to declare a **jihad**.

**Shahinshah** (Persian): king of kings.

**Sharif** (Arabic): title given to a direct descendant of Muhammad.

**Silahdâr** (Turkish): the Sultan's swordbearer.

**Sipâhi** (Turkish): an Islamic 'feudal' cavalry soldier, who held a '**timar**' or fief in return for military service.

**Solachi** (Turkish): member of the bodyguard furnished by the janissary corps.

**Spahi** see **Sipâhi**.

**Stol'nik** (Russian): a high-ranking courtier one of whose functions was to serve the Tsar and his guests at state banquets and similar occasions. The **stol'niki** also filled military, civil or diplomatic appointments, as need arose.

**Sultan-valide** (Turkish): the Sultan's mother

**Talapoin** (Siamese): Buddhist monk.

**Tarikat** (Turkish): dervish order.

**Tekke** (Turkish): dervish lodge and place of worship.

**Tercüman** (Turkish): interpreter, "dragoman", particularly those attached to the **Divan** or to an embassy. Since European languages were not a part of Muslim education, Greeks or Armenians were normally employed.

**Trithut** (Siamese): third ambassador.

**Turban**: the distinguishing sign of adult Muslims all over the Middle East, consisting of a cone-shaped felt cap with a length of cloth wound around it. According to the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, the word 'turban' or 'tulban' is not found in the Middle East. It occurs only in European languages, apparently deriving from the Persian 'dülbend', as does the word 'tulip'. Its style and colour were strictly regulated. The use of white was confined to Muslims, while a green turban was the distinguishing mark of a direct descendant of Muhammad, or 'Sharif', green being the colour of Paradise. Red, yellow and black were, at various times, permitted to non-Muslims. Most of its aspects were regulated by religion: the age at which a boy could wear one (when the beard began to grow); how it should be wound around the head - there were over seventy different methods; which prayers should be pronounced while doing so; whether gold or silver ornaments or plumes could be worn in it. The turban eventually became a symbol of office and an essential feature of the **hil'at** or robe of honour; by the seventeenth century, different social classes wore different styles of turban. A man's rank, religion and profession could all be gauged from his turban, by the subtle differences in size, colour and style of winding. It often featured on his tombstone. The largest were worn by the highest ranks, particularly in the learned professions or **ulemâ**; thus a high white turban with many windings was the mark of a distinguished scholar in Islamic law. Other officials and soldiers wore aigrettes in their turbans as badges of rank.

**Ulemâ** (Turkish): the body of those trained in Islamic canon law, custom and theology.

**Uppathut** (Siamese): second ambassador.

**Vezir-i a'zam** (Turkish): the 'Grand Vizir', the first minister.

**Wat** (Siamese): pagoda.

**Yeniçeri** (Turkish): (Janissary) a member of the crack infantry corps recruited from the **devsirme**, owing a personal loyalty to the Sultan.

**Zheve** (Shona): the fourth member of a Mutapa embassy, literally 'the king's ear'.

**Zimmi** (Turkish): one of the subject populations of the Ottoman Empire liable to pay the **cizye** or poll tax. Christians and Jews were tolerated and allowed to form their own communities. They enjoyed protection, freedom of worship and their own customary law, provided that they agreed to recognise the dominance of Islam and give allegiance to the Ottoman state. They were not permitted to bear arms and were normally distinguishable from Muslims by dress.

[Shona references from S. I. G. Mudenge, *A Political History of Munhumutapa c. 1400-1902* (Harare, 1988); Siamese references from Dirk van der Cruysse, *Louis XIV et le Siam* (Paris, 1991); on Ottoman usage see Bayerle, Gibb and Bowen, Kunt and the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*]

**Appendix I.**

For general interest and purposes of comparison, I include here some contemporary accounts of the manner in which French ambassadors were received at various 'Oriental' courts during the seventeenth century. Russia is not included because no French embassy was sent to Moscow during the relevant period.

**1. Jean de la Haye's reception by Sultan Murad IV.**

*L'AUDIENCE DONNEE PAR LE Grand Seigneur à l'Ambassadeur de France en suite de la superbe entrée du Grand Vizir dans Constantinople.*

Peu apres cette entrée du grand Vizir, à sçavoir le 11<sup>e</sup> du mesme mois, le Sr. de la Haye Venteley Ambassadeur du Roy en Turquie l'alla visiter. Il luy sceut si bon gré d'avoir commancé ses visites par la sienne: (car sçachant le grand credit qu'il a aupres de son maistre il avoit attendu comme incognito son retour à Constantinople pour demander son audience qu'ils appellent le baise-mains du grand Seigneur) qu'il luy promit dans cinq ou six jours: au lieu d'autant de semaines, voire de mois, que plusieurs employent avec grand frais pour l'obtenir: L'ordre en fut tel. Le 17 dudit mois de Janvier dernier sur les 7 heures du matin, cet Ambassadeur sortit de son hostel, appelé le logis du Roy, accompagné de 20 Estafiers vestus de ses livrées, de six Janissaires et autant de Dragomans, qui marchaient devant luy. Il estoit à cheval suivi de la noblesse Françoisise qui l'a accompagné en son voyage, de ceux de sa maison, et de tout les marchands François qui se trouvèrent lors à Constantinople, tous à pied: Ils se rendirent au port de Topana où ils s'embarquèrent: et ayans mis pied à terre à Constantinople montèrent tous à cheval accompagnez du Chaoux Bassi qui l'attendoit au port avec 40 autres Chaoux, aussi à cheval: qui les conduisirent dans le Serrail jusques à la porte de la seconde court. Là ils mirent pied à terre, traversèrent cette court, au bout de laquelle, proche du departement où se fait le baise-mains, on fit voir l'Ambassadeur pour luy faire voir la paye des Janissaires, des Spahis, Bostangis, Solachis, Capigis et autres officiers du Serrail, qui se montent bien à six mil hommes: Ce qui se fit avec un tel ordre et silence, qu'ils ressembloient plustost avec leurs grandes vestes à une assemblée de religieux qu'à des soldats. La paye finie, on apporta dix-huit vestes de brocatel de la part du grand Seigneur: desquelles l'Ambassadeur en ayant vestu une, et le surplus ayant esté distribué aux principaux de ceux qui l'avoient accompagné, ils furent conduits au departement du baise-mains où estoit le grand Seigneur. Six y entrèrent avec ledit Ambassadeur: n'ayant eu que ce nombre destiné pour baiser les mains à sa Hautesse: Les autres demeurèrent en haye à la porte. L'Ambassadeur estant entré le premier avec un Dragoman et un Secretaire, apres avoir salüé sa Hautesse, sans en approcher plus prés que de cinq à six pas, conduit sous le bras par deux officiers, se retira à un bout de la sale. Les autres furent conduits en suite un à un dans la mesme sale, chacun par deux officiers qui les tenoient aussi par dessous les bras, mais avec difference qu'ils les faisoient incliner fort bas devant sa Hautesse, qui estoit assise sur un Sofa en forme d'un petit trosne, dont le dessus est couvert de lames d'or et enrichi de Pierreries, ayant devant luy les sept Vizirs tous debout, les yeux fichez en terre, les mains croizées, immobiles comme des statuës, et dans un respect et reverence si profonds qu'ils sembloient plustost rendus à un Dieu qu'à un homme. A mesure que ces six salüoient sa Hautesse, on les faisoit sortir de la sale: Où l'Ambassadeur estant resté avec son Dragoman et son Secretaire: il fit sa harangue: qui fut apres recitée en Turc par le Dragoman: ou sa Hautesse prit grand plaisir, et le tesmoigna au grand Vizir, le Dragoman parlant: ayant derogé en ce faisant à la gravité Othomane qui n'interrompt jamais

*The 'Oriental' Ambassador in 17<sup>th</sup> Century French Comedy.*



*Réception d'un ambassadeur français à Constantinople. Jean-Baptiste Vanmour*

les harangues. Ce fait l'Ambassadeur luy presenta les lettres du Roy, le salua comme en entrant, puis se retira, couvert de sa veste avec tous les siens jusques à la porte de la seconde court : où ils reprirent le manteau, remontèrent à cheval et retournèrent au port en mesme ordre qu'ils en estoient venus. Durant la paye qui se fit aux soldats, les gens de l'Ambassadeur avoient laissé à chacun de 40 d'iceux soldats rangez en haye dans la seconde court pre le département du baizemains, une piece de toile d'or et d'argent, velours, satin, tabis et draps de Paris, qui sont les presens ordinaires qui se font au Grand Seigneur par les Ambassadeurs de France : Outre lesquels sa Hautesse se pleut grandement a veuë de trois tableaux de point de Turquie, faits à Paris, representans des paysages, l'un de soye et les deux autres de laine : admirant particulièrement ceux de laine, et s'estant informer par le premier Dragoman de l'Ambassadeur, pour ce depuis mandé expres par le Grand Vizir, comment telle fabrique estoit possible. Outre ces dix-huit vestes, au lieu de douze que le Grand Seigneur avoit accoustumé de donner aux Ambassadeurs precedents, le Grand Vizir luy en donna trois et le Capitan Bacha six, quand l'Ambassadeur les alla saluer. Il ne fut point traité comme les autres Ambassadeurs, à cause que la Ramazan duroit encor, lors de son audience, pendant lequel Ramazan, ils ne mangent point que la nuit ne soit venuë. Mais toutes ces magnificences furent d'autant mieux receües qu'elles arrivoient lors que ce Ramazan alloit finir : lequel ils fermèrent à leur mode par des theatres et machines dressées dans toutes les places, où se passèrent toute sorte de réjouissances publiques, au son des tambours, flustes et hauts bois, accompagné de bonne chere telle que nous faisons à Caresme prenant : se moquans de la mode des Chrestiens, qui se resjoüissent au commencement du Caresme, et croyans avoir plus de raison de se donner au couer joye de ce que le leur est passé. Le Grand Seigneur partit en mesme temps de son Serrail avec sa pompe ordinaire pour aller faire son Beyran, qui sont ses Pasques, dans la Mosquée neuve. Sa Hautesse estant allée en suite disner chez le Capitan Bacha, en sortit avec un vomissement et des sanglots ausquels a succédé une perilleuse maladie, qui a fait diversement parler de son evenemen : Toutesfois il n'en estoit encor rien arrivé de sinistre le dernier dudit mois de Janvier auquel ces relations furent escrites et envoyées de Pera.

