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THE OVERTURES OF A MUSLIM ALLY: DIPLOMATIC GIFTS FROM PERSIA TO
ITALY (1453-1630)

By

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Overtures of a Muslim Ally: Diplomatic Gifts from Persia to Italy (1453-1630)

By NEGAR SARAH ROKHGAR

Dissertation Director:

Sarah Blake McHam

By the mid-fifteenth century, the extensive territorial spread of Ottomans brought the Islamic world in close contact with Christian Europe. The majority of cross-cultural studies have focused on the multilayered interactions between the Ottomans and Europeans. My dissertation shifts attention to an anti-Ottoman league, first proposed by Calixtus III in 1456, and joined by Persia as a Muslim ally of Europe against the common enemy, the Ottoman Turks. The plea for an anti-Ottoman union with European powers by the Persian king in the late fifteenth century set the stage for continued alliances pursued through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by the Safavid Shahs of Persia. These enduring connections between European Christian and Persian Muslim rulers resulted in complex reciprocal diplomatic exchanges fostered through the establishment of diplomatic embassies and the exchange of gifts. This dissertation is the first art historical investigation of the visual culture that was produced through early modern Persian-Italian diplomatic relations.

This study investigates the range of meanings of these diplomatic gifts by looking at them as agents in a broader politics of imperial self-fashioning. It distinguishes between two

forms of visual and cultural exchange. The first encompasses a wide range of materials that functioned as the objects of diplomatic exchange. These included richly decorated luxury goods, such as inlaid bowls, carpets, silk brocades, and ornamental weaponry. The second includes painted representations, which were commissioned following important diplomatic missions and the formation of new alliances and treaties. Whereas gifts facilitated diplomatic negotiations, painted representations reveal much about the perception of cultural difference in early modern courts. By considering the gifts' artistic style through comparisons with similar objects still extant or represented in Persian illuminated manuscripts, this study situates the objects in their Persian context and elucidate the inherent messages behind their selection. Conversely, by looking at the paintings by European artists commissioned to illustrate these Persian embassies in Italy or address Persian-Italian negotiations through visual references, it approaches the same diplomatic interactions through the lens of Italian authorities and assesses the message they received or intended to broadcast to their audience.

In looking at painted representations, this dissertation evaluates an underlying politics of how visual images may have served various agendas. In addition to expressing deep forms of knowledge about territorial and religious histories, they visually established hierarchies of cultural and political status within the growing alliance. For example, Shah Abbas's gift of a silk brocade with an embroidered image of the Virgin Mary and Christ Child can be seen both as an appropriate gift for his Christian allies and as a display of Persian artistic and cultural prowess.

By turning attention specifically to the objects and representations associated with the Persian-Italian alliances, this dissertation adds new dimensions to the understanding of

how objects functioned as modes of communication that were integral to solidifying new forms of international relationships. It concludes with the statement that the development of global commerce in the early modern world was an outgrowth of the earlier political alliances that were founded on previous forms of gift-exchange.

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Tabel of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgments	v
List of Illustrations	xix
List of Human Agents and Missionaries	xxix
Preface	xxxiv
Chapter 1:	1
“Introduction: The Overtures of a Muslim Ally: Diplomatic Gifts from Persia to Italy between 1453 and 1630”	
➤ Historical Background.....2	
➤ Methodology.....8	
➤ Historiography.....10	
➤ Content Overview.....15	
➤ Scholarly Contribution.....21	
Chapter 2:	23
“The Anti-Ottoman Christian Diplomacy and the Aq Qoyunlu: Persian Vestiges in the Quattrocento Italy (1453-1500).”	
➤ Section1: Quattrocento Florence.....23	
- The Procession of the Magi23	
- The Florentine Cassone32	

- Section 2: Quattrocento Venice..... 40
 - Turquoise Glass Bowl.....40
- Section 3: Quattrocento Rome..... 60
 - Piccolomini: The Arrival in Ancona.....60
 - The Borgia Apartments: The Disputation of Saint Catherine of Alexandria..... 72
 - The Tazza Farnese.....84
- Section 4: Quattrocento Urbino, the Seat of a Papal Condottiere..... 94
 - Communion of the Apostles.....94
 - Frontispiece of Francesco Filelfo’s Latin translation of *Cyropedia* 99
 - Portrait of Federico da Montefeltro and his Son.....108

Chapter 3: 117

“Cinquecento: Safavid Gifts of Imperial, Territorial, and Religious Claims”

- Section 1: Cinquecento Venice.....111
 - Coins of Shah Isma’il I to the “Sultan of Venice”..... 113
- Section 2: Cinquecento Rome..... 129
 - The Gift of a *Diatessaron* in Persian.....129
 - The Persian Vangelo di Matteo..... 147
- Section 3: Cinquecento Florence...152
 - An “Indo-Persian” Shield in Museo Nazionale del Bargello.....152

Chapter 4: 172

“Shah Abbas’s Gifts: Gradual Shift from Diplomacy to Commerce”

- Section 1: Seicento Venice.....172
 - The Gift of a Velvet with Embroidered Annunciation Scene.....173
 - Gabriele Caliari's Painting: *Doge Marino Grimani Receiving the Gifts of the Persian Ambassador* and a Case Study of a Customized Safavid Gift of Embroidered Silk181
 - Safavid Gifts of textile: the 1622 Mission to Venice.....198
- Section 2: Seicento Florence.....202
 - The Embassy of Anthony Shirley and Husayn `Ali Beg Bāyāt..... 204
 - Thirty-Two Boxes of Gifts.....213
 - The Book of "Mulla Rum": Masnavi-e Ma'navi.....217
 - Human Agents Provoking a Reciprocal Recognition.....219
 - 1609: Robert Shirley and His Persian Mission to Europe..... 229
 - Shift of Power in Tuscany and Policies of Alliance with Persia.....233
 - Shah Abbas's Gifts.....238
 - The *Maṭnawīye Ma'nawī*.....239
- Section 3: Seicento Rome.....245
 - The Fresco Cycle of the Church of Sant'Onofrio.....245
 - Representation of Persians in Sala Clementina.....249
 - Giovanni Orlando's Engraving of Pope Paul V Receiving the Persian Embassy255
 - Pope Paul V Receiving the Persians: Giovanni Battista Ricci's Fresco in Sala Paolina, Vatican Library.....259
 - Papal Commissions of Persians' Portraits.....261

- 1609: Luca Ciamberlano's Engraving of the Persian Mission266
- The Gifts.....272
- Palazzo Quirinale: Representations of Shahs Abbas's Envoys in Sala Regia...275
- Cappella Paolina Borghese: Paul V Receiving the Persian Ambassadors..... 279
- Anthony van Dyck's Double Portraits of Robert Shirley and Lady Theresa...280

Chapter 5: **285**

“Conclusion: Visual Evidence in Final Dialogue with the Textual History, the Rise and Fall of a Muslim Ally in the Early Modern Italian Perception”

Maps and Illustrations **305**

Appendices **394**

Bibliography **402**

List of Images and Page References:

Map 1) Aq Qoyunlu Map.....3

Map 2) Timurid Empire Map.....3

Map 3) Safavid Empire Map.....5

Fig 1, ch.2, sec.1..... 23

Benozzo Gozzoli, *Adoration of the Magi*, 1459-60 Fresco. Palazzo Medici Riccardi, Florence.

Fig 2, ch.2, sec.1..... 27

The Three Magi, mosaics, completed in 565 AD, Basilica of Sant' Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna, Italy.

Fig 3, ch.2, sec.1.....30

Adoration of the Magi in The Menologion of Basil II (illuminated manuscript), 976. Vatican.

Fig 4, ch.2, sec.1.....31

Gentile da Fabriano, *Adoration of the Magi*, 1423, Tempera on panel, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

Fig 5, ch.2, sec.1.....32

Workshop of Apollonio di Giovanni di Tomaso, *Trebizond Cassone*, ca. 1460. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Fig 6, ch.2, sec.1.....33

Pisanello, *St George and the Princess of Trebizond*, 1436-38 Fresco, Pellegrini Chapel, Sant'Anastasia, Verona

Fig 7, ch.2, sec.1.....34

Felice Feliciano, *Pronostico o vero prophetia de la venuta del Turcho*, MS. TYP. 157, fol. 96 v. 1471-72.

Fig 8, ch.2, sec.1.....38

Bertoldo di Giovanni, *Mehmed II's Medal*, 1480, low tin bronze, Galleria Estense, Modena (9105).

Fig 1, Ch.2, Sec.2.....40

Turquoise Glass Bowl, Glass, Silver-Gilt, cloisonné Enamel, Stone. Glass: Persia (Iran) 9th century. Enamel: Byzantium 11th century. Plaques and Filigree Work: Venice reused Byzantine fragments and 15th century filigree work. H:60 D: 186 mm. Treasury of San Marco, Venice.

Fig 2, Ch.2, Sec.2.....49

Chalice with Hares, Glass, Silver-Gilt, Enamel, Pearls, Stones. Cup: Islamic, 8th-9th century. Metalwork: Byzantine, 11th century.

Fig 3, Ch.2, Sec.2.....52

Aubert de La Mottraye, drawing of the Turquoise Bowl at San Marco, in *Voyages en Europe, Asie et Afrique*, La Haye, 1727, page. 72.

Fig 1, Ch.2, Sec.3.....62

Pinturicchio, *Pope Pius II Arrives in Ancona*, 1502-08, Fresco, Piccolomini Library, Duomo, Siena.

Fig 2, Ch.2, Sec.3.....64

Workshop of Gentile Bellini, *Standing Turk*, late fifteenth century, pen in brown ink, 29.9 x 20.3 cm, Musée de Louvre, Paris, 465

Fig 3, Ch.2, Sec.3.....67

Persian Painting (Turkman), *Divan of Hidayat*, 883 H. / AD 1478. Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, Republic of Ireland (Manuscript 401).

Fig 4, Ch.2, Sec.3.....68

Persian Painting, Aq Qoyunlu dynasty, Turkmen period, late 15th century, repainted in India. Now at Smithsonian Institution. Accession Number: F1907.275.

Fig 5, Ch.2, Sec.3.....64, 72

Pinturicchio, *St Catherine's Disputation*, 1492-94, Fresco with gold leaf, Palazzi Pontifici, Vatican

Fig 6, Ch.2, Sec.3.....68

Tazza Farnese, 2nd century B.C., Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli

Fig 7, Ch.2, Sec.3.....85

Mohammed-i Khayyām, now in Collection of Islamic Paintings (4 Mueqqa' volumes), Staatsbibliothek, Berlin.

Fig 1, Ch.2, Sec.4.....94

Justus of Ghent, *The Institution of the Eucharist*, 1473-75, oil on wood. Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Urbino.

Fig 2, ch.2, Sec.4.....96

Paolo Uccello, *Miracle of the Desecrated Host* (predella paintings), 1465-69. Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Urbino.

Fig 3, Ch.2, Sec.4.....99

Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Urb.lat.410 fol. 1r.

Fig 4, ch.2, Sec.4.....99

The Cyrus Cylinder, ca. 539 B.C. Babylonia. The British Museum.

Fig 5, ch.2, Sec.4.....100, 108

Pedro Berruguete, *Portrait of Federico da Montefeltro and his Son*, Guidubaldo, 1480-81
Oil on panel, Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Urbino

Fig 6, ch.2, Sec.4.....104

Francesco di Giorgio Martini (?). Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Manuscript (Urb. lat. 508) Cristoforo Landino: *Disputationes camaldulenses*, 1472-73.

Fig 7, ch.2, Sec.4.....106

Baysunghur ibn Shahrukh Seated in a Garden, from a *Kalila u Dimna* of Nizamuddin Abdu'l-Ma'ali Nasrullah, Herat, dated Muharram 833 (October 1429).

Fig 1, Ch.3, sec.1.....114

Shah Esmā'īl I coin, 908-23 H./ Silver. Obv: Shi'a Shahada, in the margin: names of twelve Shi'a imams

Fig 2a-b, Ch.3, Sec.3.....122

Fig 2a) Archivio Stato di Venezia (ASV), S. R.M, S. LXXXIII.9. Shah Tahmasp I to Doge Gritti, 1539.

Fig 2b) ASV, S.R.M. S. LXXXIII.1. Shah Tahmasp I to Doge Gritti, 1540.

Fig 1, Ch.3, Sec.2.....129

Grande Vangelo, Ms.Or.81 (and Or. 399), Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana in Florence.

Fig 1, Ch.3, Sec.3.....152

Sipar (rotella), Late-Sixteenth Century. Gold damascened steel, Indian cane, silk, mother-of-pearl, leather and velvet, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence

Fig 2, Ch.3, Sec.3.....154

ASF, Miscellanea Medicea, 719, fol. 3. 1631

Fig 3a-b, Ch.3, Sec. 3.....159, 220

Fig 3a) ASF, Archivio mediceo del Principato, 4274a, X c.4.

Fig 3b) ASF, AMP 4274a, X c.4 (reverse), Shah Abbas Stamp 999/ 1590

Fig 4a-b, Ch.3, Sec.3.....159

Fig 4a) ASF, AMP 4274a, ins. VI. 28.

Fig 4b) ASF, MP 4274a, ins. VI, 28 (reverse), Shah Abbas Stamp 1016/1608

Fig 5, Ch.3, Sec.3.....161

ASF, Miscellanea Medicea 719, documenti archivi alla storia della Stamperia Orientale Medicea

Fig 6, Ch.3, Sec.3.....162

Caravaggio, *Medusa*, oil on canvas applied on wooden shield, 1595-98, Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy

Fig 7, Ch.3, Sec.3.....164

ASF, Guardaroba Medicea 204, fol. 18. 1598

Fig 8, Ch.3, Sec.3.....166

Tray, mother of pearl inlay, Gujarat, late-16th-early-17th century, Aga Khan Museum, Toronto

Fig 9, Ch.3, Sec.3.....169

Benvenuto Cellini, *Perseus with the Head of Medusa*, bronze, 1554, Loggia dei Lanzi, Florence

Fig 1, Ch.4, Sec.1.....175

ASV, Fasc. Persia, Doc. 3, fol.26 (ex.XII.8.26) Šāh Abbās al doge (Persiano copia)

Fig 2, Ch.4, Sec.1.....181

ASV, Firmani Persiani, no. 4, Firmano di Abbās portato di Fathi Bey (no di catalogo 99)

Fig 3, Ch.4, Sec.1.....181, 189

Gabriele Calviari, *Il Doge Marino Grimani riceve I doni degli ambasciatori persiani nel 1603*, oil on canvas, 367 x 527 cm, Venezia, Palazzo Ducale, Sala delle Quattro Porte

Fig 4, Ch.4, Sec.1.....183

Silk Velvet with the figures of the Virgin Mary and Christ Child, Persia, Isfahan, late 16th and early 17th century, Venezia, Museo di Palazzo Mocenigo, CI. XXII, II.37

Fig 5, Ch.4, Sec.1.....187

Ebn Ḥosām's *Ḳāvarān-nāma* (a Persian illustrated manuscript), Angel Gabriel invites Prophet Muhammad to observe the feats of 'Ali, illustrations by *Ḍokā'* Anvari, 830 H./1425-26, Tehran Museum of Decorative Arts and Golestān Palace Library (MS 5750).

Fig 6, Ch.4, Sec.1..... 192

ASV, Fasc. Persia, Doc. 8, no. 25 (ex. XII.8.25) Persiano-copia
 Fig 7, Ch.4, Sec.1.....196
 ASF, Carte Strozziene, Prima Serie, fol. 64
 Fig 8, Ch.4, Sec.1.....199
 ASV, Fasc. Persia, doc. 19
 Fig 1, Ch.4, Sec.2.....217
 The book of “Mulla Rum” (Maṭnawīye Ma'nawī), CI. III. 49, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Florence
 Fig 2, Ch.4, Sec.2.....217
 The book of “Mulla Rum” (sarlowh/frontispiece), CI. III. 49, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Florence
 Fig 3, Ch. 4, Sec.2.....217
 The book of “Mulla Rum” (cover), gilded leather, CI. III. 49, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Florence
 Fig 4, Ch.4, Sec.2.....160, 220
 ASF, MP 4274a, ins. VI, C. 28.
 Fig 5, Ch.4, Sec.2.....227
 ASF, MP 4274a, ins. X, C.6
 Fig 6, Ch.4, Sec.2.....240
 The book of “Mulla Rum” (fol. 309r), CI. III. 49, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Florence
 Fig 1, Ch.4, Sec.3.....245
 Sant'Onofrio Cloister fresco cycle, Episode I, 1600, Rome
 Fig 2, Ch.4, Sec.3.....246
 Sant'Onofrio Cloister fresco cycle, Episode II, 1600, Rome
 Fig 3, Ch.4, Sec.3.....246
 Sant'Onofrio Cloister fresco cycle, Episode III, 1600, Rome
 Fig 4, Ch.4, Sec.3.....247
 Sant'Onofrio Cloister fresco cycle, Episode IV, 1600, Rome
 Fig 5, Ch.4, Sec.3.....249

Giovanni and Cherubino Alberti, *Battesimo di san Clemente* (Baptism of St. Clement), 1601, Sala Clementina, Palazzo Apostolico Vaticano.

Fig 6a-b-c, Ch.4, Sec.3.....190, 250

Biblioteca del Museo Correr, Gli abiti de veneziani di quasi ogni età con diligenza raccolti e dipinti nel secolo XVIII, seconda metà “Ambasciadore Persiano,” (a) “Ambasciadore Turco,” (b) “Ambasciadore del soldano di Egitto” (c).

Fig 7, Ch.4, Sec.3.....251

Vittore Carpaccio, *Baptism of the Selenites* tempera, 1507, The Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni (Venice).

Fig 8, Ch.4, Sec.3.....251

Titian, *Allegory of the Battle of Lepanto*, Oil on canvas, 1571-75. Museo del Prado, Madrid

Fig 9, Ch.4, Sec.3.....252

Ligozzi, *The Return of the Knights of Santo Stefano from the Battle of Lepanto*, 1604-14, oil on canvas, Church of Santo Stefano dei Cavalieri, Pisa.

Fig 10, Ch.4, Sec.3.....253

Ægidius Sadeler II, “*Cuchein Olli Beag*,” 1601, engraving, Pargue.

Fig 11, Ch.4, Sec.3.....255

Giovanni Orlando, *Ali Goli Bek Mordar the Ambassador of Persia*, 1609, engraving. Ms. 1214, fold, 84r. Biblioteca Angelica, Roma.

Fig 12, Ch.4, Sec.3.....255, 259

G. B. Ricci, *Ali Goli Bek Mordar the Ambassador of Persia*, 1611, fresco, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Rome.

Fig 13, Ch.4, Sec.3.....257

Ali Goli Bek Mordar (1609). Biblioteca del Museo Correr, Venezia. MS.I. No. 247 (MS.Cigogna 2727)

Fig 14, Ch.4, Sec.3.....262

Dominicus Custos, *Anthony Sherley*, 1601, engraving, Biblioteca del Museo Correr, Venezia. E 587.

Fig 15, Ch.4, Sec.3.....263

Dominicus Custos, *Shāh Abbās*, engraving, Biblioteca del Museo Correr, Venezia. E 587.

Fig 16, Ch.4, Sec.3.....263

Guido Reni, *Shāh Abbās*, ink-wash, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi, Fondo Santarelli 3459 S.

Fig 17, Ch.4, Sec.3.....264

Bishn Das, *Shāh Abbās*, 1618. Opaque watercolor and gold on paper. The British Museum.

Fig 18, Ch.4, Sec.3.....265

Luca Ciamberlano, *Ali Goli Bek Mordar* (on the right in the lower two images), 1609. engraving, Gabinetto Nazionale delle Stampe, Rome (34.H.24, inv. 31538).

Fig 19, Ch.4, Sec.3.....266

Luca Ciamberlano, Uffizi, Gabinetto Disegni e Stame, Fondo Santarelli 3472 S.

Fig 20, Ch.4, Sec.3.....269, 276

Robert Sherley, engraving. Biblioteca Angelica, Rome, Ms. 1214, f. 75r.

Fig 21, Ch.4, Sec.3.....275

Giovanni Lanfranco and his workshop (Agostino Tassi), *Persian Embassy (Aligholi Beyg) Visiting Pope Paul V* (1609), fresco 1615-1616, Sala dei Corazzieri, Palazzo del Quirinale, Rome.

Fig 22, Ch.4, Sec.3.....276

Carlo Saraceni, *Robert Sherley*, fresco 1615-1616, Sala dei Corazzieri, Palazzo del Quirinale, Rome.

Fig 23, Ch.4, Sec.3.....276

Matthias Greuter, *Robert Sherley*, 1609, engraving. British Museum.

Fig 24, Ch.4, Sec.3.....277

Khāje Safar Azaria, fresco 1615-1616, Sala dei Corazzieri, Palazzo del Quirinale, Rome

Fig 25, Ch.4, Sec.3.....279

Flaminio Ponzio, *Cappella Paolina Borghese*, Basilica S. Maria Maggiore in Rome.

Fig 26, Ch.4, Sec.3.....279

Cristoforo Stati, *Persians at the Court of Paul V*, 1614, white marble, Cappella Paolina Borghese, Basilica S. Maria Maggiore in Rome.

Fig 27, Ch.4, Sec.3.....280

Guido Reni, *La vittoria di Eraclio sopra Chosroes di Persia* (Victory of Heraclius over Khosrow of Persia), 1613, Cappella Paolina Borghese, Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore, Roma.

Fig 28, Ch.4, Sec.3.....281

Anthony van Dyck, *Robert Sherley*, 1622, National Trust, UK.

Fig 29, Ch.4, Sec.3.....281

Sir Anthony Van Dyck, *Lady Sherley*, Oil on canvas, 1622, Rome

List of Human Agents and Missionaries:

Angelo Gradenigo: a Venetian merchant-envoy from Shāh Abbās to Venice in 1602.

Anthony Shirley (d.1635): older brother of Robert Shirley. Arrived at the court of Shah Abbas in 1599 and led the first seventeenth-century Persian mission to Europe in 1601, which was unsuccessful and he never returned to Persia.

Antonio de Gouvea (d.1628): an Augustinian missionary, who delivered Philip III's letter to Shāh Abbās in 1608.

Asad Beyg (Efet Beg in Venetian chronicles): the Safavid envoy, who was received by Doge Marino Grimani in June 1600.

Bartolomeo Contarini: Venetian agent in Alexandria, who translated one Shah Isma'il's letters in 1509, addressed to the "Sultan of Venice."

Catherino Zeno (b.1450): Venetian envoy at the court of Uzun Hasan in 1471.

Dengiz Beg Rumlu (d.1613): Shah Abbas's Turkman courtier who was dispatched to Philip III in 1608 to pursue the Shah's anti-Ottoman military alliance and negotiate the Persian silk trade through Portuguese vassals from Hormuz to Europe.

Despina Khatun (d.1478): Uzun Hasan's Christian wife from Komnenos ruling family of Trebizond. They married in 1458. She was also a sister to Catherino Zeno's wife.

Don Robert Shirley (d.1628): An Englishman. Led at least three major Safavid missions in Europe between 1609 and 1622.

Emāmqolī Khān (d.1632): the militant governor of Fars and Bahrain under whose command, the Safavid army expelled the Portuguese from their footholds and recaptured ports and Islands of Bahrain in the Persian Gulf in 1601.

Fakhr ad-Din II (d.1635): rebellious emir of Lebanon. He sheltered at the court of Medici from 1613 to 1615

Fazli Beg: Shah Abbas's envoy to the Medici court of Tuscany in 1588-90.

Francesco da Costa and **Diego de Miranda**: were two Portuguese residents of Goa who arrived at the Safavid court as papal ambassadors with letters of introduction imparted by the pope's nephew and Secretary of State, Cardinal Cinzio Aldobrandini.

Georg Krieger: Corai's secretary and a companion of Fazli Beg

Giambulad (d.1608): a rebellious emir of Aleppo. He was crushed by the Ottomans in 1608.

Giovanni Battista Vecchietti (1552-1619): also known as "Vecchietti Persiano," led a mission to Persia as the Papal envoy and Cardinal Ferdinando's book agent for the Medici Oriental Press, between 1584 and 1588. He led an embassy to the King of Spain to negotiate a military alliance with Tuscany against the Ottomans in southern ports of Persia.

Guidubaldo Brancadoro: next to Vecchietti, he was another significant figure in Robert Shirley's public reception at the Court of Cosimo II. He was the Cavalier of the Order of Santo Stefano since 1607 and the admiral since 1609.

Haji Mohammad: Uzun Hasan's emissary in Venice in September 1472.

Husayn `Ali Beyg Bāyāt: together with Anthony Shirley led the mission of 1601 to Europe.

Jahangir (r.1444-1453): Uzun Hasan's brother and predecessor

Khāje Shahsavār and Khāje `Alā' ad-Dīn: Safavid silk merchants in Venice in 1613

khāje Shāhvār, Hāji Avaz Tabrizi, and Emād: the Safavid envoys to Doge Marino Grimani in 1602.

Khāwje Muhammad Tabrizi: Shah Mohammad's envoy in Venice in 1580.

Khāwje Safar Ğulāwhī: Shah Abbas's Armenian ambassador to the Papacy, Venice, and Florence in 1610 to recover some purchased commodities and clothes that belonged to Shāh Abbās but were sequestered in Venice.

Khayr al-Din Chavush: an Ottoman ambassador at the court of Shah Abbas in 1609, negotiating a peace treaty with the Safavid court.

Maqsud Khān and Ibrāhim Khān: Shah Mohammad's envoys to the Ottoman Sultan Murad III in 1580 and 1582, respectively.

Marino Sanudo (d.1536): Venetian diarist.

Michelagnolo Corai: a Syrian-born Venetian diplomat. By 1608, he had been assigned as the Medici ambassador in Persia, and he remained at the Safavid court for five years. Prior to that, he was the Medici ambassador in Aleppo (January 1607-1608).

Michele Membrè (d.1594): Venetian amabassador to Shah Tahmasp I Safavi in 1539

Muhammad Amin Beg and **Fathi Beyg**: led the Safavid mission of March 1603 to Venice. The same mission represented by Gabriele Caliari in Palazzo Ducale Venice.

Pietro Zen: Venetian consul in Damascus, who translated a letter of Shah Isma'il to Doge Leonardo Loredano.

Shah Isma'il I (r.1501-1524): the founder of the Safavid dynasty in Persia in 1501

Shah Mohammad Khodābandeh (r.1578-1587): fourth Safavid Shah. In 1586 wrote a letter to the Pope addressing him the “The Padishah of Rome.”

Shahsavār (Sassuar or Xwāje Šāhsavār in Venetian chronicles) and **Hāji Avaz-e Tabrizi** (agi Aivas da Tauris): Safavid merchant-envoys in Venice in 1622.

Shaikh Ṣafī-al-Dīn Eshāq Ardabīlī (d.1334), the founder of the dervish order of Sufis (1301) that later evolved into the Safavid imperium in 1501

Timur (r.1370-1405): also known as Tamerlane, Timir Lenk, and Timur the Lame. He was a Turco-Mongolian conqueror and the founder of Timurid Empire (1370-1507). His reign stretched from Central Asia to modern-day Iran, Turkey, Syria, and Egypt. He defeated the Ottoman Bayezid I in 1402.

Uruch Beg: one of the Persian *Qūrchīs* (cavalrymen) in the Shirley-Bāyāt embassy

Uzun Ḥasan (r.1453-1478): The Turkman monarch of the Aq Qoyunlu confederation, who ruled eastern Anatolia and western Persia. He was the grandfather of the founder of the Safavid Empire, Shah Isma'il I.

Vicenzo degli Alessandri (d.1595): Venetian arrived secretly in Persia in July 1572. Spent two year at the court of Shah Tahmasp, but was never received by the Shah.

Yahya (d.1649): the younger brother of Mehmed III (r.1595-1603) who claimed the Ottoman throne. In 1609, he entered Cosimo II de' Medici's court to seek his support to dethrone Sultan Ahmed I

Preface

In *The Art of Embassy* (2016), the two art historians Nancy Um and Leah R. Clark refer to the early modernist Anthony Colantuono's *The Mute Diplomat* on the mitigating role of oil paintings and sculptures in European diplomatic relations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, to suggest that:

Art and material objects should be understood as central to the project of early modern diplomacy, rather than being dismissed as frivolous items subject to the depoliticized whims of collectors. As Colantuono has shown, narrative images were complex go-betweens that worked effectively because they could suggest divergent meanings or varied intentions to their givers and receivers, while deftly operating within the language of cross-cultural politesse.¹

This dissertation responds to their call by drawing attention to the levels of meanings in gifts and the human agents as they travelled in an extended shuttle of cross-cultural encounters between Persia and various centers in the Italian peninsula, during the early modern period.² The succeeding narrative is on gift-exchange in the Mediterranean, in the

¹ Nancy Um and Leah R. Clark, "Introduction The Art of Embassy: Situating Objects and Images in the Early Modern Diplomatic Encounter," *Journal of Early Modern History* 20, no. 1 (January 26, 2016): 3–18, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700658-12342487>; Anthony Colantuono, "The Mute Diplomat: Theorizing the Role of Images in Seventeenth-Century Political Negotiations," ed. Elizabeth Cropper, *Diplomacy of Art: Artistic Creation and Politics in Seicento Italy*, 2000, 51–76; Elisabeth Cropper, ed., *The Diplomacy of Art: Artistic Creation and Politics in Seicento Italy: Papers of a Colloquium Held at the Villa Spelman, Florence, 1998* (Milano: Nuova Alfa, 2000); For more publications (among others) on situating objects within early modern diplomacy, Cfr. J Watkins, "Toward a New Diplomatic History of Medieval and Early Modern Europe," *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*. 38, no. 1 (2008): 1–14; Daniel Goffman, "Negotiating with the Renaissance State: The Ottoman Empire and the New Diplomacy," in *The Early Modern Ottomans: Remapping the Empire*, ed. Virginia H Aksan (Cambridge, 2007), 61–74; Heiko Droste, "Diplomacy as a Means of Cultural Transfer in Early Modern Times The Swedish Evidence," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 31, no. 2 (2006): 144–50; Leah R Clark, "Transient Possessions: Circulation, Replication, and Transmission of Gems and Jewels in Quattrocento Italy," *Journal of Early Modern History*., 2011, 185–221; Sinem Casale, "A Peace for a Prince: The Reception of a Safavid Child Hostage at the Ottoman Court," *Journal of Early Modern History*., no. 1 (2016): 39–62.

² The political unification and national independence of Italy (*il Risorgimento*) fully materialized by 1861. Prior to that, independent city-states and courts governed the Italian peninsula. For the geographical designation of Persia between 1453 and 1630, Cfr. Map 1 and Map 3 of this manuscript.

context of the dynamic power struggles between the early modern Muslim courts and their rivalries over forging new alliances with Europe. It offers a theorized investigation primarily on the salient role of objects in shaping and reshaping the perceptions of Persian-Italian coalitions in various centers of today's Italy, namely Florence, Rome, and Venice, within intense diplomatic correspondence over developing alliances to curtail a common enemy, the Porte. It brings to light new aspects in the convoluted visual history of the early modern Muslim-Christian relations, by shifting the focus to an anti-Muslim movement, launched by the papacy, yet endorsed by the Muslim royalties of Persia, against the Sunni Ottomans.³

The chronology begins with the fall of Constantinople to Mehmed II in 1453, when the exigency recognized by the Europeans, furthermost by the papacy, of mustering another crusade overlapped with the aggressive anti-Ottoman sentiments and interests of the ruling houses of Persia. These drives were the prelude to the establishment of transcultural alliances with the goal to crush the mutual enemy. The ensuing cultural encounters opened up ways to communicate and project personal ambitions via diverse means, ranging from exchanging embassies accompanied by costly and customized gifts to the religious conversion of human agents in order to reinforce the commitments. Concurrently, an intricate network of commercial relations emerged from those transcultural exchanges that immensely contributed to the eventual metamorphosis of those political ties into trading partnerships, within the first decades of the seventeenth century; hence, the *terminus ad quem* of this thesis (1630).

³ The principal points of divisions in Islamic theological schools are explained in chapter 1 of this dissertation, footnotes no. 5 and no. 16.

The database in this analysis is gleaned from multilingual primary and secondary resources in Italy, Iran, and the United States. It contextualizes the provenance and range of meanings of a select number of case studies that best demonstrate the contextual values of the cross-cultural relationships between diplomatic objects and early modern affiliations. It considers Persia as the singular dispatcher of the gifts to theorize the central role of objects in forging transcultural alliances, within the scope of a dissertation.⁴ Moreover, this thesis focuses investigation on the primary textual and visual material preserved in Italian archives, treasuries, and collections, and concludes with the *seicento* development of international commerce. In looking at the nature of gift-objects and human agents that mediated between Persia and the particular Italian centers, the thesis engages with the discourses on agency and material culture to formulate the efficacy of knowledge of allegories and codes in visual communications between courts of disparate cultures. Through a comprehensive examination of the shape-shifts in the nature of objects in parallel to human conversions, this research narrates a rhetoric of cross-cultural exchange that laid the foundation of the global commerce of the seventeenth century, which, as inferred here, sprang from previous forms of gift giving.

Bridging a critical period in the panorama of Muslim-Christian relations, this thesis evaluates the underlying politics of how visual media served various agendas in an intercultural net of exchanges. It pushes the boundaries of the traditional conception of gifts as simply vehicles that facilitate human relations and structure a framework for my extended research project that expands to include culturally heterogeneous patrons and transporters of diplomatic objects in the early modern world. It explores the unexpected

phenomenon that a number of these diplomatic emissaries converted to Christianity, just as the gift-objects they carried, transmuted from their Islamic origins into objects of Christian display. As such, the present thesis nurtures my broader inquiry that extends to embassies and objects sent in reciprocation by the Italian centers to Persia, to analyze an integral dossier of the period's diplomatic mechanisms triggered by the anti-Ottoman politics within the constellation of early modern relations.

This dissertation is a prelude to my future scholarship that engages more comprehensively with the agents and objects of diplomacy that travelled reciprocally between Persia and the various Italian courts and states of the period, with comparative case studies in other centers in the region, including the Porte. It expands to explore the complex dynamics of categorizing specific sorts of materials as “desirable” in those cultural encounters and the agency of such materials in the self-fashioning of those early modern givers and receivers. As such, it examines the nuance that particular features including rarity, costliness, and laborious transitions brought to the afterlife of those relocated objects in their public and private receptions, particularly, the circumstances in which they were brought out to show off to visitors in their new settings.

In the full spectacle of my research project, a corpus of archival, textual, and visual material in Islamic repositories and Italian holdings are integrated. Naturally, my research requires extensive investigation in Iranian collections; nonetheless, the political insecurities of the Islamic Republic and its hostile attitude toward every sort of independent data collecting, forces me (and other scholars) to investigate instead alternative Islamic treasuries to compensate for this lamentable impediment to scholarly

progress.⁵ This part of my outlined inquiry lays beyond the scope and time limits of this dissertation; thus, appears on the itinerary of my future investigations.

The present thesis outlines a visual and material approach to investigate cross-cultural politesse of the early modern world. It studies the diplomatic dialects in which gifts, as well as human agents, were instrumental in shaping the associations. However, cultural divergences were another variable in the intricate web of early modern relations and affiliations. The present research lays the foundation to further explore that volatile dimension of cross-cultural communications in which the gifts failed to fulfill their missions or were “lost in translation.”⁶ In light of the transformative processes of translocation across cultures, this study expands to investigate the dynamics of the politico-cultural interests of the patrons and the recipients in revaluation and repurposing of the travelling objects. This will allow me to delve more intimately into the question of hierarchies in material culture of the diverse centers studied here. The ultimate goal is to move away from the traditional classification of gifts as pleasant objects that “connect individuals,” elaborated in this thesis, to engage further with the human aspects of reactions to objects. This brings to light a stronger attention to agency in translocation and translational ruptures in such procedures.⁷

⁵ Among the alternative Islamic archives wherein I will pursue my research are the Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (The Ottoman State Archives) and the Topkapı Palace Museum Archive.

⁶ For an exemplary study on “failed” gifts, Cfr. Sinem Casale, “A Peace for a Prince: The Reception of a Safavid Child Hostage at the Ottoman Court,” *Journal of Early Modern History*, no. 1 (2016): 39–62.

⁷ To this end, the two instrumental exhibition catalogues and publications that follow are frequently addressed: Linda Komaroff, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, eds., *Gifts of the Sultan: The Arts of Giving at the Islamic Courts*, 1st ed (Los Angeles) : New Haven [Conn.: Los Angeles County Museum of Art ; Yale University Press, 2011]; Elisa Gagliardi Mangilli, Ciampiero Bellingeri, and Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia, eds., *I doni di Shah Abbas il Grande alla Serenissima: relazioni diplomatiche tra la Repubblica di Venezia e la Persia Safavide ; [mostra ; Venezia, Palazzo Ducale, 28 settembre 2013 - 12 gennaio 2014]* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2013); Daniela Bleichmar and Meredith Martin, eds., *Objects in Motion in the Early Modern World*, Art History Book Series (Chichester, West

The kernels of gendered narrative extant in the dissertation, opens up new visions in the cosmopolitan visual history of the period. By shedding light on the mediating roles of the two influential consorts, namely Theodora Komnena (Despina Khatun), the Byzantine-Greek spouse of Uzun Hasan, and Theresa Sampsonia, the Circassian wife of the English ambassador of the Safavid court, the following narrative draws parallel between hierarchies of diplomacy in various cultures. It, as well, sets the stage for further elaboration on the peculiarities and strategies that authorized those unfairly overlooked women (among others) to operate within the broader network generated by their male partners and explore the agency of women in shaping the panoramic history of transcultural communications. It, thus, aims to offer a new look into the particular moments of this history, embodied in the two Christian women who represented a Muslim court to Europe.

In a broader perspective, this research addresses various aspects in the art history and material culture of a wide array of gift-objects, as well as the agency of individuals who abetted the itineraries of those objects. The transformative processes that accrue meanings to gifts so that their recipient is either officially recognized or subtly dismissed, is extensively explored in this thesis and will continue to pulsate in my future scholarship. In the upcoming publications, I move beyond the dissertation's scope to engage with the ritual and cultural commonalities and divergences of the patrons and recipients reciprocally, and elaborate a range of other meanings that gift-exchange may transmit. In order to emphasize my interpretations of Persian gift-giving, I draw more on

Sussex ; Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, Association of Arts Historians, 2016); Sinem Arcak Casale, "Gifts in Motion: Ottoman-Safavid Cultural Exchange, 1501-1618" (University of Minnesota, 2012).

the conventions of contemporary Ottoman gift-giving to the Italian centers. Within the intrinsic scope of a doctoral thesis, this framework aims to lay the foundation for multiple publications that will enrich our understanding of the complexities of the early modern *realpolitik*.

Chapter-1

“Introduction: The Overtures of a Muslim Ally: Diplomatic Gifts from Persia to Italy (1453-1630)”

The numerous collections of “Islamic Art” around the world categorize a wide array of material objects based on their point of origin, often plotted under the broad title of the “Muslim World.” In the last two decades, several exhibitions in Europe and America established new sets of classifications for these objects by looking at the pathways through which they travelled beyond their Islamic sphere.⁸ Meanwhile, publications following those exhibitions and a number of other art historical analyses that have examined the distinct visual aesthetics of the objects within and beyond their Islamic cultural boundaries have brought nuance to our understanding of agency in Islamic artistic expressions.⁹ The majority of these studies investigate the provenance,

⁸ For the exhibition catalogues, Cfr. Stefano Carboni, Institut du monde arabe (France), and Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.), eds., *Venice and the Islamic World, 828-1797*, English ed (New York : New Haven [Conn.]: Metropolitan Museum of Art ; Yale University Press, 2007); Linda Komaroff, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, eds., *Gifts of the Sultan: The Arts of Giving at the Islamic Courts*, 1st ed (Los Angeles) : New Haven [Conn.: Los Angeles County Museum of Art ; Yale University Press, 2011); Giovanni Curatola, *Islamic Art and Florence. From the Medici to the 20th Century*. (Firenze: Giunti Gruppo Editoriale, 2018); Alessandro Bruschettini, *Il Montefeltro e l'oriente islamico: Urbino 1430-1550: il Palazzo Ducale tra occidente e oriente*. (Genova: Sagep, 2018).

⁹ For other publications on Islamic objects in European settings, Cfr. Avinoam Shalem, “New Evidence for the History of the Turquoise Glass Bowl in the Treasury of San Marco,” *Persica* 15 (95 1993): 91–94; Victoria and Albert Museum and Anna Contadini, eds., *Fatimid Art at the Victoria and Albert Museum* (London: V&A Publications, 1998); Anna Contadini, Charles Burnett, and Warburg Institute, eds., *Islam and the Italian Renaissance*, Warburg Institute Colloquia 5 (London: The Warburg Institute, University of London, 1999); Eva R. Hoffman, “Pathways of Portability: Islamic and Christian Interchange from the Tenth to the Twelfth Century,” *Art History* 24, no. 1 (March 2001): 17–50; Anna Contadini and Claire Norton, eds., *The Renaissance and the Ottoman World* (Farnham, Surrey, UK ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013); Sinem Arcaç Casale, “The Persian Madonna and Child: Commodified Gifts between Diplomacy and Armed Struggle,” *Art History* 38, no. 4 (September 2015): 636–51; Maurizio Arfaio, Marta Caroscio, and Medici Archive Project, eds., *The Grand Ducal Medici and the Levant: Material Culture, Diplomacy, and Imagery in the Early Modern Mediterranean*, The Medici Archive Project Series 3 (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2016); Marco Merlo, “Islamic Weapons in the Medici Armories,” *Islam e Firenze: Arte e collezionismo dai Medici al Novecento*, 2018, 153–70; Leah R. Clark, *Collecting Art in the Italian Renaissance Court: Objects and Exchanges*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2018).

craftsmanship, and cultural modifications of the Islamic objects circulating in Europe. Less attention has been paid to the range of connotations that these objects accrued when translocated from the various centers of the Muslim lands. This thesis contributes to the discourse on cultural exchange via visual material and explores the significance of objects in mediating political and cultural agencies.¹⁰ It draws attention to the power dynamics between the Muslim dynasties of the early modern world and Europe by focusing on the visual documents in Italy in the context of the emergence of an anti-Ottoman alliance between several Italian centers and Persia, amid the vicissitudes in Persian-Ottoman relations, from 1453 to 1630.¹¹

Historical Background:

In the aftermath of the fall of Constantinople to Mehmet II (r.1451-1481) in 1453, the papacy spearheaded a Christian league, in order to thwart the territorial spread and growing political influence of this Sunni Muslim force.¹² The principal ambition of the Ottomans was to form a grand caliphate by annexing all the other Sunni territories, over which the Ottoman Sultan had already claimed superiority, and further, converting conquered lands around the globe.¹³ On the eastern borders of the Ottoman jurisdiction in

¹⁰ For anthropological approaches to the social context of visual arts, Cfr. Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press, 1998); Carl Knappett, *Thinking through Material Culture: An Interdisciplinary Perspective* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

¹¹ This dissertation focuses exclusively on the visual evidence regarding the Perso-Italian relations in Italy. However, the missions' flow was both ways and precious gifts also entered Persia through Italian/European embassies. This interactive exchange between Persia and Italy will be studied comprehensively in the near future, when this dissertation turns into a book.

¹² Sunnism (Sunni) term derives from *sunnah* (traditional habits modeled after prophet Muhammad) referring to the doctrines and practices of *ahl as-sunnah* (the Sunni community), a large denomination of Islam. For the theological dimensions of this Islamic school, see footnote no. 16.

¹³ The broad spectrum of Turkish ethnicity includes the people of Turkic language from central Asia through Turkey. However, in Italian primary sources, Ottomans are referred to as "Turks" (*Turco*), which was improvised by the contemporary observers. For the purpose of clarity, the Ottoman Turks will be mentioned as Ottomans throughout this dissertation.

Asia ruled Uzun Hasan (r.1453-1478) and the Turkman monarch of Diyarbakır in eastern Anatolia (Mesopotamia), another Sunni Muslim emperor, but one who sided with Europe against the Ottoman geopolitical expansion.¹⁴ [Map 1] Uzun Hasan was the successor of the throne that the Turco-Mongolian warlord Timur (r. 1370-1405) had granted his grandfather Qara Osman (r.1375-1435) in 1402 in honor of his valor in fighting alongside Timurids to crush the Ottomans in the Battle of Ankara.¹⁵ In fact, Qara Osman was only recognized as emir and leader of the Aq Qoyunlu confederation by Timur in recompense of his defiance in a war that imposed a devastating defeat on the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid I (r.1389-1402).¹⁶ The Aq Qoyunlu received power from Timur, and thereafter came to be known in European perspective as the legatee of Timur's acclaimed imperial conquests and ferocious forces, especially by the Ottoman adversaries among Europeans.¹⁷ [Map 2]

It was with this historical background that in 1456, Pope Calixtus III (r.1455-1458) extended an invitation to Qara Osman's heir, Uzun Hasan, to join the Christian league

¹⁴ Dīār Bakr (Diyarbakır) also known as Āmed, a throne granted to Uzun Hasan's grandfather by Tīmūr (Timur) in 1402. It was the capital of the *Āq Qoyunlū (Aq Qoyunlu: White Sheep) for almost seventy years.* Considering the multiplicity of non-Latin (English) names in this dissertation, I write the names with diacritics the first instance the name appears, but then without afterwards, in order to ease reading for English-speaking readers.

¹⁵ Uzun Hasan's grandfather was Baha-ud-Din Qara Yülük Osman Bey also known as Qara 'Otmān (Qara Osman) or Qara Yuluk of the Aq Qoyunlu Turkman tribe. In this dissertation, his name will be written as Qara Osman. For the historiography of Aq Qoyunlus' possession of Diyarbakır, Cfr. Walther Hinz, *Taşkāl-i daulat-i millī dar Īrān hukūmat-i Āq-Qūyunlū wa zuhūr-i daulat-i şafawī*, trans. Keykavous Jahandary (Tihṛān: Intiṣārā-i Ḥwārizmī, 1998), 166; R. Quiring-Zoche, "Āq Qoyunlū" in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, Vol. II, Fasc. 2, pp. 163-168. For the history of Aq Qoyunlu, Cfr. Abū Bakr Tehṛānī, *Ketāb-e Dīārbakrīya*, ed. N. Lugal and F. Sümer, 2 vols., Ankara, 1962-64; Faẓlallāh b. Rūzbehān Ḳonjī, *Tārīḳ-e 'ālamārā-ye Amīnī*, abridged tr.; V. Minorsky, *Persia in A.D. 1478-1490*, Royal Asiatic Society Monographs 26, London, 1957. For the Battle of Ankara, Cfr. Adam Knobler, "The Rise of Tīmūr and Western Diplomatic Response, 1390-1405," *Jroyalasiasoci Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 5, no. 3 (1995): 341-49. For the life and deeds of Timur, Cfr. Nezām-al-Din 'Alī Ṣāmī (d.1412), *Zafar-nāma* (1404). This source is edited by Felix Tauer. See F. Tauer, "Vorbericht über die Edition des Zafarnāma von Nizām Shāmī und der wichtigsten Teil der Geschichtswerke Ḥāfiz-i Abrūs," *Arhiv Orientální* 4, 1932, pp. 250-56.

¹⁶ 'Amīr (emir) meaning commander-in-chief, an Arabic courtly title.

¹⁷ Margaret Meserve, *Empires of Islam in Renaissance Historical Thought*, Harvard Historical Studies ; 158 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2008), 203-23.

against their common foe, the Ottomans.¹⁸ By 1469, Uzun Hasan had expanded his reign to Persia and Armenia and broadcast his own sentiments against the Ottoman Court by forging a military alliance with Venice, Rome, and the kingdom of Naples to confront the enemy. Uzun Hasan's Timurid lineage and his own aspirations in building an imperial dynasty reawakening Timur's golden age justify his endeavors in masterminding an alliance with Europe. The mutual desire for an anti-Ottoman union in the second half of the fifteenth century set the stage for continued coalitions between Persian polities and Italian rulers throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In fact, Uzun Hasan laid the foundation of what later became the platform for the Persians to confront the Ottomans.¹⁹ Besides developing political alliances with Europe, this Sunni Turkman ruler followed his ancestors' approach in reinforcement of his imperial claims by arranging a marriage alliance with the ruling house of his northern neighbor, the Byzantine-Greek kingdom of Trebizond.²⁰ Known as Despina Khatun (d.1478) in Uzun Hasan's court, this Christian princess established new portals of communication between Persia and the Christian states of the period, upon her liberality in practicing her faith under Uzun

¹⁸ Walther Hinz, *Taškīl-i daulat-i millī dar Īrān ḥukūmat-i Āq-Qūyunlū wa zuḥūr-i daulat-i ṣafawī*, trans. Keykavous Jahandary (Tihṙān: Intiṣārāt-i Ḥwārizmī, 1998), 43–45.

¹⁹ Ethnographically, Uzun Hasan was a Turkman figure (not Persian), whose lineage derived from a confederation of Turkic tribes, the Aq Qoyunlu, presiding over eastern Anatolia since the early fifteenth century. By the early years of 1470s in Europe, Uzun Hasan, who was previously known as the “King of Mesopotamia,” was identified as the “King of Persia,” the rightful successor of the virtuous kings of ancient Persia, and a providential power to rescue Europe from the barbarism of the infidels. For the political organization of the Aq Qoyunlus, Cfr. John E. Woods, *The Aqqayunlu: Clan, Confederation, Empire: A Study in 15th/9th Century Turko-Iranian Politics*, Studies in Middle Eastern History, no. 3 (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1976). For a brief overview, Cfr. R. Quiring-Zoche, “Āq Qoyunlū,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica* Vol. II, Fasc. 2, pp. 163-168. For Uzun Hasan's imperial claims and their reflections in cinquecento European commentaries, Cfr. Margaret Meserve, *Empires of Islam in Renaissance Historical Thought*, Cambridge (Harvard University Press, 2009), 223-231.

²⁰ Qara Osman married the daughter of Alexios III of Trebizond (r.1349-90). Osman's father, Faḫr-al-dīn Quṭlu, married Maria Komnene, sister of Alexios III.

Hasan's consent.²¹ Uzun Hasan's political savvy and his Christian wife's agency in developing Christian communities in Persia are [unjustly] disregarded in post-revolutionary Iranian curricular material and publications.²² Therefore, this dissertation begins with a chapter that addresses this less-studied historical era to shed light on the crucial role that this Muslim protagonist of the cinquecento and his Orthodox princess played in mobilizing the anti-Ottoman policies within early modern Persian diplomacy.

By the time of the rise of the Safavids (r.1501-1736) to power in Persia in the early sixteenth century and their strategic conversion to Twelver Imami Shi'ism, the Persians developed clashing theological viewpoints with the neighboring Sunni Ottomans, compounding their historical struggles over territory.²³ [Map 3] The intensified tensions between the two Muslim courts of the period led the Persians to reinforce a military alliance with Europe to assault the Porte on both sides, from sea and land.²⁴ Recognizing the tensions among the Muslim powers of the period in relation to Christian Europe

²¹ Princess Theodora Megale Komnene (m.1458) is known as Despina Khatun in Persian chronicles. Khātūn (Khatun) is a courtly title of nobility for women.

²² Post-revolutionary Iran is the period after the Islamic Revolution of 1979, upon which the royalist Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (d.1980), the shah, was deposed in an uprising. In his place came the Islamic Republic of Iran, which is still in position.

²³ The principal point of division between the Twelver Imami Shi'is and orthodox Sunnis is based on their conviction about the legitimate successors of Prophet Muhammad. The Twelver Shi'is believe 'Ali ibn Abi Taleb, the cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad, and his descendants are the only legitimate successors of the prophet. The Twelver Shi'a rejects the Sunni tradition of the three "Rightly Guided Caliphs" (Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, Umar ibn al-Khattab, Uthman ibn Affan) leadership after Muhammad. For an introduction to Twelver Shi'a principals, Cfr. Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, "Shi'ite doctrine," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, July 20, 2005; For Safavid sentiments towards Sunnis, Cfr. Rosemary Stanfield Johnson, "Sunni Survival in Safavid Iran: Anti-Sunni Activities during the Reign of Tahmasp I," *Iranian Studies* 27, no. 1-4 (1994): 123-33; Palmira Brummett, "The Myth of Shah Ismail Safavi: Political Rhetoric and Divine Kingship," in *Medieval Christian Perceptions of Islam: A Book of Essays*, ed. John Victor Tolan (New York: Garland Press, 1996), 331-59; For Twelver Imami Shi'ism in Safavid Persia, Cfr. Rula Jurdi Abisaab, *Converting Persia: Religion and Power in the Safavid Empire* (London: Tauris, 2015); Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order, and Societal Change in Shi'ite Iran from the Beginning to 1890*, Publications of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, no. 17 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

²⁴ In Ottoman literature, the Ottoman court or government is called The Sublime Porte or the Porte, which is the translation of the Turkish/Arabic word "Bâb-e âli" (the Gate of Eminence).

ruptures the modern images of the “Muslim World” into two opposing empires competing against one another over forging new alliances with Europe. This apprehension also allows a more nuanced reconstruction of the role of Persia’s anti-Ottoman policies in the power dynamics of the early modern period in the Mediterranean, which is the core of this thesis.²⁵

Within the 235 years of the Safavid rule, no other sovereign like Shah Abbas I (r.1587-1629) strived to stabilize and strengthen the global image of Persia.²⁶ Yet, what Shah Abbas built upon in the last decade of the sixteenth century and henceforth had been previously established by Uzun Hasan more than a century earlier. Shah Abbas invigorated and amplified the transnational negotiations with Europe through numerous diplomatic overtures in which gifts accrued multifarious functions ranging from objects of cultural exchange to agents of commercial dialogues. In an attempt to exploit the language of diplomacy within and beyond the Safavid borders, Shah Abbas redeveloped the lands under his sway into mercantile centers, producing commodities that the shah deployed to facilitate his diplomatic negotiations.²⁷

Among the most important factors in Shah Abbas’s construction of his dynastic and imperial identity was the territorial expansion of Persia, which created an alternative route across central Asia and alleviated the need for his Italian (European) allies to travel

²⁵ Regarding the reflections of Persian-Ottomans political, military, and confessional rivalry in early modern European thoughts, Cfr. Margaret Meserve, *Empires of Islam in Renaissance Historical Thought*, Harvard Historical Studies ; 158 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2008), chapter II, V: 65-117, 203-237.

²⁶ “Shāh ‘Abbās I” is the full title of the fifth Safavid shah of Persia with proper diacritics. Hereafter, Shāh ‘Abbās I will be written Shah Abbas.

²⁷ Those provinces under Shah Abbas’s direct rule were called *kāšša* (crown) lands. See Chapter 4 of this dissertation, titled “Rome”. For the revolutionary acts of Shah Abbas, Cfr. Sheila R. Canby, *Shah ‘Abbas: The Remaking of Iran* (London: British Museum Press, 2009).

through hostile Ottoman territories. In addition to this noticeable advancement in the political authority of Persia, the establishment of Shah Abbas's dominance over the production of silk accelerated the dynamics of the nature, quality, and quantity of the gift exchanges. In 1604, Shah Abbas's strategic, yet forceful, relocation of the Armenians from a silk-producing mercantile center in Naḵjavān (historical Armenia), called Julfa, to a district on his crown-owned land (*kāšša*) named New Julfa, brought about a fruitful integration of skilled Armenian merchants into Safavid trade contacts with Europe.²⁸ Concomitantly, deporting hundreds of thousands of Armenians to the Safavid lands bred the obligation to construct churches at the heart of Shah Abbas's empire, which generated more reasons to maintain cordial relations with the Christian communities of the period and circulation of cultural objects.²⁹ Looking at these convoluted intercultural exchanges through the lens of visual material re-evaluates the objects exchanged or produced in this context as vehicles to convey political agendas. Accordingly, the hostilities between the Muslim courts of the period loaded the agency of objects with connotations of diplomatic biases due to their provenance.

²⁸ For an overview on the role of Julfa merchants in the Safavids' economic developments, Cfr. Vazken S. Ghougassian, "Julfa i. Safavid Period," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 217-224 and no. 3 (Vol. 15), pp. 225-231. For archival documents on the trade contacts between Julfa merchants and Europe, Cfr. Lewond Ališan, *Sisakan: telagrutiwn Siwneac asxarhi* (Venetik: I Mxitaray Vans, I S. Lazar, 1893), 160.

²⁹ For primary descriptions of the Armenian churches in Safavid districts, Cfr. Pietro della Valle, *Les fameux voyages*, tr. E. Carneau and F. le Comte, 2 vols., Paris, 1663-65; orig., *Viaggi descritti de lui medes. in 54 lettere familiari, divisi in III parti, cioè la Turchia, la Persia e l'India*, 3 vols., (Rome, 1650-58), 160. H. Chick, ed., *A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia: The Safavids and the Papal Mission of the 17th and 18th Centuries* (London: New York : I.B. Tauris, 2012), 245. Vazken S. Ghougassian, *The Emergence of the Armenian Diocese of New Julfa in the Seventeenth Century*, University of Pennsylvania Armenian Texts and Studies 14 (Atlanta, Ga: Scholars Press, 1998), 291-92. For more information on the Armenian communities of the New Julfa, Cfr. V.S Ghougassian, "The Armenians of New Julfa and their Cultural Heritage," *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 52, no. 3 (2000): 201-20; Vazken S Ghougassian, "3. Wealthy Merchants and Factors. The Legacy of Julfa," 2018.

Methodology:

This thesis looks at two forms of visual evidence in Italian private collections and state treasuries that corroborate the intercultural exchanges with Persia during the early modern era. The first form encompasses a wide range of materials that functioned as the objects of diplomatic exchange. These included richly decorated luxury goods, such as inlaid bowls, carpets, silk brocades, and ornamental weaponry often found in the museums, treasuries, or described in textual evidence such as court chronicles and inventory records. The second includes painted representations commissioned in Italy to memorialize the overtures of this cross-cultural diplomatic interplay. This visual evidence ranges from illuminated manuscripts and courtly engravings to grand frescoes and oil on canvases in Italian royal palaces and churches. By incorporating archival discoveries to substantiate the art historical analyses of these visual documents, this thesis decodes the significance of objects in facilitating, or in some cases, disrupting negotiations of power.³⁰ In looking at painted representations that were commissioned by Italian patrons

³⁰ On the agency of gifts, Cfr. Marcel Mauss, Mary Douglas, and W. D Halls, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (London; New York: W.W. Norton, 2000); For the agency of objects, Cfr. Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1 (Autumn 2001): 1–22; Mark Osteen, "Introduction: Questions of the Gift," in *The Question of the Gift Essays Across Disciplines*, Routledge Studies in Anthropology 2 (London: Routledge, 2014), 1–41; Lorraine Daston, ed., *Things That Talk: Object Lessons from Art and Science*, 1. paperback ed (New York, NY: Zone Books, 2008); For gift-giving in Islamic court culture, Cfr. Fahmida Suleman, "Gift and Gift Giving," in *Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Josef W. Meri, Routledge Revivals: Routledge Encyclopedias of the Middle Ages (New York: Routledge, 2006), 295–96; Linda Komaroff, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, eds., *Gifts of the Sultan: The Arts of Giving at the Islamic Courts*, 1st ed (Los Angeles) : New Haven [Conn.: Los Angeles County Museum of Art ; Yale University Press, 2011]; Sinem Arcak Casale, "Gifts in Motion: Ottoman-Safavid Cultural Exchange, 1501-1618" (University of Minnesota, 2012). Regarding the role of material culture in cross-cultural encounters, Cfr. Finbarr Barry Flood, *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval "Hindu-Muslim" Encounter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 15-89; For some seventeenth-century Persian gifts to the Republic of Venice, Cfr. Elisa Gagliardi Mangilli, Ciampiero Bellingeri, and Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia, eds., *I doni di Shah Abbas il Grande alla Serenissima: relazioni diplomatiche tra la Repubblica di Venezia e la Persia Safavide ; [mostra ; Venezia, Palazzo Ducale, 28 settembre 2013 - 12 gennaio 2014]* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2013); Sinem Arcak Casale, "The Persian Madonna and Child: Commodified Gifts between Diplomacy and Armed Struggle," *Art History* 38, no. 4 (September 2015): 636–51.

following important diplomatic missions, I correlate those visual records with archival documents, such as court chronicles and epistolary sources that reveal the actual purpose of political actions. Amidst this complexity, I evaluate the underlying politics of how visual images may have served various agendas not expressed in or incompatible with the textual evidence in both Italian and Persian archives and chronicles.

These enduring relations between Italian Christian and Persian Muslim rulers resulted in complex reciprocal diplomatic and cultural exchanges fostered through the establishment of diplomatic embassies and the exchange of gifts. By looking at the two forms of visual evidence of Persian gifts and the Italian painted commissions, I assess both sides' perceptions of these intercultural negotiations concerning a mutual enemy. The purpose of this comparative study is to evaluate the objects' capacity to oscillate between heterogeneous cultures, while maintaining eloquence in revealing the benefactors' and the beholders' insights in their approaches toward a common endeavor. While those illustrations and gift displays underscore the significant role that material objects played in forming intercultural relations, the distinctive visual and material culture developed between Muslim Persia and Christian Europe articulated some unknown political intricacies that this thesis illuminates.

In this project, I incorporate a wide array of archival documents in Italian and Latin and make extensive use of early modern Farsi chronicles.³¹ From Florence, I have

³¹ For Farsi accounts on the political history of Iran from the early fifteenth century to the mid sixteenth century, Cfr. Abū al-Qāsim Ṭāhirī, *Tārīkh-i siyāsī va ijtimā'ī-i Īrān : az marg-i Taymūr tā marg-i Shāh 'Abbās* (*The Socio-Political History of Iran, from the end of Timur's to the end of Shah Abbas's Reign*) (Tehran: Franklin, 1349); Hinz, *Taškīl-i daulat-i millī dar Īrān hukūmat-i Āq-Qūyunlū wa zuhūr-i daulat-i šafawī*. For diplomatic relations between Persia and Italian courts and states of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, Cfr. Muḥammad Ḥasan Kāwūsī 'Irāqī, ed., *Asnād-i rawābiṭ-i daulat-i Šafawī bā hukūmathā-i Ītālīyā*, Čāp 1 (Tihṛān: Markaz-i Asnād wa Tārīḫ-i Dīplumāsī, 2000); Amīr Ḥusayn Barāzish, *Ravābiṭ-i siyāsī - dīplumātīk-i Īrān va jahān dar 'ahd-i Šafavīyah: Political & diplomatic relations: Iran &*

utilized archival material discovered at the Archivio di Stato, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, and Biblioteca riccardiana; in Rome, the Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Archivio di Stato, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana and Biblioteca Angelica; and in Venice, the Archivio di Stato and Biblioteca del Museo Correr. In addition to the primary documents found in the Italian archives, I consulted secondary sources in specialized Italian and English collections as well as a variety of Farsi accounts found in the National Library of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Library of the Art University of Tehran, and the Library of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tehran.³²

Historiography:

Over the past two decades, scholarly interest in relationships between Italy and the Islamic courts has grown significantly across multiple disciplines.³³ Historians of art and literature such as Angelo Michele Piemontese, Giovanni Curatola, and Giorgio Rota have played an integral role in recognizing the political diversity of early modern Muslim empires and treating them as assorted entities with sometimes opposing agendas.³⁴

world in Safavid dynasty, Chāp-i avval (Tihṙān: Amīr Kabīr, 2013). For foreign policies of Shah Abbas I, Cfr. Nasrollah Falsafi, *Zendagānī-e Šāh ‘Abbās Awwal (The Lifehistory of Shāh Abbās I)*, 4th ed., V vols. (Tehṙān: Muhammad Ali Elmi, 1369); Naṣrallāh Falsafi, *Siyāsat-i ḥāriḡī-i Īrān dar daurān-i Šafawiya*, 2015.

³² For secondary sources in Italy, I refer to the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence and the Bibliotheca Hertziana in Rome

³³ A number of seminal works such as Deborah Howard, *Venice & the East: The Impact of the Islamic World on Venetian Architecture, 1100-1500* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000) and Stefano Carboni, Institut du monde arabe (France), and Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.), eds., *Venice and the Islamic World, 828-1797*, English ed (New York: New Haven [Conn.]: Metropolitan Museum of Art; Yale University Press, 2007) in the first decade of the 21st century paved the way for later scholarship on cross-cultural matters between Italy and the Muslim World. The majority of the sources, however, are biased towards the interactions between the Ottomans and Christian Europe (Venice, specially), and less with Persia, its Muslim ally.

³⁴ For studies on Persian political interactions with Italian courts and states in the early modern period, Cfr. Angelo Michele Piemontese, “La représentation de Uzun Hasan en scène à Rome,” *Turcica* 21–23 (1991): 191–203; Angelo Michele Piemontese, “Lapidi di militi e civili emigrati d'Italia in Persia,” M. Galletti, Éd.,

Others, such as Mahnaz Yousefzadeh, have demonstrated the dynamic nature of the interactions between Persians and Italians and have opened up ways of understanding the aesthetic dimensions of political alliances.³⁵ The exhibition, “Gifts of the Sultan; the Arts of Giving at the Islamic Courts,” curated by Linda Komaroff in 2011 widely acknowledged the significance of gift culture within Islamic cultures, from the emergence of Muslim civilizations in the seventh century to the present.³⁶ Another exhibition organized by Elisa Gagliardi Mangili in the Palazzo Ducale Venice in 2013 uncovered intricate aspects of Veneto-Persian relations in the early years of the seventeenth century by looking at a number of actual Persian gifts to the Signoria of Venice and illustrations that reflected the Venetian perception of their Persian ally.³⁷ In another key study by

Medici, Missionari, Musicisti e Militari Italiani Attivi in Persia, Impero Ottomano e Egitto 88 (2008): 25–70; Angelo Michele Piemontese, “L’ambasciatore di Persia presso Federico da Montefeltro, Ludovico Bononiense O.F.M. e il Cardinale Bessarione,” *Città del Vaticano Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana* XI (2004); Angelo Michele Piemontese, “I due ambasciatori in Persia ricevuti da Papa Paolo V al Quirinale,” in *Miscellanea Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae*, vol. 12, 2005, 357–425; For re-alignments of Persian history in Rome, Cfr. Angelo Michele Piemontese, *La memoria romana dei santi martiri persiani Mario, Marta, Audiface e Abaco* (Roma: Aracne, 2003); For a recent exhibition on Florentine encounters with the Muslim World in an extended period, Cfr. Giovanni Curatola, *Islamic Art and Florence. From the Medici to the 20th Century*. (Firenze: Giunti Gruppo Editoriale, 2018); For Persian-Venetian diplomatic relations in the seventeenth century, Cfr. Giorgio Rota, “Diplomatic Relations Between Safavid Persia and the Republic of Venice an Orvverview,” in *The Turks; Middle Ages*, n.d., 580–87; Giorgio Rota, “Safavid Envoys in Venice,” in *Diplomatisches Zeremoniell in Europa und im mittleren Osten in der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Ralph Krauz, Giorgio Rota, and Jan Paul Niederskorn (Vienna: Wien, Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009), 213–49; Giorgio Rota, *Under Two Lions: On the Knowledge of Persia in the Republic of Venice (ca. 1450-1797)*, Sitzungsberichte / Österreichische Akademie Der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, 793. Bd (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009).

