مجلّة نصف سنوية محكّمة تصدر عن قسم الدراسات التأريخية في بيت الحكمة ـ بغداد
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Baghdad according to Jean Baptiste Louis Jacques Rousseau (1780-1831) Napoleon Bonaparte's Consul An agnotological approach

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This contribution is about the representation of Baghdad in Jean-Baptiste Louis Jacques Rousseau's book, Description du Pashalik de Bagdad. Rousseau (1780-1831) is a French Orientalist known for his writings on Mesopotamia and Persia. He served as Consul of France in Basra and represented in this city and in Baghdad the Compagnie Française des Indes Orientales [Oriental Indies French Company]. In this book, published in 1809, the author gives his insight, based on field experience in Baghdad and the Pashalik.

The purpose of this paper is to explore questions related to the nature of the knowledge Rousseau is providing about Baghdad, precisely how geography is imagined, and with what purpose. In a second stage, these questions will be explored using epistemological tools proper to agnotology, a research method, founded by Robert N. Proctor from Stanford University, that aims at studying ignorance, not only as a lack of knowledge but, especially, as the way ideas are framed and conveyed according to a given conception of truth, all depending on personal and contextual factors. Since the publication of the volume edited by Proctor and Schiebinger, Agnotology : The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance (2008), its domain of practice is extended increasingly to cover many fields, among them

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Anthropology (Weiss); Architecture (Moe); History (Devine), Peace and Conflict Studies (Fahoum), Medicine (Dorsey & Ray, Lee); Philosophy (Girel); Criminology (Howard, Barton & Davis); Environmental Studies (Oreskes, Lindzen, Lindzen); Group Psychology (Overskes and Conway, Martin); Literary Critique (Nersessian); Education (Bedford, Kowalski, & Taylor); and sociology (W. Davies & McGoey). With this contribution, the objective is to extend this method to cover orientalism. When studying Orientalist (and neo-Orientalist) discourse, the West is always portrayed in a position of supreme power as the one in charge of constructing itself and the world around it. This de facto empowerment is what we must re-consider. By adopting an agnotological approach, the goal is to question the capacity of the thinking ego to grasp reality because of an imagination mined by contradictions at the same time as to explore, as stated by Proctor and Schiebinger, questions related to the "structural production of ignorance, its diverse causes and conformations" (3). In this context, knowing is just one side of the coin while silence, censorship, and omissions are the other. Based on this reality, researchers should also turn their attention to what we can label as epistemological ghosts, a "knowledge that could have been but wasn't, or should be but isn't" (vii)

In this research, the term ignorance is considered from a descriptive point of view. Rather than a value judgment, it is used to explore the nature of knowledge and its limitations. The objective is more about analyzing ignorance in discursive terms rather than assessing historical events and the provided data by Rousseau, this mission being part of the work of historians.

Baghdad and the French imaginary in the early 19th century

Rousseau is known for his experience in Syria and Mesopotamia and was raised by a father who also served in diplomatic missions in the Mesopotamian and Persian regions. The author is known for his fluency in Turkish and Persian, not in Arabic (Dehérain 503), and for his love for manuscripts·

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[1] Always according to Dehérain, at age 27, Rousseau is appointed by Napoleon as an emissary, to negotiate an alliance with Persia (under Feth Ali Shah) against Russia. The description of Baghdad by Rousseau is the product of a specific interplay, of contextual factors (cultural, economic, strategic, and ethical) that determine the way this city is reinvented. One of the reasons behind the idea of studying Rousseau's book is its uniqueness. This is a work at the intersection of travel literature, mission report, and historical essay, not to mention the influence of popular culture in how the Orient and Baghdad are constructed. This book bears the print of one of the most important developments in the history of France, the birth of the Empire under the reign of Napoleon Bonaparte (1804-1814). During this short period, the country went through a succession of wars (known as Napoleonic Wars) with an agenda marked by a mix of interventionist and expansionist ambitions affecting neighboring countries. In the Mediterranean context, the Campaign of Egypt (1798-1801) and the competition with other naval powers in the region, namely Ottomans, British and Tsarist Russia, has its impact on Rousseau's account. This period also coincides with the First Barbary War (1801-1805) with the United States fighting in the shores of North Africa, just miles away from France. Also, France is losing influence in the Americas with Haiti getting its independence in 1804 and Louisiana sold to the United States in 1803. These new realities are behind the strategic shift from the Atlantic to the Pacific region.

Description du Pachalik de Bagdad is the product of these developments. It is the expression of an ethos marked by imperialist and expansionist ambitions as well as by a hunger for what is exotic. Certainly, the work that gave this city a place of choice among the French and marked the starting point in the construction of its image is the translation of Alf Laila Wa Laila [The Arabian Nights][2] by Antoine Galland in 1717 and the uninterrupted succession of editions of this same translation throughout centuries (the latest, in 2022). In 1805, just one year after the birth of the First Empire, Michel Blache composed his famous ballet, Haroun-al-Rachid

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et Zabéide, encore un Calife de Bagdad. Grand ballet en action, en trois actes [Harun-Al-Rashid and Zobeida, Another Caliph of Baghdad. Grand Ballet in Action in Three Acts]. This artistic production is a masterpiece when it comes to Orientalist depictions of Baghdad. It serves all the usual ingredients, with the Sultan's Harem as the main stage. The play is about princesses, eunuchs, servants, and a French captive (Céphise), all living in debauchery and nonchalance. At that time, when it comes to Baghdad, as the heart of Orient, French imagination still feeds on works such as Jean-Charles Poncelin de La Roche-Tilhac's Superstitions orientales, ou tableau des erreurs et des superstitions des principaux peuples de l'orient [Oriental Superstitions. A Survey of the Errors and Superstitions of the Principal Peoples of the East] (1785). The second half of the 18th century and the beginning of 19 saw a boom in travel literature with Armand Aubree's Bibliothèque universelle des voyages (in 46 volumes) and works by Étienne Marchand, François de Pagès, Jean Chardin, Robert Percival, François Raimond Joseph de Pons, and many others. Translations of this genre have flourished through the century with works by Domenico Sestini, John Taylor's, Comte Carlo De Landberg, and others.