[From Théophraste Renaudot's weekly *Gazette*, number for the 18<sup>th</sup> April 1640 [published by C. D. Rouillard in *The Turk in French History, Thought and Literature, 1520-1660* (Paris, 1940. Foreword dated 1938)].

## 2. The Sieur d'Elbée's reception by Tozifon, king of Ardra.

On his Arrival, he was carried to the *French* Apartment in the Palace, where the King immediately sent him all Sorts of Refreshments; as Meat boiled and roast, Bread of different Kinds, as well as Liquors. The Prince, the grand Priest, and other Grandees did the same, so that he had Provisions enough for two hundred People. As soon as it was Day, he was visited by all the Grandees. The Prince sent to excuse himself from seeing him, on account of the Death of one of his Children. He was confined and saw no-body, which with them is a Mark of extreme Grief...

The King visits no-body, but as a particular Mark of Favour, he gave the Sieur *d'Elbée* an Audience the same Day, as soon as he had dined. He was conducted by the two great Captains of Trade and Horse, who marched at his Side. The King was in one of his Gardens, seated in a Damask Arm-Chair, beneath a Gallery.

This Prince, called *Tozifon*, appeared to be about seventy, tall and lusty in Proportion; his Eyes large and lively; his Countenance shewed his Penetration, Judgment, and Wisdom. The Vivacity of his Genius appeared in his Answers during the long Audience. He

was dressed in two Pagnes, like under Petticoats, in the *Persian* Mode, one over the other. The undermost was of Taffety, the other of pricked Satin; a broad Taffety-Scarf served him for a Belt or Girdle. The rest of his Body was naked. He wore on his Head a Sort of Night-Cap of fine Linen, edged with Lace; and over it a Crown of Wood, black and shining like Ebony, of a fragrant Smell. In his Hand he held a small Whip, the Handle of which, of black Wood, was loaded with Ornaments, and the Cord or Whip of Silk, or *Pite*.

The *Sieur d'Elbée* approaching with three profound Reverences, the King presented him his Hand; and taking-hold of the Commodore's, cracked his Thumb three Times as he shook it, which is an extraordinary Mark of Friendship. He then caused Mats and Cushions to be brought, for *d'Elbée* and his two Officers to sit on, the Domestics waiting on the Outside of the Gallery.

The *Sieur d'Elbée*, after the usual Compliments, intreated the King, that he would allow the *French* to build a Factory in their own Way, the one built being too little, and otherwise incommodious ... the King replied ... "You will make a House, in which you will put at first two little Pieces of Cannon; the next Year you will mount four, and in a little Time your Factory will be metamorphosed into a Fort, that will make you Master of my Dominions, and enable you to give Laws to me." He accompanied these Arguments with so many apt and witty Similes, and with such an Air of good Humour and Pleasantry, that *Sieur d'Elbée* could not be displeas'd at so obliging and politic a Refusal ... After this Conversation, the *Sieur d'Elbée* made his Majesty a Present of a Fowling-Piece, and a Pair of Pistols mounted with Silver. The King received this Present very agreeably, inviting him to go-see the Prince his eldest Son; saying, that on his Account the Prince would receive his visit, though at such a Time of Mourning. After this, he took the *Sieur d'Elbée* by the Hand, and dismissed him with such Marks of Favour as he had never shown to any *European* before.

This King is so revered by his Subjects, that except his Son and the chief Priest no-body must appear before him, but with his Face prostrate to the Ground, not even daring to look-up; only when obliged to answer, they raise their Head a little, but lay it down as soon as they have done speaking, as was done by the two great Captains of Trade and Horse at this Audience. Only the Prince and chief Priest are exempted from this Submission. These speak to the King standing and have a Privilege of entering the Palace at all Hours, Day or Night, without being sent for.

The *Sieur d'Elbée* having, by the King's Favour, been taken to see the Palace and Gardens, visited all the Apartments, except that of the Womens, where no-body is permitted to enter.

The *Sieur d'Elbée* and his Company were conducted to the Prince, by the great Captain of Horse, at the Head of an hundred Troopers, who were armed with Blunderbusses and Sabres. Their Horses were large and strong, but ill bitted; the Saddles small and flat, with Stirrups in the *Portugueze* Fashion. These Horsemen had but one *Pagne*; a pointed Cap like our Dragoons, and Leather Boots, or Buskins, that came half Way up their Leg; with large Spurs that had but one Point. The *Sieur d'Elbée* and his Retinue were in Hamocks, and he had an Umbrella carried over his Head.

[From Thomas Astley, *A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels* (London, 1745)]

### 3. Alexandre de Chaumont's reception by Phra Naraï, king of Siam.

Voici une grande affaire faite; l'entrée & l'Audiance. Il y a mille choses curieuses à remarquer; & je prétens bien vous en faire une relation en forme, quand je sçaurai les noms &

les qualités de tous les personnages. Je veux pourtant vous en dire aujourd'hui quelque chose. Dès le matin M. l'Ambassadeur a mis lui-même la Lettre du Roi dans une boîte d'or, & cette boîte dans une coupe d'or, & la coupe sur une soucoupe aussi d'or, & en suite il l'a exposée sur une table. Il est venu d'abord deux Oyas, qui sont les Ducs & Pairs du royaume de Siam, suivis de quarante grands Mandarins, qui après avoir complimenté M. l'Ambassadeur, se sont prosternés devant la Lettre. Après cela ils sont rentrés dans leurs balons, & se sont mis en marche vers la ville.

Alors M. l'Ambassadeur a pris la Lettre du Roi & me l'a remise entre les mains. Nous avons marché vers la rivière, moi toujours à sa gauche. Il a repris la Lettre & l'a mise dans un balon doré, où le fils du Roi n'entreroit pas. Ce balon de la Lettre a suivi les balons où estoient les présens, & estoient accompagné par huit balons de garde. M. l'Ambassadeur suivoit dans son balon tout seul. Je le suivois aussi dans un balon du Roi tout seul. J'avois une soutane de satin noir, un rochet avec le grand manteau par-dessus. Nous avions aussi à droite & à gauche des balons de garde. Venoient ensuite quatre balons où estoient les gentilshommes que le Roi a mis à la suite de M. l'Ambassadeur avec son secrétaire; & dans d'autres balons estoient tous les gens de la maison, maîtres d'hôtel, sommeliers, valets de chambre, tous fort propres; & ensuite les trompettes, & vingt personnes de livrée. La livrée est fort belle, & c'est ce que les Siamois ont trouvé de plus beau. Ils ont vu souvent des justaucorps dorés : les petits marchands d'Europe en ont ici : les serruriers sont habillés de soie. M. l'Ambassadeur a quatre ou cinq habits dorés : ce seroit beaucoup à Londres ou à Madrid ; on dit qu'ici il faudroit en changer tous les jours.

Enfin le cortège finissoit par les balons de toutes les nations. Voilà la marche par eau, qui avoit quelque chose de fort singulier. Tous ces balons du Roi estoient dorés, & avoient des clochers d'un ouvrage fort délicat & fort doré. Il y avoit soixante hommes de chaque côté avec de petites rames dorées, qui toutes en même temps sortoient de l'eau & y rentroient : cela faisoit un fort bel effet au soleil.

