

**Franz Cumont's Syrian Tour.
A Belgian Archaeologist in the Ottoman Empire.
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Introduction

This paper highlights the Western scientific traveller as an intermediary between Orient and Occident around the turn of the nineteenth century by presenting a case study on the Belgian classicist, archaeologist and historian of religions Franz Cumont (1868-1947), and the dossier of the journey of archaeological exploration he undertook in Northern Syria, May 1907. The role of travel and archaeology in Cumont's work has been the subject of several publications (Bonnet (2004), Bonnet-Krings (2008), Krings (1998, 2004), Leriche-Gaborit (1999), Gran-Aymerich (1999))¹ but so far this particular journey has not been integrally treated. After a discussion of the classicist Cumont's relation to the Orient, I will give an account of his Syrian tour, based on three different writing contexts: the academic

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Abbreviations used : AB (Academia Belgica).

¹ Corinne BONNET, « La dimension du voyage dans la vie et dans l'œuvre de Franz Cumont » in Véronique KRINGS & Isabelle TASSIGNON, eds., *Archéologie dans l'Empire Ottoman autour de 1900 : entre politique, économie et science*, Brussel, Institut historique belge de Rome, 2004, p. 55-74; Corinne BONNET & Véronique KRINGS, "De la mission de 1900 dans le Pont aux Studia Pontica : aventure archéologique et échanges épistolaires," in Corinne BONNET & Véronique KRINGS, eds., *S'écrire et écrire sur l'Antiquité: l'apport des correspondances à l'histoire des travaux scientifiques*, Grenoble, Millon, 2008, p. 310-326 ; Véronique KRINGS, "Sur les pas de Franz Cumont dans le Pont et en Petite Arménie. Les carnets d'un voyageur," in *Recherches & Travaux*, vol. 54, 1998, p. 79-86; Véronique KRINGS, "Franz et Eugène Cumont et la Turquie de 1900," in Véronique KRINGS & Isabelle TASSIGNON, eds., *Archéologie dans l'Empire Ottoman autour de 1900 : entre politique, économie et science*, Brussel, Institut historique belge de Rome, 2004, p. 75-96; Ève GRAN AYMERICH, "Franz Cumont et l'archéologie française," in *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome. Italie et Méditerranée (MEFRIM)*, vol. 111, 1999, p. 525-539; Pierre Leriche & Justine Gaborit, "Franz Cumont, homme de terrain," in *MEFRIM*, vol. 111, 1999, p. 647-666.

output of the expedition in Northern Syria, Cumont's private travel notes, and both his active and passive correspondence. With the help of this dossier of Cumont's archaeological journey in 1907, in a third and fourth section I will examine two ways in which the Orient was brought to the Occident by the scientific traveller. Firstly, by the acquisition and transfer of archaeological material from the Orient to the Occident, providing Western institutions with Eastern artefacts. Secondly, by the transfer of ideas and images: how did the Occidental scientific traveller, the archaeologist, express his experiences with the Orient as he witnessed it to the European readership? I will disclose how Franz Cumont expressed his evaluation of the ancient Orient, which he studied, and the contemporary Orient, which he experienced during his travels.

Franz Cumont and the Orient

When Franz Cumont embarked on his journey to Syria, he was 39 years old and had acquired a reputation as one of the world's leading specialists of the religious landscape of the Roman Empire². Cumont was trained as a classical philologist at Ghent University³ but from 1888 to 1891 he perfected his classical education in some of Europe's most influential centers for the study of the ancient world and history of religions: Bonn, Berlin, Vienna and Paris. The interest of Cumont as a student in ancient religion and his willingness to look further than the classical world were certainly stimulated in Bonn by Hermann Usener's (1834-1905) influence, who introduced a comparative dimension in the history of ancient religions. This methodology met with a lot of resistance within the discipline of *Altertumswissenschaft*, because it resulted in the questioning of the superiority of classical (Greek) culture⁴. Cumont's interest in the ancient Near East led him to take courses in Syriac in both Bonn and Paris, where he also studied Hebrew and Chaldean. During these years,

² For a detailed biographical essay on Franz Cumont I refer to Corinne BONNET, ed., *La correspondance scientifique de Franz Cumont conservée à l'Academia Belgica de Rome*, Institut historique belge de Rome, Bruxelles, 1997.

³ His interest in the Roman Middle East and foreign cults became clear from his PhD dissertation entitled: "Alexandre d'Abonotichos, un épisode de l'histoire du paganisme au II^e siècle de notre ère", *Mémoires de l'Académie belge*, vol. XL, 1887, on the cult of the snake-god Glykon in Abonoteichos, Paphlagonia, at the South shore of the Black Sea.

⁴ Corinne BONNET, *Le « grand atelier de la science ». Franz Cumont et l'Altertumswissenschaft. Héritages et émancipations*, Brussel, Institut historique belge de Rome, 2005, p. 73.

Cumont also paid a lot of attention to epigraphy and archaeology and their technical and practical aspects⁵. Encouraged by his Viennese teacher Otto Benndorf (1838-1907), he undertook his first journey of epigraphical and archaeological exploration in 1890 in Dacia (present day Romania) to find Mithraic monuments⁶. Cumont returned to Ghent University in 1892 where he combined research and substantial teaching activities until his final resignation in 1911, being, for example, in charge of the course “political history of the Orient and Greece”. During the same period (1892-1913), he was conservator at the Royal Museums (cf. *infra*). Steeped in different traditions of scholarship, Cumont maintained throughout his career a very broad international network of contemporary scholars, which also included orientalists, such as Giorgio Levi della Vida (1886-1967) and Alfred Boissier (1867-1945) and Egyptologists such as James Henry Breasted (1865-1935) and Jean Capart (1877-1947), who was his colleague at the Royal Museums and who became later curator in chief there.

Cumont’s scientific activity focused mainly on ancient Near Eastern religions present in the religious landscape of the Roman Empire. In *Textes et monuments figurés relatifs aux mystères de Mithra* (1896-1899), which established him as a world authority in the study of ancient religions, Cumont collected all extant documents related to the Persian cult of Mithras, including epigraphical and archaeological material⁷. The scholar broadened his outlook to other mystery cults who found their origin in the Near East in his most important work, *Les religions orientales dans le paganisme romain* (1906 (1929⁴)), where he described mystery cults from Asia Minor, Egypt, Syria and Persia, and the pseudoscience

⁵ BONNET, *Le « grand atelier »*, p. 92-98.

⁶ BONNET, *Le « grand atelier »*, p. 96. Cf. Franz CUMONT, “Revidierte und neugefundene Inschriften aus Dacien”, in *Archaeologisch-Epigraphische Mittheilungen aus Oesterreich-Ungarn*, vol. 14, 1891, p. 108-113; Franz CUMONT, “Catalogue sommaire des monuments figurés relatifs au culte de Mithra”, in *Revue Archéologique (RA)*, vol. 20, 1892, p. 306-322; Franz CUMONT, “Catalogue sommaire des monuments relatifs au culte de Mithra”, in *RA*, vol. 21, 1893, p. 40-54.

⁷ Franz CUMONT, *Textes et monuments figurés relatifs aux mystères de Mithra* (2 vol.) H. Lamertin, Bruxelles, 1896-99 and Franz CUMONT, *Les mystères de Mithra*, H. Lamertin, Bruxelles 1900). A reedition of *Les mystères de Mithra* by Nicole Belayche and Attilio Mastrocinque, is in print, as part of the international reedition project of Cumont’s work, the *Bibliotheca Cumontiana*, which includes *Scripta Maiora*, *Scripta Minora* (7 thematical volumes containing a selection of articles by Cumont) and *Inedita*.

astrology, in terms of their impact on the Roman West⁸. By emphasizing the role of these “Oriental” religions within the Roman religious landscape, Cumont presented an interpretation of late antique religious evolution that was new in the field of history of religions, which tended to focus on Judaism as the precursor of Christianity. These issues were also tackled by contemporary scholars. In Germany, Richard Reitzenstein (1861-1931) discussed the “Hellenistischen Mysterien-religionen” and their influence on Christianity. Reitzenstein was an exponent of the Religionsgeschichtliche Schule, a group of scholars, e.g. Hermann Gunkel (1862-1932), Otto Gruppe (1851-1921) and Adolf Deissmann (1866-1937) who challenged the originality of Christianity by studying it in its historical, Oriental context⁹. This was an important development in the history of the study of Christianity and ancient religions at the end of the nineteenth century, in which the massive discovery of Oriental monuments and documents played an important role. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the heightened political interest of Europe in the East brought with it an intensification of archaeological excavations and scientific missions in the Orient, which stimulated an interaction between politics and science. Scholars could make use of a profusion of new documents, the knowledge of ancient languages and writing systems increased enormously, remnants of ancient civilizations were unearthed¹⁰. This meant also that some subjects such as the classical civilizations of Greece and Rome and the history of Christianity, could be studied in a broader context. These subjects, both crucial for the formation of European identity, were until then studied as fairly isolated phenomena and the new approach challenged their supposed originality and/or superiority. Thus Adolf Deissmann (1866-1937) compared the Greek of early Christian literature with popular Greek

⁸ FRANZ CUMONT, *Les religions orientales dans le paganisme romain* (Paris, Leroux, 1906), fourth and last edition in 1929 (Paris, Librairie orientaliste Paul Geuthner), with several editions in four languages: French (1906, 1909, 1928, 1929), English (in the United States: 1911, 1956), German (1910, 1911, 1931), Italian (1913, 1967). Cumont’s classic was reedited, with extensive introduction, in 2006 by Corinne Bonnet and Françoise Van Haepelen, as part of the *Bibliotheca Cumontiana*.

⁹ For an overview of late nineteenth and early twentieth century scholarship on the relation between Christianity and ancient oriental mystery cults, a subject of great interest for many members of the Religionsgeschichtliche Schule, can be found in Annelies LANNON, “Het christelijke mysterie. De relatie tussen het vroege Christendom en de heidense mysterieculden in het denken van Alfred Loisy en Franz Cumont, in de context van de modernistische crisis”, PhD dissertation, 2012.

¹⁰ This process of “discovery” was of course still very active when Cumont visited the Orient: in 1906 Hugo Winckler (1863-1913) led the excavations at Boghazkoi (ancient Hattusa) which unearthed the Hittite civilization.

language in the papyri from Egypt, where for example in 1897 the Oxyrynchus cache was found¹¹. In 1894, the Congrès International des Orientalistes, which was then held in Geneva, organized for the first time a section “Grèce-Orient”, in which specialists of Antiquity such as Théodore Reinach (1860-1928) presented studies based on both Greek sources and Oriental documents¹². This attitude was applauded by Cumont, who, as an ancient historian, valued the contribution of “the discovery of the ancient Near East” to the study of the history of classical antiquity, explicitly condemning a hellenomania which insisted on treating this subject as isolated from the study of neighboring cultures¹³. On the other hand, Cumont also reacted against some scholars’ tendencies to overestimate Oriental influence on Western culture. In his “Astrology and Religion among the Greeks and Romans”, he denounced the so called Panbabylonists (a.o. Hugo Winckler (1863-1913), Peter Jensen (1861-1936) and Alfred Jeremias (1864-1935)) who argued that Babylonian astrology was the origin of all art and all mythology¹⁴.

To examine Cumont’s attitude towards the impact of the Ancient Near East and the “oriental religions” in the West we take a closer look at *Les religions orientales dans le paganisme romain*. Cumont considered the oriental mystery cults responsible for the destruction of the Roman state religion. The term “destruction”, used literally by Cumont, evokes a sense of hostility, as do his repeated references to the “invasion” of the eastern mystery cults¹⁵. However, as Cumont deemed the Roman state religion to be cold and sterile,

¹¹ Adolf Deissmann, *Licht vom Osten: Das Neue Testament und die neuentdeckten Texte aus dem hellenistisch-römischen Welt*, Tübingen, Mohr, 1908.

¹² *Actes du dixième Congrès International des Orientalistes. Session de Genève. Section VI. Grèce et Orient*, Leiden, Brill, 1897. Théodore Reinach invited Cumont to speak at the Section Grèce et Orient at the Orientalist congress in 1897 : Reinach to Cumont on 24 July 1897, AB, Archivi Cumont, letter no. 1151.

