

John Locke and the Levant

Luisa Simonutti

Abstract: Locke was indubitably a convinced traveller, and, in his reflections, he championed the educational value of the Grand Tour. This article addresses travel literature in the countries of the Levant, exploring the intellectual interests that directed Locke's reading towards the works on travelling in the Ottoman world and the Near East. These readings tie up with speculations on the limits of human knowledge and civil and religious power that engaged the philosopher from his time at Oxford to the works of his maturity. This was not exoticism, but a specific historic and critical interest that engaged his considerations on alterity, tolerance, and forms of social and religious coexistence.

Keywords: Levant, tolerance, travelogues, Islam, Locke.

As to the improvements of travel I think they are all comprehended in these four - Knowledge, which is the proper ornament and perfection of the minde: Exercise, which belong to the body; Language and Conversation¹.

1. *Introduction*

Travelling has always been tied up with knowledge, with *curiositas*, and provides an opportunity for asking questions about alterity, about what is different from us in terms of customs, religion, history, politics and culture. Educational travel, from the *iter studiorum* to the Grand Tour, journeys of exploration and travel undertaken to enrich one's life from numerous points of view. Journeys made for very different reasons: for pilgrimages or to convert new worlds, to

¹ Locke to Sir John Banks, 18/28 August 1677, in J. Locke, *Correspondence*, ed. by E.S. De Beer, vol.1, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1976, p. 513.

sell one's wares and purchase exotic products, to conquer territories and also to describe foreign natural elements, animals and plants, and unknown lands and seas. Journeys that were actually made, and others very often imagined, dreamed or undertaken following the cues of historic narrations and geographical and political descriptions of cities and territories: educational reading for an understanding of those who live beyond the borders.

Locke was definitely a convinced traveller. In his capacity as tutor to the scion of the Banks family he had warmly recommended the educational value of the Grand Tour even though, after many months travelling through France, he decided to return to England rather than continue towards Italy². In *The Conduct of the Understanding* (1706), Locke emphasised the importance of broadening one's horizons through a wide range of reading.

Error and truth are blended, jumbled, in their minds; their decisions are lame and defective, and they are often mistaken in their judgments. Why? Because they talk with only one sort of men, and read only one sort of books, so that they are exposed to only one sort of notions. They carve out for themselves a little province in the intellectual world, where light shines and (they think) daylight blesses them; and they write off everything else—that vast territory—as covered by night and darkness, and take care to avoid coming near any part of it³.

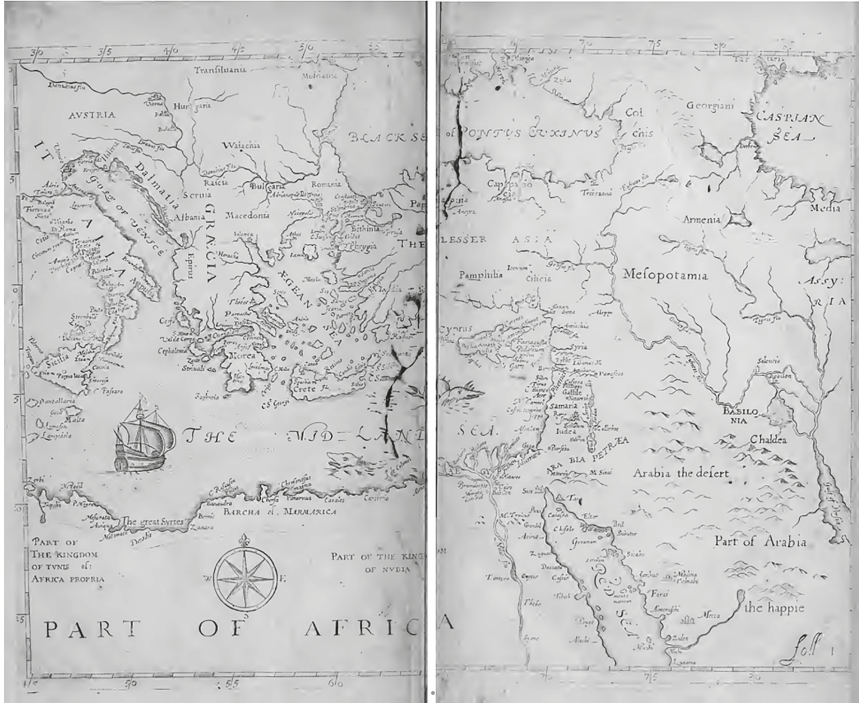
The catalogue of the philosopher's library is full of books describing places that are little-known, exotic and in any case distant, from China to Siam, and the nearest East to the Americas. Several studies, including those of Hodggen and Talbot⁴, have stressed the influence that this travel literature had on Locke's thought in the fields of economics, politics, religion and epistemology. In these initial notes it is important to observe the significant presence in Locke's library of various political, historical and geographical works relating to the Levant, an actual area generally identified with a part of the Mediterranean. From the late Middle Ages, this term was used in maritime and trade

² On this topic see L. Simonutti, "Inspirational Journeys and Trunks of Books: Initial Notes on Locke the Traveller", in *Studi lockiani. Ricerche sull'età moderna* 1 (2020), pp. 131-62.

³ J. Locke, *The Conduct of the Understanding*, ed. by J. Bennett, 2017, p. 3, <https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/locke1706.pdf>

⁴ M.T. Hodggen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 1964; A. Talbot, "The Great Ocean of Knowledge": *The Influence of Travel Literature on the Work of John Locke*, Brill, Leiden 2010. See also W.G. Batz, "The Historical Anthropology of John Locke", in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 35 (1974), 4, pp. 663-670, and the contributions in this volume of *Studi lockiani. Ricerche sull'età moderna*.

circles to denote the eastern coast of *mare nostrum*, in particular Egypt, Syria, Turkey and Greece⁵.



G. Sandys, *Travels: containing a history of the original and present state of the Turkish empire ... the Mahometan religion and ceremonies...*, J. Williams jr, London 1673, 2nd edition.

Even an initial analysis of the several dozen texts gathered by Locke – dealing with travel and historic narrations about the Levant that appeared throughout the seventeenth century – arouses curiosity about the reasons for his marked interest in a literature that went beyond the distant and exotic territories in America and Canada and the East and West Indies, discovered and travelled from the late Middle Ages up to the dawn of the modern age. The *curiositas* about the Levantine world was instead connected with reflections on religious and political tolerance and the importance that the Arabic-Ottoman world had gradually assumed in the eyes of the European observer. Islam no longer

⁵ T. Carlino, “The Levant: a Trans-Mediterranean Literary Category?”, *TRANS-* [En ligne] 2 (2006), <http://journals.openedition.org/trans/129>; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/trans.129>

simply instilled fear, but was also considered with the desire for a knowledge freed from the ancient prejudices towards a world extending from the shores of the Mediterranean that was the cradle of European culture. At the end of the 1670s Locke expressed the feelings of a traveller who had spent many months abroad upon returning home with a new perspective on his friends and society.

The love of our freinds whose conversation and assistance may be pleasant and usefull to us and the thoughts of recommending our selves to our old acquaintance by the improvements we shall bring home either of our fortunes or abilities or the increase of esteeme we expect from havinge traveld and seen more then others of the world and the strange things in it⁶.

Reading to find out: reading to better address the difficulties of undertaking unusual paths and to better understand the individual and social habits of the inhabitants. Literary, historic and epistolary descriptions that nevertheless often furnished information that was imprecise, incomplete or altered by prejudices and incidental experiences. Therefore, it was important to experience travelling in first person so as to correct interpretations and preconceptions and, after returning home, channel the new knowledge acquired through travel and reading into one's personal life, commercial and agricultural activities and, in general, into the economy, the organisation of the state and culture.

I don't say that to be a good geographer a man should visit every mountain, river, promontory and creek on the face of the earth, view the buildings, and survey the land everywhere, as if he were going to make a purchase. But everyone must agree that someone who often ventures into a country and travels up and down in it knows it better than someone who like a mill-horse keeps going around the same track or keeps within the narrow bounds of a field or two that he especially likes. Anyone who is willing to seek out the best books in every science, and inform himself of the most significant authors of the various sects of philosophy and religion, won't find it an infinite work to acquaint himself with mankind's views on the most weighty and comprehensive subjects. If he exercises the freedom of his reason and understanding as broadly as this, his mind will be strengthened, his capacity enlarged, his faculties improved⁷.

Although Locke had specific contexts and local customs in mind, he was reflecting on universal characteristics that could stimulate the rational capaci-

⁶ "Amor Patriae", MS Locke d. 1, p. 57, dated 1679, in J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Toleration: And Other Writings on Law and Politics, 1667-1683*, ed. by J. R. Milton and P. Milton, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2006, pp. 385-6.

⁷ J. Locke, *Conduct of the Understanding*, cit., p. 4.

ties of everyone. For the young student or gentleman in particular, the specific value of travelling was that it could open the mind of the youth to “Tempers, Customs, and Ways of living different from one another, and especially from those of his Parish and Neighbours”⁸. These convictions were central to Locke’s thought, and he reiterated them at the end of *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, which appeared in 1693 and continued at length to be a benchmark about the education necessary for a young gentleman.