³⁵ Mahnaz Yousefzadeh, “The Sea of Oman: Ferdinand I, G. B. Vecchiotti, and the Armour of Shah ‘Abbās I,” *RSO*, 2018; Mahnaz Yousefzadeh, “The ‘Buratto’ of the Bargello Museum,” in *In ReSignifications: European Blackamoors, Africana Readings* (Roma: Postcart, 2016), 165–73; Mahnaz Yousefzadeh, “Persiana Pompa Da Anima Toscana: The Medici’s Persian Magi, Merchants and Cavalieri” (Lecture, November 19, 2014), <http://www.casaitaliananyu.org/node/6362>.

³⁶ Komaroff, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, *Gifts of the Sultan*.

³⁷ Gagliardi Mangilli, Bellingeri, and Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia, *I doni di Shah Abbas il Grande alla Serenissima*.

Sinem Casale, the nuances of Safavid gifts received by the Ottoman Sultans from the early sixteenth to the early seventeenth century are extensively recognized.³⁸

The majority of scholarship on Persian-Italian relations elaborates on the historical, political, and commercial components of those encounters in the early modern period with less attention to the important exchange of material objects. In a few publications that focus on gift giving in Persian court culture, the focus is either confined to the gifts presented to other Muslim rulers, particularly Ottoman Sultans, or major Persian vestiges in Europe.³⁹ Building on existing scholarship on both Persian-Italian diplomatic contacts and gift giving practice in Persian diplomacy, my project turns attention specifically to Persian gift culture, within the framework of an alliance with Christian Italy against the Sunni Ottomans.⁴⁰ This thesis, then, is the first systematic

³⁸ Arcak Casale, "Gifts in Motion: Ottoman-Safavid Cultural Exchange, 1501-1618." For an example of a Safavid gift to the Republic of Venice, Cfr. Casale, "The Persian Madonna and Child." Arcak-Casale's thesis on the gifts exchanged between the two major Muslim empires of the early modern world is an instrumental study on the interactive gift culture among Muslim courts. This dissertation explores the gift giving tradition beyond Muslim courts and looks at the circulation of gift-objects in a broader spectrum of intercultural exchange with the Christian Europe in the context of a Muslim-Christian alliance between Persia and Europe against the Ottomans.

³⁹ Sinem Casale specifically studied Safavid gifts to Ottoman Sultans with a few examples of contemporary Persian gifts to the Republic of Venice (Arcak Casale, "Gifts in Motion: Ottoman-Safavid Cultural Exchange, 1501-1618."). Mahnaz Yousefzade investigated a no-more-extant Safavid gift of two suits of armor to the Grand Duke of Tuscany (Yousefzadeh, "The Sea of Oman: Ferdinand I, G. B. Vecchiotti, and the Armour of Shah 'Abbās I."). Elisa Gagliardi Mangili curated an exhibition on the state gifts the Safavid Shah had sent to the republic of Venice via a diplomatic mission in 1603 (Gagliardi Mangili, Bellingeri, and Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia, *I doni di Shah Abbas il Grande alla Serenissima.*). Linda Komaroff curated an exhibition on gift-giving in Islamic court culture, which also included a number of gifts presented to Shah Abbas I on behalf of Philip III of Spain (Marianna Shreve Simpson, "Gifts for the Shah: An Episode in Hapsburg-Safavid Relations during the Reigns of Philip III and 'Abbas I," in *Gifts of the Sultan; the Arts of Giving at the Islamic Courts* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011), 125–38).

⁴⁰ For Persian gift exchanges with Tatar and Arab envoys, Cfr. Georges Goyau, *Un Précurseur: François Picquet, Consul de Louis XIV En Alep et Évêque de Babylone*, Institut Français de Damas., Bibliothèque Orientale 2 (Paris, 1942), 293; For gifts of the Dutch envoys of the East India Company, Cfr. Cornelis Janszoon Speelman, *Journal Der Reis van Den Gezant Der O.I. Compagnie Joan Cunaeus Naar Perzië in 1651-1652 Door Cornelis Speelman ; Uitg. Door A. Hotz.*, Werken (Historisch Genootschap (Utrecht, Netherlands) 3, no. 26 (Amsterdam: J. Müller, 1908), 146–60; For Russo-Persian gift exchanges, Cfr. Pietro Della Valle, *Viaggi Di Pietro Della Valle*, I, (Brighton, 1943), 835–36; P. P Bushev, *Istoriya Posol'stv i Diplomaticheskikh Otnoshenii Russkogo i Iranskogo Gosudarstv v 1586-1612 Gg. (History of Embassies and Diplomatic Relations between the Russian and Persian States from 1586-1612)* (Moscow,

study of Persian-Italian diplomatic relations through the lens of visual culture that covers a crucial time in the history of the power negotiations in the Mediterranean, from the fall of Constantinople to the Sunni Ottomans in 1453 through the reign of the Great Safavid monarch, Shah Abbas, which ended in 1629.

In addition to the theoretical and anthropological studies on the practice of gift giving and the socio-historical contexts of objects such as Marcel Mauss's *The Gift* and Alfred Gell's *Art and Agency*, I have been inspired by recent studies on the diplomacy of art, visual complexity in cultural perspectives, and gift giving in Islamic court culture. In a methodical study, Doris Behrens-Abouseif explored cultural implications and the political significance of the diplomatic gifts in the Mamluk Sultanate (1250-1517) of Egypt and Syria. This study, and more publications on the implications of the "portability" of Medieval and Renaissance Islamic objects within and beyond the Mediterranean stimulated my interest in developing a project that investigates the political meaning and the cultural response to a category of Islamic objects displaced in a Christian domain to propose war against a Muslim force.⁴¹

1976), 131, 254-55; John Chardin and Pierre Gaudon, *Voyages en Perse*, III, (Paris: Phébus, 2007), 179; Iskandar Beg Munshī, *The History of Shah 'Abbas the Great (Tārīk-e 'ālamārā-Ye 'Abbāsī)*, trans. Roger M. Savory (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1978), 940; For gifts of live animals to and from Persia, Cfr. Giosofat Barbaro, *Travels to Tana and Persia*. (Place of publication not identified: Nabu Press, 2010), 53–54; M.V. Fekhner, *Torgovlia Russkogo Gosudarstva so Stranami Vostoka v XVI Veke (Trade between Moscow and the Countries of the East in the 16th Century)* (Moscow, 1956), 60. For an overview on gift giving in pre-Islamic Persia, Cfr. JOSEF WIESEHÖFER, "GIFT GIVING ii. In Pre-Islamic Persia" *Encyclopædia Iranica*, X/6, pp. 604-609; For gift giving in Medieval and Safavid Persia, Cfr. "GIFT GIVING iii. In The Medieval Period," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, Vol. X, no.6, pp. 604-609; Rudi P. Matthee, "GIFT GIVING iv. In The Safavid Period," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, X/6, pp. 609-614.

⁴¹ For an anthropological approach to this topic, Cfr. Marcel Mauss, Ian George Cunnison, and Edward Evans-Pritchard, *The Gift Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (Mansfield Centre, Conn.: Martino Pub., 2011); Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford ; New York: Clarendon Press, 1998); For the diplomacy of gifts in Islamic court culture, Cfr. Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy in the Mamluk Sultanate: Gifts and Material Culture in the Medieval Islamic World*, Library of Middle East History, v. 44 (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014):17-33, 70-85, 107-115; For the hybridity in cultural perspectives, Cfr. Anna Contadini and Claire Norton, eds., *The Renaissance and the Ottoman*

Modern Iranian sources on the diplomatic relations between Persia and Europe are either totally silent about the subject or tangentially brush over lists of objects that moved from one court to the other. The majority of non-Iranian sources tend also to elaborate on the historiography of Persian-European diplomatic negotiations. Few look at Islamic objects in European settings, and when they do so, they often approach the objects from a Eurocentric perspective by relying mainly on European documents and resources. For contemporary scholars, gaining access to Iranian national and private archives is cumbersome for governmental and bureaucratic reasons. In addition, Iranian passport-holders face a number of political travel bans that prohibit them from attending international conferences, making research trips, and accessing archives. My project addresses this lack of scholarly conversation between the methodologies and the multilingual literatures in Iranian and Euro-American resources. It sheds light on the composite identity of those objects in which aspects of personal, national, and territorial heritage are mobilized within fused visions of visual and material cultures.

The temporal dimension of this project is justified by the initial formation of a Christian alliance against the Porte in the second half of the fifteenth century and is continued to the third decade of the seventeenth century, when the political alliances between Persia and Italian centers had grown into commercial partnerships, after years of abortive negotiations over a military alliance. This thesis contributes new avenues to the understanding of how material objects functioned as modes of communication that were integral to solidifying or manipulating new forms of interregional relationships. Within

World (Farnham, Surrey, UK ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013); Eva R. Hoffman, "Pathways of Portability: Islamic and Christian Interchange from the Tenth to the Twelfth Century," *Art History* 24, no. 1 (March 2001): 17–50; Flood, *Objects of Translation*.

the framework of an anti-Ottoman diplomacy, I look at objects as agents in a broader politics of imperial self-fashioning to investigate how material and cultural exchanges facilitated or complicated diplomatic dialogues between a Muslim court and its Christian allies against another Muslim court. I argue that Persian gifts expressed deep forms of knowledge about territorial and religious histories. Whereas objects visually established hierarchies of cultural and political status within the growing alliances, the Italian-commissioned illustrations revealed much about the perception of cultural difference in early modern courts.

Content Overview:

This thesis charts a horizontal, historical trajectory across various cultures to contribute equally to both the study of early modern European and Islamic art. The four following chapters move chronologically, divided into sections, with each one focusing on a century-span of one or a series of Persian diplomatic missions in separate Italian centers that provided visual and material evidence attesting to those delegations. Each of the Italian centers where Persian embassies were received during the time period of the thesis is given a section of analysis with case studies, including actual gifts, visual representations, or textual documents substantiating the giving of a non-extant gift-object. My textual evidence comprises a wide range of court chronicles, travel accounts, inventory records, ambassadorial accounts, and epistolary sources in Italian, Latin, Farsi, and Arabic. By comparing the textual sources with the messages conveyed through visual references in such illustrations and in the physical or, in some cases, described characteristics of the gifts, the purpose of each chapter is to analyze how these objects worked to validate political alliances and, sometimes, to fashion perceptions of history.

The opening chapter elaborates on the diplomatic correspondence in the second half of the fifteenth century, between Persia, then a Sunni Muslim empire, and the four Italian centers of Florence, Venice, Rome, and Urbino (the seat of the papal *condottiere*). This period bookmarks the aftermath of the fall of Constantinople to the Sunni Ottomans and the consequent advances of the Ottoman Empire westward into Europe and eastward into Persian territories. In each section, I consider a crucial moment in the course of these international negotiations, which was triggered by a mutual plea for a military alliance between Persia and the European centers. The Turkman king of Persia, Uzun Hasan, assented to a coalition and joined the league to quell the Ottoman threat. While he attacked the Ottomans' eastern borders, the Italians spearheaded a crusade to re-conquer Istanbul.⁴² My emphasis in this chapter is on the ways in which gifts, such as the *Turquoise Glass Bowl* and a Hellenistic glyptic cameo, today known as the *Tazza Farnese*, enabled the king of Persia to mark the territories under his reign and fashion himself as a rightful descendant of the virtuous ancient kings of Persia, whose conquests and savvy were renowned throughout the Greek world and Europe. In this regard, visual representations, such as the *The Disputation of Saint Catherine of Alexandria* at the Vatican, the *Communion of the Apostles* at the Palazzo Ducale di Urbino, and the *Procession of the Magi* at the Medici Chapel at Palazzo Medici-Riccardi in Florence reveal the Italian perception of the Persians in relation to their own communities.

In the Renaissance resurgence of interest in the classical literatures and cultures, Italian humanists of the cinquecento were inspired by a number of resources among others that unpacked an upgraded vision of Persia. This ultimately cradled an era of re-

⁴² Constantinople was renamed Istanbul after it fell to the Sunni Ottomans.

alignment for the Persian history in Italy that mutually served their alliance. In Florence, the neo-Platonic humanist and philosopher Marsilio Ficino (d.1499) revived and disseminated the ideologies of the ancient Persian faith Zoroastrianism, whose Magi's (Zoroastrian priests) substantiated skill in reading the stars unearthed their fused identity with the "three wise men" traveling from the "east," to be the first visitors of Christ.⁴³ Ficino's teachings spread through Florence, during a period when the city was a major political and commercial ally of the Porte.⁴⁴ Notwithstanding, this recovery of Persian history appeared to be part of a broader scheme beyond the cinquecento political proposals that manipulated the contemporary Italian perceptions of Persia.

Later in the century, as Italian humanists distinguished Persians from Ottomans, they gained a new perspective by resurfacing another text by the ancient Greek historian Xenophon (d. 354 BC) named *Cyropaedia* (study of the Persian king Cyrus), in which the Persian monarch Cyrus (r.559–530 BC) was praised as the "paragon of royal wisdom."⁴⁵ The second half of the fifteenth century witnessed at least two complete translations of *Cyropedia* and another commentary on the magnificence of the Persian kings in 1504 by the Florentine poet and humanist Petrus Crinitus (d.1507).⁴⁶ The revival of such resources

⁴³ For a brief overview on the beliefs and practices, Cfr. William W. Malandra, "Zoroastrianism i. Historical Review up to the Arab Conquest," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, July 20, 2005. For more readings on this religion, Cfr. Michael Straussberg, *FASZINATION ZARATHUSHTRA: zoroaster und die europäische religionsgeschichte der frühen neuzeit*. (S.l.: DE GRUYTER, 1998), 503–69. For the "three wise men from the east" described by Matthew, Cfr. The New Testament, Gospel of Matthew (2:11). For primary information on the Magi, Cfr. Herodotus, 1.101, 1.132, 3.30, 61, 65 ff., 3.78-79. See Chapter 2, Florence.

⁴⁴ Franz Babinger, "Lorenzo de' Medici e la corte ottomana," *Archivio Storico Italiano* 121, no. 3 (439) (1963): 305–61.

⁴⁵ Meserve, *Empires of Islam in Renaissance Historical Thought*, 218, 329:39. For translations, Cfr. David Marsh, *Xenophon*, in *Catalogus Translationum et Commentariorum = Mediaeval and Renaissance Latin Translations and Commentaries: Annotated Lists and Guides*. ed. P. O. Virginia Brown et al., Vol. 8 Vol. 8 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003).

⁴⁶ The complete translations were by Poggio Bracciolini (d.1459) and by Francesco Filelfo (d.1480). See R. R Bolgar, *Classical Heritage and Its Beneficiaries*. (Cambridge, GBR: Cambridge University Press, 2011),

promoted Persian identity from a Muslim state to a noble empire with virtuous kings and glorious history. This historiographical re-alignment served both political and propagandistic purposes of the cinquecento Italian rulers. It not only facilitated and justified the reinforcement of the transnational alliance, but also offered the Renaissance princes a new stage to boast the extent of their wisdom and knowledgeability in humanism, by associating themselves with illustrious figures and marked events of global history.

Following the initial fifteenth-century establishment of the Persian-Italian alliance, the next chapters turn to subsequent developments in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. My third chapter looks at the dynamics of the political changes and the rise of the Safavid Empire in Persia at the turn of the sixteenth century. The establishment of Shi'ism as the official sect in Persia by the founder of the Safavid Empire, Isma'il I (r. 1501-1524), escalated religious tensions and rivalry between the two major Muslim empires of the period, the Sunni Ottomans and the Shi'i Safavids.⁴⁷ By contrast, the alliance with the Italian centers grew stronger. Political and cultural ties were shaped by changing perceptions of the Persians. The early modern humanists glamorized Persian history in their writings while situating the Ottomans as age-old barbarians. My focus in this chapter is on the ways in which gifts contributed to such changing perceptions of Persia by establishing its worthiness as a reliable diplomatic partner with an honorable past. I look at how objects served as modes of visual communication that retained legibility within the two courts and embodied personal

492–94. For Crinitus commentary, Cfr. *Commentarii de honesta disciplina*, Florence, 1504; Pietro Crinito, *Petri Criniti Commentarii de honesta disciplina* (Opera & impensa Philippi de Giunta [...], 1504).

⁴⁷ Šāh Esmā'īl I Šafawī (Shah Isma'il I), the founder of the Safavid dynasty in Persia in 1501.

ambitions. For example, by gifting a richly adorned ceremonial shield (*sipar*) to the Grand Duke of Tuscany, the Safavid Shah of Persia offered a symbolic gesture of military and artillery aid in real world battles against the Ottomans. On the other hand, a gift of a *Diatessaron* in the Persian language and another manuscript of a Persian translation of St. Matthew's Gospel in Rome both bespeak the nuances those intercultural communications brought to the religious narrative of Persia's reputation in Italy (and Europe).

The sixteenth century witnessed the emergence of another threat to the unity of Christendom—the rise of the reforming movement in Europe, the Protestants. While the political alliance between Christian princes in Europe and Persian Shahs had already paved the way for the establishment of the Roman Church's missionary orders in Persia, the rise of Protestantism spurred the development of Christian communities in Persia to arm the Catholic Church against this new enemy. Since the arrival of the Portuguese in the early years of the sixteenth century on the southern coast of Persia and their settlements in Hormuz, a crossroad to their colonial trading empire in the Indian Ocean, Portuguese Augustinians played an instrumental role in spreading Catholicism in Persia.⁴⁸ It is within this historical framework that I look at the Persian translation of Christian holy books as a response to the Roman Church's desire to convert the Persians and as part of an ambitious plan to form a Catholic League against the foreign threats in Asia and in Europe.

⁴⁸ John M. Flannery, *The Mission of the Portuguese Augustinians to Persia and beyond (1602-1747)*, Studies in Christian Mission, Volume 43 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2013); Carlos Alonso, "El P. Simón de Moraes, Pionero de Las Misiones Agustiniánas En Persia," *Analecta Augustiniana* 62 (1979): 343–72.

My fourth chapter moves forward in time to cover the major diplomatic missions dispatched by Shah Abbas to Europe in the first decade of the seventeenth century. In this chapter, I study a significant shift in commerce between Europe and Asia, which was enabled by the Persian alliance and the instrumental activities of the Armenian merchants of New Julfa. I suggest that these exchanges were designed not merely to cement political and diplomatic alliances but to promote Persia's viability as a new trade partner in Asia. Luxury household items such as ornamental bowls, bejeweled armor, luxurious silk brocades, and exquisite carpets with silk, silver, and gold threads are among the gifts that enhanced the perception of Persia as a desirable commercial partner in the eyes of its Italian allies. In addition to the noticeable modification in the visual and material values of Persian gifts in the seventeenth century, numerous commissions in Italy memorialized the realigned status of Persia in the Italian perspective. By a comparative study between the textual evidence in Persian and Italian chronicles and the Persian gifts, I contend that the presents revealed much about the Safavid Shah's political agenda, whereas those illustrations were instead designed to regulate Italian perceptions of Persians within the cultural and political hierarchies set by the Roman Catholic Church.

My final and fifth chapter functions as a collective assessment of the Persian embassies in Italy between 1453 and 1629, by bringing the two forms of visual and cultural exchanges, the gifts and the painted representations, into dialogue with the textual history of the period. As the Persian rulers selected the gifts, I argue, the objects conveyed the rulers' perception of their Italian partners' visual and material culture, as well as their histories. At the same time, the painted representations, commissioned by the Italian rulers, shaped Italian perceptions of these Persian-Italian exchanges, which also often served propagandistic

purposes in establishing both a moral basis for the alliance and situating Italy favorably within a cultural and political hierarchy. However, the discrepancy between the Safavid Shah's military ambitions and the Vatican's missionary aspirations in their intercultural dialogue eventually caused these diplomatic ties to evolve into an extended network for the burgeoning global trade, in which Shah Abbas's overseas silk trade took pride of place. The shift in the stature of Persia from a political to a commercial ally, I assert, contributed significantly to the development of global commerce and new routes in the Persian Gulf that connected Europe to its East Asian trading partners, avoiding the Ottoman territories. I conclude with the statement that the development of global markets in the early modern world was an outgrowth of the earlier political alliances that had been founded on previous objectives and forms of gift-exchange.

Scholarly Contribution:

This thesis contributes to the study of Islamic visual culture by enriching our understanding of distinct artistic canons in the arts of different Muslim courts of the early modern period. The investigation of both Persian and Italian perceptions of their intercultural negotiations through the lens of visual documents widens our perspective on the role of objects in constructing new frameworks for the imperial powers to fashion their political images through visual cues. The Persian-Italian engagements in the cross-religious alliances in the Mediterranean generated competitive dialogues between these powers and other Muslim empires of the period that resulted in the exchange of various cultural objects to mediate courtly interactions. To this end, examination of the provenance of Persian objects in their Italian settings contributes concomitantly to an array of discourses on the discrete or at some points intertwined interplays between the three great Muslim empires of the period,

namely the Persians, the Ottomans, and the Mughals of India, and different centers in Europe.

My principal motivation for this project is to develop a theoretical and historical framework to distinguish the visual expressions and their connotations in the objects produced in different Muslim courts of the early modern period. There are no methodological approaches similar to art history in the modern Iranian academic curriculum to analyze art objects, so it falls entirely to Euro-American scholarship to recognize Persian visual material as a type of document with distinctive cultural significances from those of the Ottomans and Mughals. By reconstructing the historical and political context of the period's intercultural interactions in the Mediterranean through the visual analyses of such objects in Italian settings, this study asserts how Persian diplomatic gifts revealed much about cultural and political intentions of the benefactors and their recipients in their aim to outplay the mutual Muslim enemy.

Chapter-2

“The Anti-Ottoman Christian Diplomacy and the Aq Qoyunlu: Persian Vestiges in the Quattrocento Italy (1453-1500).”

Section1: Quattrocento Florence

The Procession of the Magi

In 1459 Cosimo de' Medici (r. 1434-1464), known as *il Vecchio*, the establisher of the Medici dynasty's political hegemony over Florence, commissioned Benozzo Gozzoli (d.1497) to decorate the Medici private chapel at the family's residential palace in Florence.⁴⁹ [Fig 1, ch.2, sec.1] In less than two years, Gozzoli frescoed the three walls of the chapel with scenes of the *Procession of the Magi*, the “Three Wise Men” or kings who, according to Matthew's Gospel, came from the East to recognize Christ Child.⁵⁰ This Biblical event had a significant role in the religious life of Florence from 1390s, when Cosimo's father, Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici (d.1429), established the family's bank in Florence that eventually resulted in the Medici acquiring political power within and beyond Florence. Enlivened by a lay confraternity titled the *Compagnia dè Magi*, the Feast day of the Magi (*Festa dè Magi*) was celebrated every year on January sixth, with a procession initiating at the Baptistery of Florence and leading towards the Church of San Marco.

The rise of Medici to power in 1434 allowed the family to strategically engage with this brotherhood and to become the outstanding patrons of the confraternity of the Magi. The

⁴⁹ The palace is now known as Palazzo Medici-Riccardi (via Larga) because in 1659 Riccardi family bought the palace.

⁵⁰ The New Testament, Gospel of Matthew (2:11)

Medici reenacted the event in the form of a procession every year with the family members among the protagonists.⁵¹ Gozzoli's frescoes memorialized this annual ceremony in the Medici Chapel. With the youngest king on the east wall, the middle king on the south wall, and the oldest king on the west wall, the chapel absorbs the viewer into the procession composed of Biblical and contemporary figures of the Medici family and their entourage in an elaborate Florentine landscape.

Matthew's Gospel describes the "Three Wise Men" from the "East," but does not specify the exact origin of the Magi. David Ulansey refers to the twelfth-century Byzantine historian, Gregorius Cedrenus, and addresses the Magi as the guardians of the immortal fire or the celestial fire on earth magically brought to Persia by Perseus and preserved under the temple.⁵² There is textual evidence that connects this mythological Greek figure, Perseus, with Persia since the fifth century B.C., including Herodotus's *historía* asserting Perseus's son, Perses, gave his name to Persia, and hence he was the ancestor of the Persians.⁵³ Although, there are no etymological relations between the two terms, representational connections such as the depictions of Perseus with a Phrygian cap, a headgear that was associated with Mithra, the Zoroastrian divinity (*yazata*) of light and oath, strengthened these speculations since antiquity.⁵⁴ The Perseus-Persia bond was an assumption that the Greco-Roman mindset developed. As Ulansey argues, this was a forced equation since the name of Perseus did not specifically mean Persia. Nevertheless,

⁵¹ Rab Hatfield, "The Compagnia de' Magi," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 33 (1970): 107–8.

⁵² David Ulansey, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries: Cosmology and Salvation in the Ancient World*, Oxford Paperbacks (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 29–30. Cedrenus, also known as George Kedrenos, the editor of *Synopsis Historiōn*. See James R. Russell, "Cedrenus, Georgius," in *Encyclopædia Iranica* Vol. V, Fasc. 1, pp. 108–109.

⁵³ Herodotus, *historía*, book VII, ch.61.

⁵⁴ Ulansey, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries*, 26–29; Yousefzadeh, "The Sea of Oman: Ferdinand I, G. B. Vecchietti, and the Armour of Shah 'Abbās I," 70.

because Perseus appears in the literature earlier than the emergence of Persians, the ancient Greeks, specifically Herodotus, invented a son for him to justify the linkage.⁵⁵ This hypothesis, however, endured for centuries in Europe and gained a significant prominence in the sixteenth century, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

In early Persian theology, the immortal fire is directly associated with Zoroaster (d.1000 B.C), the ancient Persian sage and the founder of Zoroastrianism in Persia. Fire, as the symbol of utmost purity is venerated in Zoroastrian liturgy and protecting the Eternal Flames under the fire temples is a fundamental part of the rituals performed by Zoroastrian priests, called the Magi.⁵⁶ Zoroaster is called the founder of astrology and “magic” with the latter’s genuine meaning as wisdom over the secrets of nature. Zoroaster’s ability in reading the stars resulted in the initiation of an astronomical calendar, wisdom that was inherited by his faithful followers who were keen to observe the movements of celestial bodies.⁵⁷

In Europe, Zoroaster was known through the close relationship between his doctrine and that of Plato, investigated by scholars including Karl Dannenfeldt who substantiates this correlation with classical texts as follows:

For example Zoroastrian dualism is supposedly reflected in the struggle between the good and evil world-souls found in Plato’s *Laws* (10,896E). Plato’s interest in Persia and Zoroastrianism is also evident in the *First Alcibiades* (121E-122A). Hermodorus, Eudoxus, and Heraclides Ponticus, three disciples of Plato, were also known to be interested in Zoroastrianism. Aristotle in the *Metaphysics*

⁵⁵ Ulansey, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries*, 29–30.

⁵⁶ A. V. Williams Jackson, *Zoroaster, the Prophet of Ancient Iran (Classic Reprint)*. (New York: Macmillan, 1899), 98.

⁵⁷ Michael Stausberg, *Faszination Zarathushtra: zoroaster und die europäische religionsgeschichte der frühen neuzeit*. (S.l.: DE GRUYTER, 1998), 503–69.

(1091b) names the Persian magi, the followers of Zoroaster, as being among the earliest forerunners of Plato's dualism.⁵⁸

In Florence, Zoroaster's thoughts gained prominence in the writings of Marsilio Ficino (d.1499), the Neo-Platonic Florentine humanist and philosopher. Inspired by the reintroduction of Plato to Europe during the Council of Ferrara-Florence (1438-45), an ecumenical council composed of the Latin and Greek churches to negotiate a unity against the rise of the Ottomans, Cosimo de' Medici organized a group of scholars in the form of an unofficial academy to study Platonism and classical philosophy in Florence.⁵⁹ Sponsored by Cosimo and his successors, Ficino devoted his life at the Platonic Academy of Florence, translating, promulgating, and commenting on Plato's philosophy.⁶⁰ In his studies, Ficino celebrated Zoroaster as the predecessor of the Platonic school and the first of the six ancient theologians.⁶¹

In addition to Ficino's dissemination of Zoroastrian ideology in Florence, Poggio Bracciolini's (d.1459) translation of Xenophon's *Cyropedia* into Latin in 1450, as explained in the previous section of this chapter, demonstrated that Persia was a noble ancient empire ruled by prudent kings like Cyrus (d.530 B.C). Persia was positioned as a distinguishable kingdom from the other Muslim empires of the period, specifically the

⁵⁸ Karl H. Dannenfeldt, "The Pseudo-Zoroastrian Oracles in the Renaissance," *Studies in the Renaissance* 4 (1957): 7–8. For more detailed discussions refer to: Milton V. Anastos "Pletho's Calendar and Liturgy" in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 4 (Cambridge, Mass, 1948). And J. Bidez Les mages hellénisés: Zoroastre, Ostanès et Hystaspe d'après la tradition grecque (Brussels, 1945).

⁵⁹ At Villa di Careggi in Tuscany Florence. The architect was the Florentine artist Michelozzo di Bartolomeo (d.1472), who also designed Palazzo Medici Riccardi for Cosimo de' Medici. For more information on Michelozzo, Cfr. Michelozzo and Ottavio Morisani, *Michelozzo architetto* (Torino: Einaudi, 1951); Harriet M Caplow, *Michelozzo 1. 1.* (New York: Garland, 1977); Harriet M Caplow, *Michelozzo 2.* (New York: Garland, 1977).

⁶⁰ On the revival of Platonism in the Renaissance philosophical climate, Cfr. James Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*. 2 Volumes, (Leiden: Brill, 1991).

⁶¹ STAUSBERG, *FASZINATION ZARATHUSHTRA*, 93–228.

Ottomans who vandalized the capital of the Eastern Church.⁶² In this historical context, Europe, in general, and Florence, in particular, perceived Persia as a nation with a noble past and virtuous kings vis-à-vis the infidel and barbarian Ottomans, Cosimo de' Medici commissioned this politically charged scene with Medici family members incorporated in the narrative. To legitimize the family's sovereignty over Florence, Cosimo associated the Medici with the wise men of history whose initial recognition of Christ's divinity immortalized them in the religious history of Florence.

In his monograph on this Biblical event, *The Journey of the Magi*, Richard Trexler refers to the Magi as the “envoys by the Persian or Parthian King of Kings.”⁶³ Trexler takes the magi's skills in reading the stars and their name, “magi” (Zoroastrian priests), as evidence to assume the three men were from Persia. To substantiate Trexler's assumption regarding the Persian origin of the Magi, I draw attention to the sixth-century mosaic of the *Three Magi* at the Basilica of Sant' Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna, Italy. [Fig 2, ch.2, sec.1] The mosaic shows the three wise men wearing the Phrygian caps with the Mithraic association that was previously discussed in this section.⁶⁴ With their names, Balthassar, Melchior, and Caspar, inscribed above their heads, the three men are holding their gifts and following the star that leads them to the Christ Child.⁶⁵ By the Medici representing themselves in their private chapel as the Magi, the virtuous men who recognized Christ's royalty “long before Constantine did,” Trexler interprets the pictorial program of the

⁶² Meserve, *Empires of Islam in Renaissance Historical Thought*, 221; Yousefzadeh, “Persiana Pompa Da Anima Toscana: The Medici's Persian Magi, Merchants and Cavalieri.”

⁶³ Richard C Trexler, *The Journey of the Magi Meanings in History of a Christian Story* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 37.

⁶⁴ Mary G. Houston, *Ancient Egyptian Mesopotamian and Persian Costume and Decoration*, n.d., 166–74.

⁶⁵ Trexler, *The Journey of the Magi Meanings in History of a Christian Story*, 32–36.

chapel as a visual realignment of the narrative to serve the Medici as legitimate *de facto* rulers of quattrocento Florence.⁶⁶

To previous scholars, the pivotal role of the Persian identity of Christ's visitors in this Biblical event was not explicit. Among the numerous studies on the very origin of the Magi and their relation to the Medici in Gozzoli's frescoes of the *Procession of the Magi*, Mahnaz Yousefzadeh reads the chapel's frescoes and the Medici's integration into this narrative as "dynastic self-fashioning of the Medici," to legitimize monarchy, as an emulation of the prosperous monarchies in ancient Persia. Thus, the Medici casting themselves as the magi publically associated them with magic and monarchy and served them as a vehicle to pronounce their princely power.⁶⁷

Unlike Venice and the Papacy in the second half of the fifteenth century, Florence was uninterruptedly involved in a productive trading partnership with the Ottomans. In 1455, after the fall of Constantinople, the Signoria of Florence wrote an official letter to the victorious sultan, Mehmet II, thanking him for accommodating Florentine merchants and asking him permission to have free access to all the Ottoman territories.⁶⁸ Even after the fall of Trebizond to the Ottomans in 1461, a turning point for the Venetian Republic to

⁶⁶ Trexler, *The Journey of the Magi Meanings in History of a Christian Story*. 11

⁶⁷ Yousefzadeh, "Persiana pompa da anima Toscana: The Medici's Persian Magi, Merchants and Cavalieri." For Medici-Magi associations, Cfr. Darrell Dean Davisson, "Magian Ars Medica, Liturgical Devices, and Eastern Influences in the Medici Palace Chapel," *Studies in Iconography / Western Michigan University*, 2001, 111–62; Bengt Ankerloo and William Monter, *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe, Volume 4*. (Bloomsbury Publishing UK, 2002); Franco Cardini, *The Chapel of the Magi in Palazzo Medici* (Firenze: Mandragora, 2001); Cristina Acidini Luchinat, Eleanor Daunt, and Benozzo Gozzoli, *The Chapel of the Magi: Benozzo Gozzoli's Frescoes in the Palazzo Medici-Riccardi Florence* (London [etc.: Thames and Hudson, 1994); Francis Ames-Lewis, Birkbeck College, and Department of History of Art, *The Early Medici and Their Artists* (London: Birkbeck College, University of London, Dept. of History of Art, 1995); Rab Hatfield, "The Compagnia de' Magi," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes / Ed. E.H. Gombrich [u.a.]*, 1970, 107–61.

⁶⁸ Cristelle Baskins, "The Bride of Trebizond: Turks and Turkmens on a Florentine Wedding Chest, Circa 1460," *Muqarnas* 29 (2012): 96.

shift political sides and join the anti-Ottoman league, Florentines continued sending ships to Trebizond under an official agreement with the Porte. As Ellen Callmann describes: “In fact, in 1461 the Venetians were ousted from their houses in Constantinople and these were given to the Florentines.”⁶⁹ Thus, in the context of the Florentine-Venetian rivalry and in a competition over their florin to have equal value as the Venetian sequin, a trading alliance with the Ottomans was Florentines’ unbeatable strategy.⁷⁰

Gozzoli’s *The Procession of the Magi* in Medici Chapel, I argue, demonstrates the ripples of the quattrocento realignment of Persia’s history in Italy. In Florence, those justifications fed into the prestige of the ruling class in Florence. In the Renaissance revival of classical cultures, the new reading of the Persian history was in alignment with the needs of the Italian protagonists, particularly as it became to be perceived the cradle of virtuous figures. Yet, in the quattrocento Florence, the Medici association with the Magi, upon the narrative’s deeply ingrained prominence in the Florentine history, was primarily seen as a political ploy to serve propagandistic purposes pursued by the ruling house to establish their monarchy over their republican predecessors. However, the substantiated origin of the Magi at the time when Renaissance humanists were marveling at the sagacity of Persian monarchs and culture adds another layer to the agency of Medici-Magi representations. Remarking on the Medici conjoining themselves with the wise figures of history who were the first to recognize Christ, the family aspire to a

⁶⁹ Ellen Callmann, *Apollonio di Giovanni*, Illustrated (University of Michigan: (Oxford studies in the history of art and architecture) Clarendon Press, 1974), 50.

⁷⁰ Gülru Necipoğlu, “Visual Cosmopolitanism and Creative Translation: Artistic Conversations with Renaissance Italy in Mehmed II’s Constantinople” 29 (2012): 17–18; Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy in the Mamluk Sultanate*, 3–10.

moment in the religious history of Christendom that could vividly highlight their political and intellectual perspicacity.⁷¹

Gozzoli's frescoes in the Medici Chapel demonstrates the family's perception of the "east" by representing the characters in an exuberant setting dressed in exotic costumes.⁷² The richly-embroidered garments as well as the crowns of the Magi are among the frescoes' visual references to the eastern cultures. The earliest appearance of crowns in place of the traditional Phrygian caps in the imagery of the Magi in Europe occurred in a number of Coptic (Egypt) and Byzantine manuscripts of the tenth century.⁷³ One of the revealing examples dates back to 976 in the *Menologium of Basil II* in the Vatican in which the three Magi bear crowns while holding gifts as they humbly approach the Virgin and Christ Child.⁷⁴ [Fig 3, ch.2, sec.1] The manuscript functioned as a menology (ecclesiastical calendar in Eastern Orthodox Church) and was compiled for the Byzantine Emperor Basil II (r. 976–1025). The Eastern Roman provenance of the manuscript justify the comparable iconography of the features with those in the Byzantine art and eastern cultures.

⁷¹ Yousefzadeh, "Persiana Pompa Da Anima Toscana: The Medici's Persian Magi, Merchants and Cavalieri."

⁷² Piero Bargellini, *The Medici Palace and the Frescoes of Benozzo Gozzoli*, (Roma: Lorenzo Del Turco, 1970), 137; Piero Boitani, *Chaucer and Boccaccio* (Society for the Study of Mediaeval Languages and Literature, 1977), 158.

⁷³ Earl Baldwin Smith, *Early Christian Iconography and A School of Ivory Carvers in Provence* (Princeton University Press, 1918), 57–59.

⁷⁴ Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Ms. Vat. gr. 1613, f.272. For the full transcript, Cfr. Orthodox Eastern Church and Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, *Il menologio di Basilio II (cod. vaticano greco 1613)*. (Torino: Fratelli Bocca, 1907); Cassius Dio Cocceianus, Pius Franchi de' Cavalieri, and Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, *Cassii Dionis Cocceiani Historiarum Romanarum lib. LXXXIX. LXXX quae supersunt. Codex Vaticanus Graecus 1288*. (Lipsiae: Apud Odonem Harrassowitz, 1908).

Prior to Gozzoli's *Magi*, Gentile da Fabriano (d.1427) had represented the Adoration scene, known as *Pala Strozzi*, for the church of Sta Trinita in Florence in 1423.⁷⁵ [Fig 4, ch.2, sec.1] Other than the exotic animals, including a camel symbolizing the Holy Land, Gentile marked his *Magi* with golden bejeweled crowns and dressed them in shimmering lavish clothes to fully display the period's imagination of the eastern lands, where the *Magi* originally came from. Gozzoli's *Magi*, however, was commissioned under different circumstances. By 1460, when Gozzoli was executing the fresco in the Medici Chapel, Tuscany had already hosted the Council of Florence during which a variety of Christians, including bishops and theologians representing the Eastern Roman Church attended the meeting.⁷⁶ The flow of uncovered resources and cultures from various lands in the east to Florence exposed the Florentines to the aesthetic values and intellectual properties of those, which were then still unknown in Europe. As already discussed, the formation of the Platonic Academy in Florence was one of the outcomes of this intercultural union. Gozzoli's commission, I conclude, was another product, but one that served the patron's propaganda in mobilizing their claims as humanist princes, and simultaneously set the artist to showcase his expertise in depicting realistic figures employing his recognition of symbolism through visual idioms.

⁷⁵ For more information on Gentile da Fabriano's artistic life and style and his famed Adoration altar piece, Cfr. Antonia Boström, *Gentile Da Fabriano (c. 1355-1427): The Adoration of the Magi ...* (Chicago); [London: St. James Press, 1990]; Roberta Panzanelli-Clignett, "The *Magi* from the Orient: An Analysis of the Patronage of Gentile Da Fabriano's Adoration of the *Magi*" (1991); Warren David Tresidder, "Lorenzo Ghiberti and the Frame of Gentile Da Fabriano's Adoration of the *Magi*," *Source.*, 1995, 8–13.

⁷⁶ On Council of Ferrara-Florence, Cfr. Henry Chadwick, *East and West: The Making of a Rift in the Church : From Apostolic Times until the Council of Florence* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Joseph Gill, *The Council of Florence* (Cambridge [England: University Press, 1959).

The Florentine Cassone

The Medici were not participants in the crusade program against the Porte in the quattrocento, but the anti-Ottoman sentiments of Persians and their military alliance with Christian princes were known themes among Florentines at the time. One object that buttresses this hypothesis is a wedding chest (*cassone*), made in the workshop of Apollonio di Giovanni and Marco del Buon around 1460.⁷⁷ [Fig 5, ch.2, sec.1] The original patron of this Florentine cassone has not securely been identified to date, but scholars assume that one of the members of the Strozzi family commissioned it, due to the appearance of a bird on the *testata* (short side of the chest) that is construed as one of the Strozzi family's heraldic devices.⁷⁸

On the front panel of the *cassone*, a battle scene is represented between turbaned figures and soldiers with conical caps on horses. On the right side of the foreground, a triumphal chariot is featured with two figures on top and white horses carrying the carriage.

Adjacent to the chariot is a figure with a double-crowned hat on a dark horse, who looks towards the two figures on the chariot and points to the battle scene. In the background of the composition, on the left side, the panel features views of Constantinople, identified by accurate topographical representations, and on the right side, identified by an inscription, is Trebizond.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Andrea Paribeni, "Iconografia, committenza, topografia di Costantinopoli: sul cassone di Apollonio di Giovanni con la 'Conquista di Trebisonda,'" *Rivista dell'Istituto Nazionale d'Archeologia e Storia dell'Arte / Istituto Nazionale d'Archeologia e Storia dell'Arte* . 3 (2001): 255–304.

⁷⁸ Baskins, "The Bride of Trebizond: Turks and Turkmens on a Florentine Wedding Chest, Circa 1460," 94–95; Helmut Nickel, "Two Falcon Devices of the Strozzi: An Attempt at Interpretation," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 9 (January 1974): 80–81, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1512665>.

⁷⁹ Baskins, "The Bride of Trebizond: Turks and Turkmens on a Florentine Wedding Chest, Circa 1460," 83.

The scene's identification has been controversial among scholars. Werner Weisbach and Callmann in two independent studies have construed the battle as the fall of Trebizond to Mehmed II in 1461.⁸⁰ While in 1955 E. H. Gombrich inquired the validity of the previous arguments by questioning the intention of the artists in representing a "Greek disaster," in 1980 John Pope-Hennessy and Keith Christiansen discovered a faded inscription above one of the figures on the triumphal chariot that was a turning point in unfolding the overall message of the scene.⁸¹ The inscription reads "TANBURLANA."⁸² Timur, or as he was called in the West, Tamerlane, was the Turco-Mongolian leader whose reign stretched from Transoxania to the Iranian plateau, covering Mamluk Syria, Mesopotamia, and Anatolia.⁸³ The discovery of the inscription led scholars to identify the subject matter of this Florentine *cassone* as the battle of Ankara in which Timur conquered Bayezid I in 1402 and established himself as the warlord who brought the Ottoman sultan to his knees in a disastrous defeat.

Timur's conquest promoted him into a formidable enemy of the Ottomans. Several representations of Timur throughout the fifteenth century including Pisanello's (d.1455) *St. George and the Princess of Trebizond* in the Pellegrini Chapel, Sant'Anastasia (Verona), in 1436 (-38), attest to this reputation. [Fig 6, ch.2, sec.1] In a 1996 study by Reinhard Steiner, he identifies the "Asian" figure, previously identified by Annabelle Pelta as a "kalmuk" of Mongolian origin, as Timur. Steiner contextualizes the entire

⁸⁰ Paul Schubring, *Cassoni: Truhen und Truhenbilder der italienischen Früh-Renaissance. Ein Beitrag zur profanmalerei im Quattrocento* (Leipzig: K. H. Hiersemann, 1915), 283; Callmann, *Apollonio di Giovanni*, 48-51, 63-64.

⁸¹ E. H. Gombrich, "Apollonio di Giovanni: A Florentine Cassone Workshop Seen through the Eyes of a Humanist Poet," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 18, no. 1/2 (January 1955): 143, <https://doi.org/10.2307/750285>.

⁸² Keith Christensen and John Pope-Hennessy, "Secular Painting in 15th-Century Tuscany: Birth Trays, Cassone Panels, and Portraits," *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 38, no. 1 (Summer 1980): 13, 18-19.

⁸³ Meserve, *Empires of Islam in Renaissance Historical Thought*, 203.

fresco in relations to the Council of European Union at Ferrara and Florence and identifies the Mongolian figure as Timur. He argues that the famed Mongol ruler who conquered Bayezid I in 1402 and the Ottomans in the battle of Ankara, postponed the fall of Constantinople for another half a century. In fact, the incident of 1402 made Timur one of the most important figures not only of his own time, but also of the world history, at least in the eyes of the contemporaries and for many generations afterwards. Steiner refers to Timur as an ideal ally of Christianity and even the epitome of a ruler whose virtues and fortunes combine in an ideal way.⁸⁴

The intention of Pisanello in including Timur in the composition with St. George and the dragon can only be read in the context of the anti-Ottoman league of this period.

Concurrent to this movement, the Order of the Dragon was founded by the Holy Roman Emperor of the time, Sigismund (r. 1433-1437), to fight the expansions of the Ottomans, and St. George was adopted as the patron saint of the order.⁸⁵ Another evidence that recreates the Ottomans as a dragon is an illustration in a 1471 manuscript by Felice Feliciano (d.1479), an antiquarian Veronese poet and draughtsman. Feliciano's manuscript, the *Pronostico o vero prophetia de la venuta del Turcho*, shows the "Turks" as a giant dragon and the European forces as other animals and tools that attempt to slay the dragon.⁸⁶[Fig 7, ch.2, sec.1] In these contextual relations, Pisanello's fresco associates

⁸⁴ Reinhard Steiner, "Tamerlan-der 'Zorn Gottes' als Georgsritter? Legende und historische Anspielung in Pisanellos Georgsfresko in der Chiesa di Sant' Anastasia zu Verona," *Pantheon* 54 (1996): 31–32; Annabelle Pelta, "Pisanello's 'Saint George and the Dragon': Poetic Imagination, Chivalric Tradition, and Political Destiny in Verona" (University of Pennsylvania, 1992), 19.

⁸⁵ John V. A. Fine, *The Late Medieval Balkans: A Critical Survey from the Late Twelfth Century to the Ottoman Conquest*, 1. paperback ed (Ann Arbor, Mich: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1994), 464–66.

⁸⁶ Norman Housley, "Crusading Responses to the Turkish Threat in Visual Culture, 1453-1519," in *The Crusade and the Visual Culture* (Ashgate, 2015), 203.

Timur with the anti-Ottoman sentiments and realigns this eleventh-century incident to the fifteenth-century cross-confessional league against the common enemy.

The inscription of Timur on the Florentine *cassone* is another nod to the symbolic representation of this warlord in correspondence to the Ottomans' defeat. In an authoritative article, Cristelle Baskins reconsiders the latest argument about the *cassone* featuring Timur's conquest at Ankara in 1402. By focusing on the "sumptuously dressed companion" of Timur on the triumphal chariot, who was previously assumed to be Bayezid I as a captive, Baskins rejects the idea of the figure as the vanquished Ottoman sultan because of his luxurious outfit that is odd to depict for a loser and identifies the figure as Uzun Hasan, lavishly dressed as a victorious lord.⁸⁷ In 1458, Uzun Hasan married the niece of Emperor John IV Komnenos of Trebizond, Theodora Komnena, nicknamed Despina Khatun in Uzun Hasan's court.⁸⁸ This alliance brought Uzun Hasan and the Byzantine-Greek emperor of Trebizond together, in the form of an Asiatic League, against the menace of the Ottomans. In a letter of April 1460 to the Duke of Burgundy, John IV of Trebizond explains Despina Khatun's marriage to Uzun Hasan as a diplomatic move to make this Turkman king faithful to the Komnenos family in their

⁸⁷ Andrea Paribeni, "Una testimonianza iconografica della battaglia di Ankara (1402) in Apollonio di Giovanni," in *Europa e Islam tra i secoli XIV e XVI*, Ed (Naples: Istituto universitario orientale, 2002), 432; Baskins, "The Bride of Trebizond: Turks and Turkmens on a Florentine Wedding Chest, Circa 1460," 95.

⁸⁸ Tāhirī, *Tārīkh-i siyāsī va ijtimā'ī-i Īrān : az marg-i Taymūr tā marg-i Shāh 'Abbās (The Socio-Political History of Iran, from the end of Timur's to the end of Shah Abbas's Reign)*, 89. In this source, Taheri refers to Theodora as the "niece" of Emperor John IV, daughter of Calo Johannes the Armenian emperor of Trebizond. In some other sources regarding this topic, scholars address Theodora as the "daughter" of the emperor of Trebizond, John IV. Look at Baskins, 91. The former argument is correct. Theodora (Despina Khatun or Chatun) was the daughter of Calo Johannes (d. 1458), the Christian emperor of Trebizond, and the granddaughter of Alexios IV Megas Komnenos (d. 1429). She married Uzun Hasan in 1458 and became the Christian queen of Mesopotamia and Persia until her death in 1474. Also look at Charles Grey, *A Narrative of Italian Travels in Persia, in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (B. Franklin, 1873), 73-74. She is also referred to as Kyra Katerina. Look at Walther Hinz, *Taškāl-i daulat-i millī dar Īrān ḥukūmat-i Āq-Qūyunlū wa zuhūr-i daulat-i šafawī*, (Intišāra'ī-i Ḥwārizmī, 1998), 39-43.

attempt to take back all the territories they have lost to the Ottomans, including Constantinople.⁸⁹

To Uzun Hasan this marriage was also an assurance that gained him control over the Byzantine territories beyond his borders and accessibility to sea trade through these routes. As Uzun Hasan claimed, Cappadocia (central Anatolia) was part of Despina Khatun's dowry at the time of this political marriage.⁹⁰ Hence this alliance extended Uzun Hasan's territories at the time when he was pursuing Christian Europe's support to attack the Ottomans from both sides, the east and the west. Additionally, Despina Khatun's Christian faith played a significant role in securing Uzun Hasan's alliance with Christian princes. Uzun Hasan had three Muslim wives when he married Despina Khatun. As a part of the marriage agreement, Despina Khatun was allowed to practice her faith in Persia without any constraints. This decision presented Uzun Hasan, a Muslim ruler, as a tolerant and faithful friend of Christianity (*bona fide*), whose alliance could diminish the enemy of the Christian faith, the Ottomans.

Baskins identifies the figure with the double-crowned hat adjacent to the chariot as Emperor John IV, who is pointing to the battle scene while looking towards Uzun Hasan and Timur on the chariot.⁹¹ Undoubtedly, the representation of this historical family alliance that resulted in a memorable defeat of an ominous enemy on a wedding chest is a symbolic gesture of a successful marriage for the Florentine bride for whom the *cassone* was commissioned. Yet, the 1459-60 victory over the Ottomans in Malatya (eastern

⁸⁹ Baskins, "The Bride of Trebizond: Turks and Turkmens on a Florentine Wedding Chest, Circa 1460," 93.

⁹⁰ Baskins, 91.

⁹¹ Baskins, 92.

Anatolia) lasted only for a short period before the Ottomans took over Trebizond in 1461 and annexed these Christian territories to their own. This short-lived victory is memorialized on this Florentine *cassone*. One of the readings of this object is that the existing Asian league, the Muslim-Christian alliance against the Ottomans and their champions who defeated the Ottomans, and Persia's kinship towards the Christian faith as a Muslim empire were all known subjects in Florence. This knowledge was to imply that a Florentine family envisioned a desired marriage in this union that eventually overcame the most undefeatable enemy of that time.

This Florentine *cassone* was made before Despina Khatun's role in cementing the Persian-Venetian alliance was revealed in Europe. Trebizond was an important seaport for Venetian and Genoese merchants in the Black Sea to transfer their goods to Asia.⁹² After the fall of Trebizond, the aforementioned maritime republics had not only lost a chief trading partner to the Ottomans, but also another Christian territory to the same Muslim enemy. The approaching threat of the Ottomans made Venice reach out to a potential political ally, Uzun Hasan, whose tolerance towards Christians and whose anti-Ottoman sentiments were already proved in his alliance with John IV Komnenos. Despina Khatun's Christian faith and Uzun Hasan's strategic patronage promoted the status of churches and Christian priests in Persia.⁹³ It was Despina Khatun's direct letters

⁹² William Miller, *The Latin Orient* (London & New York: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge & The Macmillan co, 1920), 51–54.

⁹³ I will investigate this Greek princess's role in Persia's foreign affairs in the section related to the Republic of Venice

to the Signoria of Venice that resulted in the dispatch of important Venetian embassies and military assistance to Persia in 1470s in the battles against the Ottomans.⁹⁴

The Aq Qoyunlu-Kommenos alliance and its victory over the Ottomans in 1459-60 was extravagantly celebrated in Rome, as will be investigated in the next section. This triumph, although transitory, fanned a gleam of hope among Christian princes throughout Europe that if they joined together in an international union, the Ottomans could be crushed. The Republic of Venice and the Papacy were two important European centers that were directly privileged by their alliance with Persia. Florence, however, was not a participant in this political game due to its cordial relations with the Sublime Porte. As a matter of fact, in April 1475, an embassy from the Lord of Persia, Uzun Hasan, arrived in Florence. Despite receiving a letter of recommendation from Sixtus IV (r.1471-84) soliciting a warm welcome, Lorenzo de' Medici (r. 1469-92) gave the Persian embassy a cold reception, perhaps to escape from the benevolence of Mehmed II towards him and his city.⁹⁵ [Appendix I]⁹⁶ More prominently, the Florentine close relations with the Porte in the late 1470s was remarkably celebrated in an impressive medal by the ingenious sculptor Bertoldo di Giovanni (d.1491) at Lorenzo's court, offered to "the Conqueror" Mehmed II as a diplomatic gift.⁹⁷ [Fig 8, ch.2, sec.1] In this large and signed medal, which was modeled after Gentile Bellini's (d.1507) one and only example, Lorenzo

⁹⁴ Tāhirī, *Tārīkh-i siyāsī va ijtimā'ī-i Irān : az marg-i Taymūr tā marg-i Shāh 'Abbās* (*The Socio-Political History of Iran, from the end of Timur's to the end of Shah Abbas's Reign*), 63–64.

⁹⁵ Franz Babinger, "Lorenzo de' Medici e la corte ottomana," *Archivio storico italiano* 121, no. 3 (439) (1963): 316; Giuseppe Mueller, *Documenti sulle relazioni delle città Toscane coll'Oriente Cristiano e coi Turchi fino all'anno MDXXXI* (Roma: Società Multigrafica Editrice, 1966), 220.

⁹⁶ Arch. di Firenze, Riformagioni; Carteggio della Signoria, responsive, Copari, V. 1475, 16 aprile, in Roma.

⁹⁷ For the most recent study on Bertoldo's oeuvre, Cfr. Aimee Ng et al., *Bertoldo di Giovanni: The Renaissance of Sculpture in Medici Florence* (New York: The Frick Collection, in association with D Giles Limited, London, 2019).

conveyed the Medicean political support of Mehmed II.⁹⁸ Through a portrait medal of Mehmed II with an iconographical scene recognizing the Sultan's three major conquests of Constantinople, Greece, and Trebizond on its reverse, the Medici ruler of Florence broadcasted his political partiality, which was apparently not in favor of Persia.⁹⁹

In the face of Lorenzo's disobedience of the pope's decree and his cordiality with the Ottoman Sultan, the Florentines' knowledge of Persia and this empire's history and victories put them on a different level than a military ally, beyond what was like to the Venetians and other Christian rulers of the time. Even though the Persian-Florentine relations of the quattrocento did not maintain diplomatic inspirations, the deep perception of Persian history in Florence prevailed to set the stage for a reliable diplomatic relationship in the next two centuries, which will be investigated in the next chapters. Despina Khatun's grandson, Ismae'il I, became the official founder of the Safavid Empire in 1501. His grandson, Abbas I Safavid allied with Ferdinando I and Cosimo II de' Medici in the next two centuries and created a significant part of the history in the context of the anti-Ottoman league and Persia as a Muslim ally of the Christian Europe.

⁹⁸ Especially the Mehmed's plans to invade Otranto (Puglia) in southern Italy that could best serve Florence in tensions against Naples. For political rivals of Medici Florence and Lorenzo de' Medici's activities in late 1470s, Cfr. Lauro Martines, *April Blood: Florence and the Plot against the Medici*, Pimlico 627 (London: Pimlico, 2004); Marcello Simonetta, *The Montefeltro Conspiracy: A Renaissance Mystery Decoded*, 1st ed (New York: Doubleday, 2008).

⁹⁹ Ng et al., cat; 15, p: 406–9. For Bertoldo's medals, Cfr. Xavier F. Salomon, "Bertoldo di Giovanni: 'Excellent Maker of Medals,' Some Observations," in *Bertoldo di Giovanni: The Renaissance of Sculpture in Medici Florence* (New York: The Frick Collection, in association with D Giles Limited, London, 2019), 205–15.

Section 2: Quattrocento Venice

In 1471, the Signoria of Venice secretly dispatched an ambassador, Catherino Zeno (b.1450), to Uzun Hasan's court in Tabriz. In the treaty Zeno made with Uzun Hasan, the Republic ensured the king of Persia that the Venetian naval forces would attack the Sublime Porte from the sea and Uzun Hasan agreed to invade the eastern borders of the Ottomans over land.¹⁰⁰ On September 25, 1472, the Venetian chronicles recorded the arrival of a Persian emissary, Haji Mohammad, who stayed in Venice upon agreement to receive the artillery, including harquebuses and cannons that Persia needed to confront the Ottomans.¹⁰¹ In the same year, Venice made Zeno's treaty and the military alliance between the two crowns public, which aroused excitement and hope among the Serenissima's Italian allies, the papacy and the Kingdom of Naples.¹⁰²

Turquoise Glass Bowl

Haji Mohammad's mission in Venice was marked by a precious gift of a *Turquoise Glass Bowl* with gold cloisonné enamel to the *Serenissima*, preserved in the Tesoro di San Marco.¹⁰³ [Fig 1, Ch.2, Sec.2] The gift consists of a single glass in turquoise paste in the form of a five-lobed bowl, with five running hares on the outside of each lobe, and a gilded silver ligature chiseled and glimmering with precious stones covering the rim.¹⁰⁴ Five strips of gilded silver, fastened by hinges around the edge, connect the ligature to a

¹⁰⁰ Ṭāhirī, *Tārīkh-i siyāsī va ijtimā'ī-i Īrān : az marg-i Taymūr tā marg-i Shāh 'Abbās* (*The Socio-Political History of Iran, from the end of Timur's to the end of Shah Abbas's Reign*), 63.

¹⁰¹ Guglielmo Berchet, *La Repubblica di Venezia e la Persia* (Tehran: Imperial Organization for Social Services, 1976), 32.

¹⁰² Meserve, *Empires of Islam in Renaissance Historical Thought*, 227.

¹⁰³ Archivio di Stato Venezia (ASV). Secreta XXV, V. Comet, op. cit., e la tavola qui di fronte. Also see Berchet, *La Repubblica di Venezia e la Persia*, 8.

¹⁰⁴ Tesoro di San Marco, no. 140. Also listed in the inventory of 1571, no. 62. See Mario Carrieri et al., *The Treasury of San Marco, Venice* (Milan: Olivetti, 1984), 209–13.

ring, bound around the base of the bowl. At the bottom of the bowl, on the outside, a word is carved in bas-relief in Kufic that reads as “خراسان” (Khorasan), a city under Timurid’s reign over the eastern borders of Uzun Hasan’s territories.¹⁰⁵

The object appeared in the inventory of 1571 as “a turquoise-colored bowl, with unknown material, and a strip decorated with grenades around it, of which some grenades are missing.”¹⁰⁶ A number of pieces of textual evidence substantiate the object’s entrance to the Treasury as Uzun Hasan’s gift to the Serenissima.¹⁰⁷ In the 17th century *Commemoriali*, now preserved in the Biblioteca del Museo Civico Correr (Venice) it is reported that the “scudellotto” was presented to the Republic by Uzun Hasan, the King of Persia.¹⁰⁸ It was supposed that the King gave similar rarities to the Venetian ambassadors when the senate of 1473 sent him artillery and other valuable weaponry to progress against the Ottomans.¹⁰⁹ Giovanni Antonio Meschinello (d. 1799) investigated this

¹⁰⁵ Khorāsān (Khorasan), northeast Iran. This inscription was erroneously interpreted by Montfaucon in 1698 as Opifex Deus (God the Creator- بار (*bār*) is an interjection meaning “Oh” and الله (*Allāh*) is the Arabic reference to God)

¹⁰⁶ “Un scudellotto di color turchino, non sis a di che materia sia, ha il friso attorno ornato di granate, delle qual granate di esse mancano.” Biblioteca Querini Stampalia, Mss., Cl. IV, cod. 17, c.1-13. Inventario 1571, 28 novembre-23 dicembre. Laus Deo. MDLXXI, adi XXVIII Novembre, no. 62. (a copy of this inventory is at l’Ufficio delle Rason Vecchie.)

¹⁰⁷ In an exhibition catalog of 2017, Godart and Scarpari claimed that this Turquoise Glass Bowl was already in the 1325 inventory and they assumed it was brought back as booty in 1204, the Sack of Constantinople. However, the source lacks any further archival references. See Luis Godart and Maurizio Scarpari, *Dall’antica alla nuova Via della Seta* (MAO Museo d’Arte Orientale di Torino, 2017), 354–56. Most likely the catalog is discussing an object in the 1325 inventory that is recorded as “Scutelam unam de turchese varnitam argento deaurato” (ASV. inv. 1325, no. 67). A similar object that seems to point to Uzun Hasan’s gift appeared in the 1732 inventory as “Una scudella grande di turchina di roca vecchia intagliata con figure et ornate di gemme e fornimenti d’oro.” In the same inventory (1732) another glass object appears as “Vasetto di prasma di smeraldo con manico tutto di un pezzo.” According to Stringa in *Vita di S. Marco* (1610, p. 212), there is another turquoise object in the Treasury of San Marco. We are, therefore, faced with two distinct objects: one is a jug (*vasetto*) and the other is a basin (*scudella*), which are both described in the 1732 inventory. For more information on this, see Rodolfo Gallo, *Il Tesoro di S. Marco e la sua storia* (Venezia-Roma: Istituto Per La Collaborazione Culturale, 1967), 211.

¹⁰⁸ *Commemoriali* are registered and archived communications of every reign in the history of Venetian Republic. See Archivio di Stato di Venezia, La guida al patrimonio documentario. Fondi: Commemoriali.

¹⁰⁹ Museo Correr, Mss. Gradenigo, *Commemoriali*, vol. XIII, c. 5.

supposition and affirmed that the bowl was donated by Uzan Hasan (Ussum Cassan).¹¹⁰

In 1865, Guglielmo Berchet echoed the same statement and asserted that in August 1472, Haji Mohammad, a “speaker” sent by Uzun Hasan to Venice, brought to the Signoria “a very precious gift, which is still conserved among the marvelous relics of the Treasure of San Marco.”¹¹¹

Furthermore, at the State Archive of Venice, a reimbursement document from May 1473 indicates the value of the artillery purchased to be sent to Uzun Hasan.¹¹² In return for the donated weaponry, recorded by the Venetian diarist, Marino Sanudo (d.1536), the Turkman ruler sent an extraordinary present of “a jar of agate, the gift of Uzun Hasan,” an argument that was also confirmed by the Parmese illuminator Antonio Pasini (d.1845).¹¹³ According to the textual evidence discussed above, I contend that the *Turquoise Glass Bowl* in the Tesoro di San Marco unfolds as a diplomatic gift from Uzun Hasan to the Republic of Venice, in the context of the two crowns’ military alliance against the geopolitical growth of the Ottoman Empire, in 1470s.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Giovanni Antonio Meschinello, *La chiesa ducale di S. Marco : colle notizie del suo innalzamento : spiegazione delli mosaici, e delle iscrizioni : un dettaglio della preziosità delli marmi, con tutto ciò che di fuori e di dentro vi si contiene: e con varie riflessioni e scoperte* (Venezia: Presso Bartolomeo Barochelli, 1753), 54.

¹¹¹ “Questo oratore recava alla signoria un preziosissimo dono, che tuttora si conserva fra gli stupendi cimeli del tesoro di S. Marco. Esso consiste in un catino ricavato in una sola turchese di smisurata grandezza, avente il diametro delle celebri colonnette della cattedrale di Siviglia (m. 0,228). Sulla superficie esteriore stanno intagliate cinque lepri, e nel fondo le parole bar allah, interpretate dal Montfaucon opifex Deus, avvegnachè opera sì straordinaria e preziosa debba riputarsi divina. Il catino è contornato da una doppia legatura, entro e fuori, d'oro finamente cesellato e guernito di cinquanta gemme. Il Montfaucon dichiara che nessun altro cimelio gli ha destato maggior meraviglia, così pure il Cicognara; ma lo Zanotto ed il Durand dubitano, e forse a ragione, che il catino sia invece di pasta vitrea, la cui arte era perfettissima in Persia, d'onde si diffuse per la civile Europa” See Guglielmo Berchet, *La Repubblica di Venezia e la Persia*, 1865), 8.