¹³ Franz CUMONT, “Les progrès récents de l’histoire grecque”, in *Revue de l’instruction publique en Belgique*, 36, 1893, p. 9-19. Cf. p. 10: « cette merveilleuse découverte de l’ancien Orient, qui dans le domaine historique restera certainement le titre scientifique le plus brillant du XIXe siècle » and p. 11 : « Il n’est plus possible de supposer aujourd’hui, comme on faisait complaisamment autrefois, que la Grèce ait tout ou presque tout tiré de son propre fonds. Elle a été pendant longtemps, fort longtemps, à l’école de l’Orient. »

¹⁴ Franz CUMONT, *Astrology and religion among the Greek and the Romans*, New York, Putnam's sons, 1912, p. 1.

¹⁵ E.g. Franz CUMONT, *Les religions orientales*, *op. cit.*, p. 26; I refer to Franz CUMONT, Corinne BONNET, ed. and Françoise VAN HAEPEREN, ed., *Les religions orientales dans le paganisme romain*, Torino, Nino Aragno, 2006; cf. also “The invasion of the Oriental

these strong expressions of “destruction” and “invasion” do not imply a negative characterization of the oriental cults: « Si le triomphe des cultes orientaux prend parfois les apparences d’un réveil de la sauvagerie, en réalité, dans l’évolution des formes religieuses, ces cultes représentent un type plus avancé que les anciennes dévotions nationales¹⁶. »

Cumont assigned his Oriental religions a positive role in what he calls the moral and religious development of the West, in which they prepare the triumph of Christianity. As we will see, this positive attitude was a rather extraordinary position within his academic environment. With respect to Roman paganism, the oriental religions, Cumont argued, offer greater satisfaction to the sentiments, the intellect and the conscience¹⁷. But the ancient Orient showed its superiority also outside of the religious sphere. In the opening chapter of *Les religions orientales* Cumont examines how the Orient surpassed the Roman West in the domains of political institutions, science, art (especially architecture) and industry, while giving the Roman West only pride of place in the area of the law and in the area of the military: « Rome, on ne saurait lui dénier cette gloire, a élaboré un droit privé, logiquement déduit de principes clairement formulés et destiné à devenir la loi fondamentale de toutes les sociétés civilisées. ... Dans le temple austère du Droit, l’Orient n’occupe encore qu’une position subalterne¹⁸; » However, Cumont immediately qualifies this statement, by referring to Oriental jurists as Ulpian of Tyre and the in Late Antiquity influential law-school of Beyrouth. Thus, while assigning a pioneering role to the Roman jurists, the scholar emphasises the accomplishments of the Orient: « Des Levantins viennent ainsi exploiter même le champ patrimonial défriché par les Scaevolus et les Labéons¹⁹. » With regard to military accomplishments, Cumont argued, the Occident was unequivocally the superior of the Orient. However, after this assertion, Cumont sums up all the domains in which the Orient has the upper hand: « Rome trouva, sans contredit, en Occident le point d’appui de

religions that *destroyed* the ancient religions and national ideals of the Romans”: Franz CUMONT, *Les religions orientales*, *op. cit.*, p. 35 (my emphasis).

¹⁶ Franz CUMONT, *Les religions orientales*, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

¹⁷ Franz CUMONT, *Les religions orientales*, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

¹⁸ Franz CUMONT, *Les religions orientales*, *op. cit.*, p. 20-21.

¹⁹ Franz CUMONT, *Les religions orientales*, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

sa puissance militaire : les légions du Danube et de Rhin furent toujours plus solides, plus vaillantes, mieux disciplinées que celles de l'Euphrate et de Nil. Mais c'est surtout en Orient, précisément dans ces pays de « vieille civilisation », qu'il faut chercher, avant même que Constantin y transportât le centre de gravité de la puissance politique, l'industrie et la richesse, l'habileté technique et la productivité artistique, l'intelligence enfin, et la science²⁰. »

This generally positive approach to the ancient Orient was very remarkable in an age when Oriental influence was frequently associated with decadence and the decline of the Roman Empire²¹. Indeed, in the passage cited above, Cumont referred to his earlier citation of a quote by the influential French specialist of Semitic philology Ernest Renan: « Renan, lui-même, ne paraît pas s'être suffisamment affranchi d'un vieux préjugé lorsqu'il écrivait à ce propos : « Il était inévitable que la civilisation la plus vieille et la plus usée domptât par sa corruption la plus jeune²². » Renan's depreciating comments on the language and nature of the Semites caused Edward Said to call the opening chapter of the French scholar's *Histoire générale et système comparé des langues sémitiques* (1855) "a virtual encyclopedia of race prejudice directed against Semites (i.e., Moslems and Jews)²³." Indeed, Renan considered the Arian linguistic family to be far superior to the Semitic linguistic family, whose languages, and therefore the speakers of these languages, he deemed to be static and incapable of change²⁴. Cumont was certainly influenced by Ernest Renan's *Histoire des origines du christianisme, Marc-Aurèle et la fin du monde antique* (1882), and also by the

²⁰ Franz CUMONT, *Les religions orientales, op. cit.*, p. 18.

²¹ Franz CUMONT, *Les religions orientales, op. cit.*, p. 43, n. 11. Cumont cites the theories of Houston Stuart Chamberlain, Otto Seeck, Tenney Frank. On Otto Seeck, cf. also *infra*. Other widely read authors with similar views were Arthur de Gobineau and Ernest Renan.

²² "Renan, lui-même, ne paraît pas s'être suffisamment affranchi d'un vieux préjugé lorsqu'il écrivait à ce propos : 'Il était inévitable que la civilisation la plus vieille et la plus usée domptât par sa corruption la plus jeune.'" (Franz CUMONT, *Les religions orientales, op. cit.*, p. 17) Cumont cites Ernest RENAN, *L'Antéchrist*, Paris, Lévy, 1873²), p. 138-139.

²³ Edward SAID, *Orientalism*, London, Penguin, 2003 [1978], p. 133 n. 26.

²⁴ As a consequence, Renan was surprised to discover that it were those Semites who received the revelation of monotheism. Maurice OLENDER, *The Languages of Paradise. Race, Religion and Philology in the Nineteenth Century*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.), 2008 [Paris 1989], p. 51-81.

lecture “Qu’est-ce qu’une nation²⁵?”, where the French scholar already pointed out common features between the “oriental religions”, a category that would be canonized more than twenty years later with the success of Cumont’s *Les religions orientales*²⁶. However, on the very first page of his opening chapter, Cumont distanced himself from Renan’s contemptuous attitude towards the Orient. Yet, as we will see further on, Cumont’s admiration of the Orient is not always consistent, especially concerning the modern Orient. In the discussion of how and why the oriental religions spread in the Roman Empire, Cumont refuted the German classicist Otto Seeck’s race degeneration theory, which was based on Social Darwinism and belabored in his *Geschichte des Untergangs der antiken Welt*²⁷. According to Seeck’s theory, proposed in the chapter “Die Ausrottung der Besten”, in late republican and imperial Rome the best elements of society were eliminated by, a.o., civil wars and the capriciousness of monarchs. But also the religious ideal of celibacy, of which only the truly strong-willed were capable, kept these most virtuous elements of society from procreating²⁸. The deteriorating influence of Syrian slave blood was, Seeck argued, another factor in the degeneration of the race²⁹: the Orientals, i.e. Semites, were weak and compliant, and as such, almost always bought as household slaves (“Luxussklaven”). As these slaves had the greatest chance of obtaining personal contact with their masters, and, consequently, obtaining freedom, Syrian freedmen and freedwomen spread over all the Roman provinces³⁰. The thus infiltrated slave mentality, Seeck argued, was the main

²⁵ Paris, 1882.

²⁶ Corinne BONNET, “Les “religions orientales” au laboratoire de l’Hellénisme. 2. Franz Cumont,” in *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte (ARG)* vol.vol. 8, 1993, p. 181-205, p. 192-193.

²⁷ Franz CUMONT, *Les religions orientales, op. cit.*, p. 43 and especially n. 11, with reference to Seeck’s *Geschichte* (cf. note 17).

²⁸ Otto SEECK, *Geschichte des Untergangs der antiken Welt*, Berlin, Siemenroth & Troschel, 1910³, p. 269-307.

²⁹ Otto SEECK, *Geschichte des Untergangs, op. cit.*, p. 327-329.

³⁰ The cliché of the Syrian freedman (and former household slave) can be traced back to Roman Antiquity, as Petronius’ choice of a Syrian for the name of his pompous freedman in the *Cena Trimalchionis* seems to indicate (cf. Jan BREMMER, “ΜΑΑΧΟΣ ‘King’ and Trimalchio”, in *Mnemosyne*, vol.vol. 34, 1981, p. 395-396). This link between freedmen and Syrians can also be found in Juvenal, *Sat. I*, 102-111. When discussing the Syrian slaves in Rome (Franz CUMONT, *Les religions orientales, op. cit.*, p. 161-163), Cumont treats them as versatile slaves and not as particularly or exclusively suitable for household activities.

characteristic of Late Antiquity and would bring on the fall of the Roman Empire. Cumont, again, distanced himself from this racist interpretation of Roman history, ascribing it to « cette vieille illusion que l'Asie, sous l'Empire, était inférieure à l'Europe³¹. » The expression « cette vieille illusion », in the same way as Renan's « vieux » prejudice (cf. supra), emphasises the fact that Cumont places himself outside of a known, general tradition.

However, Cumont's discourse is often ambiguous. On occasion, being a child of his time, he repeats European stereotypes of and prejudices toward the Orient. For example, the cliché of oriental sensuousness recurs a fair few times in the descriptions of the *religions orientales*³². Cumont does not escape the category of *Volksggeist* when discussing, in slightly more positive terms than Otto Seeck however, the « actifs, souples, habiles, souvent peu scrupuleux³³ » Syrians, who are also labeled « vifs, dociles, intelligents autant que robustes et laborieux³⁴. »

In the description of the ritual of the Oriental cults Cumont's ambiguous attitude becomes very clear in another way as well: Cumont deemed the Oriental religions superior to the Roman state religion, but portrays their rites often as barbarous, excessive and revolting. This negative characterization relates to Cumont's evolutionist conception of the history of religions³⁵. In the « marche pénible de la société romaine vers le progrès

³¹ Franz CUMONT, *Les religions orientales*, op. cit., p. 43-44.

³² Cumont describes the oriental gods as “plus humains et parfois plus sensuels que ceux de l'Occident” (Chapter II, p. 47) and refers to the “séduction puissante de leur rituel” (Chapter IV, *L'Égypte*, p. 138) or “cérémonies à la fois orgiastiques et sensuelles” (Chapter III, *L'Asie Mineure*, p. 77) and “caractère sensuel et voluptueux” (Chapter V, *La Syrie*, p. 183) of the Ba'al and Ba'alath divine couples. In his discussion of temple prostitution in the sanctuaries of Astarte, Cumont clearly expresses a value judgement, calling the temples “maisons de débauche” and the practice an example of “égarements” (Chapter V, *La Syrie*, p. 183).

³³ Franz CUMONT, *Les religions orientales*, op. cit., p. 164. Compare Seeck : “geschmeidig” (p. 327). Here, Cumont is referring to Syrian merchants.

³⁴ Franz CUMONT, *Les religions orientales*, op. cit., p. 162. Cumont is referring to Syrian slaves. Compare Seeck : “Schlaue” (p. 328). Cumont's “strong” Syrians, oppose however, Seeck's image of weakness of the Semites (“schwächlich”, p. 327).

³⁵ This ambivalence and its relation to Cumont's evolutionist point of view are discussed by Corinne Bonnet and Françoise Van Haepere in their “Introduction historiographique” to *Les religions orientales*, op. cit., p. xxxiii-xxxix and by BONNET, “Les ‘religions orientales’ au laboratoire,” op. cit., p. 189-191. On the influence of Hegelian dialectics on Cumont's conception of history of religion, cf. Danny PRAET, “Les liens entre philosophie et religion dans quelques *Scripta Minora* de Franz Cumont,” in Corinne BONNET, Carlo OSSOLA and John SCHEID, ed. *Rome et ses religions : culte, morale, spiritualité. En relisant Lux Perpetua de*

religieux³⁶ », the Oriental religions form an intermediary step (cf. supra). Thus, the sensuality and sensitiveness of the Oriental cults would serve as antithesis to the cold and static Roman state religion, culminating in the triumph of Christianity. Thus, Cumont's attitude differentiates the inferior Phrygian and Egyptian cults from the superior Syrian and Persian cults. Richard Reitzenstein, too, evaluated some Eastern religions as higher than others (the Iranian-Indian versus the Babylonian-Israelite religions respectively). Moreover, Cumont's oriental religions are not only a part of the evolutionistic schema, in which the succession of the examined religions is an important aspect, each cult also undergoes an individual evolution from materiality to heightened spirituality, in which the rituals are classified as remnants from a primitive and savage past.