This is also a time known for the high interest in the study of other people and civilizations with the urge to catalog, index, and display. The Louvre Museum just opened its doors (in 1793). The beginning of the 19th century also saw the birth of human zoos with natives extracted from their homes to be exhibited elsewhere. This is also an era known for theorizing race and constructing it (Thomas, Bancel and Thomas).

Introducing Baghdad and Ali Pasha to Napoleon Bonaparte

The name Napoleon Bonaparte is not mentioned even once in the book. However, it is not difficult to conclude that the Consul is acting under imperial commands. This conclusion is based on the following details: A- the frequent reference by Rousseau to his reader as "Your Majesty"; B- while talking about how, in Baghdad and the Pashalik, in matters of intelligence,

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the British surpass the French, he refers to mistakes committed by the "old government" (also called "l'ancien régime" or the old regime), a name given to monarchy (38); C- his description of a meeting with Ali Pasha that took place in 1807 as explained later; D- the fact that the book is published in 1809, five years after the birth of the First Empire. All of these elements make it obvious that Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte was in power and commissioned this project.(3) As for the mission, the author is expected to generate a report on topics are supposed to be of interest to the sovereign. Priority is given to the structures of power in their military, administrative, and financial, not to mention the strategic importance of the city and the Pashalik as the main "trade hub with Turkey, Arabia, India, and Persia"(3). The book opens with a precise geographical localization of this city in terms of latitude and longitude. It also underlines its pivotal importance as the beating heart of the Pashalik and the eastern gate to the Ottoman Empire. The description starts with the epicenter of power, the castle, and the seraglio. Far from the usual orientalist voyeurism when dealing with the harem, a feeling of admiration determines these accounts with a special interest in "oriental elegance" in the domains of architecture, manners, fashion, and taste, all with fine descriptions. Then, Rousseau depicts the streets, the buildings (with a special interest in the construction materials and architecture), the climate, the public spaces (khans, cafes, madrasas, mosques, and administrative edifices), the layout of the city, and its fortifications while judging its defensive capabilities in case of invasion. Baghdad (in his opinion the city that gloriously defied Nader-Shah "whose name makes tremble the whole Orient" [3]) is protecting, not only itself and the Pashalik, but also the whole Empire against the Persians.

The author then takes note of the state of its defenses (that is walls and artillery), especially in terms of vulnerability. He cannot hide his admiration when talking about how the city is prepared for a siege, especially when it comes to the hydraulic element, with deep channels close to the walls to ensure the flow of water from the river to the city to respond to the needs

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of a population estimated, according to him, to around 100,000 souls. At the same time, he concludes that the position of the castle (not occupying the most dominating point) and the poor condition of its canons makes it vulnerable. As if he wants to call Napoleon's attention to the outcome of an eventual campaign, he declares that, even if Baghdad can defend a whole Empire, it cannot hold against a European army (in this case, the French army, "European," as explained later, being a synonym of French). To further defend this opinion when talking about the inhabitants–he describes them (while referring to the upper classes) as being mostly janissaries with a special taste for trade and "mechanical arts" (9). This double quality (referring to warlike and trading) is behind their representation as potential allies. In Rousseau's words, as opposed to the common belief that for being the product of "despotism," they should be treated as "low slaves," the members of this elite are described as "sectarians […], proud, entrepreneurial, and inclined to mutiny" (9) Added to these psychological predispositions, this class of merchant warriors is, in Rousseau's opinion, in need of new markets for its manufactured products (mainly textile, cotton or silk clothing), the quality of which limits its chances for exportation.

This is the period of the Mamluk rule in Baghdad under Ali Pasha's reign from 1802 to 1807. Rousseau shows high esteem towards this leader who, like Napoleon Bonaparte (born far from Paris, on the island of Corsica, succeeded in becoming an emperor), is depicted as the symbol of a meritocracy common in the Ottoman Empire. We learn that Ali Pasha was a "slave" from Georgia who climbed the social ladder to become the most powerful man in this part of the world. At a young age, he was bought by Souleiman Pasha the Great (1720-1802) who took him under his wing and married him to his daughter, to make him his successor. According to Rousseau, Pashas are men with extreme "administrative and military power" and right to the property and life of their subjects. Among individuals from this group, the ones in Baghdad are invested with the highest authority in the Empire and are even called «Khalifs». They all belong to

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the "three-tails" category of Pashas; as underlined, under Ottoman protocol, all provincial governors are awarded, as part of their nomination ceremony, a kaftan, a sword, and a set of horse tails according to their rank; these tails can be one or two or three; the ones with three tail are "invested with unlimited authority" (20). This power is bestowed upon them by the highly symbolic position of Baghdad. Rousseau also makes the point that being at the fringe of the Empire and far from Istanbul (Constantinople in the book), these Pashas are far from Ottoman control and have more freedom of action compared with colleagues serving in other provinces. Like his predecessors, Ali Pasha is portrayed as a man surrounded with honors and privileges by a sultan keen to avoid all "rebellious" tendencies. As if Rousseau wanted to present them as outsiders whose sense of belonging and allegiance is not as solid as one can imagine, he states that all Pashas that governed Baghdad are "Georgian renegades," former slaves whose success is due to "fortune and intrigues" (23).