In the pages published for the first time in the *Collection of Several Pieces* by Pierre Desmaizeaux under the title *Some Thoughts concerning Reading and Study for a Gentleman* by which it is generally known, Locke repeated the fact that reading is essential to improve our knowledge.

The Improvement of the understanding is for two ends; first, for our own increase of Knowledge. Secondly, to enable us to deliver and make out that knowledge to others.

The latter of these, if it be not the chief end of study in a gentleman, yet it is at least equal to the other, since the greatest part of His business and usefulness in the world, is by the influence of what He say’s, or write’s to others⁹.

Alongside the texts on rhetoric, and study of the writings on morality and the art of government of both ancient and modern societies, Locke also listed works of poetry, literature and dictionaries, and all writings related to “the reading of History, Chronology and Geography are absolutely Necessary”. Essential reading both for the individual education of a gentleman and for those who aspired to become governors of society: writings that, for the most part, he himself conserved in his own library.

In Geography we have two general ones in English, Heylin and Moll; which is the best of them, I know not, having not bin much conversant in either of them; But the last I should think to be of most use, because of the new discoveries that are made every day, tending to the perfection of that science; tho I

⁸ J. Locke, *Some Thoughts concerning Education*, ed. by J.W. Yolton and J.S. Yolton, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2000, § 212, p. 262.

⁹ *Ibid.*, *Appendix III*: “Mr Locke’s extemporè Advice & C.”, pp. 319-28, p. 319. As mentioned in the Introduction by the editors of *Some Thoughts concerning Education*, J.W. Yolton and J.S. Yolton, the title was given by Samuel Bold and the text was first published by Pierre Desmaizeaux in the *Collection of several pieces of Mr. John Locke, never before printed, or not extant in his works*, J. Bettenham for R. Francklin, London 1720, under the title “Some Thoughts concerning Reading and Study for a Gentleman”, pp. 231-45. On the longstanding interest of Locke in the non-European world see P.J. Connolly, “Travel Literature, the New World, and Locke on Species” *Society and Politics* 7 (2013), 1, pp. 103-16.

believe that the countries which Heylin mentions, are better treated of by Him, bating what new discoveries since his time have added.

These two Books contain Geography in general; [But whether,] But whether an English Gentleman would think it worth his time to bestow much pains upon that, tho without It, He cannot wel understand a Gazette, This is certain, He cannot wel be without Cambden's Brittan<n>ia; which is much enlarged in the last edition. A good collection of Maps is also very necessary. To Geography Books of Trav[e]l may be added. In that kinde the collections made by our [own] countrey-men, Hacklute, and Purchase are very good. There is also a very good collection made by Thevenot in fol: in ffrrench, and by Ramuzio in Italian, whether translated into English or no I know not. There are also several good books of Trav[e]lls of English men published, as Sands, Roe, Brown, Gage, and Dampier. There are also several voyages in ffrrench which are very good, as, Pyrard, Bergerone, Sagard[e], Bernier, and, which, whether all of them are translated into English I know not. There is at present a very good Collection of Travels never before in English, and such as are out of print, now printing by M^r Churchill. There are besides these, a vast number of other Travels; A sort of Books that have a very good mixture of delight and usefulness. To set 'them' down all, would take up too much time and room; Those I have mentioned are enough to begin with¹⁰.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 323-4. The editors have carefully identified the texts cited, correlating them with the titles given in J. Harrison, P. Laslett, *The Library of John Locke*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1971, 2nd edn. (see LL and title-number): "Peter Heylyn, *Cosmographie in Four Bookes, Containing the Horographie and Historie of the Whole World* (1652), an enlarged edn. of *Microcosmus, or A Little Description of the Great World* (Oxford, 1621); both titles were frequently reprinted. Herman Moll, *A System of Geographie* (1701; LL 2009). William Camden, *Britannia* (1586). Locke owned an Amsterdam (1645) edn. (LL 574), and a translation published by the Churchills in 1695 (LL 575). Richard Hakluyt, *The Principall Navigations, Voiages and Discoveries of the English Nation* (1589). Locke owned the enlarged edn. (3 vols., 1598-1600; LL1374). Samuel Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage, or Relations of the World and the Religions Observed in All Ages* (1613). Locke owned the 1625 edn. with the title *Hakluytus Posthumus, or Purchas His Pilgrimes* (LL 2409). Desmaizeaux correctly spells 'Hakluyt' and 'Purchas'. Melchisédech Thévenot, *Recueil de voyages* (8 parts, Paris, 1681); Locke lacked part 8 (LL 2890). He also owned Thévenot's *Relations de divers voïages curieux* (4 vols., Paris, 1663-72; LL 2889-28898). Giovanni Battista Ramusio, *Navigazioni e viaggi* (3 vols., Venice, 1595-1665; LL 2438). Many edns. published. George Sandys, *A Relation of a Journey Begun A: Dom: 1610, Foure Bookes, Containing a Description of the Turkish Empire* (1615); Locke owned the 7th edn. with the title *Travels Containing an History of the ... Turkish Empire* (1673; LL 2553). Sir Thomas Roe, *Mémoires de T Rhoë, ambassadeur du Roy d'Angleterre auprès du Mogol* (Paris, 1663); later included in the Churchills' *Collection of Voyages and Travels* (below). Edward Browne, *A Brief Account of Some Travels in Hungary, Servia, Bulgaria* (1673; LL 498); also a French translation, *Relation de plusieurs voyages faits en Hongrie, Servie, Bulgarie ...* (Paris, 1674; LL 499). Thomas Gage, *The English-American His Travail by Sea and Land, or A New Survey of the West India's* (1648); Locke owned the 3rd edn. with the title *A New Survey of the West Indies* (1677; LL 1205). William Dampier, *A New Voyage Round the World* (1697; LL 910). François Pyrard, *Discours du voyage da François aux Indes orientales* (Paris, 1611); Locke owned the new edn. with the title *Voyage aux Indes orientales* (Paris, 1679; LL 2411) and

2. ... at first view appear so extravagant ...

John Strachey, a distant relative and childhood friend of Locke's, had since the early 1660s encouraged him to indulge his own intellectual curiosity and think about living abroad for a while, convinced that this would do him much good, if not in terms of health certainly for his youthful reputation¹¹. In effect, Locke's pervasive *curiositas* accompanied him constantly. His book collection reflects his intellectual biography, his interest in so many aspects of social life and the cognitive capacities of the individual, medical and scientific knowledge in general, history, religions, languages, political systems, economic organisation and trade networks, ancient and contemporary geography, and travel literature.

In mid-October 1672 Locke told his friend about the emotions of his first sojourn in Paris in his capacity as the escort of Lady Northumberland and amused himself by ironically describing the sights, encounters and experiences of life abroad, "Perhaps your mouth will water after other matters, but to stop your longing I am to tell you that the great happiness of this heaven upon earth, Paris, lies wholly in vision too"¹². Nor did Locke spare irony about himself – "I am after the old English fashion" – but continued to be driven by his conviction of the utility of understanding different places and cultures, not only to increase one's own knowledge, but also to help make improvements in the life of one's own country. Some years later, in June 1678, while he was accompanying the son of Lord Banks on his educational tour through France, Locke repeated with conviction:

I confesse were I to speake freely my opinion concerning what is best for the young gent (as I thinke I may to you) I should considering his temper besides many other reasons thinke, as I have a long time don, travelling better for him then resting at Paris, where a young english gent, (espetically if he be naturally bashfull) will be sure to flee the conversation of strangers and to heard always with his country men, and soe have litle of the advantages with all and more then all the risques of a forain country¹³.

his *Voyage concernant sa navigation* (3rd edn. of the *Discours* (Paris, 1619; LL 2411a). Pierre Bergeron, *Relation des voyages en Tartaris* (Paris, 1634; LL 280). Gabriel Sagard Théodat, *Histoire du Canada* (Paris, 1636; LL 2526); and Sagard's *Grand voyage du pays des Hurons* (Paris, 1632; LL 2527). Locke owned several works by François Bernier, including *Voyages ... contenant la description des Etats du Grand Mogol* (2 vols., Amsterdam, 1699); cf. LL 284-9. *A Collection of Voyages and Travels*, published by A. and J. Churchill (4 vols., 1704; LL 3118). Its general preface is sometimes attributed to Locke". *Appendix III*, cit., pp. 319-28.

¹¹ J. Strachey to Locke, 18 November 1663, in Locke, *Correspondence*, vol. 1, cit., p. 216.

¹² Locke to J. Strachey, mid-October 1672, *ibid.*, p. 368.

¹³ Locke to Dr. Thomas Coxe, 13/23 June 1678, *ibid.*, p. 576.