A third aspect of Cumont's ambivalent attitude is the contrast between his obvious admiration for the superiority of the ancient Orient and his rather less admiring allusions to the contemporary Orient. At the beginning of *Les religions orientales*, Cumont warns his readers that they should not conflate the present situation of European cultural hegemony with the ancient past: « Il est difficile de s'abstraire complètement du présent et pénible de renoncer à des prétentions aristocratiques. Nous avons peine à croire que l'Orient n'a pas toujours été réduit en quelque mesure à l'état d'abaissement dont il se relève lentement, et nous attribuons volontiers aux anciens habitants de Smyrne, de Béryte ou d'Alexandrie les défauts qu'on reproche aux Levantins d'aujourd'hui³⁷. » This contrast between the grandeur of the ancient Orient and the « l'état d'abaissement » of the modern Orient is even more present in Cumont's travel notes and publications relating to his journey in Northern Syria in 1907, as is discussed in the fourth section.

As for Cumont's experiences with the modern Orient, the scholar's scientific fascination for the region led him to travel to the Near East on several occasions. While Cumont's teachers, some of the most influential classical philologists of that period, were

Franz Cumont, Caltanissetta, Sciascia Editore, 2010 (suppl. Mythos vol.vol. 1), p. 97-110; Annelies LANNOY, "Les masses vulgaires et les intelligences élevées. Les agents de la vie religieuse dans Lux Perpetua et leur interaction," in *Rome et ses religions*, op. cit., p. 63-81 and Danny PRAET, in preparation.

³⁶ Franz CUMONT, *Les religions orientales*, op. cit., p. 107.

³⁷ Franz CUMONT, *Les religions orientales*, op. cit., p. 17, transl., p. 16.

not generally in the habit of undertaking these scientific expeditions outside of Europe³⁸, many of Cumont's younger colleagues in related fields made research trips to the Orient: in 1898/1899 Richard Reitzenstein undertook an expedition in Egypt to buy papyri, Théodore Reinach excavated in Sidon in 1892 and his brother Salomon (1858-1932) in Cartaghe en Turkey (early 1880's), René Dussaud (1868-1956) undertook several journeys of exploration in Syria from 1895 until 1901. These scholars, in the same way as Franz Cumont, were often versed in the study of classical texts but maintained that material culture or non-classical sources such as the Egyptian papyri provide important information on the ancient world. The journey to the Orient was also important for students of comparative study of religions. Rudolf Otto (1869-1937) traveled extensively in India and the Middle East³⁹. Eugène Goblet d'Alviella, who has been considered as Franz Cumont's godfather in the domain of history of religions⁴⁰ had the occasion of studying the contemporary Indian religious life during his journey there in 1875, of which he published the account in "Inde et Himalaya. Souvenirs de voyage⁴¹".

The goals of the missions of archaeological and epigraphical exploration included making drawings of ancient monuments, transcribing inscriptions, drawing maps of previously little known regions. Before the Ottoman laws on the protection of antiquities, the first of which was instated in 1884⁴², the explorers could also quite freely bring back monuments and documents which they found interesting. These laws limited archaeological excavation and protected ancient and more recent objects and documents

³⁸ Suzanne MARCHAND, "From Liberalism to Neoromanticism: Albrecht Dieterich, Richard Reitzenstein and the Religious Turn in Fin de Siècle German Classical Studies", in Martin Ruehl & Ingo Gildenhard, eds., *Out of Arcadia*, London, 2003, p. 129-160 (British Institute of Classical Studies Supplement, vol. 79), p 132.

³⁹ Harry OLDMEADOW, *Journeys East: 20th Century Western Encounters with Eastern Religious Traditions*, Bloomington, World Wisdom, 2004, p. 43-50.

⁴⁰ BONNET, *La correspondance scientifique, op. cit.*, p. 217-218.

⁴¹ Eugène GOBLET D'ALVIELLA, *Inde et Himalaya. Souvenirs de voyage*, Paris, E. Plon et Cie, 1877.

⁴²When in 1881 Osman Hamdy bey was appointed director of the Imperial Museum in Istanbul, he immediately tightened the regulations on artefacts excavated by foreigners. Cf. Nicole CHEVALIER, *La recherche archéologique française au Moyen-Orient: 1842-1947*, Paris, Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 2002. The founding of important archaeological museums in the Orient in the nineteenth century, e.g the Museum of Egyptian Antiquities in Cairo (1858) and the Imperial Museum in Istanbul (1869) already attests to this more protective attitude.

from export, such as Arabic and Persian manuscripts. In this way, the journey of epigraphical and archaeological exploration was also a profitable alternative when real excavations were more difficult because of these laws. Tassignon showed how the École Française d'Athènes stimulated the epigraphical journeys in Asia Minor after the law of 1884⁴³.

In the spring of 1898, at the age of 30, Franz Cumont visited Istanbul for the first time and in 1900 he undertook a journey of archaeological exploration⁴⁴ in the Pontus region and Armenia Minor in present day Turkey⁴⁵, together with his younger brother Eugène, who was, at that moment, an assistant of staff at the Belgian War College, where he would become a professor⁴⁶. Eugène drew the many maps that accompany the volume that issued from this expedition: *Voyage d'exploration dans le Pont et la Petite Arménie*⁴⁷. In 1922-1923 Cumont led the excavations at the Hellenistic and Roman border city Dura-Europos in Eastern Syria. The mission was sent by the High Commission of the French Republic and the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres in Paris. By that time, as decided on the conference of San Remo in 1920, Syria had fallen under French mandate and Cumont worked there together with French troops, to whom he dedicates the report of the

⁴³ Isabelle TASSIGNON, "Voyages d'exploration de membres de l'École française d'Athènes et influence française en Asie Mineure dans les dernières années du XIXe siècle", in TASSIGNON & KRINGS, *Archéologie dans l'Empire, op. cit.*, p. 165-179, p.167.

⁴⁴ On Cumont's activities as an archaeologist, cf. e.g. Pierre LERICHE and Justine GABORIT, "Franz Cumont, homme de terrain," in *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome. Italie et Méditerranée (MEFRIM)*, vol. 111, 1999, p. 647-666; Ève GRAN AYMERICH, "Franz Cumont et l'archéologie française," in *MEFRIM*, vol. 111, 1999, p. 525-539.

⁴⁵ On this specific scientific journey, cf. Véronique KRINGS, "Sur les pas de Franz Cumont dans le Pont et en Petite Arménie. Les carnets d'un voyageur," in *Recherches & Travaux*, vol. 54, 1998, p. 79-86; Véronique KRINGS, "Franz et Eugène Cumont et la Turquie de 1900," in Véronique KRINGS and Isabelle TASSIGNON, eds., *Archéologie dans l'Empire Ottoman autour de 1900 : entre politique, économie et science*, Brussel, Institut historique belge de Rome, 2004, p. 75-96; Corinne BONNET and Véronique KRINGS, "De la mission de 1900 dans le Pont aux Studia Pontica : aventure archéologique et échanges épistolaires," in Corinne BONNET and Véronique KRINGS, eds., *S'écrire et écrire sur l'Antiquité: l'apport des correspondances à l'histoire des travaux scientifiques*, Grenoble, Millon, 2008, p. 310-326.

⁴⁶ Brussels, Royal Museum of the Armed Forces and of Military History, file no. 11465.

⁴⁷ Franz CUMONT and Eugène CUMONT, *Studia Pontica II. Voyage d'exploration archéologique dans le Pont et la petite Arménie (Studia Pontica Vol. II.)*, Bruxelles, H. Lamertin, 1906. At the moment of publication, Eugène was a captain of the Belgian army.

excavations⁴⁸.

However, when Cumont visited Syria for the first time in 1907, it was still part of the Ottoman Empire. In what follows I will give an account of this archaeological journey: how Cumont prepared for it, his voyage to the Orient, the actual expedition in Syria and its results. Fortunately, Cumont's private travel notes⁴⁹ together with 8 postcards sent by Cumont to his friend Raoul Warocqué and a selection of letters from Cumont's passive correspondence⁵⁰ preserved at the Academia Belgica in Rome⁵¹, permit a more complete and more detailed reconstruction of these contexts.

⁴⁸ "Aux officiers, sous-officiers et soldats de l'armée du Levant dont le concours a assuré l'exploration archéologique de Doura-Europos", FRANZ CUMONT, *Fouilles de Doura-Europos (1922-1923)*, Vol. I., Paris, Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1926.

⁴⁹ Cf. *infra*: "In the footsteps of Julian".

⁵⁰ Within the corpus of passive correspondence, there are 28 letters relating to Cumont's journey in Syria. Some correspondents write to him with advise or information he must have requested. There are also letters from Cumont's father and his brother Eugène, who give him updates on family matters and life in Belgium in general while he is abroad. Then there are of course letters concerning the 'results' of Cumont's travels: colleagues discuss inscriptions he transcribed or published, the curator of the Belgian Royal Museum in Brussels thanks him for objects he sent.

⁵¹ Cumont's passive correspondence can be consulted online through the database created by Corinne Bonnet: <http://www.academiabelgica.it/acadbel/askFCnew.ph>

In Northern Syria, May 1907

By 1907, the British explorer, archaeologist and political agent Gertrude Bell (1868-1926) could describe Syria as “a country so well known and so much frequented by tourists⁵²”. However, the touristic routes did not cover the whole country and by the beginning of the twentieth century some parts of Syria were still relatively unexplored, as the report of the “Princeton University Archaeological Expedition to Syria” (1904-1905) also reads⁵³. The pioneer explorer of Syria was the Marquis Melchior de Vogüé (1829-1916) who undertook several journeys of archaeological and epigraphical exploration throughout the country around the middle of the century⁵⁴.

Preparation

A journey of scientific exploration in a foreign land required a lot of (practical) preparation. Some scholars found it useful to publish guidelines in their travel accounts. In his report of his expedition in Syria and Mesopotamia, the German orientalist Eduard Sachau (1845-1930) gives a detailed account of how he prepared his journey⁵⁵. Hugo Grothe (1869-1954) in „Meine Vorderasiatischen Expedition 1906-1907“ (1911) provides a chapter on “Wie man in der asiatischen Turkey reist. Praktische Winke und Ratschläge für den Forschungsreisenden⁵⁶“.

⁵²Gertrude BELL, *The Desert and the Sown*, London, William Heinemann, 1907, p. 163.

⁵³ Howard BUTLER, “The Princeton University Archæological Expedition to Syria”, in *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 46, 1907, p. 182-186 (p. 184).

⁵⁴ Cf. Melchior DE VOGÜÉ, *Syrie centrale : inscriptions sémitiques*, Paris, J. Baudry, 1868-1877. Other explorers of central and Northern Syria include Johann Wetzstein (1815-1905), Eduard Sachau (1845-1930), René Dussaud (1868-1858), Otto Puchstein (1856-1911).

⁵⁵ Eduard SACHAU, *Reise in Syrien und Mesopotamien*, Leipzig, F.A. Brockhaus, 1883, p. 1-22 (“Einleitung”). For instance, Sachau elaborately related how he assembled his “Karavane”, dragoman, horses, cook, mule drivers etc. on p. 4-7. For Cumont’s publications that issued from the Syrian journey, cf. “Results”.

⁵⁶ Both books belong to Cumont’s scientific library which is now preserved in the Academia Belgica in Rome, where one finds also a “Manuel de l’explorateur”, in which technical information is given on how to draw maps, use geographical measuring instruments etcetera: Charles ROLLET D’ISLE & É. BLIM, *Manuel de l’explorateur : procédés de levers rapides et de détail, détermination astronomique des positions géographiques*,

From letters Cumont received before his departure we learn to which experts he had turned to retrieve necessary information on the regions he planned to explore and on which topics he had asked for their advice. In the archives there are letters from three French scholars that had previously visited more or less the same area: Victor Chapot (1873-1954)⁵⁷, a Roman historian, René Dussaud (1868-1858)⁵⁸, orientalist, archaeologist and later curator of the Louvre museum in Paris, and Paul Perdrizet (1870-1938)⁵⁹, archaeologist. They advised him on, e.g., people to get in touch with, possibly rewarding routes to explore and places to find interesting artefacts to purchase. Cumont had also contacted Louis Jalabert (1877-1943)⁶⁰, a French theologian who taught at the Oriental Faculty at Saint Joseph's College in Beirut. From him Cumont seems to have received the most practical information, on e.g. the daily expenses he should anticipate and where he could find a dragoman, tent, horses etc.