Ali Pasha is no exception; his merit comes with a price, a series of challenges proper to his environment. He is shown as a leader who, like Napoleon, has to face all kinds of enemies, starting with his own men. Armed soldiers, headed by the Agha of the janissaries, with the help of members of his court, took weapons against him to prevent the succession. This dignitary is depicted with a rare admiration to the point that his "oriental cruelty," "bigotry," and "fanatism" is tolerated knowing that, even in Europe, one can witness sadistic behavior and that being part of a "seldom civilized" nation, where despotism and terror are the only tools a sovereign has in his hand to control a population used to subjugation and oppression, this man is behaving adequately. The author continues, as "a good Muslim," the Pasha has high moral qualities; he is "ambitious," by not "greedy," "courageous" and "brave," all assets that make him a real warrior (25). One of the sovereign main qualities is his realpolitik, especially when dealing with the rising power of the Wahabi movement in the Arabian Peninsula which the author estimates as the main "destabilizing" force in the region (given,

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as emphasized in the book, the special ties between Wahabis and British) based on its military capabilities (especially that they can now count on their own artillery), its strategic successes, and its appeal to large segments of the population. Based on this assessment, he expresses his concern that, someday, "they will submit the entire Arabia and Mesopotamia […] In the sandy desert of Arabia, a new monarchy will rise to dethrone other powers in Asia and become the center of attention through Europe" (41). Then he concludes that no power in the region could defeat it and concludes that a European force (a French one) could face it only if it opens several fronts, coordinate in the best manner not to "be destroyed by itself," and lost in the desert. At this point, he alludes to how the Ottoman King tried several times to convince Ali Pasha to attack this emerging regional power, but this "prudent" man, "taking into account all the challenges that this kind of expedition could face," has always "avoided" such an adventure. Ali Pasha is presented as a man of experience who knows very well this enemy given that in the times of Souleiman the Great, he headed an expedition to pursue them, and he stopped at Lahsa because most of his men were disseminated out of thirst and hunger (43). Rousseau agrees: "This is an enterprise that surpasses the powers of a pasha and even those of the whole empire" (42). To illustrate his feelings of visceral enmity towards the Wahabis, he gives Napoleon a report based on interviews, conducted in Baghdad, with witnesses of a massacre perpetrated in 1801 (73-74) in the city of Karbala. He talks in detail about the atrocities of this raid and how among their victims are "elders, women, [and] children."

In dealing with his administration, Ali Pasha is shown as a man in control of the judiciary, especially judges and Mullahs[4], as well as law enforcement. Taking himself for a religious authority, he supervises judges as well as spiritual leaders and has a say in each of their decisions. At the same time, compared with his predecessor, he is in opposition, with his police whom he "humiliates" and "stripped of most of its privileges" (27) This treatment also extends to the army, especially in terms of salary (30)

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Considering the author's mission, the interest in Ali Pasha is puzzling. His portrait seems to be driven by the idea of presenting him as a strong leader whose allegiance to the Ottoman Sultan is not motivated by blind obedience. This makes the reader wonder if Rousseau wants to present him as someone whose loyalty can be easily negotiated. At the same time, it is not clear if the Consul sees in him an eventual ally or vassal(5). Ali Pasha is also introduced as someone who has strong ties with Napoleon's worst enemies, the British. Being aware of the importance of this point, Rousseau gives insight to the Emperor about the influence of Britain through diplomacy and trade. It is at this point that the objective of the visit is becoming clear. The British are seen as monopolizing trade with the Pashalik and, through it, an important part of the Asian continent. To keep Napoleon informed about their presence, Rousseau provides a detailed report on the weight of the British East India Company and how, with the Campaign of Egypt, it has now, since 1798, a representative in Baghdad by the name of M. Harford Jones (15). This part of the book is mostly about the Company's agents, the material conditions in which he works, especially housing, and other details. To make Napoleon aware of the unbalance between France and Britain when it comes to diplomatic representation, Rousseau underlines the fact that French interests are victims of negligence and lack of investments. His recommendation is for his country to have a representation in Baghdad to foster national interests and ensure the flow of merchandise in Asia in connection with Pondicherry, a French settlement in southern India. Rousseau asks Napoleon to request from the Sultan a residence for a future Consul in Baghdad (himself having this function in Basra) to serve as an "officer at the service of His Majesty to protect French interests" and "inform about political matters" (13). Such a representation will help to establish trade relations with Persia (a matter "neglected" until now), and foster commerce between Europe (France) and Asia. By doing so, France will compete with the Russians in the Caspian Sea and the British in the Persian Gulf. He then gives details about each kind of merchandise and its

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movement through Baghdad.

To get Napoleon's approval, he reports on how The British East India Company has had more and more influence and how it acts "abhorrently towards Europeans and their country" (15). This part contains much information about the resident and his successor, someone by the name of Zantiote.

Obeying the expectations of his interlocutor (Napoleon), the Consul shifts his attention to the bases of power including the administration (namely the judiciary and civil administration), and the military structure. Concisely and clearly, a list of ranks and functions is dressed including all the Turkish official terminology from the defterdar or Gran chancellor to Kazi (judge), to the Aga (or head of) of the janissaries, the guards of the castle, the police structure (including the "Arab police"), etc. Once this structure is explained in its hierarchy and functions, Rousseau turns his attention to military power to give Napoleon an idea of the government's capabilities in case of war. The forces are estimated to consist of 30,000 men (including cavalry and infantry). He then assesses the challenges facing this army, the first being the rise of Wahabism and its appeal to some "Arab tribes." When mentioning Arab and Kurd contributions to defense, the tone is highly complementary the first is considered as "robust" and "courageous," armed with only spears that they manipulate with mastery, and the second is characterized as the "best horsemen." Their weapons of choice are pistols, swords, and blunderbusses. The infantry (even consisting of only 500 men) is considered as "disciplined" and trained as in Europe. Added to the administrative and military power, Rousseau takes a look at the Pashalik sources of income (customs, taxes, raw materials) and expenses.

In this part of his work, the author shows a rare tendency towards synthesizing, indexing, and categorizing. More than a circumstantial attitude, tailored only for the city of Baghdad, this modus operandi is a pattern; every place of importance is described according to the same criteria.