In the early 1680s, in an affectionate letter to Charles Cudworth, the beloved brother of Damaris Cudworth Masham – who had chosen over a career at Trinity College commercial activities in West Bengal, where he met his death – Locke recalled with friendly enthusiasm his experiences in the distant Indies: “Though you are got quite to the other side of the world yet you cease not to make new acquisitions here, and the character you have left behinde you makes your acquaintance be sought after to the remotest parts of the earth”¹⁴. He also curiously questioned his traveller friend about the truth of some “strange stories” relating to those distant lands, wishing to know whether indeed the people and events were really as strange as they were recounted

and whether those that practise them are any of them Mahumetans, or all (which I rather suppose) heathens, and how they are looked on by the Bramins and the other people of the country, whether they have any aparitions amongst them and what thoughts of spirits, and as much of the opinions religion and ceremonies of the Hindos and other heathens of those countrys as comes in your way to learne or enquire¹⁵.

Locke wished to know the answers to many questions, including whether the various Eastern peoples measured time in months, years and weeks in a similar way to the Western calendar, and whether they too used decimal arithmetic or other forms of counting. Another uninterrupted correspondence that developed in the name of friendship and deep affection was that with Locke’s trusted friend Edward Clarke. These were long letters dealing with the subject of the education of children and young gentlemen, topics that were delineated by Locke following a crescendo of readings and experiences that, from the world surrounding childhood, were gradually expanded through the right educational paths towards cultivation of the cultural and abstract topics proper to the adult world.

That which I am going to say to you will possibly at first view appear so extravagant, that you will have reason to suspect that I have warmed my head with this subject, and that I am now so delighted with talking of it to you, that I will propose anything rather than say nothing¹⁶.

¹⁴ Locke to Charles Cudworth, 27 April 1683, in J. Locke, *Correspondence*, ed. by E.S. de Beer, vol. 2, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1976, pp. 590-91.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 591.

¹⁶ Locke to Edward Clarke, 27 January/6 February 1688, in J. Locke, *Correspondence*, ed. by E.S. de Beer, vol. 3, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1978, p. 343.

While acknowledging that his educational proposals were those of a true visionary – “confess this of all that I have hitherto writ to you to be the most visionary” – in the letter of February 1688 Locke expounded how important it was for a young man, and obviously for his friend’s son, to leave his homeland for a while and undertake a journey, in the conviction that “the seeing of the world and acquainting himself with the men and manners of other countries besides his own has advantages in it, that nothing that a man can learn at home can perfectly supply”¹⁷. Indeed, seeing the world and knowing the people and the ways of life of other countries beyond one’s own brought with it advantages that could never be acquired at home.

Locke also carefully described the ways in which the Grand Tour could be made more culturally profitable. He stressed the fact that the number of young men who were sent abroad to benefit from such an experience was still limited. He also argued that those who did undertake a journey of this kind tended to be accompanied by a tutor who became almost their oracle, thereby depriving the youth of the advantages deriving from direct observation and experience of the unknown world surrounding him, “there be few of them that stand on their own legs, and make their thought and consideration of the ways of mankind.” On an even more pragmatic note, he advised Clarke:

When you think him of an age and proficiency fit to be sent abroad I would advise you to place him for a year or so with some sober and skilful jeweller, either in Holland, or some other convenient country you should pitch on, that there with him he may learn that trade. As for his clothes and other circumstances of his stay, order them during the time as you please; for in other countries arts are not learned as they are in England, where they are bound to be under till six or seven years. By this way he will learn the language of the country sooner and better than in any other. [...] Thus I imagine he may travel over any parts of the world he has a mind to, with more advantage and experience and a great deal less charge than ordinary, and get into the conversation of the persons of condition where he comes¹⁸.

Even in his full maturity, writing to Anthony Collins at the end of October 1703, Locke still revealed an inexhaustible desire for truth in which the journey itself was a metaphor for this quest.

And if I were now setting out in the world I should think it my great “happyness”

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 346.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 347.

to have such a companion as you who had a true relish of truth, would in earnest seeke it with me, from whom I might receive it undisguisd, and to whom I might communicate what I thought true freely. Beleive it my good Friend to Love truth for truths sake is the principal part of humane perfection in this world and the seed plot of all other virtues¹⁹.

Being now “at the end of my day when my sun is seting”, Locke continues the letter to his friend regretting the time spent following the paths traced by others and already well-trodden, while he recalled with pride that he had travelled to acquire knowledge and relate what he had known and, although he admitted that such thoughts were “often old mens dreams”, he nevertheless glimpsed “openings to truth, and direct paths leading to it”.

3. *Different ways towards heaven*

So, for Locke travel was not just a crucial part of the educational experience of the gentleman, it was also a peregrination towards knowledge, a journey towards the truth that must accompany the virtuous man throughout his existence. It was a physical and experiential journey, but also a journey of the mind, a metaphysical journey that implied a sympathetic straining towards the other devoid of prejudice and arbitrary opinions, a crucial starting point for considering alterity, understanding it and tolerating it. Such reflections of Locke’s are a leitmotif that pervades his entire intellectual career, from his student days in Oxford when he was taught by eminent masters such as the Arabist Edward Pococke and frequented his fellow students at Christ Church, Henry Stubbe and John Greaves.

In 1659 Locke penned some famous lines to his esteemed friend Stubbe just a few months after the publication of *An Essay in Defence of the Good Old Cause; or a discourse concerning the rise and extent of the power of the civil magistrate in reference to spiritual affairs*. Locke expressed his appreciation of the contents of the treatise and the hope for a rapid second edition in which Stubbe would be able to further strengthen his argument by extending the history of tolerance to include more recent times, adding an account of the situation in Holland, France and Poland which, by reason of their closeness, could have great influence in pointing out the new path to be followed,

¹⁹ Locke to Anthony Collins, 29 October 1703, in J. Locke, *Correspondence*, ed. by E.S. De Beer, vol. 8, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1989, p. 97.

to tread in those fresh steps which time hath least defaced and men will travell in that road which is most beaten though Carriers only be their guides, when you have added the authority of dayly experience that men of different professions may quietly unite (antiquity the testimony) under the same government and unanimously cary the same civill intrest and hand in hand march to the same end of peace and mutuall society though they take different way towards heaven²⁰.

At the same time, however, Locke also immediately expressed a fear inherent to his reflection on tolerance, questioning:

The only scruple I have is how the liberty you grant the Papists can consist with the security of the Nation (the end of government) since I cannot see how they can at the same time obey two different authoritys carrying on contrary intrest especially where that which is destructive to ours ith backd with an opinion of infalibility and holinesse supposd by them to be immediatly derivd from god founded in the scripture and their owne equally sacred tradition, not limited by any contract and therefor not accountable to any body, and you know how easy it is under pretence of spirituall jurisdiction to hooke in all secular affairs since in a commonwealth wholly Christian it is noe small difficulty to set limits to each and to define exactly where on be gins and the other ends²¹.

He went on to add some ethical-political concerns about the security of a nation that welcomed in subjects who intended to maintain a bond of loyalty and obedience endorsed by a vow made to a foreign sovereignty which, in their zealous eyes, had the power to absolve them from all treachery and perjury, and was willing to pardon them and offer them indulgences and rewards. In these early reflections and political writings Locke displayed a marked scepticism towards those subjects driven by interests other than the peace and justice of the national government; he ended the letter addressing his friend directly: “you can never hope that they should cordially concur with you to any establishment whose consciens, and concernments both for this world and the other shall always biases them another way”²².

In the early 1660s, Locke replied to the first argument of Edward Bagshaw “*That because ‘tis agreed that a Christian magistrate cannot force his religion on a Jew or Mahomedan, therefore much less can be abridge his fellow Christian in*

²⁰ Locke to S H [Henry Stubbe], [mid-September? 1659], in Locke, *Correspondence*, vol. 1, cit., p. 110.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

²² *Ibid.*

*things of lesser moment*²³. Although Locke was aware of the presence of a plurality of dissenting rites and faiths – such as Jewish and Muslim – within the nation, he nevertheless continued to be anchored to the perception of the danger of political disorder in England that he had experienced in his youth. As he saw it, the magistrate’s role as *conservator pacis* continued to be preeminent, and he replied to the author that opening up to so much freedom of conscience “was the first inlet to all those confusions and unheard of and destructive opinions that overspread this nation”²⁴.

Nevertheless, this was also the time of Locke’s first trip to Cleves in the capacity of secretary to the diplomat Sir Walter Vane. The mission to the Great Elector of Brandenburg was destined to failure, but it was an important journey for the thirty-three-year-old Locke, who was able to observe more tolerant religious customs and usages and to visit the *Simultankirche*. These were churches and chapels that simultaneously catered to the rites and rituals of three or more confessions, either by allocating different times of worship or by equitably dividing up the areas within the church so as to provide each of the principal confessions – Catholic, Lutheran and Calvinist – with the same possibility of prayer²⁵. It is also highly plausible that in this period Locke had the chance of reading the treatise by Roger Williams, *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution* (London 1644)²⁶, which endorsed among the twelve cardinal points of the discourse that divine will had enjoined on mankind, that all men of every nationality and in every country should be allowed to practice their cults, even pagans, Hebrews, Turks and anti-Christians, and that they were to be converted through the power of God’s word and not of the sword.