One of the issues that return in almost all of these letters is the important question of authorisation to examine ancient monuments on Ottoman territory. Louis Jalabert referred to the Ottoman Decree of Antiquities, by which, he wrote, it was forbidden even to “measure the monuments⁶¹”. In fact, this law was instated in 1906 and stipulated that ancient monuments and objects were property of the Ottoman government, and therefore the right to “discover, preserve, collect and donate to museums” was reserved to the

⁵⁷ AB, Archivi Cumont, letter no. 4036, 11 February 1907. Chapot wanted to arrange a face-to-face appointment in Paris to discuss the journey. Chapot's doctoral thesis, *La frontière de l'Euphrate de Pompée à la conquête arabe*, Paris, Fontemoing, 1907, is cited frequently by Cumont in *Études Syriennes* (Franz CUMONT, *Études Syriennes*, Paris, Auguste Picard, 1917, cf. “The results of the expedition”). Albert GRENIER, “Éloge funèbre de M. Victor Chapot, membre libre non résident,” in *Comptes Rendus des Séances de l'académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, vol. 98, 1954, p. 190-192.

⁵⁸ AB, Archivi Cumont, letter no. 4038, 12 February 1907. On René Dussaud and his relationship to and correspondence with Cumont, cf. Corinne BONNET, “Les lettres de René Dussaud à Franz Cumont conservées à l'Academia Belgica de Rome,” in Manfred Dietrich and Ingo Kottsieper, eds., « *Und Mosè schrieb das Lied auf* ». *Festschrift für Oswald Loretz*, Münster, Ugarit-Verlag, 1998, p. 109-125.

⁵⁹ AB, Archivi Cumont, letters no. 4035 and 4037, 11 and 22 February 1907. On Paul Perdrizet and his relationship to and correspondence with Cumont, cf. Corinne BONNET, *La correspondance scientifique*, *op. cit.*, p. 386.

⁶⁰ AB, Archivi Cumont, letter no. 4034, 23 February 1907. On Louis Jalabert and his relationship to and correspondence with Cumont, cf. Corinne BONNET, *La correspondance scientifique*, *op. cit.*, p. 242.

⁶¹ AB, Archivi Cumont, letter no. 4034, 23 February 1907 : “...pour être autorisé à examiner de près les monuments (que la loi sur les Antiquités défend même de mesurer),...”

Ottoman government⁶². Jalabert advised Cumont to ask Osman Hamdy bey (1842-1910), director of the Ottoman Imperial Museum (today's Istanbul Archaeological Museums), for an open letter of authorisation, as this had worked well for Gottlieb Schumacher (1857-1925), a German-American civil engineer and archaeologist who travelled through Transjordan in 1884 in order to produce accurate maps of the region. Moreover, Cumont had already been in contact with Osman Hamdy bey on the occasion of his journey in Armenia Minor and the Pontus region in 1900⁶³. Osman Hamdy bey was a champion of the protection of the ancient heritage of the regions covered by the Ottoman Empire. After becoming director of the Ottoman Imperial Museum in 1881, in 1884, acting on the order of sultan Abdulhamid II, he promulgated a regulation that assigned every object found during excavations as property of the Imperial Museum⁶⁴. Cumont followed Jalabert's advise and at the end of March, the scholar received a letter from the Belgian Legation in Constantinople, which, however, brought him bad news, as Osman Hamdy bey had refused Cumont's request: " Jadis, m'a dit Hamdy bey, je délivrais parfois des documents de l'espèce, mais... les temps ont changé et je n'oserais plus agir de même aujourd'hui. Il vous faudra donc recourir à la voie officielle, ..." ⁶⁵

This official procedure included another written request which, according to the Belgian diplomat, would be referred by the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the sultan, who would issue an official permit. However, as his correspondent warned Cumont, this course of action would take considerable time and the scholar would not receive proper authorisation before April 15. Since the second half of the nineteenth century, the Ottoman government was developing a firmer grip on its cultural heritage, which it had felt slipping

⁶² Cf. Ergün ÖZSUNAY, "Protection of Cultural Heritage in Turkish Private Law," *International Journal of Cultural Property*, vol. 6, 1997, p. 278-290: 278. For the entire text of the regulation, cf. Nicole CHEVALIER, *La recherche archéologique française au Moyen-Orient: 1842-1947*, Paris, Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 2002, p. 500-505.

⁶³ Véronique KRINGS, "Franz et Eugène Cumont et la Turquie de 1900," in KRINGS & TASSIGNON, eds., *Archéologie dans l'Empire*, *op. cit.*, p. 75-96.

⁶⁴ "Hamdi bey Osman" in François POUILLON, ed., *Dictionnaire des orientalistes de langue française*, Paris, Karthala, 2008, p. 479-480. For the entire text of the regulation, cf. Nicole CHEVALIER, *La recherche archéologique*, *op. cit.*, p. 497-500.

⁶⁵ AB, Archivi Cumont, letter no. 4054, 26 March 1907.

away through the hands of Western adventurers and scholars⁶⁶. The regulations had become more strict, but having taken the necessary steps, at the end of March Franz Cumont was ready to leave for the Levant.

Journey to the Orient

The practicalities of Cumont's route from the Western world to the Orient are revealed through some of his postcards to his friend Raoul Warocqué (1870-1917)⁶⁷, a Belgian industrialist and art collector. Warocqué originated the Royal Museum of Mariemont at his family estate in Morlanwelz, Belgium, by donating his private collections to the state. Franz Cumont published catalogues of his collection⁶⁸ and advised him in his letters on objects to purchase to enrich the collections. Their correspondence is one between friends and often very personal⁶⁹. Cumont's postcards contain the usual information one finds on them: the scholar kept his friend abreast of his whereabouts, but also commented on his activities or surroundings, often with a great deal of humour, which was a recurring feature in Cumont's letters to Warocqué⁷⁰. From the first of 8 postcards we learn that Cumont embarked the ferry that would bring him from Brindisi to Cairo on March 29th, a passage of 60 hours to which he didn't look forward.

⁶⁶ Cf. "Eastern artefacts to Western museums".

⁶⁷ Cumont to Warocqué, 29 March, 4 April (2 cards), 8 April, 11 April, 28 April, 5 June (2 cards) 1907. The postcards are part of a larger corpus of letters sent by Cumont to Warocqué. This correspondence is being preserved at the archives of the Royal Museum of Mariemont. Scans of the originals can be consulted on the CD-ROM that accompanies the volume edited by Marie-Cécile BRUWIER, Marie-Françoise TILLIET-HAULOT and Annie VERBANCK-PIÉRARD, eds., *Franz Cumont et Mariemont. La correspondance adressée par Franz Cumont à Raoul Warocqué de 1901 à 1916*, Morlanwelz, Musée Royal de Mariemont, 2005.

⁶⁸ Franz CUMONT, *Collection Raoul Warocqué. Antiquités égyptiennes, grecques et romaines*. Vol. I, Mariemont, 1903. Vol. II appeared in 1904, vol. III in 1909.

⁶⁹ Cf. Marie-Françoise TILLIET-HAULOT, "Franz Cumont, l'ami de Raoul Warocqué. La personnalité du savant à la lumière de sa correspondance avec l'homme d'affaires collectionneur," in Marie-Cécile BRUWIER, Marie-Françoise TILLIET-HAULOT and Annie VERBANCK-PIÉRARD, *Franz Cumont et Mariemont, op. cit.*, p. 28-41.

⁷⁰ Marie-Françoise TILLIET-HAULOT, "Franz Cumont", *op. cit.*, p. 37-38.

“Je passerai tantôt sous le feu des vieux canons du roi Alphonse (rien de Chimay) par une tramontane dont je n’augure rien de bon pour mon estomac. Soixante heures de traversée. Oi oi oi oi to toi, comme dit Sophocle, quelle fin rigoureuse de carême ⁷¹!”

Cumont stayed in Cairo for a few days to tackle “a delicate issue” at the Egyptian museum. With the postcard he sent from there – featuring a view of the Sphinx and one of the Gizeh pyramids – Cumont clearly wishes to convey his impressions of the Oriental and exotic culture in which he finds himself to his friend:

“Arrivé au Caire sans accident ni incident, je serai retenu jusqu’à Dimanche (7) par une question épineuse se rattachant aux fouilles du musée – fouilles infructueuses. L’Égypte est le pays des émerveillements, tout y est un sujet de surprise : nature, monuments, habitants. La civilisation du Caire (qui a maintenant un million d’âmes [sans compter une multitude d’ânes]) me fera paraître plus rude la barbarie turque⁷².”

⁷¹ Cumont to Warocqué, 29 March 1907 (Royal Museum of Mariemont, 1907.03.29.1). The postcard features a photograph of the castle of King Alfonso at Brindisi (Royal Museum of Mariemont, 1907.03.29.2). “Prince de Chimay” is a Belgian title of nobility, worn in Cumont’s day by a certain Alphonse, Prince de Chimay who married in 1898 the daughter of Jules Lejeune, Minister of Justice and professor at the University of Brussels. There is no evident relation between Cumont and Alphonse, Prince de Chimay. The latter is never mentioned in Cumont’s passive correspondence. It is, however, entirely possible that the Prince de Chimay was known, even indirectly, by the two men. Cumont, for his part, was no stranger to the Belgian nobility, as he frequented Arconati, Marchioness Visconti (Franz CUMONT, *La marquise Arconati-Visconti (1840-1923). Quelques souvenirs*, Rijksdomein Gaasbeek, Gaasbeek, 1978, p. 5-41). Cumont’s “citation” of Sophocles evokes an expression of grief or desperation, as found frequently in the Athenian tragedy. The expression as it was written down by the scholar (“oi oi oi to toi”), however, is not attested in Sophocles, but most probably recalls “ottotoi ottotoi” (ὄττοτοῖ ὄττοτοῖ) in *Elektra*, v. 1306. Cumont was probably influenced by some expressions of grief which recur more often in the tragedies as “aiai” (αἰαῖ, e.g. *Elektra* v. 1404) and “oimoi” (οἴμοι, e.g. *Elektra* 1179). The use of Latin (and in this case Greek) as intellectual pleasantries is a recurring feature in Cumont’s correspondence with Raoul Warocqué (Marie-Françoise TILLIET-HAULOT, “Franz Cumont”, *op. cit.*, p. 38).

⁷² Cumont to Warocqué, 4 April 1907 (Royal Museum of Mariemont, 1907.04.04.a.1). It is not clear what constituted the “issue” regarding the “excavations” Cumont had to tackle at the “museum”. It is possible that Cumont refers to the Museum of Egyptian Antiquities, as, also in Cumont’s passive correspondence, it is referred to as “le musée du Caire” or “the Cairo museum” (e.g. Lefebvre to Cumont, 24 Mai 1908, AB, Archivi Cumont, letter no. 4665, Breasted to Cumont, 27 August 1922, AB, Archivi Cumont, letter no. 7068). I am very grateful to Luc Limme (Association Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth), for another, more plausible interpretation, which clarifies the “fruitless excavations”. In 1907, Jean Capart, Egyptologist and Cumont’s colleague at the Belgian Royal Museum, excavated in Heliopolis without achieving results. Cf. Arpag MEKHITARIAN, “Les fouilles belges en Égypte de 1905 à 1955”, in Herman DE MEULENAERE et al., eds., *Liber Memorialis 1835-1985*, Bruxelles, Koninklijke Musea voor Kunst en Geschiedenis, 1985, p. 225-229: p. 226. In this case the “museum” of which

Cumont here uses a wordplay on the French words for “soul” (“âme”) and “mule” (“âne”) to describe the Egyptian capital. The little humouristic detail evokes the exotic nature the oriental city had for the occidental traveler (and his correspondent). Cumont’s impression of Egypt and Cairo in particular was favourable, although expressed in the rather commonplace and tourist terms of “marvels” and “surprise”. Cumont’s enthusiasm contrasts with the more negative image of a used-up Orient, which has been identified as a recurring feature in Oriental travel writing from the late nineteenth century onwards⁷³. Travelers complain about the intensification of tourism and Western influence, especially in the cities of the Orient, already visited by too many to be fresh and inspiring. When Eugène Goblet d’Alviella reached Bombay in 1875, he expected an anglicized city and was pleasantly surprised when he discovered it to be wholly “Oriental⁷⁴”.