¹¹² ASV. Senato, Terra, reg. 8, c.5. This document is published in F. Ferrara, *Documenti per servire alla storia dei banchi veneziani*, in “Archivio Veneto,” vol. I, 1871, p. 143.

¹¹³ “ Uno vasetto di prasma, donò Uxom Cassan.” See Marin Sanudo, *Miscellanea di cronaca veneta* (Museo Correr, Mss. Cicogna, 921, c.24). Pasini, *op. cit.* P.94-98. Tav. XL VIII no. 105

¹¹⁴ For a counter-argument on this subject, see Avinoam Shalem, “New Evidence for the History of the Turquoise Glass Bowl in the Treasury of San Marco,” *Persica* 15 (95 1993): 91–94.

The provenance of the object prior to its arrival in Venice has been the subject of several investigations.¹¹⁵ In 1888, Emile Molinier speculated that the bowl must have been a part of the spoils from the conquest of Persia by Uzun Hasan in 1469.¹¹⁶ In 1914, Martin Conway traced the running-hare motif in ancient Persian art. It was commonly used by the thirteenth century and he assumed that that might be the production date of the bowl. In 1937, Sergio Bettini dated the glass cup in tenth-eleventh centuries.¹¹⁷ In the *Tesoro di San Marco*, the bowl's label encompasses all the aforementioned assumptions and explains the material as "Glass: made in Iran or Iraq, 9th-10th century. Enamel: Byzantine, 11th century. Metalwork: late-10th and 15th century (?)." ¹¹⁸ The bowl's museum label that juxtaposes the different compartments of the object with their relative dates and styles highlights the complex material culture of the gift, which I argue, is a key factor in unfolding the overall message behind its selection by the conqueror-king of Persia, Uzun Hasan, as a befitting diplomatic gift to the Serenissima.

¹¹⁵ Shalem; Prudence Oliver, "Islamic Relief Cut Glass: A Suggested Chronology," *Journal of Glass Studies / The Corning Museum of Glass ; Corning Glass Center.*, 1961, 9–30; Martin Conway, "The Blue Bowl in the Treasury, S. Mark's, Venice," ed. Benedict Nicolson, *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 26 (1915-1914): 140–45; Gallo, *Il Tesoro Di S. Marco e La Sua Storia*, 206–12; Carl Johan Lamm, *Mittelalterliche Gläser und Steinschnittarbeiten aus dem Nahen Osten*. (Pp. x. vi. 566. pl. 205. Berlin, 1930), 23; Robert J Charleston, "A Group of near Eastern Glasses," *Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs / Ed. Benedict Nicolson.*, 1942, 217; Kurt Erdmann, *Die Fatimidischen Bergkristallkannen* (Baden-Baden: Verl. für Kunst und Wissenschaft, 1953), 194; Venice et al., *Opere islamiche* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1971), 117; Römischgermanisches Museum, *Der Schatz von San Marco in Venedig* (Köln: Römisch-German. Museum, 1984), 28; Stefano Carboni and David Whitehouse, *Glass of the Sultans* (New York : Corning : Athens : New Haven: Metropolitan Museum of Art ; Corning Museum of Glass ; Benaki Museum ; Yale University Press, 2001), 176–77; Jonathan Bloom, *Arts of the City Victorious: Islamic Art and Architecture in Fatimid North Africa and Egypt* (New Haven: Yale University Press : In association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2007), 104–5.

¹¹⁶ Emile Molinier, *Le trésor de la basilique de Saint Marc à Venise* (Ferd. Ongania Editeur, 1888), 41.

¹¹⁷ Martin Conway, "The Blue Bowl in the Treasury, S. Mark's, Venice," ed. Benedict Nicolson, *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 26 (1915/1914): 145; Sergio Bettini, "Gli Insigni Cimeli Del Santuario E Del Tesoro Marciani," *L'illustrazione Vaticana*, 1937, 1081.

¹¹⁸ *Tesoro di San Marco*, Basilica di San Marco, Venezia, Italia.

The object is composed of three stylistically distinct parts: a ninth-tenth century glass, Byzantine enamels, and tenth to fifteenth-century metalwork. In addition to the material, the object holds two inscriptions: one is the name of a city (Khorasan) and the other is an invocation of a deity. To all the aforementioned features, the turquoise color of the object contributes an exquisite characteristic to the bowl.

In this section, I first provide a thorough study of the historical and political context of the Aq Qoyunlu-Venetian alliance that resulted in numerous exchanges of emissaries, letters, and gifts. Based on the fact that Uzun Hasan considered this object as a proper gift to add to the Treasury of San Marco in Venice, I analyze each component of this gift in its own historical context and discuss how that context manipulates the overall message transmitted by the object. Furthermore, I argue how the material culture of the object as a composite narrates the political context that pronounced it as a suitable diplomatic gift, from the Aq Qoyunlu king of Persia to his Venetian allies in their battles against the Ottomans.

As already discussed, Uzun Hasan dethroned his brother, Jahangir (r.1444-1453), and took power in Diyarbakır in 1453.¹¹⁹ Diyarbakır was a region in upper Mesopotamia (today's eastern Turkey), where was controlled by the Persians and Romans since antiquity, and in the seventh century, was captured by Muslims.¹²⁰ The city passed under the early Muslim Caliphates of Umayyad (Damascus, r. 661–750), Abbasid (Baghdad, r.750–1258), and Ayyubid (Cairo, Damascus, and Aleppo, r. 1171–1260). From the late-

¹¹⁹ Jahāngīr (Jahangir), Uzun Hasan's brother and predecessor. Hinz, *Taškīl-i daulat-i millī dar Īrān hukūmat-i Āq-Qūyunlū wa zuhūr-i daulat-i šafawī*, 33.

¹²⁰ Trevor Bryce, *The Kingdom of the Hittites*, New ed (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 137.

thirteenth century, Diyarbakır became the official residence of the Turkic tribe, the Aq Qoyunlu, a Turkman confederation originally from Turkistan and a clan to which Uzun Hasan belonged.¹²¹ In fact, in 1400, Uzun Hasan's grandfather, Qara Osman (d. 1435) joined Timur's army in his campaign in Syria and Anatolia. In 1402, after the historical subjugation of the Ottomans in Ankara, Timur granted Diyarbakır to Qara Osman in return for the latter's faith and service to the Turco-Mongolian warlord and his army.¹²² Before Aq Qoyunlu took over Diyarbakır, the city was under the control of the Mamlūk Sultanate (Cairo, r. 1250-1517), who had lost immense territories to Timur's raids in the last decades of the fourteenth century.¹²³

Consequently, Diyarbakır, the Aq Qoyunlu's first capital, was itself booty achieved through their allegiance with Timur's political and military forces, a testimony to Osman Beyg's prowess and his elevated status distinguished by Timur, and a trophy the Aq Qoyunlu gained in the devastating defeat of the Ottomans in 1402. When Uzun Hasan took over the throne in 1453, he inherited this glorifying history of the Aq Qoyunlu confederation, ironically, in the very same year when Constantinople fell to Mehmed II. Hence, it was crucial for the new anti-Ottoman Turkman lord to seek alliances against the rapid progression of the Ottomans, with whom he shared borders. Uzun Hasan's marriage to Despina Khatun from the Komnenos family of Trebizond in 1458 was a shrewd move towards constructing this anti-Ottoman network. Only two years prior to this Muslim-

¹²¹ Hinz, *Taşkıl-i daulat-i millî dar Īrān ḥukūmat-i Āq-Qūyunlū wa zuḥūr-i daulat-i şafawī*, 31.

¹²² Mamlūk rule composed of two era: Turkic Baḥrī Mamlūk Sultanate (r. 1250–1382) and the Circassian Burjī Mamlūk Sultanate (r.1382–1517). Hinz, 166; Ruy González de Clavijo, *Embassy to Tamerlane, 1403-1406*, 2006, 134.

¹²³ Kenneth M. Setton, *A History of the Crusades* (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 757; Carl F. Petry, ed., *Islamic Egypt: 640 - 1517*, digitally printed version, *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, ed. by Carl F. Petry ; Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 91–92.

Christian coalition, in 1456, Calixtus III (r.1455-1458) had dispatched a Franciscan friar, Ludovico da Bologna, to Trebizond and Georgia to muster a crusade against the Ottomans. The news of Uzun Hasan's alliance with the Byzantine-Greek emperors of Trebizond must have reached the pope's envoy, because in 1459 Ludovico arrived in Uzun Hasan's court to persuade him to join the crusade. In response, Uzun Hasan accompanied the Franciscan confrère with an envoy to the pope, Pius II (r. 1458-64), who in 1459 convened the Congress of Mantua to form a league of two continents for a crusade against the Ottomans.¹²⁴ Ludovico and the envoys of Trebizond, Georgia, and Mesopotamia (Uzun Hasan) entered Rome in late-December, 1460. Their entrance aroused consternation among Europeans to see a figure in Oriental costume representing a Muslim king in a call for crusade against another Muslim sultanate.¹²⁵

On the one hand, this marriage announced Uzun Hasan's court as a multi-cultural domain in which Christianity was welcomed and respected, as Despina Khatun was allowed to freely retain and practice her Christian faith. Hence, the European princes perceived this Sunni Muslim ruler as a trustworthy king whose alliance could defend Christianity against the infidel enemy, the Ottomans. On the other hand, Despina Khatun's involvement in political matters had direct effects on Uzun Hasan's diplomacy. In fact, Despina Khatun persuaded Uzun Hasan to defend against the Ottoman invasions in her fatherland, Trebizond, a campaign that resulted in the Victory of Malatya over the Ottomans in around 1460, an event minutely represented on the *Trebizond Cassone*, already discussed in the previous section. Furthermore, Catherino Zeno, whose arrival in

¹²⁴ I will elaborate on this event in the next section on cinquecento Rome.

¹²⁵ Hinz, *Taškīl-i daulat-i millī dar Īrān ḥukūmat-i Āq-Qūyunlū wa zuḥūr-i daulat-i ṣafawī*, 43–45.

Uzun Hasan's court in 1471 resulted in forming a military alliance between the two states followed by Haji Mohammad's departure for Venice, was married to Despina Khatun's sister.¹²⁶

Despina Khatun's marriage to Uzun Hasan brought the Anatolian state of Cappadocia under his sovereignty, as a part of her dowry.¹²⁷ Within a decade after this interfaith marriage, Uzun Hasan annexed Armenia to his domains, and by April 1469 ousted another Turkman confederation called Qara Qoyunlu (Black Sheep) who resided in Persia, and announced himself as the King of Persia, Armenia, and Mesopotamia.¹²⁸ The Aq Qoyunlu ruler assigned his sons as the governors of Isfahan, Fars, Kerman, and Baghdad (Iraq), and moved his capital from Diyarbakir in Mesopotamia to the prestigious city of Tabriz, in the northwest of Persia, the location of the previous capital of the Qara Qoyunlu ruler, Jāhānshāh (d.1467).¹²⁹ Consequently, by 1470, Uzun Hasan had the Byzantine-Greek region of Cappadocia, most of Persia (except for Khorasan), Mesopotamia, and Armenia under his rule. Sultan Husayn Bāyqarā (Herat. r.1469-1506) of the Timurid dynasty, the monarch of Herat and Khorasan, was Uzun Hasan's eastern neighbor, and the Ottoman Empire and the Mamluks of Egypt and Syria were to his west. During his mission in Tabriz, Zeno insisted on having private meetings with Despina Khatun, a request that could only be realized because of their family affiliations, and Uzun Hasan. These encounters resulted in a letter in Uzun Hasan's own handwriting to

¹²⁶ Ṭāhirī, *Tārīkh-i siyāsī va ijtimā'ī-i Īrān : az marg-i Taymūr tā marg-i Shāh 'Abbās* (*The Socio-Political History of Iran, from the end of Timur's to the end of Shah Abbas's Reign*), 62; Franz Babinger, Ralph Manheim, and William C Hickman, *Mehmed the Conqueror and His Time* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 314.

¹²⁷ Hinz, *Taškīl-i daulat-i millī dar Īrān ḥukūmat-i Āq-Qūyunlū wa zuḥūr-i daulat-i ṣafawī*, 41.

¹²⁸ Hinz, 55–71.

¹²⁹ Jāhānshāh b. Qara Yūsof (Jāhānshāh) Qara Qoyunlu chief from 1447 to his death in 1467.

the king of Georgia to persuade him to join the crusade against the Ottomans.¹³⁰

Moreover, Uzun Hasan's Christian wife was actively engaged in diplomatic relations between the Signoria of Venice and the Asiatic league in their anti-Ottoman challenge.¹³¹ On the embassy's way back to Venice, Despina Khatun prepared a clergyman in Zeno's retinue with letters, in which she persuaded the Venetians to maintain diplomatic allegiance with Uzun Hasan's court.¹³²

The fact that Despina Khatun sent her letters through a religious figure in Zeno's diplomatic mission conveys that the content of her letters pertained to matters in defense of Christianity against the frequent threats by the infidels. In other words, Despina Khatun's interference in the Aq Qoyunlu-Venetian alliance reveals her principal role as a pious Christian queen in assuring the Venetian senate that this Turkman king, Uzun Hasan, was a reliable ally despite his Muslim faith. The dispatch of six heavy cannons and firearms, accompanied by an army of hundreds of soldiers and military experts with a Venetian diplomat, Giosafat Barbaro (1413-1494), in 1473 to Tabriz, verifies Despina Khatun's profitable intervention and the Venetians' adamancy about vanquishing the Ottomans.¹³³

It was in this context that Uzun Hasan sent the *Turquoise Glass Bowl* as a diplomatic gift to Venice. Other than the word Khorasan on the bottom of this bowl, there are no textual indications that explain the fusion of artistic styles in this one object. Visual evidence,

¹³⁰ There is no specific name mentioned as the recipient of Uzun Hasan's letter, but at this point Bagrat VI (r.1465-1478) was the king of Georgia.

¹³¹ The Asiatic League consisted of "the coalition between the Komnenoi and the Anatolian and Caucasian powers, including Georgia, Mingrelia, Sinop, and Karaman." See Baskins, "the Bride of the Trebizond: Turks and Turkmans on a Florentine Wedding Chest, Circa 1460," 91.

¹³² Hinz, *Taşkıl-i daulat-i millî dar İrân hükûmat-i Âq-Qūyunlū wa zühūr-i daulat-i şafawî*, 63–68.

¹³³ Hinz, 68.

however, suggests possible provenances to this bowl that in every stage of its life history was re-modified to reconcile with the dominant visual culture of its setting. Referring to the question proposed earlier in the section about the consequences under which Uzun Hasan selected this multi-cultural object as a proper diplomatic gift to his Venetian allies, I argue that every component of this object influences the overall purpose of its presentation as a gift, when seen in the context of the Aq Qoyunlu-Venetian diplomatic alliance against the Ottomans.

Scholars have disputed the material of the bowl: some believe the bowl is of Persian turquoise and others that it is glass.¹³⁴ A 1847 report by the Italian art historian, Francesco Zanotto (d.1863), based on investigations made by the nineteenth-century art collectors, Marcantonio Corniani and Leopoldo Cicgonara (d.1834), noting air bubbles seen through the light, concluded that the bowl was made exclusively of glass. Antonio Salviati (1816-1890), the Venetian glass manufacturer, affirmed Zanotto's statement and asserted the bowl was made of glass.¹³⁵ Accordingly, one significant feature in this object is the wheel-cutting technique applied on the glass, which was used primarily by Romans and Sassanians, and later developed by Muslim civilizations in Iraq, Persia, and Egypt in the ninth and tenth centuries.¹³⁶ The same technique appears on a clear glass-cut chalice with almost identical stylized running hares carved on colored glass in the Tesoro di San Marco, dated to eighth-or-ninth-century Samarra, then the capital of Abbasids. [Fig 2,

¹³⁴ Conway, "The Blue Bowl in the Treasury, S. Mark's, Venice," 145; Gallo, *Il Tesoro Di S. Marco e La Sua Storia*, 208–9.

¹³⁵ Francesco Zanotto, "La basilica di San Marco da cappella ducale a cattedrale della città], in *Venezia e le sue laguna*, vol. II (Venezia, 1847), 86–87; Conway, "The Blue Bowl in the Treasury, S. Mark's, Venice," 145.

¹³⁶ Mario Carrieri et al., *The Treasury of San Marco, Venice* (Milan: Olivetti, 1984), 209.

Ch.2, Sec.2] This allusion upholds the theory that early Muslim glasscutters or lapidaries also produced the *Turquoise Glass Bowl*.

I already expounded on the geopolitical significance of Aq Qoyunlu's first capital, Diyarbakir. The city was granted by Timur to Uzun Hasan's grandfather, but before 1402, it passed under the Umayyad, Abbasid, and Ayyubid Caliphates, until the late thirteenth century, when it fell in the hands of Timur and was passed on to Qara Osman. Considering the glass-cutting technique employed in Uzun Hasan's gift a skill inherited and developed by the early Muslim inhabitants of the Middle East, I argue that this vitreous bowl alludes to Aq Qoyunlu's former capital, Diyarbakir. The capital city of Aq Qoyunlu for almost seventy years, Diyarbakir fell into the possession of the confederation in recompense of the Qara Osman-Timurid alliance after the eminent triumph over Bayezid I. The city maintained a historic association with the Aq Qoyunlu's Timurid lineage, as well as a symbolic value in the context of the Battle of Ankara. Hence, the provenance of the object invokes victory, while it demarcates the extent of the Aq Qoyunlu's sway.

As addressed by the art critic, Martin Conway, in his 1914 study, the earliest extant Persian object that demonstrates the running-hare motif is a sixth-century (Sassanian) bronze plate, is preserved in the Hermitage Museum. The notable long ears and the conventionalized form of the animal's body led Conway to conclude that the Venice bowl is not Sassanian. Yet, a thirteenth-century turquoise glazed tile "probably" made in Shiraz, a noteworthy court city under Timurids in the south-central Persia, displays the running-hare theme in high relief. The decorative hare on this tile stylistically resembles the ones on the turquoise bowl in the Tesoro di San Marco. Hence, Conway concludes

that San Marco's turquoise bowl is also a thirteenth-century Persian product.¹³⁷ Conway's visual evidence in comparing the two Persian objects and his conclusion about their simultaneous production based on their stylistic similitudes are convincing. Yet, the running-hare motif and its long history in Persian art impart more significance to my argument. This decorative theme was already known by the Sassanian craftsmen and reappeared in Persian artifacts in the late middle ages.¹³⁸ Therefore, the recurrence of this motif on Uzun Hasan's gift alludes to Persia and him as its king.

The glass bowl in the Tesoro di San Marco compounds two features, the wheel-cutting technique and the running-hare motif, which both had significance in Persian and Islamic histories. It is noteworthy to reiterate that Uzun Hasan conquered his rivals in Persia and took over the throne by 1469. Hence, the Persian allusions on San Marco's bowl that became a diplomatic gift only a few years after the fall of Tabriz, highlight Uzun Hasan's illustrious victories in Persia and the land's annexation to the Turkman ruler's domain. Yet, the visual culture of the object is more complex than tagging single or double styles to it. The Persian identity of the object is immensely affected by the golden mount holding silver-gilt plaques with Byzantine enamels and gems around the rim of the glass bowl.

The silver-gilt mount is composed of five bands gripping the lobes, hinged on both sides to the next band, and golden belts that connect the hinges to the ring around the base of the bowl. On every lobe, the band consists of three plaques: two on each end with fine filigree works framing six cabochons and a central precious stone, flanking a

¹³⁷ Conway, "The Blue Bowl in the Treasury, S. Mark's, Venice," 145.

¹³⁸ Richard Ettinghausen and Oleg Grabar, *The Art and Architecture of Islam: 650-1250* (Penguin Books UK, 1987), 235.

distinguished plaque in the middle with “central rosette patterns” adorned with floral motifs and “quatrefoil design of crosses.” The mount is double-framed by twisted strips of gilt-silver metal on the outside and on the inside decorated by acanthus and palmette designs in low relief.¹³⁹ According to Daniel Alcouffe, out of fifteen plaques on the mount, only the five central enameled plaques are Byzantine and many of the gems are later replacements. The “central rosette patterns,” he argued, are of Middle Byzantine period, and the “quatrefoil design of crosses” are fragments set beneath the silver-gilt panel that is cut to reveal the underneath design. Alcouffe concludes that this filigree work is of “Western European Origin” and was perhaps to imitate the Byzantine enamel work of the thirteenth century, following the exquisite example of the *Pala d’Oro*, the double-sided high altar of the Basilica di san Marco in Venice.¹⁴⁰

There is no doubt that the gilded mount of Uzun Hasan’s gift is in Byzantine style and breaks with the object’s Persian-Islamic visual culture. The reason behind the object’s embellishment in Middle Byzantine enamels and filigree works is not clear to scholars. An engraving by La Mottraye published in 1727 shows the object as it looks today.¹⁴¹ [Fig 3, Ch.2, Sec.2] This engraving led Alcouffe to passively suggest that maybe the Byzantine mount was added to the object after its arrival in Venice.¹⁴² In Berchet’s description of the object, however, he addressed the “double ligature” that surrounded the object at the time of its presentation to the Signoria by Haji Mohammad.¹⁴³ As I

¹³⁹ Carrieri et al., *The Treasury of San Marco, Venice*, 211.

¹⁴⁰ Carrieri et al., 209–11.

¹⁴¹ Aubry de LaMottraye, *Voyages du Sr. A. de La Mottraye En Europe, Asie & Afrique. I. I.* (La Haye: Johnson & Van Duren, 1727), 72; for an earlier reference to this drawing, Cfr. Vincenzo Maria Coronelli, *Isolario ...* (Venice: V M Coronelli, 1696), 17.

¹⁴² Carrieri et al., 211–13.

¹⁴³ “Il catino è contornato da una doppia legatura, entro e fuori, d’oro finamente cesellato e guernito di cinquanta gemme. Il Montfaucon dichiara che nessun altro cimelio gli ha destato maggior meraviglia, così pure il Cicognara; ma lo Zanotto ed il Durand dubitano, e forse a ragione, che il catino sia invece di pasta

mentioned earlier in this section, the 1571 inventory that recorded this object, specifically described the object with some “missing grenades.”¹⁴⁴ In these relations, a logistic dilemma emerges that challenges Alcouffe’s hypothesis: If the Venetians added the golden mount after the object’s arrival in the Treasury in the fifteenth century, why did the object have “missing grenades” at the time of its registration in the inventory of 1571, but not in the engraving of 1727?

Alcouffe’s puzzlement is an unavoidable consequence of the lack of textual information and the oddity of a Byzantine mount on a ninth-century turquoise paste glass with Persian decorative motifs, and Kufic inscriptions in this object. The question mark in front of the “15th Century (?)” on the object’s museum label also indicates its enigmatic composition of and subsequent confusion among scholars. Nonetheless, it is of substantial importance to consider this object as a diplomatic gift in 1472 to the Republic of Venice. By this time, Uzun Hasan had Anatolian Cappadocia, a region with a long history under the Byzantine Empire, as a part of his domain.¹⁴⁵ Additionally, in the Asiatic League against the Ottomans, Uzun Hasan was a significant ally of the Trebizond Empire and after the fall of Trebizond to the Ottomans in 1461, he knew himself as a rightful heir to that Byzantine-Greek heritage. According to a Polish chronicler, Długosz, in a confidential mission lead by Zeno, as the Venetian envoy in Uzun Hasan’s court to Europe, in 1474, as a part of the diplomatic negotiation Uzun Hasan proposed that his elder daughter from

vitrea, la cui arte era perfettissima in Persia, d’onde si diffuse per la civile Europa.” See Berchet, *La Repubblica di Venezia e La Persia* (Tehran: Imperial Organization for Social Services, 1976), 8.

¹⁴⁴ “Un scudellotto di color turchino, non sis a di che materia sia, ha il friso attorno ornato di granate, delle qual granate di esse mancano.” Biblioteca Querini Stampalia, Mss., CI. IV, cod. 17, c.1-13. Inventario 1571, 28 novembre-23 dicembre. Laus Deo. MDLXXI, adi XXVIII Novembre, no. 62. (a copy of this inventory is at l’Ufficio delle Rason Vecchie.)

¹⁴⁵ Robert G. Ousterhout, *A Byzantine Settlement in Cappadocia*, *Dumbarton Oaks Studies* 42 (Washington, D.C: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2011).

his marriage to Despina Khatun marry one of the royal sons of the Polish King, Casimir IV Jagiellon (d.1492).¹⁴⁶ As her dowry, the Turkman king offered the entire Greek State, “*omne Graecorum Imperium*,” and promised to baptize her, if Casimir IV Jagiellon joined the king’s call to retake Constantinople from Mehmed II and reconstitute the Roman Empire.¹⁴⁷

Uzun Hasan’s proposal for his daughter’s dowry indicates the extent of his sovereignty in the area and his possessive attitude towards the Byzantine-Greek lands. Additionally, his promise to convert his daughter was a shrewd diplomatic gesture to pronounce himself a tolerant and open-minded Muslim king. In fact, the nature of Uzun Hasan’s negotiations with the European powers suggest the king’s attempt in proposing himself as a potential leader whose principal goal was to take back Constantinople (then was renamed Istanbul), the capital of Byzantine Empire and the Greek Church, from the Ottomans. Claiming Constantinople was a mask that could appeal Europeans’, specifically Venetians’ trust, to see Uzun Hasan as a pretender with a mutual enemy and common interest, who had already proven himself as *buona fide*. Hence, reusing spoils of the

¹⁴⁶ The mission was to the Polish court, the Pope, France, Naples, Hungary and Venice.

¹⁴⁷ Małgorzata Dąbrowska, “Uzun Hasan’s Project of Alliance with the Polish King (1474),” in *The Hidden secrets: late Byzantium in the western and Polish context*, 2017, 211–12. At this time, Casimir IV had a military alliance with the Ottoman Empire in a battle against Hungary. Zeno’s mission was to persuade the Polish king to shift his political side and join the league against the Ottomans. With the help of Uzun Hasan’s proposal that ended in the marriage between his elder daughter and Casimir IV’s son in 1475, Zeno concluded a treaty with the king and conjoined the Polish Kingdom to the anti-Ottoman movement. Afterwards, Zeno proceeded his mission in Hungary and encouraged Mathias I Corvinus (r. 1458-1490), the king of Hungary and Croatia, to join the league. Thus Zeno unified the Kingdom of Poland, Hungary, and Croatia with the anti-Ottoman movement sponsored by the Republic of Venice, Papacy, and the Kingdom of Naples in the Italian Peninsula and Uzun Hasan from the Asiatic League. See Tāhirī, *Tārīkh-i siyāsī va ijtimā’ī-i Īrān : az marg-i Taymūr tā marg-i Shāh ‘Abbās* (*The Socio-Political History of Iran, from the end of Timur’s to the end of Shah Abbas’s Reign*), 67–68.

Byzantine Empire could work as a vocabulary of a shared language between Uzun Hasan's court and Venice, with her long history as a Byzantine territory.¹⁴⁸

Seen in this context, the Byzantine enamelwork on Uzun Hasan's gift to the Signoria of Venice gains a significant role in unfolding the integrated message of this object. In the context of Uzun Hasan's alliance, I consider the Byzantine mount as a provocative part of the gift at the time of its arrival in Venice. The Byzantine enamelwork of the gift, I argue, alludes to Uzun Hasan's connections with Byzantine imperial traditions, specifically his alliance with the Emperors of Trebizond, and the Byzantine territories under his reign. In this case, the fifteenth-century metalwork of the object suggests a possible modification on it in preparation for its presentation as a gift to his political ally, in Uzun Hasan's court. Before Haji Mohammad's attendance, Uzun Hasan was presumably familiar with the courtly style of Venice, through a number of diplomatic missions exchanged between the two. Hence, the king fitted his gift with the Byzantine enamel plaques that are still glimmering in the Tesoro di San Marco today.

A decade after the fall of Constantinople, the Republic of Venice sent a secret envoy, Lazzaro Querini, to the court of Uzun Hasan (r. 1453-1478) to negotiate a military alliance against the Ottomans.¹⁴⁹ The few Ottoman victories and the 1461 fall of Trebizond, a chief trading partner in the Black Sea since the thirteenth century, stimulated the Venetians to show serious interest in this alliance.¹⁵⁰ In response to

¹⁴⁸ John Julius Norwich, *A History of Venice*, 1st Vintage Books ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 8–121.

¹⁴⁹ Ṭāhirī, *Tārīkh-i siyāsī va ijtimā'ī-i Īrān : az marg-i Taymūr tā marg-i Shāh 'Abbās* (*The Socio-Political History of Iran, from the end of Timur's to the end of Shah Abbas's Reign*), 41.

¹⁵⁰ Angelo Michele Piemontese, "L'ambasciatore di Persia presso Federico da Montefeltro, Ludovico Bononiense O.F.M. e il Cardinale Bessarione," *Miscellanea Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae* 11 (2004): 541–42.

Querini's mission, in 1464, Uzun Hasan dispatched an ambassador, *Mametanazab* with letters and gifts to Venice as an expression of kinship between the two rulers.¹⁵¹

Mametanazab's mission in Venice initiated a series of diplomatic exchanges between the two states and Haji Mohammad's was one of them. Therefore, Uzun Hasan was acquainted with his partner's courtly style through the exchanges, including the emissaries' customs, gifts, and the reports he received from his envoys, until that date. Hence, the king chose the artistic styles and material as a language to proclaim his territories, at the same time, he presented a gift suitable for the visual culture of his political partner.

Lastly, the turquoise glaze of the bowl and the Kufic inscription of Khorasan are the other key features that elaborate on the Aq Qoyunlu-Timurid fused histories. In the fifteenth century, Tabriz was a center for prestigious workshops among which tile and manuscript production were outstanding.¹⁵² The workshops were centers for immigrant craftsmen to transmit the artistic styles of their origin. The inscribed letter of Khorasan on the bottom of the bowl immediately recalls the city as a well-known source of turquoise. In the 2017 exhibition catalogue that I previously mentioned, the authors perceive this inscription as a possible lure for "unsuspecting Western buyers."¹⁵³ I argue instead that this word reveals the close artistic connections between the Aq Qoyunlu Tabriz and Timurid Khorasan; a

¹⁵¹ Tāhirī, *Tārīkh-i siyāsī va ijtimā'ī-i Īrān : az marg-i Taymūr tā marg-i Shāh 'Abbās* (*The Socio-Political History of Iran, from the end of Timur's to the end of Shah Abbas's Reign*), 62.

¹⁵² Sandra Aube, "The Uzun Hasan Mosque in Tabriz: New Perspectives on a Tabrizi Ceramic Tile Workshop," *Muqarnas Online* 33, no. 1 (November 14, 2016): 33–62, https://doi.org/10.1163/22118993_03301P004.

¹⁵³ Godart and Scarpari, *Dall'antica alla nuova Via della Seta*, 354.

correlation that developed in Herat (today's Afghanistan), a significant Timurid court and cultural center, at the time of Sultan Husayn Bāyqarā.¹⁵⁴

In this regard, Gülru Necipoğlu remarked on the Turco-Iranian “Timurid International Style” of the fifteenth century that immensely influenced the taste of the royal courts from Anatolia to India. “International Timurid” taste was an artistic phase in which Persian craftsmen worked in the Timurid lands, Persia, and the Ottoman court, transmitting various technical and stylistic Timurid characteristics.¹⁵⁵ The shared cultural legacy between Tabriz and Timurid centers also involved Timur's transportation of Tabrizi craftsmen to his capital at Samarqand after his campaign of 1386, the Timurid Baysunghur's (d.1433) deportation of Tabrizi craftsmen to his capital in Herat. In addition, Herat was plundered by Turkmans twice throughout the third quarter of the fifteenth century. In 1458, Jāhānshāh Qara Qoyunlu attacked Herat. Although, it was an unsuccessful campaign, but the Turkmans of Persia and Azerbaijan took the royal treasuries, including cameos and manuscripts, back to Tabriz and Jāhānshāh deported Herati craftsmen to his capital in Tabriz.¹⁵⁶

The second raid of Herat occurred in 1469 by the troops of Uzun Hasan, after his conquest of Tabriz.¹⁵⁷ After Uzun Hasan dethroned Jāhānshāh Qara Qoyunlu and took over Tabriz in 1467, a Timurid ruler of Transoxiana and Khorasan, Abu Sa'id Mirza (d.1469), departed from his capital in Herat in March 1468, to face Uzun Hasan and

¹⁵⁴ Aube, “The Uzun Hasan Mosque in Tabriz,” 57.

¹⁵⁵ Gülru Necipoğlu, “From International Timurid to Ottoman: A Change of Taste in Sixteenth-Century Ceramic Tiles,” *Muqarnas* 7 (1990): 136. For more information on the “International Timurid Style,” also see Sophie Makariou and Musée du Louvre, eds., *Three Empires of Islam: Istanbul, Isfahan, Delhi ; Master Pieces of the Louvre Collection* (Valencia: Fundación Bancaja, 2008), 94.

¹⁵⁶ Aube, “The Uzun Hasan Mosque in Tabriz,” 54–55.

¹⁵⁷ Woods, *The Aqqyunlu*, 127.

conquer Persia. Abu Sa'id was killed in February 1469 by another Timurid descendant in the Aq Qoyunlu court, Yadgar Muhammad Mirza (d.1470).¹⁵⁸ Immediately afterwards, Uzun Hasan dispatched Yadgar Muhammad to Khorasan and declared him as the legitimate heir to the throne of the late Timurid ruler, Abu Sa'id. By that time, Khorasan had already become a province under another Timurid figure, Sultan Husayn Bāyqarā. For a brief period, Sultan Husayn accepted Uzun Hasan's domain over Khorasan, in return for the removal of all the Aq Qoyunlu troops from the city.¹⁵⁹ However, this truce lasted only a few weeks until Sultan Husayn executed Yadgar Muhammad and consolidated his control over Herat, and secured his power.¹⁶⁰

Khorasan remained a Timurid territory that Uzun Hasan never truly conquered. Yet, the inscription on the glass bowl and its turquoise color suggest the Turkman ruler's desired suzerainty over this specific land. Previously, I deliberated on the artistic exchanges between Timurid Khorasan and Turkman Tabriz. Hence, the object's turquoise paste and inscription allude to this Tabriz- Khorasan correlation. Nevertheless, I perceive Uzun Hasan's selection of this object as a deliberate nod to his authority that subjugated his rivals and enemies and extended his reign even to Khorasan. At the same time, Uzun Hasan declared himself as a descendant of Timur. Recorded by the Venetian diarist, Domenico Malipiero (1428-1515), in the pedigree Ghāsem Hasan boasted in front of the Signoria in 1464, the ambassador called his lord, Uzun Hasan, a descendant of Timur, the Turco-Mongolian warlord who devastated Bayezid I and caged the latter under his dining

¹⁵⁸ Hinz, *Taškīl-i daulat-i millī dar Īrān ḥukūmat-i Āq-Qūyunlū wa zuhūr-i daulat-i šafawī*, 62–70.

¹⁵⁹ Thomas W. Lentz and Glenn D. Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision: Persian Art and Culture in the Fifteenth Century* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1989), 242–44.

¹⁶⁰ Hinz, *Taškīl-i daulat-i millī dar Īrān ḥukūmat-i Āq-Qūyunlū wa zuhūr-i daulat-i šafawī*, 118–19.

table in 1402.¹⁶¹ This Uzun Hasan-Timur association was meant to emphasize the Turkman ruler's anti-Ottoman sentiments, as well as elevating him to the power and prowess of Timur.

The *Turquoise Glass Bowl* in the Tesoro di San Marco embodies layers of messages that encompass the ancient wheel-cutting techniques, to all the territories under Uzun Hasan's reign, his alliance with Byzantine Imperial traditions, his perception of Venice's courtly style, and his linkage to Timur. Thus, the object's multicultural appearance speaks to both side of the alliance, an ambition that Uzun Hasan pursued in his diplomacy with the Christian Europe. In fact, this diplomatic gift symbolized the legacy of the Aq Qoyunlu-Venetian alliance against the Ottomans and pronounced Uzun Hasan as a reliable king, whose valor could vanquish every threat between the two crowns. The composite identity of the object, testifies to the heritage Uzun Hasan inherited, his present reign, and the secure future he desired for, by opening the doors of his court towards European, specifically Venetian, states.

¹⁶¹ Meserve, *Empires of Islam in Renaissance Historical Thought*, 226.

Section 3: Quattrocento Rome

In the previous section on Venice, I discussed the dynamics of the complex cultures of a diplomatic gift to the Serenissima that materialized Uzun Hasan's imperial self-fashioning. In this section, I analyze a number of visual representations in Siena and Rome that depict ambassadors on behalf of that Turkmen king at the Roman Curia and bring nuance to the overall meaning of the paintings, by considering the impact of including an anti-Ottoman agent in the composition. Further on in this section, I identify a famed precious Hellenistic cameo, known as Tazza Farnese, as originating in the treasures gained by Aq Qoyunlus following their fused histories with Timurids, by associating it with a drawing of the object by a Muslim artist in Herat in the early fifteenth century. Lastly, I propose that the cameo was a diplomatic gift from the Turkmen King of Persia to the Papacy in 1471.

The Piccolomini Library in Siena

In 1502, Cardinal Francesco Todeschini (1439-1503) commissioned the Perugian artist, Bernardino di Betto, known as Pinturicchio (1454-1513), to decorate the Piccolomini Library in the Cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta, the Duomo of Siena, with a fresco cycle to honor the life of the patron's uncle, Enea Silvio Piccolomini, Pope Pius II (r.1458-1464).¹⁶² His uncle's life was celebrated in ten episodes, based on the pope's autobiography, the *Commentarii*, a distinguished historical and political chronicle written

¹⁶² Susan J. May, "The Piccolomini Library in Siena Cathedral: A New Reading with Particular Reference to Two Compartments of the Vault Decoration," *Renaissance Studies* 19, no. 3 (2005): 287–89. The past pope, Enea Silvio Bartolomeo Piccolomini (Pius II), was born in the Sienese town of Pienza and his father was of the House of Piccolomini, hence the name and location of Pinturicchio's frescoes.

within the last two years of his reign.¹⁶³ Pius II had established himself as an anti-Ottoman pontiff, who only a year after his ascension as the Supreme Bishop of Rome, in summer 1459, convoked the Council of Mantua to muster a new crusade against the Ottomans.

Following the Council, in 1464, Pius II went to the Adriatic port city of Ancona to accumulate the arms and galleys for his campaign. Cristoforo Moro (r. 1462-1471), the doge of Venice, guaranteed to supply the fleet for the crusaders and commence the operations. The Venetian galleys were to deliver artillery to the Aq Qoyunlu in Iskenderun port, thereby the Turkmans would attack the Ottomans overland through Cilician Gates and the Venetian fleet proceed over the sea.¹⁶⁴ However, by the time the Venetian ships approached Ancona, the Pope succumbed to a severe fever and died in August 1464. Hence, the campaign did not bear fruit.¹⁶⁵ Yet, the cross-confessional negotiations between Uzun Hasan, a Sunni Muslim ruler, and the Christian leaders under the umbrella of a crusade against the Sunni Ottomans, were of key significance. This international coalition was reflected in the artistic ideas of the period.

The Ottoman menace is an ongoing theme of the narratives in the Piccolomini Library. They are enlivened by the vibrant colors of the costumes against bright architectural and landscape backgrounds and framed by illusionistic arches and decorated pillars. The Ottoman menace is an ongoing theme within a larger context of a pageantry to Enea

¹⁶³ Nora S. Lambert, "Reframing the Crusade in the Piccolomini Library," in *The Crusades and Visual Culture* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2015), 227.

¹⁶⁴ Meserve, *Empires of Islam in Renaissance Historical Thought*, 227.

¹⁶⁵ Frederick Ignatius Antrobus, ed., *The History of the Popes from the Close of the Middle Ages : Drawn from the Secret Archives of the Vatican and Other Original Sources*, vol. 3 (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1899), 360–70.

Silvio's fidelity as a pious Catholic and a valiant crusader, who elevated from a secretary of cardinals to a cardinal by Calixtus III Borgia (r.1455-1458) in December 1456 and crowned as the pope in 1458, in the narratives. Although Cardinal Francesco commissioned the furnishing of the Piccolomini Library in June 1502, the subject matter predates Pinturicchio's frescoes by decades. Therefore, I begin this section with this pictorial program that echoes the mid-fifteenth-century incidents from the life of Pius II.

The cycle starts with scenes of Aeneas Silvio departing for the Council of Basel in 1431, in the retinue of Cardinal Domenico Capranica (d.1458). The Council was convoked by Pope Martin V (r.1417-1431), the first pope after the Papal Schism that began in 1378 and lasted until 1417, when the papacy returned to Rome from Avignon, in the context of reconciling the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic conflicts and amid the concerns of the rise of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁶⁶ Pinturicchio's frescoes culminate in an episode from the last week of Pius II's life, *The Arrival in Ancona*. [Fig 1, Ch.2, Sec.3] The ailing pope is on the *sedia gestatoria* held above a crowd with a partial view of Ancona in the far right background. The pope is looking down at a figure in the traditional Venetian costume of the Doge with a cape over a golden robe, and a *corno ducale* (a horn-like ducal hat) held by a younger figure behind him standing in the crowd. The Doge is kneeling on the right in front of the pope in the foreground. The Venetian dignitary is identified as Doge Cristoforo Moro, despite the Doge's beardless face in real life. This discrepancy in his appearance resulted in some scholars presuming that Pinturicchio's Venetian figure was Doge Agostino Barbarigo (r. 1486-1501), who was the Doge around

¹⁶⁶ Thomas M Izicki, "The Missing Antipope : The Rejection of Felix V and the Council of Basel in the Writings of Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini and the Piccolomini Library.," *Viator / Publ. under the Auspices of the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 41 (2010): 301–14.

the time of Cardinal Francesco's commission of the pictorial program of the Piccolomini Library.¹⁶⁷

Considering the posthumous completion of Pius II's fresco cycle, I contend that the Venetian dignitary in Pinturicchio's fresco is Doge Cristoforo Moro, who was the Doge at the time of Pius II's campaign destined for Constantinople and in charge of providing the ships to transport the crusaders. While the Pope's gaze slides down onto the kneeling Doge, the Supreme Pontiff's right hand points to his left side, where a figure with a large white turban and brown moustache stands confrontationally and looks directly out at the viewer. This turbaned figure has been identified as either Djem (Cem) Sultan (1459-1495), Mehmed II's third son, or Bajezid Osman (d.1496), also known as Calixtus Ottomanus after his conversion by Calixtus III, Mehmed II's stepbrother.¹⁶⁸ Both of the two Turkish characters were pretenders to the Ottoman throne and resided in the Papal court in the second half of the fifteenth century. However, Djem Sultan or Prince Jem, who departed to Europe to gain support for his competition for the Ottoman throne, was only five years old when Pius II arrived in Ancona. Hence, he could not be the subject of Pinturicchio's turbaned figure.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Lambert, "Reframing the Crusade in the Piccolomini Library," 233; Gyde Vanier Gilbert Shepherd, *A Monument to Pope Pius II*, 1993, 143–44.

¹⁶⁸ Lambert, "Reframing the Crusade in the Piccolomini Library," 233–34; Franz Babinger, "*Bajezid Osman*" (*Calixtus Ottomanus*), *ein Vorläufer und Gegenspieler Dschem-Sultans* (Bruxelles: Ed. de la Libr. Encyclopédique, 1951), 349–88.

¹⁶⁹ For the story of Cem, Cfr. "Gurbet-nâme-i Sultan Cem" in Halil İnalcık "Djem," *EI2*, II (1965), 535; Franz Babinger and Joachim Mayr, *Die Geschichtsschreiber Der Osmanen Und Ihre Werke* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Xerox University Microfilms, 1975), 32; Barbara Flemming, *Essays on Turkish Literature and History* (BRILL, 2017), 243–53; H. Erdem Cipa and Emine Fetvaci, *Writing History at the Ottoman Court: Editing the Past, Fashioning the Future* (Indiana University Press, 2013), 69; Christine Isom-Verhaaren, *Allies with the Infidel: The Ottoman and French Alliance in the Sixteenth Century* (I.B.Tauris, 2011), Chapter III; Tijana Krstić, *Contested Conversions to Islam: Narratives of Religious Change in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Stanford University Press, 2011), Chapter III; İsmail Hami Danişmend, ed., 'Gurbet-name-i Sultan Cem,' in *Fatih ve İstanbul*, 1 (1954): 211–70.

The case for Bajezid Osman as the standing turbaned figure is more convincing, since he was already in Rome in 1456, where he was baptized by Pope Calixtus III, and later went to the Diet of Mantua with Pope Pius II in 1459.¹⁷⁰ However, Nora Lambert traced this model/figure in a drawing labeled as the *Standing Turk*, attributed to the Venetian artist, Gentile Bellini (d.1507), who spent two years, from 1479 to 1481, at the court of Mehmed II.¹⁷¹ [Fig 2, Ch.2, Sec.3] Lambert echoed an ongoing debate among scholars who identified the same figure with the exact appearance and standing gesture (hands on his hips), placed on the left side of Emperor Maximinus II's throne facing the viewer, in *The Disputation of Saint Catherine of Alexandria*, a late-fifteenth-century fresco by Pinturicchio in the Borgia Apartments of the Vatican Palace.¹⁷² [Fig 5, Ch.2, Sec.3] This Borgia fresco will be discussed later in this section, but I include it here as a comparison. Based on these associations, Lambert argued that Pinturicchio could well have copied Bellini's drawing or another derivation of the Venetian artist's sketch that was presumably circulating among artists, and hence imposing a "precise identity" on this figure is unconvincing. The identical turbaned figures in both of the frescoes by Pinturicchio led the author to conclude that the Piccolomini figure is an archetypal Turk, "one who stands in for the threat of Islam at large."¹⁷³

The idea of the turbaned figure as a visual reference to an "archetypal Turk" in *The Arrival in Ancona* fresco is plausible. Yet, if this figure represents the "threat of Islam at

¹⁷⁰ Babinger, "Bajezid Osman" (*Calixtus Ottomanus*), *ein Vorläufer und Gegenspieler Dschem-Sultans*, 355–56.

¹⁷¹ Lambert, "Reframing the Crusade in the Piccolomini Library," 234.

¹⁷² Lambert, 232; N. Randolph Parks, "On the Meaning of Pinturicchio's Sala dei Santi," *Art History* 2, no. 3 (1979): 295–96; Sabine Poeschel, *Alexander Maximus: Das Bildprogramm Des Appartamento Borgia Im Vatikan* (Weimar: VDG, 1999), 149–55.

¹⁷³ Lambert, "Reframing the Crusade in the Piccolomini Library," 236.

large,” as Lambert argued, then it confuses the identity of the other turbaned figure in a sumptuous green garment kneeling in the left front of the *sedia gestatoria*. The figure is facing towards the Doge and raising his right hand in a gesture of faith and obedience. The identity of this figure has also been controversial among scholars. The figure was long identified as the Prince of Samos, who lost his Greek territories to the Ottomans in 1475.¹⁷⁴ Michael Barry assumed the kneeling turbaned figure was Calixtus Ottomanus and the standing figure behind him was a companion of the former Ottoman prince.¹⁷⁵ In a 1993 publication, Gyde Vanier Shepherd proposed that this figure is Uzun Hasan, who was an ally of Venice in his war against Mehmed II.¹⁷⁶

Lambert reiterated Shepherd’s identification of this turbaned figure without elaboration. I argue that this figure’s identity is of key significance in extending our understanding of this last episode in Pius II’s life and in the history of the Catholic Church. Pope Calixtus III was the figure who initiated the call for a crusade three years after the fall of Constantinople in May 1453, and mobilized papal nuncios to beseech the Christian rulers to join his summons and defend Christianity against the invasions of the infidels. As previously discussed, Ludovico da Bologna’s 1456 mission in the “East” was one of those organized by Calixtus III. The Franciscan friar returned to Rome in December 1460, accompanied by envoys representing participants in the call for a crusade, of whom one was a deputy of the Sunni Muslim ruler, Uzun Hasan.

¹⁷⁴ Shepherd, *A Monument to Pope Pius II*, 143–44; Stratton D. Green, “A Fifteenth-Century Sienese Fabula: The Dynastic and Patriotic Significance of the Piccolomini Library,” in *Renaissance Siena*, 2005, 150; Lambert, “Reframing the Crusade in the Piccolomini Library,” 233.

¹⁷⁵ Michael Barry, “Renaissance Venice and Her ‘Moors,’” in *Venice and the Islamic World, 828 - 1797* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2007), 150.

¹⁷⁶ Shepherd, *A Monument to Pope Pius II*, 144.

The envoys were received by Calixtus III's successor, Pius II, in May 1461. They assured the pope that an army from the east would battle against the Ottomans, if the Europeans simultaneously attacked them from the west.¹⁷⁷ As I mentioned in the previous section, following the missions at the court of Uzun Hasan of Ludovico in 1459 and the Venetian non-official envoy, Lazzaro Quirini, in December 1463, the Turkmen ruler dispatched several emissaries, one after the other, to Venice and Rome to affirm his alliance against their common enemy.¹⁷⁸ On March 13, 1464, Venetian chronicles recorded the attendance of an envoy representing Uzun Hasan in front of the Signoria of the Republic. *Mametanazab* was the bearer of Uzun Hasan's letter, which accompanied Quirini to Venice and received a ducal letter of response in September 1464, along with precious gifts, and returned with his mission fully accomplished.¹⁷⁹

Mametanazab's mission coincided with the start of a fifteen-year war between the Venetian Republic and the Ottomans that ended in the loss of Euboea (Negroponte), a Venetian Greek colony since the early-thirteenth century, and the Treaty of Constantinople in 1479.¹⁸⁰ The archival documents regarding *Mametanazab*'s reception in Venice in 1463-64 elucidate that the Doge who received this envoy was Doge Cristoforo Moro (r.1462-1471). Consequently, Lazzaro Quirini was also dispatched by Doge Moro and *Mametanazab*'s mission was in response to Quirini's errands at the court of Uzun Hasan. Hence, Shepherd was right in connecting the Aq Qoyunlu-Venetian

¹⁷⁷ Hinz, *Taškīl-i daulat-i millī dar Īrān hukūmat-i Āq-Qūyunlū wa zuhūr-i daulat-i šafawī*, 44–45.

¹⁷⁸ Ṭāhirī, *Tārīkh-i siyāsī va ijtimā'ī-i Īrān : az marg-i Taymūr tā marg-i Shāh 'Abbās* (*The Socio-Political History of Iran, from the end of Timur's to the end of Shah Abbas's Reign*), 62.

¹⁷⁹ ASV. Secreta XXII, p. 67. See Guglielmo Berchet, *La Repubblica di Venezia e la Persia* (Tehran: Imperial Organization for Social Services, 1976), 2–5, 142.

¹⁸⁰ Ṭāhirī, *Tārīkh-i siyāsī va ijtimā'ī-i Īrān : az marg-i Taymūr tā marg-i Shāh 'Abbās* (*The Socio-Political History of Iran, from the end of Timur's to the end of Shah Abbas's Reign*), 40–41.

alliance to the last fresco of the Piccolomini cycle, yet he was inaccurate in interpreting the figure as a representation of Uzun Hasan himself.

Previous scholars who have attempted to identify the kneeling turbaned figure in Pinturicchio's *The Arrival in Ancona* have generally overlooked his distinguished headgear. This figure in green garments wears a white turban with an untucked end on top. This last feature is comparable to the headgear of Aq Qoyunlu characters in contemporary Islamic illumination and manuscripts, of which numerous folios are still extant. For instance, in a 1478 manuscript produced in Tabriz, a royal *Hunting Scene* is represented in which a princely figure in ornate indigo blue garments with a spear in his right hand and the harness in his left is astride a white horse. The figure wears a white turban with an un-tucked end on top and two large feathers stuck in the central band.¹⁸¹ [Fig 3, Ch.2, Sec.3] There are three other figures in the composition: two horseback riders closely following the princely figure, one holding a spear and the other holding a falcon, and one strolling figure leading the three equestrians. The three horsemen have feathers in their headgear, yet not as fanciful as the ones on the princely figure and the two companions have only one feather in their turban. The white headgear of the walking figure lacks any feathers, and that leads to a conclusion that the feathers were visual expressions of the royal hierarchy at the court of Aq Qoyunlus.

In another Aq Qoyunlu manuscript of a poetic anthology, a figure in similar indigo blue garments and white turban sits at the center of the composition with his arms around a

¹⁸¹ "Manuscript. 401." The manuscript is now preserved in *Divan e Hedayat* at the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, Republic of Ireland.

female figure seated cross-legged next to him.¹⁸² [Fig 4, Ch.2, Sec.3] The painting visually translates the content of the fourteenth-century sonnet, in which the deepest feelings of a lover are poetically expressed and the lovers are celebrating their moment together, with a musician, a dancer, and maids serving wine and food.¹⁸³ The scene does not display a princely entertainment, but it establishes the lover's stature with ornate garments and a private festivity in a garden. In this Aq Qoyunlu manuscript, the male protagonist wears a white turban with the un-tucked end that has no feathers on top. These comparisons elucidate that the kneeling turbaned figure in Pinturicchio's fresco is affiliated with the Aq Qoyunlu court, but presumably not the prince himself; an argument that is buttressed by the absence of any textual or visual documents attesting to Uzun Hasan's presence in Europe.

Recalling Lambert's assessment concerning the standing turbaned figure as an "archetypal Turk," one might hypothesize that this kneeling figure is also an archetypal Aq Qoyunlu to refer to the secret negotiations between Venice and Uzun Hasan against their common enemy. However, the presence of an orator on behalf of Uzun Hasan at this specific time in Venice theoretically sets the stage to conclude that this figure represents Mametanazab. In the ducal letter sent back through *Mametanazab* to Uzun Hasan in September 1464, the Venetians referred to him as the king's "secretary and ambassador" (*vostro segretario et ambassador*).¹⁸⁴ The feather-less turban of the figure also proves his

¹⁸² The manuscript is now preserved in Freer-Sackler galleries at Smithsonian Institution in the United States of America. Accession Number: F1907.275.

¹⁸³ *Ghazal* (sonnet) 46, by Ḥāfeẓ-e Shīrāzī (1315-1390).

¹⁸⁴ ASV. Secreta XXII, p. 39.

non-royal stature, yet his placement on the same ground with the Doge of Venice, in front of the crowd, proves his prominent role in the crusade that was about to be launched.

On the right side of the Pope, among the crowd, there stands another figure who looks far out and slightly points to himself. He has been identified as Thomas Palaiologos (r.1428-1460), the Despot of Morea, whose territories fell to the Ottomans in 1460 when he fled to Italy. Thomas brought with him to Ancona the relics of Saint Andrew's head and presented them to Pope Pius II in Rome; this incident was emphasized in the *Commentarii*.¹⁸⁵ Saint Andrew was the patron saint of the Order of the Golden Fleece, a chivalric order founded by Duke Philip III of Burgundy (r.1419-1467) in 1431, and was associated with the wars against the infidels. Pius II used his reception of the relics as propaganda for his upcoming crusade.¹⁸⁶ Hence, Thomas's attendance in this scene on the opposite side of the Turk in the crowd signifies first, the principal goal of this campaign and second, serves as an encomium to Pius II as the recipient of the relics. Thomas's hand gesture points to the Order's collar and pronounces him as a pious Christian, whom the Pope recognized as the rightful heir to the Byzantine Empire. Therefore, his appearance in traditional regalia in this context, with the Pope dominating the crowd on a higher level, alludes to the Papal court's intention to re-establish the Byzantine Empire with Thomas at its head but under the religious authority of the Papacy.

The Papal-Venetian-Aq Qoyunlu alliance is embodied in the three figures, with the Pope on the apex of the triangular composition and the Doge and *Mametanazab* on the base angles. Doge Cristoforo Moro mediates between the Pope and *Mametanazab* and the

¹⁸⁵ Lambert, "Reframing the Crusade in the Piccolomini Library," 233, 240.

¹⁸⁶ Janus Møller Jensen, *Denmark and the Crusades, 1400-1650*, The Northern World, v. 30 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2007), 145–46.

latter assures the Doge about his lord, Uzun Hasan's fidelity to their alliance, with his hand gesture. The Pope looks down towards Doge Moro and points to his left where the standing Turk absorbs the viewer's attention. Given the assumption that this figure stands for Calixtus Ottomanus, an Ottoman refugee in Rome who converted to Roman Catholicism in 1456, the Pope's gesture implies that the Catholic Church's ultimate desire in this crusade would be to dethrone and convert the Ottomans. The dominant theme of the fresco is undoubtedly the triumph of Roman Catholicism over the infidels. The inclusion of a representative of a Muslim king with all the visual references discussed above brings nuance to the overtures of this Muslim ally. Therefore, the *Standing Turk* figure is not the general personification of the "threat of Islam"; instead, he represents the Ottoman throne, per se, and the fate that the anti-Ottoman allies had foreseen for that Muslim Empire.

In the first place, *Mametanazab's* figure in *The Arrival in Ancona* represents the diplomatic mission dispatched by Uzun Hasan in 1464 to Venice and the Papal court to expedite the military expedition against the Ottomans. In a broader context, the inclusion of this Aq Qoyunlu ambassador in this composition highlights the significance of this cross-confessional alliance between Christian Europe and the Muslim Turkmans against another Muslim dynasty. In fact, the juxtaposition of the Standing Turk and Mametanazab addresses the disunified "Muslim World" in which the powers' political interests were at odds with their common faith. The two turbaned figures represent the two opposing Muslim crowns of the Ottomans and the Aq Qoyunlus, of which the latter was an established ally of the Christian Europe and a significant participant in the Asiatic League, and then the European League, against the Ottomans.

The two figures' positions, one in the foreground and the other in the mid-ground of the composition, visually define the stature of the two Muslim states in this campaign; the Persian Empire participated in a crusade with the Republic of Venice and the Papacy to dethrone the Ottomans and take back Constantinople. This message is revealed only when the viewer is cognizant of the textual history concerning this incident. In fact, Pinturicchio idealized this episode and represented the scene as if Pius II witnessed the arrival of the Venetian fleet and the launching of the crusade he organized. However, Cardinal Francesco's plan to boast about his uncle's life in the last episode is not limited to manipulating the timing of the Venetians' arrival.

The Doge's *corno ducale* is off his head as a gesture of courtesy to the status of the Pope but Mametanazab has his white turban on his head. This contrast brings to the fore the fact that the kneeling turbaned figure "is" a Muslim, since the turban is an essential part of the male Muslim dignitaries' or clerics' costume and a proclamation of their faith by imitating the headgear of the Prophet Muhammad.¹⁸⁷ Therefore, male Muslim dignitaries attend official ceremonies with their turbans on the entire time.¹⁸⁸ The Muslim submissively kneeling at the *sedia gestatoria* of the Pope unfolds another layer in the overall meaning of this painting and that is an emphatic allusion to the supremacy of the Catholic Church, to which even Muslim empires submitted.

¹⁸⁷ Ahmad Ibn Husein Bayhaqi (994-1066), *Sunan al-Kubra lil Behaqi*: an Encyclopedia of Hadiths-Prophet Muhammad's Sayings), vol. 10, P., 14.

¹⁸⁸ Unlike the *corno* or any other kinds of hats that revealed secular titles, a Muslim's turban only implies religious connotations.

The Borgia Apartments at the Vatican

As briefly addressed, the *Standing Turk* figure also appears in *The Disputation of Saint Catherine of Alexandria* fresco in the Sala dei Santi in the Borgia Apartments in the Vatican. [Fig 5, Ch.2, Sec.3] Pope Alexander VI (r. 1492-1503) commissioned the same artist, Pinturicchio, to decorate the rooms of his apartment, within the first two years of his pontificate. The Spanish patron dedicated the largest fresco of the Room of Saints (*Sala dei Santi*) in his apartment to Saint Catherine, whose Feast Day in November 1491 coincided with the capitulation of Granada. On this date, the Moorish Empire of Granada collapsed after five centuries and was annexed to the Catholic Kingdom of Spain. As already argued by Randolph Parks, this incident may have inspired the Spanish Pope to celebrate the Muslim defeat and the rise of a Catholic Kingdom in his native land, in his apartment in Vatican.¹⁸⁹

Pinturicchio's stay at the Papal Court to accomplish Alexander VI's commission overlapped with the time when Djem sultan was in the custody of the Papacy, after Pope Innocent VIII (r.1484-1492) called for his transfer from France to Rome in 1489.¹⁹⁰ Djem was a threat to the throne of Sultan Bayezid II (r. 1481-1512), Mehmed II's elder son who inherited his father's empire. After losing the throne to his brother, Djem departed to Europe to gain support and rebel against his brother. Bayezid II grasped the opportunity to keep this young pretender of the Ottoman throne distant from his reign and began to pay an annual ransom to the Papacy to prohibit his return. Therefore, Djem was a

¹⁸⁹ Parks, "On the Meaning of Pinturicchio's Sala dei Santi," 296.

¹⁹⁰ Pope Innocent VIII received Djem in March 1489. Djem left the Papal Court on January 1495 to join Charles VIII of France's (r.1483-1498) call for crusade against the Turks, but died a month after. See Eamon Duffy, *Saints et Sinners: A History of the Popes* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2014), 196

powerful instrument with which the Pope could threaten the Ottoman Sultan's position.¹⁹¹

The appearance of the *Standing Turk* figure like the one in the Piccolomini Library indicates that the artist modeled the Turk in Pius II's last episode after the Borgia Turk, while both were inspired by Bellini's sketch, and presumably by Djem himself, who was at the Papal court at this time.

The fresco is generously adorned with gold leaf that sparkles as the natural light from the opposite window strikes the scene. Saint Catherine of Alexandria stands in the foreground, facing the enthroned Emperor Maximinus II (d.313), the pagan Roman emperor. The direct outward gaze of the Turk, standing next to the throne between the two protagonists, interrupts the Saint's and the Emperor's disputation, yet engages the viewer. At the center of the middle-ground stands a monumental triumphal arch that alludes to the Arch of Constantine and the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in Rome (312 AD), in which Saint Catherine's uncle, Constantine the Great (d.337 AD) defeated the pagan emperor Maximinus II and became the head of the Roman Empire. Following the victory, Constantine entered Rome through the newly erected Arch of Constantine and remained the sole emperor of the Romans throughout his reign. Constantine's monarchy fostered Christianity and his pro-Christian policies throughout his reign later made Rome the Seat of the Papacy.¹⁹²

Pinturicchio modified the locations and the date of the Arch to serve the propagandistic purposes of the Spanish Pope's commission and the House of Borgia. While the

¹⁹¹ Kenneth Meyer Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant (1204-1571)*. Vol. 2: *The Fifteenth Century*, Reprinted, Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society, 2 [i.e. 127] (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Soc, 1997). Chapter 2.

¹⁹² Hans A Pohlsander, *Emperor Constantine.*, 2004, 77–79.

disputation took place in Egyptian Alexandria in around 305, Pinturicchio integrated this symbolic Roman monument of 312 into this narrative with contemporary figures to echo the victorious position of Christianity. The juxtaposition of the pagan Emperor with the standing Turk suggests that the Ottomans were the new pagans of that time. The Arch is surmounted by a bull that alludes to the Coat of Arms of the Italo-Spanish Borgia family and is adorned with a Latin motto, “PACIS CULTORI,” that praises the Pope and his family line as the cultivators of peace.¹⁹³ In this narrative, the Pope’s family heritage is associated with Constantine the Great, whose rule nurtured the supremacy of the papacy and the spread of Christianity. The three allusions in this painting, the revival of Saint Catherine’s disputation that concluded in the conversion of pagan scholars and philosophers at the emperor’s court to her faith, the incident’s insinuations regarding the surrender of Moors to the Catholic monarchs in Granada, and the custody of Djem at the Papal Court, are assertions of the supremacy of the church and the ultimate annihilation of the infidels.

To understand the vehemence of the Borgia family’s anti-Muslim position, we need to emphasize their Spanish origins and the Muslim domination of Spain for centuries, from 711 to 1492. Alexander VI’s uncle, Calixtus III Borgia, had earlier inaugurated a series of challenges against the Ottomans and in December 1456, appointed Enea Silvio Piccolomini (later Pope Pius II) and Rodrigo de Borja (later Alexander VI), to the College of Cardinals. As already discussed, Pius II followed Calixtus III’s path in confronting the Ottomans by organizing another military expedition to reconquer

¹⁹³ Cynthia Stollhans, *St. Catherine of Alexandria in Renaissance Roman Art: Case Studies in Patronage*, 2017, 83.

Constantinople. Preceding Rodrigo de Borja's pontificate, in December 1471, Pope Sixtus IV (r.1471-1484) established an anti-Ottoman legation called *de latere* and dispatched nuncios, including Cardinal Rodrigo, to Europe to urge a united action of Christendom.¹⁹⁴ Hence, he was already involved with the anti-Ottoman challenges when he was elected Pope. With the three allusions discussed above, Alexander VI pronounced his court as an anti-Ottoman Catholic community.

On the right corner of the composition, a figure with sumptuous gold on black garments and embroidered armor, is looking directly at the disputation. He is atop an elegant white horse with his profile exposed to the viewer. In 1979, Parks speculated that the "hawk-faced horseman," in contemporary Turkish costume standing on the right corner of the foreground, was Djem.¹⁹⁵ In 1999, Sabine Poeschel reiterated Parks's hypothesis and identified this figure on the white horse as the hostage Ottoman prince.¹⁹⁶ Nevertheless, they both ignored the figure's distinguished Aq Qoyunlu turban that just like the one worn by Mametanazab in the Piccolomini Library, has an un-tucked end on top. While the Ancona scene refers to an actual 1464 incident from the life of Pius II, the Borgia painting depicts no precise event: it represents a fusion of historiography. Hence, the identity of this turbaned figure is entangled in this amalgam, yet the specific form of his turban associates him with Aq Qoyunlus.