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The traveler's gaze turns to the city for more details with a special interest in the social organization. If the eastern bank of the Tigris is the symbol of opulence, as the siege of power with the seraglio and the castle, opposed to it is a world defined in radical terms. When it comes to architecture, the first obey a circular layout and is well protected while the second is described as almost abandoned and architecturally anarchic; in this part, life is described in miserabilist and degrading terms with the poor living in precarity and unprotected against foes and nature. The wealthy are described as "civic, spirited, generous, and obliging," while the poor are ("like in all of Turkey") "ignorant, rude, superstitious, insolent, addict, and lazy" (9). Between the two worlds, a "boat bridge" and, in constant frenzy, a swarm of dinghies ensures the transportation of goods and people. Comparing these two worlds, Rousseau portrays dwellings according to social class factors. The rich live in mansions, decorated with exquisite taste that blends local specificities with Persian ones, while the poor live in adobe homes, constantly threatened with destruction by the rain. Roaming the streets of Baghdad, the author negatively describes homes, markets, and public buildings in terms of hygiene and urban planning.

The city is described as a multicultural microcosm with many minorities living side by side, among them Armenians, Egyptians, and Indians. While talking about wealth and elegance, Rousseau calls the reader's attention to the Persian community and the way it is treated thanks to government protection. Some of its members are given a monopoly on trade with Iran and Kandahar. They are described as "educated, upright, sincere, and endowed with all the essential qualities for foreign negotiators, whose first concern must always be to win the goodwill and esteem of the nation that welcomes them." (10) Other Persians come to visit the Baghdad and the Pashalik for spiritual reasons (pilgrimage to shrines) and/or economic ones, selling goods.

The traveler's gaze is also attracted by the outskirts of the metropolis, shown as "underexploited" farming land with a variety of crops (barley, rice, cot-

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ton, wheat, tobacco, sesame, dates, and many other fruits) and also a hunting ground with rich wildlife. He even talks with details about the weather, especially the "burning winds carrying with it sulfurous odor," its travel through the desert, and the damage it causes before crashing against the walls of the capital, rising and covering the horizon (7-8). One of the topics that are recurrent in Western travel literature on Baghdad is the heatwave; it is no exception when Rousseau describes how to protect themselves against the heat, people spend part of the day in basements and the night in terrasses to profit from the breeze coming from the river.

When it comes to ecological capacity, Rousseau's attention is mostly taken by The Euphrates and Tigris. The map of the Pashalik is structured around them, being considered as what holds the source of life. Through his travels, the Consul reports on agricultural life on the banks of these two rivers. He also shows a high interest in navigation-related matters, such as depth and width, tailored to the transit needs for boats and ships of various sizes. To show his fascination with these rivers, he compares them to the ones in Europe.

Baghdad, between imagination and reason

Description du Pashalik de Bagdad has many agnotological moments. Of the most outstanding is one described in a document sent from Baghdad to General Sebastian, Ambassador of France in Constantinople, to debrief him on Rousseau's visit to Ali Pasha in 1807. The author describes a Rousseau just landing in Baghdad, walking in the streets in the middle of a procession, and throwing coins to mesmerized customers seated on café terrasses while enjoying a drink. This shows how "knowledgeable" is the visitor of the uses and etiquette in the capital. How to explain such a behavior? Is it because of ignorance, arrogance, or both? What image does he have of his guests? Are they all, in his opinion, expecting charity? This same modus operandi is in vigor when Rousseau is received by Ali Pasha. The French Consul remained standing in the presence of the highest au-

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thority in the Pashalik while he was supposed to sit. As for the exchange of gifts, his was labeled as "mediocre." The ruler of Baghdad is represented as diligent and patient (which contradicts his character as described in the book) even if these are clear protocol violations (Janin, 183-184).

Is Rousseau acting out of "innocent ignorance," not being prepared, or is he acting out of "strategic ignorance," a way for him to set a "logic of places" by which the visitor wants to emphasize his status as a representative of the Emperor and determine the relation to his interlocutor? The answer to this question is nowhere to be found in the book. However, knowing that agnotology is about epistemological ghosts that can be extracted only from the context, let us prioritize the author's depiction of reality rather than focus on an incident reported by a third party. One of the main characteristics of this work is its self-reliance and assertiveness; its author does not present himself as someone in quest of knowledge; rather, he shows, most of the time, a "confirmation bias" by selecting information that enforces his preconceptions and agenda. From a Foucauldian perspective, what we are dealing with is a "jeu de vérité" [game of truth] (114); the game makes the idea of truth something mutable according to the context, as when Napoléon once said: "But what is theory? A mere dream, when applied to the masses of mankind." (Alison, 347). Theory as the first step towards scientific truth is itself a chimera ("dream"). This synthesizes the way ignorance is constructed following the Foucauldian scheme as a dynamic proper to the trio: power, knowledge, and a given idea of truth. Napoleon, the conqueror is calling for science to be the base of power through a "creative" approach to truth. This tempering with truth has ethical implications, the proof is that even if the French Revolution (1789) is about a theory of the world based on liberty, equality, and fraternity, one of the first measures taken by Napoleon was the restoration of slavery in Haiti in 1802 even though it was abolished in 1794. Rousseau, as Napoleon's eye, is in Baghdad, not only to report but to construct reality itself using ingredients proper to duties and prescriptions proper to his status and the society of

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his time. He is in Baghdad to reimagine and categorize to the point that even positive qualities are assigned as tokens; when he describes the upper class or Ali Pasha, he reaches conclusions, not based on observation and analysis, but, rather, on rewarding the ones he considers as eventual allies and denigrating the ones who do not fit in the big picture. In these descriptions, observation is often based, not on individual cases, but on general qualities, and the conclusions are generalizations instead of products of interaction.

