FRANÇOIS DE LA BOULLAYE LE GOUZ

The Travels and Observations of la Boullaye le Gouz, Gentleman of Anjou, in which are described the religions, governments, & conditions of the states and kingdoms of Italy, Greece, Anatolia, Syria, Palestine, Caramania, Chaldea, Assyria, Mughal India, Bijapore, Portuguese India, Arabia, Egypt, Holland, Great Britain, Ireland, Denmark, Poland, the islands and other parts of Europe, Asia and Africa where he traveled, with illustrations; and dedicated to his eminence, the Cardinal Capponi


Courtesy of Houghton Library (Ty 615.53.508), Harvard University

François de la Boullaye le Gouz, an aristocrat from France, strategically altered his costume and name—although from choice rather than by necessity. While the engraved portrait on the frontispiece to his 1653 book shows him dressed as a European, a woodcut illustration reveals the author in “Levantine costume” travelling under the pseudonym “Ibrahim Beg.” This “voyageur Catholique” commented extensively on his journeys to Egypt, the Holy Land, Persia, Mughal India, and Europe. In Armenia, he made a point of climbing Mount Ararat but failed to see the fabled remains of Noah’s ark. According to Boullaye, Ireland was every bit as exotic and curious as Turkey.

Boullaye presented his volume to Cardinal Luigi Capponi, Vatican librarian. His travel account eventually joined the growing Vatican collection of books dedicated to antiquities, oriental languages, and biblical history.

Books and visual images generated from travels across physical borders, social boundaries, and religious confessions within Christian Europe, North Africa, and the Islamic Middle East during the seventeenth century shake up our assumptions about a monolithic, Eurocentric worldview.

—Cristelle Baskins, Associate Professor of Italian Renaissance Art, Tufts University