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E. Natalie Rothman. *Brokering Empire: Trans-Imperial Subjects between Venice and Istanbul.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012. Illustrations. xx + 323 pp. $45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8014-4907-9.

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Belonging in Venice, 1570-1670

E. Natalie Rothmanâs book, *Brokering Empire*, which analyzes constructions of Venetian identity, appropriately begins with a quotation, ââIn Venice, all are foreigners who are not Venetians,ââ expressed by Cornelio Frangipane, who came from Friuli, a Venetian colony, after a visit to Venice in the 1550s (p. 1). She intimates to readers from the first page that the articulation of Venetian identity was a complex process and the boundaries of who was considered Venetian were both blurred and fiercely negotiated. Veniceâs population included many inhabitants who were not considered Venetian, as well as many âforeignersâ who migrated to the city but retained their own unique characteristics contributing to Veniceâs distinctive character. In particular, Rothmanâs book focuses on networks of individuals who influenced the creation of boundaries of identity in Venice, which addressed the questions of who could be considered Venetian and how one might achieve this status.

Rothman coins the term âtrans-imperial subjectsâ to refer to a variety of individuals from groups who in various ways existed in a borderland, sometimes geographical and sometimes ideological, between Venice and the Ottoman Empire. Her use of the word âstraddledâ to describe the activities of these individuals exemplifies the delicate balance that they sought to maintain between multiple âlinguistic, religious, and political boundariesâ due to the fluctuating strength of their connections to both Venice and the Ottoman Empire (p. 11). Their relationship with the Venetian state was not static but in a constant condition of negotiation.

In her insightful introduction, Rothman indicates her studyâs relevance to larger issues, such as the creation of a European identity and Europeâs encounters with others, including the encounter in the Mediterranean and its relation to Orientalism. She places these analyses in the context of Ottoman and Venetian relations during an era when, according to earlier scholarship, both the Ottoman Empire and Venice were supposedly in decline. Thus this period 1570-70 has been relatively neglected despite its significance for Ottoman-Venetian relations: the Ottomans, although defeated at the battle of Lepanto, nonetheless conquered two islands that had been under Venetian rule, Cyprus and Crete. The historical context, during which Venetian ideas of Ottoman otherness developed, was a period when the Ottoman Empire conquered Venetian territories. The Ottomans were perceived as threatening Venetian imperial interests, and this informed Venetian discourse on the nature of Ottoman identity.

This book was researched and written from the Venetian perspective. Rothman supports her arguments with thorough research in the Venetian archives, and includes some examples of documents that she studied in the appendices. The sources that support her arguments are Venetian state documents that record negotiations be-

tween the Venetian state and âtrans-imperial subjects.â Rothman is also familiar with the scholarly literature on the Ottoman Empire that has been produced recently, but she does not use Ottoman primary sources. She indicates in the introduction that this is a book written from the Venetian perspective, although the subtitle, âTrans-Imperial Subjects between Venice and Istanbul,â might lead readers to expect that it also explores the perspective of Istanbul. However, this book merely touches on an analysis of âtrans-imperial subjectsâà Ottoman identity in contrast to the detailed analysis of their negotiation of Venetian identity.

Brokering Empire analyzes the shift over time in how the differences between Venice and the Ottoman Empire were articulated in juridical or commercial terms used in the sixteenth century to mostly ethnolinguistic and religious ones by the seventeenth. This shift of discourse reflects how both Venice and the Ottoman Empire were participating in their own versions of the Age of Confessionalization. Scholars use the term âconfessionalizationâ to refer to processes that deepened ties between religious institutions and centralizing states leading to individuals feeling increasing pressure to conform to the stateâs religious ideology. Previously individualsâ religious beliefs and practices were of less concern to the state and an individualâs conformity to the stateâs religious practices was often optional.