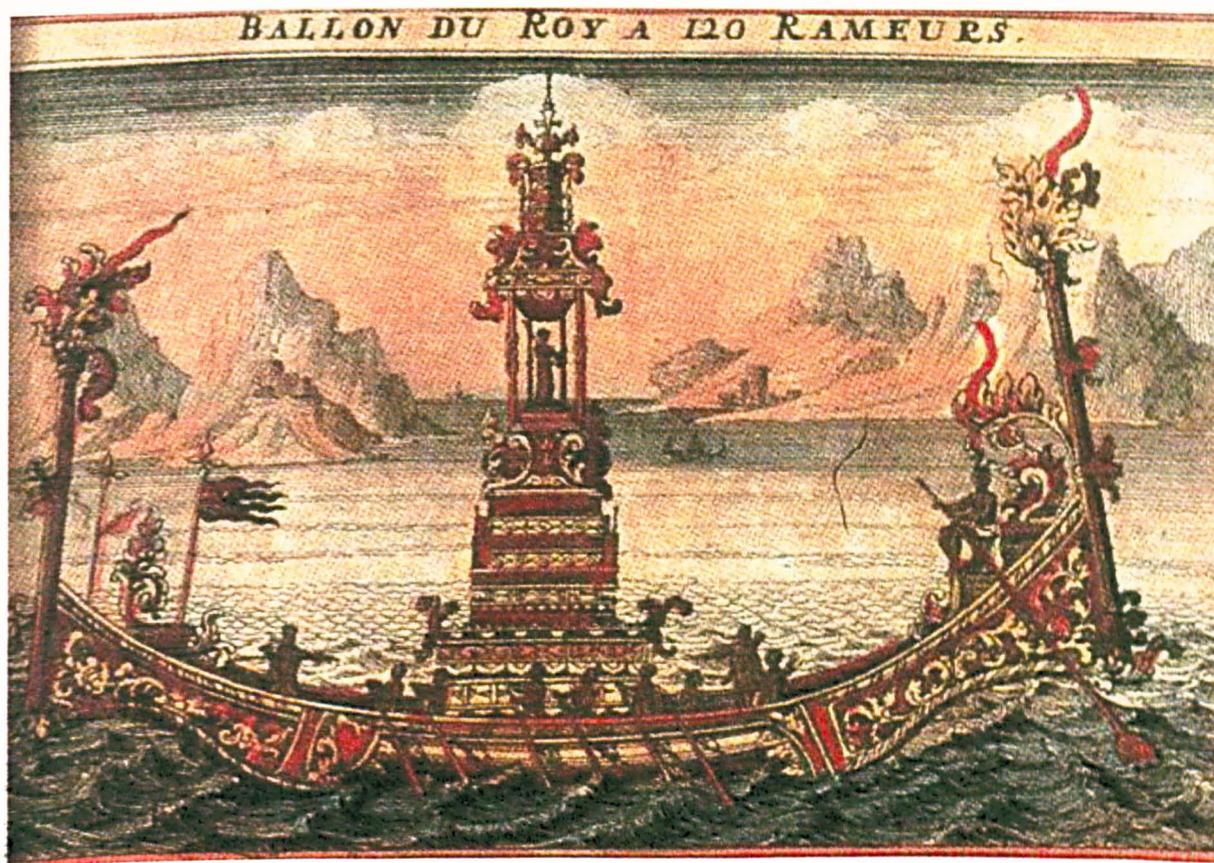
La loge des Hollandois, & un vaisseau Anglois nous ont salué en passant de tout leur canon ; & ce qui ne s'est jamais fait dans la capitale d'un royaume, le Roi présent. La forteresse a tiré plus de vingt coups de canon : le vaisseau François a aussi tiré plus de vingt coups. Il avoit emprunté des perriers, & faisoit le plus de bruit qu'il pouvoit. Enfin on a fait des honneurs à M. l'Ambassadeur qu'il n'eust jamais osé demander.

En mettant pié à terre, M. l'Ambassadeur a pris la Lettre du Roi & l'a mise sur un char de triomphe encore plus magnifique que le balon. Il est ensuite monté dans une chaise découverte dorée, portée par dix hommes. Il avoit à ses deux côtés deux Oyas, aussi dans des chaises & je le suivois aussi dans une chaise portée par huit hommes. Je ne me suis jamais trouvé à telle fête, & je croyois estre devenu Pape. Suivoient les gentilshommes à cheval; les gens de la maison, trompettes & livrées à pié. Nous avons marché dans une rue aussi longue et plus étroite que la rue Saint Honoré; entre deux doubles files de soldats, le pot en tête & le bouclier doré. Les uns ont des sabres, & les autres des piques. Il y avoit sur notre chemin de temps en temps des éléphants, armés en guerre. Tout s'est arrêté à la première porte du palais. M. l'Ambassadeur est descendu de sa chaise; a pris la Lettre du Roi sur le char de triomphe; est entré dans le palais en la portant ; & ensuite me l'a remise entre les mains. Nous avons marché gravement, les gentilshommes devant, & les Oyas à droite et à gauche. Nous avons passé trois ou quatre cours. Dans la première, il y avoit un régiment de mille hommes avec le pot en tête et le bouclier doré. Ils estoient assis sur leurs talons, leurs mousquets devant eux fichés en terre. Cela est assez beau à la veuë; mais franchement, je crois que cinquante mousquetaires les batroient bien.

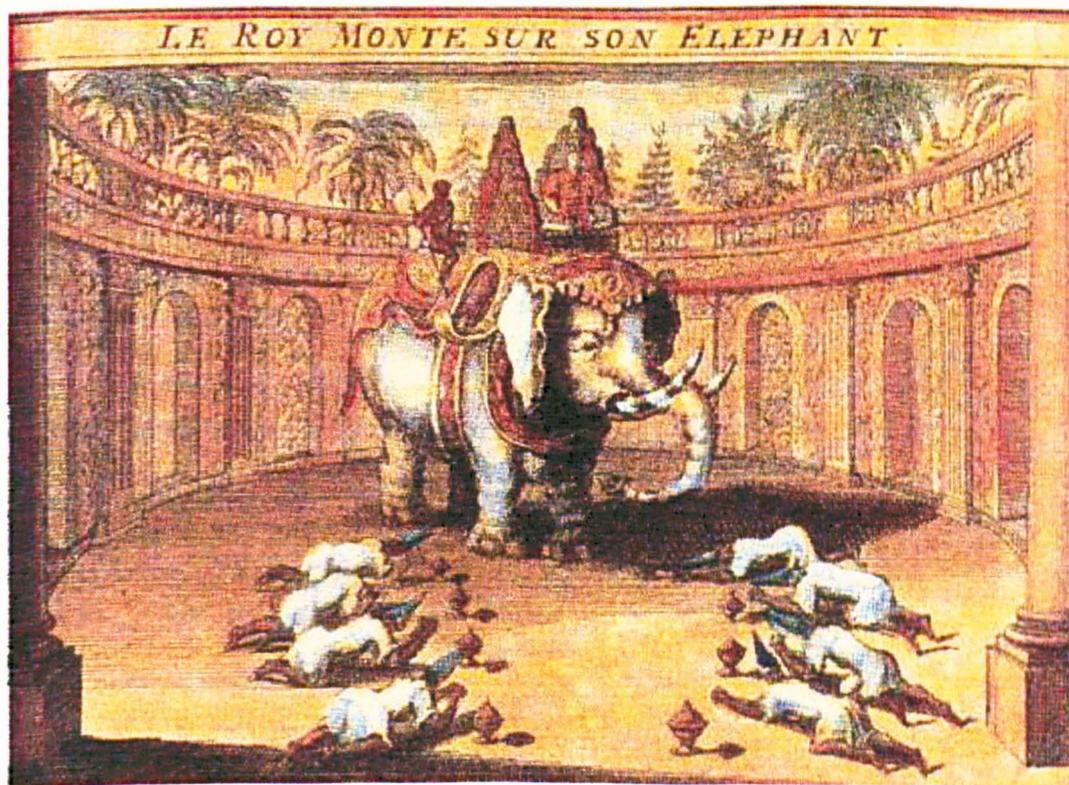
Dans la seconde cour il y avoit peut-estre trois cens chevaux en escadron. Les chevaux sont assez beaux, & mal dressés. Mais, ce qu'on ne voit en nul lieu du monde, il y avoit des éléphants bien plus grands que ceux du dehors. Nous en avons bien vu quatre-vingts;

& entre autres le fameux éléphant blanc, qui dans les guerres de Pegou a couté la vie à cinq ou six cens mille hommes. Il est assez grand, fort vieux, ridé, & a les yeux plissez. Il y a toujours auprès de lui quatre Mandarins avec des éventails pour le rafraîchir, des feuillages pour chasser les mouches et des parasols pour le garantir du soleil quand il se promene. On ne le sert qu'en vaisselle d'or; & j'ai veu devant luy deux vases d'or, l'un pour boire et l'autre pour manger. On luy donne de l'eau gardée depuis six mois, la plus vieille estant la plus saine. On dit, mais je ne l'ai pas veu, qu'il y a un petit éléphant blanc tout prêt à succéder au vieillard, quand il viendra à mourir. J'ai veu aussi l'éléphant prince, qui est le plus grand & le plus spirituel des éléphants : c'est celui que le Roi monte. Il est fier est [sic] indomptable à tout autre; & quand le Roi paroît, il se met à genoux. On m'a dit qu'à Louvo nous verrions ce manège. Enfin, dans la dernière cour, nous avons trouvé de grandes troupes de Mandarins, la face en terre, appuiez sur leurs coudes. Il falloît monter sept ou huit degrez pour entrer dans la salle d'audiance. M. l'Ambassadeur s'est arrêté avec M. Constance, pour donner le temps aux gentilshommes François d'entrer dans la salle, & de s'asseoir sur des tapis. On estoit convenu qu'ils y entreroient la tête haute à la Française, avec leurs souliers, & qu'ils se mettroient à leur place avant que le Roi parust sur son trône; & que quand il y paroîtroit, ils luy feroient une inclination à la Française sans se lever. Cependant M. l'Ambassadeur et moi estions au bas du degré avec le Barcalon, dont jusques-là on n'avoit pas ouï parler. Il a dit à son Excellence, qu'à la nouvelle de son arrivée à la barre, il avoit eu envie d'y aller, mais que les affaires de l'Etat l'en avoient empêché. Dès que les gentilshommes ont esté placez, on a ouï sonner les trompettes & les tambours du dedans; ceux du dehors ont répondu : c'est le signal que le Roi se va mettre sur son trône. Aussitôt M. Constance, nus piés, c'est-à-dire, avec des chaussettes sans souliers, a monté les degrez en rampant, comme on fait à Rome en montant 'la scala santa', & encore bien plus respectueusement. M. l'Ambassadeur l'a suivi : j'estois à sa gauche portant la Lettre du Roi. Son Excellence a ôté son chapeau sur les derniers degrez, dès qu'il a veu le Roi ; & après estre entré dans la salle, a fait une profonde révérence à la Française. J'estois à sa gauche, & et n'ai point fait de révérence, parce que je portois la Lettre du Roi. Nous avons marché jusqu'au milieu de la salle entre deux rangs de grands Mandarins prosternez. Il y avoit parmi eux un beau-frère du Roi de Camboge. Là M. l'Ambassadeur a fait la seconde révérence, & s'est avancé vers le trône du Roi à la portée de la voix, & s'est mis devant le siege qu'on luy avoit préparé. Il a fait sa troisième révérence, & a commencé sa harangue debout, & découvert : mais à la seconde parôle il s'est assis, & a mis son chapeau. Je suis demeuré debout tenant toujours la Lettre du Roi. Il a dit, « Que le Roi son maître, si fameux par tant de victoires, & par la paix que plus d'une fois il a donnée à ses ennemis à la tête de ses armées, lui a commandé de venir trouver sa Majesté aux extrémités de l'univers, pour luy présenter des marques de son estime & l'assurer de son amitié. Mais que rien n'estoit plus capable d'unir ces deux grands Princes, que de vivre dans les sentimens d'une même croyance ; & que c'estoit particulièrement ce que le Roi son maître lui avoit commandé de représenter à sa Majesté ». Il a ajouté, « Que le Roi le conjuroit par l'intérêt qu'il prend à sa véritable gloire, de considérer que cette supreme Majesté dont il est revêtu sur la terre, ne peut venir que du vrai Dieu, c'est à dire d'un Dieu tout-puissant, éternel, infini, tel que les Chrétiens le reconnoissent, qui seul fait regner les Rois, & regle la fortune de tous les peuples : que c'estoit à ce Dieu du Ciel & de la terre qu'il falloît soumettre toutes les grandeurs, & non à ces foibles divinitez qu'on adore dans l'Orient, & dont sa Majesté qui a tant de lumiere & de pénétration, ne peut manquer de voir assez l'impuissance ». Il a fini en disant, « Que la plus agréable nouvelle qu'il pouvoit porter au Roi son maître, estoit que sa Majesté persuadée de la vérité se fait instruire dans la Religion Chrétienne ; que cela cimenteroit à jamais l'estime & l'amitié entre les deux Rois ; que les François viendront dans ses États avec plus d'empressement & de confiance; & qu'enfin sa Majesté s'asseureroit par ce moyen un bonheur éternel dans le Ciel, après avoir regné avec autant de prospérité qu'elle fait sur la terre ».