Cumont’s high opinion of the “civilisation” of Cairo is stressed by the contrast with the “barbarism” he was anticipating. The use of this rather ideologically charged opposition reflects a culturally and socially diversified approach to the Orient. It is interesting to note that this occidental traveler, however generalizing his comment on “Turkish barbarism” may be, does not observe the Orient he is visiting as a homogeneous, unvarying unity.

Cumont arrived in Beyrouth after a voyage from Port Saïd and sent Warocqué his impressions of the “most European city of Syria”.

“Voici le portrait (un peu flatté) de Beyrouth, la ville la plus européenne de la Syrie, au pied du Liban. Mais au lieu des neiges et des cèdres de la Bible je n’ai encore aperçu sur la célèbre montagne que d’épais nuages noirs. Je pars demain pour Jérusalem, par la côte de Phénicie. Amitiés F.C.⁷⁵”

Beyrouth did not wholly impress the scholar as he deems the representation of the city on the front of the postcard “a little flattering”. This time the literary/cultural reference is to

Cumont speaks could very well be the Belgian Royal Museum. However, interpretations can take us only so far and Cumont’s activities in Cairo remain unknown to us.

⁷³ Ali BEDHDAD, *Belated travelers. Orientalism in the age of colonial dissolution*, Durham (NC), Duke University Press, 1994; Jean-Claude BERCHET, *Le voyage en Orient. Anthologie des voyageurs français dans le Levant au XIX^e siècle*, Paris, Flammarion, 1985, p. 20.

⁷⁴ GOBLET D’ALVIELLA, *Inde et Himalaya*, *op. cit.*, p. 9-10.

⁷⁵ Cumont to Warocqué, 11 April 1907 (Royal Museum of Mariemont, 1907.04.11.1).

the Bible, in which indeed several passages speak of the famous cedars and the snow on Mount Lebanon⁷⁶. Before travelling to Northern Syria, Cumont took time for a trip along the coastline of the Lebanon and to Jerusalem. The day before his departure to Aleppo, he writes to his friend for the last time for more than a month, his tone again dominantly humouristic (fig. 1):

“ Mon cher Raoul, merci de ton télégramme que j’ai trouvé en revenant à la côte, où je ne fais que toucher. Je repars demain pour Alep et l’Euphrate et pourrai plus difficilement donner de mes nouvelles. Jusqu’ici tout va bien sauf quelques coups de soleil qui ont avivé mon teint de lys et de rose. Le cavalier de droite m’a protégé contre les maraudeurs de gauche et j’ai failli étouffer au dîner central. Amitiés F.C.⁷⁷”

[Fig. 1]

The front of the postcard features three pictures, the (French) captions which read: “Bedouins on their camels”, “Arab dinner” and “Bedouin horseman”. The images demonstrate the interest occidental tourists had in the exotic nature of the Orientals, their traditional dress, their riding animals, their eating habits (sitting on the ground!) etc. Apparently this exoticness struck the Belgian archaeologist too, or at least he must have thought that it would interest Warocqué. But instead of commenting upon any real encounter with Orientals, Cumont made up an Oriental adventure to amuse his friend⁷⁸.

Cumont arrived in Aleppo on the first of May. After a short excursion in the surroundings, he returned there and set off for his expedition on the 10th of May.

In the footsteps of Julian

The itinerary of Cumont’s expedition was partly determined by the route the Roman emperor Julian had taken during his fatal campaign against the Persian Empire in 363⁷⁹. Julian “the Apostate”, the last pagan emperor of a largely christian Roman empire, had

⁷⁶ E.g. snow : Jer 18:14, cedars : Judg 9:15.

⁷⁷ Cumont to Warocqué 28 April 1907 (Museum of Mariemont, 1907.04.28.2).

⁷⁸ It will have reminded Raoul Warocqué of “ Oriental ” adventure literature in contemporary popular culture. To give an example in German popular culture, the “Oriental” travel novels of Karl May, featuring Kara Ben Nemsî as the protagonist hero, e.g. *Durch Wüste und Harem* and *Von Bagdad nach Stambul*, both published in 1892, were very successful.

⁷⁹ Cf. Franz CUMONT, *Études Syriennes*, *op. cit.*, Chapitre I : La marche de Julien, 1-34.

attracted Cumont's interest since the beginning of his career⁸⁰. The emperor was initiated in the "eastern" cult of Cybele and has also been linked to the cult of Mithras. His chief military ambition however, was to invade and defeat Persia in the long-standing feud between the two great empires⁸¹. Cumont followed in the emperor's footsteps from Aleppo to the Euphrates, after which he headed North and then returned in Western direction, to Alexandretta, present day Iskenderun at the Mediterranean coast of Turkey, where he arrived on the 1st of June.

Cumont meticulously recorded the exact route of his expedition in four little booklets he always seems to have had on hand. Three of them are day-to-day diaries. The first dated entry is on May 6th; the notebooks end on the 1st of June. A fourth booklet is not dated but contains Cumont's notes from his trip in the Lebanon (cf. supra, "Journey to the Orient"). In addition, there is a small diary of the year 1907. All these documents are currently being preserved in the Academia Belgica in Rome, where Cumont's academic library and private archives are kept⁸². The notebooks do not only feature a description of Cumont's itinerary, but also drawings of monuments and transcriptions of epigraphic evidence. In villages, inscribed ancient blocks or slabs were often reused as building material, and on occasion Cumont mentioned the difficulties he had in obtaining permission to study the inscriptions: under a transcription of an inscription Cumont wrote:

"Pierre servant de pavement extérieur dans la cour (*crossed out in manuscript*) en haut de l'escalier d'une maison à Tchardak. Copiée non sans peine. On m'assura

⁸⁰ Franz CUMONT, *Sur l'authenticité de quelques lettres de Julien*, Recueil des Travaux publiés par la Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres de l'Université de Gand, vol. 3, Gand, Clemm, 1889; Franz CUMONT, "Deux corrections au texte du "Misopogon" de Julien," in *Revue de l'instruction publique en Belgique (RIB)*, vol. 32, 1889, p. 82-84; Franz CUMONT, "Les lettres de Julien au philosophe Eustathios," in *RIB*, vol. 35, 1892, p. 1-3; Franz CUMONT, "Fragment inédits de Julien," in *Revue de Philologie*, vol. 16, 1892, p. 161-166; Franz CUMONT and Joseph BIDEZ, "Recherches sur la tradition manuscrite des lettres de l'Empereur Julien," in *Mémoires couronnés et autres mémoires publiés par l'Académie royale des sciences, des lettres et des beaux-arts de Belgique*, 57, 1898, p. 1-155 and Franz CUMONT and Joseph BIDEZ, eds., *Imp. Caesaris Flavii Claudii Juliani epistulae, leges, poemata, fragmenta varia*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1922.

⁸¹ In *Les religions orientales, op. cit.* (Chapter VI), Cumont discusses, without naming Julian, this tension between cultural and religious exchanges and military enmity between Rome and Persia of which the emperor is an example.

⁸² These archives contain also the four notebooks which Cumont used during his journey in Pontus and Armenia Minor in 1900. These notebooks have been discussed notably by Véronique Krings in her publications on this particular journey, cf. n. 28.

qu'un autre fragment de la même pierre se trouvait dans un jardin mais je ne pus obtenir qu'on me la montrât⁸³.”

The notebooks thus also contain Cumont's comments on his surroundings and his travel experiences, which will be discussed in the fourth section. Although Cumont most probably was accompanied by other assistants, the only travel companion whom he mentions is his guide. Whether this guide acted as a dragoman, or whether there was an actual dragoman present aside from the guide, is therefore unclear⁸⁴. However, even this guide appears only three times, twice because he gave Cumont information on ruins they passed and once because he killed two snakes. This vagueness on his travel circumstances is characteristic of Cumont's notebooks, which prioritise his scientific pursuits⁸⁵.

The results of the expedition

On the 5th of June, Cumont wrote to his friend Warocqué from Alexandretta: “Je suis éreinté mais satisfait. Je reviens avec des impressions inoubliables et des carnets bourrés de notes⁸⁶.” These notes would serve as the basis for the academic output of Cumont's journey in Northern Syria. The *Études Syriennes* consist of a series of articles, published as a whole in 1917. Most of them had already appeared previously in various journals. The *Études Syriennes* form a heterogeneous collection of texts on matters of ancient geography and ancient religion, all of them of course related to the region Cumont travelled through for almost a month. As an appendix to this volume, Cumont added the detailed description of his itinerary. The reader can follow Cumont's route as the author described the cities, the villages, the landscape (cf. “Through European eyes”) he passed through as well as monuments he encountered and even the weather he experienced, always indicating the

⁸³ AB, Archivi Cumont, inv. 3504, 39R, 18 May 1907. Cumont situates a Kurdish village “Tchardak” near the Euphrates, close to Bâlkis (Zeugma, later Seleucia on the Euphrates).

⁸⁴ An indication of the presence of other people is given by Cumont's use of “notre guide”, “our guide” in the notebooks; when Cumont speaks of himself, he regularly uses the first-person singular pronouns.

⁸⁵ Cf. infra: “Route, landscape, people”; on the - very similar - content of Franz Cumont's travel notes from his journey in the Pontus region and Armenia Minor in 1900, cf. Véronique KRINGS, “Sur les pas”, *op. cit.*, p. 82-85; on the scarcity of personal observations in Cumont's report of this journey, *Studia Pontica II. Voyage d'exploration archéologique dans le Pont et la petite Arménie*, cf. Pierre LERICHE and Justine GABORIT, “Franz Cumont, homme de terrain”, *op. cit.*, p. 653.

⁸⁶ Cumont to Warocqué, 5 June 1907 (Museum of Mariemont, 1907.06.05.b.2).

specific time and also the exact direction he took. However, Franz Cumont did not only take impressions and notes back to Europe (I will return to these in the last section). Another type of result from this expedition consists of the considerable amount of ancient Oriental artefacts the archaeologist bought to enrich the collections of Belgian museums, as will be discussed in the following section.

Eastern artefacts in Western museums

The transfer of non-western archaeological material to western institutions has been the object of repeated critique and is up to this day an important issue within the international context of museum policies and academic scholarship on the history of museums and collections⁸⁷. Anouar Abdel Malek, one of the first critics of the academic discipline of orientalism, for example, denounced the “accumulation and concentration of the treasures belonging to the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America in the great European cities⁸⁸.” In fact, from the second half of the nineteenth century onward, more and more archaeological missions were dispatched to the Orient⁸⁹. Key players were the great colonial powers of Europe, France and Britain, but also, especially toward the end of the century, the German Empire and the United States. The excavation and transport of ancient art, medieval manuscripts etcetera were certainly driven by scientific interest, but also aimed at enhancing national prestige by installing a “national treasure” in the often recently founded national museums⁹⁰. Moreover, the competition between the colonial powers, their

⁸⁷ Cf. e.g. Athéna Tsingarida & Donna Kurtz, eds., *Appropriating Antiquity/Saisir l'Antique: Collections et collectionneurs d'antiques en Belgique et Grand Bretagne au XIX^e siècle*, Brussel, Le Livre Timperman, 2002 (Lucernae Novantiquae, vol. 2), Maya JASANOFF, *Edge of empire: lives, culture, and conquest in the East, 1750-1850*, New York, Knopf, 2005.

⁸⁸ Anouar ABDEL-MALEK, “Orientalism in crisis,” in *Diogenes*, 44, 1963, p. 104-112.

⁸⁹ This intensification of oriental archaeology is part of the phenomenon Suzanne Marchand identified as the ‘Second Oriental Renaissance’, a “great leap forward in oriental studies”, in particular in the case of Germany, but also in a broader European context. Cf. Suzanne MARCHAND, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 157-211.

⁹⁰ Athéna Tsingarida & Donna Kurtz, eds., *Appropriating Antiquity*, *op. cit.* Cf. also the importance the German administration gave to the excavations at Pergamom, instigated by Carl Humann: Klaus NOHLEN, “Les musées royaux enrichis de maints trésors”, in KRINGS & TASSIGNON, eds., *Archéologie dans l'Empire*, *op. cit.*, p. 141-151.

institutes and museums in the struggle for economic, political and scientific influence in the Ottoman Empire was an important motivating factor⁹¹. In this way many artefacts and manuscripts, unearthed from Oriental soil, found their way into European universities and museums. Furthermore, many objects were sold by Orientals to Western travellers and archaeologists and the traffic of antiquities flourished. The East-West trafficking of oriental artefacts continued to thrive to the benefit and often with the support of European state museums, such as, in Cumont's case, the Belgian Royal Museums of Brussels and Warocqué's collections of Mariemont.

