

The Middle East or the initiatory journey

Initiated by biblical texts he read with his religious education, his desire to discover the Middle East was reinforced by his mother's death in 1829 which caused a difficult period of doubt : the revolution of July 1830 and the abandonment of his political career that no longer fulfilled him led him to self-questioning. The failure of his candidacy as Member of Parliament of Bergues, Macon and Toulon left his perspectives of a political future uncertain.

The journey that led him to Marseille where he embarked in July 1882 toward Greece, Lebanon, Syria and Palestine was first a quest to give meaning to his existence. "I always dreamt, since, of a journey in the Middle East as a great step of my inner life ; I was eternally building in my thought a vast and religious epic in which these beautiful places would be the main setting ; it also seemed the doubts of the spirit, the religious perplexities would find there their solution and their appeasement."

Open to the discovery of other ways of living, he was sensitive to the interpenetration of cultures as in Jerusalem or Alexandria. The multiple impressions that he brought back upon returning to France in 1833 led to the publishing of *A Journey in the Middle East*: a compilation of picturesque notes that he defined in the preamble as "the written look of a passenger who saw the landscapes flee in front of him and who, to remember them the next day, threw a few pencil strokes without color on his journal pages".

Curious of the political situation of the countries he crossed, he observed their evolution and governing and gave an analysis in a speech addressed on 4 January 1834 in the Parliament Chamber. He defined there the role of European powers in the relationships with the Ottoman Empire. Another speech, given in 1840 in favor of peace keeping in Turkey, consolidated his image of expert of the Middle East.

In his desire to increase and diversify his incomes with an activity that was familiar to him, he obtained from the Sultan the free concession of lands to exploit in the region of Smyrne, in Burghaz-Ova where he travelled to in 1850. If the experiment didn't succeed because of a lack of sufficient financial means, the journey gave birth to the publishing of *A new Journey in the Middle East* in 1851.

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