The 'Oriental' Ambassador in 17<sup>th</sup> Century French Comedy.



The Royal Barge, illustration from Guy Tachard, *Voyage de Siam des Pères Jésuites*.



The Royal elephant, illustration from Guy Tachard, *Voyage de Siam des Pères Jésuites*.

La harangue finie, M. l'Ambassadeur, sans se lever, & sans ôter son chapeau, hors quand il parloit des deux Rois, a montré à sa Majesté quelques-uns des présens qui estoient dans la salle. Il m'a ensuite fait l'honneur de me présenter, & puis les Gentilshommes. Aussitôt M. Constance, qui a servi d'Interprète, s'est prosterné par trois fois avant que de parler & a expliqué la harangue en Siamois, M. l'Ambassadeur demeurant toujours assis & couvert. Dès que l'explication a esté faite, M. l'Ambassadeur s'est levé, a ôté son chapeau, s'est tourné de mon côté, a salué respectueusement la Lettre du Roi, l'a prise & s'est avancé vers le trône.

Il faut vous expliquer ici un incident fort important. M. Constance, en réglant toutes choses, avoit fort insisté à ne point changer la coutume de tout l'Orient qui est que les Rois ne reçoivent point les lettres de la main des Ambassadeurs : mais son Excellence avoit esté ferme à vouloir rendre celle du Roi en main propre. M. Constance avoit proposé de la mettre dans une coupe au bout d'un baton d'or, afin de M. l'Ambassadeur pust l'élever jusqu'au trône du Roi : mais on lui avoit dit qu'il falloit ou abbaïsser le trône, ou élever une estrade, afin que son Excellence la pust donner au Roi de la main à la main : M. Constance avoit asseuré que cela seroit ainsi. Cependant nous entrons dans la salle, & en entrant nous voyons le Roi à une fenêtre au moins de six piés de haut. M. l'Ambassadeur m'a dit tout bas, « Je ne lui sçaurois donner la Lettre qu'au bout du bâton, et je ne le ferai jamais ». J'avouë que j'ai esté fort embarrassé. Je ne sçavois quel conseil lui donner. Je songeois à porter le siège de M. l'Ambassadeur auprès du trône, afin qu'il pust monter dessus : quand tout d'un coup, après avoir fait sa harangue, il a pris sa résolution ; s'est avancé fierement vers le trône, en tenant la coupe d'or où estoit la Lettre ; & a présenté la Lettre au Roi sans hausser le coude, comme si le Roi avoit esté aussi bas que lui. M. Constance, qui rampoit à terre derriere nous, crioit à l'Ambassadeur, « Haussez, haussez » : mais il n'en a rien fait et le bon Roi a esté obligé de se baisser à mi-corps hors la fenêtre pour prendre la Lettre ; & l'a fait en riant, car voici le fait. Il avoit dit à M. Constance, « Je t'abandonne le dehors, fais l'impossible pour honorer l'Ambassadeur de France ; j'aurai soin du dedans ». Il n'avoit point voulu abbaïsser son trône, ni faire mettre une estrade ; & avoit pris son parti, en cas que l'Ambassadeur ne haussast pas la Lettre jusqu'à sa fenêtre, de se baisser pour la prendre. Cette posture du Roi de Siam m'a rafraîchi le sang : & j'aurois de bon cœur embrassé l'Ambassadeur pour l'action qu'il venoit de faire. Mais non seulement ce bon Roi s'est baissé si bas pour recevoir la Lettre du Roi, il l'a élevée aussi haut que sa tête, qui est le plus grand honneur qu'il pouvoit jamais lui rendre. Il a dit ensuite qu'il recevoit avec grande joie des marques de l'estime et de l'amitié du Roi de France ; & qu'il estoit presque aussi aise de voir M. l'Ambassadeur que s'il voyoit le Roi lui-même. Il a demandé des nouvelles de la Maison Royale & des nouvelles de la paix & de la guerre. M. l'Ambassadeur lui a répondu que le Roi, après avoir pris la forte place de Luxembourg, avoit obligé les Espagnols, les Hollandois, l'Empereur et tous les princes d'Allemagne à signer avec lui une trêve de vingt ans. Enfin le Roi a souhaité à M. l'Ambassadeur, que le Dieu du Ciel le ramenast en France aussi heureusement, qu'il l'avoit amené au royaume de Siam. J'ai oublié à vous dire que M. l'Evêque de Métellopolis et M. l'Abbé de Lionne se sont trouvez dans la salle avant nous ; & qu'après que M. l'Ambassadeur a eu rendu la Lettre du Roi, je me suis assis sur le tapis à sa main droite, M. l'Evêque estant à sa gauche, M. l'Abbé de Lionne derriere l'Evêque, & M. Constance un peu devant M. l'Ambassadeur. Le Roi a esté quelque temps sans rien dire. Après quoi on a ouï les trompettes & tambours comme avant l'audience : c'est pour avertir au dehors que sa Majesté va sortir de son trône. Il s'est retiré doucement, & a fermé la petite fenêtre. M. l'Ambassadeur est demeuré sur son siege pour donner le temps aux Gentilshommes de défiler avec M. Vachet, qui par l'ordre exprés du Roi avoit esté leur conducteur. M. l'Evêque, M. l'Abbé de Lionne & moi avons suivi, & un moment après M. l'Ambassadeur et M. Constance.