Franz Cumont held official positions in the Belgian Royal Museums for Art and History in Brussels from 1899 onwards⁹² and the museum has profited enormously from Cumont's diligence in bringing back objects from his oriental travels. According to one obituary⁹³ he multiplied by ten the items of the museum's collections in the fourteen years he had them under his care⁹⁴. In the introduction of his first *Catalogue des sculptures & inscriptions antiques (monuments lapidaires) des Musées Royaux du Cinquantenaire*, published in 1898, Cumont regrets that "l'État n'a jamais cherché à se former une collection de marbres anciens par des acquisitions à l'étranger⁹⁵." Cumont's view that public museum collections,

⁹¹ When at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth France was losing its dominant position in the Ottoman Empire to Germany, the French embassy in Constantinople tried to restore this position, also by way of heightened archaeological activity. Cf. Nicole CHEVALIER, "Peut-on parler d'une archéologie française dans l'Empire ottoman à la veille de la Première Guerre mondiale?", in KRINGS & TASSIGNON, eds., *Archéologie dans l'Empire*, op. cit., p. 153-164.

⁹² In 1899 he was appointed voluntary curator and in 1901 delegated curator of the Royal Museums.

⁹³ Claire PRÉAUX, "Franz Cumont (1868-1947)," in *Le Flambeau* (1940-47), p. 528.

⁹⁴ In 1908 Cumont also endowed Ghent University with its first papyrus collection, consisting of 48 papyri from the 2nd century CE. (See: Raymond BOGAERT, "De papyrusverzameling van de Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit te Gent," in *Anamnèsis. Gedenkboek Prof. Dr. E.A. Leemans*, Werken uitgegeven door de Faculteit van de Letteren & Wijsbegeerte, vol. 149, Brugge, De Tempel, 1970, p. 107-125). However, the collection was not purchased in Egypt by Cumont himself, but probably by Jean Capart, Egyptologist and Cumont's colleague at the Belgian Royal Museum, as this course of action was suggested in a letter from Joseph Bidez to Cumont on the subject (AB, Archivi Cumont, letter no. 3614, 31 October 1905).

⁹⁵ Franz CUMONT, *Catalogue des sculptures & inscriptions antiques (monuments lapidaires)*, Bruxelles, Musées Royaux des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels, 1898, p. 1.

especially of ancient works of art, also played an important educational role in society⁹⁶, was not exceptional, as it was present in Lord Elgin's motives to ship the Parthenon friezes to England⁹⁷. It is also explicitly promoted by Jean Capart, e.g. in his essay "Le rôle social des musées"⁹⁸. The Belgian Egyptologist greatly enriched the Egyptian collection of the Royal Museums and as curator in chief, also from this social and educational perspective, revolutionized the organization of the museum.

Again, the correspondence generates some interesting insights in Cumont's activities in Syria. The curator in chief of the Belgian Royal Museums, Eugène Van Overloop, writes to Cumont before his departure that according to Eugène Verlant, an official at the Belgian Ministry of Agriculture, Administration of the Fine Arts, Cumont was authorised by the ministry to spend 4000 Belgian francs that would afterwards be reimbursed⁹⁹. Of course, this budget had to be spent cautiously, as the sellers would try to get the most out of the transactions. In his letter addressed to Cumont on the 12th of February, René Dussaud referred to a friend of his, a French diplomat living in Antioch whom Cumont could look up if he wished to. Dussaud wrote that he would be happy to notify the diplomat of Cumont's visit, but that he would not tell the man that Cumont had an important position at the Royal Museums of Brussels, because " (...)la chose se sachant dans le pays, les prix des objets

⁹⁶ Corinne BONNET, *La correspondance scientifique, op. cit.*, p. 19: citation from a letter from Cumont to Warocqué, 4 August 1904.

⁹⁷ Dyfri WILLIAMS, "Of publick utility and publick property?": Lord Elgin and the Parthenon Sculptures", in Athéna Tsingarida & Donna Kurtz, eds., *Appropriating Antiquity, op.cit.*, p. 103-164.

⁹⁸ Jean CAPART, "Le rôle social des Musées", in *Le temple des musées*, Bruxelles, Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, p. 73-96 (1st edition, 1932), p. 93-122 (2nd edition, 1936). Cf. François MAIRESSE, "L'idée du musée dans la pensée de Jean Capart", in *Annales d'Histoire de l'art et d'Archéologie*, vol. 17, 1995, p. 113-121.

⁹⁹ AB, Archivi Cumont, letter no. 1312, 23 March 1907. The ministerial authorisation to spend 4000 francs is indeed confirmed by a letter from Eugène Verlant himself to Cumont (AB, Archivi Cumont, letter no. 1318, 22 March 1907). By way of comparison, the hourly wage of an unskilled labourer in Belgium, 1907, was 0,35 francs (Peter SCHOLLIERS, "A century of real industrial wages in Belgium, 1840 -1939," in Peter SCHOLLIERS and Vera ZAMAGNI, eds., *Labour's reward*, Aldershot, E. Elgar, 1995, p. 106-137; p. 203-205. Compared to e.g. France or Great Britain, the Belgian state did not provide a large budget for its national museums and museum curators thus had to rely on the patronage of rich investors to complement the budgets. Cf. François MAIRESSE, "Le 'Système Capart'. L'art de penser et gérer les Musées.", Brussel, 1994 (Mémoire présenté en vue de l'obtention du titre de licencié en Histoire de l'Art et Archéologie, orientation Art contemporain), p. 19-20 for an overview of the budgets accorded by the Belgian state to the Belgian Royal Museums.

que vous pourriez désirer acheter tripleraient avant votre arrivée¹⁰⁰.” We have an accurate idea of the prices of the individual artefacts which the archaeologist acquired during his entire journey, thanks to Cumont’s small diary of the year 1907, which he had on him in Syria. This diary, used as a notebook, features meticulously recorded lists of all artefacts bought, each with their respective price. Thus, for example, we can see that two terracotta fragments from the Syrian village of Terib cost him as little as 3 francs, while he paid 300 francs for one of his more pricy acquisitions, a relief representing the Egyptian god Tutu as a sphinx, from the Fayyum and dated in the Roman period, purchased by Cumont in Cairo¹⁰¹. Cumont’s contacts with local sellers, known from both the archives of the Royal Museums of Arts and History in Brussels¹⁰² and the archives of the Royal Museum of Mariemont¹⁰³, are also attested in the lists with purchased objects. Cumont mentioned a Farah in Tyre, most probably a relative of Ferdinand Farah, with whom Cumont had negotiated many purchases¹⁰⁴. Cumont also recorded a “Saida inscription - 20¹⁰⁵” bought from a Chékri Abela. This could be the epitaph of Abdimilk of the Royal Museums in Brussels¹⁰⁶.

Although Cumont regularly selected artworks for Raoul Warocqué’s collection of

¹⁰⁰ AB, Archivi Cumont, letter no. 4038, 12 February 1907.

¹⁰¹ AB, Archivi Cumont, inv. 3508, 24: “Sphinx panthée du Fayoum - 300”; cf. Franz CUMONT, *Musées Royaux du Cinquantenaire. Catalogue des sculptures et inscriptions antiques (monuments lapidaires)*², Bruxelles, Vromant, 1913, p. 73-74, no. 57. For more recent bibliography, cf. Olaf E. KAPER, *The Egyptian God Tutu* (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta vol. 119), Leuven, Peeters, 2003, p. 309-310 (I thank Dirk Huyge (Royal Museums of Arts and History, Brussels) and Luc Limme (Association Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth) for the reference). The terracotta fragments from Terib are not mentioned in Franz CUMONT, *Musées Royaux du Cinquantenaire*, *op. cit.*

¹⁰² Eric GUBEL, “Franz Cumont & C° au pays des 1001 nuits/ennuis,” in KRINGS & TASSIGNON, eds., *Archéologie dans l'Empire*, *op. cit.*, p.107-110.

¹⁰³ Annie VERBANCK-PIÉRARD, “Sous l’égide de Franz Cumont: les antiquités classiques de Mariemont,” in Marie-Cécile BRUWIER, Marie-Françoise TILLIET-HAULOT and Annie VERBANCK-PIÉRARD, *Franz Cumont et Mariemont*, *op. cit.*, p. 55-56.

¹⁰⁴ Cumont records a “statuette (de) femme entre deux piliers - 18 frs” (AB, Archivi Cumont, inv. 3508, 24. This statue features in the archives of the Royal Museums in Brussels: Eric GUBEL, *Franz Cumont & C°*, *op. cit.*, p. 108. Also recorded under “Farah Sour” are “une pierre gravée - 20 frs” and “Sour - Bête avec signes” (AB, Archivi Cumont, inv. 3508, 24) but it is not completely clear whether these objects were really bought from Farah.

¹⁰⁵ AB, Archivi Cumont, inv. 3508, 24: “20” refers most probably to the price of the object.

¹⁰⁶ Eric GUBEL, *Franz Cumont & C°*, *op. cit.*, p. 109 and Franz CUMONT, *Musées Royaux du Cinquantenaire*, *op. cit.*, 168 no. 142.

antiquities in his museum of Mariemont and took it upon him to negotiate on the price with the sellers¹⁰⁷, there is no evidence in the correspondence that Cumont had received a budget or commission to buy any artefacts for him during his journey in Syria. However, Cumont regularly donated pieces he bought during his travels to the museum. From his Syrian tour he brought, for example, a marble torso of Venus, purchased in Cairo¹⁰⁸.

After Cumont returned from the Near East, Eugène Van Overloop forwarded a message from the Minister of Agriculture, who had also the Administration of the Fine Arts as part of his ministerial portfolio, thanking Cumont for the “vigour he had put in the growth of the museum’s collection¹⁰⁹.” Charles Clermont-Ganneau, the French diplomat and archaeologist to whom the *Études Syriennes* are dedicated, expressed his hope that “vous revenez en bonne santé et satisfait de votre chasse archéologique¹¹⁰.” The metaphor recurs in a letter by Victor Chapot (cf. supra, “Preparation”), who congratulates Cumont in the following terms: “Je suis heureux d’apprendre que vous rapportez, en bonne santé sans doute, un butin de voyage satisfaisant¹¹¹.”

As for Franz Cumont himself, in his notebooks as well as in the *Études Syriennes*, he more than once described artefacts that he purchased and mentioned how ancient coins are offered to him in almost every village¹¹². Once he even congratulated himself that a seller

¹⁰⁷ Annie VERBANCK-PIÉRARD, “Sous l’égide”, *op. cit.*, p. 49-68.

¹⁰⁸ Museum of Mariemont inv. B.323, cf. VERBANCK-PIÉRARD, “Sous l’égide”, *op. cit.*, p. 59-60. The statue is included in the list of objects bought in Cairo “Vénus torse fragment (?) - 40 (?)” (AB, Archivi Cumont, inv. 3508, 24). The fact that this entry was crossed out afterwards seems indeed to indicate that Cumont did not count it with his expenses he made for the Royal Museums of Art and History, because he reserved it as a donation to the Museum of Mariemont.

¹⁰⁹ “Il y a lieu de se féliciter des résultats et je vous prie de vouloir bien remercier M. Cumont *du zèle qu’il a mis dans l’accroissement des collections des musées.*” AB, Archivi Cumont, letter no. 1313, 13 July/September 1907 (my emphasis). Moreover, Van Overloop confirms that Cumont’s expense of 4162 Belgian francs will be reimbursed by the Ministry.

¹¹⁰ AB, Archivi Cumont, letter no. 4081 23 June 1907.

¹¹¹ AB, Archivi Cumont, letter no. 4098, 16 July 1907. It is of course entirely possible that both comments, the one by Chapot in particular, refer to all scientific results Cumont brought back from Syria: his notes, transcriptions, drawings, photographs etc., and not explicitly or exclusively to the artefacts he acquired.

¹¹² Cumont, *Études Syriennes*, *op. cit.*, p. 281.

had greatly undervalued a piece¹¹³. At one point, he added a comment to a description of tombs that had been violated: “Les pillards d'autrefois n'y ont rien laissé à prendre aux archéologues d'aujourd'hui¹¹⁴.”