In 1667, just a few months after his return home from the diplomatic mis-

²³ Locke quoted Bagshaw’s work in J. Locke, *First Tract on Government*, in *Id., Two Tracts on Government*, ed. by P. Abrams, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1967, p. 127. E. Bagshaw wrote “First, Because it is directly contrary to the Nature of Christian Religion in generall, which in every part of it is to be Free and Unforced; for since the Christian Magistrate cannot, as I think now all Protestant Writers do agree, force his Religion upon any, but is to leave even those poore Creatures the *Jews* and *Mahumedans*, to their unbelief (though they certainly perish in it) rather than by Fines and Imprisonments to torture them out of it; then much lesse may he abridg his Fellow Christian, in things of lesser Moment, and which concerne not the substance of his Religion, from using that Liberty in serving God, which his conscience prompts him to, and the Nature of his Religion doth warrant him in”. E. Bagshaw, *The Great Question Concerning Things Indifferent in Religious Worship*, London 1660, pp. 2-3.

²⁴ J. Locke, *First Tract on Government*, cit., p. 160.

²⁵ See L. Simonutti, “Inspirational Journeys”, cit., pp. 136-9.

²⁶ See C. Bennett, “John Locke, Muslims, Religious Freedom and the Role of the State”, in *International Journal of Education and Social Science* 6 (2019), 5, pp. 39-44.

sion, in an important passage of the *Essay Concerning Toleration*, Locke wrote

if I observe the friday with the Mahumetan, or the Saturday with the Jew, or the sunday with the Christian, whether I pray with or without a forme, whether I worship God in the various and pompous ceremonies of the papists, or in the planer way of the Calvinists. I see noe thing in any of there, if they be donne sincerely and out of conscience, that can of its self make me, either the worse subject to my prince, or worse neighbour to my fellow subject²⁷.

Locke had by now become a staunch champion of toleration, which ought to be established by the magistrate as the foundation and safeguard of the peace and tranquillity of the people. In the pages that were probably drafted around 1675, he clearly spelled out the theological-political aspect:

Though the magistrate have a power of commanding or forbidding things indifferent which have a relation to religion, yet this can only be within that church whereof he himself is a member, who being a lawgiver in matters indifferent in the commonwealth under his jurisdiction, as it is purely a civil society, for their peace, is fittest also to be lawgiver in the religious society (which yet must be understood to be only a voluntary society and during every member's pleasure), in matters indifferent, for decency and order, for the peace of that too. But I do not see how hereby he hath any power to order and direct even matters indifferent in the circumstances of a worship or within a church whereof he is not professor or member. 'Tis true he may forbid such things as may tend to the disturbance of the peace of the commonwealth to be done by any of his people, whether they esteem them civil or religious. This is his proper business; but to command or direct any circumstances of a worship as part of that religious worship which he himself doth not profess nor approve is altogether without his authority, and absurd to suppose. Can anyone think it reasonable, yea, or practicable, that a Christian prince should direct the form of Mahomedan worship, the whole religion being thought by him false and profane? and vice versa; and yet it is not impossible that a Christian prince should have Mahomedan subjects who may deserve all civil freedom; and *de facto* the Turk hath Christian subjects.

As absurd would it be that a Magistrate either Popish, Protestant, Lutheran, Presbyterian Quaker, etc., should prescribe a form to any or all of the differing churches in their way of worship. The reason whereof is because religious worship being that homage which every man pays to his God, he cannot do it in any other way, nor use any other rites, ceremonies, nor forms, even of indifferent things, then he himself is persuaded are acceptable and pleasing

²⁷ Locke, *An Essay Concerning Toleration*, cit., p. 274.

to the God he worships; which depending upon his opinion of his God, and what will best please him, it is impossible for one man to prescribe or direct any one circumstance of it to another: and this being a thing different and independent wholly from every man's concerns in the civil society, which hath nothing to do with a man's affairs in the other world, the magistrate hath here no more right to intermeddle then any private man, and has less right to direct the form of it, then he has to prescribe to a subject of his in what manner he shall do his homage to another prince to whom he is feudatory, for something which he holds immediately from him, which, whether it be standing kneeling, or prostrate, bareheaded or barefooted whether in this or that habit, etc. concerns not his allegiance to him at all, nor his well government of his people. For though the things in themselves are perfectly indifferent, and it may be trivial, yet as to the worshipper, when he considers them as required by his God or forbidden, pleasing or displeasing to the invisible power he addresses, they are by no means so, and till you have altered his opinion (which persuasion can only do) you can by no means, nor without the greatest tyranny prescribe him a way of worship; which was so unreasonable to do, that we find little bustle about it, and scarce any attempts towards it by the magistrates in the several societies of mankind till Christianity was well grown up in the world, and was become a national religion; and since that [time] it hath been the cause of more disorders, tumults, and bloodshed, then all other causes put together²⁸.

This long passage deserves attention also in the light of Locke's later works, in particular the *Letter concerning Toleration* and the following *Letters*. It offers insights into the possible types of historic sources and reports of travels in the Levant that Locke was able to read and collect in his library²⁹. But, even more importantly, it highlights the supremacy in Locke's reflection of a conceptualisation of the relation with alterity based primarily on historic and political considerations, leaving dogma and more strictly theological issues to one side.

²⁸ J. Locke, "Toleration A", in *Id.*, *Political Essays*, ed. by M. Goldie, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1997, pp. 231-3.

²⁹ Valuable suggestions are found in the article by C. Bennett, "John Locke, Muslims, Religious Freedom and the Role of the State", cit.

4. *The Saints, who are canonized amongst the Turks*

In 1682 in the pages of his *Commonplace book*, under the heading “*Traditio*” Locke dwelt on the ethical aspects of the three religions of the book – “The Jews, the Romanists and the Turks, who all three pretend to guide them selves by a law reveld from heaven which shews them the way to happynesse”³⁰ – emphasising that they were constrained to the same degree to resort to the authority of the interpretative tradition of the texts. In this way, Locke muses, they appear to be admitting that a positive law, and even divine law, cannot be transmitted in writing in a way that is sufficiently comprehensible for all the inhabitants of the earth or, in any case, for peoples who are distant in time, in language and in habits. This is a weak point, which would pave the way to the notion of a natural religion that each man carries within himself, or that could in any case arouse suspicion about the integrity of priests and masters more interested in retaining a role of authority and privilege than in operating in adherence to the rules of faith and of generally recognisable behaviour.

Locke reflected constantly on the possibility of knowledge “of visible certain Truth”, and in one of the final chapters of the *Essay concerning Human Understanding* dealing with the subject of error and fallacious assent he pondered whether those who teach one thing in the Christian world and another in the Turkish world can be considered oracles and certain and infallible models of truth³¹. However, it is in the first book of the *Essay*, devoted to the critique of innate ideas, that Locke places the existence of innate moral principles such as justice, piety, gratitude etc. squarely in the dock, dwelling primarily on the innate idea of godhead. Based on the very travel literature that Locke had at his disposal on the shelves of his college, or in the home of the Shaftesburys and then that of the Mashams and, above all, in the libraries of Limborch and Furly in Holland and in his own book collection, Locke listed the overseas territories where the population has no notion of God, and the immoral practices perpetrated by distant peoples.

Having reiterated the principle of truth that God must be venerated, Locke goes on to explore the gnosological principle of the existence or otherwise of an innate notion of divinity, again on several occasions drawing on travelogues and books containing accounts of journeys and descriptions of distant lands,

³⁰ J. Locke, “*Traditio*”, in *Id.*, *An Essay Concerning Toleration*, cit., p. 393.

³¹ J. Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by P.H. Nidditch, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1975, IV.xx.3, p. 708.

such as the works of Thevenot, Jan de Lery, and La Loubère³². Another source was the *Collection of Voyages and Travels*, the introductory pages of which were in fact attributed to Locke himself, albeit only starting from the third edition published in the middle of the seventeenth century. There is, however, no documentation confirming the truth of this attribution or that Locke was responsible for composing the very useful and extensive *Catalogue and Character of most Books of Travels* that completes the long, discursive introduction to the volumes published in the Churchills' print shop³³.

The articles of Gül A. Russell have clarified the fact that, from his school-days at Westminster and then also at Christ Church, Locke's education comprised not only the classical languages but also the study of Hebrew and Arabic. More specifically, Russell has analysed the influence that Ibn Tufayl's work *Philosophus autodidactus* had on the *Essay concerning Human Understanding*³⁴.

The first Latin edition of the treatise by this prominent Arab figure was in fact published in Oxford in 1671, in the very period when Locke was engaged in reflections on the cognitive capacities, the extension and limits of human knowledge, the *tabula rasa*, the role of experience and natural philosophy, and was writing the first pages of *De Intellectu humano* (1671). The meshing of events and personal connections is intriguing. Not only was Ibn Tufayl's work translated from Arabic into Latin by Edward Pococke – son of the namesake

³² M. Thévenot, *Recueil de voyages*, E. Michallet, Paris 1681; *Id.*, *Relations de divers voiaiges curieux*, 4 vols., A. Cramoisy, J. Langlois and G. Clovisier, Paris 1663-72, LL 2889-90; J. Thévenot, *Relation d'un voyage fait au Levant*, L. Billaine, Paris 1665, LL 2888; J. de Lery, *Histoire d'un voyage fait en Brasil*, A. Chuppin, [Geneva] 1578, also Latin edition, Frankfurt am Main 1590, LL 1718 and 1717; S. de la Loubère, *Du royaume de Siam*, A. Wolfgang, Amsterdam 1691, also English version, London 1993, LL 1811 and 1811^a.