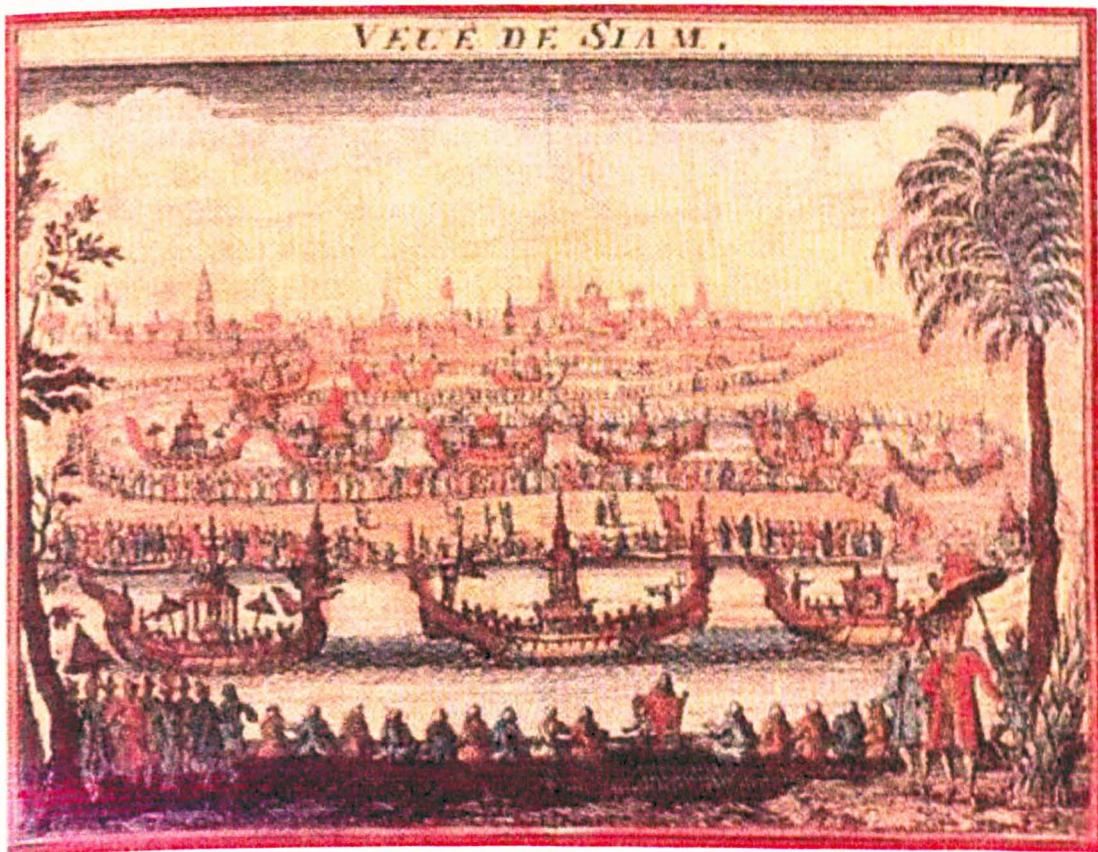
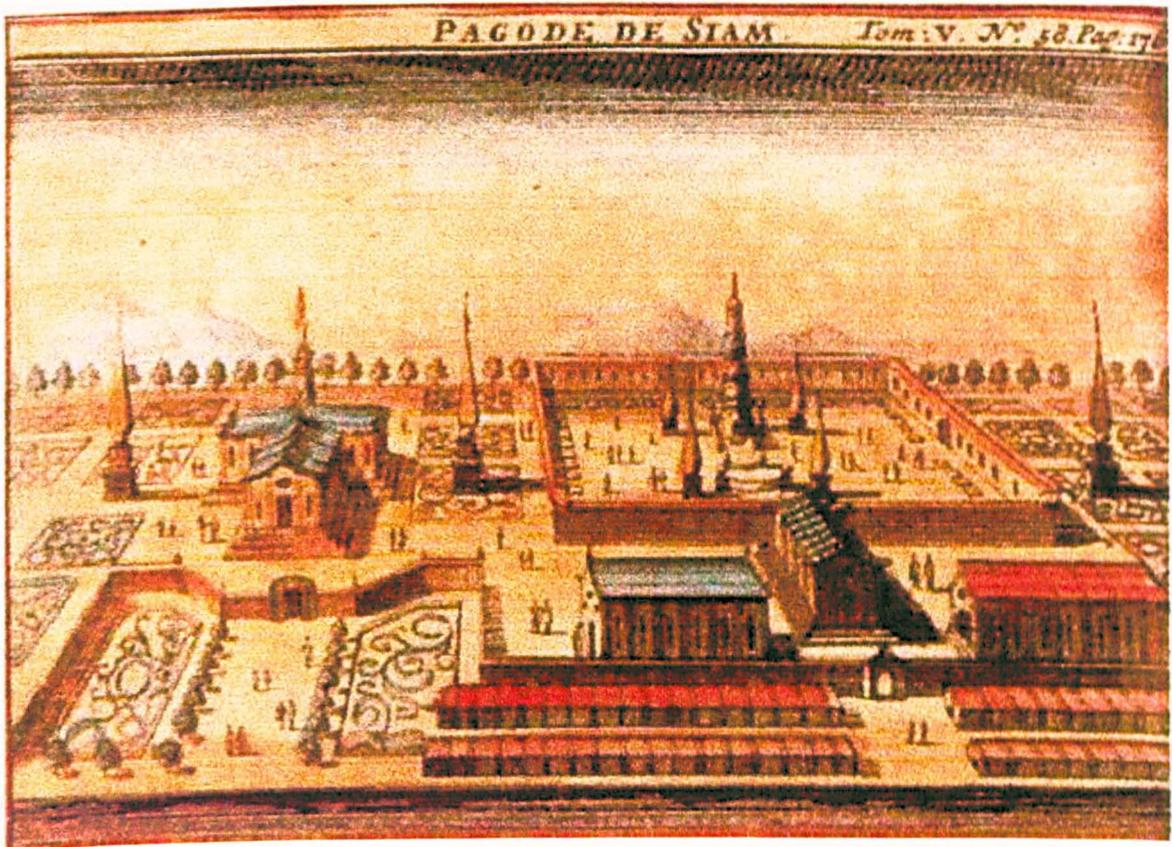
Aussitôt que le Roi s'est retiré, le Barcalon & tous les grands Mandarins du

royaume, qui avoient esté prosternez pendant l'audiance, se sont levez à leur séant. Or entre ces Mandarins il y a un beaufrère du Roi de Camboge, & des fils de Roi. Je ne sçai si je vous ai dit, qu'à la porte du palais un jeune Opra, favori du Roi est venu recevoir M. l'Ambassadeur et l'a suivi à l'audiance. En sortant nous avons retrouvé toutes choses dans le même ordre, les Mandarins, les éléphants, & les troupes. M. l'Ambassadeur à la porte du palais est remonté dans sa chaise, & moi dans la mienne ; les Gentilshommes ont suivi à cheval, tout le reste à pié. Il a fallu remonter dans les balons pour aller au palais de son Excellence. On a remis pié à terre au bout de la ruë des Chinois, ensuite on a passé dans la ruë des Mores : ce sont les deux plus belles de Siam. Les maisons en sont de pierres & de brique : c'est beaucoup dire en ce país-ci. La marche estoit toujours la même. Nous sommes enfin arrivez au palais de son Excellence, au milieu d'une foule incroyable de peuple : on ne voioit que des têtes. La ville est assurément fort peuplée : mais ce n'est pas encore Paris. La cour de ce palais est grande, & fort gaie. A droite est un grand lieu à colonnes, qui est magnifique et galant : le haut est peint d'un jaune, qui paroît or : les murailles sont blanches, toutes pleines de niches où il y a des porcelaines ; ce jaune, ce blanc et ce bleu se marient fort bien ensemble. Il y aura dans deux jours une fontaine jaillissante : on travaille nuit & jour à un petit réservoir qui fournira l'eau. Voyez par là si ces gens-ci oublient quelque chose. A gauche est le corps de logis. M. l'Ambassadeur y a une antichambre, une chambre, des garderobes, une gallerie, & une fort belle terrasse : j'y ai une fort jolie chambre. La chapelle est grande, & nous avons, dit-on, la consolation d'y voir tous les jours des turbans Chrétiens. Il faut que je vous aime bien d'écrire si longtemps, estant aussi las que je le suis. Les honneurs coutent cher. J'ai porté la Lettre du Roi ; les Siamois me regardent avec respect : mais je l'ai portée plus de trois cens pas dans un vase d'or, qui pesoit cent livres, & j'en suis sur les dents. En arrivant M. l'Ambassadeur a fait distribuer quatre cens pistoles en pieces de trente sols, aux balons qui l'ont amené de la barre & qui l'ont conduit à l'audiance, aux hommes qui l'ont porté sur leurs épaules, & à ceux qui l'ont servi pendant qu'il a esté à la Tabanque. La libéralité est un peu forte ; & je ne crois pas qu'il en soit quitte pour douze cens pistoles en présens. Mais comment feroit-il autrement ? Les autres Ambassadeurs en usent ainsi. Laissera-t-il tomber le nom du Roi dans un país où il passe pour le plus grand Prince du monde ? Et n'est-ce pas dans ces occasions qu'il faut donner jusqu'à sa dernière pistole ?

M. Constance vient de sortir d'ici : c'est un maître homme. M. L'Ambassadeur lui disoit qu'il avoit esté embarrassé, en voyant le trône du Roi si haut, parce qu'il avoit bien résolu de ne point hausser le bras en donnant la Lettre, & qu'il auroit esté au désespoir de déplaire à sa Majesté. « Et moy », lui a répondu M. Constance, « j'estois encore plus embarrassé : vous n'aviez qu'un Roi à contenter, & j'en avois deux ». Il nous a montré pendant l'audiance le beaufrère du Roi de Camboge prosterné comme les autres. « Son Excellence », nous disoit-il, « a les piés où les frères de Roi ont la tête ». En un mot c'est un drôle, qui auroit de l'esprit à Versailles. Il a trouvé les confitures à la Française fort bonnes. Bonsoir, je dors tout debout.

[Entry for the 18th. October 1685, François-Timoléon de Choisy, *Journal du voyage de Siam fait en 1685 & 1686 par M. l'Abbé de Choisy* (Paris, 1930)].

The 'Oriental' Ambassador in 17<sup>th</sup> Century French Comedy.



Pagodas and balons, from Guy Tachard, *Voyage de Siam des Pères Jésuites*.

## Appendix II

I reproduce here two contemporary descriptions of Dervish ceremonies, taken from those works on the Ottoman Empire believed to have been in Molière's possession at the time of his death, at least according to Gaston Hall's interpretation of the *Inventaire*, with which I am in agreement. These presumably would have been available to Molière, as required, to supplement the oral information provided by Laurent d'Arvieux for the *turquerie* of the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*.

### 1. The account of the Mevlevi Dervishes given by Paul Rycaut in *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (1668).

The Mevelevee, otherwise and most commonly named Dervise, which word signifies Poor and renouncers of the world, have their chief and Superior foundation in Iconium, which consists of at the least four hundred Dervises, and governs all the other Convents of that Order within the Turkish Empire, by vertue of a Charter given them by Ottoman first of the Mahometan Kings, who out of devotion to their Religion once placed their Prior or Superiour in his Royal Throne, because having been his Tutor, and he who girted on his Sword (which is the principal Ceremony of Coronation) he granted him and his successors ample Authority and Rule over all others of the same Profession.

They pretend to great Patience, Humility, Modesty, Charity and Silence in presence of their Superiour or others; their eyes are alwayes fixed downwards, their heads hanging towards their breast, and their bodies bending forwards.

Their shirts are of the coarsest Linnen can be made, with a White Plad or Mantle about their shoulders: but most wear a loose kind of Garment made of Wool at Iconium or in Anatolia, of a dark colour; their Caps or what they wear on their heads, is like the Crown of a Hat of the largest size, made of course Camels hair of a whitish colour; their Legs are alwayes bare, and their Breasts open; which some of them burn or sear in token of greater devotion: they wear also a Leathern girdle with some shining stone upon the Buckle before, either of Marble or Alabaster, Porphyry, Ivory or some thing that makes a great shew or luster.