In this section, I have illustrated one side of Cumont's intermediary role between the Orient and Europe. Finally, I will investigate in more detail which images Cumont retained from his journey and how he expressed them to his readers in Europe.

“Through European eyes”

In his cultural critique on the Western conceptions of the East, *Orientalism*, Edward Said¹¹⁵ assigned an important part to Orient travellers and residents in the construction and reiteration of mythical images of the Orient to a Western public. According to Said, whether they were literary authors, like Flaubert or Nerval, or scientists like Sir William Jones, in their writings they all betrayed the same superior attitude towards the Orient that reinforced and helped construct the European colonialist idea that the passive East could not rule itself. Furthermore, observing the Orient through their Western eyes, they emphasized its strange, exotic nature, its Otherness. In this last part of the paper, I aim to examine how Cumont as a Western traveller and archaeologist, experienced the Orient and how he expressed his “unforgettable impressions” to his Western readership. I already touched upon this subject when I discussed the postcards Cumont sent during his journey to his friend Raoul Warocqué. Here, however, I will focus on Cumont's travel notes from Syria and the academic publications which issued from them. I will argue that to a certain extent Cumont's attitude can properly be conceived as Orientalist in the Saidian sense I

¹¹³ “Nous pûmes acquérir, chez un collectionneur de monnaies locales, une petite pierre gravée, dont il était heureusement loin de soupçonner l'intérêt” (FRANZ CUMONT, *Études Syriennes*, *op. cit.*, p. 188, my emphasis).

¹¹⁴ FRANZ CUMONT, *Études Syriennes*, *op. cit.*, p. 178. Where it might be difficult to interpret this comment as an implicit auto-critique on archaeologists who act in a certain way as grave robbers, Cumont here deplores the greediness of the robbers, wishing that archaeologists like himself could have found and taken the objects in the grave. On the other hand, the notion of auto-critique on European attitudes toward the Orient is not absent in Cumont's ideas, as is shown by the passage of *Les religions orientales dans le paganisme romain* (cf. n. 37) where Cumont uses the first person plural to warn his readers for Western prejudices about the Orient.

¹¹⁵ Edward SAID, *Orientalism*, *op. cit.*

sketched above. Firstly, Cumont was fascinated by the remnants of the ancient Orient yet took but little notice of the contemporary Orient, an attitude which he shared with many archaeologists and orientalist of his time. Secondly, the idea that Middle East would profit from Western rule returns in his writings. Lastly, in certain passages Cumont alludes to the exotic and “different” nature of the Orient.

Route, landscape, people

It is clear that, when Cumont scribbled his private and on-the-spot observations in his notebooks, his focus was on the exact description of the route he was following and of the monuments he encountered. However, he did have eyes for his surroundings. Cumont was very impressed by the Syrian landscapes, which he describes almost constantly in his notebooks, now alluding to the desolateness of the scenery, then relishing in the wide variety of colours he discerns: “A droite toujours les rochers blancs de l’Euphrate [en ?]¹¹⁶ dessous desquels courent nuages noirs, lueurs étranges. La pluie tombe. On aperçoit le fleuve jaune qui s’étale et des îles vertes, (...). En face les petits cubes bruns des maisons serrées et entourées parfois de bouquets d’arbres¹¹⁷.” Many of these descriptions found their way in the *Études Syriennes*, though generally in a more succinct form. In this particular case the Itinerary in the *Études Syriennes* simply reads: “À droite, on aperçoit toujours les eaux limoneuses de l’Euphrate et au delà des falaises blanches¹¹⁸.”

However, when it comes to the people he saw and met on his journey, Cumont did not seem to find them interesting enough to describe them elaborately. I already mentioned Cumont’s silence regarding his travel companions and his focus on his scientific pursuits (cf. supra) and will discuss this in further detail in the following paragraphs. Cumont’s attitude is not exceptional, as we find it in other accounts of journeys of exploration, such as René Dussaud’s “Voyage dans la Syrie du Nord” (1897)¹¹⁹ or Otto Puchstein and Carl

¹¹⁶ A few words, a.o. “domine” are crossed out, “en” is not readable here, but should be inserted.

¹¹⁷ AB, Archivi Cumont, inv. 3504, 18, May 15.

¹¹⁸ Franz CUMONT, *Études Syriennes*, op. cit., p. 288.

¹¹⁹ René DUSSAUD, “Voyage en Syrie (octobre-novembre 1896). Notes archéologiques”, in *Revue Archéologique*, vol. 30, 1897, p. 304-357.

Humann's "Reisen in Kleinasien und Nordsyrien" (1890)¹²⁰. On the other hand, travel accounts sometimes do include some reflections on the "nature of the Orientals". The archaeologist and member of the École Française d'Athènes Georges Perrot (1832-1914) described the Oriental nature and civilization as radically different from "our", Occidental nature and civilization, which makes it very difficult for Western observers to understand the Orient¹²¹. The Orientals are said to lack our thirst for knowledge and are compared to a child, observations which echo in Gertrude Bell's "The Desert and the Sown"¹²².

In Cumont's notebooks the inhabitants of the villages he passed through are often referred to, but almost always very briefly and generally¹²³. Twice the headdress and jewellery of women villagers were given particular attention:

"Les femmes sont coiffées d'une sorte de tiare rouge, recouverte d'un linge blanc et ornée d'une profusion de pièces de monnaie¹²⁴."

"Les femmes portent de hautes coiffures, chargées de monnaies et de pendeloques d'argent, qui font un bruit de grelots ; elles insèrent dans une narine percée une petite rosace d'argent et se tatouent le menton¹²⁵."

These comments are almost literally copied from Cumont's travel notes. It should be noticed, however, that Cumont in the *Études Syriennes* grouped together two comments that appear separately in his travel notes: the description of the hair styles with the silver pendants was written in the village of Hassan Oglou, while the pierced noses and the

¹²⁰ Carl HUMANN & Otto PUCHSTEIN, *Reisen in Kleinasien und Nordsyrien*, ausgeführt im Auftrage der Königlichen Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berlin, Dietrich Reimer, 1890.

¹²¹ Georges PERROT, *Souvenirs d'un voyage en Asie Mineure*, Paris, Michel Lévy Frères, 1864, p. i - vi.

¹²² Gertrude BELL, *The Desert*, *op. cit.*, p. ix.

¹²³ Based on a word count, it can be estimated that Cumont's comments on Syrians he saw and/or met take up only approximately 4% of the travel notes.

¹²⁴ Franz CUMONT, *Études Syriennes*, *op. cit.*, p. 295 (village of Saryslar); compare "Coiffure élevée des femmes – sorte de tiare rouge recouverte d'un linge blanc et couverte d'une multitude de pièces de monnaies." (AB, Archivi Cumont, inv. 3504, 57, May 20, village of Saryslar).

¹²⁵ Franz CUMONT, *Études Syriennes*, *op. cit.*, p. 296 (village of Alif); compare "Coiffures des femmes pendeloques d'argent qui s'agitent avec bruits de grelots monnaies etc." (AB, Archivi Cumont, inv. 3504, 59, May 21, village of Hassan Oglou); "Village Kurde, haute coiffure des femmes – une narine percée petite rosace d'argent tatouages sur le menton." (AB, Archivi Cumont, inv. 3504, May 21, village of Alif).

tattooed chins were mentioned a few pages later, when Cumont was already in Alif¹²⁶. On the occasion of crossing the Euphrates, an adventure upon which the scholar reported quite elaborately in his notebook – he almost lost his trunk in the violent river – Cumont described the boatmen: “Elle [la barque] approche six solides gaillards les jambes nues jusqu’au haut des cuisses, la peau hâlée le visage presque aussi foncé que leur tarbouche¹²⁷.” Even in the little notebook Cumont used when he traveled along the coastline of the Lebanon (cf. supra), this attitude is present. This excursion was not a part of the real expedition and in that sense a leisure trip, but again Cumont almost exclusively comments on ancient ruins, artefacts and his route. However, at one point during this excursion Cumont commented, quite out of the blue, without reference to an actual event or person: “L’émigration est pour ce pays une nécessité historique. Dès que la population croit le sol rocailleux de la montagne ne suffit plus à sa subsistance. Mais devant elle s’ouvre la mer infinie, pleine de promesses¹²⁸.”

It is interesting to note that similar reflections on the Orient Cumont experienced, as well as value judgments, are more numerous in Cumont’s academic publications on Syria than in the private notes on which they were based. For example, when in the *Études Syriennes* Cumont referred to the *mudir*, the chief of the village of Balkis, he wrote that this man speaks “Turkish, worthy of a mamamouchi¹²⁹.” *Mamamouchi*, a term coined by Molière, has a very derisive and denigrating connotation, evoking self-importance and pompousness in officials¹³⁰. While Cumont did refer to this same *mudir* in his notebooks, he did not pass

¹²⁶ Cumont situates the neighbouring villages of Alif, Hassan Oglou and Saryslar close to the Euphrates, in the South of modern day Turkey.

¹²⁷ AB, Archivi Cumont, inv. 3504, 20, May 15.

¹²⁸ AB, Archivi Cumont, inv. 3506, 19b.

¹²⁹ Franz CUMONT, *Études Syriennes*, *op. cit.*, p. 133. It is quite a strange comment, as Cumont, as far as we know, did not speak Turkish himself. It is however likely that he could guess the pompousness of the *mudir*’s language through the latter’s manner of speaking, the forms of address he used etc.

¹³⁰ MOLIÈRE, *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, 1670. Etymologically, the term is construed upon the Arabic “ma menou schi”, literally “not good thing” (Emile LITTRÉ, *Dictionnaire de la langue française*, Paris, Hachette, 1873). In Molières play, the main character, M. Jourdain, is given the fake noble title of “Mamamouchi” in order to ridicule his desire for nobility (Act IV). The whole scene is set in an Oriental sphere, in which M. Jourdain dons an Oriental costume, complete with turban, and the ennobling ceremony is performed in a fake “Oriental/Turkish” language.

judgment on him in any way but reports upon a meeting as follows: “Il y a un très grand nombre de tombeaux dans la montagne. Le chef du village me dit que si je prenais des notes sur chaque tombeau j’écrirais un gros volume¹³¹.”

Further references to close personal meetings with Orientals are rather sporadic. Once, Cumont made a note of his lunch with a Bedouin¹³² and when he spent the night in Balkis, he mentioned that the “*agha*” offered him the hospitality of the *mussafir oda*, a special guest chamber for travellers¹³³. These encounters are not mentioned in the *Études Syriennes*.

European paternalism

The preface to the *Études Syriennes*, written during World War One in 1917, offers some reflections on Syria that go beyond academic interest in ancient geography or religion. As will become clear, in this passage Cumont placed himself within a European tradition of paternalism towards the Middle East¹³⁴.

“Cependant son sol offre tant de ressources naturelles et les races qui le peuplent sont d'une intelligence si déliée, qu'il suffirait presque de lui assurer la sécurité et la justice pour que, contrée d'antique culture, il reprenne un développement comparable à celui de l'Égypte, sa rivale d'autrefois. Puisse-t-il bientôt sous un gouvernement humain voir s'ouvrir pour lui une ère réparatrice de prospérité pacifique, telle qu'il n'en a plus connu depuis les siècles lointains où y régnaient les Césars¹³⁵.”

¹³¹ AB, Archivi Cumont, inv. 3504, 28L, 17 May.

¹³² “Déjeuner chez un Bedouin” (AB, Archivi Cumont, inv. 3503, 67L, 12 May).

¹³³ “À peine sous notre tente le *agha* nous supplie d’accepter l’hospitalité du *mussafir oda*.” (AB, Archivi Cumont, inv. 3504, 28R, 17 May).

¹³⁴ cf. Thierry HENTSCH, *L’Orient imaginaire. La vision politique occidentale de l’Est méditerranée*, Paris, Les éditions de Minuit, 1988, p. 188.

¹³⁵ Franz CUMONT, *Études Syriennes*, *op. cit.*, p. x-xi.