When thought serves truth, priority is given to sound arguments. An agnotological approach is primarily about detecting flaws in the argumentation process. Contradiction is the main weakness when trying to convince the reader. Being aware of Napoleon's admiration of Islam (Spillmann, Bilici), even when talking about Muslims (especially Arabs and Turks) in the most degrading terms, Rousseau adopts a strikingly complementary tone every time he mentions this religion, describing it as a religion based on charity, equality, and rectitude. For him, Islam is good, not Muslims. Islam is not considered a "lived religion," in symbiosis with social reality and power dynamics. Instead, it is converted into a set of moral qualities, serving, not humans as social beings, but a given image of them based on abstract qualities. When the author is not convinced of these positive qualities, he adopts, from time to time, a terminology that contradicts this same purpose, as when, instead of talking about Baghdad as the former capital of the Khalifate, he uses the derogative term "empire of the Sarrazins" or Saracens, a term inherited from the time of the Crusades and refers to Muslims as "Mahometans" [Mahomedans]. This label (replaced nowadays in France by the expression "la religion du prophète" or the prophet's religion) presents this faith as a sect instead of one of the three Abrahamic religions. It is also part of the old dichotomy: real (Christianity) vs. fake religion that determined the debate on religion until the twentieth century.

As stated before, if it is a common belief that oppression and cruelty are part of the nature of oriental societies, sometimes, the author contradicts himself

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when he talks about migrants as attracted to Baghdad by "business, devotion, and, especially, advantages granted by a non-oppressive government" (11) or when, observing the quality of life of Persian migrants, or the way the Ottomans are protecting the Dominican Church or how Jews enjoy privileges as traders and public servants. Baghdadi Jews are described as "hypocritical, deceitful, wicked, and capable of chicanery and baseness when it comes to their interests" (12). At the same time (in the same page), they are portrayed as holding some of the most influential positions in key sectors such as Customs and Ali Pasha's residence. According to him, this success can be explained by the moral corruption of a bourgeoisie that, defending its own interests, relies on the Jew's "frippery," "flexibility," and "efficiency." It is a common trait of Rousseau's character to show admiration too, moments later, contradict himself under the urge to find defects. In a passage, Rousseau emphasizes the lack of hygiene in public spaces in Baghdad (bathhouses, cafés, and streets) as if French society at that time holds the standards in this domain, while according to Ann F. La Berge, the idea of public health in France (associated to hygienic concerns) only emerged in 1802 (1984,356).[6] At the same time, Rousseau is impressed with the diet with markets everywhere selling all kinds of merchandise, especially fresh fruits with low prices to make it accessible to everybody as if nutrition is not part of life hygiene. In the beginning, meritocracy in the Ottoman era is put in high esteem, especially when talking about the Mamluks, just a couple of pages later, it is explained in a way that contradicts what had been advanced when he stated: "[F]ortune and talent are among the Turks products of chance." He then explains that to be successful, one needs only to know how to read and understand the Quran, memorize some passages by famous poets, and acquire, by the power of imitation and repetition, some principles to navigate the world of politics. This is why Ali Pacha is seen as someone who "venerates" and constantly mimics his mentor and father-in-law, Souleiman Pasha (24).

The book follows the same pattern: instead of giving a legal explanation that

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contradicts the idea of institutional racism, the author prefers to simplify the issue. When informing on the way slaves are treated, especially when given the same opportunities as their masters, or when he presents Baghdad as a multicultural society or how the Ottomans protect the Dominicans (91) and how Christians enjoy "plenty of freedom" (96), Rousseau decides to omit factors that root these realities into the social fabric and make them the pillars of the social order, namely the constitutional and legal frames. For the reader who has basic knowledge of the Ottoman Empire, one of the most notorious idiosyncrasies of this book is how there is not a single mention of the millet system for example nor the "devshirme" nor the special status given to foreigners under a "protégé system" under which individuals like Rousseau himself are protected in given all kinds of privileges.

Baghdad and French imago mundi

The interactions with the city, the Pashalik, and their inhabitants are shaped by a view rooted in a specific geographical imagination, which positions France as the center of the universe (as elucidated below). In this same spirit, Rousseau cannibalizes (as in when a body is taken apart and the pieces used for a purpose other than where they belong) the city, stripping it of its own time, to present it as a "ghost of the past," a city that was the "capital of the Arab Empire," home to "thirty-six Caliphs," governed by what he considers as "horrible laws," a land marked with "sectarian and fanatic wars" where the "Quran has been bloodstained more than once." It is a place that suffered successive destructions by Tartars, Turks, and Persians: "[I]ts greatness collapsed under the relentless attacks of Barbarians." He then concludes that "it always conserves a name that bares memories of its glories and misfortunes." (2-3). If time (together with space) serves as the essential frame when observing and studying human actions, Baghdad is extracted from it. The city is thrown into a pit of macabre and bloody succession of out-of-context events. Its quality as a place for humans, to interact and build symbolic and material ties, is sacrificed under a reading of history that makes violence and destruction a necessity rather than a

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circumstance. Therefore, the invitation of the reader to remove Baghdad from its pragmatic reality and consider only the ghost that is left: "a name that bares memories of its glories and misfortunes." What is "a name" in this sense if not a tag or a label? Labels, even when praiseworthy, do not reflect the inherent reality of the object but, instead, an added value that helps to sell an idea (or a product). When the past is traumatic, people do not invest in it; this is why in Baghdad, the author witnesses a divorce with what Pierre Nora calls "sites of memory."

While reading Description du Pashalik de Bagdad, sometimes it is challenging to distinguish between reason and imagination. In condemning this city to a frozen time, Rousseau does not make an exception; this attitude is proper of most of the Orientalist depictions(7). Consequently, the city loses its vibrancy and liveliness to become a synonym of cultural petrification, stagnation, and lack of innovation.

What we are left with are two cities in one: the Pasha and the upper classes, living on one bank of the river, and the rest of the population, on the other, outside of the walls. In this configuration, the "poor" are represented as a mass of anonymous humans whose life is mentioned only in negative terms, not as part of a community or a neighborhood, but as a group at the margin of all forms of social organization. These two worlds are plunged into deep solitude. In terms of belonging, the two classes are aliens; the rich are portrayed as foreigners who profit from a system known for its laxness, and the poor, are simply ignored and absent. When assessing the defensive capacities of Baghdad, the author focuses on the military infrastructure and does not mention the human element as if defending a city is a pure matter of logistics and martial professionalism. History teaches us that without solidarity and mobilization around a common cause, a territory falls easily into the hands of its enemies.