Besides their Fast of Ramazan, they keep a weekly Fast on every Thursday, on which day, none unless for some indisposition of health or some other lawful cause, hath licence to eat, untill after Sun-setting.

Every Thursday and Friday the Superiour of the Convent makes a sermon or exposition of some Verses in the Alchoran, or out of the Books wrote by their Founder, or some other prime Doctor of the Mahometan Law; after which is done, the Dervises with marvellous modesty and reverence bowing to their Superiour, begin to turn round some of them with that swift motion that their faces can scarce be seen; a certain Pipe made of a Cane, sounding all the time of this motion; and on a sudden when the Musick ceases, they all stop with that exactness and firmness, shewing no symptoms of a disordered or swimming brain; to which having accustomed themselves from their infancy or youth, in some years that motion becomes as natural, with as little disturbance to their Head or Stomach, as to walk forward, or to use any other exercise which nature is delighted with. This custom (they say) they observe with great devotion in imitation of their first Founder Mevelana, who for fourteen dayes together, and without any nourishment, used this Vertiginous motion by a miraculous assistance (his Friend Hamze, or Companion, all that time sounding by him with his Flute or Pipe) untill at last falling into an extasie, he received strange Revelations, and divine commands for the institution of this his Order: the Pipe they play on, they esteem for an ancient and sanctified sort of Musick, and to be that with which Jacob and the other holy

Shepherds in the Old Testament praised God.

It hath a doleful melancholy sound; but their constant exercise and application thereunto makes it as Musical as can be imagined in such an Instrument: the best of those Canes are esteemed to come from Iconium, and are of twenty five Dollars price. But this sort of devotion with instrumental Musick, is by Turks themselves disputed against, denying that their Founder, who was so spiritual a man, did ever institute, or himself use Musick in his turning round, because the Alchoran expressly forbids all devotion and service of God with Musick, but only with the natural and living voice; And that is the reason, why in calling their people to prayers they use no Bells, but only the voice of a man; and for this cause I remember, that in my time prohibitions have been made by publick Authority against this practice of the Dervises. But they on the contrary, alledging David's example, and his Dancing before the Ark as Arguments for their Musick and Giration, have by the help of several persons in power, many of them being greatly affected with their devotion, maintained from time to time this custom and institution of the first Founder of this Order, notwithstanding that one Vanni Efendi a great Segh or Preacher, esteemed as a knowing Person by the Grand Signior and all the Court, hath by his Authority endeavoured to Reform this Corruption (as he calls it) amongst them.

They profess Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience, like Capuchin Friars or other Orders of St. Francis; but if any have not the gift of continence; he may obtain License to leave his Convent and marry; but of these, they observe that none ever thrived or lived happily with contentment, that renounced this Dedication to Gods Service.

The Novices serve in the most servile Offices, and in time others supply their places; they lie as companions two together in a Cell, some of which employ their time in Learning to Read and Write in Turkish, Arabick and Persian; but most yield to their slothful temperament to which they are naturally addicted: but because the nature of man is restless, and must employ it self either in good or bad actions; most of these associates exercise some kind of Legerdemain, or tricks to amuse the minds of the common people; and some really apply themselves to Sorceries and Conjurations by help of familiar spirits. Busbequius tells strange Stories of one with whom he was acquainted, that he would strike a stone of great weight and bigness against his bare Breast with that force and violence as were sufficient to knock down an Ox, or break the bones of the stoutest Gyant; and that the same man he hath seen take an Iron Bar red hot from the fire and hole it in his mouth, and though the spittle and moisture of his mouth hissed with the heat, yet he seemed to take it thence again without the least hurt or burning imaginable.

This sort of people of all other Turks, addict themselves to drink Wine, Strong-Waters, and other intoxicating Liquors; and eat Opium in that quantity, by degrees using their bodies thereunto, that no Mountebank or Mithridates himself who was nourished with poison, are capable to digest half that proportion that these men will do; the effect of which is at first, like men drunk or mad, to raise their spirits to a sort of distracted Mirth, and afterwards when the subtle vapours are consumed and spent, and a dull stupefaction overcomes them, they name it an extasie, which they account very holy and divine in imitation of their first Founder, who was often observed to put himself into this condition; and therefore what helps may be found to excite Mirth or distraction, is lawful and allowable in this Order.....

These Dervises have Monasteries in the most famous places of the Turkish Empire, which serve the travelling Pilgrims of this Order for Inns and places of entertainment: fort they above all other Religious Turks, journey and travel from one place to another, where the Mahometan Religion is professed, under pretence of preaching and propagating their Faith; and thus they travel upon Charity of their Monasteries and Alms of others into Persia, China, and the Dominions of the Mogul, by which means they become the best spies and intelligencers of any that are found in the Eastern parts of the world.

I remember at Adrianople to have seen the Ruine of one of these Monasteries situated on a pleasant hill, and in good Air, that oversees the whole City and Plains round about; which upon enquiry I understand was demolished by the famous Visier Kuperli; because it was discovered to be a Rendezvous of the lewd Women of the Town, and a Stew where the young Gallants debauched the Wives of the richest Turks, to whom their Husbands had given liberty in honour to the Sanctity of the place, to be often present at the devotion of the Dervises; but their way of practice being too publick and scandalous, the Foundation of their house by the order of the Visier was razed to the ground.

2. The account of the Mevlevi Dervishes given by the Chevalier du Loir, *Voyages, Lettre Cinquiesme a Monsieur Boulliau, Prieur de Magny* (1654) p. 153 ff.

Ils ont neantmoins quelques pratiques de devotion qui se fait publiquement, & avec beaucoup de modestie bien qu'elle soit fort ridicule. Deux fois la sepmaine un des leurs fait une Predication dans leur Convent, & les femmes qui par tout ailleurs n'ont point d'entrée aux lieux ou sont les hommes y assistant par un privilege particulier, estant bien raisonnable qu'elles soient admises aux devotions de ces Religieux amans. Celuy qui presche prend pour texte quelque verset de l'Alcoran, & ie vous asseure que les plus devots Chrestiens pourroient profiter de la Morale de son Sermon.

Cependant tous les Dervichs sont renfermez dans une balustrade pour n'estre pas importunez de la foule des assistans, & pour n'estre pas troublez dans l'exercice de leur ordre, que ie vais vous descrire.

La Predication estant finie, les Chantres qui sont dans une galerie, comme sont icy les orgues dans les Eglises, accordant leurs voix avec des flutes, qui pour estre merueilleusement harmonieuses sont deffenduës à tout autre sorte d'usage, commencent un Hymne à la cadance d'un tambour de biscaye. Voicy les parolles de cet Hymne, que i'ay nottéés, afin que ceux qui sçavent la Musique en puissent iuger...

Hymne.

*I ki hezar a feryn, ay, ay,  
I ki hezar a feryn bou nidge Sultan olur dgia-num  
Kouli olan Kichiler, dgianum, husreu-u hhakan olur.*

*I ki hezar aferin bon nidge sultan olur,  
Kouli olan kichiler, husreu-u hhakan olur  
Ayaghinung tozini surme theken guceuzine,  
Nesne gurur gueuzi kim valihu heiran olur,  
Cherbetinung catresin her kim itcher dgiuresin,  
Gungli guher doluben sinesi ûmman olur,  
Sanga direm, dedey salma devi dunsade,  
Nefsi devin zapt iden dinde suleyman olour,  
Sen malungne tapmaghil, kiochku saray yapmaghil,  
Ol dourouchuh yaptughung sung oudgi viran olour,  
Beslemeghil tenugni nîmet-u bircan ile,  
Bir gun olur ol yenung damoude biriain olour,  
Her kichi kimal boulur senma ki deuler boulur,  
Devleti boulan kichi allahi boulan olur,  
Her ki bougun velede inanuben yuz sure,  
Yokhsoul ise bai olour, bai ise soultan olur.*

Voicy l'explication de cette Hymne, dont assurément vous trouverez le sens meilleur que le chant.

Ha! Combien de louanges merite, & combien est grand ce Seigneur, dont les Esclaves sont autant des Rois.

Quiconque frotera ses yeux de la poudre de ses pieds, verra quelque chose qui luy donnera tant d'admiration qu'il en tombera en extase.

Celuy qui boira une goutte de son breuvage, aura le sein comme un Ocean remply de pierreries et de liqueurs precieuses.

Je te le dis, ô Pere! Ne lasche point dans ce monde la bride à tes passions, quiconque les reprimera sera un vray Salomon dans la foy.

Ne t'amuse point à adorer les richesses, n'y a bastir des Kiosks, & des Palais.

La fin de ce que tu auras basty n'est que ruine.

Ne nourris point ton corps avec tant de delicatesses & de friandises. (p. 156)

Il arriveroit un iour que ce corps resteroit dans les enfers

Ne t' imagine point que celuy qui trouve des richesses trouve du bon-heur.

Celuy qui trouve le bon-heur n'est autre que celuy qui trouve Dieu

Tous ceux qui se prosternent avec respect et humilité, croiront aujourd'huy en Vélé, seront riches,

S'ils estoient pauvres, & s'ils estoient riches deviendront des Rois.

Tous ceux qui se prosternent avec respect & humilité, croiront aujourd'huy en Vélé, seront riches, s'ils estoient pauvres, & s'ils estoient riches deviendront des Rois [Vélé est le fils de Mola Sunquiur leur fondateur].

