In September 1589, only weeks after the assassination of Henry III at the begin-
ing of August of that year and during a decisive period of the French civil
wars, a collection of treatises and diplomatic reports in Italian was published
anonymously in Paris. Entitled *Tesoro politico*, it comprised anonymous politi-
cal essays on statecraft and reports by Roman and Venetian diplomats on courts
and regimes in Europe and beyond, some forty pieces of various length and
without visible order. Revised, expanded, and translated into French as *Trésor
politique* in 1608, the collection quickly became one of the most important
documents of post-Machiavellian political thought in Europe at the turn of
the sixteenth century.\(^1\) How can one explain the rise of this anonymous ad
hoc compilation to an internationally influential anthology and a fundamental
text of modern political theory? The popularity of the *Trésor* might best be
elucidated by its textual format and what I will call its anthological mode. It
allowed the work’s different editors and publishers to adapt the collection to a
rapidly changing political landscape in different national contexts. Regardless
of these diverse contexts, the anthology’s evolution was marked by the increas-
ing space the different editors granted the discussion of the Ottoman Empire.
The following analysis of the Empire’s treatment at different stages of the *Tré-
sor’s* intricate international editorial history demonstrates how this anthology
contributes substantially to the early modern conceptualization of statehood by

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\(^1\) According to Jean Balsamo, the *Trésor* was “en son temps le plus fameux des ouvrages politi-
tiques” and “contribuait à fonder la science politique moderne.” See Jean Balsamo, “Les Origines parisi-
opening and confronting various perspectives on contemporary international politics. Moreover, the case study of the Turk in the Trésor politique reveals the anthological as an intrinsically political mode.

The Thesoro was published during the most severe crisis the French kingdom had faced since the beginning of the civil wars in 1562. The assassination of Henry III triggered an intense struggle for political supremacy because the legitimacy of the heir to the throne, the Protestant Henry of Navarre, was violently contested by the powerful, ultra Catholic League, which had made the French capital its stronghold. While the political substance of the Thesoro and the date and place of its publication suggest that it was intended as a direct intervention into this critical situation, it remains difficult to determine precisely which ideological goals motivated the anonymous editor-printers to publish this Italian collection in Paris. After analyzing the bandeaux or stripe-shaped ornamentations at the top of some of the Thesoro’s pages and taking into account such circumstances as the almost exclusive presence of the 1589 edition in Parisian libraries today, Jean Balsamo concludes that the anthology was most likely the work of the three well-established Parisian printers Denis Cotinet, Léger Delas, and Denis Binet, whose editorial program reveals their sympathies for the League.² The editor-printers placed an anonymous report on the kingdom’s desolate situation, entitled “Relatione delle divisioni di Francia,” the only topical piece of the collection, at the heart of the Thesoro. The content and position of the “Relatione” leads Balsamo to surmise that the editor-printers intended to bolster the position of Louis of Gonzaga, Duke of Nevers, as a mediator between Henry of Navarre and the League and a guarantor of peace during the troubled weeks and months after the assassination of Henry III. He even goes so far as to suggest that this anonymous piece “donnait son sens au recueil tout entier, et justifiait de sa parution.”³

In order to forge an effective propagandistic tool to be used in the fierce struggle for political power of the day, the editors chose the format of an anthology. If we consider the specific socio-historical context of the Thesoro’s publication, the question arises why they opted for the anthological mode. With this term I am following Seth Lerer’s reflections on the differences between anthologies and miscellanies as discrete forms of Medieval English collections and what he describes as “the anthologistic.”⁴ Lerer suggests that, contrary to miscellanies, anthologies are controlled by a “literary intelligence” and that “the

mark of the anthologist . . . is a moment when the idea of the anthology is thematically present in the texts” (1255). Thierry Rolin, publisher of the 1611 edition of the *Trésor*, defines himself as precisely that “literary intelligence” when he describes the purpose of the anthology as giving an overview “de la conduicte, des moeurs, des loix, des coustumes, & de la police de tous les peuples de l’univers” (“Au Lecteur,” v), following in the footsteps of Cotinet and the other editor-printers. We will see below how the idea of the anthology in Lerer’s sense is also present through the way it combines and sets into tension different accounts, in particular those about the Ottoman Empire. The anthological mode is thus suggested as a discursive model that characterizes and distinguishes the modern state.