This oversimplification of the social reality, its lack of nuance (with superficial consideration of cultural, economic, and historical factors), and its

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marginalization of the majority can be explained by the tendency towards the appropriation of geography and history. Since Edward Said's Orientalism, the research explores the epistemological dimension (in the sense of the way we conceptualize knowledge) dimension of the way the West constructs the Orient. Rousseau belongs to the generation behind the development of what will be given the name of "Arabistan," a geographical extension including "Egypt, Arabia, and Persia" as underlined by William Fogg in his Arabistan. The land of "The Arabian Nights": being travels through Egypt, Arabia, and Persia, to Bagdad (1875). In his Arabistan, or, the land of "The Arabian nights" : being travels through Egypt, Arabia, and Persia, to Bagdad " (1875) For him, Arabistan is "'the scene of the' Thousand and One Stories,' in many of which Haroun-a-Raschid, the Caliph of Bagdad, is the hero." (vii). In his introduction to the book, Bayard Taylor describes it in association with "antique and medieval memories" (vi). In the context of this concept, "strategic ignorance" works according to a double process of effacement and recreation, all according, not to reason (as championed by French Enlightenment) but by a strong sense of entitlement and need to fulfill desires; like many orientalist travelers, Rousseau acts as if the world around him awaits for his gaze to exist. He sees himself as the one in charge of creating the uncreated, stating the unstated, and categorizing the uncategorized. This epistemological appropriation (as opposed to inquiry), and the blind spots, it supposes, are behind the hesitation to endorse the book by the scientific community of its time. The preface is signed by S. de S. (who is also the editor). It is a common rule that a preface is an endorsement of the book. However, the absence of his full name suggests that the author may not fully endorse this action. When he refers to the academic institution to which he belongs, he uses only the word "Society" without giving the name or any other details. Not only that, but the tone is also implicitly ironic when, in the end, S. de S. asks the reader to support the author and give the book "un accueil favorable" [to welcome it] knowing how the author shows "zeal for arduous research" (vii). As for

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the quality of this work, it comes mainly from a "long stay in the region" (instead of a prominent research track) and the acquisition of accurate geographical "notions" (in the original text). By using the word "notions" instead of knowledge, for example, one can conclude that S. de S. wants to distance himself from the results. This work is also described as a way for Rousseau to "show himself worthy" of a learned society. The hesitations shown in the preface are, sometimes, translated into acts, as when S de S. intervenes when Rousseau misquotes Al Saâdi (20) or when, referring to some translations of Persian poetry (included at the end of the book), S. de S., makes it clear that he cannot judge its quality, "The originals are not in [his] possession" (vi) or when he reproaches to Rousseau the confusion he creates when using names of tribes and places (115) . S. de S. is Silvestre de Sacy, the director of a unique academic institution in France specialized in oriental languages, l'École spéciale des langues orientales (created in 1795) known as L'Institut des Langues Orientales (Paris). Based on a correspondence between Silvestre de Sacy and Rousseau, we learn that the Consul wants to become a correspondent of the Institute (referred to as the Society in the preface), and, for this reason, he is trying to get de Sacy's support by doing mainly a work of information and translation (Dehérain). By the time of the publication of his book, Rousseau had already fulfilled his dream. However, a correspondent does not have the same duties and expectations, especially in matters of research, as a member of the faculty or fellows. This can allow for a certain degree of understanding when it comes to scientific rigor.

That is said, not only Rousseau, but most of the people of his generation who are versed in the study of other regions and peoples of the globe have to face the same dilemma to the point that, during the 18 century and beginning of the 19, geographers are exposed to challenges related to the question of power (and its geographical imagination) and the scientific and ethical aspects related to their work[8].

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Bagdad as a decentralized center

Description du Pashalik de Bagdad is a good example of how structural ignorance is culturally induced. Ignorance can inhabit the core imagination of nationhood and its place in the world according to a worldview that feeds on feelings proper to group subjectivity. In his description of Baghdad and the Pachalik, Rousseau often refers to Europe as the pole of comparison (comparison in terms of technology, discipline, administration, defense, and aspects of daily life). What the author calls Europe is often a way to describe a national desire that consists of imagining France as a synonym of a whole continent, all according to the desire to conquer and subjugate. Of this continent, the enemy is excluded; Great Britain is referred to as an outsider that feeds feelings of hostility to Europe (in reality France). This conception of the nation as a projection into space through conquest finds its basis in an old idea of France as the center of the world. It all goes back to the so-called Ancien Régimeancien régime-ancien régime or Old Regime about the monarchic era when King Louis XIV (1638-1715) used to call himself "le Roi Soleil" or the King Sun considering himself as the being that enlightened his surroundings. This self-description is also applied to the whole French nation as the representative of a kind of "cosmocracy," a power that goes beyond the profane to cover a sacred dimension. It is this centrality of power, embodied by the sovereign, that determines the relationship to science as when Napoleon describes theory as a "fiction" when dealing with the "mass of human beings." Science served this purpose in many ways. Montesquieu's "theory of climates" (according to which human behavior is determined by climatological factors, and, in this world, the French are the privileged ones, their country having the best climate on earth) to the theorization of race through the 19th century and coining laws based on the idea of race such as Le Code noir [the Black Act] and Le Code de l'Indigénat [Indigenous Act], not to mention the birth of colonial Ethnography and Anthropology. All of these factors are behind fostering what we can call

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active ignorance, something that, when dealing with the rest of the world, consists of ignoring all that can disturb a geographical imagination that gives France a dominating status.