Je ne vous ay point escrit cette traduction interliniare, parce que la phrase du François ne se rencontre pas avec celle du Turc, & i'ay cru que ce seroit traduire ces Vers assez exactement que de mettre ligne pour Vers comme ie vous l'envoye: Vous remarquerez seulement que le *ay, ay*, qui est une particule d'exclamation, ny le mot *dgianum*, qui signifie mon ame, ne font point partie des deux premiers Vers, mais que souvent il [sic] les mettent à la cesure & à la fin des couplets, & qu'ils ont plusieurs semblables mots qu'ils appliquent de mesme en chantant, mais à propos & selon le suiet.

Durant le premier Verset de cet Hymne tous les Dervichs sont dans une posture fort devote, assis sur lestalons [sic], les bras croisez & la teste baissée. Le Superieur qui est dans le Queblé, orné d'une Estolle de poil de chameau, frappe des mains aussitost que le second commence, & tous les Dervichs (p. 157) s'estant incontinant levez, le plus proche de luy passant devant le saluë, avec une profonde inclination de teste, & se met à tourner, pirouëttant petit à petit d'un mouvement si viste, qu'à peine peut-on s'en appercevoir; Celuy qui suit en fait autant, & aussi tous les autres qui sont trente ou quarante. Cette danse circulaire ayant duré quelquefois plus d'un demy-quart d'heure, dans son plus rapide mouvement cesse tout d'un coup au mesme signal qu'elle a commencé, & les Dervichs, comme s'ils n'avoient bougé de la place où ils se trouvent, se remettent assis en leur premiere posture, iusques à ce que leur Superieur les fasse encore recommencer. Ainsi cette danse continuë quelquefois une heure & plus, à quatre ou cinq reprises dont les dernieres durent tousiours plus longtems, parce que les dervichs sont plus en haleine, & plus en bransle pour tourner, estans vestus fort à propos pour ce suiet d'une espede de iupon volant, taillé en rond comme les chemisettes des femmes de France.

La façon de vivre des Santons, est toute contraire à celle des Dervichs, ils semblent qu'ils fassent une Profession particuliere d'estre d'autant plus sales & negligez que

les autres sont polis. Ils laissent croistre leurs cheveux, & bien qu'ils soient souvent baignez de sueur, que leur cause le violent exercice de leur Religion, ils ne les peignent (p. 158) jamais pour estre plus malpropres. Leur devotion fait autant d'horreur que celle des Dervichs donne à rire. Ils n'en font l'exercice que deux fois la sepmaine, & pour le rendre plus effroyable, ce n'est qu'à trois heures de nuit. Apres avoir fait leurs Prieres ils tournent quelque temps à la façon des Dervichs, & puis se prenant la main comme s'ils vouloient danser un bransle, ils secouënt la teste qu'ils ont toute nuë en façon de demoniaques, & ils se demenent en criant, à qui plus horriblement *Allahou*, c'est à dire Dieu est grand, iusques ce que l'haleine leur manquant, ils ne puissent pousser de leurs poulmons qu'ils ont epuisez qu'une voix heurlante & meuglante, comme d'une beste qui expireroit estant assommée...

...(p. 159) Voylà ce qui est plus remarquable pour les Religieux Turcs qui sont d'autant plus estimés que leur façon de vivre est extravagante, & ils n'ont qu'à faire les demoniaques pour estre en reputation de sainteté. D'où vient que generalement parmy les Turcs, les fous sont reverez comme des saints. Revenons au reste de la devotion des Turcs qui consiste en mille superstitions, comme de medailles, de voeux, de presens, de pelerinages et indulgences qu'ils croient gagner par de petites Oraisons. Ils portent pour cet effet tousiours un gros chappellet, & soit qu'ils cheminent ou qu'ils soient dans leurs maisons & mesme en compagnie pour conversation ils marmottent souvent un *Allahou*, l'intention de ces petites Prieres regarde quelquefois les morts, touchant lesquels ils ont des pensées bien ridicules que ie veux aussi vous escrire pour finir avec eux l'entretien de leurs devotions.

**Appendix III.**

Specimen of Turkish dialogue from Bartholomew Georgiewitz, *De Turcarum moribus epitome* (Lyons, 1553) [my translation].

TURCA: Handa gidertsen bre, Giaur?  
*Quo vadis ô Christiane?*  
[Where are you going, Christian?]

CHR: Stambola giderum, Tsultanum.  
*Constantinoplim versus pergo Princeps.*  
[I am going towards Constantinople, sir.]

TURCA: Ne issum var bu memleketten?  
*Quid negotii habes in his regionibus?*  
[What business do you have here?]

CHR: Bezergenlik, ederum, Affendi var, Anadolda.  
*Mercaturam, exerceo Domine, vel, mihi negotium est in Asia.*  
[I am a merchant, sir, or, I have business in Anatolia.]

TURCA: Ne habar scizym girlerden?  
*Quid novi fertur in vestrīs partibus?*  
[What is the news from your country?]

CHR: Hits neste bilmezom tsaa dimege.  
*Nescio quid novi scire cupis, ut dicam tibi.*  
[I don't know what news you want to hear, in order to tell it to you.]

TURCA: Gioldassum varmi tsenumles?  
*Est ne tibi comes?*  
[Is anyone with you?]

CHR: Ioch, ialanuz, gheldum.  
*Non, sed solus, veni.*  
[No, I came on my own.]

TURCA: Benumle gelutmitsun?  
*Mecum placet ne venire?*  
[Would you like to come with me?]

CHR: Irachmider tsenum iataghom?  
*Est ne procul tuum hospitium?*  
[Are your guest quarters far away?]

TURCA: Iachender bundan gustereim tsaa.  
*Prope est, hinc ostendam tibi.*  
[It is close, I will show you the way there.]

CHR: Gel ghusterivere Allaha tsuertson?  
Veni ostende, si Deum amas.  
[Come and show me, if you love God.]

TURCA: Kalch iochari tur bonda.  
*Erige te sursum, sta hic.*  
[Get up, stand over here.]

CHR: Hanghi daraftan der bilmezum.  
*In qua parte est, nescio.*  
[I don't know which direction it is in.]

TURCA: sag eline bacha ghun aloghutsine.  
*Ad dexteram respice ad orientem.*  
[Look to your right, towards the east.]

CHR: Bir buch e\*\* atsarghibi gurunur omider?  
*Una alta domus tan qua castellum apparet, illud ne est?*  
[A tall house which looks like a castle, is that it?]

TURCA: Gercsekson oder, iaken deghilmis?  
*Verus es, illud est, prope non est?*  
[You are right, that's it, isn't it close?]

CHR: Allaha tsmarladoch tzeni. Ben oraa gitmezom.  
*Deo commendo te. Ego illac non ibo.*  
[God bless you, I shan't go there.]

TURCA: Bore neden kockartso? Nitcie gelmetso?  
*He quem times? Quare non venis?*  
[What are you afraid of? Why won't you come?]

CHR: Benum iolum oraa deghelder.  
*Meum iter illac non est.*  
[My route is not that way.]

TURCA: Vargeth tsagloga eier ghelmeson.  
*I bonis avibus, si non vis venire.*  
[Good luck to you, if you don't want to come.]

CHR: Gegsien hair oltsion.  
*Nox fausta tibi sit.*  
[May the night be a lucky one for you.]

TURCA: Aghbate hair oltsion. Ben kurtuldom tsoch succur Allaha.  
*Et tibi foelicior. Ego liberatus sum, summa laus Deo.*  
[And luckier for you. I am a free man, all praise be to God.]

## Appendix IV

## 1. Theatrical productions known to have been attended by 'Oriental' embassies:

Title	Author	Theatre	Embassy	Year
<i>Acis et Galathée</i>	Campistron	Opéra	Siamese	1686
<i>Amadis de Gaule</i>	Quinault	Opéra Opéra	Muscovite Persian	1685 1715
<i>Amours de Vénus et d'Adonis</i>	Donneau de Visé	Théâtre du Marais	Ottoman	1670
<i>Amphitryon</i>	Molière	Palais-Royal	Muscovite	1668
<i>Arlequin esprit aérien</i>	Cinthio	Comédie Italienne	Ottoman	1670
<i>Armide</i>	Quinault	Opéra Opéra	Siamese Tripolitan	1686 1704
<i>L'Avare</i>	Molière	Comédie-Française	Siamese	1686
<i>Bajazet</i>	Racine	Saint-Cloud	Siamese	1686
<i>Le Bourgeois gentilhomme</i>	Molière	Palais-Royal Comédie-Française Comédie-Française	Ardra Siamese Tripolitan	1670 1686 1704
<i>Clovis</i>	Jouvancy [?]	Collège Louis le Grand	Siamese	1686
<i>Les Coups de l'Amour et de la Fortune</i>	Boisrobert	Théâtre du Marais	Muscovite	1668
<i>Don Japhet d'Arménie</i>	Scarron	Louvre	Ottoman	1721
<i>Le Festin de Pierre</i>	Molière [?]	Palais-Royal	Ardra	1670
<i>L'Inconnu</i>	T. Corneille	Comédie-Française Comédie-Française	Siamese Tripolitan	1686 1704
<i>La Lingère du Palais</i> [?]	Fatouville	Comédie Italienne	Moroccan	1682
<i>Le Port de Mer</i>		Comédie-Française	Tripolitan	1704
<i>Omphale</i>	Palaprat	Comédie-Française	Ottoman	1721
<i>Roland</i>	Quinault	Opéra	Siamese	1685
<i>Thésée</i>	Quinault	Opéra	Ottoman	1721

## 2. 'Oriental' embassies of the reign of Louis XIV.

1654 Russian embassy, led by Constantin Garesnott Metcherski.

1665 Moghul embassy.

1668 Russian embassy, led by Pierre Potemkin.

1669 Süleyman Aga Müteferrika, Ottoman 'envoyé en mission spéciale'.

1670 Mattéo Lopés's embassy from the West African state of Ardra [now part of Benin].

1680 Siamese embassy: Pya Pipat Kosa, Luang Sri Wisan, Khun Nakhon Vichai, accompanied by Claude Gayme and Emmanuel Picareda of the Missions Etrangères. Presumed lost at sea off Madagascar.