The last decades of the fifteenth-century witnessed total turmoil at the court of Aq Qoyunlu with Uzun Hasan's dozens of successors and the ultimate disintegration of the

¹⁹⁴ Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant (1204-1571)*. Vol. 2, 315. Acta Consistorialia, in Arch. Segr. Vaticano, Arm. XXXI, tom. 52, fol. 77r.

¹⁹⁵ Parks, "On the Meaning of Pinturicchio's Sala dei Santi," 296 and 309-310 (no31-32).

¹⁹⁶ Poeschel, *Alexander Maximus*, 149-55.

empire.¹⁹⁷ Uzun Hasan died in 1478 and his power was usurped by Uzun Hasanids and his brother's, Jahangirid, pretenders, of whom only three rulers were adults. Due to Mehmed II's devastating defeat of Uzun Hasan in August 1473 at the Battle of Otlukbeli (Başkent) of the Ottoman-Venetian war (1463-1479), the Aq Qoyunlu-European alliance also withered and the Venetians signed the Treaty of Constantinople with the Sublime Porte that announced the victory of the Ottomans.¹⁹⁸ Uzun Hasan's son and designated successor, Sultan K̲halīl (K̲alīl Ibn Uzun Ḥasan r. 1478) attempted to establish political relations with his father's former enemies, the Ottomans, and dispatched high-ranking ambassadors to the Porte. However, his reign did not exceed eight months and his cousin, Sultan Ya'qūb (r.1478-1490) seized power and reigned over twelve years. During the Papacy of Alexander VI, Uzun Hasan's grandsons, Sultan Rustam (r.1492-1497) and Sultan Ahmad Gōvde (r. May 1497- December 1497) were holding office in Tabriz, after a few years of power struggles following the death of Ya'qūb.¹⁹⁹ After Sultan Ahmad's assassination in 1497, the empire underwent further breakdown with several sultans dominating different parts of the Aq Qoyunlu dominion until 1501, when it collapsed and was taken over by the founder of the Safavid Empire, Esma'il I Şafawī (r.1502-1524).²⁰⁰

In this chaotic political climate of the last decade of the Aq Qoyunlu Empire, it is unlikely that an ambassador was dispatched to the Papal Court. The Borgia fresco corresponds with the post-war reconciliation of the Venetian Republic and its European

¹⁹⁷ John E. Woods, *The Aqquyunlu: Clan, Confederation, Empire: A Study in 15th/9th Century Turko-Iranian Politics*, Studies in Middle Eastern History, no. 3 (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1976), 138.

¹⁹⁸ Franz Babinger and William C Hickman, *Mehmed the Conqueror and His Time* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 315; Woods, *The Aqquyunlu*, 134–37.

¹⁹⁹ Sultan Rostam's full name is Rostam Ibn Maqşūd Ibn Uzun Ḥasan and Sultan Ahmad's full name is Aḥmad Ibn Oğurlū Moḥammad

²⁰⁰ Woods, *The Aqquyunlu*, 138–73; Vladimir Minorsky, *The Aq-Qoyunlu and Land Reforms* (London, 1955), 449–62.

allies after losing several territories in Albania and Greece, while the Ottomans had reached the outskirts of Venice's empire and captured Genoese colonies at Caffa, which ended the Genoese enterprise in the Black Sea.²⁰¹ The decline of the Aq Qoyunlu Empire and the mutual apathy towards the military alliance against the Ottomans on the one hand, and the thriving forces of the Sublime Porte, on the other hand, preoccupied the anti-Ottoman League. The lack of any textual evidence pertaining the presence of an Aq Qoyunlu ambassador in Europe throughout the last decade of the fifteenth century also affirms that no diplomatic mission was dispatched by this Muslim ally to Rome. Hence, the identity of the equestrian figure with an Aq Qoyunlu turban in the Borgia fresco remains mysterious.

The profile pose of the figure suggests that Pinturicchio might have copied this character from a portrait medal or coin with a carved image of an Aq Qoyunlu personage. In the 1470s, following the notes of the Italian humanist, Francesco Filelfo (d.1481), on the Latin translations of Poggio Bracciolini's *Cyropedia* (discussed in the cinquecento Florence section), Uzun Hasan, like other virtuous Kings of Persia, was widely known in Italy. Following Enea Silvio, Filelfo also "lamented the Christendom's failure to capitalize on Timur's previous attacks on the Ottoman Turks, hailed the new alliance as evidence that Europe might yet take advantage of the Persian threat to the Ottoman rear," as Margaret Meserve noted. Sixtus IV knew Uzun Hasan as a "distinguished prince, a friend of Christianity."²⁰² In 1471, three envoys of Uzun Hasan were at the Roman Curia and received payments (*tribus oratoribus*) by order of Sixtus IV.²⁰³ One was a "Spanish

²⁰¹ Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant (1204-1571)*. Vol. 2, 333.

²⁰² Meserve, *Empires of Islam in Renaissance Historical Thought*, 226.

²⁰³ Archivio Segreto Vaticano, 'Introitus et exitus', t. 487, f. 97v, in data 20.VIII.1471. Roma, Archivio di Stato, Camerale I, reg. 845 (Mandati, Primus Bullarium Sixti IV), f. 3.

Jew” serving at the court of Uzun Hasan who might have accompanied Lazzaro Quirini to Venice and had planned to go to Rome afterwards.²⁰⁴ This envoy, Isaac Beg, was the bearer of Uzun Hasan’s *Fathnama* (or *fath-nāma*, message of victory) of his lord’s triumph over Qara Qoyunlus and the Timurids and a letter that expressed the Aq Qoyunlu’s kinship with the Papal court and affirmed their alliance.²⁰⁵ These letters were translated in the Genoese Colony of Caffa, which had become a frequent transit point for Persian envoys to Italian centers.

Isaac Beg returned to Rome several times, as an interpreter and ambassador. Guglielmo Berchet argued that in October 1472, Isaac converted to Catholicism in honor of Sixtus IV.²⁰⁶ This figure gains importance in my next section on Urbino, the court of the Duke Federico da Montefeltro (1422-1482), the *condottiere* of the papal forces. I will elaborate on the role of Isaac Beg in these alliances in the next section, but here I intend to draw attention to the frequent contacts between the two courts, one in Tabriz and the other at the Vatican, in the context of their anti-Ottoman league. Following Sixtus IV’s 1471 *de latere*, when the Pope dispatched nuncios to Europe and other pro-crusade Christian centers to urge the local rulers to unite against the common foe, he sent Cardinal Oliviero Carafa (1430-1511) to the Kingdom of Naples. Cardinal Oliviero was also the commander of the papal fleet under Sixtus IV. At the court of Ferdinand I of Naples (r.1458-1494), the papal admiral commanded a naval force, and with the simultaneous

²⁰⁴ ASR. August 16, 1471, Sixti IV, Lib. Bullet. 1471-73.

²⁰⁵ Angelo Michele Piemontese, “L’ambasciatore di Persia presso Federico da Montefeltro, Ludovico Bononiense O.F.M. e il Cardinale Bessarione,” *Miscellanea Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae* 11 (2004): 565.

²⁰⁶ “«spagnuolo di nascita e di fede ebreo» il quale confermava che il suo signore era in viaggio con un potentissimo esercito, e risoluto di non ritirarsi dall’Asia minore senza aver prima debellato il Turco.[9] Questo messo fu consigliato di presentarsi al re Ferdinando di Napoli ed al pontefice. Dai quali ottenne buone parole e scarse promesse. A Roma fu con due famigliari battezzato da papa Sisto, che gli pose il suo nome, e lo regalò di molti doni.” Berchet, *La Repubblica di Venezia e la Persia*, 32.

support of Doge Mocenigo of Venice (r. 1478–1485), attacked the Ottoman ports in Izmir and Antalya, in 1472, and captured Smyrna. Cardinal Oliviero returned victoriously to Rome with twenty-five Turkish captives and exotic camels, as well as the harbor chain of the gate of Satalia as valuable booty. A triumphal procession followed his return, in January 1473, with the captives converting to Christianity in a *tableau vivant*. Some pieces of the harbor chain adorned the main entrance of the Basilica of Saint Peter's in the Vatican to immortalize this victory.²⁰⁷

Two days after Cardinal Oliviero's procession with the Turkish captives, in March 1473, another theatrical performance took place, but this time the victor saluted was Uzun Hasan.²⁰⁸ After the conquest of some Ottoman holdings by a coalition of the Papacy, the Venetians, and the Kingdom of Naples, and the constant confirmation from the court of Uzun Hasan regarding its fidelity to the alliance, the idea of attacking the Porte from both sides was revived. At this time, Uzun Hasan's *Fathnama* had also reached Rome and broadcast his chivalry and conquests in the Byzantine-Greek lands and Asia.²⁰⁹ A banquet hosted by Cardinal Pietro Riario (1445-1474), Sixtus IV's nephew, at the palace of the late Cardinal Basilios Bessarion (1403-1472), took place. Cardinal Bessarion was a native scholar of Trebizond and a close friend of Sixtus IV. He was the protector of the Franciscan Order and was supervising the missions of Ludovico da Bologna, the

²⁰⁷ David Chambers, *Popes, Cardinals, and War: The Military Church in Renaissance and Early Modern Europe* (London ; New York : New York: I. B. Tauris ; Distributed exclusively in the USA by Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 77.

²⁰⁸ Angelo Michele Piemontese, "La représentation de Uzun Hasan en scène à Rome," *Turcica* 21–23 (1991): 191–203.

²⁰⁹ On *Fathnama* see C. Edmund Bosworth, "FATH-NĀMA" in *Encyclopedia Iranica* Vol. IX, Fasc. 4, pp. 422–423. "Arabic-Persian term used to denote proclamations and letters announcing victories in battle or the successful conclusion of military campaigns."

Franciscan friar sent by Calixtus III, in Asia.²¹⁰ In 1461, after the fall of his homeland to the Ottomans, he established “The Academy of Bessarion” in his own palace in Rome, with the goal of encouraging Roman humanism to flower in the anti-Ottoman resistance in the Greco-Byzantine community immigrated to Italy.²¹¹ Cardinal Bessarion had been dispatched to Europe during Sixtus IV’s *de latere* program. Therefore, he was known as an established Greek scholar and a Roman Catholic cardinal, whose principal aspiration was to expel the Ottomans and save the Byzantine Greeks.²¹²

As a locus of Greek-Byzantine ritual traditions to foster anti-Ottoman sentiments, the location of the banquet was strategically designated to stage what was planned by the Papal court in March 1473. On March 2, on a raised stage in the middle of the hall, an actor with a bejeweled hat in Greek style (*capello alla grescha*) and rich fashionable garments played Uzun Hasan as “the king of Macedonia.” The play unfolded in three acts, opening with “the feast of coronation” in which the investiture ceremony of Uzun Hasan was theatrically performed. The second act fancifully reenacted the challenge of the Ottomans, with another actor playing a Turkish ambassador, who failed to refute the legitimacy of the king. Later in the second act, the Ottomans surrender to conversion and join the believers of Christ and the supremacy of the pope, by singing “*Viva la fede de Jesus Cristo, cum il Papa et el Cardinal San Sisto.*” The last act took place on the following day, Wednesday, March 3, 1473, when an outdoor triumphal procession

²¹⁰ Piemontese, “L’ambasciatore di Persia presso Federico da Montefeltro, Ludovico Bononiense O.F.M. e il Cardinale Bessarione,” 540; Angelo Michele Piemontese, “The Nuncios of Pope Sixtus IV (1471-84) in Iran,” in *Iran and Iranian Studies: Essays in Honor of Iraj Afshar* (Princeton, N.J., 1998), 90–108.

²¹¹ Piemontese, “L’ambasciatore di Persia presso Federico da Montefeltro, Ludovico Bononiense O.F.M. e il Cardinale Bessarione,” 541.

²¹² Baskins, “The Bride of Trebizond: Turks and Turkmens on a Florentine Wedding Chest, Circa 1460,” 92–94.

celebrated the victory of the king.²¹³ In this regard, Angelo Michele Piemontese wrote that it was: “A complex spectacle, though ephemeral, that was nourished by allusions to events and to politico-cultural allegories, perceived and past on the eve of the confrontation between the two powers of the time, which had the appearance of a propitiatory rite.”²¹⁴

In this context a medal with the carved portrait of Uzun Hasan was circulating in Rome in the early 1470s.²¹⁵ To my knowledge, there is no trace of the portrait medal remaining today; however, at the date of the Borgia frescoes, the medal was supposedly kept in the papal treasuries or in a Roman collection and might have inspired Pinturicchio’s Aq Qoyunlu figure in *The Disputation of Saint Catherine of Alexandria*.²¹⁶ The figure is atop a white horse, the symbol of conquest and invincibility that was often reserved for the popes and high-ranking dignitaries.²¹⁷ With the absence of any textual documents pertaining to the diplomatic exchanges between the two crowns at this time, it is reasonable not to assign a specific identity to this figure. However, with the Aq Qoyunlu appearance of this horseman and his prestigious position on the white horse with sumptuous clothing, I argue that he represents a general image of the Aq Qoyunlus. A juxtaposition of the two discussed Pinturicchio’s frescoes, *The Arrival in Ancona* in Siena

²¹³ Piemontese, “La représentation de Uzun Hasan en scène à Rome,” 196.

²¹⁴ “Ce spectacle complexe, quoique éphémère, nourri d’allusions événementielles et d’allégories politico-culturelles, pensé et réalisé à la veille de l’affrontement entre les deux puissances du temps, eut l’allure d’un rite propitiatoire.” Piemontese, 194.

²¹⁵ Meserve, *Empires of Islam in Renaissance Historical Thought*, 228–29.

²¹⁶ This medal might have been made by Guaccialotti of Prato (1435–1495), who started to work at the Papal Court under Pope Paul II and was still serving there under Sixtus IV. He made the medal for Sixtus IV with the Turkish captives on the reverse side of the medal. See George Francis Hill and J. Graham Pollard, *Medals of the Renaissance*, Rev. and enl. ed, A Colonnade Book (London: British Museum Publications, 1978), 67–68.

²¹⁷ “And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.” Book of Revelation 19:11.

and *The Disputation of Saint Catherine of Alexandria* in Vatican, suggests that in Italy, Aq Qoyunlus were associated with the anti-Ottoman challengers of the period. Hence, the Aq Qoyunlu figure in the Borgia fresco, who is contemplating the disputation where Djem is also among the attendants, embodies a general image of the Muslim Turkmen and their alliance with Christendom; this was a cross-confessional coalition that sought a destiny for the infidels just like Djem's.

Undoubtedly, the Italian rulers were cognizant of Uzun Hasan's reign, his conquests, and territorial achievements in the Byzantine-Greek lands and Asia through their cultural and political exchanges. Yet, in Rome, the performance in March 1473 presented this Turkmen lord as the "king of Macedonia," the Byzantine-Greek region that fell to the Ottomans in the 1430s and devastated the Greek world that later regarded this loss as a prelude to the fall of Constantinople. Uzun Hasan had substantial connections to the Byzantine-Greek world, through his marriage and military alliance with the Trebizond Empire since 1458, and after the fall of Trebizond to the Ottoman Turks in 1461, he found himself in charge of taking back Despina Khatun's fatherland from the Ottomans. As already discussed in the section on Venice, Uzun Hasan claimed the "whole Greek State" as a dowry for his daughter when she married the Prince of Poland.²¹⁸ Hence, this Turkmen king was trumpeting his bonds with the Greek world in his foreign policies with the Christian rulers. As a Muslim strategist, however, he had to present his territories as a tolerant and reliable ally and distinguishing his court from the other Muslim court of the time, the Ottoman Empire.

²¹⁸ Dąbrowska, "Uzun Hasan's Project of Alliance with the Polish King (1474)," 211–12.

While the Ottoman Turks were vandalizing the heritage and monuments in the conquered territories and converting churches to mosques, Uzun Hasan was offering his daughter's conversion to Catholicism to qualify for marriage to the Christian prince and allowing papal nuncios and Christian communities in his domain.²¹⁹ By the 1470s, Uzun Hasan had achieved his goal in declaring himself as a "friend of Christianity," although not a Christian himself.²²⁰ Therefore, the Greek-associated face of his multi-cultural empire served the propagandistic purposes of the Christian allies of this anti-Ottoman league better.

In November 1472, a book of letters between Uzun Hasan and Mehmed II, called *Epistolae Magni Turci*, were published in Rome. In the letters, Mehmed II angrily threatened the King of Persia that if the latter dared to step over the Sultan's territories on the other side of the Euphrates River, the Ottomans would vanquish him the same way Alexander did Darius III at the Cilician Gates.²²¹ These letters are illuminating in their promotion of Uzun Hasan as the "King of Macedonia," just as he had been in the play staged in Rome.

King Alexander III (Alexander the Great. r. 356–323 B.C.) of the ancient Greek Kingdom of Macedonia defeated the last Achaemenid king of Persia, Darius III (r. 380–330 B.C.) in the Battle of Gaugamela in 331 B.C, east of the Tigris.²²² The Cilician Gates that Mehmed II alluded to are those that Alexander's army passed through to meet the

²¹⁹ For a broader image of the conversions in the Ottoman Empire, Cfr. Krstić, *Contested Conversions to Islam*.

²²⁰ Meserve, *Empires of Islam in Renaissance Historical Thought*, 226.

²²¹ Meserve, 228–29.

²²² Richard N. Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran*, Handbuch Der Altertumswissenschaft, 3. Abt., 7. T (München: C.H. Beck, 1984), 135; Samuel K. Eddy, *The King Is Dead: Studies in the near Eastern Resistance to Hellenism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961).

Persians. In essence, the Battle of Gaugamela was a metaphor for Mehmed II's fight over Macedonia with the King of Persia, Uzun Hasan. Mehmed claimed Macedonia, while the Roman performance of March 1472 celebrated Uzun Hasan as the king and marked him with a Greek-fashioned costume. Mehmed II's bragging about Macedonia in the published letters humiliated the Ottomans, but at the same time, associated Uzun Hasan with the virtuous and noble Achaemenid Kings of ancient Persia. To this add the influential translation of Xenophon's *Cyropedia* that glamorized the ancient monarchies in Persia, specifically the Achaemenid Empire and Cyrus II (the Great) of Achaemenid (600-530 B.C), as the "paragon of royal wisdom, virtue, piety, and political savvy."²²³ Meserve argued that this "romanticizing" of Persian history was in response to "demonizing" the "Turks" in the aftermath of the fall of Constantinople. This realignment, I argue, was also to justify the Italian centers' alliance with the Persians, as a Muslim empire whose kings were the descendants of the virtuous ancient monarchs of this realm.

The Tazza Farnese

The one object that encapsulates this whole network of associations in the political history of Uzun Hasan and his European allies is a Hellenistic glyptic cameo, known as the *Tazza Farnese*, now in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale of Naples.²²⁴ [Fig 6, Ch.2, Sec.3] The cup is of sardonyx agate with a face of a gorgon on one side and personifications of Greek divinities on the other. The material, the carving technique, and

²²³ Meserve, *Empires of Islam in Renaissance Historical Thought*, 218; Mahnaz Yousefzadeh, "The 'Buratto' of the Bargello Museum," in *In Re Significations: European Blackamoors, Africana Readings* (Roma: Postcart, 2016), 166.

²²⁴ Inv. 27611, Museo Archeologico Nazionale Napoli, Italy. The antique bowl entered Palazzo Farnese in Rome in 1586, hence the name.

the iconography of the figures lead to an attribution of the phial-shaped cup to the Ptolemaic kingdom of Egypt (305 BC–30 BC), the Hellenistic monarchy in Alexandria.²²⁵ In September 1471, Lorenzo de' Medici (*il Magnifico*. r.1469-1492), the *de facto* ruler of the Florentine Republic, bought the *Tazza* in Rome. Before then, the cup was in the possession of Pope Paul II (1464-1471) and then bequeathed to Sixtus IV.²²⁶ However, a drawing of the interior of the cameo, now in the Collection of Islamic Paintings (4 *Mueqqa'* volumes) in Berlin, holds the inscription of a Muslim artist, who signed his name, Muhammad ibn Mahmud Shah al-Khayyam (محمد ابن محمود شاه الخيام). [Fig 7, Ch.2, Sec.3] This drawing is not dated, but referring to another folio found with the same name inscribed and dated to 1409, in addition to a calligraphy from the Academy of Timur's grandson, Baysunghur (d.1433) in Herat, Ernst Kühnel inferred that this Muslim artist was active in the middle-Timurid period, around 1433, in Herat.²²⁷

There are a few hypotheses regarding the itinerary of this object from Alexandria to Herat and finally to Rome, where Lorenzo il Magnifico purchased it. In response to the question about how the *Tazza* fell into Timur's hands and then arrived in Italy, Horst Blanck argued that the cameo was a gift from the Mamluk sultan of Egypt to Timur in 1402, which was then brought to Venice as a gift from an Islamic ruler from the east.²²⁸ Marina Belozerskaya proposed a labyrinthine itinerary for the object from Alexandria to Rome, then to Constantinople, back to Italy, and from there to Byzantium, probably as a

²²⁵ Marina Belozerskaya, *Medusa's Gaze: The Extraordinary Journey of the Tazza Farnese*, Emblems of Antiquity (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 98; Julia Gonnella, Friederike Weis, and Christoph Rauch, eds., "Original and Copy: The Special Case of the Tazza Farnese Drawing," in *The Diez Albums: Contexts and Contents*, Islamic Manuscripts and Books, Volume 11 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2017), 413–14.

²²⁶ Gonnella, Weis, and Rauch, "Original and Copy: The Special Case of the Tazza Farnese Drawing," 414.

²²⁷ Burchard Brentjes, "The 'Tazza Farnese' and its way to Harāt and Naples," *Oriente Moderno* 15 (76), no. 2 (1996): 321–24.

²²⁸ Horst Blanck, *Eine persische Pinselzeichnung nach der Tazza Farnese.*, *Archäologischer Anzeiger* 79/2 (1964): 312; Gonnella, Weis, and Rauch, *The Diez Albums*, 415. Look at footnote:111.

gift from the Republic of Genoa to Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos (r.1261-1282), in the context of the Treaty of Nymphaeum in 1261.²²⁹ The Ottoman invasions of Byzantine territories shifted the possession of their treasuries to the Ottomans, but Timur's defeat of Bayezid I in 1402 and the Sack of Bursa carted off the Ottoman treasures to Timur's capital in Samarqand (modern Uzbekistan). From there, Belozerskaya concluded that the cup fell into the hands of the Aq Qoyunlus through the Sack of Herat (1471) to Venice, as a part of their diplomatic rapprochement to encounter the Ottoman advances. Ultimately, the cup arrived in Rome in the possessions of the Venetian pope, Paul II.²³⁰ Nevertheless, Belozerskaya refuted the last phase of the object's journey, by stating that the cup had already been in Italy in the 1450s.²³¹

In 1996, Burchard Brentjes found connections with other rarities from the Timurid treasuries of Herat in Tabriz that indicated the cameo arrived in Uzun Hasan's capital, after the Sack of Herat in 1471, an incident already discussed in the section on Venice.²³²

²²⁹ The treaty was an alliance between the Emperor of Nicaea and the Republic of Genoa that supported Emperor Michael VIII to recapture Constantinople and restore the Byzantine Empire and established the Genoese commercial hegemony in the eastern Mediterranean, in the context of their rivalry with Venetians. For more information, see A. A. Vasil'ev, *History of the Byzantine Empire 324-1453 Vols 1 and 2*. (University of Wisconsin Press, 1971), 537–38.

²³⁰ Belozerskaya, *Medusa's Gaze*, 99–115; for more information on the scholarship, see Ulrico Pannuti, "La Tazza Farnese : Datazione, interpretazione e trasmissione del cimelio," in *Studi di Glittica*, 2009, 211–14; J. M. Rogers, "Mehmed the Conqueror: Between East and West," in *Bellini and the East* (London; Boston: National Gallery Company; Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 2005), 80–97.

²³¹ Belozerskaya, *Medusa's Gaze*, 115. Pannuti also argued that the *Tazza* was in Europe during the reign of the Holy Roman Emperor, Federico II (r.1220-1250) from the House of Hohenstaufen. According to Pannuti, Federico II bought it ("*magnum scutellam de Onichio*") in 1239 and his son and successor, Conrad IV (r.1237-1254) sold it in 1253 ("*vasa de onizilio et calzedono*") and probably then the object was transported to the East. See Pannuti, "La Tazza Farnese : datazione , interpretazione e trasmissione del cimelio," 211-214.

²³² Saray Collection, Istanbul. Volume H 2152. See Brentjes, "The "Tazza Farnese" and its way to Harāt and Naples." p.321-324; Klaus Parlasca, *Neue Beobachtungen zu den hellenistischen Achtgefäßen aus Ägypten* (Malibu: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 1985), 322. J.M. Rogers argued that the *Tazza* was a gift from Uzun Hasan, probably through the Franciscan friar, Ludovico da Bologna, in 1460-61, assuming that the Turkamān king had obtained the object shortly before in Trebizond. See Rogers, "Mehmed the Conqueror: Between East and West," 93. However, Rogers ignored al-Khayyam's drawing of the cup in Herat in 1430s.

In a dialogue between the Venetian traveler and diplomat, Giosafar Barbaro, and Uzun Hasan, narrated in the Venetian's travel account, the king showed Barbaro a "*camewe* (cameo) *of the breadeth of a grote, wherein was a womans* (woman's) *heade* (head) *graven; her heare* (hair) *backwarde* (backward), *and a garlande* (garland) *about her heade* (head):"

He badde me look, is not this Mary? I answered, no. Why, who is it than? I answered, it was the figure of some ancient goddess that the Burpares* worshipped, that is, to witt, the Idolaters. He asked me howe I knewe it? I tolde him I knewe it; for these kinde of works were made before the coming of Jesu Christ. He shakes his heade a litle, and saied no more.²³³

The allusions of the figurative program on the cameo that was the subject of Barbaro and Uzun Hasan's conversations to the Greco-Roman Pantheon of Gods and the nature of the king's inquiries demonstrate the latter's curiosity about European visual culture. This conversation illuminates the king's reception of the "foreign" culture of the object, but presumably, he was not acquainted with any other figures than the most prominent divinities of Christianity, the Virgin and the Christ.

Barbaro's earliest encounter with Uzun Hasan relates to his secret mission, together with Catherino Zeno, to the court of Aq Qoyunlu in Tabriz, in 1471. At this time, as Barbaro described, the Republic was at war with the Ottomans and "desired that he (Mehmed II) should be harassed on the East by the arms of the King Ussun Cassan (Uzun Hasan), who some years before with great skill in the art of war had made himself Master of Persia,

²³³ Giosofat Barbaro, *Travels to Tana and Persia*. (Place of publication not identified: Nabu Press, 2010), 59; also look at David J Roxburgh, *Persian Album, 1400-1600: From Dispersal to Collection*. (Place of publication not identified: Yale University Press, 2013), 2. * But-perest or Bot parast بت پرست the Persian word for pagan and idolater. (Bot: idol. Parast: worshipper)

and a great part of the neighboring provinces.”²³⁴ Barbaro returned to Venice with a Persian ambassador, Haji Mohammad, the bearer of the *Turquoise Glass Bowl*, who stayed in Venice from September 1472 to 1473, when he back to Tabriz with Barbaro, as the ambassador of the Republic.²³⁵ On their way back, they carried six cannons and artillery. However, the mission never bore fruit, due to the hijacking of the group by Kurdish bandits on their way to Tabriz, who killed Haji Mohammad and a number of Venetians and robbed them of their weapons.²³⁶

John E. Woods claimed that in 1470, the Aq Qoyunlu king dispatched an ambassador to Venice and to the papacy to broadcast his victories over Jāhān Shāh Qara Qoyunlu and Abu Sai’d Timuri, adding that the only remaining enemy was Mehmed II.²³⁷ Based on Woods’ historiography on the Aq Qoyunlu-Venetian negotiations and the military alliance between the two courts, Brentjes suggested that in 1470, the ambassador “might have” gifted the cameo to the Venetians, “proclaiming the victories against the former owners of the cameo, sent to the pope, known as a lover of fine arts, to win his support.”²³⁸

²³⁴ Ṭāhirī, *Tārīkh-i siyāsī va ijtimā’i-i Īrān : az marg-i Taymūr tā marg-i Shāh ‘Abbās* (*The Socio-Political History of Iran, from the end of Timur’s to the end of Shah Abbas’s Reign*), 64–65; Barbaro, *Travels to Tana and Persia.*, 1.

²³⁵ Piemontese, “L’ambasciatore di Persia presso Federico da Montefeltro, Ludovico Bononiense O.F.M. e il Cardinale Bessarione,” 552.

²³⁶ Ṭāhirī, *Tārīkh-i siyāsī va ijtimā’i-i Īrān : az marg-i Taymūr tā marg-i Shāh ‘Abbās* (*The Socio-Political History of Iran, from the end of Timur’s to the end of Shah Abbas’s Reign*), 68.

²³⁷ Woods, *The Aqqyunlu*, 127.

²³⁸ Brentjes, “The “Tazza Farnese” and its way to Harāt and Naples,” 323. Brentje proposed that in 88 B.C., the King of Armenia Minor and Pontus, Mithridates VI (r.120-63 B.C), looted the Ptolemaic treasures of Alexandria, which was then inherited by the Parthians (r. 247-224 A.D) of Persia. Afterwards, the treasury fell into the hands of Sassanians, who brought it to Ctesiphon (modern Iraq) and after the Arab invasion of 637, it was translocated to Baghdad. During the Sack of Baghdad in 1258, the treasury entered the possession of Mongols (r.1206-1365) and then Jalayirid Sultans (r.1335-1432), until it was plundered by Timur. See p.21.

J. M. Rogers argued that the *Tazza* was Uzun Hasan's gift presented through the Franciscan friar, Ludovico da Bologna, on his return to Rome in 1460-61.²³⁹ Yet, Friederike Weis accurately pointed to the obscure part in the object's provenance by stating "its exact whereabouts before 1471, when it finally came into Lorenzo de' Medici's possession from Paul II's bequest, will probably never be revealed to us."²⁴⁰ A textual correspondence at the *Biblioteca Vallicelliana* in Rome, however, may solve this mysterious historiographical lacuna. In a letter issued on Ramazan 875/ February-March 1471 in Persian and translated into Latin on July 25, 1471 in Caffa, Uzun Hasan had addressed "Paulus II," announcing his great victories in his 1467-69 campaign and describing the new extent of his empire, from India in the east and Cathay in the north of Asia, to African Ethiopia in the south.²⁴¹ The Turkman king addressed the Ottomans as the only obstacle between Persia and Europe.²⁴² The bearer of this letter, as Piemontese argued, was the Franciscan friar, "Ludovicus Bononiensis" who brought back with him "a notarized act, which has escaped the attention of his biographers."²⁴³ However, a thorough review of the dates of the Persian ambassadors who were received in Rome in 1471 might clarify this ambiguity.

In a document issued on September 10, 1471, to Caterino Zeno on his second mission in Persia, the Senate of Venice reported that Lazzaro Quirini was accompanied by an emissary of Uzun Hasan from Persia.²⁴⁴ This emissary was Mirath (Murad- an

²³⁹ Rogers, "Mehmed the Conqueror: Between East and West," 93.

²⁴⁰ Gonnella, Weis, and Rauch, "Original and Copy: The Special Case of the Tazza Farnese Drawing," 416.

²⁴¹ "Litterae uzuncassan ad Paulum Papam II" Roma, Biblioteca Vallicelliana, Ms. B 19, fols. 179v-81; also see Isabella Lazzarini, *Communication and Conflict: Italian Diplomacy in the Early Renaissance, 1350-1520* (OUP Oxford, 2015), 24-27.

²⁴² Piemontese, "The Nuncios of Pope Sixtus IV (1471-84) in Iran," 92-93.

²⁴³ Piemontese, 92.

²⁴⁴ ASV. Secreta XXV. Cornet, Op. cit. Marino Sanudo, Cronaca ms. nell'Archivio Cicogna. See Berchet: 112-116.

Armenian), who entered Venice as an orator in February 1471 and was received on March 7.²⁴⁵ Guglielmo Berchet's observations on the fifteenth-century documents located "another legate of Uzun Hasan" (*un altro legato di Uzunhasan*) in the same year (1471), who arrived in Venice, through the way of Black Sea and Polonia, and directed his mission to the Supreme Pontiff to solicit his lord's concordance with the Christian rulers.²⁴⁶ A textual document at the *Archivio Segreto Vaticano* indicates that in August 1471, three Persian ambassadors were received by Pope Sixtus IV, "the new pontiff," who were then proceeding to Naples.²⁴⁷ Another document at the same archive reveals that Ludovico Bononiense (Bolognese) returned to Rome with another ambassador from Persia, Ishaq (Isaac) Beg, carrying Uzun Hasan's *Fathnama* and letter to Pope Paul II.²⁴⁸

I extrapolate from all the correspondence discussed above that Isaac was the notary that accompanied the Franciscan friar, Ludovico, to Rome with Uzun Hasan's message of victory and letter to Pope Paul II, and presumably brought the *Tazza Farnese* as a diplomatic gift. Before Isaac's first mission, in 1465 another messenger of Uzun Hasan named Ghāsem Hasan (Kasem-Hasan) arrived in Venice with letters of that attested Aq Qoyunlus' readiness to wage war and encouraged the Republic and other Christian rulers to simultaneously attack the Ottomans, upon their mutual agreement. The senate replied

²⁴⁵ Venetian New Year started on March 1. Ducale a Vettor Soranzo in Sicilia, 2 marzo 1471. *Ib.*

²⁴⁶ Berchet, *La Repubblica di Venezia e La Persia*, 1976, 115. The number and names of the Persian ambassadors in Venice in this year are recorded in a document at Archivio Segreto Vaticano as four envoys: Azimamet (Haji Mohammad), Morat (Mirath-Morad) Nicolo and Chefarsa. Look at: Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Armadio XXIX, 'Divers. Camer.', t. 42 ('Sixti IV Capitulator.' 1471-1482, Liber 7), f. 313 e segg. (5v-7)

²⁴⁷ Archivio Segreto Vaticano (ASV), 'Introitus et exitus', t. 487, f. 97v, in data 20.VIII.1471. Roma, Archivio di Stato, Camerale I, reg. 845 (Mandati, Primus Bullarium Sixti IV), f. 3.

²⁴⁸ Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Armadio XXIX, 'Divers. Camer.', t. 42 ('Sixti IV Capitulator.' 1471-1482, Liber 7), f. 313 e segg. (= 5v-7), ricevuta di Dominicus Petri de Venetiis, 1.X.1471. Piemontese, "L'ambasciatore di Persia presso Federico da Montefeltro, Il Cardinale Bessarione e Ludovico Bononiense O.F.M. e," 544. GASPARE DA Verona e M. CARANI, *Le vite di Paolo II*, ed. G. Zippel (*Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, III. 16), Città di Castello 1904, 190.

on February 27, 1466 and assured Uzun Hasan that Serenissima would continue the struggle vigorously and hoped that the other participants would hold on to their vows.²⁴⁹ Ghāsem Hasan's mission coincided with the first two years of Pietro Barbo's papacy as Pope Paul II. Therefore, the burgeoning point of the political correspondence with the Venetian Pope was Ghāsem Hasan's mission of 1465-66. Yet, the bearer of Uzun Hasan's letter in 1471 was Isaac, and not Ludovico, and the lack of any credential letters in his first mission is the reason why previous scholars overlooked this figure and confused him with the Franciscan friar. Consequently, the ambassador that Woods referred to must be Isaac Beg and Brentjes's suggestion must follow the Persian mission of 1471, instead of 1470, as well.

I ultimately infer that the *Tazza Farnese* was a diplomatic gift from Uzun Hasan, however, not to the Serenissima, but to the Venetian Pope, Paul II, in the context of delivering his *Fathnama* to the Papal court as an embodiment of his victories over the previous owners of this precious cameo. However, by the time the Persian mission arrived in Rome Paul II had already died (July 1471) and Uzun Hasan's *Fathnama* and precious gifts were delivered to Sixtus IV, from whom Lorenzo il Magnifico purchased the *Tazza*.²⁵⁰ The object obtained a new life history after its entrance into the Medici collections, but before, when it was in the possession of Aq Qoyunlus, it was a precious object and a trophy to the Turkmans. Uzun Hasan was married to a Christian princess and papal nuncios, like the Bolognese Ludovico, were in contact with his court, yet I assume,

²⁴⁹ Secreta XXII, pag. 132. See Berchet: 107-108.

²⁵⁰ Joseph Alsop, *The Rare Art Traditions: The History of Art Collecting and Its Linked Phenomena Wherever These Have Appeared*, 1st ed, Bollingen Series, Bollingen series, 35; The A.W. Mellon lectures in the fine arts, 27 (New York: Pantheon Books ; [Puis] Princeton : N.J. : Princeton University Press, Cop., 1982), 390-95.

the rationality behind recycling this object as a suitable diplomatic gift from Aq Qoyunlu Empire to the Supreme Pontiff was to express his knowledge of his diplomatic partner's history, through an object with "Western" origin.

The Barbaro-Uzun Hasan conversation reveals that the king was aware of the general idea imbedded in the allegorical meanings of Greek mythology. Presumably, the deities of the Eleusinian cult on the *Tazza Farnese*, were no exception in Uzun Hasan's recognition of the pictorial program of the object with a heathen theme. Knowing that Christianity succeeded the polytheism of the Greco-Roman world, Uzun Hasan considered this antique cup as a gift to express his devotion to the sovereignty of Christendom and show himself as a friend of Christianity. That day's ominous infidels were the Ottomans and presenting such gift to the Pope evoked their mutual desire to subdue the enemy, just like the idolaters of the pagan world. The gorgon face on the outer side of the cup alluded the menace and threat of the external enemies and in the context of Uzun Hasan's alliance with the Papacy, that external common enemy would be the Ottoman Turks.

In addition to the thematic values of the gift and their contextual appropriation to a new set of opponents to Christianity, the recycling of the object from a Timurid trophy to a diplomatic gift loaded the object with layers of meanings. Through this gift, Uzun Hasan announced his court as the heir to Timur's and Qara Qoyunlu's treasuries, two formidable rivals that Uzun Hasan overcame in his 1467-71 campaign. Hence, as the king flaunted his recent victories in his *Fathnama* to the Pope Paul II, this gift embodied those victories. Just like in the *Turquoise Glass Bowl* in the *Tesoro di San Marco* where the composite style of the object's physical appearance narrated the breadth of Uzun Hasan's

reign, the recycling of *Tazza Farnese* from a trophy to a diplomatic gift also expressed the extent of this Turkman king's conquests. Uzun Hasan's 1469 conquest of Tabriz that ended the Qara Qoyunlu dominance over most of Persia, made his new capital city a trophy of his triumph over his Turkman rivals. His 1471 Sack of Timurid Herat not only enriched his treasuries in Tabriz, but also tagged the history of his triumphs to the objects in his treasury. Thus, the Hellenistic *Tazza* was an expression of Uzun Hasan's political savvy, the breadth of his reign, and his knowledge of the recipient's visual culture.

Section 4: Quattrocento Urbino

In the previous sections, I looked at illustrations and gifts that memorialize the diplomatic relations between Persia and the Italian centers of Florence, Venice, and Rome, in the second half of the fifteenth century. In Florence, I studied the reflections of the Latin translations of the classical texts that insinuated the realignment of the imperial past of Persia in a center that was then a major political and commercial ally of the Ottomans into a distinguished noble empire. In Venice and Rome, I identified the Persian ambassadors and their missions and discussed how those visual representations and gifts accrued an array of meanings in the context of those centers' military alliances with Persia against the Ottomans. In this section, I investigate another aspect in the course of these diplomatic negotiations: the infusion of Persian visual references in the propagandistic program of Federico da Montefeltro (1422-1482), the Duke of Urbino and Gonfaloniere of the Holy Roman Church. By studying four illustrations that indicate Federico's recognition of his Persian allies, I argue that these Italian paintings manipulate the reception of the textual history for their audience by utilizing Persian objects or figures to boast the Duke's magnificence as a humanist Renaissance prince.

Communion of the Apostles

In February 1473, the Confraternity of the Corpus Domini in Urbino commissioned the Flemish artist Joos van Ghent (1410-1480) to paint an altarpiece for its church of Saint Agata.²⁵¹ [Fig 1, Ch.2, Sec.4] Just like the *Compagnia de' Magi* in Florence, the Corpus Domini of Urbino was also a prominent lay organization, whose activities encompassed events with civic statements highlighting the city's political fortunes. The patron chose the *Communion of the Apostles* as the subject matter of this painting on the high altar of

²⁵¹ Ercole Scatassa, "Chiesa del Corpus Domini, in Urbino," in *Repertorium Für Kunstwissenschaft* (Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 1902), 440.

the Church.²⁵² As Marilyn Aronberg Lavin addressed in 1967, the subject of Joos van Ghent's painting, the *Communion of the Apostles*, had often appeared in Byzantine art, but rarely in Europe and had never before been part of a commission dedicated to the Corpus Domini that celebrates the Institution of the Eucharist.²⁵³

Christ is the dominant figure at the center of the composition, offering the consecrated bread to his apostles surrounding him. On the right side of the background, Federico da Montefeltro (d. 1482), then the Signore (1444-1474) and later the Duke of Urbino (1474-1482), stands in his renowned left-profile, due to the loss of his right eye and parts of his nose in a joust in 1450.²⁵⁴ Federico turns towards and gestures with his right hand to a bearded figure in exotic sumptuous apparel standing next to him. Lavin found this "bearded gentleman" the key to interpret the altarpiece. In an early-seventeenth-century historiography by Bernardino Baldi (1533-1617), this figure is referred to as "the ambassador of the Shah of Persia."²⁵⁵ Based on the copy of a Latin letter written between August and September 1472, now in the *Biblioteca Apostolica* (Vatican), in which Federico addressed Uzun Hasan and congratulated the Turkman king for his victories and expressed his gratitude for receiving an ambassador from the king, Paolo Alatri identified this ambassador as Isaac Beg, the "Jewish Spaniard".²⁵⁶ A credential letter from Uzun Hasan to the Senate of Venice in 1472 substantiates Alatri's argument that this

²⁵² Dana E. Katz, "The Contours of Tolerance: Jews and the Corpus Domini Altarpiece in Urbino," *The Art Bulletin* 85, no. 4 (December 2003): 646. The painting is on top of an earlier *predella* by Paolo Uccello (1397-1475), with six scenes of the Miracle of the Desecrated Host, completed around 1468.

²⁵³ Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, "The Altar of Corpus Domini in Urbino: Paolo Uccello, Joos Van Ghent, Piero Della Francesca," *The Art Bulletin* 49, no. 1 (March 1967): 1.

²⁵⁴ Alison Cole, *Italian Renaissance Courts: Art, Pleasure and Power*, Renaissance Art (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2016), 130-31.

²⁵⁵ B. Baldi, *Della vitae de' fatti di Federigo di Montefeltro, duca di Urbino*, 1604, F. Zuccardi, ed., Rome, 1824, n.z., Lib. 10, p. 241f.

²⁵⁶ Ms Urb. lat. 1198, Alatri, *Lettere di stato e di arte*, 78f. See Paolo Alatri, ed., *Lettere di stato e d'arte (1470 - 1480)* (Roma: Edizioni Storia e Letteratura, 1949), 79.

ambassador was the “*magnus medicus Isaac fidelis*” (Isaac), who was in Italy at this time.²⁵⁷ [Appendix II]

According to the authoritative Venetian historian Guglielmo Berchet (1833-1913) and reiterated by many historians, Isaac and two of his companions were baptized by Pope Sixtus IV (r.1471-1484), while on his mission in Rome, in 1472. Lavin based her argument on this conversion and asserted that this figure, as a Jew newly converted to the Catholic faith, unfolds the anti-Semitic implications of this altarpiece that fully coordinates with the *predella* that demonstrates the damned fate of unrepentant Jews.²⁵⁸ [Fig 2, ch.2, Sec.4] This assertion led Lavin to conclude that the visual imagery, such as the basin and the ewer on the floor reflecting the *Koinonia* (communion), was borrowed from the Byzantine art that in conjunction with the Persian ambassador, evokes a marriage of Western liturgy and Eastern iconography, rooted in the Council of Ferrara-Florence (1438-1445).²⁵⁹

In another authoritative study, Dana E. Katz proposed a counter-argument and interpreted the inclusion of Isaac, the ambassador of the anti-Ottoman Muslim Aq Qoyunlus, and the Jews in the *predella* as representations of Federico’s openness and tolerance towards religious diversity as a civic identity of Urbino. Katz argued that Federico’s gesture towards Isaac, as an anti-Ottoman agent, is a visual reassurance from the *gonfaloniere* (captain) of the Holy Roman Church to his Christian subjects that “Turks posed no threats to Urbino.”²⁶⁰ Furthermore, Katz inferred that the *predella* only displays the fate

²⁵⁷ Archivio Cicogna. Marino Sanudo, Cronaca ms. (1472)

²⁵⁸ Lavin, “The Altar of Corpus Domini in Urbino,” 17.

²⁵⁹ Lavin, 11–13.

²⁶⁰ Dana E. Katz, “The Contours of Tolerance: Jews and the Corpus Domini Altarpiece in Urbino,” *The Art Bulletin* 85, no. 4 (December 2003): 658, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3177363>.

of the Jews who are hostile to Christianity and “the non-Christian who crosses the line and threatens the religious and civic community of Urbino,” not the Jewish communities at large. Federico employed the Jews’ *utilitas* in money trade that propelled the economy and society of fifteenth-century Urbino.²⁶¹ Based on this, Katz concluded that the altarpiece as a whole is a visual expression of Federico’s devotion to protecting his Christian subjects, specifically those of Urbino, against any outside threats.²⁶²

While the Persian ambassador’s appearance in this altarpiece is visual evidence that validates the textual history of the correspondence between Uzun Hasan and Federico da Montefeltro regarding the Ottoman challenge, his prominent stature in the composition illuminates another aspect of Federico’s court. Previous scholars have emphasized Isaac’s conversion to Christianity and the nuance this conversion brings to the overall meaning of this two-part painting that reflects the civic identity of Urbino. Undoubtedly, this ambassador’s conversion would have been of extraordinary importance in the course of cross-confessional negotiations against a common Muslim enemy. However, the association of the converted Persian ambassador with Isaac was only speculated upon by later scholars and is not a substantiated fact. In 1472, Domenico Malipiero, the Venetian senator in Rome, recorded that the ambassador of Persia and two of his companions were baptized by Pope Sixtus IV.²⁶³ An anonymous account, in which the anti-Turk naval expedition of Cardinal Oliviero Carafa was poetically celebrated, also narrated that an

²⁶¹ Maristella Botticini, “A Tale of ‘Benevolent’ Governments: Private Credit Markets, Public Finance, and the Role of Jewish Lenders in Medieval and Renaissance Italy,” *The Journal of Economic History* 60 (March 2000): 164–89.

²⁶² Katz, “The Contours of Tolerance,” December 2003, 657–58.

²⁶³ Archivio Storico Italiano, VII, 1 (1843), 79. “*Ambassador de Persia 1 st battezzato a Roma da Papa Sisto, insieme con due famegli, e ghe e sta messo nome Sisto, dal nome del Papa, el qual con tutti i Cardinali e tutta la corte, l’ha presenta de gran doni e molto richi ...*” Also see Piemontese, 550.

ambassador of Persia sent by Uzun Hasan (Usoncassano), plus two of his servants were baptized by Sixtus IV in Rome.²⁶⁴

None of the primary sources mentioned above named the Persian ambassador who converted to Christianity. The speculation about his identity was possibly first made by Berchet in the mid-nineteenth century (around 1865), and later perpetuated by other scholars.²⁶⁵ The Polish diplomat and historian at the court of Casimir IV, Jan Długosz (1415-1480), reported in 1475 the arrival of an ambassador of Persia: “Isaac, a Greek of Trebizond, but in the sect of Mohammad,” that refuted Isaac’s ethnicity and Jewish faith, as argued by Berchet.²⁶⁶ Considering all the controversies, it is reasonable to leave our investigation on the authenticity of this ambassador’s conversion for a future study and focus on the actual presence of a proxy of the king of Persia in this altarpiece.

I argue that the inclusion of Isaac, an ambassador from Persia, in the *Corpus Domini* altarpiece of Urbino primarily finds its value in a realm beyond the political circumstances of the period, in the world of Renaissance humanism and in the Latin translations of Xenophon’s *Cyropedia* in 1470. The strategic realignment of Persia’s imperial past to distinguish this Muslim ally of Christian Europe from the Ottomans introduced Persia’s ancient kings as paragons of ideal rulers with virtuous monarchs and the present kings as their legitimate descendants. In this regard, I turn to a illumination on

²⁶⁴ A. MEDIN, ‘Per l’origine della voce ‘sancassan’. Le gesta di Husun Hasan in un cantare del sec. XV’, in Atti del Reale Istituto Veneto di scienze, lettere e arti, LXXXVII (1927-28), 799- 814, ottave 8-10, 32.

²⁶⁵ Berchet, *La Repubblica di Venezia e la Persia*, 1976, 115. For more information on Isaac, see N. IORGA, ‘La Politique Venitienne dans les eaux de la Mer Noire’, in *Académie Roumaine. Bulletin de la Section Historique*, II (1914), 335-370. M. A. Halevy, ‘Le rôle d’Isaac- Beg médecin et ambassadeur de Uzun-Hasan en Moldavie et dans les pays voisins’, in *Revue d’Histoire de la Médecine Hébraïque*, n° 45 (12e année, n° 3, octobre 1959), 117-127. R. Y. ELIED, *Bibliography of Mediaeval Arabic and Jewish Medicine and allied sciences*, London 1971, 129.

²⁶⁶ Johannes Długosz. *Historia Polonica*, I. L. Gleditsch & M. G. Weidemann, Lipsiae 1712, II, Liber XIII, 530-531, sub anno 1475; ed. I. Zegota, “Czas”, Cracoviae 1878, V, 626.

the frontispiece of Francesco Filelfo's Latin translation of *Cyropedia* that associates Federico with the wise kings of ancient Persia. I argue that the painting demonstrates the Duke's immersion in Quattrocento humanism which embraced the political incidents of the period and legitimized Christendom's alliance with fifteenth-century Persia as the descendant of its noble ancient monarchs.

Frontispiece of Francesco Filelfo's Latin translation of *Cyropedia*

The painting represents Federico atop a white horse with an elaborately embroidered amethystine saddle, tending the golden mace to a king in a solemn position on the throne, who in turn, holds the gold scepter and grants Federico investiture.²⁶⁷ [Fig 3, Ch.2, Sec.4] The king is in green tunic and a gold-embroidered violet pallium, with a double-crowned golden conical miter. In 1913, Cosimo Stornajolo confirmed that the enthroned king is *Ciro* (Cyrus the Great, 600-530 B.C.E), the founder of the Achaemenid Empire of Persia (550-330 B.C.E), the king of Mesopotamia and Babylonia (up to the borders of Egypt).²⁶⁸ As engraved on the still-extant *Cyrus cylinder*, the king freed the captives in the lands he conquered and allowed the Jews of Babylonia to rebuild the Temple of Jerusalem.²⁶⁹ [Fig 4, ch.2, Sec.4] In this painting, the Count of Urbino is receiving his power from this Persian king, *Ciro*, who models good governance and is the king of religious freedom.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁷ Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Urb. Lat. 410, fol. 1r.

²⁶⁸ Xenophon (Cyropaedia 1.2.1)

²⁶⁹ Cosimo Stornajolo, *I ritratti e le gesta dei duchi d'Urbino nelle miniature dei codici vaticano-urbinati, Etc.* (Roma: Pp. 25. pl. XXV., 1913).18. E. Bickerman, "The Edict of Cyrus in Ezra 1," in E. Bickerman, *Studies in Jewish and Christian History I, Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums* 9, Leiden, 1976, pp. 72-108. The *Cylinder* is now in the British Museum, no. 90920.

²⁷⁰ Alireza Naser Eslami, "Il Palazzo Ducale di Federico tra Oriente e Occidente. Architettura tra simbologia e rappresentazione del potere," in *Il Montefeltro e l'Oriente Islamico* (Genoa: Sagep, 2018), 33-35; B. Landsberger and T. Bauer, "Zu neuveröffentlichten Geschichtsquellen der Zeit von Asarhaddon bis Nabonid," *ZA* 37 (1927): 88-94.

Federico is represented as an ideal Renaissance man, versed in letters and adept in arms. This is the dominant theme in Federico's double portrait of 1476 with his only heir, Guidobaldo (1472-1508), by the Spanish artist, Pedro Berruguete (1450-1504). [Fig 5, ch.2, Sec.4] In this painting, Federico is portrayed in armor beneath a ducal mantle, while contemplating a manuscript at a lectern.²⁷¹ Guidobaldo, the future duke who was only four at this time, stands next to his father in a ceremonial robe richly embroidered with pearls, with his face washed by the bright light streaming from an invisible window. The child holds the ducal scepter in his right hand and lays his left on Federico's armed leg to fully emphasize the enduring power of the cultured House of Montefeltro. This double-portrait encapsulates Federico's Court of Urbino with harmonious integration of thought and deed.²⁷² Federico established his court with his military expertise from the tutelage of general Niccolò Piccinino (1386-1444) and the extensive earnings from his education at the humanistic school of Vittorino da Feltre (d.1446) in Mantua, where he learned Latin, astronomy, and music, as well as the full array of a humanist curriculum. His library contained numerous volumes of illuminated rare manuscripts in Arabic, Persian, Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, religious texts, ancient military history, and scientific and philosophical subjects.²⁷³

It was in this context that the memory of the imperial past of Persia was refreshed and perpetuated in and around Urbino. In 1464, the Italian humanist, Giovanni Mario Filelfo

²⁷¹ The manuscript was identified as the *Moralia* by St. Gregory the Great (r. 590-604). See Marcello Simonetta, J. J. G. Alexander, and Pierpont Morgan Library, eds., *Federico da Montefeltro and His Library*, 1st ed (Milano, Italy : [Città del Vaticano]: Y.Press ; Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 2007), 106–8.

²⁷² Cole, *Italian Renaissance Courts*, 130.

²⁷³ Ingrid Alexander-Skipnes, "Bound with Wond'rous Beauty": Eastern Codices in the Library of Federico Da Montefeltro," *Mediterranean Studies* 19 (2010): 67–85; Cole, *Italian Renaissance Courts*, 107–10. Also see Cole, 107-110.

(d.1480), the son of the famed Francesco Filelfo, composed *Cançon Morale*, an encomium to Federico, in which the junior Filelfo praised him as “the follower of Artaserse (Artaxerxes I of Persia) and Darius I” (*Imita l’Artaserse e l’ primo Dario*)²⁷⁴ Artaxerxes I (r.464-424 B.C), the sixth Achaemenid King of Persia, was recognized in classical texts by authors, such as Plutarch, as a high-minded monarch in internal and foreign affairs and a brave warrior.²⁷⁵ Darius I (r.522-486 B.C) was the third Achaemenid king of kings, who called himself “the king of all kinds of men” and ruled over the largest empire of all time.²⁷⁶ To this, adds Francesco Filelfo’s letter to Federico, in which he compares Montefeltro’s Palazzo Ducale with *Perspolis*, the magnificent palatial complex on an immense half-natural and partly-man-made terrace in Pārsa (the city of Persian settlers, today’s Fars province in south-east Iran), and the dynastic center of the Achaemenid Empire.²⁷⁷

Within the context described above, the Persian ambassador in the *Corpus Domini* altarpiece is first and foremost a visual reference to the virtuous ancient kings of Persia whose descendants were the reliable and potent allies of Christian rulers against outside threats in the fifteenth century. The remorseful look of Judas with his moneybag, in the left corner, is directed towards the center, where Christ is offering the Host, and past Christ, to Isaac and Federico. This shrewd artistic placement of the figures on the

²⁷⁴ BAV, Urb. lat. 702, f. 80v. Urb. lat. 804, f. 95v. Also see G. Zannoni, ‘I due libri della Martiados di Giovan Mario Filelfo’, in *Rendiconti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei, Cl. di scienze morali*, s. VI, vol. Ili (1894), 557-572: 559.

²⁷⁵ Plutarch, *Artaxerxes* 1.1. also see Cornelius Nepos, *De Regibus* 1.4

²⁷⁶ R. G. Kent, “Old Persian Texts. The Lists of Provinces,” *JNES* 2 (1943): 138; E. Meyer, *Geschichte Des Altertums IV* (Basel, 1954), 85.

²⁷⁷ Aulo Greco, “Francesco Filelfo e Federico di Montefeltro,” in *Francesco Filelfo nel quinto centenario della morte : atti del XVII Convegno di studi maceratesi (Tolentino, 27-30 settembre 1981)* (Padova, 1986), 45–514; Janez Höfler, *Der Palazzo ducale in Urbino unter den Montefeltro (1376-1508) : neue Forschungen zur Bau- und Ausstattungsgeschichte* (Regensburg: Schnell + Steiner, 2004).

opposite sides of the composition, with Judas exiting on the far left confronting the Isaac-Federico bond on the right, evokes the meaning that their coalition expels every conspirator. A hovering angel right above Federico and Isaac visually emphasizes this claim.

The inclusion of the Persian ambassador in this altarpiece is a nod to Federico's deep humanist learning. Besides the political anti-Ottoman and the civic anti-Jewish implications transmitted by this figure (if indeed he converted to Catholicism), themes already discussed by previous scholars, the ambassador represents Persia and its recovered noble past. Federico's intimate position in relation to Isaac reveals his devotion to this alliance, as an ideal ruler dedicated to the duties of state and church, to protect his community. At the same time, Federico's wisdom about the imperial past of his Persian partner, revived through the translations of classical texts and his eloquence in Latin, are two intermingled inferences deliberately boasted of in this painting by the inclusion of a Persian figure among Federico's closest entourage.

This idea finds its parallels in the illustration on the frontispiece of Filelfo's Latin *Cyropedia* that was dedicated to Pope Paul II. As Piemontese interpreted this illustration, Federico's reception by *Cyrus* of Persia evokes a "mutual recognition" (*reciproco riconoscimento*) between the two figures. At the time of Filelfo's dedication, between 1468 and 1470, Federico was a *condottiere* (mercenary leader) and the Count of Urbino, and it was not until 1474 that he was made the Duke of Urbino by Pope Sixtus IV. Basilios Bessarion, the anti-Ottoman Greek scholar of Trebizond and the founder of the "Academy of Bessarion" in Rome, was one of Federico's closest friends and the future

godfather of Guidobaldo.²⁷⁸ In the academy, Federico was referred to as the ideal prince whose court in Urbino was an extension of the academy.²⁷⁹ In fact, Bessarion was an influential figure in Federico's princely life, whose portrait along with Vittorino da Feltre's and Pope Sixtus IV's adorned Federico's *Studiolo*, a room for his learning and cultivation.²⁸⁰ In Filelfo's illustration, this ideal prince is being recognized by an ancient Persian king, whose virtues and victories were rehearsed by Federico.

Xenophon's *Cyropedia* referred to Cyrus as the follower of the "Magians."²⁸¹ Despite the lack of textual evidence, the majority of scholars including Nora E. Mary Boyce, the authority on Zoroastrian scholarship, persuasively argued that the remnants of fire temples and a number of Greek texts attest that Cyrus the Great was a Magian himself and the Zoroastrian magi were highly valued at his court.²⁸² Considering this, Filelfo's illustration associates Federico with the magi, whose magic recognized Christ's royalty. This idea alludes to Benozzo Gozzoli's 1459 *Procession of the Magi* fresco at the Medici Chapel in the Palazzo Medici Riccardi in Florence, in which, as argued previously, the Medici represented themselves as the three magi, the first visitors of the Holy Family, as an attempt to legitimize their rule over Florence. Although in Filelfo's illustration there are no Christian references to confuse the subject matter with a religious scene,

²⁷⁸ Angelo Michele Piemontese, "L'ambasciatore di Persia presso Federico da Montefeltro, Ludovico Bononiense O.F.M. e il Cardinale Bessarione," *Città del Vaticano Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana XI* (2004): 545.

²⁷⁹ Giovanni Mercati, *Per la cronologia della vita e degli scritti di Niccolò Perotti, Arcivescovo di Siponto* (Roma: Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, - Studi e testi 44 (Biblioteca apostolica vaticana), 1925), 77–81; Giorgio Cerboni Baiardi, *Federico di Montefeltro: lo stato, le arti, la cultura*, n.d., 61–79.

²⁸⁰ Therefore, I propose that the Byzantine iconography of the *Corpus Domini* altarpiece is a reflection of Federico's devotion in his relation with Bessarion.

²⁸¹ 4.5.14

²⁸² Boyce, Nora Elizabeth Mary, "The Religion of Cyrus the Great," in *Achaemenid History III. Method and Theory*, ed. A. Kuhrt and H. Sancisi-Weerdenburgh (Leiden, 1988), 30. Also see H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, "The Death of Cyrus. Xenophon's Cyropaedia as a Source for Iranian History," in *Papers in Honor of Professor Mary Boyce II*, *Acta Iranica* 25, Leiden, 1985, pp. 459–71.

nonetheless Federico's allusion to the magi, his fully armed body, and his white royal horse highlight his credentials as a wise *condottiere*-prince.

The integration of Persian references into Federico's propaganda as a humanist prince reverberates in two other illustrations; one is a tempera painting on parchment in the *Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana*.²⁸³ [Fig 6, ch.2, Sec.4] In this illustration, Federico is portrayed bust-length in three-quarter pose turned to his right towards another figure, whose identity has been a mystery among scholars. The figure in red tunic, portrayed together with Federico, has been identified as either the prolific Florentine humanist Cristoforo Landino (1424-1498) or Francesco di Giorgio Martini (1439-1502), the assumed artist of the painting. Cristoforo Landino held a position at the Florentine Studio between 1458-1497 as the chair of rhetoric and Latin poetry and contributed immensely to the revival of Platonism in the fifteenth century, a trajectory also pursued by his student, Marsilio Ficino (d.1499). Landino wrote three philosophical dialogues, all in Ciceronian Latin, of which he dedicated one, *Disputationes Camaldulenses* to Federico shortly after 1470.²⁸⁴ However, the physical and iconographic features of the figure in this painting are notably remote from Domenico Ghirlandaio's (1449-1494) portrayal of Cristoforo Landino in Santa Maria Novella in Florence. For this reason some scholars have speculated that the figure is not Landino, but instead a self-portrait of the artist, Francesco di Giorgio, next to Federico.²⁸⁵

²⁸³ Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (Roma). Codice *Vaticano-Urbinatino* latino 508, risguardia anteriore: Anno 1475 circa, cartapeccora mm.270 x 186.

²⁸⁴ Craig Kallendorf, "Cristoforo Landino," ed. Colette Nativel, *Centuria latinae; cent une figures humanistes de la Renaissance aux Lumières offertes à Jacques Chomarat* (Geneva, Switzerland: Oxford University Press, 1997), 477-483.

²⁸⁵ Fert Sangiorgi and Francesco Carnevali, *Iconografia Federiciana* (Urbino: Arti Grafiche Editoriali, 1982), 36.

In this painting, Federico holds an open book in front of his chest and looks at the interlocutor, who is facing him. The two figures are surrounded by a rectangular frame that simulates a window with an open sky in the background, and on the balustrade lays a splendid carpet. Sangiorgi and Carnevali have emphatically titled it as a “Persian carpet” (*tappeto persiano*).²⁸⁶ In 2004, Piemontese suggested that “probably” this carpet was a gift brought by the same ambassador represented as the turbaned figure in Oriental costume in the *Corpus Domini* altarpiece.²⁸⁷ This hypothesis is still followed by scholars to date.²⁸⁸ The lack of substantial documentation regarding Uzun Hasan’s gifts to Federico da Montefeltro challenges any conclusions; however, according to Bernardino Baldi, Uzun Hasan, who sent ambassadors on his behalf to the Christian rulers, particularly ordered his envoys to visit him [Federico] and present him with rich gifts.²⁸⁹ Therefore, it is certain that the ambassador had precious gifts with him to present to the Count of Urbino, and this carpet was probably one of those.

The carpet has a green background with multicolored medallions at the center and a border of bright pseudo-Kufic motifs on a rich crimson base. Stylistically the carpet resembles Pinturicchio’s carpet in the *Pope Pius II at the Congress of Mantua* fresco in the Piccolomini Library in Siena. The decorative design of the carpet associates it with

²⁸⁶ Sangiorgi and Carnevali, 36.

²⁸⁷ Piemontese, “L’ambasciatore di Persia presso Federico da Montefeltro, Ludovico Bononiense O.F.M. e il Cardinale Bessarione,” 556.

²⁸⁸ Naser Eslami, “Il Palazzo Ducale di Federico tra Oriente e Occidente. Architettura tra simbologia e rappresentazione del potere,” 34.

²⁸⁹ “Era per queste cagioni Federico conosciuto, e celebrato da tutti non solamente in Italia, ma anche nelle parti remote del mondo. E di qui è che Usuncassano potentissimo re di Persia nel mandar, che fece Ambasciadori a’ Potentati Cristiani, ordinò loro particolarmente, che da sua parte lo visitassero, e gli presentassero ricchissimi doni: il che fecero essi diligentemente, onde egli per lasciar viva la memoria di quel fatto, fece ritrarre sè e gli Ambasciadori dal naturale nella tavola dell’Altar maggiore della Confraternita del Corpo di Cristo in Urbino da Giusto Tedesco famoso pittore di que’ tempi, e che per quanto si dice il primo che portasse in Italia l’uso moderno del dipingere a Olio” See Bernardino Baldi, *Vita e fatti di Federigo di Montefeltro, duca di Urbino*, 2nd ed., vol. 3 (Bologna: Turchi, 1826), 241–42.

the ones represented in Timurid illumination. [Fig 7, ch.2, Sec.4] One hypothesis is that the carpet was produced to serve as a diplomatic gift and its decorative design was influenced by the then-globalized Timurid Style, an artistic taste, mentioned earlier, that was prevalent in the fifteenth-century royal courts of eastern Asia, from Anatolia to India. Uzun Hasan was the sole Asiatic ally of Federico at this time. This enhances the likelihood that Federico obtained the carpet from his diplomatic relations with Uzun Hasan. The other theory is that the carpet was another trophy gained by the Turkman sack of Timurid treasuries in Herat and the Aq Qoyunlu conquest of Tabriz in 1470 that accessed for the king the assets accumulated in Tabriz by Qara Qoyunlus and Aq Qoyunlus. Either of the two hypotheses indicate that Uzun Hasan's gift had a prominent Timurid identity, which coheres with his other gifts discussed in the previous sections, such as the *Turquoise Glass Bowl*.