This principle of a country as the center of the universe organizes and shapes Rousseau's views of Baghdad and the Pashalik. Given that in his country, it is a common idea to talk about "Paris et la Province" (which means, simply, Paris and the rest of the country), in his book, Baghdad is described in the same fashion: there is this metropolis in one hand, and the rest of the Pashalik in the other. The capital is like the heart and the Tigris and Euphrates, the main arteries; each village, monument, town, and city plays a role in the overall picture, one determined by the author›s strong desire for possession to the point that the whole book follows the same patterns; the main focus is always about strategic and economic potentialities including crops, trade, natural resources, points of transit, fortifications, troops, ethnic composition and tensions, all with the same assessment of capabilities and weaknesses. Rousseau's gaze is controlled by the imperative of reproducing the centralist view to the point that Baghdad and Paris both obey almost the same layout; if, since the Middle Ages, Paris and its region are considered as L'Île de France [French Island] with Paris as the heart and the suburbs as what feeds it, Baghdad and its outskirts are also represented in the same fashion. As the second most important city in France, Marseille finds a mirror in Basra, considered by Rousseau as second to Baghdad. The comparison between the two even follows the theory of climate (mentioned above) with Baghdad being blessed by a "very healthy and epidemic-free climate" (7) while Basra is known for "a bad and very dangerous climate, especially for foreigners" (34). French centralism is also the pole according to which the book is organized when covering political, administrative, and legal aspects, all according to a system set to ensure loyalty to the Ottoman Sultan, each region having a pasha appointed by the Sultan and representatives of the civilian and military administration.

These forms of centralism cannot suffice to give Baghdad the same status as

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Paris for the author is faithful to the imperative of organizing the world according to a supremacist view (in the sense of being the representative of what is considered as perfect). Rousseau's image of the world consists simply of showing how, in case of invasion and occupation, French centralism will not be a strange phenomenon. However, what makes the difference is the people themselves. If centralism is considered a universal tendency, humans themselves are not all the same, and this is where racism and ignorance of the realities of the other play a key role in reinventing Baghdad and the Pashalik. The Ottomans are seen as capable of providing a system that can ensure connecting parts of the empire, even as far as the pashalik with which we are concerned. However, anthropologically, humans in this region are shown as not apt to fully adapt to this system. Here, Rousseau falsifies the most elementary ingredients that contribute to the making of a society organized around a controlling center. When finishing reading Description du Pashalik de Bagdad, the reader has the impression that this is a land populated with only minorities that lack the kind of social imagination that can shape a common sense of belonging to the point that the author creates minorities where there are none. Knowing that ethnically Arabs are the majority, Rousseau proceeds to a work of fragmentation that mixes religion and ethnicity with Christians and Jews considered a different race (even if the word "race" is absent in the book) and the Arabs themselves as a minority organized in three groups (62-63): 1- The nomadic that he calls "stray" who adopt a way of life "exempt from ambition" and are happy with the little they have. 2- The ones who live on the outskirts of villages and cities in huts and dwellings built out of straw and reeds, among them those who, in Baghdad, live on the western bank of the Euphrates. This category shows more "zeal and initiative" than those of the first one and needs to buy luxury products made by the "civilized and settled." 3- The third category is made up of the ones living in villages and cities, most of them dedicated to "mechanical arts." They are referred to as constantly "avoiding calling a greedy master's attention knowing

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how much they fear seeing the product of their labor becoming the prey of others." By "others," the author means "rapacious government" and soldiers sometimes converted into highwaymen. Apart from the admiration explained by their sense of "primitive freedom," Arabs are described in the most degrading terms. This discrimination can be explained by a strong belief in an alliance between them and the Wahabis (even if he states that Arabs are the majority in Basra and this city was attacked in the most atrocious and vicious terms in 1801) and the British. Arabs are sometimes considered foreigners in their own land as when he puts them in the same category as "Indians, Egyptians, etc."(11) or when he thinks about them while talking about trade, as foreigners as the British. It happens that they are considered natives as when he talks about "Nagedi Arabs" (47) from the region of Basra, the Mutéfiks, and other tribes. They are also seen as not yet ready to be part of the global society because of what can be referred to as visceral moral inadaptation. This inadaptation can affect even the sense of invention as when he describes the locals crossing the river on floating devices of their make; these are tubes made out of goat skin that swimmers inflate and attach to their stomachs and to their shoulders a package with their clothes. Not only men but also women join the group while "vibrating the air with their songs" (53). For Rousseau this is a procession of thieves looking for the ideal prey (52). As mentioned before, Arabs are also presented as attracted by Wahabism, a movement described in the most horrific terms with "hordes" of undisciplined fighters, roaming the desert and spreading destruction everywhere with no reason. Rousseau refers in degrading terms to Christians[9], Jews, and Yazidis. Yazidis are depicted in the most degrading terms as "a nation of barbarians without laws, customs, fasting, celebrations, prayers, and policing who live on agriculture and rapine […]. They sell their own children" (98). Just as the Wahabbis, Ali Pacha organized an expedition against them, and the results were limited with only some families "massacred" or "enslaved" or "forcibly converted to Islam" (99). As for Turks, they are associated to an apparatus

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seldom efficient and unable to defend itself. His critique of this apparatus finds in the system of taxation a field of choice with Arabs being the victim of choice due to the heavy taxes they have to pay.

These social, political, and administrative fragilities are faced with the omnipotence of the "Europeans" (the French), presented as makers of miracles and capable of giving the land and its people a second chance. They can correct it all even "climate" (35) and they could be better rulers than the Turks who do not appreciate the place because of their "inertia and natural nonchalance" (49) French have also the power to save even history as when the author shows a particular interest in old buildings in Baghdad and assesses them to conclude that they are "ancient" with "frontispieces adorned with Arabic and Cufic inscriptions dating back to the time of the Khalifes" (16). He surveys the outskirts of Baghdad, highlighting some of the most important heritage sites such as Imam Azem, known of the Imam Abu Hanifa's tomb or Imam Moussa or Kazémi, another holy site. Rousseau is attracted by the architecture of the minaret and dome of the mosque, both made with bricks "encrusted with gold," a gift from the Aga Mohmmad Khan, one of the Persian king's uncles (18) He also mentions the ruins of Haroun Al Rashid wife Zobeideh's mausoleum. He describes with details the Nimrud Tep, considered, according to him, as a "vestige from the Tower of Babel," Madin and what looks like a Zoroastrian temple. When he reaches Babylon, the tone changes. It represents for him a union between "contrasts" that are "glory" and "degradation." It is portrayed as "imposing and grandiose" (67) He then shifts his attention to the "travelers' sadness" while watching the ruins. It is this "degradation" that determines the description of what is left of Babylon, "a pile of shapeless hovel inspiring sadness and horror" (68) He talks about how Arabs converted the ruins of Babylon into a source of income; they "dig holes in the ground in search of medallions (in bronze, silver or even gold), and highly praised objects such as vases, idols made with metals, boxes, utensils, carved rocks. They also extract bricks to ship them to Baghdad where

