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Michel Espagne, Nora Lafi, and Pascale Rabault-Feuerhahn, eds., *Silvestre de Sacy: Le projet d'une science orientaliste*. Paris: Éditions du Cerf/Patrimoine, 2016. Pp. 355. €29.

In the history of Oriental studies in Europe, between the era of the crusades and the twentieth century, we can perceive at least two major shifts. The first was the relocation of the practicing of Oriental studies from Rome and the Catholic Church to the new northern European centers of learning, such as Paris, Leiden, and Cambridge, from the end of the sixteenth century onward. The second was the more gradual transition from scholarly discourses and visions, which were entwined with religion, toward a more secular attitude in which, in spite of clear religious disagreements, a certain measure of objectivity was strived for and a broader range of religious and nonreligious sources was collected, edited, and explored. These two shifts contributed to the formation of Oriental studies as an autonomous discipline in the course of the nineteenth century and, moreover, to the acceptance of Islam and non-European civilizations as separate fields of scholarly inquiry.

The first shift, from the domination of the church to secular institutions and universities, was related to the emergence of dissident and Protestant scholarly networks in northern Europe, in Germany, Switzerland, the Dutch Republic, and England, which expanded throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These networks no longer relied on Catholic institutions for their text material or on clerical patrons but built their own resources and relationships with each other and with informants and intermediaries abroad. Although the Protestant scholars explicitly countered “papist” discourses of Islam, this did not mean that Oriental studies were dissociated from religion. Protestant scholars, too, denounced Muhammad as a false prophet and even

as the Antichrist; but by propagating a more objective approach, they cleared the way not only for the recognition of the positive aspects of Islam but also for a vision of the prophet as a historical figure and a statesman.

The growth of new scholarly interests resulted in the acquisition, publication, and translation of a more diverse corpus of material, a more systematic interest in languages, secular history, and *belles lettres*. Major landmarks were Thomas Erpenius's Arabic grammar (1613), Edward Pococke's religio-historical anthology (1650), Adriaen Reland's compendium of Islamic doctrines (1705), Antoine Galland's translation *Mille et une nuit* (1704–17), and George Sale's revisionist translation of the Qur'an (1734). Although the center of Oriental studies moved to the Protestant countries, the new trend did not pass by France unnoticed. In fact, it can be argued that new directions were shown by such religiously dissident scholars as Guillaume Postel (1510–81) and Isaïc Casaubon (1559–1614), who were teachers of the subsequent generation of Protestant orientalists. At the turn of the eighteenth century the influential reference work by Barthélemy d'Herbelot was published (1697), and in 1723 John Gagnier published an edition and translation of Abu al-Fida's history. At the end of the seventeenth century, the French minister of trade, Jean-Baptiste Colbert, initiated an influential project for the education of young experts in Oriental languages, the so-called *jeunes de langues*, showing a new, pragmatic, interest in Eastern languages.

The various secularizing trends in Oriental studies converged at the end of the eighteenth century in the towering figure of Antoine-Isaac Silvestre de Sacy (1758–1838), who is often seen as the founding father of modern institutionalized and secular orientalism. The career of Silvestre de Sacy coincided with a more solid institutionalization of academic pursuits in France and new philological paradigms, but also with the Napoleonic era and the French expeditions to North Africa, which gave him the reputation of a collaborator with imperial interests. Silvestre de Sacy was born in a well-to-do Parisian bourgeois family and from a young age dedicated himself to the study of Oriental languages. He provided translations for the French expedition to Egypt, and apparently as a reward in 1795 he was appointed the first director of the newly established *École des Langues Orientales*, a post he retained until his death. In 1806 he became professor at the *Collège de France*, of which he was appointed head administrator in 1823. In 1822 he was elected as the first president of the *Société Asiatique de Paris*, a new society founded to foster the study of the Orient. Apart from these academic posts, he was also deputy for Paris in the *Corps Législatif*.

All these functions would by themselves justify Silvestre de Sacy's reputation as the solid founder of modern orientalism, but his publications are noteworthy, too. In 1806 and 1826/27 he published two editions of an extensive *Chrestomathie* of Arabic texts of various kinds, and in 1810 and 1830 he released two editions of an Arabic grammar

that could finally replace Erpenius's grammar, which was still in use. In 1838 his standard work *Exposé de la religion druze* appeared, which is still relevant today.

Silvestre de Sacy is the subject of a timely collection of essays, *Silvestre de Sacy: Le projet européen d'une science orientaliste*, edited by Michel Espagne, Nora Lafi, and Pascale Rabault-F Feuerhahn. Apart from brief overviews of Silvestre de Sacy's life and work, contributions zoom in on particular works and place them in their scholarly context. Some articles highlight biographical issues, such as his Jansenist persuasion, his attitude toward the Jews, and his portrayal by the Egyptian traveler-scholar al-Tahtawi. Others stress his importance for the formation of the corpus of Arabic *belles lettres* and his administrative accomplishments. Several essays show his significance and recognition beyond France's borders and the role he played in the establishment of modern Oriental studies in Germany, Russia, and Italy. All contributions together reveal a man who understood the importance of language education and literary texts for modern scholarship and relations with the East and who contributed to firmly rooting orientalism in academic institutions. His importance is shown not only by his scholarly work and administrative achievements but most vividly by his many disciples who continued to spread his ideas all over Europe.

Richard van Leeuwen