Timur, the valiant warlord and the emperor of Persia, Mesopotamia, Mamluk Syria, and vast parts of Ottoman Anatolia, who crushed Sultan Bayezid I in 1402, was perpetually associated with Turkish defeat throughout Italy.²⁹⁰ Uzun Hasan, who considered his empire a legitimate inheritor of Timur's reign, was not only pictured together with Timur on a Florentine *cassone* as victorious in battle against the Ottomans, but also was remembered as a descendant of Timur, with whom he shared this hostility towards the enemy.²⁹¹ Hence, it would have been an astute strategic move for Uzun Hasan to have selected his gifts in Timurid style or from those treasuries that carry this identity. As a

²⁹⁰ Margaret Meserve, *Empires of Islam in Renaissance Historical Thought*, Harvard Historical Studies (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2008), 203–23. I have already discussed this association in my previous sections. For example, the Florentine cassone and Pisanello's St George and the Princess of Trebizond in Verona.

²⁹¹ Domenico Malipiero, *Annali Veneti dall'anno 1475-1500*, eds. T. Gar and A. Sagredo (*Archivio Storico Italiano*, ser. 1, 7.1 [1843]), 25.

result, his diplomatic partners would remember him as another Timur or a gallant commander who brought his Timurid rivals to their knees and plundered their treasuries, a conquest proudly boasted in Uzun Hasan's *Fathnama*.

In Urbino, the representation of this carpet in Federico's portrait with another figure (Cristoforo Landino?), in my view, accrues an array of other meanings than Uzun Hasan's associations with Timur. This carpet is infused with Federico's propaganda as a humanist prince with cultural aspirations. It brings nuance to Federico's deep acquaintance with the history, civilization, and culture of his "eastern" partner and his eloquence in reading Latin and Greek sources, among which were those texts that distinguished Persians as a civilized noble race. As a precious gift of Uzun Hasan represented in this portrait, the carpet reflects Federico's shrewdness in recognizing his political allies against an outside threat, as a *gonfaloniere* of the Holy Roman Church and a Renaissance prince. As an exotic object, it entails Federico's interest in the arts and culture of the Islamic east. This passion was integrated into Federico's splendid library that held folios of exquisitely illuminated Persian manuscripts of the Quattrocento that narrated some of the stories of Persian literature and recounted its history.²⁹² In addition to the Persian manuscripts, there were a number of Arabic sources, including the Arab scholar, Ḥasan ibn al-Haytham's (d.1040), astrological texts and a Koran, in Federico's library that upon his request were translated.²⁹³

²⁹² Bruschettini, *Il Montefeltro e l'oriente islamico*, 281–329.

²⁹³ Ingrid Alexander-Skipnes, "Bound with Wond'rous Beauty": Eastern Codices in the Library of Federico da Montefeltro," *Mediterranean Studies* 19 (2010): 81. Also for general perspective on this material, see Hans Belting, *Florence and Baghdad: Renaissance Art and Arab Science* (Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2011), 164–210.

The carpet in Federico's portrait reflects his political and cultural aspirations, as well as his reception and deep knowledge of his ally's history. The carpet recounts Federico's taste and love of beauty.²⁹⁴ As the painting depicts him reading a manuscript, the carpet highlights Federico's interest in learning beyond the Italian peninsula. Hence, the carpet is absorbed in the propagandistic messages of this painting. While the giver of this gift, Uzun Hasan, fashioned his empire through the material and visual culture of the object, the carpet underwent a significant conversion of implications in its new setting in Urbino. The carpet in this painting boasts Federico's thoughts, princely ambitions, interests, and knowledge as a humanist leader, rather than explicating the Persian alliance and its king, Uzun Hasan.

Portrait of Federico da Montefeltro and his Son

The other painting that reflects Persian allusions used as a tool to propagate Federico's image as a learned and magnificent ruler is the *Portrait of Federico da Montefeltro and his Son, Guidobaldo*, by Berruguete. [Fig 5, ch.2, Sec.4] As already noted, the painting is a dynastic portrait with Federico and Guidobaldo, as the present and future dukes of Urbino.²⁹⁵ On the upper left corner of the composition, above Guidobaldo's head, there sits a bejeweled conical bonnet that is thought to be one of the "rich gifts" from Uzun Hasan to Federico, as described by Baldi.²⁹⁶ The bonnet is studded with shimmering

²⁹⁴ For carpets in Renaissance paintings, see David Young Kim, "Lotto's Carpets: Materiality, Textiles, and Composition in Renaissance Painting," *The Art Bulletin* 98, no. 2 (April 2, 2016): 181–212, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00043079.2016.1108151>.

²⁹⁵ Federico was made the Duke of Urbino in 1474 and the *gonfaloniere* of the papal forces by the Pope Sixtus IV. See Cole, *Italian Renaissance Courts: Art, Pleasure, and Power*. P.129.

²⁹⁶ Jacques Lavalleye, *Les Primitifs Flamands: Le Palais Ducal d'Urbino* (Brussels, 1964), 22; Sangiorgi and Carnevali, *Iconografia Federiciana*, 30; Alexander-Skipnes, "Bound with Wond'rous Beauty": Eastern Codices in the Library of Federico da Montefeltro," 73; Lavin, "The Altar of Corpus Domini in Urbino," 13.

pearls, as is Guidobaldo's ceremonial robe and Federico's high chair. Its visual features allude to a papal *tiara* and its placement, right above Guidobaldo's head while he holds his father's scepter with the word "*pontifex*" engraved on it, provokes the papal support of Federico and the House of Montefeltro.²⁹⁷

The pearled conical bonnet, however, was first a gift of Uzun Hasan in the context of a mutual plea for a military alliance against the Turkish expansions in the east and the west. Hence, the inclusion of the Persian gift in the composition, per se, implies Federico's political intentions and allegiance to the anti-Ottoman coalition with Persia and the papal crusade ideal.²⁹⁸ Another key point in the visual features of the gift is its material value with rich incrustation of pearls, a substance abundant in southern Persia, Hormuz and the Persian Gulf. With this precious gift, in fact, Uzun Hasan recognized Federico's stature as a potent military leader and a sage prince, through a courtly discourse.

In Berruguette's double-portrait, Uzun Hasan's gift is displayed along with the emblems of the two chivalric orders, the Ermine around his neck, bestowed on him by Ferrante of Aragon (King of Naples), and the Garter around his left knee from Edward IV (king of England), both in 1474.²⁹⁹ In this context, the bejeweled hat is a part of the propagandistic program of Federico that implies the Duke's famed military and princely reputation.³⁰⁰ Hence, the gift that was presented to glorify the wealth of Uzun Hasan's treasuries and express his recognition of Federico's prowess in a courtly manner is

²⁹⁷ Charles M. Rosenberg, "The Double Portrait of Federico and Guidobaldo da Montefeltro: Power, Wisdom and Dynasty," in *Federico di Montefeltro: lo stato, le arti, la cultura, Ed.*, ed. G. Cerboni Baiardi, vol. 2 (Rome, 1986), 218–19.

²⁹⁸ Rosenberg, 220–22.

²⁹⁹ Alexander-Skipnes, "Bound with Wond'rous Beauty": Eastern Codices in the Library of Federico Da Montefeltro," 72.

³⁰⁰ Rosenberg, "The Double Portrait of Federico and Guidobaldo da Montefeltro: Power, Wisdom and Dynasty," 221.

converted into a visual tool that reinforces Federico's stature among his Christian subjects and Quattrocento rulers. The strategic placement of the pearled hat above Guidobaldo's head implies that this enhanced reputation was to be passed on to the next generation of the House of Montefeltro, specifically to the only heir to Federico's court, Guidobaldo. Therefore, Uzun Hasan's pearled conical bonnet presented to Federico as a diplomatic gift by the Shah of Persia to recognize him as a military ally against the Turkish threats, is transformed into an anti-Ottoman agent that signifies Federico's dedication to the Church and to the papal crusading ideals against the Ottomans. To all that, is added a self-fashioning by the Duke to demonstrate his virtues as a prince, as a *gonfaloniere*, and as a humanist.

Chapter-3

“Cinquecento: Safavid Gifts of Imperial, Territorial, and Religious Claims”

Section 1: Cinquecento Venice

In order to understand the meaning of the Persian diplomatic gifts to Venice in the sixteenth century, it is necessary first to review the tumultuous history of the period. There is a single gift discussed in this section, however its significance cannot be overstated in the tripartite tensions among the Persians, Christian Italy, and the Ottomans.

In the aftermath of Uzun Hasan’s devastating defeat by the Ottomans at the Battle of Başkent (eastern Anatolia, August 1473) followed by the Turkman lord’s death in 1478, the Aq Quyunlu court entered a period of upheaval that lasted until the end of the century.³⁰¹ A year after Uzun Hasan’s death, in 1479, the Venetian Republic signed a treaty with the Ottomans and ended the sixteen years of war between the two states.³⁰² While Muslim dominance totally disappeared from Spain (1492), the massive army of Charles VIII of France (r. 1483-1498) marched across the Alps in September 1494 and inaugurated four years of Italian Wars (1494-1498) that resulted in the expulsion of the Medici from Florence and the fall of Naples to the French king. However, the counter acts of the League of Venice (1495), consisting of the Republics of Venice and Florence, Duchies of Milan and Mantua, the Kingdoms of Naples and Spain, together with the Holy

³⁰¹ Shai Har-El, *Struggle for Domination in the Middle East: The Ottoman-Mamluk War, 1485-91*, The Ottoman Empire and Its Heritage, v. 4 (Leiden ; New York: E.J. Brill, 1995), 98–99.

³⁰² Kāwūsī ‘Irāqī, *Asnād-i rawābiṭ-i daulat-i Şafawī bā ḥukūmathā-i Ītālīyā*, 3.

Roman Empire, ultimately restored Charles VIII's gains to Italy.³⁰³ It was in this political context that Uzun Hasan and Despina Khatun's grandson, Isma'il (1487-1524), founded the Safavid Empire of Persia in 1501 in the long-established capital city of Tabriz.³⁰⁴

In an immediate act, Shah Isma'il I (r. 1501-1524) proclaimed the Twelver Shi'a (*Eṭhnā-ʿaṣarī* Shi'ites) as the official Islamic sect of the Safavid Empire (1501-1722) in the first Friday Congregational Prayer (*ṣalāt al-jumu'ah*), after his ascension in July 1501.³⁰⁵ This drastic action distinguished the Safavid state from its Sunni Ottoman neighbors and intensified tensions between the two crowns.³⁰⁶ In fact, this religious independence was a defensive as well as a political strategy to protect the Safavid domain from Ottoman takeover, as this Sunni neighbor's principal ambition was to form a grand caliphate by annexing all the other Sunni Muslim territories, of which the Ottomans had already claimed leadership. Isma'il's promulgation of Shi'ism in his realm, in a sense, prevented Persia's potential Islamic annexation into Sunni Ottoman possessions and put Persia in permanent hostility with the Sunni Muslim states of the period.³⁰⁷

Two years before the rise of the Safavid Empire, in 1499, the *Serenissima* entered a second war with the Ottomans that lasted until 1503, which was another deplorable failure for the Venetian navy that ended in a peace treaty between Doge Andrea Gritti (r.

³⁰³ Christine Shaw, *The Italian Wars, 1494-1559: War, State and Society in Early Modern Europe*, Second edition, Modern Wars in Perspective (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), 31–33.

³⁰⁴ Ṭāhirī, *Tārīkh-i siyāsī va ijtimā'ī-i Īrān : az marg-i Taymūr tā marg-i Shāh 'Abbās* (*The Socio-Political History of Iran, from the end of Timur's to the end of Shah Abbas's Reign*), 145–52.

³⁰⁵ The Twelver Shi'a is a sect of Islam that believes the twelve imams are the rightful successors of the Prophet Muhammad.

³⁰⁶ Ṭāhirī, *Tārīkh-i siyāsī va ijtimā'ī-i Īrān : az marg-i Taymūr tā marg-i Shāh 'Abbās* (*The Socio-Political History of Iran, from the end of Timur's to the end of Shah Abbas's Reign*), 150–51.

³⁰⁷ Falsafī, *Siyāsat-i ḥāriḡī-i Īrān dar daurān-i Ṣafawīya*, 13–14.

1523-1538) and Sultan Bayezid II (1481-1512).³⁰⁸ In November of the very same year, when Venice was preoccupied with the aftermath of its loss to the Ottomans, Giuliano della Rovere (d.1513) was selected the head of the Catholic Church, as Pope Julius II (r.1503-1513). In order to hinder Venetian dominance in northern Italy, Julius II formed a military alliance with Louis XII (r.1498-1515), King of France, Maximilian I (r.1508-1519), the Holy Roman Emperor, and Ferdinand II (r.1479-1516), the King of Aragon against the Republic of Venice. This alliance, named the League of Cambrai (1509-1511), defeated the Venetian army in Agnadello on May 14, 1509, and exacerbated the Venetian military and political standing.³⁰⁹

Coins of Shah Isma'il I to the "Sultan of Venice"

In the same year when the *Serenissima* was at war with the major European powers, two Safavid envoys were received by the *Signoria* of Venice.³¹⁰ The first one arrived on March 9, on a ship through Beirut, and the second arrived via Cyprus on May 14, the same day as the defeat of the Venetians at Agnadello.³¹¹ Both envoys (*messi*) carried letters from Shah Esma'il, of which the first was translated in Alexandria by Bartolomeo Contarini and the second one in Damascus by Pietro Zen, the Venetian consuls.³¹² This resulted in both consuls' imprisonment by the Mamluk sultan of Cairo, because of the threats made by the Ottoman Sultan, Bayezid II, for having tolerated the Persians to

³⁰⁸ Lester J. Libby, "Venetian Views of the Ottoman Empire from the Peace of 1503 to the War of Cyprus," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 9, no. 4 (1978): 104, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2540047>.

³⁰⁹ Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant (1204-1571)*. Vol. 2, 38–39.

³¹⁰ Giorgio Rota, "Safavid Envoys in Venice," in *Diplomatisches Zeremoniell in Europa und im Mittleren Osten in der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Ralph Krauz, Giorgio Rota, and Jan Paul Niederskorn (Vienna: Wien, Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009), 217.

³¹¹ Nicolò Barozzi (ed.), *I diarii di Marino Sanuto*, vol. 8 (Venice 1882) col. 14, col. 232, col. 255; SCARCIA AMORETTI (ed.), *Šāh Ismā'il I nei "Diarii" di Marin Sanudo*, vol. 1 (Rome 1979) 161-163.

³¹² Anna Contadini and Claire Norton, eds., *The Renaissance and the Ottoman World* (Farnham, Surrey, UK; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), 109–18.

conspire against the Sublime Porte in the Mamluk state.³¹³ However, the senate had received the first announcements from Shah Esma'il I in August 1505, when Contarini, the Venetian consul in Damascus, reported his visit with an envoy holding a letter of the shah addressed to the "Sultan of Venice."³¹⁴ Contarini forwarded the letter and a translation to Venice, which arrived in January 1506 and was received by Doge Leonardo Loredano (r. 1501-1521).³¹⁵

In this initial letter, the Shah of Persia expressed his friendship towards the Republic and announced his victories to the Doge. Along with his message of victories, Shah Esma'il I sent Doge Loredano a number of gold and silver coins that carried the following inscriptions, as described by the Venetian diarist, Marino Sanudo. [Fig 1, Ch.3, sec.1] (here is my translation):

On the obverse:

السلطان، العادل، الكامل، الهادى، الوالى ابولمظفر شاه اسمعيل (بهادر خان)، خلدالله ملكه

(Sultan, righteous, accomplished, conductor, the victorious Shah Esma'il, may god eternalize his reign)

On the reverse:

لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ مُحَمَّدٌ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ وَعَلَيْ وَلِيَّ اللَّهِ

³¹³ Guglielmo Berchet, *La Repubblica di Venezia e la Persia* (Tehran: Imperial Organization for Social Services, 1976), 135–36.

³¹⁴ Diarii Sanudo, vol. VI. Codd. marciani

³¹⁵ Kenneth Meyer Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant, 1204-1571: The Sixteenth Century*, vol. III, *Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society*, v. 114, 127, 161-162 (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1976), 38–39; Giorgio Rota, "Diplomatic Relations between Safavid Persia and the Republic of Venice. An Overview," in *The Turks*, n.d., 581.

(The Shi'a *Shahada*-testimony: There is no god but god, Mohammad the messenger of god, Ali the companion of god).³¹⁶

The Shah's gift of gold and silver coins, along with his letter of kinship and victories, are of great importance from political, cultural, and economic points of view. Shah Esma'il I, in a diplomatic act, recognized the Doge of Venice as a potential ally of his newly emerged empire, through a traditional courtly discourse, by his gifts of honor. However, the gifts were in Islamic aniconic fashion, as it was practiced in the early Safavid era with an absence of any visual representations, unlike coins and medals in the European tradition. Instead, descriptive/panegyric inscriptions in Arabic on the obverse of the coins replaced the portraits of the ruler and aesthetically designated the coins as Islamic.³¹⁷ Therefore, Esma'il's coins, in the first instance, acted as portable expressions of the authority and faith of a Muslim leader. The inscriptions on the coins revealed double messages about the Shah's influence and religious affiliation. While the inscription on the obverse of the coins praised Esma'il and his reign in every aspect, the reverse side propagated the Safavids' faith as a newly established Shi'a Muslim empire.

As claimed by the Safavids, the founder of the Safavid Sufi (*Sūfī*: ascetic in Muslim tradition) order, Sheikh Ṣafī-al-Dīn Eshāq Ardabīlī (d.1334) was a descendant of the House of Prophet Muhammad (*Sayyed*) and Ali ibn Abu Talib (cousin and son-in-law of

³¹⁶ “Da una parte: “Soldam, Ladel, Elchemel, Elhadi, Sainsa, Elmoda, Ismail Sain, Chaledule Melche (El Signor giusto, compido, corredor, re dei re, el victorioso Ismail mundo et puro, Iddio fazi el so regno eterno)».

E dall'altra parte la formula religiosa dei Persiani:

«Lailla, Lhalla, Mahumet Resulhalla, Uhalī, Ulihalla (Un solo Dio, un solo messo Maometto, un sanctissimo Ali)».” See Sanudi *Diarii* Vol. VII, pag. 194.

³¹⁷ Grabar, Oleg. *The Formation of Islamic Art*. Rev. and enl. ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987.

the Prophet). Consequently, Esma‘il inherited this lineage through his father.³¹⁸ Shaikh Ḥaydar (d.1488), Esma‘il’s father, was the son of the first head of the Safavid Order, Shaikh Jonayd (1447-1460), and Uzun Ḥasan’s sister, Kadija Begom (Ḳadīja). Shaikh Ḥaydar continued the alliance with Uzun Hasan and married his daughter, Martha (originally named Ḥalīma Begī Āgā), from Despina Khatun, who later became Esma‘il’s mother.³¹⁹ Along with his Sufi followers, Shaikh Ḥaydar conducted military organizations and wore a distinctive headgear, called *tāj-e ḥaydarī* (turban-crown), which consisted of a red felt cap (*kolāh*) with twelve gores, commemorating the Twelve Shi’a Imams, wrapped over the cap forming a white turban surmounted by a projecting crimson baton and a feathery plume.³²⁰

The Turks called the militant Sufi followers and wearers of the *tāj-e ḥaydarī* the Redheads (*Qezelbāš*). Also known as *tāj-e Safavi*, the distinctive headgear was revived by Shaikh Ḥaydar’s son, Esma‘il, when he founded the empire in 1501. In fact, the *tāj* or the headgear was a manifestation of the Safavid rulers’ and their followers’ political and religious ideologies as a Twelver Imams Shi’a empire, distinguished from the Sunni Muslim authorities of the period, particularly the Ottoman counterparts, and created a sort of visual unity among them. The prevalence of this headgear among Safavid dignitaries was to such an extent that Sanudo reported that Venetian caravans of red velvet were

³¹⁸ According to Mīr Abu’l-Faṭḥ Ḥosaynī in the revised version of صفوات الصفاء (*Ṣafwat al-ṣafā’*: a biography of the eponym of the Safavid dynasty and the genealogy of the founder of the Safavid order of Sufi, Shaikh Ṣaḫī-al-Dīn Eshāq Ardabīlī, by Ibn Bazzāz). See S. A. (Kasrawī) Tabrīzī, نژاد و نبار صفوی (Nežād o tabār-e Ṣafawīya), Āyanda II, 1306 (1927-28), pp. 357-65, 489-97. Also see Minorsky Vladimir, The Turks, Iran and the Caucasus in the Middle Ages. Preface by J.A. Boyle. Variorum Reprints, London 1978; page 517-518.

³¹⁹ MS London, British Library, Or. 3248, fol. 20b. Also see غياث الدين خواندمير (Ghiyāṣ ad-Dīn Moḥammad Khwāndamīr), حبیب السیر (*Ḥabīb al-sīar*), Tehran, IV, pp. 425, 428.

³²⁰ Ḥabīb al-sīar, Tehran, IV, pp. 426-27.

dispatched to Persia through Aleppo to be sold to the “Sophi” (the Shah).³²¹ This report, to some extent, demonstrates the Venetian perception of the political and religious implications of this *tāj*. However, the Venetian strategic contribution to this division not only reveals the incentives of trade between the two states, but also hints at the intricacy of diplomacy in this context, and how the Safavids’ attempts in enhancing these distinctions in visual emblems nurtured their anti-Ottoman reputation in Europe. This ideology was also reflected in Safavid art and propaganda, particularly in Esma‘il’s coins sent to Venice.

To ascertain the imbedded messages of these coins, we need to proceed with a brief review of the divisions between Shi’a and Sunni doctrines in Islam. Following the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632, the key dispute that separated the Muslim community into Shi’a and Sunni followers was the former’s belief in the requisite of family relationship (*Ahl al-Bayt*- the House of Muhammad) in the righteousness of the successors of the Prophet, while the Sunni Muslims believed that the successor was to be chosen by the elite of the Muslim community. Consequently, the Shi’a believe that Ali ibn Abu Talib (d.661) was the rightful successor of the Prophet, while the Sunni Muslims chose Muhammad’s father-in-law, Abdullah ibn Abi Quhafah (also known as Abu Bakr, d.634), as the first Caliphate.³²² Following the schism, Ali ibn Abu Talib is the leading figure in Shi’a ideology and his name is a verbal signifier of this Islamic tradition. Hence, the appearance of the name “Ali” (علي ولي الله) on the coins gifted to the Doge of Venice (Ali the companion of God) is seen as an official proclamation of the religious affiliation

³²¹ Sanudo VI, 57. Also see Hinz, *Taškīl-i daulat-i millī dar Īrān hukūmat-i Āq-Qūyunlū wa zuhūr-i daulat-i šafawī*, 93.

³²² Lesley Hazleton, *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*, 1. Anchor Books ed (New York: Anchor Books, 2010).

in Esma‘il’s newly-founded state. This declaration also distinguished the Safavid crown from the Sunni sultans and pronounced the Persians as a nation with religious, as well as political conflicts, against the Ottomans.

As a theocratic state where religion and politics were intricately intertwined, Esma‘il’s establishment of Shi’ism in Persia was, on the one hand, a diplomatic move to free his reign from Sunni-Ottoman hegemony. On the other hand, the intensity of this religious discrepancy brought the Persians closer to their European allies, as both shared the same enemy, who threatened them territorially and religiously. The inscriptions on the reverse of the coins not only broadcast Esma‘il’s faith, but also put more weight on his opposition and power as a distinguished Muslim leader different from the Sultan, Shah Esmā‘īl protected his nation against the Ottomans, using religion as a defensive instrument, and reached out to his grandfather’s European allies to revive their coalition and annihilate their common enemy, the Ottomans.

Shah Esma‘il I reintroduced a gold coin particular to his reign named the *Ashrafi*, shortly after his ascension to power. While gold was a rare substance in Ottoman lands before the fall of Mamluk Egypt to the Ottoman sultan in 1517 and the flow of tax money in gold, the Safavids had the advantage of accessing gold because they were on the west-east bullion traffic from Europe to India through the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf.³²³ Gold coins had been a significant part of Persia’s monetary system, since the Achaemenid *Daric* (8.4 gr), struck during Darius I’s reign (522-486 B.C).³²⁴ However, during the Safavid realm gold coins were exclusively minted for gift and commemoration purposes,

³²³ Rudolph P. Mathee, “Between Venice and Surat: The Trade in Gold in Late Safavid Iran,” *Modern Asian Studies* 34, no. 1 (February 2000): 224–25.

³²⁴ Michael Alram, “Daric,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, VII. No.1, p. 36-40.

unlike silver coins which was commonly used for exchange in trade. Shah Esma‘il I’s silver coins, named *Shahi*, had the same features as the gold ones, yet with tradable monetary values (one-*Shahi*: 50 Dinar-9.2 gr. silver).³²⁵

In sum, the *Ashrafis* and *Shahis* struck in the name of Shah Esma‘il I Safavi, the gold and silver material of the gifts, the aesthetic features, and the inscriptions on both sides of the coins each transmit incredibly important messages about the significant shifts of power and religion in Persia, the longstanding ally of Christian Europe and enemy of the Ottomans. The combination of gold and silver coins symbolically honored the doge of Venice and updated the Republic about all sorts of changes in Persia. This courtly gesture set the stage for several more diplomatic missions from Safavid Persia to the *Serenissima* in the course of the sixteenth century. As previously mentioned, two Safavid envoys arrived in Venice with letters from the Shah in 1509 and were lodged in Cà Barbaro at S. Stefano.³²⁶ In those letters, the Shah requested the Republic to cast cannons and artillery for his battles against the Ottomans from the side of Asia Minor, while Venice would attack the Porte from the sea.³²⁷ Although the envoys were received by the Doge on May 16 (1509), the unfortunate timing of their visit, just around the time when the French defeated the Venetian army in Agnadello (May 14), resulted in the envoys’ return with empty hands, but with verbal reassurance of the *Serenissima*’s affection for the Shah of Persia.³²⁸

³²⁵ Farzaneh Gha‘eini, (*Safavid Coins*) *Sekkahā-ye šafawīya* (Pazineh, 2009).

³²⁶ Rota, “Safavid Envoys in Venice,” 217.

³²⁷ Berchet, *La Repubblica di Venezia e la Persia*, 155-157; Amīr Ḥusayn Barāzish, *Ravābiṭ-i siyāsī - dīplumātīk-i Īrān va jahān dar ‘ahd-i Šafāvīyah : Political & diplomatic relations: Iran & world in Safavid dynasty*, Chāp-i avval (Tihṙān: Amīr Kabīr, 2013), 329–30.

³²⁸ “*che i Veneziani si ricordavano molto bene la buona amicizia e la lega che avevano stretta col re di Persia, che essi erano molto contenti che il sufi fosse nemico dei Turchi, avesse pensato di comunicare alla repubblica l'interesse della guerra, e promettesse quelle cose, le quali se Uzunhasan avesse mantenute non*

The 1509 missions came to nothing in terms of military support from the *Serenissima*, but the Venetian-Persian concord continued, although with fluctuations. In 1514 Shah Esma‘il I disastrously lost the battle to Sultan Selim I (r. 1512-1520) in Çaldıran (northwest Safavid borders) and consequently let the Turkish state expand eastward in Safavid soil to Tabriz. In fact, Shah Esma‘il I lost because of his lack of artillery and strong army. By 1515, the Portuguese fully occupied the southern port-city of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf to use as a vassal for their trade from Europe to India.³²⁹ In 1517 the Ottoman Empire under Selim I subjugated the Mamluk states of Syria, Egypt, and the two Muslim holy cities of Mecca and Medina. It approached its zenith during the reign of Sultan Suleiman I (r. 1520-1566), also known as Suleiman the Magnificent. Shah Esma‘il I’s sudden death in 1524 marked another standstill in the diplomatic relations of the Safavid Empire, with his eleven-year-old son, Shah Tahmasp I (r. 1524-1576) succeeding the throne.

Shah Tahmasp I’s long reign witnessed three Ottoman sultans on throne: Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, Sultan Selim II (r. 1566-1574), and Sultan Murad III (1574-1595), and several European missions in making alliances with the Safavid Shah of Persia against the Ottomans. Charles V of Habsburg (r. 1519-1526) and Ferdinand I (r. 1558-1564), the Holy Roman Emperors, and Philip II (r. 1556-1598), King of Spain, were among those Catholic authorities who, with the support of the Papacy, reached out to Shah Tahmasp I

vi sarebbe forse più stata occasione di muover guerra agli Ottomani; ma che tali erano i cambiamenti delle cose del mondo, che siccome in quel tempo il persiano non pensò o non potè ritentare la sorte delle armi, così ora la repubblica trovandosi in gravissima condizione, non poteva far ciò che pure ardentemente desiderava, avvegnachè era occupata in una importantissima guerra, mossale dai più potenti sovrani d'Europa che avevano congiurato a Cambray, non provocati da ingiuria alcuna, ma solo eccitati da invidia della felicità dei Veneziani.” See Berchet, pp. 25–26.

³²⁹ Pinto Carla Alferes, “The Diplomatic Agency of Art between Goa and Persia : Archbishop Friar Aleixo de Meneses and Shah ‘Abbās in the Early Seventeenth Century. 2018,” in *Global Gifts*, 2018, 150–53.

in their anti-Ottoman attempts, some of which will be discussed in the following section.³³⁰ Nevertheless, after the Safavid-Ottoman war of 1532 to 1555, Shah Tahmasp I signed the Peace of Amasya (1555) with Sultan Suleiman and initiated twenty years of truce between the two states. On the other side of the globe, the Holy League (1538), consisted of the Republic of Venice, the Papacy (Paul III, r.1534-1549), the Kingdom of Spain and Portugal and the Holy Roman Empire entered three years of war against the Franco-Ottoman alliance (1537-1540). This culminated in the Turco-Venetian Peace Treaty of 1540.³³¹

In the course of the Holy League wars against the Ottomans, in October 1539 the Venetian envoy, Michele Membrè (d.1594), arrived in Persia and was received by Shah Tahmasp I in *Marand* (a Safavid military center northwest of Tabriz).³³² Michele Membrè, known as “Micha’eil Beg” (میکائیل بیگ) in Persian chronicles, stayed at the court of Shah Tahmasp and delivered an important message of a Venetian-Persian alliance and invited the Shah to join the war against the Porte. Nevertheless, the Venetian treaty of 1540 with the Ottoman Sultan not only sidelined Membrè’s mission, but also tainted the Shah’s trust of his Venetian allies. The two letters of Shah Tahmasp to Doge Andrea Gritti in 1539, now preserved at the State Archive of Venice, demonstrate this change from the Shah’s initial warmth towards his Venetian counterparts and their suggested military-political alliance in the first letter to his disappointments with the Republic, in

³³⁰ Ṭāhirī, *Tārīkh-i siyāsī va ijtimā’ī-i Īrān : az marg-i Taymūr tā marg-i Shāh ‘Abbās* (*The Socio-Political History of Iran, from the end of Timur’s to the end of Shah Abbas’s Reign*), 183–89.

³³¹ Barāzish, *Ravābiṭ-i siyāsī - dīplumātīk-i Īrān va jahān dar ‘ahd-i Ṣafavīyah*, 330–31.

³³² Michele Membré and A. H Morton, *Mission to the Lord Sophy of Persia (1539-1542)* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips for the Gibb Memorial Trust, 1999).

the second letter, as the Venetians approached another humiliating peace treaty with the Porte.³³³ [Fig 2a-b, Ch.3, Sec.3]

In his second letter, in August 1540, Shah Tahmasp I expressed his bewilderment about the news of the peace treaty (capitulation of 1540) and explained his initial disbelief and the consequent inquiries about the credibility of the upsetting news. The Shah accused the Ottomans of not being reliable in their promises and warned the Republic about the consequences. As a result, Shah Tahmasp wrote to his Venetian counterpart that he saw no more reason for “Micha’eil Beg” to remain at his court and reported that he was sending back the envoy to Venice. However, toward the end of the letter, the Shah stressed that there had been and would be no betrayals on his part and guaranteed that if (هنگام فرصت - at any opportunity) they decided to attack the Porte from the sea, the Safavid forces would not hesitate to stand by their Venetian allies and raid from land. [Appendix III]

Although Membère’s mission did not bear fruit in terms of a military alliance between the *Serenissima* and the Safavid Shah of Persia, his stay at Tabmasp’s court of Tabriz was welcomed by the Shah. At the end of his stay, as recorded in his account, the Shah presented the thirty-year-old Membère some clothes, eighty ducats, and a horse, with which he could make his way back to Venice and deliver the Lord’s letters to the Doge.³³⁴ Membère did not specify the style of the clothes he received from the Shah;

³³³ Muḥammad Ḥasan Kāwūsī ‘Irāqī, ed., *Asnād-i rawābiṭ-i daulat-i Ṣafawī bā ḥukūmathā-i Ītālīyā- The Diplomatic Relations between the Safavids of Persia and the Italian Centers*, Čāp 1 (Tehrān: Markaz-i Asnād wa Tārīḥ-i Dīplumāsī, 2000), 6–7; Barāzish, *Ravābiṭ-i siyāsī - dīplumātīk-i Īrān va jahān dar ‘ahd-i Ṣafavīyah*, 332; Mohsen Bahram Nejad, “Mo’arefī va Sharḥī bar Do Sanad-i Tārīkhī az Monāsebāt-e Īrān va Venīz dar ‘Ahd-e Shāh Tahmāb-e Avval” (A commentary on two textual documents from the Iranian-Venetian Relations during the reign of Shah Tahmasp I), *Faslnāme-ye Tārīkh*, Islamic Azad University, Fall (2006/1385), 17–18.

³³⁴ Membère and Morton, *Mission to the Lord Sophy of Persia (1539-1542)*, 22.

however, presenting robes of honor were among the most common means of reciprocal recognition in Islamic courts of the period. Usually made of sumptuous cloths of silk and gold with the name of the ruler inscribed on the robe, adorned with precious stones and jewelry, robes of honor, called *khil'a* (خلعة) in Arabic, were a traditional gift from a Muslim ruler.

Membrè's experience at the Safavid court was very different from that of the other Venetian diplomat, Vincenzo degli Alessandri (d.1595), who secretly arrived in Persia in the course of the Venetian Cyprian war against the Ottomans in July 1572.³³⁵ Alessandri spent almost two years walking across Ottoman territories in the guise of an Armenian merchant to arrive in Tabriz and deliver the *Signoria*'s gifts and letter to Shah Tahmasp, who was then in his new capital, Qazvin. In the letter held by Alessandri (issued on October 30, 1570), the Republic invited Persia to intervene in their battle with all the Christian princes against the Ottomans and immortalize their names, like their Italian counterparts. However, after a long wait and several meetings with the Shah's son and pretender to the Safavid throne, Ḥaydar Mirza (d. 1576), Alessandri was never received by Shah Tahmasp and left Persia in 1574 empty-handed, but with a four-braccia (about 9 feet and 2 inches) silk carpet presented to him by Ḥaydar Mirza, the future Shah Isma'il II (r. August 1576- November 1577), in turn for the sequins (gold coins) he offered the prince in his audience.³³⁶

³³⁵ Ṭāhirī, *Tārīkh-i siyāsī va ijtimā'ī-i Īrān : az marg-i Taymūr tā marg-i Shāh 'Abbās* (*The Socio-Political History of Iran, from the end of Timur's to the end of Shah Abbas's Reign*), 186–89.

³³⁶ Berchet, *La Repubblica di Venezia e la Persia*, 30–37, DOCUMENTO XXIII. 1570, 30 ottobre, in Zonta. Shah Tahmasp's son and pretender of his throne, Ḥaydar Mīrzā (Mirza: a princely title in Persian).

One reason for the Shah's apathy towards Alessandri's presence and proposal at his court was the Peace Treaty of Amasya (1555) that put twenty years of truce between the two archival rivals, the Safavids and the Porte. The other hindrance was Tahmasp's despair in his diplomatic relations with the *Serenissima* in regards to the notorious common enemy, the Ottomans. The Venetian proposal delivered by Alessandri could indeed immortalize the name of the Safavid court, as the naval forces of the Holy League, led by the Venetian Republic, ultimately crushed the Ottoman fleet in the Battle of Lepanto in October 1571 and inflicted a historic defeat on the Turkish threat.³³⁷ The Shah decided to pretend a graceful relation with the Ottomans; however, his hostility towards them never subsided. In early 1567, when the Safavid emissary arrived in Edirne to officially congratulate Sultan Selim II on his coronation, among the precious gifts that Shah Tahmasp sent were two very subversive manuscripts that, under the guise or of precious "gifts," particularly undermined Ottoman legitimacy. They were brought by a huge embassy of seven hundred figures on thirty-four laden camels.

Both adorned with large rubies and pearls, the two volumes consisted of a Qur'an and an illuminated *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) of the eleventh-century Persian poet, Abu'l Qasim Firdausi (935–1020). The royal *Shahnama* was illuminated with 259 illustrations of the ancient kings of Persia in the guise of the Safavid court, under the name and patronage of Shah Tahmasp. The Qur'an manuscript was said to be written by the hand of Imam Ali, the successor of Prophet Muhammad in Shi'a tradition. To this was added the *Shahnama-yi Shahi* (royal *Shahnama*) in which the victories and the deeply rooted

³³⁷ Ṭāhirī, *Tārīkh-i siyāsī va ijtimā'ī-i Īrān : az marg-i Taymūr tā marg-i Shāh 'Abbās* (*The Socio-Political History of Iran, from the end of Timur's to the end of Shah Abbas's Reign*), 193–95. Also see A. M. Piemontese, "Alessandri," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, I/8, pp. 825-826

tradition of Persian kingship were represented in the sixteenth-century Safavid manner.³³⁸

Both of the two manuscripts were insulting gifts, as they deliberately venerated Safavid political and ideological identity, instead of praising the recipient of the gift, and thereby dismissed the Ottoman Sultan's supremacy.³³⁹ Despite the intrinsic animosity expressed in his gifts, Tahmasp cleverly remained at peace with the Ottoman court to the end of his reign, as he aged and had less motivation in confronting his forceful rival.

Alessandri's secret mission in Persia was reciprocated in 1580 by Shah Tahmasp's son, Shah Mohammad Khodābandeh (r.1578-1587), after years of internal unrest and the Ottoman-Safavid war, following Tahmasp's death in 1576. The eighty-year-old Khāwje Muhammad Tabrizi (chogia Mehemet in Venetian chronicles) secretly arrived in Venice in the guise of a trader. Khāwje Muhammad was first received in the private apartment of the Doge Nicolò da Ponte (r.1578–1585), together with the Head of the Council of Ten twice, on May 1 and June 17, 1580.³⁴⁰ The reason of this secrecy was that the Republic did not intend to arouse Ottoman suspicions, as in 1573, Venice, with the intervention of the French, had abandoned the Holy League (Papacy and Spain) to make a separate peace with the Porte.³⁴¹

After the first two meetings in May and June 1580, Khāwje Muhammad met with two Venetian officials (Antonio Milledonne and Domenico Vico) in the house of the late diplomat, Vicenzo degli Alessandri.³⁴² The report was presented to the Council of Ten, as

³³⁸ Komaroff, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, *Gifts of the Sultan*, 18–19.

³³⁹ Arcak Casale, "Gifts in Motion: Ottoman-Safavid Cultural Exchange, 1501-1618," 19–20.

³⁴⁰ Espositioni Ambasciatori 1580-83. See Berchet *La Repubblica di Venezia e la Persia*, DOCUMENTO XXVIII

³⁴¹ Barāzish, *Ravābiṭ-i siyāsī - dīplumātīk-i Īrān va jahān dar 'ahd-i Šafavīyah* =, 334.

³⁴² Rota, "Safavid Envoys in Venice," 220; Berchet, *La Repubblica di Venezia e la Persia*, 183.

the most influential governing institution of Venice on June 13 of the same year and allowed the Doge to secretly receive the Persian envoy in order to present him the Republic's response. The Venetians made Khāwje Muhammad "read" the response instead of handing him an official letter, as a matter of secrecy and the envoy's own safety, and along with 300 sequins dispatched him back to the Safavid court.³⁴³ Khāwje Muhammad's secret mission was a mixture of "eloquence and diplomatic ingenuity," as Giorgio Rota interpreted it. Despite several requests by the Persian envoy, the *Serenissima* refused to entrust an official letter and even justified their action by making Shah Tahmasp's similar attitude towards Alessandri as an excuse for not offering proper courtesy.³⁴⁴

Although Khāwje Muhammad left Venice respectfully and peacefully, his mission did not accomplish the results the Shah favored. In the same year (1580) a Safavid embassy led by Maqsud Khān arrived in Istanbul requesting peace with Sultan Murad III (r.1574-1595).³⁴⁵ This was followed by another mission in 1582 by the ambassador Ibrāhim Khān; the Safavid Shah was playing both sides against the middle with his European and Ottoman counterparts. At the same time that the court in Persia was in an attempt to

³⁴³ "Per l'affezione grandissima che noi portiamo al serenissimo re di Persia, havendo la Signoria Nostra sempre avuto buona amicitia con li serenissimi suoi predecessori, havemo veduto gratamente voi, mandato qui per ordine di S. M., ed udite volentieri le lettere che ci avete portate, et in risposta vi dicemo: che noi desideriamo intender sempre felici successi di S. M. come di re giustissimo e valorosissimo, et nostro amico, onde avemo pregato et pregamo di cuore il signor Dio che li doni victoria, et speriamo che così sarà, poichè difende una causa giusta et comanda ad una nazione valorosissima et solita ad esser sempre victoriosa. Noi non vi diamo lettere nostre per non mettere in pericolo la vostra persona che ne è carissima, per la prudentia che conoscemo essere in voi; ma riferirete a bocca a quei signori che vi hanno mandato, ed anche a Sua Maestà questa nostra buona volontà, nella quale continueremo sempre, sperando nel Signor Dio, che continuando la guerra darà occasione non solamente a noi, ma anco a tutta la christianità, di mostrare con effetti il comun desiderio; et per segno che vi abbiamo veduto volentieri vi sarà dato dal segretario nostro un presente che goderete per memoria nostra" Arch. secreto del Collegio, Registri anni 1580-83. Berchet *La Repubblica di Venezia e la Persia*, 79.

³⁴⁴ Rota, "Safavid Envoys in Venice," 221.

³⁴⁵ Arcak Casale, "Gifts in Motion: Ottoman-Safavid Cultural Exchange, 1501-1618," 128.

maintain peace with the Ottomans, the Shah was secretly sending messengers to reassure his Venetian partners about his anti-Ottoman sentiments and his good will about his court's traditional ally, the Republic of Venice. On the other side, the *Serenissima*, which secured its political, naval, and commercial status in the Mediterranean by the 1573 peace treaty with the Ottomans for almost a century, welcomed those Persian attempts, but never made them official, in order to have both of the Muslim rivals on her side and strategically use them at times as a threatening tool against each other.³⁴⁶ Naturally, this ingenuity created a reciprocal distrust between the two states.

The shift of power in Persia from the weak-willed and frail Shah Mohammad Khodābandeh to his son, the greatest Shah of the Safavid dynasty, Shah Abbas I (r.1587-1629), marked the most notable turning point in the political, economical, cultural, and artistic history of the Safavid court of Persia. The first decade of his reign witnessed serious internal discord with the *Qezelbāš* and the *Uzbek* tribes (in Khorasan). Shah Abbas I strategically made a peace treaty with the Ottomans in 1590, who had occupied vast areas of Persia's northwest, to focus on the unrest in his domain. However, by 1599, when the twenty-eight-year-old Shah Abbas I imposed his authority over the internal rivals of the Safavid throne, he initiated a series of diplomatic missions to Europe to revive the Persian-European alliance against the Ottomans and to foster new reciprocal commerce for his flourishing economy.³⁴⁷ The first influential diplomatic mission from Shah Abbas I, led by Asad Beg (*Gerak Yiragh Tabrizi*, known as Efet Beg in some

³⁴⁶ At the time of Khāwje Muhammad's visit, two Ottoman emissaries were in Venice. See Maria Pia Pedani Fabris, *In nome del Gran Signore* (Venezia, 1994), 170–76.

³⁴⁷ Nasrollah Falsafi, *Zendegiy E Shah Abbas E Avval* (The Life History of Shah Abbas I), vol. 5 (Tehran: Entesharat e Elmi, 1997), 1932.

Venetian sources) arrived in Venice in June 1600.³⁴⁸ This mission and the following embassies of the seventeenth century will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

³⁴⁸ Berchet. *La Repubblica di Venezia e la Persia*, 192-193.

Section 2: Cinquecento Rome

In this section, I investigate the Cinquecento Vatican-Safavid correspondence over a military alliance between the two powers against their mutual enemy, the Ottomans. A gift of a Diatessaron in Persian language and another manuscript of a Persian translation of St. Matthew's Gospel unravel the nuance those religio-political communications brought to the Persian reputation in Italy (and Europe), at this time. I argue that the Persian translation of Christian holy books evoke the Roman Church's desire to convert the Persians, as part of a ambitious plan, to form a Catholic League against the foreign threats, the Ottomans and the Protestants. In the course of this interreligious correspondence between the Catholic Church and the Safavid Shahs of Persia, I shed light on the notable contribution of the Portuguese Augustinian missionaries, settled in Hormuz on a crossroad to their Asian colonial centers in India.

Gift of a Diatessaron in Persian

Farsi sources claim that the earliest contacts between the Safavid court of Persia and the Vatican was not until 1579, when Pope Gregory XIII (r. 1572-1585) dispatched an envoy with a letter to Shah Mohammad Khodābandeh (r.1578-1587) to assure the Persian Shah about the papacy's full support of his anti-Ottoman campaigns.³⁴⁹ However, a *Grande Vangelo* (الانجيل المعظم: *al- 'Injīl al-Mu'azzam*) in Persian script sent at the time of Shah Tahmasp I to Pope Paul III (r.1534-1549), preserved at Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana in Florence, proves otherwise.³⁵⁰ [Fig 1, Ch.3, Sec.2] In the next few paragraphs, I investigate the fused nature of this gift's identity in the religio-political context of its

³⁴⁹ Muḥammad Ḥasan Kāwūsī 'Irāqī, ed., *Asnād-i rawābiṭ-i daulat-i Ṣafawī bā ḥukūmathā-i Ītālīyā*, Čāp 1 (Tih-rān: Markaz-i Asnād wa Tārīḥ-i Dīplumāsī, 2000), 117–18; Amīr Ḥusayn Barāzish, *Ravābiṭ-i siyāsī - dīplumātīk-i Īrān va jahān dar 'ahd-i Ṣafavīyah* =: *Political & diplomatic relations: Iran & world in Safavid dynasty*, Chāp-i avval (Tih-rān: Amīr Kabīr, 2013), 336–37; Abū al-Qāsim Ṭāhirī, *Tārīkh-i siyāsī va ijtimā'ī-i Īrān : az marg-i Taymūr tā marg-i Shāh 'Abbās* (*The Socio-Political History of Iran, from the end of Timur's to the end of Shah Abbas's Reign*) (Tehran: Franklin, 1349), 271–73.

³⁵⁰ Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana. Ms.Or.81 (and Or. 399). See Angelo Michele Piemontese, "I due ambasciatori in Persia ricevuti da Papa Paolo V al Quirinale," in *Miscellanea Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae*, vol. 12, 2005, 358.

modification procedure from a religious manuscript to a gift. I argue that this process finds its roots in the *Portuguese Padroado* (1514), the Vatican recognition of the “right of patronage” to the Portuguese monarchs in the administration and foundation of churches and religious organizations in their territories and overseas expansions. Confirmed and amplified by the Medici Pope, Leo X (1513-1521), in 1514, the Portuguese Augustinian mission to the Eastern Mediterranean initiated disseminating Christianity in the region, from Cape of Good Hope to China. With the occupation of the island of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf as a Portuguese crossroad to their Indian trading centers of Goa and Gujarat (*Estado da India*) since 1507, Portuguese Augustinians were established in this strategic port-city by 1515, and promoted political and ecclesiastical relations between the Catholic Church and the Safavids of Persia.³⁵¹ The Persian *Grande Vangelo*, I argue, unravels these intermingled religio-political relations.

Laurenziana’s *al-’Injīl al-Mu’azzam* (*Grande Vangelo*) contains all four Gospels (*Diatessaron*) in contentious narrative of the life and miracles of Christ.³⁵² The manuscript is in four major chapters (*bāb*- libro) based on the Gospels and unfolds in historical order. Each chapter is subdivided into sections (*fasl*- capitoli). The direction of the chapters’ order is from left to right, while the sections are read from right to left, in the direction of Arabic/Persian scripts. The folios (pages) are numbered around the center of the left margin in *Abjad* numeral order, based on which, Arabic/Persian letters accrue

³⁵¹ Flannery, *The Mission of the Portuguese Augustinians to Persia and beyond (1602-1747)*, 32–33.

³⁵² Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana. Ms.Or.81.

numeral values.³⁵³ A corresponding digit-based numbering in Hindu-Arabic (Western) order also appears on the top left of the verso margin.

The manuscript is dated based on Islamic lunar calendar as (here is the English transcripts): “Dušanba, Shawwāl 8, 954 Hjrī.” that corresponds to “Monday, November 21, 1547” and the location of production is recorded in Hasankeyf, a town alongside Tigris (today’s southeast Turkey).³⁵⁴ As explained at the end of the script, the text was in the pen of a Syrian Christian, referred to as, “Ibrāhīm ibn šammāsh 'Abd Allāh al-Hisnkayfi al-Masīhī al-Surīyānī al-Ya‘qūbī bi-Hisnkayf al-Mahrūsah” (Ibrāhīm, son of šammāsh 'Abd Allāh, from Hasankeyf, the Jacobite (*Giacobita*) Syrian Christian, from the *Mahrūsah* (literal translation: in custody) city of Hasankeyf).³⁵⁵ *Mahrūsah* was the title used for the extended Safavid territories from the second half of the sixteenth century and Hasankeyf was a Safavid realm until 1517, when it fell into the hands of the Ottomans.³⁵⁶

As the copyist continued on the following folio (124v), the manuscript belonged to “Istīfānūs Qatūlīqūs al-Madinat al-Mahrūsah šalāmāst” (Stephan Catholicos of the *Mahrūsah* city of šalāmāst/Salmas-today’s northwest Iran). Stephan Catholicos, deciphered as Stefan V, was the patriarch of Armenia (r.1541-1564), a region under the reign of Shah Tahmasp I.³⁵⁷ The title of the calligrapher is signed as “nām i 'imāda” (نام -عماده *proprio Cristiano*) baptismal name and “Laqab i ta'rīf” (لقب تعریف *ufficiale*

³⁵³ Giuseppe Tatian Messina, “Un diatessaron persiano del secolo XIII tradotto dal siriano,” *Biblica* 23, no. 4 (1942): 268–69.

³⁵⁴ Hasankeyf also written Hışn Kayfa' (حصن كیفه), southeastern Turkey.

³⁵⁵ Firenze, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Ms.Or.81. folio: 123v, 124r.

³⁵⁶ 'Alī Naqī Naṣīrī and Willem M. Floor, *Titles & Emoluments in Safavid Iran: A Third Manual of Safavid Administration*, 1. ed (Washington, DC: Mage Publ, 2008), 180–252.

³⁵⁷ Piemontese, “I due ambasciatori in Persia ricevuti da Papa Paolo V al Quirinale,” 358–59.

musulmano) title with which he was renowned at the time (این زمان - “In zaman”), respectively in two square diagrams of 7x7 grid with letters. In each square, the initial letter is placed at the center of the table and designed in a way so that reading in every four cardinal directions would result in pronouncing the correct name. [image of the signature] Derived from the diagrams, the Christian name of the copyist was “Iwānīs” (ایوانیس - Giovanni) and his title was “‘Izz al-Dīn” (عزّ الدّین – Glory of the Religion).

Following a prolonged benediction for the owner of the holy book (*sāheb e ketāb*), the readers of the manuscript are asked to pray for the souls and deeds of the family of the owner. As scribed, the manuscript was transcribed as a memento of him (Catholicos Stephanos) and in honor of his name, so that on the “Doomsday” he would receive divine compassion and his sins would be forgiven and the reward of the two worlds would be bestowed to his ancestors. This final invocation is misleading in deciphering the exact giver and receiver of the gift. In a 1942 publication, Giuseppe Messina shed light on this matter and delineated that Iwānīs 'Izz al-Dīn was a Jacobite Syrian priest in the second half of the thirteenth century, who was among those deported Christians to Khorāsān and Māzandarān, in Persia, under the Ilkhanid Empire (1256-1353).³⁵⁸ Hence, Messina concluded that the Laurenziana *Diatessaron* was a Persian translation of a thirteenth-century Syrian transcript by Iwānīs 'Izz al-Dīn, based on the teachings of Taziano (d. ca 180 A.D.), the Syrian theologian and philosopher.

On the bottom of the same page, in a section separated with a line from the above text, the copyist reinstated in Persian a reference corresponding to the two powers, both

³⁵⁸Giuseppe Tatian Messina, “Un diatessaron persiano del secolo XIII tradotto dal siriano,” *Biblica* 23, no. 4 (1942): 270, 280-297.

pretenders of the region, the Ottoman and the Safavid. The translation follows: “the writing of the book of the venerated *’Injīl* culminated at the time of the righteous king, Sultan Suleiman the Great, the sultan of the earth and the sea, the owner of the throne of Constantinople, concurrent to the reign of Shah Tahmasp, the enthroned king of Tabriz, on Shawwāl 21, 954 H. (December 5, 1547 A.D).” This different date on the very last part of the manuscript may suggest the finishing day of the whole work by the copyist.³⁵⁹

In 1548, Stefan V of Armenia took the Persian *Grande Vangelo* as a gift to Rome.³⁶⁰ In the first instance, the gift was recycled by the Armenian patriarch to be used as a suitable offer to the head of the Catholic Church. In this transition, I argue, the Persian *Diatessaron* accrued layers of new implications, with an infusion of interreligious diplomacy and trade, which will be the focus of the next paragraphs. According to Messina, the copyist of the manuscript was Ibrāhīm, to whom Stefan V commissioned the task of writing the code in memory of himself and his family.³⁶¹ In fact, the Armenian Patriarch turned to a Jacobite Syrian from Hasankeyf (southeastern Turkey) to have a Persian copy of the four Gospels in his own name.³⁶² Besides the historical evidence regarding the annexation of Hasankeyf to the Ottoman Empire in 1517, the inherent

³⁵⁹ Angelo Michele Piemontese, *Catalogo dei manoscritti Persiani conservati nelle biblioteche d'Italia* (Roma: Ist. Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, Libr. dello Stato, 1989), 104–8.

³⁶⁰ Anton D. Pritula, *Christianstvo i persidskaya knizhnost' XIII-XVIII vv [Christianity and the Persian Manuscript Tradition in the 13–17th Centuries, in Russian]* (St Petersburg, 2004), 10–21, 154. Also see Piemontese A.M. *Catalogo dei manoscritti persiani conservati nelle biblioteche d'Italia*. Roma. Libr. dello stato. № 5, 1989. P. 104, no. 140.

³⁶¹ Messina, “Un diatessaron persiano del secolo XIII tradotto dal siriano,” 276.

³⁶² Although it is not substantiated whether the copyist of Stefan V’s *Grande Vangelo*, Ibrāhīm, was a catholic convert, but his full name, as stated in the manuscript, “Ibrāhīm ibn šammāsh 'Abd Allāh,” suggest that he might have been a former Muslim who converted to Christianity. The literal translation of his name is: “Ibrāhīm son of šammāsh 'Abd Allāh.” ‘Abd Allāh (عبدالله), meaning “servant of Allah (God)” was and is a common name among Muslims, as the Prophet Muhammad’s father’s name was also 'Abd Allāh. In this case, if Ibrāhīm’s father had been a Muslim, consequently Ibrāhīm, himself ought to be a Muslim. Yet, since it is out of the scope of this study to trace this figure, I will leave this argument for a future research.

hierarchy in Ibrāhīm's referring words towards the two powers of the region, Sultan Suleiman and Shah Tahmasp, approves that Ibrāhīm transcribed the Persian *Diatessaron* in Hasankeyf under Ottoman reign. While Ibrāhīm appraised Suleiman by dedicating the throne of the universe to him, as the "Sultan of the earth and the sea, the owner of the throne of Constantinople" he referred to the Safavid power by his literal territorial realm, as "Shah Tahmasp, the *Padishah* of the throne of Tabriz (The Safavid capital)." In other words, this manuscript of the Holy Gospels travelled from a realm under the Sunni Muslim Ottoman, Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, to a Christian jurisdiction under the reign of the Shi'a Safavid shah, Tahmasp I.

On the colophon (ending note), a Latin text concludes the manuscript. The text's translation reads as follows:

This book was written in Arabic letters, but in Agemensi [*Ajem*-non-Arab/Iranians] language, that is Persian. It unfolds with the Gospels of the four Evangelists, scripted by Joannes [Iwānīs]. It was gifted by Stephanos, the Patriarch of the Greater Armenia, the Catholic who was in Rome in the year 1548 and paid obedience to Pope Paul III and he made confession just as what had been done at the Council of Florence, at the time of Eugene IV (r.1431-1447).³⁶³

The Latin text is followed by a name-signature as "Petrus Paulus Gualterium Aretinus" that is Pietro Paolo Gualtieri (d.1572), who was the Secretary of Briefs (*segretario dei brevi*) of Pope Paul III at the time when Patriarch Stefano V arrived in Rome to confess his faith to Roman Catholicism in 1548.³⁶⁴

³⁶³ Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Firenze, Ms. Or. 81 (125r-125v). Also see Giuseppe Tatian Messina, *Diatessaron Persiano* (Roma: Pontificio Istituto biblico, 1951), 14–15.

³⁶⁴ Piemontese, *Catalogo dei manoscritti persiani conservati nelle biblioteche d'Italia*, 107.

The recycling of this gift by Stefan V for Pope Paul III is of significant importance in the context of two intertwined movements: first, the Portuguese Augustinian mission to Persia and second, the Council of Trent (1545-1563). The seeds of the Vatican-Portuguese apostolic interrelation was cultivated by Pope Leo X's recognition of the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Crown of Portugal in 1514, as was previously noted. Based on this bull, the rulers of Portugal were empowered to establish missionary enterprises and ecclesiastical infrastructures to foster Roman Catholicism in their European and overseas districts. The discovery of a new sea route through the Red Sea across Indian Ocean, round the Cape of Good Hope through Persian Gulf to India, in the early-Sixteenth century by the Portuguese explorer, Vasco da Gama (d.1524), established new tripartite relations among the Crown of Portugal, the Safavids of Persia, and India.³⁶⁵

The first contacts between Portuguese and Safavids of Persia occurred in 1507 in the Island of Hormuz, between the Portuguese commander, Alfonso de Albuquerque (d.1515), who soon became the Governor of the *Estado da India* (1509) in Goa, and Isma'il I.³⁶⁶ The construction of the Portuguese fortress in Hormuz began in the same year, however, it took until 1510 when Alfonso clearly stated in a letter to Ismail I that a military alliance between the two countries, by land and sea against the Ottomans, would be the privilege of the Portuguese presence in Hormuz. In 1513, another ambassador of Alfonso from Goa, visited Tabriz and met with the Christians of Armenia. The construction of the Portuguese fortress in Hormuz was complete by March 1515, which was a manifestation of Portuguese power in the Island. In return, Isma'il I requested

³⁶⁵ Flannery, *The Mission of the Portuguese Augustinians to Persia and beyond (1602-1747)*, 32–33.

³⁶⁶ *Estado da India* was established in 1505 and embraced all Portuguese territories east of Cape of Good Hope. See Flannery, 33.

Portuguese naval assistance in his battles against the Mamluk sultan of Cairo and the Ottomans that revealed the Shah's recognition of this alliance in regards to the greater threat generated by the Ottomans.³⁶⁷

After several diplomatic exchanges between the Portuguese Goa and Safavid Tabriz, the Portuguese power was consolidated in Hormuz; however, the Shah was not content with the loss of "his" Island and asked for heavy tributes. Isma'il's devastating defeat in Çaldıran (1514), addressed in the previous section, enervated his military and political strength, and led him to embrace his alliance and maintain good relations with the Portuguese of Hormuz. With Isma'il's son, Tahmasp I, on throne, this correspondence gained a new force and the first Portuguese ambassador to Tahmasp arrived in Tabriz in 1549. This mission took place while in 1545, stemming the Protestant Reformation (1517), Pope Paul III had convoked the Council of Trent to pose an objection to the Roman Catholic Church issues raised by the German monk and theologian, Martin Luther (1483-1546). One of the outcomes of this ecumenical council was to centralize the papal policies in missionary activities, which served directly to increase the influence of the papacy.³⁶⁸

With Portuguese *padroado* mission to disperse Catholicism in their colonial lands, this post-Trent radical centralization promoted union between Rome and the Eastern Churches, to which Portuguese missionaries played an important role in leading the Christians of the region in conformity with the Roman Catholic Church. Among those "eastern Christians" were the Armenian Catholics, whose delegates at the Council of

³⁶⁷ Flannery, *The Mission of the Portuguese Augustinians to Persia and beyond (1602-1747)*, 32–35.

³⁶⁸ *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent : Celebrated under Paul III, Julius III, and Pius IV, Bishops of Rome* (London: London Printed for T.Y [MDCLXXXVII [1687]).

Florence (1431-1449) had already signed the decree of union with Rome.³⁶⁹ Armenia had been annexed to the realm under the Persian crown, since the time of Isma'il's grandfather, Uzun Hasan, hence was inherited by the Safavids. As a former conquest by the Turkman Qara Quyunlus, Armenia was captured by Uzun Hasan, after the defeat of his Turkman rivals in Tabriz, in 1467. Since 1502, Isma'il I Safavid re-claimed parts of Armenia (Etchmiadzin) under his sway. Subsequently, at the time when Stefan V of Armenia dedicated the Persian *Grande Vangelo* to Pope Paul III in Rome, his see (Salmas-then in Armenia) was a Safavid domain.

The Latin text at the end of the Persian manuscript, specifically the name of Pietro Paolo Gualtieri on the bottom of the page, sheds light on the provenance of this religious gift. Born in Arezzo, Tuscan, Gualtieri took the initial steps towards his curial career in 1517, when he went to Rome in favor of the Medici Pope, Leo X and was consolidated in the Curia by the time when the other Medici Pope, Clement VII (r. 1523-1534), took over the seat of the Papal States.³⁷⁰ Gualtieri accompanied Pope Paul III in his anti-Ottoman campaign of 1538, when the Holy League, consisted of the Republic of Venice, the Crowns of Spain and Portugal, and the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V (r. 1519-1556), launched a battle against the Franco-Ottoman alliance.³⁷¹ Since 1538, Gualtieri was the *Scriptor* of the Apostolic Chancellery (*scriptor della Cancelleria apostolica*) and by May 1546, he was appointed as the Secretary of the Briefs, by Pope Paul III.³⁷²

³⁶⁹ Anthony O'Mahony, ed., *Eastern Christianity: Studies in Modern History, Religion and Politics*, 1. publ (London: Melisende, 2004), 140–59.

³⁷⁰ *Diarium* (Roma, Biblioteca nazionale, Mss. Vitt. Em., 237v-240v, 269). The Persian manuscript's record in a Florentine Medici collection (Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana) might be related to Gualtieri, who was an old Medici supporter.

³⁷¹ Edward Hamilton Currey, *Sea-Wolves of the Mediterranean* (New York: F. A. Stokes, 1929).

³⁷² Gallo, Valentina. Gualtieri, Pietro Paolo in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* - Volume 60 (2003).

When the Council of Trent promoted re-reading of the sacred texts, numerous eastern scholars arrived in Rome for the Council and took with them series of codes and religious books in different languages. Fluent in Latin and Ethiopian, Gualtieri, who had nurtured his intellectual ambitions in refined scholarly environments such as Cardinal Ippolito de' Medici's (1511-1535) *Accademia della Virtù*, under the tutelage of the Sienese humanist, Claudio Tolomei (1494-1556), recorded, studied, and often translated those texts.³⁷³

Among the "Eastern Christian" dignitaries who went to Rome to profess their loyalty and renew their covenant to the Roman Catholic Church, was the Armenian Stefan V, who took with him the Persian translation of the *Diatessaron* as a gift.

As early as 1514, the Portuguese Augustinians established and continued their apostolate among the Armenians, whose original conversion is attributed to St. Gregory the Illuminator (257-337 A.D) in the early-fourth century. Since then Christianity had played a significant part in the Armenian history and the formation of their national identity.³⁷⁴

In fact, Armenians were a special group of minorities under the Safavid reign, whose state was a general reflection of the Shahs' tolerance and position towards Christendom, to whom the Safavids had already claimed kinship and allegiance, to obtain their support against the mutual enemy. The Armenian community acquired considerably distinguished stature in the politico-economic position of the Seicento Safavid Persia, however, their renewal of the union with the Catholic Church in the mid-sixteenth century fostered

³⁷³ Ippolito de' Medici was the illegitimate son of Giuliano di Lorenzo de' Medici (1479-1516). See Irene Fosi - Guido Rebecchini, MEDICI, Ippolito de', in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana.