³³ See Locke, *Correspondence*, vol. 8, cit., pp. 172-3; J. S. Yolton, *John Locke A Descriptive Bibliography*, Thoemmes Press, Bristol 1998, pp. 432-3. The ethnographic perspective emphasised by H. Suzuki, "Ethnographical in John Locke's Theories (I)", in *The Annals of the Hitotsubashi Academy* 6 (1956), 2, pp. 47-65, continues to be interesting, particularly in relation to the drafts of the *Essay*. On the other hand, the attribution to Locke of the introduction and editing of the four volumes of *A Collection of Voyages and Travels, Some Now First Printed from Original Manuscripts*, A. and J. Churchill, London 1704, is no longer supported. However, P.J. Connolly underlined that Locke's correspondence shows that he was consulted about the project of Churchill's *A Collection of Voyages and Travels*. See P.J. Connolly, "Travel Literature, the New World, and Locke on Species", cit., p.106.

³⁴ See G.A. Russell, "The Impact of The *Philosophus Autodidactus*: Pocockes, John Locke, and the Society of Friends", in G.A. Russell, *The 'Arabick' Interest of the Natural Philosophers in Seventeenth-Century England*, Brill, Leiden, 1994, pp. 224-65. Locke's contacts with the Pocockes and the comparative analyses of Ibn Tufayl's *Philosophus autodidactus*, Locke's three drafts and the *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, all paths sketched out in Russell's essay, are the subject of a historic investigation being carried out by L. Simonutti.

teacher at Christ Church – but Locke had also been the pupil and later colleague of Pococke senior and tutor to Pococke junior, translator of the *Philosophus autodidactus*³⁵. Ibn Tufayl's work enjoyed a significant circulation in England and abroad. Here we would simply mention that it was translated into English by the Quaker George Keith in 1674, and that the probable go-between was Locke's friend and co-religionist Benjamin Furly³⁶. In the *Advertisement to the Reader* Keith wrote

Since the Latine Version of it came abroad (which was in the year, 1671.) it is translated into *Dutch* some considerable time ago: after it came into my hands, and that I perused it, I found a great freedom in mind to put it into English for a more general service, as believing it might be profitable unto many; but my particular *motives* which engaged me hereunto was, that I found some good things in it, which were both very savoury and refreshing unto me³⁷.

Not only did Locke and Furly know about Ibn Tufayl's work, but were so familiar with it that they used the title as a metaphor for a young and promising intellect, as Furly did in the letter to the philosopher dated 28 March 1691, in which he related with moving grief the loss of his daughter Babe.

Deare friend, I was last night prevented for want of time to write you by the post, and I know not but I maybe too late with this, by a passenger, to let you know the afflicting news of the losse of our dearest Babe, our little Philosophus Autodidactus, whom it pleasd divine Providence, to remove from this visible world, the 26 Instant about 3 in the morning, after 8 days sickness of the mazes, which, with an extraordinary, and almost intollerable pain, in my wives right thigh, keeps her very low³⁸.

A new English edition titled *The History of Hai Eb'n Yockdan*³⁹ was pub-

³⁵ Ibn Tufayl, *Philosophus autodidactus, sive, Epistola Abi Jaafar ebn Tophail de Hai ebn Yokdhan: in qua ostenditur quomodo ex inferiorum contemplatione ad superiorum notitiam ratio humana ascendere possit ex Arabicâ in linguam Latinam versa ab Edvardo Pocockio*, H. Hall, Oxford 1671.

³⁶ See G.A. Russell, "The Impact of the 'Philosophus Autodidactus'", cit., p. 250. See also C. Gallien, L. Niayesh (eds.), *Eastern Resonances in Early Modern England Receptions and Transformations from the Renaissance to the Romantic Period*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham 2019, chap. 6.

³⁷ *An Account of the Oriental Philosophy, Shewing the Wisdom of some Renowned Men of the East; And particularly, The profound Wisdom of Hai Ebn Yokdan, both in Natural and Divine things; ... Writ Originally in Arabick, by Abi Iaaphar Ebn Tophail; And out of the Arabick Translated into Latine, by Edward Pocok, a Student in Oxford; And now faithfully out of his Latine, Translated into English [by George Keith], For a General Service. Printed in the Year 1674.*

³⁸ Furly to Locke 18/28 and 20/30 March 1691, in J. Locke, *Correspondence*, ed. by E.S. De Beer, vol. 4, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1979, pp. 244-5.

³⁹ Ibn Tufayl, *The history of Hai Eb'n Yockdan, an Indian prince, or, The self-taught philosopher writ-*

lished by George Ashwell in 1686, with an extensive summary in French that was rapidly presented to a broad public in the same year of 1686 in the third volume of Jean Le Clerc's *Bibliothèque Universelle et Historique*.

Locke was, therefore, more interested in unravelling gnoseological issues, in demonstrating that even if different peoples could agree upon a name or a sound, this was not sufficient to prove that the idea of God was innate⁴⁰. In the *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, he availed of several extravagant and embroidered accounts from this travel literature, from the writings of Vossius, Pietro della Valle, and Baumgarten⁴¹, as well as exotic narrations about the customs and religions of the populations of Siam, the East and West Indies and the American continent. For instance, he referred to the *Viaggi* by Pietro della Valle and quoted a passage from the work of Martin von Baumgarten, *Peregrinatio in Aegyptum, Arabiam, Palaestinam et Syriam* (Nuremberg, 1594) in which the author described the outrageous sexual and nutritional practices of the Muslims and the way in which they venerated as saints madmen and those who had freely given themselves up to penitence and poverty⁴². Such accounts were guaranteed to arouse the sentiments and curiosity of the European reader, and Locke trusted to them without displaying any interest in a theological and dogmatic examination of the truth of the various religious creeds or narrations. Rather, he was concerned with analysing the social fabric of such communities and placing his thoughts within a broader context of the history of different societies and of their forms and contexts.

There are numerous references to the "turbanned nations"⁴³ in Locke's writings, especially in the *Letters concerning Toleration*. These letters mesh the reflection of the many works on the Levant that Locke possessed with the echoes of a major debate on the dogma of the Trinity that engaged the Anglican world at the time, which was committed to denouncing the factual link be-

ten originally in the Arabick tongue by Abi Jaafar Eb'n Tophail ... ; set forth not long ago in the original Arabick, with the Latin version by Edw. Pocock ... ; and now translated into English [by G. Ashwell], R. Chiswell, London 1686.

⁴⁰ See J. Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, cit., liv.14-15, and the reference to F. Timoléon de Choisy, *Journal du voyage de Siam*, P. Mortier, Amsterdam 1687.

⁴¹ Of the numerous works by Gerardus Johannes Vossius and Isaac Vossius conserved in his library, it is probable that Locke is referring here to I. Vossius, *Dissertationes, the tribus symbolis, Apostolico, Athanasiano, et Costantinopolitano*, Amsterdam, 1642 (LL 3111); Pietro della Valle, *Viaggi*, Venice 1667, 4 vols (LL 3046).

⁴² J. Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, cit., l.iii.9, pp.71-72.

⁴³ N. Matar, "John Locke and the 'turbanned nations'", in *Journal of Islamic Studies* 2 (1991), 1, pp. 67-77.

tween the English Unitarians and the Ottoman world. Proof of this was to be found in the Letter which the Unitarians allegedly delivered to the Moroccan ambassador Ameth Ben Ameth, who had been invited by Charles II to the English court in 1682 with the greatest pomp⁴⁴. Diplomatic and mercantile relations between the two countries had been consolidated for some time, but the scandal was caused not only by the deferential tone of the Letter but also by the doctrinal affinities and the belief in a single God that transpired from the writings of the English Unitarians and the Muslims.

Despite the fact that in his printed works Locke had always sought to avoid taking a stand on the burning issue of the Trinity, and had denied his closeness to Socinianism at every polemical twist, he was unable to escape the attacks of one of his most staunch opponents, John Edwards, who wished to unmask what he believed emerged from Locke's writings regarding the faith of the Turks and that of the Christians, and what he saw as the weak defence of the Bible against the Quran. According to Edwards, the *Reasonableness of Christianity* was a book for atheists, Turks, Hebrews and pagans, and for certain weak Christians, an undeniably Socinian work in which Christian doctrine was described in such a way as to make it the same as that of Islam.