The body of the book that supports the arguments outlined in the introduction is divided into four main parts. Part 1, âMediation,â focuses on individuals who were active in commerce: merchants and brokers. Given that the book title is *Brokering Empire*, explanations regarding brokerage in Venice are an important element of the study. Rothman demonstrates that the line between brokers and merchants was frequently blurred. Bankrupt merchants often turned to brokerage in order to continue their commercial activities. Language skills were an essential advantage to success as a broker in Venice. Thus, trans-imperial subjects were often employed as brokers, although they were frequently involved in legal proceedings as unlicensed brokers. Trans-imperial subjects came to be seen as increasingly foreign in the seventeenth century because of changes in Venetian policy. For example, eventually transactions with Ottoman merchants necessitated the presence of an official interpreter regardless of the linguistic capabilities of the individuals involved. Also by 1621 Ottoman and Safavid merchants were required to reside in the Fondaco dei Turchi rather than wherever they chose in the city.

Part 2, âConversion,â describes the impact of the Age of Confessionalization in Venice. During this period, religious groupsâ relations with the state became increasingly well defined. Rothman claims that conversion should be viewed as âa set of historically shifting social practices rather than as individual spiritual choicesâ (p. 88). Converts from Ottoman lands emphasized changing circumstances leading to their change of religion rather than new beliefs. Whereas some scholars have seen ârenegadesâ as âproducing their own values and norms, based on their individual choice,â Rothman argues that converts worked within the limits of Venetian institutions established to regulate convertsâ lives (p. 122). Her study focuses on conversions to Catholicism by individuals who were formerly Muslims, Jews, or Protestants. Although becoming Catholic united them, their origins and social status determined both aspects of their initial conversion and their subsequent life experiences.

In part 3, âTranslation,â Rothman focuses on dragomans, official interpreters, who served in the Venetian state bureaucracy. This section explores the tension that existed between demonstrating foreign experience, which was recognized as leading to increased competence, and establishing loyalty to Venice, which was necessary for achieving high office. Thus there was a fine line between emphasizing foreign versus metropolitan linkages by those attempting to achieve and retain official Venetian positions. Moreover, dragomans claimed specialized knowledge, and due to their connections with the Venetian elite, they began to define who and what were foreign in Venice. This process is explored in part 4.

The last part, âArticulation,â explores tax policy used to support dragomans and analyzes the development of the term âLevantine.â This section includes a fascinating account of a broker who contributed to the establishment of the concept of âTurkish difference,â which influenced the foundation of a Fondaco dei Turchi in Venice. This change in Venetian policy directly benefited the broker and his family for years to come. The discussion of the development of the terms âLevantineâ and âLevantiniâ articulates how these terms indicate a perspective from metropolitan Venice rather than from the borderlands with the Ottoman Empire. The meaning of the term âLevantineâ in Venetian texts varied over time, but it came to refer to all Ottoman and Safavid subjects, especially to Ottoman merchants conducting business in Venice rather than in Ottoman territories. Its use by authors indicated their identification with metropolitan Venice and not with territories east of Venice.

Rothman concludes by claiming that the question of who was Venetian and how one could recognize someone with this status was not clearly answered at the time. It depended on who was doing the designating and their relationship to the kind of document that was being produced. Rothman contends that it was not a simple binary of Venetian versus non-Venetian but that a third category also existed, trans-imperial subjects who were both Venetian and non-Venetian at the same time themselves. Rothman acknowledges that to truly answer the questions that she raises a more comparative framework is needed, examining Ottoman as well as Venetian sources. So although she does not employ Ottoman materials, she acknowledges the need for inclusion of Ottoman sources to achieve a clearer understanding of early modern history. âIntegrating the Ottomans more fully into early modern historical narratives is a crucial antidote not only to visions of European pre-Enlightenment innocence but also to equally problematic and Eurocentric postcolonial assumptions about a linear European imperial expansion as the main driving force of early modern historyâ (p. 251).

Ottomanists are working to integrate Ottoman history into the history of early modern Europe. What Rothman has achieved is to âdocument the emergence of boundaries now so ingrained that their very historicity is often forgottenâ (p. 251). Her explication of this process of creating boundaries that are now seen as natural but that were articulated in specific historical contexts is a valuable contribution. She emphasizes that we must question the motivations of the individuals who articulated these boundaries rather than assuming that these boundaries are natural and always existed. Venice existed on a continuum between the Ottoman Empire and Western Europe. This analysis of how Venice came to be defined as part of the West rather than part of the East is well worth reading by scholars interested in the roots of European identity in the early modern period.

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