³⁷⁴ Tiran Nersoyan, H.J Nersoyan, and Vigen Guroian, *The Christology of the Armenian Orthodox Church* (Jerusalem: St. James Press, 2004).

missionary activities in Persia that incorporated into the emergence of Christian communities within the religious fabric of Shi'a Persia.³⁷⁵

The Persian *Grande Vangelo* was the embodiment of all those reciprocal international interactions. The Persian script of the Laurenziana *Diatessaron* indicates two significant implications: one is the distinct language revived by the Safavids as the official language, in attempt to construct a national congruence within their realm to distinguish their empire from those of other Muslim courts, specifically the Ottomans. In other words, the language of the manuscript once justified the object to its owner (Stefan V). By presenting it to the Roman Catholic Church, the Armenian patriarch remodified the object's agency to function as a vehicle to pronounce his religious faith and political affiliation. Yet, the Persianized identity of the gift broadcasted its inherent Safavid character, which leads us to the second implication of the manuscript's language.

As a patrimonial gesture towards creating a Persian nation-state, the Safavids began to replace Arabic with Persian, as the literary and official language of administration and theological works. It was at the time of Shah Tahmasp I, when Persian inscriptions began to appear on Safavid coins and replaced the old Arabic verses, such as the example of Shah Isma'il's gold and silver coins to the *Serenissima* that I analyzed in the previous section.³⁷⁶ Therefore, the Persian translation of a Duecento *Diatessaron* would, per se, reflect this internal shift in the official language of the empire and of the theological discourses. Yet, the presentation of this manuscript, the Persian *Grande Vangelo*, also updated the Curia with the latest changes in the court of Persia. Therefore, Stefan V's gift

³⁷⁵ Vartan Gregorian, "Minorities of Isfahan: The Armenian Community of Isfahan 1587-1722," *Iranian Studies* 7, no. 3/4 (1974): 652–80.

³⁷⁶ Rudi Matthee, "Safavid Dynasty," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, July 2008.

in Persian not only embraced his and his community's religious devotion, but also reflected the most recent changes in the official language of the Safavid Persia. In other words, the language of the manuscript was associated with the Safavid state at this time, hence was also seen as a reflection of the Safavid receptive position towards the political patronage of the Church for disseminating Catholicism in the region.

It took almost fifty years for another Gospel in Persian to arrive in Rome. The Persian version of the Gospel of Matthew (*Vangelo di Matteo*), now in Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, is another valuable treasure that I consider in the next few pages. Prior to that, some historical background about the political context of these diplomatic relations between Persia and the Christian (mostly Catholic) princes of Europe is useful. In the next paragraphs, I will be unpacking this material.

This idea of Safavid contribution to the Catholic unity against foreign threats was reinforced by Pope Pius V's (1566-1572) letter to Shah Tahmasp I, in October 1571.³⁷⁷ A few weeks after the Battle of Lepanto, the Pope sent his letter through a Portuguese envoy to the court of Persia. In his letter to Shah Tahmasp, the Head of the Catholic Church detailed the devastating defeat the Holy League inflicted on the Ottoman fleet and stated the Papacy's willingness in fostering peace and that the war against the Ottomans was an implicit undertake in this trajectory. In an ambitious gesture to seize the opportunity and diminish the already-weakened Ottomans, the Pope encouraged the Shah to organize a strong army and invade the eastern frontiers of the Porte, while the Holy

³⁷⁷ Rome, ASV, *Brev. ann.* IV-VII. Arm. XLIV

League would attack them from Europe by land and sea.³⁷⁸ This communication not only indicates the intermingled religio-political missionary activities of the Papacy and the Kingdom of Portugal in Persia, but also revealed the Holy League's recognition of the geopolitical importance of Persia, in their wars against the Ottomans, and the exigency of the Safavids's contribution in maintaining the desired peace.

The 1555 Treaty of Amasya between Shah Tahmasp I and Sultan Suleiman on the one hand, and the 1573 Ottoman-Venetian peace treaty after the War of Cyprus, on the other hand, withered the hopes for an international alliance between Persia and the Holy League against their common enemy.³⁷⁹ However, the Ottomans remained a potential territorial and religious threat to both sides and the interreligious diplomatic communications endured among those allies. The tripartite missionary activities continued with Shah Tahmasp's son, Shah Mohammad Khodābandeh (r.1578-1587), Pope Gregory XIII (r.1572-1585), and the Spanish Habsburg king, Philip II (1527-1598), who after 1580, following the death of the heir-less Cardinal-king Henry the Chaste (r.1578-1580), claimed the throne of Portugal and combined the two kingdoms of Portugal and Spain under his reign.³⁸⁰ Consequently, Philip II took over the Portuguese overseas expansions, including the Island of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf.

In January 1579, Pope Gregory XIII addressed a letter to Ivan IV Vasilyevich, the first Tsar of Russia (r. 1547-1584) and noted the necessity of military assistance to Shah

³⁷⁸ H. Chick, ed., *A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia and the Papal Mission of the XVIIth and XVIIIth Centuries*, 2 vols., London, 1939 (based on extensive documentation from Archivio di Propaganda Fide and Casa Generalizia dei Carmelitani in Rome). Vol. II: 1272–73 and Vol. I: 19-21.

³⁷⁹ Caroline Finkel, *Osman's Dream: The Story of the Ottoman Empire 1300 - 1923* (London: Murray, 2006), 161.

³⁸⁰ Willem M. Floor and Farhad Hakimzadeh, *The Hispano-Portuguese Empire and Its Contacts with Safavid Persia, the Kingdom of Hormuz and Yarubid Oman from 1489 to 1720: A Bibliography of Printed Publications 1508 - 2007*, Acta Iranica 45 (Lovanii: Peeters [u.a.], 2007).

Mohammad Khodābandeh in his battle against the Ottomans.³⁸¹ The same instructions were forwarded from Vatican to the papal nuncio in Poland and informed him of the news that a Persian envoy was at the court of Portugal pleading with the European princes to accompany Persia in their move confronting the Ottomans. At the end, the Pope ensured his nuncio to update him with the results of this past Persian missionary.³⁸²

In the same year, 1579, a papal envoy visited Shah Mohammad Khodābandeh in Qazvin (then the capital of the Safavid Empire) and presented the Shah with the Pope's letter. In his message, Gregory XIII declared his gratitude over hearing the victories gained by the Persians against the Ottomans and assured the Shah about the papacy's military and financial support of the Persians. This is the letter I addressed in the beginning of this section as the earliest known Vatican-Safavid communication remarked upon in Farsi sources. According to this letter, the Pope guaranteed the Safavid Shah for annual payment of up to 100,000 Sultanies (gold coins) in any currency preferred by the Shah (ingots, Portuguese ducats, Ottomans ducats), as long as his army was in battle against the Ottomans. The pope even offered to pay up to "150,000 scudi and something over," if the Shah promised to make war against the Porte whenever they were about to aspire hostilities against the Christians. Along with the financial aid, the pope ensured the Persians to provide them with five to six thousand hand-harquebuses and up to fifteen to twenty pieces of cannons and artillery, as soon as the Shah require those. At the end, the pope asked the Shah to inform the Pope about the Persians' needs in their battles with the

³⁸¹ Chick, *A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia*. Vol. I: 22.

³⁸² Rome, ASV, *Vide*. Misc. Arm. 117, p.130.

Ottomans and the safe routes, through which the money and offensive weapons could reach Persia.³⁸³

As I noted previously in this section, the establishment of Portuguese Augustinians in Hormuz had direct impacts on the interreligious diplomatic relations between Vatican and Persia in this period. In 1582, under the decision of the viceroy in Goa, the Prior of the Augustinian Hermits in Hormuz, Fr. Simão de Moraes (d. 1585) was chosen to deliver Philip II's letter to Shah Mohammad Khodābandeh.³⁸⁴ The letter had arrived in Goa via the new viceroy of India, Dom Francisco de Mascarenhas (r.1581-1584), and bore the Spanish king's message of congratulations to the Persian Shah about his recent victories over the Ottomans, proposed an alliance between the two crowns against their mutual enemy, and informed the Shah about Philip II's succession to the throne of the Hispano-Portuguese Empire.³⁸⁵ An Armenian, named João Batista in Portuguese chronicles, accompanied Fr. Simão on his mission to Persia. João Batista was the envoy of the viceroy of Naples to Shah Mohammad Khodābandeh, who had just returned from his mission with gifts and letters and was in Goa waiting for the cargo ships to take the sea route back to Europe.³⁸⁶

On his return to Goa, the Armenian claimed that the Shah of Persia had asked the Spanish king to send a Catholic priest to Persia for the conversion of the country. Astonished by

³⁸³ Rome, ASV, Spagna, Misc. Arm. II, 117 (116), p. 135. See Chick, *A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia*. Vol. I: 23-25.

³⁸⁴ "Documentação 11, 231; Alonso 'El P. Simón de Moraes, Pionero de Las Misiones Agustiniánas En Persia," *Analecta Augustiniana* 62 (1979): 343-72.

³⁸⁵ Luz, Francisco Paulo Mendes da. *O Conselho da Índia: contributo ao estudo da história da administração e do comércio do ultramar português nos princípios do século XVII*. Divisão de Publicações e Biblioteca, Agência Geral do Ultramar, (Lisboa: Pp.649, 1952), 309; Flannery, *The Mission of the Portuguese Augustinians to Persia and beyond (1602-1747)*, 48.

³⁸⁶ Diogo do Couto, *Decadas da Asia*, X, I. (Lisboa, 1788), 514 ff.

the assertion (?), the viceroy of India dispatched the Armenian with Fr. Simão back to Persia to learn about the credibility of the former's claim. Fluent in Persian language due to his years of stay in Qazvin, the Augustinian envoy was well received by the Shah, while Shah Mohammad Khodābandeh was on a military campaign in Khorasan.³⁸⁷ The Shah responded Fr. Simão's mission with an official letter and an envoy to accompany him to Lisbon. Although the envoys never reached Philip II's court, because their ship was lost in the sea around Africa, but the Augustinian's letters of report to Gregory XIII and the Spanish king, now at the Vatican Archives, have offered valuable information regarding Fr. Simão's mission.³⁸⁸

In his letter to Pope Gregory XIII on October 20, 1582, the Augustinian Fr. Simão wrote from Kashan, a half-desert city in the middle of Persia, and promisingly reassured the pope that the Persian Shah was faithful to his pact of friendship with the Catholics against the Ottomans. Fr. Simão emphatically guaranteed that the "emperor of the Persians" was committed to make warfare with the Ottomans, and even more, if he could receive assurance that the sovereigns of Christendom were about to act the like.³⁸⁹ The accounts of Fr. Simão's mission at the court of Persia was also reflected in the reports of another papal envoy, Giovanni Battista Vecchietti (1552-1619), who arrived in Persia as a book agent and diplomat for the Medici Oriental Press, in 1584.³⁹⁰ Vecchietti's expedition in

³⁸⁷ While in Qazvin, Fr. Simão had taught Shah Mohammad Khodābandeh's son and pretender of the throne, Hamze Mirza, mathematics and astronomy. See Ṭāhirī, *Tārīkh-i siyāsī va ijtimā'i-i Īrān : az marg-i Taymūr tā marg-i Shāh 'Abbās* (*The Socio-Political History of Iran, from the end of Timur's to the end of Shah Abbas's Reign*), 247.

³⁸⁸ Rome. ASV. *Vide*. Misc. Arm. II. 117, pp. 130 (Portuguese), 142 (Italian), 154 (Latin).

³⁸⁹ Rome. ASV. *Vide*. Misc. Arm. II. 117, pp. 154. Also see Chick, *A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia*. Vol. I: 26; Ṭāhirī, *Tārīkh-i siyāsī va ijtimā'i-i Īrān : az marg-i Taymūr tā marg-i Shāh 'Abbās* (*The Socio-Political History of Iran, from the end of Timur's to the end of Shah Abbas's Reign*), 274–75.

³⁹⁰ Horatio F. Brown, "A Report on the Conditions of Persia in the year 1586," *The English Historical Review* 7, no. 26 (1892): 314–21; "Documentação 11, 231; Also see Alonso 'El P. Simón de Moraes, Pionero de Las Misiones Agustonianas En Persia." 362, no. 51.

Persia (1584-1588) is of significant importance in the course of the Cinquecento cross-cultural exchanges and diplomacies. His mission regarding the Medici Oriental Press (1584), an establishment founded by the Medici cardinal, Ferdinand de' Medici (1549-1609), in Rome, under the patronage of Pope Gregory XIII, is the subject of my next section. However, the incident in Vecchietti's mission in Persia that pertains the most to this section is that he was the bearer of Pope Gregory XIII's message, which was explained and recorded in a brief and a letter issued on February 29, 1584.³⁹¹

In a cipher dispatched on June 23, 1584, from the papal nuncio in Poland to Cardinal Tolomeo Gallio, the Papal Secretary of the State (*Segretario di Stato* from 1572 to 1585) and authoritative advisor to Pope Gregory XIII, it was noted that Philip II had sent twenty-six pieces of artillery, harquebuses, and new weapons, from Spain to the Shah of Persia, to use in his battle against the "infidels."³⁹² This document reveals the dynamics of the then-ongoing missionary activities. Those were effective to the extent that were about to mature to a real international military alliance against the Ottomans. Whether Philip II's weaponry ever reached Persia is an obscure matter, however, the change in the seat of the papacy in April 1585 with Sixtus V (r.1585-1590) as the new pope, re-directed the papal principals, and consequently those of the other Catholic powers, to the new pontiff.

³⁹¹ Rome, ASV. Ep. ad Prine. 19, f. 39r (brief). Rome, ASV, Arm, XLIV, 25, ff.341v-342r, no. 114 (copy of the letter). Also see Angelo Michele Piemontese, "La diplomazia di Gregorio XIII e la lettera del re di Persia a Sisto V," *Miscellanea Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae* 14 (2007), 386 (Al Re di Persia un breve).

³⁹² Rome, ASV. *Misc. Arm.* II, 116, ff.152r-163r. Also see Piemontese, "La diplomazia di Gregorio XIII e la lettera del re di Persia a Sisto V," 387.

Before proceeding to the next phase of the Vatican-Safavid encounters, there are two conclusive notions to take into consideration: first is the close political and religious ties between the papacy and the king of Hispano-Portuguese Empire (1580-1640), who also had southern Italy (Sicily and Naples) and Milan under control and indirect dominance over the Medici Tuscany and Genoa, in their anti-Ottoman policies towards Persia. This entitled the Safavids to develop their European relations in an extended network of Catholic powers. Second, the Portuguese trading empire in Asia provided a safe route for the European diplomats and envoys to Persia, crosscutting the Ottoman territories. This second matter not only enhanced intercontinental diplomatic contacts between Europe and Persia, but also opened up new geographies of commerce. In around 1540, the first ledger of Persian carpets arrived in Florence and in 1580s, exquisite carpets with silk and gold threads were commissioned to Persia, which often bore the coat of arms of European noble families.³⁹³ In this regard, the Persian carpet commissioned by the first Grand Duke of Tuscany, Cosimo I de' Medici (r. 1537-1574), in 1549 with the coat of arms of the House of Medici is of considerable importance.³⁹⁴

To Sixtus V as the new pope, Vecchietti carried a letter dated in July 1586, from Shah Mohammad Khodābandeh, addressed to “The *Padishah* [king] of Rome” (*Re di Rome*), on his return.³⁹⁵ In his letter the Shah mentioned the papal envoy as Mr. Batista (جناب - *Jenāb-e Bātista*) and expressed his gratitude over receiving him. At the end, the

³⁹³ Giovanni Curatola, *Islamic Art and Florence. From the Medici to the 20th Century*. (Firenze: Giunti Gruppo Editoriale, 2018), 41; Marco Spallanzani, *Carpet Studies: 1300-1600*, Textile Studies, III (Genova: Sagep, 2016), 83–85, 95.

³⁹⁴ Florence, ASV. GM. ... “Un tappeto lavorato d’oro e seta e lana, arme, di variati colori, lavorato in Azzermia [Persia].” Also see Spallanzani, *Carpet Studies*, 198.

³⁹⁵ Rome, ASV, A.A., *Arm.* I-XVIII, 773, ff.222-224: Lettera di Sultan Muhammad re di Persia a papa Sisto V. See Piemontese, “La diplomazia di Gregorio XIII e la lettera del re di Persia a Sisto V,” 400.

Persian Shah pledged the pope about the prolongation of their alliance against the nefarious Rum (Porte) on his part and stipulated the Head of the Catholic Church of fervent friendship and interest in reciprocal agreements.³⁹⁶

The Persian Vangelo di Matteo

It was in this political climate that another Persian manuscript of a religious Christian book arrived in Rome: the Persian *Vangelo di Matteo*.³⁹⁷ It is the oldest New Testament code survived in Persian in the Vatican Library. The manuscript is dated in around 1312 and the signature (*onomastico*- name-day) suggests a Syro-Mesopotamian area for its execution. Between twelfth and fifteenth century, communities of illustrious scholars, philosophers, and Persian translators resided in Mosul (Aleppo), under the patronage of the local Turkish and Kurdish princes. Mosul was captured by the Mongolians of Persia in the thirteenth century and since 1289, a Christian from Erbil, Mas'ud ibn Ya'qub, was the governor, who, under Persian sway, implemented diplomatic correspondence with the Roman Church. Therefore, Mosul is the potential place of production for the Vatican's Persian *Vangelo di Matteo*.

The book is small in size (162 x 115 mm), which suggests that it was prepared for educational or contemplative purposes. This illuminated manuscript is devoid of numbered divisions, yet contains a rubric that highlights the theme of the passages. The text is written in cursive *naskh* script, a form of Arabic/Islamic calligraphy, common

³⁹⁶ Muḥammad Ḥasan Kāwūsī 'Irāqī, ed., *Asnād-i rawābiṭ-i daulat-i Ṣafawī bā ḥukūmathā-i Īlālīyā*, Čāp 1 (Tih-rān: Markaz-i Asnād wa Tārīḥ-i Dīplumāsī, 2000), 120–21, 175–178.

³⁹⁷ Angelo Michele Piemontese, *Vangelo di Matteo: Persiano* (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana) Vat. pers. 4; Francesco D'Aiuto et al., eds., *I vangeli dei popoli: La parola e l'immagine del Cristo nelle culture e nella storia* (Roma : Città del Vaticano: Rinnovamento nello Spirito Santo ; Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 2000), 332–34.

since the tenth century, and is a fusion of Classic and Old Persian (archaic) dialects, with some Arabic revisions.³⁹⁸ Yet, the source of the book is Syrian versions of the Gospels, alike the Laurenziana's *Grande Vangelo*. At the end of the manuscript (folio 78r), the copyist signed the work as follows: "the gratitude is all to the God, to the auspicious (blest?) selected messenger of God, Matti, who composed the book in Hebrew (عبرانی—*Ebrani*) from the land of Palestine. [The book] is twenty-eight sections, dated in early-*Rajab* [November] in the hundred-and-twelfth year [of Hijri. Corresponds to 1312]." With a spatial interval with the above note, the copyist ended the manuscript with the following sentence that is translated as: "The divine compassion is to the ones who read [this book] and plea for the [divine] mercy for the feeble scribe [gesture of modesty], Mas'ūd ibn Ibrāhīm" (Mas'ūd son of Ibrāhīm).³⁹⁹

Following the the Persian colophon, there is another signature on the top right of the next page that reads "Tūma Jān, the Armenian" (توما جان ارمنی).⁴⁰⁰ In a 2000 publication, Piemontese deciphered that the signature belonged to Tommaso Giovanni [Awetīk], "Giou[v]antomasso Auidich Armeno d' Aleppo," who was in Rome in two phases, between May 1595 and March 1599, to attend the *Collegio dei Neofiti* (College of the Neophytes).⁴⁰¹ Developed to a Catholic church-college by Pope Gregory XIII in 1577, it was a place of education for the Muslim and Jewish converts to the Roman Catholicism. The College was in a former institution, founded by Pope Paul III in 1543 for the new converts (*neofiti*). The head of the College, Cardinal Giulio Antonio Santoro (1532–1602), consecrated the Titular Bishop of Sidonia (Lebanon), Léonardo Abela (r.1582–

³⁹⁸ Sheila S. Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2007).

³⁹⁹ Rome, BAV, *Vat. Pers.* 4 (f. 78r).

⁴⁰⁰ Rome, BAV, *Vat. Pers.* 4 (f. 79v).

⁴⁰¹ Messina, *Diatessaron Persiano*, 333.

1605) in 1583, to collaborate with the Catholic churches of Aleppo. In the inventory of the “found and purchased books” (*libri ritrovati et comprati*) by Abela, there was a version of St. Matthew’s Gospel in Persian language that was first in the library of the college and later transferred to the Vatican Library, which is assumed to be the subject of my argument.⁴⁰²

As a bibliophile, book agent, and specialist in Persian matters, Vecchietti verified the authenticity of the Persian *Vangelo di Matteo* and translated the Colophon in an inscription in Italian at the end of the book, dated in 1598 (Roma 1598).⁴⁰³ Besides the prominent value of this historical manuscript and its provenance to the Vatican Library, it is of significant importance to consider this Persian Gospel in the larger context of Gregory XIII’s college for the Muslim (and Jewish) converts, which will be the core of my argument. While papal nuncios and envoys were in constant communication with Persia and Portuguese Augustinians were settled in Hormuz to foster Catholicism in the region, the selection of this manuscript is notably meaningful. The Persian translation of the Gospel of Matthew, originally written in Aramaic, I argue, embodied the Catholic Church’s ultimate desire for the conversion of all Muslims and Jews to Christianity. The Persian translation of a Christian holy book was per se a reference to the conversion of Persians, which was an inherent theme in the ongoing religio-political relations between the Catholic European powers and the Safavids. In this quattrocento Persian manuscript

⁴⁰² “Vangelio di lingua Persiana di san matteo” Arch. Bilb. 15A, f.111, l. 6. Regarding Abel’s mission refer to: Rome, Vat. Lat. 14158, f. 16v and 18r.

⁴⁰³ Rome, Vat. Lat. 3774. The binding, which bears the engraved coat of arms of Pope Urban VIII (r. 1623-1644) in gold and the cardinal-librarian, Francesco Barberini (1626-1633) in plates and covered in green parchment, shows the period during which the manuscript was on view in the library, as a precious trophy. See Piemontese, “Vengelo di Matteo, Persiano” in *I vangeli dei popoli: la parola e l'immagine del Cristo nelle culture e nella storia* (Roma, 2000), p. 333-334.

(*Vangelo di Matteo*), what parallels the Armenian patriarch's *Grande Vangelo* is that in both cases the Persian language was a deliberate nod to the Catholics' desired for the conversion of Persia.

Another significant aspect in this specific version of the Gospel is that Matthew's record is the only one among the four Gospels that narrated the Magi, the Three Wise Men from the East, who followed the stars to Jerusalem to recognize the newly-born "King of Jews" and pay him homage.⁴⁰⁴ In the era when every effort was made in Italy to reconcile Persians with Christendom in their anti-Ottoman alliance, the story of the Magi was that religio-cultural intersection that bound the two traditions. Therefore, the Persian Version of the Matthew's Gospel in the Vatican Library that was previously owned by a pious Catholic Armenian, who was presumably a convert himself due to his attendance at the *Collegio dei Neofiti*, appears to be seen as a precious trophy that provoked the conversion of Persia, from where the Magi rose to recognize the holiest of Christianity, in the first century.

In 1586, the same year when Shah Muhammad Khodābandeh directed a letter to "The *Padishah* of Rome" and sent it through Vecchietti, Pope Sixtus V commissioned the opening of a road conducting the port of Ospedale di Santo Spirito in Sassia (Rome) to the Church of Sant'Onofrio, who was believed to be a prince of ancient Persia, and who had spent his life in a cave in solitude as penance.⁴⁰⁵ In 1600, Pope Clement VIII (r. 1592-1605) commissioned twenty-eight frescoes to decorate the cloister with the miracles of this Persian saint, which will be addressed in the next chapter. Had the legend of

⁴⁰⁴ Gospel of Matthew, 2:1-2

⁴⁰⁵ Angelo Michele Piemontese, "La diplomazia di Gregorio XIII e la lettera del re di Persia a Sisto V," *Miscellanea Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae* 14 (2007): 396.

Sant'Onofrio been recognized by the Catholic Romans of the late-sixteenth century, Sixtus V's ecclesiastical commission would have been justified as a strategic approach to resurrect the saint's ethos. Yet, the pope's approach in opening a road to a church where housed the relics of a Persian hermit was, I conclude, a strategic diplomatic gesture, in accordance with other movements of the second-half of the sixteenth century, to reconcile Persia with the cultural and religious values of the Catholic league.

The discovery of the relics of Saint Mario and his wife Marta, two saints from Persia, who were martyred in the second-half of the third century in Rome, in 1589, is another evidence that strengthens the notion of perceiving these Persian connotations in a larger matrix of associations.⁴⁰⁶ In this procedure, Persia was converted from a "Muslim Empire" to a distinguished and cultured ally of Christianity. The Church solemnized the two Persian martyrs in 1590 and relocated the relics to the Church of Sant'Adriano al Foro (Rome); an act that only reinforced this view of the Church curating the Persian connotations for the Catholic devotees.⁴⁰⁷ In sum, the second-half of the sixteenth century witnessed excavation of historical, cultural, and in some cases, legendary associations with Persia, in Europe and by the Roman Church, in an effort to reconcile their interreligious alliance with the religio-cultural values of the Christendom. In these cinquecento realignments of the Persian history in Italian perception, the Islamic features of this Asiatic partner's identity was noticeably manipulated to be overshadowed by those that could best serve the political and commercial expediencies of the Italian side, namely the historic ties to Christianity.

⁴⁰⁶ Piemontese, *La memoria romana dei santi martiri persiani Mario, Marta, Audiface e Abaco*.

⁴⁰⁷ Piemontese, "La diplomazia di Gregorio XIII e la lettera del re di Persia a Sisto V," 396–97.

Section 3: Cinquecento Florence

In this section, I am reconsidering the Indo-Persian Sipar (scudo) at the Bargello Museum in Florence previously identified as a diplomatic gift from Emir Fakhr ad-Din II of Lebanon to Cosimo II in around 1613. I investigate the provenance of this shield by illuminating the Persico-Medici correspondence in the context of Ferdinando's "Medici Oriental Press" and the expeditions of his envoys in Persia in the late sixteenth century. Through another diplomatic gift composed of two Persian suits of scale armor from Shah Abbas in the new Armeria Medicea at the Uffizi and the primary documents that locate those gifts, I propose that the Bargello shield was also displayed in the same galleries in the context of the Safavid-Medici military alliance against the Ottomans in the last twelve years of the Cinquecento. Since the previous arguments located this object as a Seicento diplomatic gift to Cosimo II, I start from 1613, when the object was originally identified, and track it to the related communications of the late Cinquecento.

An "Indo-Persian" Shield in Museo Nazionale del Bargello

In the Sala Islamica of the Museo Nazionale del Bargello in Florence, there is a splendid shield with refined figures, animals, and plants in mother of pearl on a black and gold rhinoceros skin, with gold damascened steel at the center, on hoops of Indian rattan.⁴⁰⁸[Fig 1, Ch.3, Sec.3] The museum label of this object identifies it as an "Indo-Persian" *Sipar* (rotella or circular shield) of the early seventeenth century. In an article of 1966, Lionello G. Boccia suggested that this shield might have been part of the gifts of Emir Fakhr ad-Din II (r. 1590-1633) to Cosimo II de' Medici (r.1609-1621), on the

⁴⁰⁸ Firenze. Museo Nazionale del Bargello, inv. 788 AM

occasion of his request for an alliance in 1613.⁴⁰⁹ In the early 1590s, the Ottoman provincial governor of Damascus assigned Fakhr ad-Din II as the tax collector of Druze Mountain in the hinterland of Beirut. Fakhr ad-Din II gradually extended his dominion and power over the Mount of Lebanon and some parts of the Syrian countryside.⁴¹⁰ By 1613, Fakhr ad-Din II was the emir of Druze, in Sidon (Lebanon), and the governor of Mount Lebanon, an area under Ottoman rule.

The two ports of Sidon and Tyre under Fakhr ad-Din's governance in Beirut were important vassals through which goods were transferred from Europe to the eastern Mediterranean. In 1608, Ferdinando I de' Medici (r. 1587-1609) started a secret diplomatic negotiation with the emir for an alliance between the two rulers and the emir's secure travel to Tuscany.⁴¹¹ This agreement initiated a series of letter exchanges between the two courts. After Ferdinando's death in February 1609, the Grand Duke's son, Cosimo II, continued his father's path and held close diplomatic relations with Fakhr ad-Din. In 1613, the Ottoman governor of Damascus uncovered the secret alliance between Fakhr ad-Din II and the Grand Dukes of Tuscany. Fakhr ad-Din escaped to Florence to find shelter in Cosimo II's court and stayed until 1615, when he left for Messina on the call of the Spanish viceroy in Sicily to join the battle against the Ottomans.⁴¹² Fakhr ad-Din's anti-Ottoman sentiments resulted in his reputation as a rebellious prince, who could be instrumentalized by European authorities as a vehicle to attack the Ottoman throne.

⁴⁰⁹ "ambedue possono forse aver fatto parte dei doni dell'Emiro Fakr-ed-Din a Cosimo II in occasione della sua richiesta d'alleanza nel 1613." L.G. Boccia, "La serie di armi orientali presenti al Museo Nazionale del Bargello," *Antichità viva* IV (1966): 60.

⁴¹⁰ Kamal S. Salibi, "The Secret of the House of Ma'n," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 4, no. 03 (July 1973): 272, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743800031469>.

⁴¹¹ ASF, Medici Principalato (MP) 4275, fol. 166-68.

⁴¹² Hafez Chehab, "Reconstructing the Medici Portrait of Fakhr Al-Din al-Maani," *Muqarnas* 11 (1994): 117, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1523213>.

In 1996, Mario Scalini reiterated Boccia's argument that this shield was a diplomatic gift from the rebellious emir of Lebanon, Fakhr ad-Din II, most probably in 1613 to Cosimo II when the *emir* was sheltered in Florence.⁴¹³ Boccia and Scalini referred to the inventory of 1631 that recorded this object as: "*Una rotella grande tutta coperta di madre perla con scudo in mezzo*" to buttress their argument that this object entered the Medici collection before 1631.⁴¹⁴ [Fig 2, Ch.3, Sec.3] In the same year as Scalini's article, in a publication by Michael Levey, the author brushed over this object and argued that this was a diplomatic gift from the Safavid Shah of Persia to Cosimo II to persuade him to join the alliance against the Ottomans. Yet, Levey did not take his argument any further and left it with no textual evidence.⁴¹⁵ In the 2018 exhibition catalog on *Islam and Florence*, Marco Merlo echoed Boccia's initial hypothesis and included this shield in the rich gifts, comprised of extraordinary embellished weapons, that Fakhr ad-Din II brought to Florence.⁴¹⁶

There are two factors, however, that challenge Boccia's original hypothesis that other scholars to date have followed. First, it completely overlooked the existing textual evidence that verify the correspondence between Ferdinando I or Cosimo II de' Medici and other Muslim authorities of the time, besides the Emir. In fact, Fakhr ad-Din of Lebanon is proposed as the only contact with Muslim rulers of the period; consequently, the only vehicle who could have transported this shield to Florence. Second, is the lack of any substantial documents that confirm the attribution of this shield to Emir Fakhr ad-

⁴¹³ Mario Scalini, "Oggetti rari e curiosi nelle collezioni medicee: esotica e naturalia," *Antichità Viva* 2–3 (1996): 62–63.

⁴¹⁴ ASF. GM 513, f. 24

⁴¹⁵ Michael Levey, *Florence: A Portrait* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1996), 399.

⁴¹⁶ Marco Merlo, "Islamic Weapons in the Medici Armories," *Islam e Firenze. Arte e collezionismo dai Medici al Novecento*, 2018, 166.

Din. According to a 2010 article by Rosangelo Cuffaro, in recent years the hypothesis that the shield was a diplomatic gift by Fakhr ad-Din II has been questioned by the same scholar who had initially proposed the connection with the emir. The author argued that typological and stylistic comparisons with other objects of analogous Indo-Persian manufacture suggest a different origin and chronology. The gifts that had accompanied the emir in Florence and were destined for the Grand Duke, were minutely recorded in the letters that accompanied them and in the related communications. Yet, the artifact that was argued to have been a gift from Fakhr ad-Din is not recognizable among those goods.⁴¹⁷ However, Cuffaro does not suggest any alternative arguments, and subsequently the Bargello shield remains an overlooked object in the Medici collection with an enigmatic provenance.

In this section, I address the art historical obscurity on the Bargello shield through historical and sociopolitical investigation. Beginning with Ferdinando's anti-Ottoman program, I probe his correspondence, first as a cardinal, and later as the Grand Duke of Tuscany with the Muslim allies of his court. Ferdinando's Oriental Press and the envoys dispatched to the Islamic lands to procure books and manuscripts for the Press played a key role in his network with the Muslim empires. Through a number of archival documents, I locate the object in the *Guardaroba Medicea* and propose a reconstruction for the provenance of this dazzling shield and its display in the Medici armory collection. Further, I analyze the complex artistic style of the shield in the context of the shared heritage between Persia and India. I conclude that this common past was wisely

⁴¹⁷ Rosangelo Cuffaro, "Fakhr ad-Din II alla corte dei Medici (1613-1615). Collezionismo, architettura e ars topiaria tra Firenze e Beirut," *Marburger Jahrbuch Für Kunstwissenschaft* 37 (2010): 209–17.

integrated into the visual program of the object to reflect the political message of the shield as a diplomatic gift to propose a military alliance against the invasions of the Ottomans.

After the battle of Lepanto in 1571 and the devastating defeat of the Ottomans by the naval army of the Holy League, European agents, particularly the Tuscan ones, tried to compound local uprisings against the Ottomans who were already diminished by their loss, and to spur the rebels to revolt. As a cardinal in Rome, Ferdinando patronized the “Medici Oriental Press” in 1584, not only for propagandistic purposes, but also to safeguard the Medici missions in the Levant....

After his accession as the Grand Duke of Tuscany in 1587, Ferdinando I joined the anti-Ottoman league sponsored by Clement VIII (r. 1592-1605) and provided financial aid to the Habsburgs to rebel against the Ottomans and join the crusade. Ferdinando’s correspondence with Fakhr ad-Din and his plans for trade with Beirut on the one hand, and his treaty of 1607 with emir Giambulad (d.1608) of Aleppo, another rebellious prince under Ottoman sovereignty, to revolt against the Porte on the other hand, pronounced him as an anti-Ottoman leader whose strategy was to spur the local rulers to rebel.⁴¹⁸

After Giambulad was crushed by the Ottomans in 1608, Medici attention turned more towards Fakhr ad-Din and offered him arms and shipment, primarily intended for Giambulad. Another internal breakdown for the Ottomans that Ferdinando infused into his anti-Ottoman program was his support of Yahya (d.1649), the younger brother of Mehmed III (r.1595-1603) who claimed the Ottoman throne after his brother’s death in

⁴¹⁸ Alessandro Olsaretti, “Political Dynamics in the Rise of Fakhr Al-Din, 1590-1633: Crusade, Trade, and State Formation along the Levantine Coast,” *The International History Review* 30, no. 4 (2008): 712–19.

1603. After Mehmed III's son, Ahmed I (r.1603-1617), was enthroned, Yahya departed for Europe to gain support and overthrow the sultan. The Medici hosted Yahya for several years and in 1609 Ferdinando sent him on a Tuscan ship to the Levant to muster support and overthrow the Sultan.⁴¹⁹ In the meantime, while most of the sources are silent on this significant part of the trans-confessional league against the Ottomans, Ferdinando I dispatched a Syrian-born Venetian, Michelagnolo Corai, in 1608 as a Medici ambassador to Persia, an already-established Muslim ally of Europe in this anti-Ottoman challenge. Michelagnolo, who was previously the Medici ambassador in Aleppo, stayed at the Safavid court until 1612 and was welcome at the court of Shah Abbas (r. 1587-1629).⁴²⁰ According to a letter of report in 1612 from Georg Krieger, the Medici ambassador's secretary, to Duke Cosimo II, Shah Abbas appointed Michelagnolo as the "commissioner of Persian mining operations" that reflects his influence in Persia.⁴²¹

Prior to the dispatch of Michelagnolo to the Safavid court, the first figure who represented Ferdinando's interest in Persia was Giovanni Battista Vecchietti (1552-1619), later known as "Vecchietti Persiano" who served as the book agent and ambassador for the Medici Oriental Press in Persia between 1584 and 1587.⁴²² Vecchietti was Ferdinando's diplomatic advisor in matters regarding the Muslim empires, specifically Persia. At the time of Vecchietti's departure, Ferdinando was still a cardinal in Rome and with the definite support from the pope, Gregory XIII (p.1572-1585), he pursued his

⁴¹⁹ Olsaretti, 720–21.

⁴²⁰ ASF, MP 4275, fol.146. also look at Muḥammad Ḥasan Kāwūsī 'Irāqī, ed., *Asnād-i rawābiṭ-i daulat-i Ṣafawī bā ḥukūmathā-i Ītālīyā- The Diplomatic Relations between the Safavids of Persia and the Italian Centers*, Čāp 1 (Tehrān: Markaz-i Asnād wa Tārīḥ-i Dīplumāsī, 2000), 70–71.

⁴²¹ ASF, MP 4275, fol. 298.

⁴²² For "Vecchietti Persiano" look at the report letter at ASF, MP 4929, fol. 23 and MP 4275, fol 189. Ugo Tucci, "Una relazione di Giovan Battista Vecchietti sulla Persia e sul regno di Hormuz(1587)," *Oriente Moderno* 35, no. 4 (April 1955): 149–60.

interest in “the East.” Letters report that Vecchietti’s expedition to Persia reveal the nature of this commission and the intended alliance between the Medici and the Safavids. Ferdinando and Shah Abbas were both enthroned in 1587, the former as the fifth Safavid Shah of Persia and the latter as the Grand Duke of Tuscany. Vecchietti wrote Ferdinando I in November 1588 that he would follow the Grand Duke’s instructions to report to Philip II (r.1556-1598) of Spain the result of his negotiations in Persia.⁴²³ Philip II had annexed Portugal to his reign in 1571 and become the king of Spain and Portugal, hence authorized over the Island of Hormuz, an important vassal in southern Persia under Portuguese rule since 1515.⁴²⁴ In this complex network of relations, I argue, the correspondence between Vecchietti and Ferdinando I, reveals that the nature of Vecchietti’s mission in Persia was not to collect manuscripts and books per se, but under the guise of matters regarding the Medici Oriental Press, it was to negotiate a military alliance with Persia against the Porte.⁴²⁵ In fact, Vecchietti delivered a proposal for a military alliance to Philip II on behalf of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, with the support of the Papacy, and his Muslim ally, Shah Abbas Safavi.⁴²⁶

⁴²³ ASF, MP 4919, fol. 568.

⁴²⁴ Pinto Carla Alferes, “The Diplomatic Agency of Art between Goa and Persia : Archbishop Friar Aleixo de Meneses and Shah ’Abbās in the Early Seventeenth Century. 2018,” in *Global Gifts*, 2018, 150–53.

⁴²⁵ Medici Oriental Press or *Stamperia orientale Medicea*, the main purpose of the Stamperia Medicea was to print a polyglot bible, hence provide the platform to launch a scholarly approach to eastern (oriental) sources and languages, namely Persian, Arabic, and Ottoman Turkish. See For a variety of sources on different aspects of the Medici oriental Press, Cfr. Guglielmo Enrico Saltini, “Della Stamperia Medicea orientale e di Giovan Battista Raimondi,” *Giornale storico degli archivi toscani* 4 (1860): 257–308; Robert Jones, “The Medici Oriental Press (Rome 1584-1614) And The Impact Of Its Arabic Publications On Northern Europe,” in *The “Arabick” Interest of the Natural Philosophers in Seventeenth-Century England* (Brill, 1993), 88–108; Piemontese, “Leggere e scrivere ‘Orientalia’ in Italia”; Piemontese, “I fondi dei manoscritti arabi, persiani e turchi in Italia”; Margherita Farina and Sara Fani, “The Typographia Medicea and the Humanistic Perspective of Renaissance Rome,” in *The Grand Ducal Medici and the Levant; Material Culture, Diplomacy, and Imagery in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (London/Turnhout: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2016).; Curatola, *Islamic Art and Florence. From the Medici to the 20th Century.*, 182–84.

⁴²⁶ ASF, MP 4919, fol. 602, 612. Look at Mahnaz Yousefzadeh, “The Sea of Oman: Ferdinand I, G. B. Vecchietti, and the Armour of Shah ’Abbas I,” *Rivista degli Studi Orientali*, 2017, 60–61.

At the State Archive of Florence, there are two letters from Shah Abbas to the Grand Duke of Tuscany that correspond to the time of Vecchietti's expedition in Persia. Scholars have suggested various dates for these two letters; however, both hold Shah Abbas's official stamps that are dated in Indo-Persian numerals in the margins. The first letter is dated 1587-88 (996 AH) and the second 1590-91 (999 AH).⁴²⁷ [Fig 3a-b, 4a-b, Ch.3, Sec.3] In the first letter, Shah Abbas recommends a person named Fazli Beg, as his envoy to transmit the king's kinship with the Dukedom of Tuscany and guarantees that Tuscan merchants and travelers will have safe passage and accommodations throughout Safavid territories. In the second letter in 1590-91, Shah Abbas expresses his concern about not hearing back from Fazli Beg despite sending another figure, "Giorgy," whom he explains as Fazli's friend, after the first envoy. Shah Abbas writes to the Grand Duke that he has not heard back from either of his envoys and the purpose of his second letter is to ensure that the doors of negotiation and friendship towards European princes are open at his court.⁴²⁸

In a 1949 article, Virgilio Pontecorvo discovered the "Giorgy" mentioned in Shah Abbas's letter was Georg Krieger, who in 1611 was back in Persia serving as the secretary of Michelagnolo Corai.⁴²⁹ M. H. Kāwūsī 'Irāqī asserted that in 1608 two figures, one a Persian resident of Tuscany named "Fazli Beg," accompanied by another

⁴²⁷ Medicea Principato (MP) 4274a, insert X, c.3 and 4274°, inserto X, c.4. Virgilio Pontecorvo dated the two letters in 1590-91. See VIRGILIO PONTECORVO, "Relazioni tra lo scià 'Abbās e i granduchi di Toscana Ferdinando I e Cosimo II.," *Oriens* 4, no. 1 (January 1, 1951): 160–61. Angelo M. Piemontese dated the first one in 1588 and second one in 1590. See Angelo Michele Piemontese, *Catalogo dei manoscritti Persiani conservati nelle biblioteche d'Italia* (Roma: Ist. Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, Libr. dello Stato, 1989), 128. Both letters are stamped with dates in the margin in Persian/Arabic numbers that reads the first one as 996 in lunar calendar that corresponds to 1587 and the second in 999 that corresponds to 1590. Look at Kāwūsī 'Irāqī, *Asnād-i rawābiṭ-i daulat-i Ṣafawī bā ḥukūmathā-i Ītālīyā*, 87–89.

⁴²⁸ Kāwūsī 'Irāqī, *Asnād-i rawābiṭ-i daulat-i Ṣafawī bā ḥukūmathā-i Ītālīyā*, 87–90.

⁴²⁹ Pontecorvo, "Relazioni tra lo scià 'Abbās e i granduchi di Toscana Ferdinando I e Cosimo II.," 162.

Tuscan person named “Gorgio Criger” (Georg Krieger), arrived in Persia holding a letter of response from Ferdinando I to Shah Abbas. In this letter, Ferdinando I informed the Shah that he agreed to a military alliance with Persia against the Ottomans.⁴³⁰ I will investigate the seventeenth-century diplomatic missions in the next chapter, but a letter from Shah Abbas addressed to Ferdinando I that was delivered after his death by Robert Sherely in August 1609 to Ferdinando’s successor, Cosimo II, confirms Kāwūsī’s argument regarding Fazli Beg’s presence in Persia. In this letter, Shah Abbas explained that because Fazli Beg converted to Islam while passing through the Ottoman territories on his way back to Persia, the Shah is sending another ambassador to the Grand Duke. The Shah introduced Don Robert Shirley, an Englishman who was fluent in English and Italian, as his new ambassador to transmit the Shah’s devotion to the Grand Duke.⁴³¹ [Fig 4, Ch.4, sec.2]

This letter is illuminating in two aspects: one is in the fact that Shah Abbas was selecting non-Muslim or Christian figures as his ambassadors to Europe, which was a common practice among non-Catholic courts; in this case, supposedly, to appeal to the Christian world’s trust in his court as a reliable and open-minded Muslim ally of Europe through someone knowledgeable in European languages. As already addressed in the previous chapter, this strategy was also practiced by Uzun Hasan in the second half of the fifteenth century. All other characters discussed earlier in this section, i.e. Fakhr ad-Din, Yahya, and Giambulad, were Ottoman-affiliated figures, though they were scheming to gain the throne, and hence could serve as agents to crush the unity of the Sublime Porte. The case

⁴³⁰ Kāwūsī ‘Irāqī, *Asnād-i rawābiṭ-i daulat-i Ṣafawī bā ḥukūmathā-i Ītālīyā* (The Diplomatic Relations between the Safavids of Persia and the Italian Centers), 69.

⁴³¹ ASF, MP 4274a, insert VI, c. 28.

of Persia, however, was different in the sense that it was a grand Muslim empire with shared borders with the Ottomans, plus the religious conflicts between the Shi'it Safavids and the Sunni Ottomans that could intensify the enmity between the two Muslim empires.⁴³² The second revealing aspect of this letter is that it confirms Fazli Beg arrived in Florence sometime between 1587-88 when the Shah's first letter was issued and 1590-91, when he presented Shah Abbas's letter to Ferdinando I, and that he stayed at the Medici court after his arrival.

The synchrony between the date of Shah Abbas's first letter to the Grand Duke of Tuscany and Vecchietti's departure from Persia suggests that Fazli Beg was either accompanying Vecchietti to Philip II, and eventually Ferdinando, or that he was sent on an independent mission from Vecchietti. In both of the two cases, Fazli Beg's expedition was in response to the Medici ambassador's mission in Persia.⁴³³ In Vecchietti's report on Persia from 1588, he described in detail how the Ottomans were invading the Persian borders in Tabriz, previously the city of the royal seat in the North West, and the southern coasts of Hormuz and Bushehr.⁴³⁴ At the end of the report, Vecchietti urged the Catholic king to stop the Turkish invasions by providing military assistance to the Persians; otherwise, the Persian Gulf will turn into a theater of war.⁴³⁵

In a 2018 article, Yousefzadeh suggested that Vecchietti's report is the source for a poem now preserved in the *Miscellanea Medicea* at the State Archive of Florence.⁴³⁶ [Fig 5,

⁴³² The Shi'a-Sunni Schism has been explain in the first chapter (Introduction), p. 5, f.n. 16.

⁴³³ Yousefzadeh, "The Sea of Oman," 61.

⁴³⁴ Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Dispacci Spagna, filza 21, I, 1589 gennaio 16. Also look at Tucci, "Una relazione di Giovan Battista Vecchietti sulla Persia e sul regno di Hormuz (1587)," 152–60. Venetian year starts March 1, thus January 1589 corresponds to 1588.

⁴³⁵ ASF MP. 4920, fol. 23. Look at Yousefzadeh, "The Sea of Oman," 64.

⁴³⁶ ASF, *Miscellanea Medicea* 719, insert 56, fol. 71v.

Ch.3, Sec.3] The poem is in the Persian language and starts with “در بحر عمان عظیم” (In the Great Sea of Oman), but the grammatical errors and the word-choices in this document suggests that the author was not a native Persian.⁴³⁷ Yousefzadeh argued that this poem is a call for a crusade and in line fourteen of the poem the author addresses the “oriental battle armor” that Shah Abbas sent as diplomatic gifts to Ferdinando I in this context.⁴³⁸ In an earlier article of 1966, Detlef Heikamp discussed the Armory Galleries (Armeria Medicea) at the Uffizi, which Ferdinando started to re-organize immediately after his ascension as the Grand Duke of Tuscany.⁴³⁹ Heikamp described parts of the display with Caravaggio’s *Shield of Medusa* commissioned by Cardinal Francesco Maria del Monte (1549-1627) in 1598, on the occasion of Ferdinando’s new armory galleries.⁴⁴⁰ [Fig 6, Ch.3, Sec.3] According to Heikamp, a warrior figure, armored in scaled iron and wearing a white Oriental turban sat atop a wooden horse holding Caravaggio’s shield. The wooden mannequin had a spear in one hand and the shield with the face of Medusa on the other. The wooden figure confronted another armed knight on horseback, with a harness entirely embroidered in green velvet, with golden brass bullets, a velvet saddle fringed with green silk, standing at the center of the gallery.⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁷ در بحر عمان عظیم *Dar Bahr-e Oman-e A'zeem*. Yousefzade argues that the author is most probably Giovanni Battista Raimondi, the director of the Stamperia Medicea (Medici Oriental Press) and the linguistic master in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish. Look at Yousefzadeh, “The Sea of Oman,” P. 52. Angelo M. Piemontese suggests Tommaso da Terracina, a Dominican friar, as the author of the poem, through comparisons with similar handwritings in a manuscript in Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana (Ms. Or. 459). Look at Piemontese, *Catalogo Dei Manoscritti Persiani Conservati Nelle Biblioteche d'Italia*, 99.

⁴³⁸ این سلاح جامه مزین آورد The author translates the line as “He takes this ornamental battle armour in his hands to take it to war.” Look at Yousefzadeh, “The Sea of Oman.” P. 55.

⁴³⁹ Detlef Heikamp, “La Medusa del Caravaggio e l'armatura dello Scia 'Abbas di Persia,” *Paragone Arte* 17, no. 199 (1966): 62–75.

⁴⁴⁰ Heikamp, 66.

⁴⁴¹ ASF. Guardaroba Medicea 204, fol.18 (1598) ASF, Guardaroba Medicea, Vol. 513, c. 1v. (1631). Also look at Heikamp, “La Medusa del Caravaggio e l'armatura dello Scia 'Abbas di Persia,” p. 66-67.

The two equestrian cavaliers were surrounded by more than sixty armored figures lined up along the walls. Most wore parade armor, elaborately embossed or chiseled with gold incrustations. In addition, there were pieces of artillery in iron and bronze, as well as a huge number of shields, swords, scimitars, daggers, and other weapons.⁴⁴² Heikamp argued that the white turban with the tip is the typical Safavid headgear that consists of a felt cap (*kulab*) and topped with a crown (*taj*), which warps in one end tucked in and the other hanging on the side (This form of the turban was explained in the section on Rome and Venice). The author concluded that these suits of armor (*jazerant*) in Ferdinando's new Armeria Medicea came as gifts from Shah Abbas of Persia to the Grand Duke, Ferdinando I and substantiated his argument with a number of travel documents of witnesses who described the display, in addition to the 1631 inventory.⁴⁴³

The two suits of scale armors are now lost. Heikamp also addressed this matter, but he used Caravaggio's *Shield of Medusa* to date the entrance of the Persian suits of armor into Florence. He contended that because the *Shield of Medusa* was made in 1598, it must have been displayed immediately after entering Florence, and hence long before the inventory of 1631 documented it. Heikamp located the two suits of armor as diplomatic gifts brought by the Persian embassy, Anthony Shirley and Husein Ali Beg, who were

⁴⁴² Heikamp, "La Medusa del Caravaggio e l'armatura dello Scia 'Abbas di Persia," 67.

⁴⁴³ Heikamp, 69. Heikamp refers to a German manuscript of 1611, now preserved in the Museo Germanico di Norimberga: "Due Armature persiane a cavallo, sono fatte solo di cuoio, ma impenetrabili alle pallottole." Also John Ray's description on his visit to Florence in 1664 that records this part of the Armory Galleries as "A suit of Persian armor for a man on horseback, made of little scales of iron." Another German traveler's textual evidence from 1677 in biblioteca di Stoccarda: "due cavalli che il Re di Persia ha donato al Granduca ferdinando I, tutti muniti di corazza come anche i due uomini che li hanno usati..." Giovanni Cinelli, described the two suits of armor in a manuscript also in Biblioteca Nazionale "Due armadure persiane tanto per lo cavaliere come per lo cavallo molto acconciatamente a quell'uso lavorate, che dal re di Persia furono a quest' Altezza donate." Also see Yousefzade "The Sea of Oman." P. 67, footnote. 45.

dispatched to Europe in 1599 and arrived in Florence in 1601⁴⁴⁴. In 2002, Paola Barocchi and Giovanna Gaeta Bertelà asserted that the shield was displayed immediately after its delivery to Florence.⁴⁴⁵ Subsequently, a question emerges regarding this historiographical lacuna, if Heikamp's argument is correct regarding the Medusa shield arriving in Florence in 1598 and the Persian gifts in 1601. Yousefzadeh's article filled in this blank and argued that Heikamp overlooked Fazli Beg's mission in 1588-90.⁴⁴⁶ Although all the aforementioned publications focus on the *Shield of Medusa* and are illuminating in dating the two suits of armor of Shah Abbas, which were not the main objects of this section, they can elucidate the provenance of the Bargello shield.

The inventory of 1598 records Caravaggio's shield. Although there is no mention of Shah Abbas's armors to Ferdinando, they must still have been the bearer of this shield, an argument already affirmed by Heikamp.⁴⁴⁷ At the bottom of the same folio that documents Caravaggio's shield, there is the description of another shield (scudo) that matches in every feature the Bargello *Sipar*. [Fig 7, Ch.3, Sec.3] The Guardaroba Medicea recorded this object on October 31, by Antonio Maria Bianchi, the description is translated below:⁴⁴⁸

A shield or a round wheel made of circles of Indian canna with a smaller steel shield, and around it is all covered with mother of pearl floral branches and Indian animals and where the aforementioned part ends up is the same Indian canna covered with silk and velvet, with four handles of ropes with silver rings.⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁴ This embassy will be extensively discussed in the next chapter

⁴⁴⁵ Paola Barocchi and Giovanna Gaeta Bertelà, eds., *Collezionismo mediceo e storia artistica* (Firenze: Studio per edizioni scelte, 2002), 359–260.

⁴⁴⁶ Yousefzadeh, "The Sea of Oman," 69.

⁴⁴⁷ Heikamp, "La Medusa del Caravaggio e l'armatura dello Scia 'Abbas di Persia."

⁴⁴⁸ With sincere thanks to Dr. Maurizio Arfaioli who helped me extensively with reading and transcribing the documents at the State Archive of Florence.

⁴⁴⁹ Guardaroba Medicea 204, fol 18 (1598). The "October 31" date shows the date when the object was transferred to the New Galleries that started in September 1598. "Uno schudo o rotella tonda fatto di cerchi di cannuccie d'india che nel mezzo vi è uno schudetto dacciaio germani, e attorno sino a uno [?] di [?]"

I previously remarked that this shield is truly an overlooked object in the Medici collection, as it was never located in the inventories before 1631. The description of the 1598 inventory mentioned above is identical to the shield with mother of pearl at the Bargello, although the inventory does not offer a title for this object. Hence, I conclude that this shield was among the gifts that Shah Abbas sent to Ferdinando I in the context of Vecchietti's mission to Persia and the military alliance between the Medici and the Safavids of Persia in the late sixteenth century. The nature of Vecchietti's expedition was diplomatic and with this ceremonial shield and the now-lost embroidered scale suits of armor, the Safavid Shah of Persia was urging the Florentines to contribute towards military aid in war against the Ottomans.

The shield is intricately inlaid with mother of pearl, demonstrating a royal scene with crossed-legged figures being carried on ceremonial canopies and hunting scenes. Hunting was a royal pastime since antiquity in Persia and employed by the first Persian kings to display their power over nature. The vegetal design of the shield strongly evokes the art of books in Persia and India, dating from their shared Turco-Mongolian heritage under the Timurids. Among the animals on the shield, there is an elephant with two figures atop; one is seated and the other is holding a parasol above his head. Presumably, the elephant and the floral pattern of the shield convinced the scholars to title the style of the shield as "Indo-Persian." While both centers were on the trade route connecting Europe to eastern Asia, it is of key importance to consider the cordial relationship between Persia

incirca, tutto commeesso di madre perla a rami fiure e animali al indiana e da dove finiscie dette commettiture sino al fine sono le medesime cannuccie coperte a cerchi di seta bertina schura, e seta bertina chiara foderate coperte di velluto ina[?] stinto, con maniglia di quattro cordi avolti con anel d'argento."

and the Mughals of India throughout the Safavid reign that resulted in numerous diplomatic and artistic exchanges.⁴⁵⁰

The extensive application of mother of pearl on this shield suggests an allusion to the well-known pearl of Hormuz, favored since the time of Timur. Ahmad ibn Arabshah (d.1450), a Syrian traveler and historian from the time of Timur, described the diamond and pearl of Hormuz and the turquoise of Khorasan and Nishabur among the precious gifts to the king.⁴⁵¹ Furthermore, the material culture of the shield recalls Gujarati mother of pearl works, of which an exquisite example is now at the Aga Khan Musuem of Toronto.⁴⁵²[Fig 8, Ch.3, Sec.3] The Aga Khan *Tray* is comoarable to the Bragello *Sipar* in its figural design and floral arabesque background. The unprecedented appearance of winged figures on the mother-of-pearl-inlaid *Tray* find parallels in Safavid, as well as, contemporary Indian figural paintings. The Persian style of the figures' headgears on the Bargello *sipar* and the imagery of a hunting scene, ingrained in Persian royal illustrations since the Sassanian period, associate the shield with Persian-Safavid patronage, while the Aga Khan *Tray* and numerous other examples of this Indo-Persian technique substantiate the intertwined artistic and cultural ties of the two courts.⁴⁵³

There is a comparison between the messages that the material composition and toponymic value of the Bargello shield transmitted with those of the Turquoise Glass

⁴⁵⁰ Canby, *Shah 'Abbas*, 24.

⁴⁵¹ E. J. van Donzel, ed., *Islamic Desk Reference* (Leiden ; New York: E.J. Brill, 1994), 144; Belozerskaya, *Medusa's Gaze*, 87.

⁴⁵² Aga Khan Musuem, *Tray, overlaid in Mother-of-pearl and lacquer*, Late 16th to early 17th Century (or, 1575, 1625)Tray, 17 1/10 in diameter, 43.5 cm diameter. For Gujarati mother of pearl inlay, Cfr. Simon Digby, *The Mother-of-Pearl Overlaid Furniture of Gujarat: The Holdings of the Victoria and Albert Museum.*; Robert Skelton and Victoria and Albert Museum, *Facets of Indian Art: A Symposium Held at the Victoria and Albert Museum* (New Delhi: Heritage Publishers, 1987).

⁴⁵³ Simon Digby, *The Mother-of-Pearl Overlaid Furniture of Gujarat: The Holdings of the Victoria and Albert Museum.*, 221–221; Ekrem Akurgal et al., *Les trésors de Turquie* (Genève: Skira, 1966), 235.

Bowl that Uzun Hasan sent as a gift to Venice in 1473. As already argued in the previous chapter on Uzun Hasan's relations with the Republic of Venice, the inscription of the city-name "Khorasan" on the *Turquoise Glass Bowl* he gifted alluded to his suzerainty over Khorasan, a rich source of this greenish-blue mineral and a Timurid land that he strove to achieve and conquered for a short period around 1470, to pronounce the extent of his reign and his Timurid heritage to the Venetian Signoria. In other words, the gift spoke to the political circumstances in which the object became a gift. More than a century later, Uzun Hasan's great grandson, Shah Abbas Safavi, presented a shield rich in mother of pearl, abundant in Hormuz, to accentuate the preciousness and the richness of the Island of Hormuz that was under serious threat of being looted by the Ottomans.

The Ottoman presence in the Gulf of Oman and their ongoing battles with the Portuguese since 1538 were a real threat to the southern harbors of Persia. The fall of Muscat to the Ottomans in 1552 brought the Ottomans closer to their main objectives, which were to invade the Island of Hormuz, expel the Portuguese from the Persian Gulf, and seize control over the Indian Ocean Trade.⁴⁵⁴ The Ottomans never achieved this target and the conflicts between them and the Portuguese endured for decades.⁴⁵⁵ In 1588, the Portuguese ousted the Ottomans from Muscat, but this defeat did not terminate the Ottoman threat in the area. The Ottoman occupation of Egypt, Syria, Basra, Aden, and Katif maintained them as a menacing threat to the Portuguese trade and the Persian borders.⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵⁴ Pius Malekandathil, *Maritime India: Trade, Religion and Polity in the Indian Ocean*, 2015, 117.

⁴⁵⁵ John Peterson, *Historical Muscat: An Illustrated Guide and Gazetteer*, Handbook of Oriental Studies. Section One, Near and Middle East, Handbuch Der Orientalistik, v. 88 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2007), 118.

⁴⁵⁶ Salih Özbaran, "The Ottoman Turks and the Portuguese in the Persian Gulf, 1534 - 1581," *Journal of Asian History* 6, no. 1 (1972): 58–59.

Looking at the splendid shield in this context, the gift is a vehicle for the Safavid Shah of Persia to seek military aid from the Grand Duke of Tuscany in his battles against the Turkish invasions, through the Sea of Oman and the Persian Gulf. The princely scene, outdoor gathering, tending horses, birds on trees, courtiers, and food, embroidered on this Persian shield reveal nothing but peace between the two courts: a peace that could vanquish the common enemy. In the central tier of the shield, there are figures on both sides of trees, picking fresh fruits and putting them in basins near the trees. In the second tier, there are cross-legged seated figures, enjoying food and fruits in trays in a princely manner. This gesture is suggestive of the fruitfulness and effectiveness of this peace; the fruit is the symbol of productivity and abundance caused by this alliance that would annihilate any sort of threat to this concord.

According to Heikamp's description of the display with Shah Abbas's two suits of armor and the shield of Medusa held by one of the wooden figures, there were a huge number of shields in the exhibition. Whether the Bargello shield was one of them cannot be proved from the known documents. However, because the Bargello shield is recorded on the same date with the shield of Medusa, I argue that this shield was part of the display in Ferdinando's new Armory Galleries with Shah Abbas's other gifts.⁴⁵⁷ Whether the Bargello shield was supposed to be held by the Persian cavalier at the Uffizi, and the *Shield of Medusa* replaced it, is another tantalizing issue which no documents discovered thus far have illuminated.

The story of Perseus-Medusa had a long history in the Medici dynasty, as already addressed in the previous chapter on the *Tazza Farnese*. The Perseus-Persian relation is

⁴⁵⁷ GM 204, fol.18.

another key element investigated in regards to the *Adoration of the Magi* fresco in the Medici Chapel in the Palazzo Medici-Riccardi. The Persian cavalier with Caravaggio's Medusa in one hand, associates both of these mythological bonds with this arrangement at Ferdinando's Armory Galleries. The Perseus-Persian connection believed widely throughout Italy materialized in the Persian knight holding the gorgon Medusa's shield. As already immortalized by Ferdinando's father, Duke Cosimo I de' Medici, with Benvenuto Cellini's (d.1571) bronze *Perseus with the Head of Medusa* in 1554, the subject matter was an adaptation of the myth to Medici sovereignty. [Fig 9, Ch.3, Sec.3] The iconography of Perseus overcoming Medusa served as propaganda for Medici victories over their enemies. Representing Perseus as a Persian cavalier was a vivid gesture to combine these histories and perform the Medici-Persian alliance.⁴⁵⁸ Hence, I argue, the composition transmits the Persian-Medici coalition as a new Perseus that will vanquish the gorgon, the Ottomans.

Caravaggio's *Shield of Medusa* served as an appropriation of the exotic scene with Persian scaled armor, shields, daggers, and other weapons for the visual culture of the Cinquecento European audience of display. Concurrently, it evoked the association of Medici sovereignty with the myth of Perseus. Looking at the picture through the lens of the Medici-Safavid alliance broadens the message beyond its Medici-Perseus association. Ferdinando's display of Shah Abbas's diplomatic gifts with the shield of Medusa alludes to the Quattrocento concept of Perseus as the ancestor of the Persians, revived by new readings of ancient texts like that of Herodotus. As already addressed with respect to Gozzoli's frescoes in the Palazzo Medici, the Medici depicted themselves as the Magi,

⁴⁵⁸ Yousefzadeh, "The Sea of Oman," 70–71.

the guardians of the celestial fire, brought to earth by Perseus.⁴⁵⁹ More than a century later, Ferdinando I's display of Shah Abbas's gift of suits of armors holding Caravaggio's *Shield of Medusa* reiterated the same associations between Perseus and Persia and deployed the myth in the family's iconography of power.

In these contextual relations I conclude, the Bargello shield with its extensive use of the mother of pearl, a substance well-known and abundant in the Island of Hormuz, illuminates the Safavid Shah's intentions in considering it as a proper diplomatic gift. As addressed in Vecchietti's report on Persia and the "Sea of Oman" poem, the Ottomans threatened the southern and western borders of Persia. As a Muslim ally of Europe, the Shi'i Safavids were the chief opponents of the geopolitical growth of the Sunni Ottomans. On the one hand, the Safavid Shah of Persia was desperate for military aid and experts from his Christian European allies against the Turkish offensives. On the other hand, the European leaders were eager for an alliance with Persia to attack the Ottomans from both sides and transfer their trading routes from Ottoman territories to the Persian vassals. Vecchietti's mission at Philip II's court in Spain about his negotiations with the Shah of Persia regarding a military alliance against the Ottomans illuminates the existence of such a proposal between the Grand Duke of Tuscany, the Papacy, the King of Spain and Portugal, and the Safavid Persia.