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they are sold at a high price" (69). Rousseau wants the reader to imagine the mythical city through the same prism of moral degradation, Babylon being for him the birthplace of "some virtues" and "displayed all the vices". It gave birth to "some elevated souls" and to "monsters". His dream is to give it a second life. Therefore, he is asking Napoleon (in the book "European Government") to ask the Ottoman sultan to authorize French archaeologists to start working on historical sites around Hilla to "discover interesting and curious facts about Antiquity" (70).

Conclusion

Description du pachalik de Bagdad has more than one merit. It is a first-hand account of a member of the French administration at one of the most crucial moments in the history of this country and its European neighbors. It is also a description of life in Baghdad and the Pashalik, with some unique experiences such as the meeting with Ali Pasha. The originality of this work is in the gaze of an author shared between the imperative to fulfill his duties as someone supposed to provide a report on the state of the situation in political, economic, strategic, and cultural terms. At the same time, the weight of shared beliefs about Baghdad as the heart of Orient and its dimension in the collective imaginary "corrupts" the text by discarding it from the dryness and concision of the report it is supposed to be. Rousseau's book is, more than anything, a translation of imperial desires according to a worldview based on the need to set France as the center of the universe while contesting and dissolving other centers, among them Baghdad as what is associated with the idea of the cradle of human civilization. These desires announced the future at a time when the Ottoman Empire was not yet the "sick man of Europe" and France did not yet occupy most of the Arab World, from Morocco to Lebanon.

While analyzing the imagination behind the reinvention of Baghdad by the Consul of France, it became obvious that, in the name of a certain imago mundi inherited from the Old Regime, the author sacrifices the main in-

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gredients in a work of research that is inquiring and building sound arguments. This is explained by the weight of ideology on scientific inquiry and how research is supposed to be conducted according to a division of work with a split between the field experience as experienced by the traveler and data analysis as what is the domain of academic work. This organization, especially in the domain of geography, is behind the sacrifice of rigor to foster an agenda set by Napoleonic France. From an agnotological point of view, in this book, ignorance is embedded in the project of research, the conduction of fieldwork, and the expectations of the reader. Ignorance is in this sense existential and teleological; existential given that, in the name of a certain image of the nation, the rest of the world must obey the proper desires to fit a certain conception of truth, and teleological given that Rousseau makes ignorance a finality in itself; it is a strategic move aimed at convincing Napoleon of the vital importance of Baghdad and the Pashalik in giving France a strategic position in the West Asia at a time when its power is reduced to almost nothing in the transatlantic arena. This call comes with a price for Baghdad, a process of cannibalization of time, social ties, ethnoreligious configurations, dynamics of race, and all the institutional support to live in a multicultural environment.

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(Endnotes)

1. The Rousseau (father and son) are known for a collection of rare Arab manuscripts (700 in total), acquired from them in 1818 by the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Moscow). Serge A. Frantsouzoff describes it as a "unique collection of true masterpieces in the domain of books written in Arabic script" (250). It is not clear if these manuscripts were sold to the government of Russia. The author talks only about "transaction" without any further details.
2. All translations are mine.
3. Of interest is Guillaume Antoine Olivier's book, also commissioned and published in 1807, Voyage dans l'empire Othoman, l'Egypte et la Perse: fait par ordre du government, pendant les six premières années de la République.
4. Apparently, it is not uncommon to see a Pasha invested with such powers. In the Travels of the Abbé Carré in India and the Near East, 1672 to 1674, the author describes a scene where the "Turkish Mulla, with all his influence and importuning" asks in vain the Pasha of Baghdad for a boat to cross the river (Burn and Fawcett, 77).
5. Sometimes, the author cannot control the real desire, that of seeing Napoleon invading the Pashalik. While describing the Shat Al Arab (the "Arabs river" as he calls it), he proceeds according to military ambitions: " The Arabs River is so vast that even frigates with forty cannons can easily sail upstream to anchor off Basra." (33)
6. See also La Berge 1975.
7. As an example of this kind of attitude, these reflections by F. C. Webb, an English traveler whose worst nightmare is to see Baghdad joining the present under French influence: "The time will, no doubt, come, alas! When in this city of Arabian romance the sleepy traveler by an express train, after reading a railway edition of the 'Arabian Nights,' shall be awakened from his dreams by a Turkish railway guard shouting, 'Bagdad–dix minutes d'arrêt [10-minutes stop]…'" (3)
8. In a research based on works by French geographers between 1750 and 1820, Isabelle Laboulais-Lesage describes most of these geographers as "amateurs" who do not take

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seriously field work and rely on travelers to do their work. From the correspondence between Rousseau and Sacy, we can see how this is the kind of agreement that exists between both men.

9. As members of a minority, Christians are not considered natives of the land, and their communities are described as shaken by constant conflicts. According to Rousseau, they are organized into two groups, Catholics and Schismatics. Members of the first group are Chaldeans, Syrians, and Armenians, and the seconds are organized around a plethora of churches. The two groups are presented as victims of "cupidity", "jealousy", "pettiness", "malevolence", and "intrigues" (. Because of these permanent tensions, the government closed the Catholic church, and its adepts are now praying with the Carmelites who are under French protection (11-12).