By drawing on documents about statecraft that had previously circulated only in secluded circles as single tracts, the anthological mode allowed the editors of the *Thesoro* to react quickly to a rapidly evolving political crisis by publishing existing but little known documents. They lent these documents new significance by compiling them in a certain order and making them an integral part of an innovative political discourse. The anthological mode allowed the editors to combine these tracts and treatises with a polemic text commenting on the current state of affairs, the “Divisioni di Francia.” The juxtaposition with diplomatic reports and treatises reflecting on politics bestowed a greater legitimacy on the topical piece. By positioning the essay on France’s divisions at the center of the compilation, the editors also symbolically located France at the heart of Europe, couching it between the Holy Roman and Ottoman Empires on the one side and England and the Italian states on the other. The latter are portrayed as stable, prospering states so that the *Thesoro*’s interior order suggests the gravity of France’s instability and fragility as the politically central, fundamental issue. Moreover, the anthological mode facilitated anonymity, which was probably of vital interest during the turmoil of 1589. The Italianate name of the printer, Alberto Coloresco, is as fictive as that of the publishing body, a mysterious “Academia Italiana di Colonia.” Of imaginary German origin and in Italian, the *Thesoro politico* is clearly a collection that attempts to efface all traces of local identity. Anonymity is not necessarily bound to the anthological mode but its multiplicity of voices supplements and enhances the editor-printers’ obvious desire to remain unknown. The absence of an authorial voice and the presence of diverse viewpoints, themselves uttered from undisclosed sources and without any indication of hierarchy among them, feed into the editors’ scheme to hide their ulterior motives and efface their identities as much as possible.

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5. In the following I will quote from this edition.
6. For another perspective on the importance of anonymity in the creation of collections, see Eleonora Stoppino’s chapter 4 on chivalric epic poems in this volume.
I. *Thesoro, Trésor, and the Translation of Politics*

The diversity of Italian voices, providing multiple perspectives on political and cultural matters, might be one of the reasons for the *Thesoro’s* continued popularity among contemporary readers in France and Italy. The complex history of the collection’s revisions and editions testifies to its success but also to the malleability and adaptability of the anthology as a textual format and mode in response to a swiftly changing political world. After the original edition was republished with minor alterations in 1593, the *Thesoro* was substantially extended, refashioned, and subdivided into two books for an edition by the Milanese printers Girolamo Bordone and Pietro Martire Locarni in 1601.\(^7\)

Among the additions to this edition were three chapters on the Ottoman Empire in which the author describes its administrative and military apparatuses and reflects on the question of how the seemingly invincible Turks could be overcome. The chapters were culled from the Italian translation of a treatise by René de Lucinge, a diplomat in the service of the Duke of Savoy, entitled *De la Naissance, durée et cheute des Estats*, first published in Paris in 1588. In his treatise, Lucinge contests the thesis that the Ottoman Empire is invincible and argues for a new offensive, a line of reasoning that the Milanese editors adapted for this extended version of the *Thesoro politico*.\(^8\)

The first French translation of the *Thesoro* was issued in 1608. Its publisher, Nicolas du Fossé, reorganized and extended the Italian collection of 1601, adapting it yet again to the political circumstances of early seventeenth-century France and his agenda. Most notably, the “Divisioni di Francia” and Calvinist references of the original *Thesoro* were eliminated from the French translation. These alterations indicate that, contrary to the anonymous French editors of the original *Thesoro*, Fossé supported Henry IV and his politics of religious tolerance, which he promulgated after his enthronement in the Edict of Nantes in 1598.\(^9\)

One consequence of the *Thesoro’s* return from Italy to France and its translation was that the truncated and condensed Italian version of Lucinge’s treatise on the Ottoman Empire was retranslated into French, now circulating concurrently with Lucinge’s original treatise and finding an even wider audience thanks to the popularity of the anthology. Several Latin translations appeared in Frankfurt in 1610. When Rolin publishes the *Trésor*

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7. For this summary of the *Trésor’s* editorial history I draw on Balsamo’s fundamental research (“Les Origines parisiennes du Tesoro politico”) and on Michael J. Heath’s “Montaigne, Lucinge and the *Thesoro politico*,” *Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance* 45 (1982), pp. 131–35.


once more in 1611, he further expands it by adding a “Discours de la Milice des Turcs” and a “Discours de l’Island.” In its final version the collection had grown to a compendium of 922 pages.