1682 Moroccan embassy, sent by Muley-Ismaël, led by Hadgi Mohammed Temin.

1684 Arrival of a Siamese mission sent to enquire after the fate of the first embassy: Khun P'ichaï Walit, Khun P'ichit Maïtri, accompanied by Bénigne Vachet.

Algerian embassy led by Hadgi Giafar Aga.

1685 Polish embassy.

- 1686 Siamese embassy: Ok-Phra Visut Sunthorn [Kosapan], Ok-Luang Kanlaya Ratchamaïtri, Ok-Khun Siwisan Wacha.  
 1687 Russian embassy, led by Potemkin  *fils*.  
 1697 Arrival of an Ottoman envoy "pour annoncer à la cour de Louis XIV l'avènement de Süleyman II".  
 Arrival of the Chinese embassy led by Joachim Bouvet.  
 1699 Moroccan embassy, led by Abdala Ben Aisha.  
 1704 Tripolitan embassy, led by Hadji Mustafa.  
 1708 Bahri Mehri Efendi, Ottoman 'envoyé en mission extraordinaire'.  
 1709 Ömer Aga, Ottoman 'envoyé en mission spéciale'.  
 1715 Persian embassy, led by Mehemet Riza Beg.  
 Tripolitan embassy, led by Mehemet Godoya Effendi.

### **3. French diplomatic representation at the Porte during the seventeenth century.**

- 1589-1605 François Savary, comte et seigneur de Brèves  
 1605-1610 François de Gontaut Biron, baron de Salignac  
 1610-1619 Achille de Harlay, baron de Sancy et de la Môle  
 1620-1631 Philippe de Harlay, comte de Césy  
 Louis Des Hayes, baron de Courmenin, envoyé en mission spéciale, 1621  
 1631-1634 Henri de Gournay, comte de Marcheville  
 1634-1639 Philippe de Harlay, comte de Césy  
 1639-1661 Jean de la Haye, seigneur de Vantelet  
 Roger de Nagu, marquis de Varennes, envoyé en mission spéciale, 1646  
 Nicolas-François Blondel, sieur de Criosettes, envoyé en mission spéciale, 1658-1659  
 Jean-François Roboly, chargé d'affaires, 1660-1665  
 Du Pressoir Fontaine, envoyés en mission spéciale, 1664-1665  
 1665-1669 Denis de la Haye, seigneur de Vantelet  
 1670-1679 Charles-Marie-François Olier, marquis d'Angervillers et de Nointel,  
 Laurent d'Arvieux, chevalier, envoyé en mission spéciale, 1672  
 1679-1685 Gabriel-Joseph de la Vergne, comte de Guilleragues  
 Jean-Baptiste Fabre, le sieur, chargé d'affaires, 1685  
 1686-1689 Pierre de Girardin, seigneur de Vaudreuil  
 Louis Girardin de Vauvré, l'abbé, chargé d'affaires, 1689  
 Jean-Baptiste Fabre, le sieur, chargé d'affaires, 1689  
 1689-1700 Pierre-Antoine de Castagnères, marquis de Châteauneuf  
 1699-1711 Charles, marquis d'Argental, comte de Ferriol, envoyé en mission spéciale,  
 1692-1695, 1696-1698, puis ambassadeur.  
 François Belin, chargé d'affaires, 1710  
 1710-1716 Pierre Puchot, seigneur de Clinchamp, marquis et comte des Alleurs  
 François Belin, chargé d'affaires, 1713

### **4. Ottoman "envoyés en mission spéciale" in France.**

- 1595 Mutahher Müteferrika, "envoyé en mission spéciale".  
 1601 Barthelemy de Cueur, "renégat de Marseille", personal physician to the Sultan, sent as "ambassadeur".  
 1607 Mustafa Aga, "chiaoux que l'empereur des Turcs envoya".

- 1618 Hüseyin Çavuş (Ureju Chaous), "envoyé en mission spéciale".  
 1640 "Un chaoux turc".  
 1658-60 "un ambassadeur de la Porte Ottomane" at Lyon [?].  
 1669 Müteferrika Süleyman Aga, "envoyé en mission spéciale".  
 1697 "envoyé pour annoncer à la cour de Louis XIV l'avènement de Süleyman II".  
 1708 Bahri Mehri Efendi, "envoyé en mission extraordinaire".  
 1709 Ömer Aga, "envoyé en mission spéciale".  
 1721 Yirmisekiz Çelebi Mehmed Efendi, "envoyé en mission extraordinaire".  
 1742 Said Mehmed

### 5. Soliman Aga's itinerary in 1669-70.

9<sup>th</sup> June: Receives secret visit from Denis de la Haye

11<sup>th</sup> June: Visits de la Haye for further confidential meeting and is given present of a gold watch.

12<sup>th</sup> June: Embarks for France.

20<sup>th</sup> June: Reaches Naples and is transferred to a French ship.

4<sup>th</sup> August: Arrives at Toulon, where he is received with all honours by de la Gibertie.

21<sup>st</sup> August: Arrives at Marseilles.

24<sup>th</sup> August: Leaves Marseilles.

1<sup>st</sup> October: Arrives in Lyons.

16<sup>th</sup> October: Arrives in Fontainebleau, where he admires the royal palace.

31<sup>st</sup> October: Leaves Fontainebleau.

1<sup>st</sup> November: Arrives in Issy where he is lodged with M. de la Bazinière.

4<sup>th</sup> November: 9am The Suresnes audience with de Lionne.

19<sup>th</sup> November: 9am The second audience with de Lionne at Suresnes.

3<sup>rd</sup> December: Soliman Aga makes his formal entry into Paris, he is now lodged in the Hôtel de Venise, staying in the capital for the first time.

5<sup>th</sup> December: The Royal audience at Saint-Germain-en-Laye.

7<sup>th</sup> December: Special issue of the *Gazette* is published.

18<sup>th</sup> December: D'Arvieux reports that Soliman is seriously ill.

19<sup>th</sup> December: A further special issue of the *Gazette*.

May 1670: Soliman Aga sets out for home. He is instructed to wait at Valence for de Nointel, the new French ambassador. De Nointel has strict instructions to prevent him catching sight of the Turkish slaves. In August, the party meets up at Toulon.

21<sup>st</sup> August: De Nointel finally sets sail in the *Princesse*, under the command of Daplemont. The voyage is prolonged by storms.

22<sup>nd</sup> October: The *Princesse* arrives off Constantinople in company with three other men of war of the royal squadron, to the consternation of the Turks.

24<sup>th</sup> October: De Nointel disembarks incognito to make his private arrangements.

10<sup>th</sup> November: Denis de la Haye joins the party on board ship and the two ambassadors make their formal entry into the city together. According to de Nointel's first despatch from Constantinople, Soliman Aga had already left the ship to make his report to the Kâ'im-makâm.

De Nointel writes to de Lionne from Pera on the 6<sup>th</sup> November 1670:

Soliman Aga qui est à la Porte, a mandé que j'obtiendrois plus que je ne souhaitois; que toutes choses y estoient très bien disposées, et qu'il avoit fait son devoir et continueroit de le faire.

L'entretien que nous eusmes l'un avec l'autre, avant nostre séparation, a esté réduit de ma part à le faire souvenir des bons traitements qu'il avoit receus en France, soit dans l'audience du Roy, soit dans les vostres, à luy insinuer qu'il estoit de son intérêt de me procurer un accueil pareil et plus favorable, à luy remonstrer qu'il luy estoit plus utile, que les mérites et la puissance du Roy sur mer et sur terre fussent plustost cognus à la Porte par les relations qu'il en feroit que non pas par une autre manière; qu'on ne luy demandoit que la vérité en ce rencontre, et que s'il n'avoit point eu de présents, c'estoit par la raison qu'il n'en avoit pas apporté, et que Sa Hautesse n'en faisoit point aux ambassadeurs de Sa Majesté. Il me respondit qu'il ne manqueroit aucune occasion d'informer le Grand Seigneur et ses ministres de toutes les grandeurs qu'il avoit veues, et qu'asseurément, on le préviendroit en luy demandant un compte exact; que lorsque Sa Hautesse envoyoit des présents aux bachas et autres officiers, elle s'informoit elle mesme de la manière dont ses envoyés avoient esté receus; qu'à plus forte raison, elle luy commandera de luy dire tout ce qui s'est passé dans son ambassade vers un aussi grand empereur que celui de France.

Voilà, Monsieur, les termes dans lesquels je suis demeuré avec luy, qui me font croire, estant soustenu par la puissance du Roy et par la solidité de vos instructions et de vos ordres, que je réussiray dans ma négociation. J'ay creu qu'il estoit important de commencer à me faire cognoistre par une entrée publique, encore que quelques uns de mes prédécesseurs l'ayent négligé par des considérations particulières, et je m'y suis déterminé par l'exemple des autres ambassadeurs et par la raison que, s'agissant d'un renouvellement d'alliance, il estoit à propos de faire voir la magnificence des François aux Turcs, après leur avoir imprimé la terreur avec les vaisseaux de Sa Majesté...

This is the last reference that we have to Soliman Aga. He cannot have been too harshly treated on his return home, as we see him remaining in office and obviously regarded as a figure of some influence at the Porte. The implied threat in de Nointel's account of their conversation, as well as the intransigent manner of his own entry into Constantinople, shows that the French still had much to learn of the subtle art of diplomacy.

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