

*Eyewitness account of a 16th century mission to the Ottoman court,
illustrated with 28 watercolours*

Braeckle, Jacques de. *Memoires du voiage de Constantinople de Jacques de Bracle seigneur de Bassecourt.* Manuscrit du XVI^e siècle.

No place, c. 1570. 4to (210 × 135 mm). French manuscript on paper. 90 ff. Flemish Bastarda in black ink, 26 lines. Bound with 16 strictly contemporary specimens of Turkish marbled paper, a series of 28 watercolours, heightened in gilt and two extensive, early 19th century manuscript additions (complete transcript of the the travelogue and a biography of the author). Slightly later vellum with ms. title.

€ 250,000

Unique, fascinating and unpublished manuscript containing the account of a diplomatic journey to the Ottoman Empire in 1570. Braeckle (1540–71), a Flemish physician, “assisted Charles Rym Baron de Bellem, Ambassador of Maximilian II in Constantinople, probably as a secretary. He wrote an account of his journey, which contains interesting details about the places he visited, the manners and customs of the inhabitants, incidents, etc.” (Belgian National Biography II, 903). Leaving Prague on 13 March 1570, the mission passed through Vienna and then Hungary and Czechoslovakia before entering Ottoman territory, visiting the mosques and caravanserais of Sokollu Mehmed Pasha (c. 1505–79), Grand Vizier of Sultan Selim II (1524–74) who ruled the Turks at the time of Rym’s and Braeckle’s journey. Their stay in Constantinople lasted from 31 May to 12 August 1570, permitting the author to describe several monuments and works of art. The mission ended with their return to Germany on 23 October 1570. Jacques de Braeckle died shortly afterwards, in 1571.



The ms. is accompanied by a beautiful set of 28 original watercolours heightened in gilt. Showing Ottomans in traditional costumes, such illustrations were usually fashioned for sale to travellers in Constantinople or passed on to western merchants. However, as the present set includes the caravanseraï of the diplomatic legation, it is extremely likely that these were created with the sole purpose of illustrating the diplomatic mission of Charles Rym, described within the present manuscript. The figures are captioned next to the subjects, indicating that the legends were recorded after the plates were collated and sewn together, or that they were included in books before insertion into the present volume. Among the illustrations are the caravanseraï of the ambassadors to Constantinople, Sultan Selim II, the Mufti, costumes of Ottoman dignitaries and the military, a Persian, a Moor of Barbary, six women including a lady in a burqa and a Bulgarian, a giraffe, etc. The author of the Italian captions may have been the ambassador Edoardo Provisionali: he was responsible for several diplomatic missions and is known to have appreciated the Ottoman culture; furthermore, de Braeckle left Constantinople in his company.

The manuscript is also bound with 16 remarkable specimens of 16th c. Turkish paper (title in French in pen on the first sheet: "papier de Turquie"). At the beginning of the volume is a transcription, calligraphed in an elegant French cursive of the early 19th century (18 unnumbered ff., black ink, 21 lines per page). The volume ends with a short biography of the author (2 pp., black ink, with the arms of de Braeckle). Yerasimos provides a detailed chronology of the journey, listing the major cities visited as well as monuments and curiosities noted by the travellers.

Only three manuscript copies of the present travelogue are recorded, mostly restricted to family use: two copies are in the National Archives of Belgium in Brussels (Fonds 692 Lalang, 8f., cf. Yerasimos); a third copy is bound in a miscellany and kept at the communal Archives of Ghent.

Binding rubbed, spine detached, in excellent condition internally.

References: Stéphane Yerasimos, *Les Voyageurs dans l'Empire Ottoman (XIVe–XVIe siècles)*, Ankara, 1991, pp. 286 f. Not in Blackmer or Atabey.