This sketch of the Trésor’s intricate editorial history not only elucidates the lively exchange of diplomatic reports and political ideas between France and Italy at the turn of the sixteenth century; it also shows how and why the anthological mode lends itself to the construction of a differentiated, complex, and shifting political discourse. Besides its multiplicity of voices and its possibility to maintain the anonymity of the single texts’ authors—or, as in the case of Lucinge, to condemn them to namelessness—the anthological mode’s creativity and effectiveness reside in the way in which it can easily be adapted to the political climate of the day according to the ideological interests of the editor-printers. It is therefore more than likely that the collection owes its continued popularity in rapidly and drastically changing political environments, to which the translations and numerous editions testify, as much to its anthological mode as to the quality of the single texts.

How the anthological mode functions as a political mode can be demonstrated by a closer analysis of one of the Trésor’s most prominent figures, the Turk. The positioning of the treatises on the Ottoman Empire reflects the authors’ and editors’ deeply ambivalent attitude toward this figure. As Heath and Balsamo have argued, the Turkish treatises serve indirectly to revise traditional ideas of the state at the turn of the sixteenth century. This revision, however, is conditioned by its presentation in the anthological mode. Relying on the anthology’s fragmentation into autonomous pieces set in multiple dialogical relationships, the editors are able to propose new ways of thinking about different forms of statehood while assuaging or eluding the tensions that these innovative ideas must have provoked in early modern readers, let alone in their rulers. Critical readings of the Trésor politique have focused on the truncation of Lucinge’s treatise on the Ottoman Empire while almost no attention has been paid to the way in which the avatars of the Naissance function in the anthology. By integrating parts of Lucinge’s treatise, the editors of the Trésor confront the traditional idea of the Turk as a God-sent scourge with the new understanding of the Ottoman Empire as the incarnation of the modern concept of the reason of state. The creation of a productive tension between such competing ideas about alternative forms of statehood and of an implicit critical dialogue about them depends structurally on the anthological mode.

10. Balsamo argues that the introduction of the modern political idea of reason of state at the turn of the sixteenth century in Italy is intimately related with the debate about the Ottoman Empire on the peninsula which often associates the Turks with Machiavellian principles (“‘Une parfaite intelligence de la Raison d’Estat,’” pp. 309–10).
II. Anthologizing the Turk

The Ottoman Empire is among the few civilizations that are present in all three books of the 1608 French translation and, besides Iceland, the only state that receives additional and considerable space in the 1611 edition. Supplementing this edition, the “Discours sur la milice des Turcs” comprises almost sixty pages. The representation of the Turk, along with the discussion of the Ottoman Empire’s role as a powerful player in sixteenth-century international politics, thus constitutes a major, recurrent, and guiding theme of the anthology.

In addition to the length of each piece in an anthology, its position is significant. The “Divisioni di Francia,” which assumed the symbolic center position in the 1589 Thesoro, serves as a case in point. In the same edition, the Ottoman Empire also assumes a prominent place in the anthology’s symbolic order of states and peoples. Numerous aspects of the Empire are discussed in three chapters whereas other states are portrayed in only one or, in the case of France, two essays. The treatises on the Turks are placed in a conspicuous position, after the articles on Rome, the Holy Roman Empire, and Spain and before the two central texts on France. If we assume that the disposition of the single texts in an anthology is deliberate and defines their relationship to the other texts and their place in the collection as a whole, setting the Ottoman Empire as a textual and symbolic dividing line between France and the other major powers in continental Europe is striking. The discussion of France is followed by the description of England, Flanders and the Italian city-states, Switzerland, Sweden, the Muscovite principality, and Persia. The editors of the Thesoro do not seem to follow any obvious principle of order, be it chronological, geographical, or according to the size or form of the state, going back and forth between monarchies, city-states, and empires. For instance, the description of Sweden follows that of Milan, and Persia is discussed last. By locating the three treatises on the Ottoman Empire immediately before the two central pieces on France, the editors create a close relationship between Turkish and French politics and seem to suggest a comparison between the two, France being closer to the Ottoman Empire than to any other continental European state in the symbolic order of the Thesoro.