A letter by Vincenzo di Andrea Alamanni (d.1591), the Medici ambassador in Spain between 1586 and 1590, from Madrid to Florence in May 1589 indicates that Vecchietti consulted his Highness, Ferdinando I, to ask the Spanish King for his approval to send

⁴⁵⁹ Ulansey, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries*, 30.

artillery, military, and fortification experts from Florence through Portugal to Hormuz.⁴⁶⁰ Fazli Beg's mission in Florence at around the same time as Ferdinando's proposal to dispatch military aid to Persia could well have been the channel through which Shah Abbas's ceremonial armors entered the Grand Duke's collection. Picturing the display at the Uffizi in the last decade of the Cinquecento, the Bargello shield is perceived as a vehicle to express the peaceful and fruitful alliance between the two princes that will bring their common enemy to their knees. The Indo-Persian style of the shield suggests the cordial relations between the two Muslim courts of the period, the diplomatic and artistic exchanges between the two, and more importantly, the trading routes between the two centers under Portuguese rule, and after 1571, under the Spanish reign. The shield encapsulates the combined history of Persia and India since Timurid rule and the contemporary diplomatic and mercantile relations. The material culture of the gift is suggestive of the need for an alliance against the Turkish threat in the Sea of Oman and the Persian Gulf, and the pictorial program of the object evokes cordial diplomatic relations between the Safavid Persia and the Medici to overcome the enemy.

⁴⁶⁰ ASF Mediceo Principato. 4920, fol. 23. "[...] Dal Vecchietti Persiano [Giovanni Battista Vecchietti] mi fu scritto ultimamente che S.A. desiderava sapere se era servizio di S.M.tà che in Persia si mandassero fabbricatori di Artiglierie, che sapessino adoperarle, et s'intendessero di fortificazioni, come quel Rè domandava, conciosia che quando ciò fusse, S.A. gli incaminerebbe quà in Portogallo, perche fussero imbarcati poi per Ormùs." Also see Yousefzadeh, "Sea of Oman," 62.

Chapter-4

“Shah Abbas’s Gifts: Gradual Shift from Diplomacy to Commerce”

Section 1: Seicento Venice

In this section, I focus on the gradual shift in the stature of Persia from a political ally of Venice to a commercial partner, in the first three decades of the seventeenth century. Of the numerous Persian missions dispatched to Venice, five are investigated in this section. The first mission, led by the Englishman Anthony Shirley and Husayn `Ali Beg Bāyāt in 1599, demonstrate the Venetian attitude towards their former political ally with anti-Ottoman ambitions, the Persians. The next two missions, led by Asad Beg and Fathi Beg, in 1600 and 1603 respectively, reveal the two-fold political and commercial aims of Shah Abbas I in his foreign policies. The gifts of luxurious textiles often with Christian figural themes embroidered in gold presented to the Republic of Venice and the unprecedented request of the Shah for specific locations for the gifts’ display shed light on the Shah’s politico-economical message to the Serenissima through his “commodified” gifts of silk brocades that advertised his blooming silk industry. In alignment with his centralization of the Safavid State, Shah Abbas took over the silk-producing provinces in northern Persia and established a monopoly over the silk trade. The fourth mission investigates the Shah’s curious attempts to find a way to the flourishing market of Venice and to test the Republic’s position in regard to a crusade against the Ottomans. The last mission investigated in this section carried a large quantity of fine textiles to Venice. The nature and size of the Persian gifts affirm the dramatic turn in the stature of Persia and the significant contribution of Shah Abbas’s trade monopoly and the position of the Safavid territories at a trading crossroads in the development of global trade.

The Gift of a Safavid Velvet with Embroidered Annunciation Scenes

On the arrival of the first Persian envoy of the seventeenth century in Venice, on June 8, 1600, the Safavid ruler Shah Abbas I (r. 1587-1629) sent a gift of a piece of velvet with gold-embroidered scenes of the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary.⁴⁶¹ The scene of Gabriel and the Virgin was woven sixteen times on the eighteen-meter textile (*7 a 8 braccia*), in a repeating pattern.⁴⁶² The gift was highly admired in Venice and was later hung in the Ducal Palace (*Palazzo Ducale*), in the Hall of the most important political institution of the Republic, the Council of Ten (*Sala del Consiglio dei Dieci*).⁴⁶³ The Shah's present has not survived, yet its vast matrix of connotations still demonstrates its uniqueness and provocative nature in revealing the strategic agenda the new Safavid Shah undertook in his foreign diplomacy with his European allies. In the next paragraphs, I look at this first Persian diplomatic mission of the Seicento that was received in Venice through the lens of the visual culture of the period. At the core of my argument is the array of implications that this multi-cultured gift transmitted.

In 1587, *Abbas Mirza* (1571-1629) succeeded to the throne of the Safavid Empire as Shah Abbas I of Persia. As noted in the previous section, the first decade of his reign was greatly entangled with the internal unrest that the eleven years of his father's (Shah

⁴⁶¹ Venezia, ASVe, *Collegio. Esposizioni Principi*, Registro 14.

⁴⁶² Guglielmo Berchet, *La Repubblica di Venezia e la Persia* (Wentworth Press (27 agosto 2016), 1865), 43; Rodolfo Gallo, *Il tesoro di S. Marco e la sua storia* (Venezia-Roma: Istituto per la Collaborazione Culturale, 1967), 260–61; Giorgio Rota, *Under Two Lions: On the Knowledge of Persia in the Republic of Venice (ca. 1450-1797)*, Sitzungsberichte / Österreichische Akademie Der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, 793. Bd (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009), 19; Sinem Arcaç Casale, "The Persian Madonna and Child: Commodified Gifts between Diplomacy and Armed Struggle," *Art History* 38, no. 4 (September 2015): 641. One Venetian *braccia* equals 0.63 meters for silk and 0.68 meters for wool. See Angelo Martini, *Manuale di metrologia* (Rome 1976) 817; Rota, "Safavid Envoys in Venice," 248, no. 97.

⁴⁶³ Venezia, ASV, *Libro cerimoniali*. Arch. gen.

Mohammad Khodābandeh) rule left him.⁴⁶⁴ To consolidate his power, in 1598, Shah Abbas moved his capital from Qazvin to the more central city of Isfahan, distant from the Ottoman borders on the west, and henceforth took every effort to make himself the monarch of Safavid mercantilism.⁴⁶⁵ In 1599, Shah Abbas I dispatched his first official diplomatic mission to Europe. However, two factors prohibited the Persians from receiving a diplomatic welcome in Venice. The first was the unabashed politico-commercial ties of the Republic with the Ottomans at that time (1601); the second was the *Signoria*'s struggle to resist papal and imperial enforcement in joining the Christian League against the Ottomans in their war which had begun in 1593 in Hungary.⁴⁶⁶ I will elaborate on this mission and its reciprocal overtures in the political, commercial, and religious ambitions of the European rulers and Shah Abbas in their anti-Ottoman diplomacy in my next section. In this section, I begin with the earliest Persian mission that was officially received in Venice by the Doge in 1600, which according to the majority of today's Farsi sources, was a mission to observe the state of the earlier mission (1599) and to record how the European rulers treated the Safavid ambassadors.⁴⁶⁷

Asad Beg (*Efet Beg* in Venetian chronicles) was the Safavid envoy, who was received by Doge Marino Grimani (r. 1595-1605) in June 1600. A merchant from Tabriz, Asad Beg reached Venice through Aleppo and presented the Shah's letter and gift of the gold-

⁴⁶⁴ Tāhirī, *Tārīkh-i siyāsī va ijtimā'i-i Īrān : az marg-i Taymūr tā marg-i Shāh 'Abbās* (*The Socio-Political History of Iran, from the end of Timur's to the end of Shah Abbas's Reign*), 282–84.

Rudolph P. Matthee, *The Politics of Trade in Safavid Iran: Silk for Silver, 1600-1730*, Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 69–74.

⁴⁶⁶ Giorgio Rota, "Safavid Envoys in Venice," in *Diplomatisches Zeremoniell in Europa und im mittleren Osten in der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Ralph Krauz, Giorgio Rota, and Jan Paul Niederskorn (Vienna: Wien, Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009), 223–24.

⁴⁶⁷ Nasrollah Falsafi, *Zendagānī-e Shāh 'Abbās Awwal* (*The Lifehistory of Shāh Abbās I*), 4th ed. (Tehrān: Muhammad Ali Elmi, 1369), 1936–37; Muḥammad Ḥasan Kāwūsī 'Irāqī, ed., *Asnād-i rawābiṭ-i daulat-i Ṣafawī bā ḥukūmathā-i Ītālīyā- The Diplomatic Relations between the Safavids of Persia and the Italian Centers*, Čāp 1 (Tehrān: Markaz-i Asnād wa Tārīḥ-i Dīplumāsī, 2000), 11; Houshang Mahdavi, 41.

embroidered velvet to the Doge. Although Iranian sources treat Asad Beg's expedition as a minor one intended to reinforce the pact proposed by the former ambassadors, Anthony Shirley (1565-1635) and Husayn `Ali Beg Bāyāt, whom Shah Abbas dispatched in 1599, the content of the letter Asad Beg delivered to Venice proves that his mission was an independent one of a two-fold nature: political and commercial diplomacy. [Fig 1, Ch.4, Sec.1] In his letter to the Doge, after a long praise of the friendship between the two crowns, the Shah specifically asked for two favors: first, to have the Persian textiles in various colors that were used in Safavid Persia dyed in Venice in Persian style, and second, to assign two brokers to sell those textiles in Venice and purchase new items for the Shah.⁴⁶⁸

Along with his letter, Asad Beg presented the Shah's unique gift that featured the Annunciation scenes, glittering in gold threads on a large velvet, to the Doge. The gift's complex nature with the curious fusion of Christian iconography on a Persian gift textile, I argue, embodied Shah Abbas' twofold diplomacy towards his allies in his early contacts with Europe. Concurrent with his diplomatic approach in pursuing and reinforcing his grandfathers' anti-Ottoman alliance with Europe, Shah Abbas forged a trading partnership to support the commercial monarchy he had established at the dawn of the seventeenth century. His gifts were vehicles of his "diplomatic marketing," as I would call it, in which the Shah incorporated Christian figural representations to incite his European targets to develop their commerce and continue their alliance with Persia. The gift spoke to the visual culture with which the Doge and his Venetian entourage were

⁴⁶⁸ Berchet, *La Repubblica di Venezia e la Persia*, 1865, 43–44; Casale, "The Persian Madonna and Child," 642.

most identified, yet it was immersed in Safavid Persian connotations through its material culture and provenance.

Modern Iranian sources claim that Asad Beg's mission ended with no results and he returned empty-handed, but the Doge's response letter to Shah Abbas proves an opposite inference.⁴⁶⁹ [Appendix IV] In fact, the Doge had reacted to the Shah's request favorably and dispatched Asad Beg with his letter attesting his future cooperation and gifts worth two hundred ducats.⁴⁷⁰ Asad Beg's splendid reception by the Venetians in June 1600 contrasts meaningfully with Shirley-Bāyāt's mission set by Shah Abbas in 1599. Uruch Beg (d. 1604), one of the Persian delegates on the 1599 mission to Europe, recorded in his travel account that when the Persian ambassador sent an emissary ahead to Venice to ask permission for the embassy, the *Signoria* refused to offer it, because a Turkish envoy was then in the city "treating some important matters of state."⁴⁷¹ Due to the hostility between the two Muslim crowns, the Republic excused herself for not being in a position to welcome the Persians and thus dismissed them.⁴⁷²

In a 2009 publication, Giorgio Rota elucidated the possible Turkish envoys who were in Venice around the time the Persian embassy arrived in Verona in March-February 1601 and dispatched the previously mentioned emissary.⁴⁷³ Two Turkish envoys were received in Venice for political matters during this time: Çavuş Daud and Doctor Bartolomeo Coressi, who were received in May 1600 and on April 12, 1601, respectively, by the

⁴⁶⁹ Venezia, ASV, *Miscellanea atti turcheschi*. Arch. Gen.

⁴⁷⁰ Berchet, *La Repubblica di Venezia e la Persia*, 1865, 192–93. For Farsi sources on this matter see Kāwūsī 'Irāqī, *Asnād-i rawābiṭ-i daulat-i Ṣafawī bā ḥukūmathā-i Ītālīyā*, 11; Falsafi, *Zendagānī-e Šāh 'Abbās Awwal (The Lifehistory of Shāh Abbās I)*, 1936–37; Barāzish, *Ravābiṭ-i siyāsī - dīplumātīk-i Īrān va jahān dar 'ahd-i Ṣafavīyah*, 612.

⁴⁷¹ Guy L. Strange, *Don Juan of Persia A Shi'ah Catholic 1560-1604*. (Routledge, 2013), 282.

⁴⁷² Strange, 281–82.

⁴⁷³ Rota, "Safavid Envoys in Venice," 221–25.

Collegio. Rota inferred that Çavuş Daud must have left well before the Persians arrived and Coressi must have been on his way to Venice at that time.⁴⁷⁴ Hence, it would have been unlikely that the presence of a “Turkish ambassador [who] was at that very time with them treating of important matters of state,” as Uruch Beg relayed, was the genuine reason behind the Republic’s refusal of accepting the Persians.⁴⁷⁵ Rota emphatically concluded:

the Venetian Senate simply did not want to deal with a mission whose main aim was the creation of an anti-Ottoman military alliance between Persia and the Christian powers, at a time when Venice was doing her best to resist Papal and Imperial pressure to join the league which had already been fighting against the Ottomans in Hungary since 1593.⁴⁷⁶

To this mission, I compare Asad Beg’s expedition, whose principal message was to reinforce friendship, despite all the contradictory political expediencies, and to develop commerce between the two states. Asad Beg’s mission was well received by the *Signoria*, and for his mission a carpet was spread in the antechamber where the ambassador and his retinue were anticipating their reception, while in only a few months later, the Shirley-Bāyāt embassy did not even receive permission to proceed beyond Verona.⁴⁷⁷ This inconsistency in the Republic’s attitude towards Persia only reveals one conclusion and that would be, as noted by Rota, the Venetians’ reluctance in adhering to their former diplomatic ambitions in forming a military alliance with Persia. Yet, Asad

⁴⁷⁴ For more information of the missions of the two Turkish envoys, see Pedani Fabris, *In nome del Gran Signore*, 208. ASV. *Collegio, Esposizione principi*, Filza 11 (12 April, 1600) and ASV. *Senato, Deliberazioni, Costantinopoli*, registro 9, fols. 178a and 183a (17 April and 19 May 1601) [Coressi carried two letters].

⁴⁷⁵ Strange, *Don Juan of Persia A Shi’ah Catholic 1560-1604.*, 282; Rota, “Safavid Envoys in Venice,” 222.

⁴⁷⁶ Rota, “Safavid Envoys in Venice,” 224.

⁴⁷⁷ Cicogna, *Delle iscrizioni veneziane* 5, 645.

Beg's mission was of a different nature. The changing nature of the alliance between Persia and Venice led to a new sort of gift culture. Emerging from their already established diplomatic friendship, Shah Abbas was forging a novel trading alliance with *Serenissima*, even though their political ambitions were incongruent.

Modern Farsi sources claim that the Shirley-Bāyāt mission “failed” because of the close politico-economic ties between Venice and the Ottomans; however, they overlook the fact that these two missions had fundamentally different motivations, but together represented Shah Abbas's double-sided ambitions in his foreign diplomacy. Iranian scholars, such as Muḥammad Ḥasan Kāwūsī ‘Irāqī, dismissed the idea that Shah Abbas's diplomatic mission to Venice was not even allowed in the city and Asad Beg's mission was not intended to follow up the first one, but instead to propose a new way of communication.⁴⁷⁸ In fact, on May 16, 1602, Shah Abbas dispatched another envoy, Angelo Gradenigo, the Venetian Jewish convert to Catholicism, to gather information on Shirley-Bāyāt's mission. The Shah's initiative this time was spearheaded by a merchant whose mission in Venice was comprised of two significant features. First, the Shah incorporated Catholic converts into his Royal Office (*xāsse-ye šarife*), which I assume, was to project his recognition over the stimulus that “conversion” to Catholicism could beget trust among Catholic princes and facilitated his diplomatic negotiations. On behalf of the Shah, Gradenigo presented a gift of an iron gauntlet with the name of Shah Abbas inlaid in gold to the Republic. This gift leads to the second notable circumstance of this mission. Gradenigo's gift of decorative armor, just like the Shah's splendid *Separ* (shield) with gold and mother of pearl presented to the Grand Duke of Tuscany elaborated in the

⁴⁷⁸ Kāwūsī ‘Irāqī, *Asnād-i rawābiṭ-i daulat-i Šafawī bā ḥukūmathā-i Ītālīyā*, 11.

previous chapter, I argue, reassured the recipient (in this case the Venetians) about the Shah's military ambitions in his early seventeenth century diplomatic missions.⁴⁷⁹

In regard to Gradenigo's mission, I propose, Shah Abbas sent a Venetian merchant-envoy to Venice with the aim of abating any suspicion about his political motivations in his alliance with the Republic, in case the earlier Venetian "excuse" for denial of the Persians was reliable. Yet, the mission of Asad Beg, a Persian trader, followed a different trajectory than those of Shirley-Bāyāt and Gradenigo and opened up a new pathway in the reciprocal relations between the two states. Asad Beg's mission was to facilitate Safavid-Venetian commercial negotiations and he returned with his mission accomplished.⁴⁸⁰ These two Persian embassies of the early seventeenth century by Shirley-Bāyāt and Asad Beg illuminate the state of Venetian-Safavid relations, to which Shah Abbas tailored his diplomatic gifts.

The Safavid velvet with the gold-embroidered scenes of the Annunciation was a medium through which Shah Abbas articulated his cross-cultural commercial ambitions. The figural representation was a display for the Venetian recipients to recognize his court's artistic and cultural prowess, as well as the Shah's royal artists' awareness of Christian themes and iconographical conventions. Concomitantly, the gift incited Venetian consumers to open up their markets to the Persian textiles. Shah Abbas targeted the Venetian market, and for this aim, he infused Christian figural representations that were rooted in the visual culture of the Seicento Europe (in this case, Venice) with the Persian

⁴⁷⁹ Falsafi, *Siyāsāt-i ḥārīgī-i Īrān dar daurān-i Šafawiya*. Guglielmo Berchet, "La Repubblica di venezia e la Persia. Nuovi documenti e regesu" *Raccolta Veneto*, Vol. 1, no. 2, (1866) 14-17. Giorgio Rota, ed. Hasan Celal Güzel, C. Cem Oguz and Osman Karatay "Diplomatic Relations between Safavid Persia and the Republic of Venice. An Overview," in *The Turks*, vol. II, 582.

⁴⁸⁰ Although Asad Beg never reach Persia as he died on his way back.

textile to incite Venetian curiosity. In his diplomatic marketing, the Shah strategically combined the traditional Islamic non-figural “repeating pattern,” which often encompasses repeated vegetal or geometrical motifs to adorn the textile, with figural representations of a Christian narrative, to facilitate his commercial negotiations.⁴⁸¹

The cross-religious cultural and artistic exchanges reflected in the Shah’s gift, I argue, were in alignment with his political and economic ambitions. To provoke Venetian consumer desire for Persian textiles, Shah Abbas went beyond the conventions of Islamic ornamental designs in religious art and incorporated visual elements that could speak to the visual culture of its Venetian audience and provoke them to integrate those items in their public and private collections. This was the beginning of a new trajectory that Shah Abbas undertook to incorporate “commodified gifts,” as Sinem Arcak Casale termed them, to mediate between his political, religious, and commercial diplomacy.⁴⁸²

By 1600, Shah Abbas had turned the two important raw silk-producing cities of Gilān and Māzandarān along the southern coast of the Caspian Sea into crown-owned estates (*Khasseh*) and established a state monopoly on the production and exportation of silk.⁴⁸³

The Shah’s dominion over foreign trade swiftly developed a centralized economic system under his rule in which silk was the main item for sale.⁴⁸⁴ Shah Abbas’ flourishing silk

⁴⁸¹ Oleg Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art* (Yale University Press, 1987). For Armenian liturgical vestments produced in Isfahan at this point in time, see Amelia Peck, *Interwoven Globe: The Worldwide Textile Trade, 1500?1800* (Yale University Press, 2013), 217–21; Carol Bier and Textile Museum (Washington, D.C.), eds., *Woven from the Soul, Spun from the Heart: Textile Arts of Safavid and Qajar Iran, 16th-19th Centuries* (Washington, D.C: Textile Museum, 1987). Other examples at Victoria & Albert Museum, no. 1060-1906, no. 331-1920, Musée Historique des Tissus, Lyons, no. 31517; Musée du Louvre, p. 49 no. 25, Philadelphia Museum, no. 67-30-48. For general information on Safavid clothing, see Layla S. Diba “Clothings x. In the Safavid and Qajar periods,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol.8, pp. 785-808.

⁴⁸² Casale, “The Persian Madonna and Child.”

⁴⁸³ Linda K. Steinmann, “Shah ’Abbas and the Royal Silk Trade 1599-1629,” *Bulletin (British Society for Middle Eastern Studies)* 14, no. 1 (1987): 68–74.

⁴⁸⁴ Niels Steensgaard, *The Asian Trade Revolution of the Seventeenth Century*. (London: University of Chicago, 1974).

industry, together with the relatively easy transfer of textiles to Europe and bypassing Ottoman territories, formed the nature of the Shah's diplomatic gifts throughout his reign. In a 1602 letter from Shah Abbas to Doge Marino Grimani, the Shah named his three agents, "khāje Shāhvār," "Hāji Avaz Tabrizi," and "Emād," who were in Venice to accomplish a mission. [Fig 2, Ch.4, Sec.1] The Shah asked the Doge for his assistance to those agents in finding the orders of their Highness (فرموده های خاصه شریفه) and returning immediately. The Shah was not specific in his letter about the mission or the items; however, the message reveals that his envoys were in Venice to purchase (or acquire) the royal orders. This demonstrates that Shah Abbas's previous request, delivered by Asad Beg, about having brokers in the city to bargain for sought items had been complied with by the *Serenissima*.

Gabriele Caliari's Painting: *Doge Marino Grimani Receiving the Gifts of the Persian Ambassador* and a Case Study of a Customized Safavid Gift of Embroidered Silk

A few months before Shah Abbas declared another war against the Ottomans, a new Persian mission arrived in Venice and was received on March 5, 1603, in *Sala del Collegio*.⁴⁸⁵ The Venetian artist, Gabriele Caliari (1568-1630), memorialized this event in a grand painting in *Palazzo Ducale*, Venice, in the same year. [Fig 3, Ch.4, Sec.1] Led by two Safavid ambassadors, Muhammad Amin Beg and Fathi Beg, this well-documented mission took a letter and precious gifts to present to the Doge of Venice and apparently Caliari captured that moment when the Persians were offering those splendid gifts to the

⁴⁸⁵ Venezia, ASV, *Fase Persia*, Doc. 8 (Copia). Also ASV. *Cerimoniali* cit.

majesty of the Republic. I will elaborate on Caliri's painting shortly, but first I focus on the list and nature of the gifts that Shah Abbas sent his Venetian ally.

Nine items (یک تھوز - *yek toghūz*) were selected by the Shah to be presented as gifts to the Republic: one mantle of gold-embroidered fabric, a velvet carpet with gold threads, one gold-embroidered velvet with the figures of Christ and Mary (*ʿĪsā va Maryam*), three *tāq* (each *tāq* is about fifty meters) gold-embroidered fabrics, and three *tāq* plain fabrics.⁴⁸⁶

This list, which was originally in a form of *Nastaʿlīq* calligraphy in Persian transcripts, is recorded in three other documents at the State Archive of Venice, including one by the *Procuratori di Supra* (Administrators of the properties of St Mark's Basilica).⁴⁸⁷ In the latter document, recorded on March 9, 1603, the gifts are described with more important details. According to this document, the velvet carpet had silk and gold threads and was 4 x 3 *braccia* (about 4.75 meters) and the Christ and Mary velvet was a 7 *braccia* (about 4.5 meters) silk. The pack of six *tāq* fabrics was composed of three silk cloths with golden patterns and three robes of plain silk (no gold).⁴⁸⁸ The receipt for the presents specifies that the Christ and Mary silk cloth had fourteen figures (*con quattordecì figure*).⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁶ Venezia, ASV, Collegio, Esposizioni principi, *filza* 14r-14v (the list of gifts in Persian transcripts in *Nastaʿlīq* font). ASV, *Esp. Principi*. (Traduzione della Nota del presente del re di Persia, bollata con il suo proprio bollo): "...Un manto tessuto d'oro, Un tappeto di velluto tessuto con oro et argento, Un panno di velluto tessuto in oro con figure di Cristo et di sua madre Maria, Tre cavezzi tessuti in oro, Tre schietti tessuti con seta." Also ASV, Secreta Commemoriali, *registro* 26, fols. 179b-180a. See Rota, "Safavid Envoys in Venice," Appendix 4 and 5, and Plate 1 and 2. Also see Berchet, *Venezia e la Persia*, 198.

⁴⁸⁷ ASV, Secreta, Commemoriali, *registro* 26, fols. 180°-180b.

⁴⁸⁸ "... Un Manto tessuto d'oro, Un Tapeto di seta, et d'oro à Figure di braza 7, Un Panno di seta, et d'oro à Figure di braza 7, Tre Vesti di seta, et d'oro à Figure, Tre altre Vesti di tela di seta senza oro à figure..." ASV, Secreta, Commemoriali, *registro* 26, fols. 179b-180a.

⁴⁸⁹ "... Un Panno di seta, et d'oro à Figure longo braza sette, in circa, con quattordecì figure..." ASV, Secreta, Commemoriali, *registro* 26, fols. 180a-180b.

As is evident, all nine items were textiles and among those, silk particularly stands out. Indeed the material culture of the gifts was a vehicle for the Shah's imperial self-fashioning and a boast about his flourishing silk industry and market. At the same time, the Shah rehearsed another integration of Christian figural representations within a Safavid gift, with the figure of Virgin and Christ embroidered on a silk velvet cloth. Beside the already-addressed connotations that this specific fusion transmitted, like those of the Annunciation velvet, the figural representation on this second velvet is distinguished meaningfully from the one Asad Beag had brought to Venice in May 1600. In the next few paragraphs, following a detailed visual analysis of the textile gift, I will draw attention to the incorporation of this specific biblical scene into the Shah's silk, of which he was so proud, and its presentation as a suitable gift to the Republic of Venice.

On the gold-embroidered silk presented by Fathi Beag in March 1603, the Virgin Mary is represented in a cross-legged seated position in a landscape, nursing the Christ Child.⁴⁹⁰ [Fig 4, Ch.4, Sec.1] Holding him in her arm on her right lap, the Virgin bares her breast in the Child's mouth and Christ Child reaches out his hand to grab his mother's breast. Both figures are recognizably haloed with golden pointed flames, in the Safavid fashion of representing Shi'a Muslim holy figures.⁴⁹¹ This stylized visual hierarchy distinguishes the Mother and Child from another female companion, who stands modestly next to the Virgin holding a cloth, presumably to hold the Child afterwards. Between the holy figures and the attendant, there is a pond with fish and a landscape with shrubs and sprouting flowers. On the receipt of the Shah's gifts to the Republic in 1603, this silk was

⁴⁹⁰ A fragment of this silk is now at the *Museo di Palazzo Mocenigo* in Venice.

⁴⁹¹ Oleg Grabar, "The Story of Portraits of the Prophet Muhammad," *Studia Islamica* 96 (2003): 19–38; Christiane Gruber, "Between Logos (Kalima) And Light (Nūr): Representations Of The Prophet Muhammad In Islamic Painting," *Muqarnas Online* 26, no. 1 (2009): 229–62.

recorded as brocade with fourteen figures embroidered on it. However, since fourteen is an even number, and in each scene, three figures are represented, the number must reflect the complete composition that was originally repeated fourteen times on the seven-*braccia* silk velvet.⁴⁹²

In a 1994 publication, Gauvin Bailey suggested that these shrubs were references to the palm tree that is associated with the Nativity in Islamic tradition.⁴⁹³ Sinem Casale elaborated on Bailey's interpretation and referred to the Qur'anic version of the Nativity, which translates:

And the pains of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a palm-tree: She cried (in her anguish): "Ah! would that I had died before this! would that I had been a thing forgotten and out of sight!" But (a voice) cried to her from beneath the (palm-tree): "Grieve not! for thy Lord hath provided a rivulet beneath thee; and shake towards thyself the trunk of the palm-tree; it will let fall fresh ripe dates upon thee."⁴⁹⁴

Casale argued that because in the Qur'anic version of the Nativity, Virgin Mary was alone, the attendant "might be intended to represent an angelic being whose voice calms Mary by telling her about the stream and the palm tree."⁴⁹⁵ Clearly, there is a pond and a tree included in this figural imagery. I disagree, however, that this is a scene of the "Nativity." Instead, I reread it as a *Madonna del Latte* (Madonna Lactans), a Christian iconography that at its core, celebrates the Catholic Church's veneration of the

⁴⁹² Berchet, *La Repubblica di Venezia e la Persia*, 1865, 46; Gallo, *Il tesoro di S. Marco e la sua storia*, 261.

⁴⁹³ Gauvin Alexander Bailey, "In the Manner of the Frankish Masters : A Safavid Drawing and Its Flemish Inspiration," *Oriental Art* 40, no. 4, Winter (1994): 33.

⁴⁹⁴ Qur'an, verse 23- 25, chapter 19 (sūrat Maryam): فَأَجَاءَهَا الْمَخَاضُ إِلَى جُذْعِ النَّخْلَةِ قَالَتْ يَا لَيْتَنِي مِتُّ قَبْلَ هَذَا وَكُنْتُ نَسِيًّا مَنْسِيًّا ﴿٢٣﴾ فَنَادَاهَا مِنْ تَحْتِهَا أَلَّا تَحْزَنِي قَدْ جَعَلَ رَبُّكِ تَحْتَكِ سَرِيًّا ﴿٢٤﴾ وَهُزِّي إِلَيْكِ بِجُذْعِ النَّخْلَةِ تُسَاقِطُ عَلَيْكَ رَطْبًا جَنِيًّا ﴿٢٥﴾ نَسِيًّا مَنْسِيًّا For English translations see Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *Koran: An English Interpretation of the Holy Quran with Full Arabic Text*. (Lahore: Muhammad Ashraf, 1992), Sūrat Maryam.

⁴⁹⁵ Casale, "The Persian Madonna and Child," 643.

incarnation of Christ, the Son of God, and the exalted role of Mary, as the Mother of God.⁴⁹⁶ This iconography configures the human nature of Christ, who as a baby suckled milk from his mother's breast. The Virgin Mary incarnated the Son of God in her body, thus symbolizing the Church, in Catholic ideology, where the Eucharist is miraculously transformed into the body of Christ during the Mass (Transubstantiation).

As recorded in the Venetian accounts of Fathi Beag's reception, the Safavid ambassador delivered the Shah's wish to the Doge about displaying the velvet with the figure of Christ and the Virgin in the Church of San Marco.⁴⁹⁷ This request, I argue, buttresses the hypothesis that the Safavid *Madonna del Latte* velvet was a gift tailored not only to the visual taste of its recipient, but also to the desired setting for its display. It is significant to note that the figural representation on this velvet surprisingly harmonizes with the iconographical connotations of the *Madonna del Latte*, that is, Mary as the symbol of the Church whose milk turned into the Christ's blood. As was requested by the Shah, this gift of velvet was designed for the Church of San Marco and this was even distinguished from that silk velvet carpet among the gifts that the Shah, relayed by Fathi Beag, wished to offer to the Treasury of San Marco, so that it would be on view once every year.⁴⁹⁸

The Shah's requests about his gifts being displayed in specific settings reveal two important observations. First, the Shah was well informed about the religious and cultural circumstances of these two interrelated Venetian institutions. Second, designing the

⁴⁹⁶ For more interpretations on this matter, Cfr. Max Thurian, *Mary: Mother of the Lord, figure of the Church* (London: Mowbray, 1985).

⁴⁹⁷ «E questo, disse il persiano, il re manda perchè sia presentato alla chiesa di S. Marco» Berchet, *La Repubblica di Venezia e la Persia*, 1865, 45–46.

⁴⁹⁸ «Questo, disse il persiano, è dei più belli tappeti che si facciano. Il mio re avendo inteso che ogni anno si mette fuori il tesoro di S. Marco, tanto famoso per tutto il mondo, lo manda alla Serenità Vostra, perchè si contenti ordinare che ogni[46] volta che si esporrà il tesoro sia esso esposto sopra questo tappeto per la sua gran bellezza» Berchet, 46.

Persian *Madonna del Latte* for the “Church” of San Marco connotes that the Shah had knowledgeable Catholic advisors at his court to enlighten him with those subtle iconographical references. This may be contextualized by the fact that, in 1599, two Portuguese friars arrived in Isfahan through Hormuz, the Franciscan fra Alfonso Cordero, and the Dominican Nicolau de Melo.⁴⁹⁹ The Dominican friar declared himself the Bishop of Hormuz and a nuncio of the pope and the King of Spain. The Shah gratefully welcomed the friars and gave Nicolau de Melo a [now-lost] precious thirteenth-century golden cross, embellished with diamonds, turquoise, and rubies.⁵⁰⁰ During their stay at the Court of Isfahan, the Shah shared his curiosity about the state of the papacy and asked fundamental questions about Christian rituals, and finally in 1599, he dispatched them with his ambassadors Anthony Shirley and Husayn `Ali Beg Bāyāt to Europe.⁵⁰¹

The two Portuguese friars were not the only Christian missionaries at the court of Shah Abbas in Persia. In 1600, Pope Clement VIII (r. 1592-1605) dispatched two Portuguese nuncios, Francisco da Costa (Jesuit) and Diego de Miranda (layman), to Isfahan. This was in response to the “false” news rumored by Asad Beg in Venice about the Safavid Shah’s willingness to convert with his children to Roman Catholicism and to establish a Portuguese Augustinian mission in Hormuz.⁵⁰² The Pope immediately sent the two nuncios to express his joy over the good news of the Shah’s inclination to join the

⁴⁹⁹ Carla Alferes, “The Diplomatic Agency of Art between Goa and Persia : Archbishop Friar Aleixo de Meneses and Shah `Abbās in the Early Seventeenth Century. 2018,” 154.

⁵⁰⁰ This gift of the Shah to the Dominican friar is indeed another enlightening subject of study. However, because my focus in this study is on the gifts in Italian collections, I will leave this gift for future research.

⁵⁰¹ Falsafī, *Siyāsāt-i ḥārīgī-i Īrān dar daurān-i Šafawīya*, 14–15.; Carlos Alonso, *Embajadores de Persia En Las Cortes de Praga, Roma y Valladolid: 1600-1601* (Roma: Instituto espanol de historia eclesiastica, 1989), 161–65.

⁵⁰² Kāwūsī `Irāqī, *Asnād-i rawābiṭ-i daulat-i Šafawī bā ḥukūmathā-i Ītālīyā*, 11.

Christian religion and to propose a joint action against their most hostile enemy.⁵⁰³

Between 1602 and 1608, more nuncios arrived at the Court of Isfahan that reinforced the cross-religious relations between the Safavids and the Roman Church.⁵⁰⁴ I will elaborate on the fundamental role that these figures played in the course of the Safavid-European, anti-Ottoman campaign in the early seventeenth century later in this chapter.

Nevertheless, it is illuminating to note that the Shah allowed those nuncios and their Christian communities to preach freely, perform their rituals, and build churches in different provinces of the Safavid realm. Hence, it is not preposterous to envision that the Shah must have had religious advisors at his court for his negotiations with Christian Europe, and that those priests presumably counseled him in his selection and modifications of the diplomatic gifts.

Although the Safavid *Madonna del Latte* thematically blended seamlessly with its desired setting, the visual features, such as the pointed flame-haloes and the cross-legged seating position of the Virgin made the object oscillate between the two cultures. The fiery halo symbolizes the Shi'a concept of divine enlightenment (*Nūr -e Mohammadi*) of Prophet Mohammad and his cousin, 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭāleb, who, according to Shi'a ideology, was the rightful successor of the Prophet.⁵⁰⁵[Fig 5, Ch.4, Sec.1] As a visual rendition of sanctity in Shi'a Safavid painting, the flame-halo in the *Madonna del Latte* velvet signifies an inherent, yet strategic artistic exchange, through which the Shah communicated a two-fold message; his knowledge and respect for Christianity and his

⁵⁰³ Roger Savory, *Iran under the Safavids*, 1. publ. 1980 This digitally printed version 2007 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007), 107.

⁵⁰⁴ Kāwūsī 'Irāqī, *Asnād-i rawābiṭ-i daulat-i Ṣafawī bā ḥukūmathā-i Ītālīyā*, 135.

⁵⁰⁵ Uri Rubin, "Pre-Existence and Light: Aspects of the Concept of Nur Muhammad," *Israel Oriental Studies* 5 (1975): 105.

tolerance toward his Christian subjects. The Shah's velvet *Madonna del Latte* associated the holiest figures of Christianity with those of Shi'ism through the visual element of a stylized halo. In addition, the crossed-legged sitting position of the Virgin visually "Persianized" Mary through a traditional gesture long rooted in Persian painting.⁵⁰⁶

In sum, the Safavid *Madonna del Latte* silk velvet connoted the Shah's economic, artistic, religious, and political prowess in his relations with Europe. The material culture of the gift conveyed the Shah's luxury gained by his monopoly over silk production and exportation, as well as his military potency in imposing his power over those formerly independent provinces with a flourishing silk industry. The figural imagery of the textile stood between a Persian painting of Shi'a sanctity and a Christian iconography of Mary and Christ Child. The Shah's request for the velvet's display in the Church of San Marco recalled his acquaintance with those iconographical significances, which emerged from a religio-political campaign between Persia and the Roman Church that developed Christian communities, convents, and churches in Persia. Finally, Shāh Abbās's Persianized *Madonna del Latte* in the Church of San Marco projected the Safavid Shah's recognition of this Venetian ecclesiastical institution within the political body of the Republic, wherein Shah Abbas wished to settle an agent of his court.

Shāh Abbās's gifts of rich textiles brought nuance to that imperial image of him that he wanted the European powers to recognize. Nevertheless, Gabriele Caliari's painting of *Il doge Marino Grimani riceve I doni dagli ambasciatori persiani* (Doge Marino Grimani Receives the Gifts of the Persian Ambassadors) in the *Palazzo Ducale*, I argue,

⁵⁰⁶ For Persian painting and its visual modes, Cfr. Oleg Grabar, *Mostly Miniatures: An Introduction to Persian Painting* (Princeton, N.J.; Chichester: Princeton University Press, 2002); Sheila R Canby, *Persian Masters: Five Centuries of Paintings* (Bombay: Marg Publications, 1990).

approached Fathi Beg's reception from a different angle, through the lens of the Venetian Republic. [Fig 3, Ch.4, Sec.1] The painting is oil on a grand canvas in *Sala delle Quattro Porte*, which was the antechamber to the more important rooms of the *Sala dell'Anticollégio* and the *Sala del Senato* of the Ducal Palace in Venice. Caliari adorned the wall on the right of the entrance to the Senate Room with Fathi Beg's reception, for the contemplation of those in passage to or waiting to be received in the Chamber of the Great Council.

The painting captures the moment when the luxurious gifts of the Shah are being taken out of a box and his letter is being read to the Doge. Four Venetians in black garments and white neck ruffles spot the painting in places where different episodes of the reception ceremonies are taking place. One of the Venetians in the foreground has his right arm on another figure in a red vestment and a green cape. The Venetian has been identified as the official interpreter and dragoman of the Republic, Giacomo de Nores, who organized this visit.⁵⁰⁷ In Caliari's painting, he has been bestowed with a visual emphasis as he actively introduces the other figure, presumably another Armenian in the group of the Persian legates, who accompanied Fathi Beg.⁵⁰⁸ At the very center of the foreground, a glamorous gift of a silk with a gold-embroidered decorative pattern in a symmetrical design catches the eye of the viewer. Observing the gift-giving scene and the reception in progress, the Venetian officials of different political ranks in red and blue garments are represented seated in two levels, on the right side of the mid-ground.

⁵⁰⁷ Berchet, *La Repubblica di Venezia e la Persia*, 1865, 44–45.

⁵⁰⁸ Cristelle Baskins believes that the figure who is reading the letter to the Doge is Dragoman Nores. See Cristelle Baskins, "Framing Khoja Sefer in the Sala Regia of the Quirinal Palace in Rome (1610-1617)," *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies* 24 (2015): 16. For the role of Armenians in Safavid Persia, Cfr. Savory, *Iran under the Safavids*, 1–26, 174–75, 198.

Shifted to the left upper part of the canvas, Doge Grimani is enthroned on his seat atop a number of steps and an oriental carpet under his feet marks his elevated rank. Two Persian dignitaries in official Safavid regalia flank the Doge.⁵⁰⁹ On the right side of the Doge sits another Persian dignitary in splendid garments with his right hand grabbing the edge of his shimmering coat. A golden cloak embellished with delicate vegetal pattern over a bright robe with similar golden design distinguishes this figure from the other turbaned dignitaries in traditional “Safavid ambassador” costumes, with plain silk mantles and golden frog buttons over a bright *qabā’* (long garment with sleeves) with a twisted silk belt wrapped around their waist. [Fig 6a, Ch.4, Sec.3] The shine in his regalia reveals that it was of fine silk, just like the gift of textile with golden design in the foreground that has already created astonishment among the Venetians. The turbaned figure in rich silk garments is Fathi Beg, Shah Abbas’s special agent, who, accompanied with six other Persians and three Armenians, led the second Persian mission in Venice, in March 1603.⁵¹⁰ The Persian dignitaries’ distinct white turbans (*dastār*) with twelve folds that symbolized their Twelver-Imam Shi’a faith and a red baton on top (*tāj-e Safavi*) distinguish them from other figures in the painting: the Venetians, the Armenians, and other Persians of lower ranks.⁵¹¹

In the first instance, Caliari’s painting reflects Fathi Beg’s reception and the rich gifts he presented to the Doge of Venice on behalf of his master, Shah Abbas I Safavid. Caliari’s

⁵⁰⁹ Giovanni Grevembroch, *Gli abiti de Veneziani di quasi ogni età con diligenza raccolti e dipinti nel secolo XVIII*, Venezia, Museo Correr, Biblioteca, Ms. Gradenigo Dolfin 49, vol. II, tav. 122

⁵¹⁰ Camillo Tonini, “I doni degli ambasciatori Persiani alla Serenissima nella tela di Gabriele Caliari,” in *I doni di Shah Abbas il Grande alla Serenissima. Relazioni diplomatiche tra la Repubblica di Venezia e la Persia Safavide. Catalogo della mostra* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2014), 28–29.

⁵¹¹ The Muslim Persians had their turbans on throughout all official ceremonies, because wearing a turban was (and still is) a *Sunnah Mu’akkadah* (السنة المؤكدة), meaning practices emphasized by the Prophet Muhammad and refusal to observe those prohibits the Muslim devotees from reaching perfection.

painting was a contribution to the decorative program of a hall with a group of allegorical sculptures of the virtues, frescoes of mythological subjects and cities under Venetian dominion in a self-celebrating decorative scheme honoring the city of Venice, and her institutions, aristocratic heritage, and role as *antemurale della Christianità* (bulwark of Christendom).⁵¹² Caliari's artistic interpretation of Fathi Beg's reception, I believe, was another visual medium to propagate the excellence of the Venetian Republic.⁵¹³ The painting renders the scene with Muslim Persians' offering precious gifts to the *Serenissima*. The Doge's stare from his majestic seat at the glittering gold-embroidered silk brocade in the foreground promotes the idea that Caliari's painting was to stress the Republic's prosperity in global diplomacy and commerce. While a Venetian official is reading the Shah's letter to the Doge and an interpreter is whispering to the Persian ambassador, the Doge directs his gaze towards the luxurious textiles from the far land of silk-producing centers and monopoly of global silk trade, offered in honor of his State.

On the Safavid side, in addition to the silk carpet that the Shah sent specifically as a dedication to the Treasury and the *Madonna del Latte* velvet intended for the Church of San Marco, the Shah sent an exquisite gold-embroidered mantle (*un manto tessuto d'oro*), as relayed by the Persian envoy. The Shah had it tailored especially for the Doge in one piece with no seams, as a memento of himself. This conveys that the Shah had meant to recognize every member within the ecclesiastical and political body of the

⁵¹² Rota, "Safavid Envoys in Venice," 232; Wolfgang Wolters, *Der Bilderschmuck des Dogenpalastes: Untersuchungen zur Selbstdarstellung der Republik Venedig im 16. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1983), 228–29.

⁵¹³ Among other paintings of the *Sala delle Quattro Porte* at the time of Caliari's painting were: Vicellio Tiziano's (1490-1576) painting of *Doge Antonio Grimani (1436-1523) Kneeling Before Faith* and Jacopo Tintoretto (1517-1594) decorative scheme from 1578 onwards. Cfr. Fantelli, Pier Luigi. "La sala delle Quattro Porte." *Quaderni della Soprintendenza ai Beni Artistici e Storici di Venezia / Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali.*, 1979, 81–82; "Il 'Paradiso' del Tintoretto torna a Palazzo Ducale a Venezia." *Amici dei musei / Federazione Italiana delle Associazioni degli Amici dei Musei.*, 1985.

Republic and intended to reconcile with them through his individual gifts. The Persian added that the Shah had a similar mantle made for his great ally, the Emperor of Mughal Akbar I (r. 1556-1605).⁵¹⁴ Clearly, Shah Abbas signaled his alliance with the other Muslim Empire of the period, the Mughals (1526-1857), to the head of the *Serenissima* to reinforce his diplomatic and commercial pact with Venice and the privileges that this pact would bring to the Republic, including a safe trade route to the flourishing market of India.

In his letter, the Shah asked the Doge for his assistance to the Persian agents in purchasing the required artillery and fine combat equipment (*Yerāgh*). [Fig 6, Ch.4, Sec.1] In September 1603, Fathi Beg and his retainers returned to his master with a ducal letter expressing kinship between the two states and gifts worth 3,360 ducats.⁵¹⁵ In addition to the Venetian royal presents, Fathi Beg returned with the weaponry that was requested by the Shah.⁵¹⁶ This indicates that the Republic at least allowed, if not provided, the Persians' acquisition of the needed military equipment for their armed battles against the Ottomans, another of which was about to be launched (1603-1612). In

⁵¹⁴ «Questo, disse il persiano, il mio re ha fatto fabbricare apposta per la Serenità Vostra, ed è tutto di un pezzo senza cucitura, e lo manda a Lei in particolare, acciocchè si contenti per amor suo ed in memoria di S. M. portarlo Ella stessa in dosso. Ne ha fatto fare un altro simile a questo, e lo ha mandato a presentare al re di Mogol suo grande amico.» see Berchet, *La Repubblica di Venezia e la Persia*, 1865, 46.

⁵¹⁵ Guglielmo Berchet, *La repubblica di Venezia e la Persia* (Tehran: Imperial Organization for Social Services, 1976). DOCUMENTO XXXV

⁵¹⁶ In addition to all the noted items, Fathi Beg returned to Persia with eight oil paintings with religious and secular subject matters, including a the Nativity, naked female portraits, and a portrait of the Queen of Cyprus. The Queen was Caterina Cornaro (r.1473-1489), daughter of Emperor John IV of Trebizond and Despina Khatun's sister, who got married to the Venetian aristocrat, Nicolò Crispo. She was second cousin thrice removed of Shāh Abbās. For complete list of gifts see Marianna Shreve Simpson, "The Morgan Bible and the Giving of Religious Gifts between Iran and Europe/Europe and Iran during the Reign of Shah 'Abbas I," in *Between the Picture and the Word: Manuscript Studies from the Index of Christian Art*, ed. Colum Hourihane and John Plummer, Index of Christian Art Occasional Papers 8 ([Princeton, N.J.] : University Park, PA: Index of Christian Art, Dept. of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University ; Distributed by Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 147. Rota, "Safavid Envoys in Venice," 233, no. 57.

other words, the Venetians supported the Persian forces in their anti-Ottoman clashes, though indirectly.

The Venetian gifts included a bowl with gilded silver figural engravings, silver bowls and jugs, a silver flask with studded glass, a full suit of armor (scale armor), and four harquebuses decorated with pearls and gold.⁵¹⁷ The nature of the ducal gifts to Persia, with all the gold and silver supplies and decorated weapons, affirm two notions. First, the Shah's trade in Persian silk facilitated the commercial exchange with Europeans. Among all those items he ordered his agents to purchase were fine suits of armor and battle equipment, which illuminates the privileges the Shah gained through his international commerce. Second, through his silk trade with Europe, the Shah acquired silver and gold, substances scarce in Persia, to strike coins to develop his trade globally, specifically with India.⁵¹⁸ In fact, the monetary value of those ducal gifts (3,360 ducats) to Fathi Beg compared to that of Asad Beg's mission (200 ducats) already indicates that the Shah had immensely developed trade with the Republic.⁵¹⁹ Reciprocally, *Serenissima* recognized the value of the Shah's embassy to Venice, as well as this cross-religious diplomacy through his royal gifts.

⁵¹⁷ “un bacile con ramino d'argento dorato a figure, ed uno simile di argento puro, un catino d'argento con oro e brocca simile, due fiaschi d'argento intagliati col vetro, un'armatura completa, due zacchi forniti l'uno verde in oro, l'altro rosso, e quattro archibugi lavorati in radice con perle e oro” see Berchet, *La Repubblica di Venezia e la Persia*, 1865, 47.

⁵¹⁸ Sheila R. Canby, *Shah 'Abbas: The Remaking of Iran* (London: British Museum Press, 2009), 24, 72.

⁵¹⁹ For the development of Safavid trade with Europe, Cfr. Matthee, *The Politics of Trade in Safavid Iran*; Matthee, “Between Venice and Surat: The Trade in Gold in Late Safavid Iran”; Rudolph P. Matthee, “Anti-Ottoman Politics and Transit Rights : The Seventeenth-Century Trade in Silk between Safavid Iran and Muscovy,” *Cahiers Du Monde Russe* 35, no. 4 (1994): 739–61; Mohammad Ali Ranjbar and Reza Sehhat Manesh, “New Routes to Iran's International Trade in the Safavid Era,” *Ancient Asia* 7 (December 20, 2016): 8, <https://doi.org/10.5334/aa.124>.

However, Caliari's painting does not convey the mutual recognition in this historical event at first glance. Instead, the painting offers its audience a scene in which the Shah's gifts deliberately suggest a form of tribute (*pīškāš*).⁵²⁰ This, I argue, manipulated for its Venetian audience how Shah Abbas formulated this embassy to Venice, or at least the message he wished his precious gifts to transmit. Caliari's painting of Fathi Beg's reception, essentially, served to celebrate the Venetian Republic, towards whose majesty Muslims were subservient. Yet, there is a deeper level of intricacy in this painting's matrix of connotations, to which I now turn my attention. In the foreground of the painting, before the Doge's seat, there are two dogs of two different breeds, one in the hand of a Venetian and the other in the custody of a Persian *paggio* (young servant). Camillo Tonini interpreted these two dogs in which stand in a "graceful manner" as perhaps a reference to faithfulness.⁵²¹ However, it is not clear if this configuration of loyalty, as argued by Tonini, was a mutual commitment between the two crowns or it was meant to represent the Muslim Persians' fidelity to the Republic. In the following paragraphs, I investigate the nuance that these compositional elements (dogs) bring to the overall message of Caliari's painting in the *Palazzo Ducale*. With the help of another set of diplomatic gifts, a letter from Shah Abbas to the King of Spain, and an earlier papal letter, I propose that these two dogs are a visual reference to the Venetian-Persian alliance against the Ottoman Turks.

⁵²⁰ Pedani Fabris, *In nome del Gran Signore*, 69; Berchet, *La Repubblica di Venezia e la Persia*, 1865, 47; For an opposing argument see Wolfgang Wolters, *Der Bilderschmuck des Dogenpalastes : Untersuchungen zur Selbstdarstellung der Republik Venedig im 16. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1983), 228.

⁵²¹ "...forse la fedeltà" see Tonini, "I doni degli ambasciatori Persiani alla Serenissima nella tela di Gabriele Caliari," 29.

Following the Peace of Zsitvatorok between the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II Hapsburg (r. 1576-1612) and Sultan Ahmed I (r.1603-1617) in November 1606, that ended the fifteen years of war which began in 1593, the Ottomans' attention turned to rebellions in Asia, including that in Persia. In 1607, Shah Abbas dispatched a diplomatic mission to Philip III of Spain (r.1598-1621), who had all lands under Portuguese jurisdiction (including Goa [India]) and parts of southern and northern Italy under his sway. In his letter, the Shah pleaded for the Spanish king to send his mighty fleet to the Persian Gulf to aid the Persians witharquebuses and artillery in their fight against the Turkish invasions.⁵²² To entice the King's military assistance, the Shah declared that his aim was to recover the seat of "Ismael" [Esmā'īl II Safavid (r.1576-15770)], his ancestor, in the grand cities of Baghdad and Cairo, and emphasized that he had faith that all Christian residents of his kingdom must enjoy equal rights and liberty as did his Muslim subjects.⁵²³ Shah Abbas assured Philip III that with his assistance the Turkish throne would collapse and Philip would become the Emperor of Istanbul (former Constantinople), and he (Shah Abbas) would easily become the king of Egypt and Syria (Cairo and Baghdad). This final statement conveys that the Shah offered a mutual gain: the more territories under his reign would also offer to the Roman Church an extended Asiatic realm to foster Catholicism, and Constantinople would be restored to the Christians. Shah Abbas promised the Spanish King that once they overcame this tyrannical mutual enemy, they both would govern the world in peace through their

⁵²² Firenze, ASV. *Carte Stroziane* serie 1, no. 15 (Copia di una lettera che scrive il Re di Persia al Re di Spagna tradotto di lingua armenia in spagnola e poi in italiana).

⁵²³ Sydney Carlyle Cockerell and John Plummer, eds., *Old Testament Miniatures: A Medieval Picture Book with 283 Paintings from the Creation to the Story of David*, New ed. (London: Phaidon, 1969), 13–14.

alliance. Towards the very end of the letter, the Shah begged the King's great mightiness to stand against this "dog" (*questo cane*), "who would have grown more if he could."⁵²⁴

With the metaphor "Dog," the Shah referred to no one other than the Ottoman Sultan. To reinforce his anti-Ottoman pact, Shah Abbas accompanied his letter to Philip III with a meaningful set of gifts among which were the images of Ismael and Tahmasp [Shah Tahmasp I (r. 1524-1576)], together with his own portrait, cast in gold and embellished with precious stones and pearls, and four live dogs of different colors.⁵²⁵ [Fig 7, Ch.4, Sec.1] In fact, the Shah's curious gifts were the embodiment of his proposal. The dogs that he once used to refer to the Ottomans in his letter metaphorically were complemented by his gift of actual dogs. Pope Sixtus IV's 1471 encyclical letter to his nuncios, refers to the *de latere* (anti-Turkish legation) established in December of the same year. To urge Christendom to unite against the common foe, Sixtus IV wrote the letter with grief, stating "the most truculent race of the Turks, followers of the impious dog Mohammed [Mehmed II], had risen rabidly against the Christian faith."⁵²⁶ In this context, in which the Ottomans were referred to as "dogs," at least twice verbally, and once with a gift of four live dogs, having two dogs included in the Venetian painting in a political setting goes beyond decoration.

In Caliari's painting, both dogs are securely under control. The one in the lower-left corner of the composition faces outward and stands meekly with its leash grabbed by the

⁵²⁴ "...Mostra signore la tua gran possanza contro a questo cane che ce magneria il core se potesse." ASF. *Carte Stroziane* serie 1, no. 15. My sincere thanks to Dr. Maurizio Arfaio from the Medici Archive Project, who generously helped me with translation and transcription of the letters.

⁵²⁵ The 1607 list of Shāh Abbās's gifts to Philip III is of significant importance in the course of his diplomatic gift giving. I will address those gift-objects in an upcoming article.

⁵²⁶ Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant (1204-1571)*. Vol. 2, 315. The letter is in Rome, *Acta Consistorialia*, in *Arch. Segr. Vaticano, Arm. XXXI*, tom. 52, fol. 77r.

Persian *Paggio*. The other one, with a golden leash-chain, has turned his head towards the Venetian who is holding him back, right next to the scene with the glimmering gift of silk that has caught the attention of the Venetians in the painting and its viewers. In the context of the “behind-the-scene” military assistance of the Republic to the Safavid Persians in their upcoming battles against the Ottomans, I propose, these two dogs represent the Ottoman menace that mutually threatened both the crown of Persia and the stability of the *Serenissima*. As already stated, the Republic did not intend to actively involve itself in the anti-Ottoman campaigns of the period; however, the alliance with the Ottoman Empire’s neighboring Persians could act as a constant warning to the Porte and its relentless territorial and political expansions.

In conclusion, Caliari’s painting offers two levels of documentation about a historical event. On the first level, the painting acts as a visual document which is partial to a Veneto-centric perspective. On the second level, it complicates the textual evidence concerning the reception of the Persian ambassadors and Safavid-Venetian relations. It furthermore adds dimensions to that alliance indicating that under the cover of a commercial partnership, the two states were still pursuing their alliance. Caliari’s painting testified to the hidden gleams of hope for an anti-Ottoman alliance between Safavid Persia and the Republic of Venice. Nevertheless, a set of diplomatic gifts presented by another Safavid mission about nineteen years later than Fathi Beg’s mission, in 1622, proves that all those hopes had withered and were replaced by commercial ambitions.⁵²⁷

⁵²⁷ The Persian orators were received by the *Collegio* on February 1, 1621 Venetian calendar, which corresponds to February 1622 (Venetian New Year was March 1).

The Safavid Gifts of textile: the 1622 Mission to Venice

Four carpets in the name of Shāh Abbās, twenty-five *giurini* (a Venetian term for a type of fabric used to line other clothes), and twenty-five Indian *lizari* (fabric dyed with *Lizari*-plants from Rubiaceae family used for extracting dyes, most probably red) are on the list of gifts that Shah Abbas sent with a letter to the Doge, received in Venice on February 1, 1622.⁵²⁸ In his letter, the Shah expressed his gratitude about his union with the Christian powers and particularly the Republic of Venice, “his Kingdome’s old ally.” He named his two agents, Shahsavār (Sassuar or Xwāje Šāhsavār in Venetian chronicles) and Hāji Avaz-e Tabrizi (agi Aivas da Tauris), and articulated that he had sent them to assure the Republic that the doors of commerce were open in his realm and to confirm the good friendship and renew the practice of trade between the two states.⁵²⁹ At the end of the letter, the Shah asked the “Lord of Venice” for his help and the protection of those Persian agents to execute the Shah’s will and return immediately. He concluded his letter by expressing a reciprocal favor and guaranteed the Doge he would promptly fulfill his will in any service in the Shah’s state, and begged the Venetian lord to simply ask for what he needed.⁵³⁰

The senior ducal adviser (*Consigliere ducale*) Benedetto Tagliapietra received the Shah’s letter and gifts on behalf of the absent Doge Antonio Priuli (r.1618–1623), and assured the Persian orator that his request would be honored.⁵³¹ A document, now in Archivio

⁵²⁸ Guglielmo Berchet, *La Repubblica di Venezia e la Persia* (Tehran: Imperial Organization for Social Services, 1976), 80. For the two specialized terms of *Giurini* and *Lizari*, my sincere thanks to Dr. Marco Musillo from the Kunsthistorischen Institute in Florence who helped me with terminology and definition.

⁵²⁹ Venezia, AVG (Archivio veneto generale). *Secreta XLIV*, pag. 31.

⁵³⁰ Berchet, *La Repubblica di Venezia e la Persia*, 1976, 214–15. Document XLIV

⁵³¹ Giorgio Rota argued that Xwāje Šāhsavār seems to have gone to the *Collegio* without a previous announcement, which might explain his reception by the senior adviser of the dog, rather than the latter

Veneto Generale, reveals what the Shah's proxy had recommended.⁵³² According to this document, the fifty drapes gifted by Shahsavār were delivered to the *Procuratori de Supra* to be used in public ceremonies of the Church of San Marco. One can infer from this order that the Shah wanted his textile to be incorporated into the assets of the most venerated religious institution of the Republic of Venice. This not only projected the Shah's goodwill towards the Catholic faith and rituals, but also facilitated his trade with the *Serenissima* by supplying the Republic's ceremonial attire and liturgical vestments with Persia's most luxurious export, silk. Yet, neither the Shah's letter nor his gifts stimulated a diplomatic alliance for an armed battle.

There is no trace of the former anti-Ottoman military alliance between the two states in the final years of Shāh Abbās's reign (d 1629). About a decade prior to Shahsavār- Hāji Avaz-e Tabrizi's 1622 mission, in March 1613, Shah Abbas had dispatched Khāje Shahsavār together with Khāje 'Alā' ad-Dīn to Venice to purchase a number of commodities, including body armor (*armature*).⁵³³ [Fig 8, Ch.4, Sec.1] On the other hand, in 1622, Khāje Shahsavār returned to Venice, this time exclusively for trade. This shift demonstrates how the Shah's hopes for crushing the Ottoman throne and forging a military alliance with Europe gradually shattered and his diplomatic alliance metamorphosed into a commercial partnership. This dramatic turn in the Shah's foreign policies was also occasioned by drastic changes of trade power in the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman, which contributed significantly to the development of global trade.

himself. Rota, "Safavid Envoys in Venice," 237, no. 65. Also Berchet, *La Repubblica di Venezia e la Persia* (Tehran: Imperial Organization for Social Services, 1976), 212.

⁵³² Venezia, Archivio veneto generale. Deliberazione del Senato, 4 febbraio 1621.

⁵³³ ASV, *Fasc. Persia*, Doc. 18 and Doc. 19 (copia).

By April 1622, the Portuguese were totally expelled from Hormuz by an Anglo-Safavid alliance, and *Bandar 'Abbās* (a port from the Persian Gulf to the mainland, formerly known as *Gombarū* or *Cambarão*) was established to replace the Portuguese Hormuz.⁵³⁴ Shah Abbas brought the commercial center in the Persian Gulf to the mainland and named the harbor after himself, hence the name *Bandar 'Abbās*. Shah Abbas granted his British allies notable revenues and vessels in the new port for their shipping to tie their European market to the British East India Company (1600-1874) in Asia in rivalry with the Dutch East India Company (1602-1799).⁵³⁵ This conquest not only brought the Persian Gulf directly under the Shah's central government, but also provided him a new outlet for the local products of Persian silk to a vast network of European partners, through a sea route crosscutting the Ottoman territories.⁵³⁶ According to the Roman traveler Pietro della Valle (1586-1652), who spent almost four years, from 1617 to 1621, at the court of Shāh Abbās, *Bandar 'Abbās* was an "emporium" with traders from all nations, especially Jews and Indians.⁵³⁷

As Shah Abbas lost hope in his European allies, especially the papacy and the Spanish, to launch an international cross-religious crusade against the Ottomans, he turned his

⁵³⁴ Savory, *Iran under the Safavids*, 114–15; Michel Mazzaoui, "From Tabriz to Qazvin to Isfahan: Three Phases of Safavid History," in *Zeitschrift der deutschen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft*, supp.III, I.XIX (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1977), 514-522.

⁵³⁵ X. De Planhol, "BANDAR-E 'ABBAS(I) i. The City," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, Vol. III. No.7, pp. 685-687. For more information on the British East Indian Company, see Niels Steensgaard, *The Asian Trade Revolution The East India Companies and the Decline of the Caravan Trade*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017); Patrick J. N. Tuck, ed., *The East India Company, 1600-1858* ([London ; New York: Routledge, 1998]; William Foster, Patrick J. N. Tuck, and William Foster, *England's Quest of Eastern Trade*, Repr; [Faks. der Ausg.] London, Black, 1933 / [with new introd. by Patrick Tuck], *The East India Company 1600-1858* / ed. by Patrick Tuck; Vol. 1 (London: Routledge, 2000).

⁵³⁶ Steinmann, "Shah 'Abbas and the Royal Silk Trade 1599-1629," 73–74.

⁵³⁷ G. Gancia, *Viaggi di Pietro della Valle*, il Pellegrino, 2 vols., Brighton, England, 1843; Luigi Bianconi, ed., *Viaggio in Levante di Pietro della Valle*, Florence, 1942; Franco Gaeta and Laurence Lockhart, *Viaggi di Pietro della Valle. Lettere dalla Persia I*, Rome, 1972; A. M. Piemontese, "Pietro della Valle," *Bibliografia italiana dell'Iran (1462-1982) I*, Naples, 1982, pp. 153-60.

attention primarily to the economic aspect of his overland relations and to the development of commercial exchanges. The shift in the stature of Persia from a political to commercial ally, I assert, contributed to the development of global commerce in the early modern world. The revival of the Silk Road and Spice Road that connected Europe to its East Asian trading partners, specifically the two rivals of British and Dutch East India companies, with Safavid crossroads in the middle, promoted Persia to the status of a protagonist of commercial globalization. Those economic ties, I conclude, were the outgrowth of the earlier political alliances that were founded on previous forms of gift-exchange.

Section 2: Seicento Florence

On March 27, 1601, the Grand Duke of Tuscany Ferdinando I de' Medici (r. 1587-1609) honored the members of a diplomatic mission from Persia with fine golden necklaces supporting medallions of his own portrait set in precious stones.⁵³⁸ The recipients of the Grand Duke's gifts were the Englishman Anthony Shirley (Mīrzā Antonio in some Farsi sources), and the *qezelbāš* (Shi'a Safavid militant forces) commander-in-chief Husayn 'Ali Beg Bāyāt. The two agents were the leading figures of this mission, which left Shah Abbas's capital, Isfahan (*Esfahān*), on July 9, 1599, to deliver the Shah's letters and gifts to a number of European princes and entice them to form a military alliance with Persia against the Ottomans.⁵³⁹ This is the mission that was prohibited by the Venetian Republic from entering the city, because of political excuses explained in the previous section. The Shirley-Bāyāt expedition in Florence has received little attention in Persian chronicles and sources, but Italian treasury records and court chronicles have historically pinpointed the Grand Duke's precious gifts of the golden necklaces to the Persian ambassadors.⁵⁴⁰ In this section, through a number of Persian diplomatic overtures at the court of Medici, I shed light on the pivotal role that the Medici Grand Dukes of Tuscany played in the shift

⁵³⁸ Firenze, ASF, Settimani, *Diario Fiorentino*, Vol. 1, 1598-1608, manoscritti 131. Fol. 237 and Vol. VI ms.237.