5. *The Western Turk*⁴⁵

There can be no doubt that Locke was very widely-read regarding the Mediterranean world and the Levant. Consequently, his knowledge cannot be reduced merely to the witticisms to be found in his youthful correspondence with John Strachey – “wee breake forth afresh and then the greate controvercie may bee decided betweene the Pope and Turke”⁴⁶ – or to a deferent rhetorical circumlocution – “as often as I reade your letter I examine my self what great things I have donne whether I ever yet releivd cittys and conquerd ar-

⁴⁴ On these aspects see L. Simonutti, “Paradigmi d’eresia: socinanesimo e maomettanesimo tra Inghilterra e Francia (Stubbe, Locke, La Croze, Bayle)”, in *Le ragioni degli altri. Dissidenza religiosa e filosofia nell’età moderna*, in *Philosophica*, 3 DOI: 10.14277/6969-132-4/PHIL-3-8, 2017, pp. 153-76.

⁴⁵ “L’Europe, qui se voit menacéé d’un terrible ennemi que vous nommiez fort bien dans une de vos lettres, *The Western Turk*, qui porte la desolation par tout.” As emphasised by Pieter Guenellon in the letter to Locke of 23 June/4 July 1702, in J. Locke, *Correspondence*, vol. 7, cit., 1982, p. 640, citing an expression used by the philosopher in a previous missive which does not appear to have been conserved.

⁴⁶ Locke to John Strachey, 22 September 1660?, in Locke, *Correspondence*, vol. 1, cit., 1976, p. 154.

mys, whether I ever yet made the Turk tremble, and made some other place out sound Lepanto⁴⁷. Nor can it be restricted to literary references, as in his letter to Elinor Parry, which suggest his probable familiarity with Richard Knolles' *The Generall Historie of the Turkes*, (1603), or the *Relation of a Journey*, (1615) by George Sandys⁴⁸, although he did continue to bear these works in mind and recommended them years later in *Some Thoughts concerning Reading and Study for a Gentleman*.

While Locke's interest in the interactions of power in Europe and in the Mediterranean underlies all his thought, it surfaces only from time to time in sporadic references in his works and correspondence. For instance, it is hard to say for certain whether he had the chance to read the manuscript of the *Account of the Rise and Progress of Mahometanism* by his friend Stubbe. What is certain is that it was a subject that constantly attracted his attention as a physician, a political secretary, a philosopher and a policy maker at the Board of Trade. He read the philological works of Hottinger and his *Historia Orientalis*; in his library he had the works of Paul Rycaut (or Ricaut) on the Ottoman Empire, the *Quran* in the Paris translation of Du Ryer that appeared in 1647, and the writings of Humphry Prideaux on the life of Mohammed with their polemic attack on the crypto-Muslims, namely the deists and the Socinians.

Locke was a voracious reader and we have to limit ourselves to mentioning just a few texts among those that were of the greatest importance in seventeenth-century culture, along with some already mentioned and cited by Locke. Despite being restricted to works dealing with the Levant and the countries bordering the Mediterranean, this list would already number several dozen texts⁴⁹. These include: George Addison's writings on Morocco (1671); the travel memoirs of François-Savinien d'Alquié (1671); the travels in Africa of Jean Armand, known as Mustafa (1666); the general history of Turkey by Michel Baudier (1624); the navigations and travels in Turkey of Nicolas de Nicolai and of Joseph Georgirenes (1678); the journals of travels in the Levant of Baron Henri Beauvau (1608), Baron Louis des Hayes (1645), Jean du Mont (1694) and George Roberts (1699); the letters written from Levantine lands by Du Loir (1654); the narrations of Gilles Fermandel (1760) and Christoph Fürer von Haimendorff (1621); the history of the Grand Vizier Mahomet published by François de Chassepol in 1676 and the accounts of the religions,

⁴⁷ Locke to G W [William (later Sir William) Godolphin], [c. August 1659?], *ibid.*, pp. 94-95.

⁴⁸ See the letter from Locke to P E [Elinor Parry, later Mrs. Hawkshaw? early December 1659?], *ibid.*, p. 132, and the valuable notes in the critical appendix.

⁴⁹ See Harrison, Laslett, *The Library of John Locke*, *cit.*, p. 307.

government and customs in the lands of the Levant written by Gabriel de Chinnon (1671); the journey to Jerusalem by Nicolas Benard (1621), that to the Holy Land by Jean Doubdan (1661) and to Galilee by Michel Nau (1670); the numerous writings by François Bernier; the oft-reprinted journeys to the Levant by Sir Henry Blunt; the no less famous journal of travels in Persia and the East Indies by Jean Chardin (1686); the journey to Mount Libanus by Girolamo Dandini (1675) and that to Constantinople by Quiclet (1664); the *Instructions for Travellers* by Philip Sidney (1633), collections of travel journals by Jean Baptiste Tavernier (1680) and numerous other collections published in anonymous form.

Other works that Locke could not fail to have among his papers were the three volumes by Jacob Spon, the Lyons physician who explored the territories of Southern Europe and the Near East with scientific precision, a guide for gentlemen who wished to travel in Italy, in the lands of Dalmatia, in Greece and in the Levant⁵⁰, as well as the treatises of Giovanni Battista Ramusio, the most famous of sixteenth-century geographers. Locke shared the curiosity of Henry Blunt, who had undertaken the journey to the Levant “from England by the way of Venice into Dalmatia, Sclavonia, Bosna, Hungary, Macedonia, Thessaly, Thraces, Rhodes and Egypt, unto Gran Cairo” which in 1650 was already in its fourth edition.

Intellectuall Complexions have no desire so strong, as that of *knowledge*; nor is any knowledge unto man so certain, and pertinent, as that of humane affaires: This *experience* advances best, in observing of people, whose *institutions* much differ from ours, for customes conformable to our owne, or to such where with we are already acquainted, doe but repeat our old observations, with little acquist of new.[...] I was of opinion, that hee who would behold these times in their greatest glory, could not find a better *Scene* then *Turky*: these considerations sent me thither; where my generall purpose gave me four particular cares: First, to observe the Religion, Manners, and Policy of the *Turkes*⁵¹.

Blunt confessed that for a traveller, and for the writer, it was a hard task to understand the organisation of such a mixed society, to discover whether the discipline of the Turkish army – marching against Poland at the time – was similar to that of Europe or if they had new strategies. He was also fascinated by the planning of the bustling city life in the city of Cairo which would have

⁵⁰ J. Spon, *Voyage d'Italie, de Dalmatie, de Grèce et du Levant, fait aux années 1675 et 1676*, A. Celler le fils, Lyon 1678.

⁵¹ H. Blunt, *A voyage into the Levant*, A. Crooke, London 1650, 4th edition, pp. 3-4.

fallen into chaos, famine and desolation if in the Turkish dominion there had been nothing but evil inclinations, “as most Christians conceive”, whereas, on the contrary, “*Egypt* is held to have been the fountaine of all *Science*, and *Arts civill*”⁵².

The almost 250 packed pages of George Sandys’ *Travels Containing an History of the ... Turkish Empire* (1673) with numerous engravings and detailed descriptions, and the books of the traveller and cartographer Melchisédech Thévenot, and his nephew Jean de Thévenot, a naturalist and he too a passionate traveller, undertook not to provide untruthful accounts or waste time on trivialities, or recount only things that could surprise the reader. Indeed, Jean de Thévenot, in his meticulous way, clarified that “ie me suis fortement attaché à dire la verité, ce qui n’est pas de moy ie l’ay marqué afin qu’on ne m’en impute rien”⁵³, despite, obviously, bringing up the usual charges that “la religion des Turcs est remplie de tant de sottises et d’absurditez”⁵⁴.

From the second half of the seventeenth century European culture began to show a growing interest in the Islamic world. This attention was aimed principally at knowledge, albeit mostly for the purpose of refuting the religion and social practices of the Levantine peoples and only rarely for conversion to Islam. There were various reasons why it became increasingly necessary to know Arabic and the texts of the Quran: in order to preach, convert and generally hinder the spread of Islam; to get to know the social organisation of the Muslim world so as to combat it and curb the policy of territorial conquest of Europe undertaken by the Ottoman army under Suleiman I; to acquire a better knowledge of Arabic medicine, philosophy and sciences; and to develop the growing economic, commercial and diplomatic relations with the Arab-Ottoman world.

A precursor in the study of the Islamic world and language was the erudite Guillaume Postel, whose *Histoires Orientales et principalement des Turkes* (Paris 1575) was in Locke’s possession. Edward Pococke, the biblical scholar and professor of Arabic and Hebrew at Christ Church, and John Greaves, a scientist and passionate collector, were among the most influential figures for the young Locke, through both their works and his frequentation of them at Oxford. Locke was attracted by a study of the Arabic-Islamic world devoid of prejudices and theological-dogmatic diatribes. His reflection was not aimed at

⁵² Ibid., p. 6.

⁵³ J. de Thévenot, *Relation d’un voyage fait au Levant*, L. Billaine, Paris 1665, *Preface*.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 71.

defining the dogmas of a true and universal religion, but at envisaging a broad notion of tolerance, and the historic accounts of the state, politics and religion of the Turkish-Ottoman world represented a significant stimulus and source.