The juxtaposition of the two unequal monarchies is even more striking if one considers that French interest in the Ottoman Empire had continuously waned since the death of Henry II in 1559 and the end of the strategic alliance that his father, Francis I, had forged with the Turks against Charles V and Habsburg hegemony in Europe. The interest in the rising Empire to the East

11. For an elucidating synthesis of this chapter of Franco-Turkish relationships, see Edith Garnier, L’Alliance impie: François Ier et Soliman le Magnifique contre Charles Quint (1529–1547) (Paris: Félin, 2008).
subsided quickly due to the concerns about the religious tensions that led to
the outbreak of a protracted civil war in 1562, heavily affecting the daily life
of the French and preoccupying their minds. After the Ottoman fleet had been
defeated by a Spanish-Venetian coalition near Lepanto in 1571, the European
myth of the Turks’ invincibility was shattered. Why then, at a time of great
domestic turmoil and a perceived dwindling Turkish threat to the European
continent, did the French editors of the *Thesoro* grant such a high-profile status
to the Ottoman Empire?

The anonymous author of the “Relatione di Costatinopoli”—translated
into French as “Discours de Constantinople” from which I quote—describes
the Ottoman Empire as a civilization that defies the principles of European
statecraft and tradition and yet is about to establish a universal monarchy. This
paradox can be explained only “par la permission de Dieu” (75). The perceived
invincibility of the Turks is all the more unfathomable, the author argues, if
one considers the brutal subjection of the populations that have been integrated
into the Empire, the conversion of Christian slaves into devout servants to
the sultan, the division of the Muslim community into different “opinions” or
religious factions, the isolation of the sultan, and the imagined depravity of his
harem.

The “Discours” thus recapitulates what were well-worn commonplaces about
the Turks by the end of the sixteenth century. Later, however, the anonymous
author, whom historians have identified as the Venetian diplomat Marcantonio
Barbaro, recommends that the Turks be treated the same way as someone in a
ping-pong game with a glass ball. When the partner throws it with verve, one
has to receive it gently in order to keep it from breaking and one has to know
how to return it cautiously but firmly: “la façon de traitter avec les Turcs est
semblable à celuy quy iouë avec une balle de verre, veu que quand son compa-
gnon l’envoye avec force, il ne la faut pas renvoyer avec violence, pource qu’elle
vient à se rompre d’une & d’autre sorte, & qu’à ceste occasion il estoit necessaire
de la prendre dextrement, & puis de la sçavoir renvoyer vivement . . . parler
dignement avec vivacité de coeur, c’est faire ce qui est convenable” (88). Despite
his alleged depravity, infidelity, and cruelty, the Turk is considered an adversary
who deserves scrutiny and respect. He is even likened to a “compagnon,” a
companion or mate whom one must encounter with dignity. While this con-
sideration might bespeak most of all the diplomat’s immediate concern about
successful negotiations with the enemy, it also testifies to the conviction that it
is possible to engage the Turks in a political dialogue and that their apparently
God-given supremacy might be contained or even overcome simply through
a prudent and skillful exchange among partners. The idea of negotiation thus
undermines for a short moment the overarching theoretical stance expressed in
the “Discours de Constantinople” that the welfare of a state is ultimately deter-
mined by God. Contemplating the geopolitical situation from an ideological position still predominant during the second half of the sixteenth century, the author of the “Discours” interprets the fact that the infidel is allowed to enslave and convert Christians and to command a vast, ever-expanding empire as the scourge that God sent to punish a quarreling Christendom.