One cannot help but feeling that here Cumont was championing Western interference, if not Western rule, in Syria¹³⁶. In this view, the resemblance of this passage to de Chabrol's words in the *Description de l'Égypte* is striking: "Que ne seroit-on pas en droit d'espérer avec de pareils hommes, s'il étoit possible d'introduire parmi eux des idées plus justes et les lumières de la civilisation Européenne¹³⁷?" De Chabrol also proposed the idea that "this miserable and until now uselessly fertile soil", could, under European government, "pass on rapidly to a state of prosperity¹³⁸." Bonaparte's expedition in Egypt (1798-1801) and the *Description* that issued from it, is, in fact, generally considered as the inauguration of the political and scientific colonisation of the Orient by the Occident¹³⁹. Victor Langlois (1820-1869), orientalist and specialist of ancient Armenian numismatics, who travelled through Asia Minor with the support of the French government in 1852-1853, begins his travel account as follows: "L'Orient est aujourd'hui le sujet de sérieuses préoccupations et de patientes recherches. Chaque année nos soldats vont planter le drapeau de la France dans des régions lointaines, afin de porter au milieu de populations à demi barbares les bienfaits de notre civilisation¹⁴⁰. » This idea that Europe - and France in particular - had a "mission civilisatrice et régénératrice" to accomplish in the Orient, was still very much alive during the first World War, as is demonstrated by Cumont's words.

¹³⁶ In fact, three years after Cumont wrote the preface to the Syrian Studies, Syria was assigned as a mandate to France at the conference of San Remo. The comparison with Egypt is relevant, as it had been a de facto British protectorate since 1882 and officially since 1914.

¹³⁷ *Description de l'Égypte, ou Recueil des observations et des recherches qui ont été faites en Égypte pendant l'expédition de l'armée française*, vol. VII, Paris, Imprimerie impériale (puis royale), 1809-1822, p. 424, cited in Thierry HENTSCH, *L'Orient imaginaire*, *op. cit.*, p. 188. Gaspard de Chabrol (1773-1843) was a French official who participated in Bonaparte's Egyptian campaign.

¹³⁸ *Description de l'Égypte*, *loc. cit.*, cited in Thierry HENTSCH, *L'Orient imaginaire*, *loc. cit.*

¹³⁹ Said, for example, sees the expedition as "a sort of first enabling experience for modern Orientalism"; cf. Edward SAID, *Orientalism*, *op. cit.*, p. 122; for Said's comments on the *Description*, cf. Edward SAID, *Orientalism*, *op. cit.*, *passim*, especially p. 84-86.

¹⁴⁰ VICTOR LANGLOIS, *Voyage dans la Cilicie et dans les montagnes du Taurus*, Paris, B. Duprat, 1861, p. 1. Cf. also the conclusion of Eugène Goblet d'Alviella in *Inde et Himalaya*, *op. cit.*, p. 385, which reads: "...; car pour que l'Inde puisse un jour reprendre son rôle dans le développement général de l'humanité, il faut laisser aux Anglais le temps d'achever l'œuvre d'éducation sociale et politique que seuls ils sont capables de mener à bonne fin. (my emphasis)» Here also, the role of Europe lies in the restoration of the Oriental country to its former greatness and civilization.

Already in *Les religions orientales*, published 11 years prior to the *Études Syriennes*, while discussing the general superiority of the Orient over the Occident during the Empire, Cumont expressed the idea that the Orient profited from Roman rule: “Tandis que la Grèce végète appauvrie, humiliée, épuisée, que l’Italie se dépeuple et ne suffit plus à sa propre subsistance, que les autres provinces d’Europe sortent à peine de la barbarie, l’Asie Mineure, l’Égypte, la Syrie recueillent les moissons opulentes que leur assure la paix romaine¹⁴¹. » Two important instruments of the Roman rule were the army and the law, which were the two domains in which according to Cumont the Romans surpassed the ancient Orientals, as I discussed in the first section. As such, the ancient Orient’s superiority was not only an intrinsic feature, it was also made possible by the Occident. The contrast between the richness which Syria knew in Roman times and the poverty Cumont encountered returns more than once in the notebooks. The following passage is a description of the present site of ancient Doliche, the centre of worship of Jupiter Dolichenus, a Syrian Ba’al divinity who gained substantial popularity in Rome.

“Cependant son nom antique s'est perpétué jusqu'à nos jours en celui de Tell-Duluk, appliqué à un modeste hameau d'une cinquantaine de feux, groupés au bord d'une vallée fertile (fig. 55) à deux heures de cheval vers le nord d'Aïntab. Ses maisons de pierres brutes et de boue ont un aspect d'autant moins engageant qu'on a coutume d'y coller des gâteaux de fumier, afin qu'ils y sèchent et puissent être brûlés à défaut d'autre combustible. Mais une quantité de débris romains attestent encore l'opulence passée de ce pauvre petit village :...¹⁴²”

In 1917, it seems that in Cumont’s view, as he expressed it in the preface of *Études Syriennes* (cf. supra), Europe could bring peace and prosperity to the Middle East in his days, in the same way as it had done in Antiquity. Again, Cumont’s observations bring to mind French

¹⁴¹ Franz CUMONT, *Les religions orientales*, op. cit., p. 18.

¹⁴² Franz CUMONT, *Études Syriennes*, op. cit., p. 177.

ambitions of a new Roman Empire, in the first place Napoleon Bonaparte's Empire, modelled on the Roman Empire¹⁴³.

The exotic Orient experienced

Cumont explicitly drew attention to the strange and exotic nature of the Orient in a discussion of a bas-relief representing two goddesses on a camel, the Oriental animal par excellence. "Le chameau nous paraît toujours un quadrupède un peu ridicule, et son nom éveille en français un sentiment très éloigné de la vénération¹⁴⁴." In French, the word has indeed a very negative connotation if applied to a person. A few pages later, Cumont repeated more or less the same idea, but added an important reflection upon it:

"Les statues divines étaient suivies de musiciennes, portées comme elles à dos de chameau. Une telle parade nous semblerait peut-être plus burlesque qu'édifiante, mais ne la regardons pas avec nos yeux d'Européens; en vérité, il suffit d'avoir vu défiler une caravane pour s'apercevoir que le chameau est par excellence un animal processionnel¹⁴⁵."

Not only was Cumont aware of his Western bias, it is his own travel experience, his own encounter with the Orient¹⁴⁶, that helped him understand ancient religious practice better. Cumont seems to have reduced the historical distance, projecting the present he saw on the past he studied. On the other hand, the link between caravans of camels and religious processions was not new to the European perception of the Orient, as we can see it in some of the most important Orientalist paintings of the second half of the nineteenth century, e.g. "Les rois mages en voyage" (between 1886 and 1894) by James Tissot (1836-1902) and "Pèlerins allant à la Mecque" (1861) by Léon Belly (1827-1877).

¹⁴³ This attitude is present in many works of French ancient historians around the turn of the nineteenth century. We cannot go into further detail here, but will discuss this in a study which focuses on these analogies made between Roman and French imperialism by Cumont and contemporary French scholars such as René Cagnat (1852) and Jules Toutain (1937) (with Sarah Rey, Ghent University).

¹⁴⁴ Franz CUMONT, *Études Syriennes*, *op. cit.*, p. 272.

¹⁴⁵ Franz CUMONT, *Études Syriennes*, *op. cit.*, p. 276.

¹⁴⁶ In the travel notebooks Cumont only rarely reports sightings of caravans, yet e.g. here: "cavane (*sic*) déchargée attend le passage, les hommes assis en cercle" (AB, Archivi Cumont, inv. 3504, 20, 15 May).

An even stronger instance of the projection of the present on the past and the influence of experience on the understanding of the past is to be found in a discussion of the cult of the Euphrates in the *Études Syriennes*. In his notebooks, Cumont often described the impressive river: “L’Euphrate nappe immense qui glisse sans bruit avec une vitesse effrayante – opposition avec la bourrasque d’hier qui faisait déferler les vagues contre le rocher¹⁴⁷.” Impressions like these must have been on Cumont’s mind when he wrote in the *Études Syriennes*: “La grandeur du spectacle qu’offre le puissant cours d’eau se frayant un chemin à travers les cluses profondes du Taurus, était propre à frapper l’imagination des tribus barbares¹⁴⁸,...” ”

Cumont here projected his own impression, the experience he had as a traveler, on the minds of the ancient inhabitants of Syria, the “barbarians”, whom the natural power of the river must have attracted and fascinated - up to the point that they regarded it as a deity - as it did the modern scientist. And again, as in the case of the camel (cf. *supra*), this “shared” experience allowed the scientist to come to a better understanding of ancient religion:

“Dans la solitude, une eau mobile semble au voyageur qui la suit une compagne et un guide; quand il quitte ses bords, il éprouve comme le regret d’avoir abandonné une amie, et l’attraction étrange qu’elle exerce sur ses sentiments, lui fait comprendre la vénération qu’elle inspirait aux anciens¹⁴⁹.”

The gender aspect of this passage is difficult to render in English, but might be of some interest as Cumont remained a bachelor throughout his life and devoted himself to the study of ancient religions. This passage, which concludes the section on the cult of the Euphrates in the *Études Syriennes*, shows a degree of sensitivity towards this particular piece of the Orient which nor his private travel notes, nor the rest of the *Études Syriennes* did

¹⁴⁷ AB, Archivi Cumont, inv. 3504, 26, 17 May.

¹⁴⁸ Franz CUMONT, *Études Syriennes*, *op. cit.*, p. 253. It should be noted that the segments on the cult of the Euphrates and the goddesses on the camel were published several years after Cumont’s journey to Syria. An Italian version of former appeared in 1916 (Franz CUMONT, “Il culto dell’Eufrate nell’epoca romana,” in *Rivista di scienza delle religioni*, vol. 1, 1916, p. 93-99), while the latter was first published by Cumont as “La double fortune des Sémites et les processions à dos de chameau,” in *Revue de l’histoire des religions*, vol. 69, 1914, p. 1-11.

¹⁴⁹ Franz CUMONT, *Études Syriennes*, *op. cit.*, p. 255-256. This particular passage does not feature in the Italian version of the text (cf. *supra*), but was added for the edition of *Études Syriennes* in 1917.

reach. Ten years after the facts, the long, adventurous and probably rather lonely journey through the land of the Euphrates still had its effects on the mind and the emotions of the Belgian scholar¹⁵⁰.

Conclusion

The dossier of documents concerning Franz Cumont's 1907 archaeological expedition is very rich. In addition to 375 pages worth of published scientific work, we have at our disposal a considerable amount of private travel notes, a substantial body of letters sent to Cumont by both academic experts and political institutions, and even postcards written by Cumont himself.

As I have demonstrated in this paper, firstly, this dossier sheds precious light on practical issues concerning the practice of archaeology in the Ottoman Empire around the turn of the nineteenth century, such as how to obtain authorisation to study monuments. In this way, these personal documents help place the scientific traveller and his work in the historical and social context, while giving us valuable information on the context itself. This dossier on Franz Cumont permits us to study the persona of the European archaeologist or scientific traveller as an intermediary figure between the Orient and the Occident, bringing back bits and pieces, artefacts and images, of the Orient to the Western world. The dossier touches upon the interest of the Belgian state in the acquisition of oriental artefacts and the practice of the archaeological market in the East.

Secondly, the dossier allows us to compare the experiences of the scientific traveller in the Orient and how they are expressed in three different writing contexts. The travel notes, written "for Cumont's eyes only", betray the utterly scientific interests of their author and contain very few value judgments of and reflections upon his experience with the Orient as he could witness it, except for the frequent descriptions of the landscape. On the postcards Cumont sent to his friend Warocqué, which form a less private writing context than the personal notes, practical information on his journey to and from Syria

¹⁵⁰ Cumont makes the same link between personal experience and the understanding of ancient eastern religious phenomena in *Astrology and Religion*, *op. cit.*, p. 140, on the subject of astral mysticism: "The magnificent appearance of the glittering sky has always vividly impressed mankind, and whoever has enjoyed the soft brilliance of an Eastern night, will understand how in that country adoration was naturally excited for the inextinguishable centres of light on high."

(Cumont was not able to send postcards during his actual expedition) and humoristic comments and wordplay take up most of the limited space. In his observations of his surroundings, both humour and rather positive but commonplace remarks prevail. The most public writing context, the *Études Syriennes* (1917), contain remarkably more value judgments and reflections upon his experiences the travel notes upon which they are based. These comments, moreover, betray two aspects of Cumont's attitude toward the Orient which were already present in his important work on the *religions orientales* from 1906: firstly, an awareness of the Western bias of Europeans dealing with the Orient and secondly, an admiration for the ancient Near East that clearly contrasts with a more negative and rather paternalistic attitude towards the contemporary Near East that, even if it could claim superiority over the West in the ancient world, had lost its advantage to Europe.