6. *The just measures of reason*

On Sunday 19 February 1682 Locke noted in his Journal:

A strong and firme perswasion of any proposition relateing to religion for which a man hath either noe or not sufficient proofs from reason but receives them as truths wrought in the minde extraordinarily by god him self and influences coming immediately from him seemes to me to be Enthusiasme, which can be noe evidence or ground of assurance at all nor can by any meanes be taken for knowledg. For I finde that Christians, Mahumetans, and Bramins all pretend to it (and I am told the Chineses too) But tis certain that contradictions and falshoods cannot come from god, nor can any one that is of the true Religion be assured of any thing by a way whereby those of a false religion may be and are equally confirmed in theirs⁵⁵.

He went on to corroborate this statement by drawing on the stories contained in Rycaut's book, recalling the description of the Turkish dervishes who claim that, through their mystical whirling, they are enlightened by God, can see his face and listen to his word. Locke also emphasised that Bernier's tales too recorded the fact that certain Hindu sects similarly believed that they were enlightened by and intimately united with God, just as the more spiritualised Christians did. However, as regards such illuminations, Locke immediately specified that, however clear they might appear to be, they could not carry greater knowledge or certainty than the proofs of truth supported by reason. On the contrary, they continued to be no more than imaginings of the fancy, because it is not the clarity of the fancy but the evidence of the truth that yields certainty, "but mear imaginations of the phansy how clearly soever they appear to or acceptable they may be to the minde for tis not the clearnesse of the phansy, but the evidence of the truth of the thing which makes the certainty"⁵⁶.

⁵⁵ J. Locke, *An Early Draft of Locke's Essay. Together with Excerpts from his Journals*, ed. by R.I. Aaron, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1936, p. 119.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*



Source gallica.bnf.fr / BnF: [Frontispice : histoire de l'Empire Ottoman. Hommage rendu au Sultan en présence de l'armée. Au fond, vue de Constantinople.]

Locke is hence referring to chapter 13 of Book II of Paul Rycaut's *The present state of the Ottoman Empire containing the maxims of the Turkish politie, the most material points of the Mahometan religion, their sects and heresies, their convents and religious votaries, their military discipline*, in the London edition of 1670. This work was published for the first time in 1666, albeit with the date of the following year, and very few copies of this first edition survived the great fire that struck London in 1666. It was rapidly reprinted and enjoyed enormous popularity, being translated into

various European languages⁵⁷. It is interesting that Locke's book collection also included the French translation in the 1677 edition, probably indicative of his interest in the Near East cultivated since his Oxford days that he had not abandoned during his travels in France.

Rycaut spent several years in the Ottoman Empire, from 1660 to 1667, in the service of the British Ambassador to the Sublime Porte, Heneage Finch, third Earl of Winchilsea, and later in Smyrna, where he remained up to 1677, also acquiring a knowledge of Turkish. His work contains a detailed account of the Ottoman political, military and religious organisation. Nevertheless, it continued to follow the pattern of the 15th-16th-century treatise drafted for defensive purposes, concerned with providing details about the organisation of the state and military enrolment, the naval military forces etc., portraying the Ottoman state and the despots in line with stereotypes of prejudice and fear. At the same time, in the chapter dealing with the promises of tolerance made by the Muslims towards all the religions present in the empire, Rycaut fully expounds the contents of an important treatise in the form of a contract drawn up by Mohammed himself as a warranty that he did not intend to either persecute or destroy the Christian religion. He states that the original text was found in the convent of the monks of Mount Carmel and later conserved in the library of the King of France and that he had copied the contents word by word for the reader's benefit. He ends the long quotation from the treatise by stressing that it had been emanated at the dawn of Muslim political power, when it was still very weak but that once Islamic political power had become established this tolerant attitude had, on the contrary, been replaced by the violence of the sword and by social and religious persecution. The dual register used by the author of *The present state of the Ottoman Empire* in actual fact reflected the European vision of the Levant, and above all the history and vicissitudes of contemporary England.

The work was undoubtedly an important source for Locke and formed part of the background to his reflections on the subject of tolerance as a form of political organisation on the part of a government that intends to guarantee the peace and prosperity of its subjects. Rycaut's work also linked up with the stimuli of the erudite context of Christ Church, Locke's friendship with Stubbe and Greaves,

⁵⁷ For further information see L.T. Darling, "Ottoman Politics through British Eyes: Paul Rycaut's 'The Present State of the Ottoman Empire'", in *Journal of World History* 5 (1994), 1, pp. 71-97; W. Schweickard, "Paul Rycaut, 'The present state of the Ottoman empire'. Textual tradition and lexical borrowings from Turkish", in *Studia Linguistica Universitatis Jagellonicae Cracoviensis* 132 (2015), pp. 187-96.

and his accompaniment of Edward Pococke in his travels in the Ottoman world, and with the tolerant political vision of William Penn and the Quakers⁵⁸.

The pages of Locke's Journal continue the strand of reflections on the Christian and Mohammedan religions, while also addressing the cults in use in the distant East and West Indies. He endorsed the fact that "Enthusiasme is a fault in the minde opposite to brutish sensuality as far in the other extreme exceeding the just measure of reason as thoughts groveling only in matter and thing of sense come short of it"⁵⁹. Reason rather than zeal provides the correct measure for governing a nation and the relations between different churches and religious communities. As he stated in the first lines of the *Letter concerning toleration* "Everyone is orthodox to himself," and expecting to bend the conscience of a man to believe one's own as the only certain truth is an act that is completely opposed to evangelical teaching. He asks his reader whether, in a foreign land where to the eyes of a Mohammedan or a pagan prince the Christian religion could seem false and offensive towards God, Christians themselves might in turn be persecuted? However, Locke wishes his reasoning to be even clearer and so he provides an example: let's suppose that in the city of Constantinople there are two churches – one Arminian and the other Calvinist. Although they diverge from each other in certain doctrines and ceremonies, neither of the two churches shall be entitled to attack the other or claim that it is orthodox and judge the other to be in error or heretical⁶⁰.

7. Conclusion

The picture sketched out in this article offers an initial motivation for Locke's interest and the conservation among his papers of a short but important Arabic manuscript translated into English, probably by his friend John Greaves, that includes fragments from the *Doctrina Machumet*⁶¹, the dialogue between Mohammed and an eminent rabbi. Although the manuscript is known, it has not yet been analysed or set in relation to its complex history.

⁵⁸ N. Matar, "England and Religious Plurality: Henry Stubbe, John Locke and Islam", in *Studies in Church History* 51 (2015), pp. 181-203, p. 192.

⁵⁹ J. Locke, *An Early Draft*, cit., p. 121.

⁶⁰ J. Locke, *On toleration and the unity of God*, ed. by M. Montuori, J.C. Gieben, Amsterdam 1983, pp. 34-35.

⁶¹ *Doctrina Mabumet*, in Theodore Bibliander, *Machumetis Saracenorum principis eiusque successorum vitae ac doctrina ipseque Alcoran*, Johannes Oporin, Basel 1543, pp. 189-200.

Nor has investigation been made of its significance in relation to the *Essay* and the *Letters concerning Toleration*, Locke's political and religious reflections and his conviction that infidels and heretics are to be fought with the power of words and not that of weapons, as well as his reiterated defence of religious unity through the safeguarding of the multiplicity of rites. A study by the author for a new chapter in Locke's thought, based on a critical edition of the manuscript and its history, is currently in the course of publication.

Towards the end of his *Letter* Locke penned a memorable passage, driven by the conviction that religious zeal – and not the inevitable diversity of opinion – is responsible for the conflict and wars of the Christian world and the refusal to tolerate those who think differently.

Those that are seditious, murderers, thieves, robbers, adulterers, slanderers, etc., of whatsoever Church, whether national or not, ought to be punished and suppressed. But those whose doctrine is peaceable and whose manners are pure and blameless ought to be upon equal terms with their fellow-subjects. Thus if solemn assemblies, observations of festivals, public worship be permitted to any one sort of professors, all these things ought to be permitted to the *Presbyterians*, *Independents*, *Anabaptists*, *Arminians*, *Quakers*, and others, with the same liberty. Nay, if we may openly speak the truth, and as becomes one man to another, neither *Pagan* nor *Mahometan*, nor *Jew*, ought to be excluded from the civil rights of the commonwealth because of his religion. The Gospel commands no such thing⁶².

In the *Postscriptum* Locke again asserts that religious diversity should not set men against one another, and that a Turk is not, nor should be judged to be, heretical or schismatic for a Christian. However, it was in the *Third Letter* of 1692 that, in pressing his critical polemic against Jonas Proast, Locke unequivocally formulated the broader conception of toleration, namely that Jews, Muslims and pagans cannot be excluded from political society and deprived of their civil rights. "I think you are under a Mistake, which shews your Pretence against admitting Jews, Mahometans and Pagans, to the Civil Rights of the Commonwealth, is ill grounded"⁶³.

This marked a crucial stage in the achievement of political tolerance in the modern age, and in the intellectual career of Locke whose convictions were maturing, efficaciously fuelled by numerous cultural elements, reading, corre-

⁶² Locke, *On toleration and the unity of God*, cit., pp. 102-103.