The second treatise, whose Italian title was translated into “Discours cõme l’Empire des Turcs, encore que tyrannique et violent, est pour durer longtemps, & invincible par raisons naturelles” for the 1611 edition, both reinforces and significantly modifies this theoretical stance. At the beginning, the anonymous author refers to Aristotle’s tenet that violent regimes cannot persist, a position that the rise and perseverance of the Ottoman Empire seem to prove fundamentally wrong. In the vein of the “Discours de Constantinople,” the Empire is conceived as the paradox of a powerful, stable, and invincible tyranny. Yet, the author of the second treatise explains this phenomenon with what he calls “natural reasons” by which he means certain principles of the Ottoman government: for instance, the most important functions such as the protection of the sultan and the administration of justice are reserved for converted Christian slaves and denied to “Turcs naturels” (90). Moreover, the Ottoman authorities approve of a libertarian lifestyle, which “naturally” attracts people (“une liberté de la vie, qui est une chose qui alleche si naturellement l’homme,” 90). This “liberté de la vie” also creates a feeling of unity among the sultan’s subjects that is further strengthened by a powerful central government and an absolutist monarch.

At first glance, the author’s reference to Aristotelian political theory and his emphasis on the allegedly natural causes of Ottoman supremacy seem to feed into an attempt to comprehend and rationalize what was perceived as a political and religious paradox. Yet, the rationalization of the geopolitical situation ends there. In order to lend more pertinence to his argument about the natural superiority of the Turks and to establish a stark dichotomy between Christians and infidels, the author explains the victory of Catholic forces over the Ottoman fleet at Lepanto as “un miracle de Dieu” (91). Whereas the sultan’s empire prevails “par sa propre force, & par raison naturelle,” Christianity can counter the Turkish threat only by “moyens surnaturels” (93), which consist of a true and not merely feigned union of all Christians. The author’s political thought thus remains deeply rooted in Christian metaphysics. Any Christian state’s welfare depends on the unity of its believers and is an expression of God’s grace.

The role of the Turk, however, has shifted from the first to the second treatise. Whereas in the first he was cast as a God-sent scourge, the Turk is now represented as an imposing and indomitable force of nature who requires a supernatural response. If before he was an infidel in the service of God’s wrath, he is now dissociated and excluded from any divine influence or control unless, of course,
one considers “nature” itself an expression of the divine in the world. The second “Discours,” however, gives no indication of this kind of understanding.

The idea, expounded in the two pieces on the Turks, that Christian nations are protected by God and need to unite in order to combat the infidel, thus puts the next two texts on France in a particular perspective, especially the “Divisioni di Francia.” The juxtaposition of the treatises on the Turks and on France entices the reader to an analogical reading and suggests, from the editor-printers’ Catholic perspective, the comparison of France’s interior conflict with the international confrontation between Christianity and the Ottoman Empire. The French have to unite and soothe God’s wrath in order to overcome the Huguenots, the divine scourge and infidel from within. The formation of this unity as well as the installation of a centralized government and a forceful sovereign, however, will require an enormous effort, equaling the same “moyens surnaturels” that the second “Discours” invoked as the necessary means to overcome the Turks.

The anthological mode that enables this political reflection through the symbolic vicinity between the Ottoman Empire and France in the 1589 edition allows Nicolas du Fossé to dissociate the two states and recast their relationship in the French translation of 1608, maintained by Rolin in 1611. Not only did Fossé drop the “Divisioni,” he also repositioned the “Discours de France” so that it concludes the first of three books and assumes the final and climactic position in a pageant of nations. On the other hand, Fossé located the original treatises on the Turks at the opposite end, towards the beginning of the first book, framed by the essays on Spain and Venice.

Some forty pages into the second book, two texts—the truncated and retranslated version of Lucinge’s treatise on the Turks mentioned above—inaugurate an entirely different discourse on the Ottoman Empire. In the first text, the diplomat Lucinge, who remains unidentified in the Trésor, argues that the perceived notion of the Turk’s invincibility cannot be sustained if one considers historical facts. According to Lucinge, historical analysis shows that, over a period of 280 years, the Ottomans led thirty-six military campaigns against neighboring countries, of which they won eighteen (417), leaving it up to the reader to conclude that statistically there is a fifty percent chance of winning against the Turks. The author encourages his readers to correct their preconceptions by taking into account other historical experiences and to come to logical conclusions by considering historical evidence: “par les raisons que nous deduirons icy, ils [les Chrestiens] doivent esperer qu’il [le Turc] peut estre facilement surmonté, ainsi que font clairement cognostre diverses experiences” (416–17). “Raisons,” “experiences,” and statistics are elements of a new approach to the Turkish paradox and a fundamentally different conceptualization of statehood. In De la Naissance, durée et cheute des Estats, Lucinge conceives of the state as
a collective body which is subject to a natural life cycle and argues that, after its rise, the fall of the Ottoman Empire is inevitable and imminent. Religion is defined as a means to appease and control the state’s subjects instead of providing supernatural forces to combat an invincible enemy. Among the thirty-nine chapters of La Naissance, the editors of the Thesoro politico of 1601 selected and conflated those in which Lucinge proposes what has been called psychological warfare as the most effective strategy against the Turks. In order to destabilize the Ottoman Empire, Lucinge suggests, among other means, that the court in Istanbul be infiltrated, the enslaved populations indoctrinated and alienated from their ruler, and that their allegiance to the sultan and the Empire be undermined. All this is laid out in the “Discours comme on pourrait engendrer une alienation de courage” (423–27).

Yet, what applies to the Ottoman Empire is also true for any other state. Lucinge’s fragments in the Trésor politique configure the Turkish state as one among many, a natural and constantly changing entity that is susceptible to human cunning rather than dependent on God’s protection. The Turks, who were previously either demonized as God’s scourge or excluded from divine grace and relegated to nature, are now portrayed as equal human beings whose Empire is subject to the same laws of history as the European states. The only difference between the Ottoman Empire and the European powers is that they are at different stages in their life cycles, the former being at its prime and about to begin its natural decline. As an enemy, the Turk becomes vincible precisely because he fights with the same weapons and is prone to the same weaknesses as everybody else.

III. The Autonomy of Reading

In the Trésor politique, these three configurations of the Turk—God-sent demon, godless barbarian, and vincible but equal enemy—signify the deep ambivalence of Western diplomats and political thinkers toward the Empire in the East. But they also contribute to a complex conceptualization of the state that is echoed and further developed in other pieces of the anthology. If we return to the initial question of how the continued success of the Thesoro from 1589 across Europe can be explained, we may find a partial answer in the different models of statehood the anthology sets into a productive tension. By scrutinizing the treatment of the Ottoman Empire in the Trésor, French readers could discover the traditional proposition of a state under God’s tutelage and prone to His

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wrath side by side with the idea that states have historically proven unstable but that their development can be rationally analyzed and actively influenced as in the case of the Ottoman Empire. Pondering these alternative conceptions of the state must have been of particular importance to the reading public of a country that, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, was just emerging from a devastating civil war and still grappling with its traumatic experiences and profound consequences, seeking to reconcile lingering religious and ideological differences under a new sovereign. This process was severely shattered again by the assassination of Henry IV in May 1610, occurring between the publications of Fossé’s 1608 and Rolin’s augmented 1611 editions.

In this particular historical situation the anthological mode of the Trésor might have been even more decisive for the collection’s success than the political ideas it contained. What we have constructed so far as a chronological, linear development of political thought in the Trésor—from the more traditional understanding of the state under God’s tutelage predominant in the 1589 edition to what could be characterized as a more Machiavellian approach to the state propounded in the later editions and French translation—13—is, of course, only one possible interpretation based on a handful of the anthology’s texts revolving around the Ottoman Empire. In their copies of the Trésor politique, the readers of 1608 discovered side by side a great many texts lying in front of them like gems amassed in a treasure chest, each precious in its own right and all vying for the readers’ attention. More than any other, the anthological mode allows readers to pick and choose according to their interests. It also requires an active engagement with the Trésor and its seemingly random juxtaposition of composite texts, like the reading just performed in this article, in order to derive possible meanings from them and their order. In the realm of political ideas, then, the anthological mode fulfills what we might call in modern terms an anti-totalitarian or anti-ideological function. The anthology’s inherent multiplicity of voices and the necessity that its mode imposes on the reader to choose and engage with them in order to derive meaning warrant, maybe more than any other textual mode, the freedom of ideological self-positioning. In the uncertain, fragile world of the turn of the sixteenth century, it is this freedom that the editor-printers of the Trésor might have sought to promote above all by opting for the anthological mode. In doing so, they ultimately propose this mode, which resists any ideological closure, as a basic condition for the modern state.