⁶³ J. Locke, *A third letter for toleration, to the author of the third letter concerning toleration*, A. and J. Churchill, London 1692, chap. 3, p. 78. See also N. Matar, "England and Religious Plurality", cit., p. 199 and ff.

spondence and travel experiences in England and Europe. The philosopher's gaze towards the Levant went beyond the ancillary late-mediaeval and sixteenth-century vision of a study of Arabic and Hebrew functional to an understanding of the Bible. It was instead driven by the desire to understand the organisation of the Muslim state and society and its literature, and to tolerate its forms of religion while continuing to see them as mistaken. Therefore, the time is ripe for a new analysis of the concept of tolerance in Locke in relation to the Hebrew and Islamic worlds and within a broad and diversified cultural context; these pages contain some initial notes moving in this direction.

Bibliography

- E. Bagshaw, *The great question concerning things indifferent in religious worship briefly stated; and tendred to the consideration of all sober and impartial men*, London 1660.
- W.G. Batz, "The Historical Anthropology of John Locke", in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 35 (1974), 4, pp. 663-70.
- M. von Baumgarten, *Peregrinatio in Aegyptum, Arabiam, Palaestinam et Syriam*, Paul Kauffmann, Nuremberg 1594.
- C. Bennett, "John Locke, Muslims, Religious Freedom and the Role of the State", in *International Journal of Education and Social Science* 6 (2019), 5, pp. 39-44.
- H. Blunt, *A voyage into the Levant*, Andrew Crooke, London 1650, 4th edition.
- T. Carlino, "The Levant: a Trans-Mediterranean Literary Category?", *TRANS-* [online] 2 (2006), <http://journals.openedition.org/trans/129>; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/trans.129>
- A Collection of Voyages and Travels, Some Now First Printed from Original Manuscripts*, ed. by A. and J. Churchill, London 1704.
- P.J. Connolly, "Travel Literature, the New World, and Locke on Species" *Society and Politics* 7 (2013), 1, pp. 103-116.
- L.T. Darling, "Ottoman Politics through British Eyes: Paul Rycaut's 'The Present State of the Ottoman Empire'", in *Journal of World History* 5 (1994), 1, pp. 71-97.
- Doctrina Machumet*, in Theodore Bibliander, *Machumetis Saracenorum principis eiusque successorum vitae ac doctrina ipseque Alcoran*, Johannes Oporin, Basel 1543, pp. 189-200.
- C. Gallien, L. Niayesh (eds.), *Eastern Resonances in Early Modern England: Reception and Transformations from the Renaissance to the Romantic Period*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham 2019.

- J. Harrison, P. Laslett, *The Library of John Locke*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1971, 2nd edition.
- M.T. Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 1964.
- J. de Lery, *Histoire d'un voyage fait en Brasil*, Antoine Chuppin, [Geneva] 1578; other Latin edition, Frankfurt am Main 1590.
- J. Locke, *A third letter for toleration, to the author of the third letter concerning toleration*, A. and J. Churchill, London 1692.
- J. Locke, "Some Thoughts concerning Reading and Study for a Gentleman", in P. Desmaizeaux (ed.), *Collection of several pieces of Mr. John Locke, never before printed, or not extant in his works*, J. Bettenham for R. Francklin, London 1720, pp. 231-45.
- J. Locke, *An Early Draft of Locke's Essay. Together with Excerpts from his Journals*, ed. by R.I. Aaron, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1936.
- J. Locke, *First Tract on Government*, in J. Locke, *Two Tracts on Government*, ed. by P. Abrams, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1967.
- J. Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by P.H. Nidditch, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1975.
- J. Locke, *Correspondence*, 8. vols., ed. by E.S. De Beer, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1976-1989.
- J. Locke, *On toleration and the unity of God*, ed. by M. Montuori, J.C. Gieben, Amsterdam 1983.
- J. Locke, *Political Essays*, ed. by M. Goldie, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1997.
- J. Locke, *Some Thoughts concerning Education*, ed. by J.W. Yolton and J.S. Yolton, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2000.
- J. Locke, *An Essay concerning Toleration: And Other Writings on Law and Politics, 1667-1683*, ed. by J.R. Milton and P. Milton, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2006.
- J. Locke, *The Conduct of the Understanding*, ed. by J. Bennett 2017, <https://www.early-moderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/locke1706.pdf>
- S. de la Loubère, *Du royaume de Siam*, Abraham Wolfgang, Amsterdam 1691, also English version, London 1993.
- N. Matar, "John Locke and the 'turbanned nations'", in *Journal of Islamic Studies* 2 (1991), 1, pp. 67-77.
- N. Matar, "England and Religious Plurality: Henry Stubbe, John Locke and Islam", in *Studies in Church History* 51 (2015), pp. 181-203.
- G.A. Russell, "The Impact of 'The Philosophus Autodidactus': Pocockes, John Locke, and the Society of Friends", in G.A. Russell (ed.), *The 'Arabick' Interest of the Natural Philosophers in Seventeenth-Century England*, Brill, Leiden 1994, pp. 224-65.

- P. Rycaut, *The present state of the Ottoman Empire containing the maxims of the Turkish politie, the most material points of the Mahometan religion, their sects and heresies, their convents and religious votaries, their military discipline*, J. Starkey and H. Brome, London 1670.
- G. Sandys, *Travels: containing a history of the original and present state of the Turkish empire ... the Mahometan religion and ceremonies*, J. Williams jr, London 1673, 2nd edition.
- W. Schweickard, "Paul Rycaut, 'The present state of the Ottoman empire'. Textual tradition and lexical borrowings from Turkish", in *Studia Linguistica Universitatis Jagellonicae Cracoviensis* 132 (2015), pp. 187-96.
- L. Simonutti, "Paradigmi d'eresia: socinianesimo e maomettanesimo tra Inghilterra e Francia (Stubbe, Locke, La Croze, Bayle)", in *Le ragioni degli altri. Dissidenza religiosa e filosofia nell'età moderna*, in *Philosophica*, 3 DOI:10.14277/6969-132-4/PHIL-3-8 (2017), pp. 153-76.
- L. Simonutti, "Inspirational Journeys and Trunks of Books: Initial Notes on Locke the Traveller", in *Studi lockiani. Ricerche sull'età moderna*, 1 (2020), pp. 131-62.
- A. Talbot, *"The Great Ocean of Knowledge": The Influence of Travel Literature on the Work of John Locke*, Brill, Leiden 2010.
- J. de Thévenot, *Relation d'un voyage fait au Levant*, L. Billaine, Paris 1665.
- M. Thévenot, *Relations de divers voiage curieux*, 4. vols., A. Cramoisy, J. Langlois and G. Clovsier, Paris 1663-72.
- M. Thévenot, *Recueil de voyages*, E. Michallet, Paris 1681.
- F. Timoléon de Choisy, *Journal du voyage de Siam*, P. Mortier, Amsterdam 1687.
- Ibn Ṭufayl, *Philosophus autodidactus, sive, Epistola Abi Jaafar ebn Tophail de Hai ebn Yokdhan : in quâ ostenditur quomodo ex inferiorum contemplatione ad superiorum notitiam ratio humana ascendere possit ex Arabicâ in linguam Latinam versa ab Edvardo Pocockio*, H. Hall, Oxford 1671.
- Ibn Tufayl, *An Account of the Oriental Philosophy, Shewing the Wisdom of some Renowned Men of the East; And particularly, The profound Wisdom of Hai Ebn Yokdan, both in Natural and Divine things; ... Writ Originally in Arabick, by Abi Iaaphar Ebn Tophail; And out of the Arabick Translated into Latine, by Edward Pocok, a Student in Oxford; And now faithfully out of his Latine, Translated into English [G. Keith]: For a General Service. Printed in the Year, 1674.*
- Ibn Tufayl, *The history of Hai Eb'n Yockdan, an Indian prince, or, The self-taught philosopher written originally in the Arabick tongue by Abi Jaafar Eb'n Tophail ... ; set forth not long ago in the original Arabick, with the Latin version by Edw. Pocock ... ; and now translated into English [by G. Ashwell], R. Chiswell, London 1686.*
- Pietro della Valle, *Viaggi*, 4 vols, P. Baglioni, Venice 1667.

- I. Vossius, *Dissertationes, the tribus symbolis, Apostolico, Athanasiano, et Costantinopolitano*, J. Blaeu, Amsterdam 1642.
- J. Spon, *Voyage d'Italie, de Dalmatie, de Grèce et du Levant, fait aux années 1675 et 1676*, A. Cellier le fils, Lyon 1678.
- H. Suzuki, "Ethnographical in John Locke's Theories (I)", in *The Annals of the Hitotsubashi Academy* 6 (1956), 2, pp. 47-65.
- J.S. Yolton, *John Locke A Descriptive Bibliography*, Thoemmes Press, Bristol 1998.

Luisa Simonutti
Institute for the History of Philosophy and Science
in Modern Age (ISPF) - National Research Council (CNR)
luisa.simonutti@ispf.cnr.it