⁵³⁹ Falsafī, *Siyāsat-i hāriḡī-i Īrān dar daurān-i Šafawiya*, 126–27.

⁵⁴⁰ ASF, *Storia d'etichetta, Guardaroba IV*, fol. 9v-10r. ASF, *Storia d'etichetta, Guardaroba I*, fol.215. secondary sources on this matter: Lucien-Louis Bellan, *Chah 'Abbas I, sa vie son histoire*, *Grandes figures de l'Orient* 3 (Paris, 1932); Ludwig von Pastor and Pio Cenci, *Storia dei papi dalla fine del Medio Evo. IX, Storia dei papi nel periodo della Riforma e della Restaurazione cattolica. Gregorio XIII (1572–1585)*, (Roma: Desclée & Cie, 1955), 268; Ludwig von Pastor and Pio Cenci, *Storia dei papi dalla fine del Medio Evo: Storia dei papi nel periodo della Riforma e Restaurazione cattolica. Clemente VIII, 1592-1605*, (Roma: Desclée & Cie, 1942), 221; Ludwig von Pastor and Pio Cenci, *Storia dei Papi nel periodo della restaurazione cattolica e della Guerra dei Trent'anni: Leone XI e Paolo V (1605-1621)* (Roma: Desclée & Cie, 1962), 264; Ettore Rossi, "Relazioni tra la Persia e l'Ordine di San Giovanni a Rodi e a Malta," *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 13, no. 4 (1933): 351–61; Franz Babinger, *Sherleiana* (Berlin: Berlin Reichsdr. [Leipzig] [Harrassowitz], 1932), 25–26.

of trading power in Hormuz and the southern coasts of Persia, a role that was in alignment with the Florentines' attempts in creating a market outside of the Mediterranean.⁵⁴¹

My goal in elaborating on this initial formal diplomatic mission from Persia in Europe is not to go over every detail of this historical event. Instead, I intend to contextualize the various agents, including the gifts and individuals, which facilitated the formation and development of this interplay. In the next few paragraphs, first, I investigate the underlying motive for the Grand Duke's recognition of the Shah's ambassador with his gifts. In this mission, the Shah accommodated his letter-proposals with thirty-two chests of gifts for those Christian princes. Later in this section, I will focus on the material culture of those gifts and the specific statements that the material culture of the gifts made to orchestrate the Shah's politico-commercial ambitions. I start now by posing the dilemma of the discrepancy between the two leading figures of the mission. I assess how the monetary value of the Grand Duke's gifts distinguished one of the figures over the other and recognized him as the main ambassador of the Shah. Following a substantial background about the formation of this mission and the status of each participant, I further contextualize the gifts that the Shah selected for his European allies in order to decode the manifold messages of those Persian diplomatic missions in Florence and in Europe.

⁵⁴¹ Kenneth R. Andrews, "Sir Robert Cecil and Mediterranean Plunder," *The English Historical Review* 87, no. 344 (July 1972): 520–24; Gustavo Uzielli, *Cenni storici: sulle imprese scientifiche marittime e coloniali de Ferdinando I, granduca di Toscana (1587-1609)* (Firenze: Firenze G. Spinelli & C., 1901).

The Embassy of Anthony Shirley and Husayn `Ali Beg Bāyāt

Uruch Beg, one of the Persian *Qūrchīs* (cavalrymen) in the Shirley-Bāyāt embassy and the secretary of the mission, recorded in his travel account: “the Grand Duke now presented our ambassador with a fine gold chain to go around his neck sixteen times....and he gave another of like value to Sir Anthony Shirley.”⁵⁴² As Uruch Beg stated, Husayn `Ali Beg Bāyāt was referred to as “our ambassador,” while Anthony Shirley had no official courtly title. Nevertheless, the Italian archival documents reveal that the Duke’s gift to the Englishman was worth 700 ducats and the one to Husayn `Ali Beg 300. This notable difference in the gifts’ monetary value initially suggests that the Medici Grand Duke recognized Anthony Shirley as the Shah’s main ambassador in this mission. According to Anthony Shirley’s travel account, prior to the embassy’s departure in July 1599, Shah Abbas handed his “golden seal” to him (Anthony) and called him “brother, what you sign, even if it would be worth my throne, I consent.”⁵⁴³ This discrepancy between what was expected by the Persians on one side and the “non-Persians” on the other side, offended Husayn `Ali Beg to the extent that by the time the group arrived in Rome, in April 1601, a quarrel took place between the two and the Persian took his complaint to the Pope about Anthony Shirley’s “rebellious” activities.⁵⁴⁴

⁵⁴² Strange, *Don Juan of Persia A Shi`ah Catholic 1560-1604.*, 283.

⁵⁴³ E. Denison Ross, *Sir Anthony Sherley and His Persian Adventure*. (Routledge, 2015), 133. This quote is also translated by the Iranian historian Nasrollāh Falsafi (d.1982) to Farsi, “برادر، هر چه را که تو مهر کنی، “گرچه به قدر سلطنت من ارزش داشته باشد، قبول دارم” see Falsafi, *Siyāsāt-i ḥāriḡ-i Īrān dar daurān-i Šafawiya*, 20.

⁵⁴⁴ Anthony Sherley recorded the gifts that the Shah himself carefully selected: Forty well furnished horses, four of which had saddles with plates of gold and precious stones, and two with silver saddles, and others with silver-embroidered velvet, fifteen (or twelve) camels, six mules to carry the gifts, three fairly embellished tents (pavilions), eighteen (or twenty-four) carpets with gold, silk, and crewel threads, silver worth 16000 ducats, and pistols, which the messenger of the Shah emphasized to Sherley that those were only for self defense, not gifts. See Ross, *Sir Anthony Sherley and His Persian Adventure.*, 62.

In his own defense, Anthony Shirley claimed that he was the Shah's main ambassador with a double-missioned embassy, one of political nature and the other of religious character, with his credential letters. Anthony Shirley emphatically challenged Husayn 'Ali Beg's claim by claiming that Shah Abbas would never entrust a "Muslim" to deal with the interests of Catholicism.⁵⁴⁵ I will elaborate on the Shirley-Bāyāt squabble in Rome in the next section of this chapter. For our present purposes, however, one factor of this complaint sheds light on the mission's enigmatic reception at the Medici court, which is the focus of the first part of this section. One of Husayn 'Ali Beg's issues with Shirley's activities was that the latter delivered a letter in the Persian language to Ferdinando I de' Medici in Pisa, on behalf of Shah Abbas, while, according to Husayn 'Ali Beg, the Shah gave them eight letters and the Grand Duke of Tuscany was not one of the addressees; hence the Persian accused Shirley of forgery and infidelity to Shāh Abbās. On this matter, Uruch Beg is totally silent and the modern Iranian sources have hardly elaborated on the overtures of this mission.⁵⁴⁶ In the following paragraphs, I will underscore the significance of this embassy and the nuances that the Grand Duke's recognition of Anthony Shirley as the main ambassador brought to this specific mission.

In December 1598, Anthony Shirley, accompanied by his younger brother Robert Shirley, and a large group of his entourage arrived in Qazvin (Qazvīn), the former capital city of the Safavid Persia. On his original itinerary, Anthony and his twenty-four

⁵⁴⁵ Carlos Alonso, *Embajadores de Persia en las cortes de Praga, Roma y Valladolid (1600-1601)* (Roma: Instituto español de historia eclesiastica, 1989), 71–83.

⁵⁴⁶ Muḥammad Ḥasan Kāwūsī 'Irāqī, ed., *Asnād-i rawābiṭ-i daulat-i Ṣafawī bā ḥukūmathā-i Ītālīyā*, Čāp 1 (Tihṛān: Markaz-i Asnād wa Tārīḫ-i Dīplumāsī, 2000), 70–71; Amīr Ḥusayn Barāzish, *Ravābiṭ-i siyāsī - dīplumātīk-i Īrān va jahān dar 'ahd-i Ṣafavīyah: Political & diplomatic relations: Iran & world in Safavid dynasty*, Čāp-i avval (Tihṛān: Amīr Kabīr, 2013), 642; Falsafī, *Siyāsāt-i ḥārīḡī-i Īrān dar daurān-i Ṣafawīya*, 23.

associates were sent by the Earl of Essex to aid the Duke of Ferrara and Modena Don Cesare d'Este (r.1597-1628), in his struggle against Pope Clement VIII, who did not recognize the former's principality due to his illegitimate succession. However, before the English supporters arrived on the scene, they learned that Cesare d'Este had succumbed to the Papal decree; consequently, Anthony redirected his trajectory to Venice. In the *Serenissima*, Anthony met with a Persian merchant, who was doing business on behalf of the Shah of Persia and even more interestingly, Shirley came across Michelagnolo Corai (Michel Angelo Giovanni Corrai, 1557-1615?), a Syrian-born imperial knight then acting as a translator, interpreter, and a political negotiator, who also had come to Venice from the Court of Persia.⁵⁴⁷ Due to his several years of living in Aleppo during the time of the Persian occupation in the Safavid-Ottoman armed battles over Syria, and Persia, in the second half of the sixteenth century, Michelagnolo was acquainted with the Persian language and lands.⁵⁴⁸ Prior to that, Michelagnolo had been involved in Duke Vincenzo I Gonzaga (r. 1587-1612) of Mantua's campaign against the Ottomans in Hapsburgs territories; hence, Michelagnolo was a well-credited diplomat and polyglot experienced in interceding in the Italian Peninsula as well as the Middle East.⁵⁴⁹

The Shirley-Corai conversations during the ten weeks of the Englishmen's lodging in Venice, shifted Shirley's mind to the Safavid Court of Persia, which as Corai described,

⁵⁴⁷ Ross, *Sir Anthony Sherley and His Persian Adventure*, 107; Federico M Federici, "A Servant of Two Masters: The Translator Michel Angelo Corai as a Tuscan Diplomat (1599–1609)," in *Translators, Interpreters, and Cultural Negotiators: Mediating And*. (Place of publication not identified: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

⁵⁴⁸ Federici, "A Servant of Two Masters: The Translator Michel Angelo Corai as a Tuscan Diplomat (1599–1609)," 88.

⁵⁴⁹ Federico M Federici and Dario Tessicini, *Translators, Interpreters and Cultural Negotiators: Mediating and Communicating Power from the Middle Ages to the Modern Era*, 2014, Michel Angelo Corai.

had a Shah liberal to strangers and an entertaining court culture.⁵⁵⁰ Apparently, the negotiations between the Englishman and Corai culminated in the latter's accompanying the party to Persia as Anthony's interpreter. Through Ottoman Aleppo, where Corai had friends among the Janissaries and a couple of English merchants, from whom Anthony borrowed a good amount of money, the group of Englishmen, Michelagnolo Corai, and a number of Persian retainers reached Qazvin in December 1598. In advance of the party's arrival in Qazvin, Shirley sent Corai forward to announce their coming and prepare the lodging.⁵⁵¹ At this time, Shah Abbas was about to return to his new capital in Isfahan (capital from March 1598), at the center of Persia, after his victorious battles in Khorasan (eastern Persia) against the Turkic *Uzbeks*.⁵⁵² The Shah's triumphal return following his power consolidation in the eastern frontiers of his reign coincided with Shirley's arrival at the Court of Persia with a proposal to persuade the Shah to undertake a military alliance with European powers on the Shah's western borders, against the old mutual enemy, the Ottomans.

Another notable coincidence at this time occurred when Shirleys arrived at the court of Shah Abbas. On their arrival, the Englishmen found the Shah in preparation for sending an embassy to the King of Spain with valuable gifts and letters.⁵⁵³ Anthony deliberately interfered and brought to the knowledge of the Shah that it would be best to extend that mission and send letters to a larger number of European princes who were willing to join him in his anti-Ottoman battles. According to Uruch Beg, eight courts in Europe were targeted, among which were the Roman Pontiff, the *Signoria* of Venice, the Holy Roman

⁵⁵⁰ Ross, *Sir Anthony Sherley and His Persian Adventure.*, 106–7.

⁵⁵¹ Ross, 7–9.

⁵⁵² Barāzish, *Ravābiṭ-i siyāsī - dīplumātīk-i Īrān va jahān dar 'ahd-i Ṣafavīyah*, 578–79.

⁵⁵³ Strange, *Don Juan of Persia A Shi'ah Catholic 1560-1604.*, 232.

Emperor, and the Queen of England.⁵⁵⁴ The Shah accompanied Anthony Shirley and his English retinue with commander Husayn `Ali Beg Bāyāt, four other Persian *Qurchīs*, a number of servants and translators, a *Mollā* (Muslim cleric), Francesco da Costa and Diego de Miranda, the two Portuguese nuncios in Persia dispatched by Pope Clement VIII, and thirty-two chests of gifts to the courts of Europe.⁵⁵⁵ On July 9, 1599, the embassy departed from Isfahan, passed through the northern province of Gilan (Gīlān), and through the Caspian Sea on the north, and embarked on a ship to Europe.⁵⁵⁶

According to one of Anthony Shirley's English attendants, George Manwaring (the Marshal), while in Venice, where Anthony met with the Persian merchant and Michelagnolo Corai, the senior Shirley sent his junior sibling, Robert Shirley (d.1628), to the Duke of Florence for "some business," who welcomed Robert at his court and presented the Englishman with a chain of gold worth of 1600 French crowns (800 florins?).⁵⁵⁷ In another record by Anthony Shirley in Spanish (*Pesso polytico de todo el Mundo por el Conde Don Anttonio Xerley*), Anthony asserted that Robert was an intermediary between Ahmed (IV) al-Mansour of Morocco (r.1578-1603) and Ferdinando I de' Medici, the Grand Duke of Tuscany.⁵⁵⁸ In around 1600, Ahmed al-Mansour had dispatched an embassy to Queen Elizabeth I of England (r.1558-1603), which culminated in a commercial and military alliance between the two crowns against the Kingdom of

⁵⁵⁴ Strange, *Don Juan of Persia A Shi 'ah Catholic 1560-1604*. Chapter IV.

⁵⁵⁵ Falsafi, *Siyāsāt-i ḥāriḡī-i Īrān dar daurān-i Ṣafawīya*, 20.

⁵⁵⁶ Falsafi, 20; Barāzish, *Ravābiṭ-i siyāsī - dīplumātīk-i Īrān va jahān dar 'ahd-i Ṣafavīyah*, 580; Strange, *Don Juan of Persia A Shi 'ah Catholic 1560-1604*, 231–35.

⁵⁵⁷ Ross, *Sir Anthony Sherley and His Persian Adventure*, 106.

⁵⁵⁸ Xerley, Conde A. *Pesso polytico de todo el Mundo por el Conde Don Anttonio Xerley [Shirley]*, Al Exmo Señor Conde Duque de Oliuares del Conssejo de su Mag su sumiller de Corps y su cauallerizo Mayor. Dated Granada, November 2, 1622. *Egerton MS. 1824*, ff. 124. Also see Ross, 106.

Spain, whose armada was about to invade the Queen's frontiers.⁵⁵⁹ This was only about a decade after the pro-Ottoman Queen Elizabeth I was excommunicated by Pope Pius V (r.1566-1572), in 1569, due to her faith in Protestantism.⁵⁶⁰ Yet, prior to the Anglo-Moroccan alliance, the Shirleys had led mediating attempts in Tuscany, which involved two significant circumstances: first, the Shirleys had close political contacts with the Grand Duke of Tuscany even before their adventure in Persia and these presumably fertilized the commercial alliance that was forged between the Medici Grand Duke and the king of Fez and Morocco in 1604.⁵⁶¹ Second, Robert's business at the Medici court was also in alignment with the Florentines' plan for creating markets outside of the Levant and the Mediterranean.⁵⁶²

⁵⁵⁹ Sovereign of England and Wales (Elizabeth I), "A Speech Made by Queen Elizabeth, (of Famous Memory) in Parliament: Anno 1593, and in the 35th Year of Her Reign : Concerning the Spanish Invasion" (D. Mallet, 1688); Khalid Ben-Srhir and Malcolm Williams, *Britain and Morocco during the Embassy of John Drummond Hay: 1845 - 1886*, History and Society in the Islamic World (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005), 10–14.

⁵⁶⁰ H. Cumyn, "The POPE'S Bull of Excommunication against Queen ELIZABETH.," *Sentimental Magazine, Or, General Assemblage of Science, Taste, and Entertainment*, May 1775, 223–24; For more readings on this subject see Jerry Brotton, *This Orient Isle - Elizabethan England and the Islamic World.*, 2017; Jerry Brotton, *The Sultan and the Queen: The Untold Story of Elizabeth and Islam*, 2017.

⁵⁶¹ David William Davies, *Elizabethans Errant : The Strange Fortunes of Sir Thomas Sherley and His Three Sons, as Well in the Dutch Wars as in Muscovy, Morocco, Persia, Spain, and the Indies* (Ithaca: N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1967), 193.

⁵⁶² For the commercial alliance between the Medici and the king of Fez (Morocco): ASF, Mediceo del Principato 4274, ins, 3, cc. 84r-90v. Also see Niccolò Capponi, "Sul ponte sventola bandiera rossocrociata: L'altra faccia della marina medicea nel Levante," in *The Grand Ducal Medici and the Levant: Material Culture, Diplomacy, and Imagery in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (London/Turnhout: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2016). Moreover, Anthony and Robert's brother, Sir Thomas, had also organized privateering expeditions in 1602 in the Mediterranean, to attack the Spanish merchandise. By October of the same year, Thomas Sherley returned to the Court of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, where he became a soldier and a courtier, for an armed offense against the Porte (Sultan Mehmed III). The Grand Duke equipped the Englishman with necessities. Sir Thomas fought under the flag of the Grand Duke (with Sir Thomas ships: *Saint George, Dragon, and Virgin*) against the Turkish possessions, until January 15, 1603, when he was captured by the Turks. His anti-Ottoman raids raised the English residents of Livorno and Levant merchants against him, as his activities would damage the Anglo-Levant trade. See Davies, *Elizabethans Errant : The Strange Fortunes of Sir Thomas Sherley and His Three Sons, as Well in the Dutch Wars as in Muscovy, Morocco, Persia, Spain, and the Indies*, 172–74.

Following the establishment of the chivalric Order of Santo Stefano by Ferdinando I's father, Cosimo I de' Medici (r. 1537-1574), in 1561, the Florentines gradually lost their security and market in the Ottoman Levant. The crusading Order's principal goal was to protect the Tuscan ports and lands from the Muslim invasions, yet this role extended over time to a grander moral ambition -- to safeguard Christendom. In addition to the anti-Muslim impetus of the Order, this Tuscan militant group was disrupting Ottoman mercantile activities in the Eastern Mediterranean. It played a significant role in damaging the Ottoman fleet at the Siege of Malta (1565) and the Battle of Lepanto (1571). These activities of the Order of Santo Stefano ultimately caused the political and commercial bridges between the Grand Duchy of Tuscany and the Sublime Porte to deteriorate.⁵⁶³ As the Florentines' interest in the Levant and the Eastern Mediterranean trade declined in the second half of the sixteenth century, the Grand Dukes' attention shifted towards the courts and markets outside of the Ottoman hegemony, of which *al-Maghrib* (Northwest Africa) and the sea trade of the Indian Ocean that crossed through southern coasts of Persia were two of the major alternatives.⁵⁶⁴

In this context and with these commercial ambitions that the Grand Duke of Tuscany was pursuing, when he received Robert Shirley in March 1598 to negotiate over a new market in Morocco. The Grand Duke gifted Robert a gold chain, whose value was announced in

⁵⁶³ Ozden Mercan, "Medici-Ottoman Diplomatic Relations (1574-78): What Went Wrong?," in *The Grand Ducal Medici and the Levant; Material Culture, Diplomacy, and Imagery in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (London/Turnhout: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2016), 20.

⁵⁶⁴ Between 1591 and 1593, Ferdinando I had already designated laws that licensed the Armenians and Persians to trade in the Livornine ports and prior to that, as a cardinal in Rome (1562-1587), Ferdinando had a number of expensive Persian carpets of silk and gold threads in his wardrobe. See Spallanzani, *Carpet Studies*, 83-95. For Ferdinando's 1591/3 Livornine decrees, Cfr. Stephanie Nadalo, "Populating a 'Nest of Pirates, Murtherers, Etc.': Tuscan Immigration Policy and Ragion di Stato in the Free Port of Livorno," in *Religious Diaspora in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Timothy G. Fehler et al. (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2015), Chapter 3.

French currency, an accent on Ferdinando's alignment with the Crown of France matrimonially through Christine de Lorraine (m.1589), the granddaughter of Catherine de' Medici (d.1589), Queen mother of France. It was with this historical background that the Grand Duke received Anthony Shirley and his retinue in March 1601, only two years after Robert's reception.⁵⁶⁵ From an alternative perspective, the Anglo-Moroccan anti-Catholic alliance and the Medici anti-Ottoman ambitions crossed at this point, where the Shirleys were one of the hinges, and Persia was attached along this convoluted matrix of heterogeneous expediencies.

It is not clear, after all, whether Husayn 'Ali Beg's claim regarding Shirley rebelling against the Shah's order was credible or Ferdinando I was in fact one of the Shah's original recipients of the letters and gifts.⁵⁶⁶ The latter hypothesis can be buttressed by following the two crowns' previous communications and diplomatic exchanges in regard to the Medici Oriental Press (1584) and Vecchietti's expedition in Persia and the succeeding report, already explained in the previous chapter.⁵⁶⁷ Between the two possible cases, considering all the aforementioned background that tied the Shirleys to the Florentines' marketing beyond the eastern Mediterranean, I rather focus on the substantiated fact that Anthony Shirley presented an invitation on behalf of the Shah of Persia to the Medici Grand Duke of Tuscany to invite him into a military alliance against the Porte. In reciprocity, the Grand Duke recognized Shirley as the main ambassador in a

⁵⁶⁵ Davies, *Elizabethans Errant: The Strange Fortunes of Sir Thomas Sherley and His Three Sons, as Well in the Dutch Wars as in Muscovy, Morocco, Persia, Spain, and the Indies*, 132.

⁵⁶⁶ Barāzish, *Ravābiṭ-i siyāsī - dīplumātīk-i Īrān va jahān dar 'ahd-i Ṣafaviyah* =, 529.

⁵⁶⁷ Vecchietti was a diplomat, papal envoy, and book agent for the Medici Oriental Press in Persia between 1584 and 1588. On his way back to Florence, he stopped in Spain to report to Philip II about his negotiations with the Shah of Persia. See Angelo Michele Piemontese, "La diplomazia di Gregorio XIII e la lettera del Re di Persia a Sisto V," *Miscellanea Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae* 14 (2007): 389; Mahnaz Yousefzadeh, "The Sea of Oman: Ferdinand I, G. B. Vecchietti, and the Armour of Shah 'Abbās I," *RSO*, 2018, 62–64.

courtly manner, hosted the embassy for ten days in Pisa, where the Grand Duke and Duchess were on a hunting expedition, showed them the treasuries of the Grand Duke, and later instructed a chamberlain to pay all their travel expenses as far as their next destination, Rome.⁵⁶⁸

According to Uruch Beg, prior to their departure, the embassy visited to the magnificent new city of “Leghorn” (Livorno), which was then being built with “more than five thousand slaves” and would “become the finest ports of all the Mediterranean Sea.”⁵⁶⁹ Inferred from Uruch Beg’s description of their visit to Livorno, the Grand Duke (and Duchess) accompanied the embassy and afterwards, presented the golden necklaces to the Shah’s proxies.⁵⁷⁰ The visit to Livorno, per se, alludes to the commercial backdrop of this mission that was nurtured by the Florentines’ ambitions in expanding their trading network and the Persians’ attempts to divert the trading routes to Europe from Ottoman crossroads to the ports in the Persian Gulf. This happened only a few months before the *qezelbāš* forces took over Bahrain (formerly under Portuguese Hormuz) and the pearl-fishing Sea of Oman (December 1601), seeking a route to sell Persian silk in Europe, without having to cross Ottoman jurisdictions. This marked the beginning of the fall of the Spanish-Portuguese trading empire in the Persian Gulf (1622) and the transformation of the southern coasts of Persia into a center of commercial competition among the Persians, the Portuguese, and the newcomers to the trade route in the Indian Ocean, the

⁵⁶⁸ Strange, *Don Juan of Persia A Shi’ah Catholic 1560-1604.*, 282–83; Davies, *Elizabethans Errant : The Strange Fortunes of Sir Thomas Sherley and His Three Sons, as Well in the Dutch Wars as in Muscovy, Morocco, Persia, Spain, and the Indies*, 114–40.

⁵⁶⁹ Strange, *Don Juan of Persia A Shi’ah Catholic 1560-1604.*, 283.

⁵⁷⁰ Strange, 283.

British and the Dutch.⁵⁷¹ Therefore, the visit to Livorno implies a reciprocal assessment of the trading capacities, agents, and itineraries between the two commercial centers, one in the Mediterranean and the other in the Persian Gulf, to further enhance the commercial-political relations between the two anti-Ottoman courts.

Thirty-two Boxes of Diplomatic Gifts

In this two-fold missionary activity in Europe, the Safavid Shah of Persia entrusted thirty-two chests of gifts as a diplomatic gesture to endorse his anti-Ottoman endeavors. In the travel account of Shirley's French steward in his European mission, Abel Pinçon, the Shah's gifts to each of the designated European princes were composed of "nine scimitars, nine wrought and gilded bows with quivers and arrows of the same workmanship, nine pieces of the material of which they make their turbans, which they call seroiscia* or, as some say, cessa, nine girdles of pure linen painted in the Indian fashion, nine more broad girdles made of the wool of the goat which secretes within itself the Bezoar stone."⁵⁷² Gift giving in Islamic court culture was not limited to an "obligatory" component of human relations; rather, it was an expression of political prowess, diplomatic aspirations, and conveyed formal alliances between the two crowns.⁵⁷³ In addition to the general implications of gifts among Muslim courts, the

⁵⁷¹ Mulla Jalal al-Din Monajjem, *Ālamārā-ye 'Abbāsī* (Safavid Avvisi) 210, 1576, Falsafi, *Siyāsāt-i ḥāriḡī-i Īrān dar daurān-i Ṣafawiya*, 82–93. For, Cfr. R. M. Savory, "Ālamārā-ye 'Abbāsī," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, vol.I, no. 8, p. 796.

⁵⁷² Abel Pinçon, *Relation d'un Voyage fait es annees 1598 et 1599 in Relations Veritables et Curieuses* (Paris 1651). For English translation see Ross, *Sir Anthony Sherley and His Persian Adventure*, 100.

*According to Ross, quoting Sir William Foster, seroiscia or *Serassa* was a "cloth exported from Gujarat or Masulipatam."

⁵⁷³ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, (Mansfield Centre, Conn. Martino Pub.2011), 8-10. Linda Komaroff, *The Gift Tradition in Islamic Art: Taqālīd al-Ihdā' Fī al-Funūn al-Islāmīyah* (Los Angeles, CA : New Haven: Los Angeles County Museum of Art ; Yale University Press, 2012), 15–17.

material culture of the presents also contributed significantly in transcending the inherent message of the benefactor to the recipient.

Shāh Abbās's gifts to the European princes came in two major guises: luxury brocades and royal armor. The sumptuous brocades, as in the case of those gold-embroidered textiles sent to Venice, connoted his blooming silk industry to inspire those princes to forge a commercial alliance, which would not only extend the Shah's market in Europe, but also damage the Ottoman dominance over trade in the Eastern Mediterranean. The decorative armor, on the other hand, evoked a military substrate integrated into the mission's objectives. Persia was desperate for European armaments. As also noted by Abel Pinçon, Shah Abbas could muster "as many as forty thousand horsemen armed with bows and arrows, scimitars, shields, and battle-axes." Yet, there were no artillery, corselets, or cuirasses in the Shah's reserves. Although Pinçon stressed that the Shah had recently acquired some harquebuses, among which, I assume, were those brought from Venice, his army was seriously deprived of weaponry and warfare skills.⁵⁷⁴ Therefore, the Shah had reached out to Europe to solicit for actual artillery, and for this, he had sent numerous decorative or ceremonial armaments to encourage the recipients for full support in his actual armed battles.

In regard to the military aspirations of the Shah's proposal to his European allies, embodied in the bejeweled armaments, the choice of a military figure, Husayn `Ali Beg Bāyāt, as the bearer or even the assistant to the conveyor of the presents (Anthony Shirley) in his European expedition is also suggestive of Shah Abbas's martial objectives. This also reinforces the Shah's warlike impetus in his earlier communication with the

⁵⁷⁴ Ross, *Sir Anthony Sherley and His Persian Adventure.*, 100.

Grand Duke of Tuscany, through Fazli Beg, in which, as argued in the previous chapter, the Safavid Shah sent an elaborately decorated shield with exuberant intarsia of mother of pearl on black and red lacquer. In Islamic court culture, the bearers of the gifts were also part of the message.⁵⁷⁵ Hence, the “Shirley- Bāyāt” embassy in Tuscany and in Europe, per se, embodied the Shah’s two-fold motivations in pursuing his cross-religious allegiance with Europe against a mutual enemy.

Further, in his account, Pinçon relayed the Shah’s original addressees for his gifts and letters by stating:

After the knight Shirley had stayed about three months in Spahan [Esfahān] the Sophi [Shāh Abbās] sent him back to Christendom, with one of his nobles, bearing his presents and letters addressed to the Pope, the Emperor [Rudolph II], the King of France, the King of Spain, the Queen of England, the King of Scotland, of Poland, the Signory of Venice, and the Earl of Essex...⁵⁷⁶

Pinçon’s statement, on the one hand, stressed on the role of the human and gift agents in forming this trans-imperial interplay. On the other hand, this record clarifies that, apparently, the number of letters that Pinçon named corresponds to that of Husayn `Ali Beg’s claim and yet, the Grand Duke of Tuscany was not among those designated recipients of the Shah’s proxies.⁵⁷⁷ This, hypothetically, insinuates that Anthony Shirley manipulated the mission and redirected his embassy to Tuscany, on its way to Rome. However, if Anthony’s quote of the Shah’s last words to him before their departure and his handing the golden seal to Sir Shirley are credible, then Anthony had the official right

⁵⁷⁵ Komaroff, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, *Gifts of the Sultan*, 20; Abū-‘Alī al-Ḥasan Ibn-‘Alī Nizām-al-Mulk and Hubert Darke, *The Book of Government or Rules for Kings: The Siyar al-Muluk or Siyasat-Nama of Nizam al-Mulk* (Richmond: Curzon [u.a.], 2002), 94–97.

⁵⁷⁶ Ross, *Sir Anthony Sherley and His Persian Adventure.*, 100.

⁵⁷⁷ Davies, *Elizabethans Errant : The Strange Fortunes of Sir Thomas Sherley and His Three Sons, as Well in the Dutch Wars as in Muscovy, Morocco, Persia, Spain, and the Indies*, 112–19.

to take an alternative route and head to the Medici court, with which the Shirley brothers were already connected in the Medici's trans-Mediterranean commercialism.

The Shirley- Bāyāt expedition in Europe may be interpreted as a total failure, particularly after the two agents' quarrel in Rome, when Shirley forsook the mission and never went back to Persia, and Husayn `Ali Beg proceeded to Spain with his Persian associates.⁵⁷⁸

Moreover, in the Rome of Pope Clement VIII, three Shi'a members of the ambassador's retinue converted to Roman Catholicism and remained in the "Holy City" (Rome).⁵⁷⁹

Meanwhile in Spain, two more of his entourage, including his nephew Ali Gholi Beg converted to Catholicism.⁵⁸⁰ Later, his secretary, Uruch Beg (d.1605), joined the converts and changed his name to "Don Juan," and resided for the rest of his life in Spain.⁵⁸¹

Finally, Husayn `Ali Beg and his notably small retinue returned on a Spanish ship from Lisbon to Hormuz, and never pursued the mission to the other European courts on their original itinerary. However, despite all the discord between the leading figures of the embassy, I consider this mission as the trigger of a series of intense diplomatic communications between Shah Abbas and the Grand Dukes of Tuscany that all emerged from mutual anti-Ottoman diplomacy and marketing.

⁵⁷⁸ Carlos Alonso, "Una Embajada de Clemente viii a Persia (1600–1609)," *Archivum Historiae Pontificiae* 34 (1996): 7; Boies Penrose, *The Sherleian Odyssey: Being a Record of the Travels and Adventures of Three Famous Brothers During the Reigns of Elizabeth, James I, and Charles I* (Barnicotts Limited The Wessex Press, 1938), 173.

⁵⁷⁹ Opher Mansour, "Picturing Global Conversion: Art and Diplomacy at the Court of Paul V (1605–1621)," *Journal of Early Modern History* 17, no. 5/6 (2013): 546; Angelo Michele Piemontese, "I due ambasciatori in Persia ricevuti da Papa Paolo V al Quirinale," in *Miscellanea Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae*, vol. 12, 2005, 362.

⁵⁸⁰ Ali Gholi Beg took the name "Don Philip" in respect of Philip III of Spain and the other figure, Bunyad Beg, converted as "Don Diego." See Falsafi, *Siyāsat-i ḥārīḡī-i Īrān dar daurān-i Ṣafawiya*, 26–27.

⁵⁸¹ Falsafi, 26.

The Book of “Mulla Rum”: Masnavi-e Ma'navi in the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale of Florence

On August 16, 1609, Cosimo II de' Medici, the new Grand Duke of Tuscany, handed an elaborately embellished book of Persian poetry to Giovanni Battista Vecchietti to store it for him. [Fig 1, Ch.4, Sec.2] The manuscript, now at *Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale* in Florence, is illuminated on the *sarlowh* (gilded and bejeweled frontispiece in Islamic art of the book tradition) and columned with lapis lazuli blue and vermilion lines on the inside. [Fig 2, Ch.4, Sec.2] On the cover, the manuscript is bound in red leather, richly illuminated with vegetal patterned golden leaves.⁵⁸² [Fig 3, Ch. 4, Sec.2] The folios (made of linen and hemp) are sectioned in four columnar parts, filled with verses in *Nasta 'līq* script in black ink.⁵⁸³ On the opening of the manuscript, is an inserted page attesting that the volume was given to Vecchietti on August 16, 1609.⁵⁸⁴ The date of this rendition corresponds with those on a number of documents at the State Archive of Florence that substantiate the reception of another ambassador from the court of Shah Abbas by the Grand Duke of Tuscany.

Prior to any further investigation of this illuminated manuscript of Persian mystical poetry, it is crucial to provide a thorough context of the circumstances in which the book arrived in the treasury of the Grand Duke of Tuscany. In the next paragraphs, I first engage with an instrumental circumstance in the political history of the Safavids that

⁵⁸² Angelo Michele Piemontese, *Catalogo dei manoscritti Persiani conservati nelle biblioteche d'Italia* (Roma: Ist. Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, Libr. dello Stato, 1989), 117–18.

⁵⁸³ Sardar, Marika. “The Arts of the Book in the Islamic World, 1600–1800.” In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000.

⁵⁸⁴ “N. 4. Questo é un poeta persiano chiamato Mulla Rum nella prima parte si contengono alcuni racconti di casi amorosi di alcuni mariti altra alcune historiette et alcuni insegnamenti morali dato in serbo a Gioamb. Vecchietti del Ser.mo G. Duca Cosimo alli 16 di Agosto 1609.” Inserto 6, ff. 2r. Biblioteca nazionale centrale (BNC). Fondo mediceo palatino Ms. *Cl.III.49* (II.II.2) Banco Rari 42.

facilitated the intercultural negotiations between the court of Persia and Europe.

Furthermore, I expound on the role of a number of influential agents who generated a matrix of connections between the two courts of Safavid Persia and Medici Tuscany.

Later, I shed light on the various approaches beyond political expediency that the Persians took to bond with their Tuscan allies.

In the early years of the seventeenth century, Shah Abbas had forcefully transferred thousands of Armenians from Julfa (Jolfā) in Azerbaijan to a district near Isfahan on the *kāšša* land (the crown's private domain), called the "New Julfa."⁵⁸⁵ Many of them were skillful merchants whom Shah Abbas supported to exploit their expertise and far-reaching mercantile network to increase the state revenue from the overseas silk trade with European partners and involve them in his negotiations with the Christian world regarding a mutually beneficial anti-Ottoman deal.⁵⁸⁶ The Armenian merchants who were already experienced with the Levantine silk trade were not only instrumental in the development of Shah Abbas's international commerce, but also played a pivotal role in the establishment of Catholic settlements in Persia. By 1607, hundreds of Armenian clerics led the Catholic rituals and traditional processions of thousands of Christians, including Armenians, Safavid converts, and foreign dignitaries in Persia celebrating the feast of Christmas and Epiphany. Large Catholic communities at the heart of the Safavid

⁵⁸⁵ For more information on the role of Armenians in the commercial developments of the Safavid Empire in the seventeenth century, Cfr. Ina Baghdiantz McCabe, *The Shah's Silk for Europe's Silver: The Eurasian Trade of the Julfa Armenians in Safavid Iran and India (1530-1750)*, University of Pennsylvania Armenian Texts and Studies, no. 15 (Atlanta, Ga: Scholars Press, 1999); R. W. Ferrier, "The Armenians and the East India Company in Persia in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries," *The Economic History Review* 26, no. 1 (1973): 38-62.

⁵⁸⁶ Ghougassian, *The Emergence of the Armenian Diocese of New Julfa in the Seventeenth Century*, 68.

Empire performed public ceremonies with outsized crosses and singing hymns.⁵⁸⁷ This was a manifestation of the Shāh's tolerance and endeavor to please not only the Armenians but also the Roman Catholic Church by developing missionary orders in Persia in the hope for a military alliance against the Porte.⁵⁸⁸

Human Agents Provoking a Reciprocal Recognition:

Robert Shirley

On August 15, 1609, Anthony's younger brother, Robert Shirley, arrived in Palazzo Pitti (Florence), as the ambassador of Shāh Abbās.⁵⁸⁹ On September 18th of the same year, Robert was honored with a gold chain worth 800 ducats by the new Grand Duke of Tuscany, Cosimo II de' Medici (r.1609-1621).⁵⁹⁰ According to the Apostolic Nuncio in Florence (*Nuntius apostolicus Florentinus*), Antonio Grimani (d.1628), in his public reception, Robert stood in front of the Grand Duke and read the letter of the Shah in the "Italian" language with his turban on (*con il capo*).⁵⁹¹ As an overt indication of allegiance to the Safavid Shah of Persia and towards an "oriental self-staging as part of a complex rhetoric of diplomatic self-legitimation and improvised trade negotiation," Robert Shirley deliberately chose to present himself in richly embroidered Persian silk robes (*Khil'a*)

⁵⁸⁷ Vazgen Hakobyan, Ašot Hovhannisyan, and L S Xăcikyan, *Hayeren Jeragreri ŽĖ Dari Hišatakaranner (1601-1620 TT) Pamyatne Zapisi Armjanskix Ruskopisej XVII Veka* (Erevan: Haykakan SSH Gitowtyownneri Akademiayi Hratarakcowtyown, 1974), 259–61.

⁵⁸⁸ Ghougassian, *The Emergence of the Armenian Diocese of New Julfa in the Seventeenth Century*, 204–7.

⁵⁸⁹ ASF, Mediceo del Principato 4275, fol.189.

⁵⁹⁰ "...una collana d'oro con maglie scorniciate e maglione che la tiene insieme in dieci fila..." ASF, Mediceo del Principato 4275, fol.321. ASV, Guardaroba 2, *Storia d'etichetta di Toscana, dal 1539 al 1612*, cc,271-273. Penrose, *The Sherleian Odyssey: Being a Record of the Travels and Adventures of Three Famous Brothers During the Reigns of Elizabeth, James I, and Charles I*, 175; Evelin Philip Shirley and The Roxburghe Club, *The Sherley Brothers, an Historical Memoir of the Lives of Sir Thomas Sherley, Sir Anthony Sherley, and Sir Robert Sherley, Knights* (Cornell University Library, 1848), 63.

⁵⁹¹ "un'oratione di mez' hora nella nostra lingua" Roma, ASV, Fondo Borghese, s.II, 298, f.281v. BAV, Urb. Lat. 1077, ff.442r, 448v,455r,463r. See Piemontese, "I due ambasciatori in Persia ricevuti da Papa Paolo V al Quirinale," 373.

with a *haydarī* turban.⁵⁹² His *dastār* (headgear) was often bejeweled with a crucifix on top, to signify his newly embraced Catholic faith (previously Protestant) and to maintain the Englishman's position as an intermediary between the Christian Europe and the Shi'a Safavids.⁵⁹³

In a letter from Shah Abbas to the Grand Duke of Tuscany in 999 H./1590 AD the Safavid Shah explained that he had sent Fazli Beg before to express kinship between the Court of Isfahan and Tuscany and to cement the unity between the two crowns against the enemy. Nevertheless, since he had not received any news from Fazli Beg, the Shah had sent Fazli's friend, Giorgi [Giorgio Krieger], of whom he had not received any updates, either. Yet, Shāh Abbās's intention in sending the second letter was to assure the Grand Duke that the doors of political and commercial communications were always open at the Safavid court of Persia.⁵⁹⁴[Fig.3a-b, Ch.3, Sec.3]

In the credential letter that Robert Shirley delivered to the Grand Duke, the Shah had explained that because Fazli Beg had converted to Islam while he was passing through Ottoman territories on his way back to Isfahan, Shah Abbas had decided to incorporate another ambassador, "Don Lebert [Robert] Shirley," to convey his message to the Grand Duke. The Shah also stressed that Robert's words were credible, since he had entrusted some verbal messages to the Englishman to deliver to the Grand Duke.⁵⁹⁵ [Fig 4, Ch.4,

⁵⁹² Ladan Niyayesh, "The Fabric of Silk Power in the Sherley Portraits," in *Early Modern Diplomacy, Theatre and Soft Power: The Making of Peace* (United Kingdom, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 207.

⁵⁹³ Piemontese, "I due ambasciatori in Persia ricevuti da Papa Paolo V al Quirinale," 373; Niyayesh, "The Fabric of Silk Power in the Sherley Portraits," 214–16; Mansour, "Picturing Global Conversion: Art and Diplomacy at the Court of Paul V (1605-1621)"; Falsafi, *Siyāsāt-i ḥārīgī-i Īrān dar daurān-i Šafawīya*, 127; Penrose, *The Sherleian Odyssey: Being a Record of the Travels and Adventures of Three Famous Brothers During the Reigns of Elizabeth, James I, and Charles I*, 175.

⁵⁹⁴ ASF, Fondo Mediceo 4274a, ins. X, C.4.

⁵⁹⁵ ASF, Fondo Mediceo 4274a, ins. VI, C. 28.

Sec.2] I have explained the implications of this latter document in my previous chapter, however for the purpose of this section, I elaborate on a few other points that illuminate the mediating role of a number of human agents in the formation of a political and commercial network between the two courts, to face the fierce and growing Ottoman commerce.

In the late 1608/1016 H., Ferdinando I dispatched a Persian resident of Tuscany, Fazli Beg, and another Tuscan figure, Gorgio Criger [Giorgio Krieger], to Isfahan to deliver the Grand Duke's message to Shah Abbas.⁵⁹⁶ The Shah's letter delivered to the Grand Duke via Robert Shirley testified that Fazli Beg had actually returned to the Safavid Court in Isfahan and presumably presented Ferdinando's response to Shah Abbas. To reconstruct the web of human associations between the two courts of Tuscany and Persia, it is indispensable to investigate the agents and their roles in serving the ambassadorial impetus of both crowns in their anti-Ottoman diplomacy. So far, I have explored the human agents who acted as proxies of the Safavid Shah of Persia or on behalf of the Persian court. In the next part of this section, I expound on a number of individuals whose intercession was at the Grand Dukes' behest. In this interplay, a number of Ottoman-affiliated rebels, exploited by the Medici to campaign against the Porte, performed a remarkable role in the dynamics of the Perso-Tuscan coalition.

Michelagnolo Corai and Giorgio Krieger

By 1608, Michelagnolo Corai had been assigned as the Medici ambassador in Persia, and he remained at the Safavid court for five years. Prior to that, he was the Medici

⁵⁹⁶ Kāwūsī 'Irāqī, *Asnād-i rawābiṭ-i daulat-i Şafawī bā ḥukūmathā-i Ītālīyā*, 69.

ambassador in Aleppo (January 1607-1608). A document at the State Archive of Florence reveals that Michelagnolo was receiving arms and heavy armor from Florence in Aleppo in 1607.⁵⁹⁷ In another illuminating document at the same archive, on January 25, 1607, Michelagnolo was commissioned to undertake a diplomatic visit on behalf of Ferdinando I to `Ali Pasha Janbulād (Jumblatt), the Kurdish governor of Aleppo, Damascus, Tripoli (Syria), and the Holy Land.⁵⁹⁸ `Ali Pasha had risen in rebellion against the Porte, since 1605, and the Grand Duke of Tuscany was a (if not the) major European advocator of the Pasha's revolts.⁵⁹⁹ Michelagnolo's mission was to transmit the Medici Court of Tuscany's full support of the Pasha's anti-Ottoman riots. For this, the Grand Duke had instructed his ambassador to deliver a number of Italian cannons to `Ali Janbulād and to promise the rebellious pasha a notable amount of money as a reward for his assistance in the Christians' reconquering of Jerusalem.⁶⁰⁰

In the same document, the Grand Duke allowed his ambassador to inform his recipient about Ferdinando's similar proposal to the Shah of Persia. In fact, Ferdinando had ordered Michelagnolo to pursue his mission at the court of Shah Abbas and to invite the Safavid shah to join the military cause against the Ottomans.⁶⁰¹ Another undated

⁵⁹⁷ ASF, Mediceo del principato (MP henceforth) 4275, fol. 142.

⁵⁹⁸ ASF, MP 4275, fol. 49, fol. 57 (*passaporto per il Cav.re Michelangelo Corai*).

⁵⁹⁹ Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon* (Pluto Press, 2015), 6, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt183p4f5>.

⁶⁰⁰ Federici, "A Servant of Two Masters: The Translator Michel Angelo Corai as a Tuscan Diplomat (1599–1609)," 91–96.

⁶⁰¹ "...Istruzione a voi, Cav.re Michelagnolo Corai, per il viaggio che havete da fare in Soria [...] Sbarcato che sarete in Soria, mostrate d'esser andato per vostri servizii particolari, et trovando amici o parenti vostri, non comunicherete a nessuno le commessioni che havete da noi, essendo necessaria la segretezza per non mettere le genti in sospetto et per non guastare il negozio. Anderete senza perder tempo a trovare il Bascia d'Aleppo [Ali Canbulad] dove egli sarà, mostrando però ad ogni altro che vi andate per vostri affari privati, et cercherete adito et entrata appresso di lui sotto pretesto di dargli delle nuove di christianità [...] Dinanzi a lui andrete solo, et senza alcuna pompa nè apparenza, et nel principio non entrerete a ragionare d'altro che delle cose de' principi christiani, secondo gli interrogatorii che da lui vi saranno fatti, mostrandogli quanto i detti principi habbiano sentito et sentino volentieri i progressi che egli ha fatto contro alla tirannide Ottomanno [...] Se in questi ragionamenti voi vedessi che egli non desse orecchie et mostrasse di non si

document reveals that the Syrian-born Medici ambassador was in Isfahan, offering free use of Tuscan ports (Livorno and all the other shores), plus notable gifts of luxury textiles and draperies, in exchange for the Shah's alliance with the European forces in an armed battle against the Ottomans in the Mediterranean.⁶⁰² Prior to Michelagnolo's reception in Isfahan, a document issued on April 6, 1607, from Florence to the ambassador in Aleppo, described a tense armed battle between the Catholic forces, comprised of galleons of the Grand Duke Ferdinando I, Pope Paul V, the *Signoria* of Genoa, Philip III of Spain, and Charles Emmanuel I of Savoy (r.1580-1630), against the Ottomans in Sicily.⁶⁰³ Considering 'Ali Pasha's devastating defeat by the Ottomans in autumn 1607, Michelagnolo's reception at the Safavid Court of Isfahan and his warlike proposal must have been offered sometime in late 1607 or early 1608.⁶⁰⁴

In a 1607 document, Michelagnolo Corai had asked for a number of clothing items from the Grand Duke for himself and his secretary, "S.r Giorgio [Krieger] Tedesco," in Aleppo.⁶⁰⁵ In around 1612, the same secretary informed the Grand Duke Cosimo II that

curare delli aiuti et dell'amicizia dei principi christiani, non passate più altre et non gli communicate d'haver lettere né ambasciate da noi. Ma vedendo voi inclinato come è verisimile che sarà, allora gli scoprirete a solo a solo le nostre commessioni, et gli presenterete la nostra lettera, facendogli in conformità d'essa, l'offerta della nostra amicizia et corrispondenza [cancelled: facendogli fare] ^et certificandogli^ che non solamente nio con le nostre forze marittime saremo pronti a dargli quelli aiuti che potremo, ma c'ingegneremo ancora di persuader l'istesso a tutti gli altri principi christiani, i quali non hanno il maggior desiderio che vedere deprimere affatto il tirannico Imperio Ottomanno. ^Offeritegli ancora che se egli havesse gusto di 4 o 6 pezzi di cannoni all'usanza e forma d'Italia, noi gliene mandremo volentieri^ [...] Potrete anche comunicargli che noi vi habbiamo dato una lettera per il Re di Persia [Abbas I] et commessovi che doppo che havete esequito in Soria quello che vi habbiamo ordinato, ve n'andiate a trovare il detto Re, per inanimare lui ancora a questa unione, et mostrargli la prontezza de principe christiani in lor aiuto et favore..." ASF, MP 4275, fol. 49. See BIA, Michelagnolo Coari.

⁶⁰² ASF, MP 4275, fol. 146-7.

⁶⁰³ ASF, MP 4275, fol. 134.

⁶⁰⁴ Edhem Eldem, Daniel Goffman, and Bruce Alan Masters, *The Ottoman City between East and West: Aleppo, Izmir, and Istanbul*, Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 31. Corai's reception must have been sometime before May 1608, when he wrote a report letter (in June 26, 1608) to the Grand Duke from Mazandaran and explained that he had been there for over a month. ASF, MP. 4275, fol. 178.

⁶⁰⁵ ASF. MP 4275, fol.72.

Michelagnolo Corai had been assigned as the commissioner of the mining operation in Persia by Shah Abbas.⁶⁰⁶ On July 9, 1612, in a report to Florence, Michelagnolo confirmed Krieger's announcement and asked the Grand Duke to return his secretary to Isfahan.⁶⁰⁷ Considering that Giorgio Krieger had accompanied Michelagnolo on his mission to Aleppo, I presume, he returned from Aleppo to Florence after the victorious Ottoman troops conquered the city and Corai was imprisoned. However, Michelagnolo was able to resume his duties and to pursue his mission in Persia soon thereafter. In late 1608, Giorgio Krieger accompanied Fazli Beg to Persia and joined the Medici ambassador, whose arrival at the Court of Isfahan can be proved by the 1612 brief he sent to the Grand Duke reporting Corai's new position in mining operations in Persia, as explained previously.⁶⁰⁸

Giovanni Battista Veccheitti and Guidubaldo Brancadoro

In February 1608, when Robert Shirley and his retinue departed from Isfahan to Mazandaran (*Mâzandarân*) and the Caspian Sea to embark on his mission to Europe, he was in fact holding the Shah's letter of response to the Grand Duke of Tuscany in regard to their mutual military and commercial alliances in Mediterranean. In Robert's reception ceremony by Cosimo II de' Medici on August 15, 1609, two significantly important characters were present among others, whose participation, I argue, defines the Grand Duke's reception of Robert's embassy; Giovanni Battista Vecchietti and Guidubaldo Brancadoro (d.1625) were those two agents.⁶⁰⁹ As explained in the previous chapter,

⁶⁰⁶ ASF. MP 4275, fol. 298.

⁶⁰⁷ ASF. MP 4275, fol. 301, 309.

⁶⁰⁸ Federici, "A Servant of Two Masters: The Translator Michel Angelo Corai as a Tuscan Diplomat (1599–1609)," 96.

⁶⁰⁹ ASF. MP 4275, fol. 189.

Vecchietti, also known as "Vecchietti Persiano," led a mission to Persia as the Papal envoy and Cardinal Ferdinando's book agent for the Medici Oriental Press, between 1584 and 1588.⁶¹⁰ On his return, in December 1588, about a year after Ferdinando succeeded as the Grand Duke of Tuscany (October 1587), Vecchietti stopped in Spain to report to Philip II about his mission in Persia and Hormuz.⁶¹¹ In his report, Vecchietti, then as the mutual envoy of Pope Paul V and the Grand Duke Ferdinando I, urged the King of Spain's military assistance, in the guise of artillery and military experts, to the Persians for their armed battles against the Ottomans in the Persian Gulf.⁶¹² In another report on May 27, 1589, the Grand Duke was informed that Vecchietti had asked Philip II whether he would object if Ferdinando I sent "artillery and fortification specialists" to Persia.⁶¹³ Those communications, I assume, associated Vecchietti's 1580s expedition in Persia to that of Michelagnolo Corai, yet for the former, the mission was in the "disguise" of "book collecting" and retained an investigative nature: through Michelagnolo's embassy, Ferdinando had decisively extended his anti-Ottoman proposal for a military alliance to the Shah of Persia. In other words, Vecchietti's mission at the Safavid Court of Persia set the tone for the subsequent communications between the two courts. Therefore, I conclude, when Robert Shirley and his retinue entered the Medici Court of Florence, the ambassador gifted the Grand Duke with an elaborately illuminated manuscript of Persian

⁶¹⁰ Guglielmo Enrico Saltini, "Della Stamperia Orientale Medicea e di Giovan Battista Raimondi," *Giornale storico degli archivi toscani* 4 (1860): 257–308.

⁶¹¹ ASF, MP 4919. Fol. 568.

⁶¹² Ugo Tucci, "Una relazione di Giovan Battista Vecchietti sulla Persia e sul regno di Hormuz (1587)," *Oriente Moderno* 35, no. 4 (April 1955): 149–60.

⁶¹³ ASF, MP 4920, fol. 23. See BIA for transcripts and translation.

poetry, which was then handed to Vecchietti to add to the Grand Duke's [inherited] collection of "Oriental" treasures.⁶¹⁴

Guidubaldo Brancadoro

The other significant figure in Robert Shirley's public reception at the Court of Cosimo II was the Cavalier of the Order of Santo Stefano (1607) and the admiral (1609), Guidubaldo Brancadoro. According to a report issued in September 1609, at the end of the public reception, the Grand Duke Cosimo II handed the English ambassador "S.r Conte Don Roberto" a letter and a second letter to "Cav.re Brancadoro," addressed to the Shah [Abbās].⁶¹⁵ I infer from this report that Cosimo II responded to Robert Shirley's proposal with a military agent to fully express his martial ambitions against the Ottoman Sultan (Ahmed I) to the Safavid Shah of Persia and reciprocally recognize his court as an official ally in this armed struggle.⁶¹⁶

Sultan Yaḥyā

Concurrently, in June 1609, another pretender to the Ottoman throne named "Sultan Jahja [Yaḥyā]" (also known with his baptismal name as Alessandro Pastrovicchio), entered Cosimo II's court to seek his support to dethrone Sultan Ahmed I (r.1603-1617).⁶¹⁷ In a

⁶¹⁴ "N. 4. Questo é un poeta persiano chiamato Mulla Rum nella prima parte si contengono alcuni racconti di casi amorosi di alcuni mariti altra alcune historiette et alcuni insegnamenti morali dato in serbo a Gioamb. Vecchietti del Ser.mo G. Duca Cosimo alli 16 di Agosto 1609." Inserto 6, ff. 2r. Biblioteca nazionale centrale (BNC). Fondo medico palatino *Ms. CI.III.49* (II.II.2) Banco Rari 42.

⁶¹⁵ ASF. MP 4275, fol. 189. "...La domenica desse l'udienza publica nel salone della piazza [...] Una [lettera] ne dette in risposta al S.r Conte Don Roberto [cancellato: Sho] Serlhey cav.re inglese et l'altra al Cav.re [Guidubald o] Brancadoro, a detto Re ['Abbas I], et una ne scrisse al detto Re ancora il detto Amb.r Serlheii in una sacchattina di drappo che gli diceva del Sultano [Ahmed I]..."

⁶¹⁶ Kāwūsī 'Irāqī, *Asnād-i rawābiṭ-i daulat-i Ṣafawī bā ḥukūmathā-i Ītālīyā*, 76.

⁶¹⁷ Salvatore Bongi, "Sopra una missione di Gaspare Scioppio a Lucca comb ambasciatore del Sultano Iachia," *Archivio Storico Italiano* Nuova serie 12, no. 1 (23) (1860): 211–37; Pontecorvo, "Relazioni tra lo scià 'Abbās e i granduchi di Toscana Ferdinando I e Cosimo II," 158.

letter from Robert Shirley to Shah Abbas, written during the same mission (August 1609), the English ambassador reported to the Safavid Shah primarily about his stately reception by the Grand Duke of Tuscany, and later, about Yaḥyā's shelter at the Court of Medici.⁶¹⁸ [Fig 5, Ch.4, Sec.2] Shirley updated the Shah on the fact that the Grand Duke was decisive about supporting “this youth” (Yaḥyā) with a forceful fleet to fight against the Porte and recommended that the Safavid Shah would also contribute to this armed campaign to finally annihilate the “ominous Porte” (رومیه شومیه) and bond more closely with his European allies.⁶¹⁹

At the end of Robert Shirley's letter to Shah Abbas, the ambassador informed the Shah that he had received the Grand Duke's response and was about to proceed to Rome (this will be investigated in the next section) and afterwards to Spain, before his return to Persia. In fact, Robert Shirley did go to Rome and Spain afterwards, and this leads to the conclusion that Brancadoro (his ambassador) was presumably the bearer of Robert Shirley and the Grand Duke's letters to Shah Abbas.⁶²⁰ At this time, the Safavid army (*qezelbāš*) which had been engaged in a brutal war against the Ottomans in the northwest of Persia, gained notable victories in Tabriz and Azerbaijan. In August 1609, an Ottoman embassy led by Khayr al-Din Chavush, arrived in Persia. Negotiations over a peace treaty between Sultan Ahmed I and Shah Abbas took almost three years and was often interrupted by scattered offenses on both sides against each other. Ultimately, in 1612, the two Muslim empires reached a peace treaty; nevertheless, it was fragile enough to

⁶¹⁸ ASF, MP 4274a, ins. X, fol. 6. Dated تحريراً في شهر جمادى الثاني سنة سبع عشر و الف (Ġumādā aT-Tānī (6), 1017 H./August 19, 1609)

⁶¹⁹ Pontecorvo, “Relazioni tra lo scià ‘Abbās e i granduchi di Toscana Ferdinando I e Cosimo II,” 163–64; Kāwūsī ‘Irāqī, *Asnād-i rawābiṭ-i daulat-i Ṣafawī bā ḥukūmathā-i Ītālīyā*, 75–76.

⁶²⁰ Pontecorvo, “Relazioni tra lo scià ‘Abbās e i granduchi di Toscana Ferdinando I e Cosimo II,” 170.

only last three years.⁶²¹ Amidst the Ottoman-Safavid theater of “war and [seeming] peace,” in September 1609, Yaḥyā was dispatched to Livorno to embark on Tuscan galleons to Lebanon and Syria.⁶²²

On his campaign, Cosimo II accompanied Yaḥyā with two other military leaders in his oppositions against Sultan Ahmed I: the General of the Galleons Guglielmo de Beauregard, and commander Guidubaldo Brancadoro. Although this campaign was fundamentally based on Yaḥyā’s rebellious motivations, this young pretender to the Ottoman throne achieved nothing but disappointment for his own aspirations. The majority of the sources blame Yaḥyā’s deficiencies in mustering his own following in Ottoman domains on his lack of strong connections with the Ottoman administration.⁶²³ However, I believe Yaḥyā’s incompetence in organizing an internal rebellion overshadowed other factors most importantly Cosimo II’s reluctance to back the Perso-Tuscan military alliance in Syria, due to a major shift of political vision and alliances in Europe and in the Medici network.⁶²⁴

⁶²¹ Barāzish, *Ravābiṭ-i siyāsī - dīplumātīk-i Īrān va jahān dar ‘ahd-i Šafavīyah*, 368–79.

⁶²² Federici, “A Servant of Two Masters: The Translator Michel Angelo Corai as a Tuscan Diplomat (1599–1609),” 96–98; Vittorio Catualdi, *Sultan Jahja dell'imperial casa ottomana od altrimenti Alessandro, conte di Montenegro, ed i suoi discendenti in Italia : nuovi contributi alla storia della questione orientale e delle relazioni politiche fra la Turchia e le potenze cristiane nel secolo XVII*. (Trieste: G. Chiopris, 1889), 67–69.

⁶²³ Nasrollah Falsafi, *Zendagānī-e Šāh ‘Abbās Awwal (The Lifehistory of Shāh Abbās I)*, 4th ed. (Tehrān: Muhammad Ali Elmi, 1369), 1984; Abd al-Reza Houshang Mahdavi, *Tārikh-e Ravābet-e Khāreji-e Irān (The History of Iran’s Foreign Affairs)* (Tehrān: Amir Kabir, 1393), 80–81; Kāwūsī ‘Irāqī, *Asnād-i rawābiṭ-i daulat-i Šafawī bā ḥukūmathā-i Īlāīyā*, 76; Catualdi, *Sultan Jahja dell'imperial casa ottomana od altrimenti Alessandro, conte di Montenegro, ed i suoi discendenti in Italia: nuovi contributi alla storia della questione orientale e delle relazioni politiche fra la Turchia e le potenze cristiane nel secolo xvii.*, 71; rafael[Рафаил Левакович] Levaković, “Vita de principe Sultan Jachia cattolico di Casa Ottomana nato nel 1585 dal Sultan Mehemet e dalla Christiana greca rinegata Elana di Giorgio Caldarano do Trapezzonda fatta Sultana col nome di Lalpare,” 1650 1590.

⁶²⁴ Federici, “A Servant of Two Masters: The Translator Michel Angelo Corai as a Tuscan Diplomat (1599–1609),” 96–98.

1609: Robert Shirley and His Persian Mission to Europe

The dynamics of this Medici-Safavid discord may also find roots in earlier correspondence, during which the Medici Grand Duke had declined Shah Abbas's directives. In the Shah's embassy to Tuscany, Shah Abbas had instructed Robert Shirley to negotiate with the Medici ruler to encourage the King of France, Henry IV (r. 1589-1610), with whom "the Grand Duke had affinity," to annul his Franco-Ottoman alliance. [Appendix V] In May 1604, the King of France had reinforced the already-established alliance (since 1535 between Francis I and Sultan Süleymān I) by signing a peace treaty with Sultan Ahmad I. The "peace treaty and Capitulation" (*'Ahd-nāme*) brought the king notable advantages, such as the pre-eminence of the French ambassadors over all European agents at the Ottoman Court and the permission to French forces to wage war against the Ottoman vassal-states (Algiers and Tunisia), in case of any violation of the capitulation.⁶²⁵

Prior to furthering my investigation on the outcome of this negotiation, I draw attention to the rationales of the Shah behind his suggestion to the Grand Duke of Tuscany pertaining the Franco-Ottoman coalition. Shah Abbas's desire was to exploit the Franco-Medici matrimonial kinship as a channel to persuade France to resign the alliance with the Ottomans. At the time, when Robert Shirley extended the Shah's proposal to the Grand Duke in 1609, the King of France was married to Ferdinando I's niece, Marie de' Medici (m.1600-1642). Hypothetically, the Medici queen of France was not the "affiliation" that the Shah had in mind when transmitting his proposal to Robert Shirley.

⁶²⁵ Randall Lesaffer, ed., *Peace Treaties and International Law in European History: From the Late Middle Ages to World War One* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), 343. Treaty made on 20 *Zī l-hajje* 1012 (20 May 1604). Leiden University Library | UBL Or. 1137 [1]

There is an illuminating point in this correspondence and that is the original addressee of the Shah's letter. When Robert Shirley left Isfahan in February 1608, bearing the Shah's gifts and letters, Ferdinando I was on the throne in Florence. However, by the time the embassy arrived at the Medici court in August 1609, Ferdinando's son, Cosimo II, had succeeded his father as the Grand Duke of Tuscany. The Shah's principal recipient of the proposal was, in fact, Ferdinando, a spouse to the Franco-Medici duchess, Christine de Lorraine. Ferdinando had died a few months before Shirley's reception in Florence, on February 7, 1609.⁶²⁶ Consequently, the Shah's message was inevitably delivered to the new Grand Duke, not the intended addressee.

Cosimo II deliberately rejected the Shah's request by recalling the "highness" of the King of France and that it would be out of the Grand Duke's position to instruct a grand king like that of France in his policies. The response letter also contained another denial of Shāh Abbās's proposal that pertained to the Medici commercial ties to the Levant.

Apparently, the Shah had asked the Grand Duke to prohibit any communications of the Tuscan (European) merchants in the Ottoman territories, though Cosimo II rejected this plea, as well, by stating that it was impossible to renounce all the numerous gains that the trade in the Levant bore for Europe.⁶²⁷ In his response, Grand Duke Cosimo II relied on Pope Paul V's verdict to ban transportation of any sort of weaponry to the Ottoman jurisdictions and assured the Shah that, just like his father, Ferdinando, he would also revoke every armed expedition to the Levant, but never agreed to suspend trade with the Ottomans.

⁶²⁶ ASF, MP 4275, fol.194-195. The Shah's anti-Ottoman requests did not reflect in his own letter, presumably as a matter of secrecy and security.

⁶²⁷ ASF, MP 4275, fol. 196-199 (minuta). Also refer to Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli, manoscritto cit. p.

Toward the end of his letter, Cosimo guaranteed to inform the Shah when his court, and those of the King of France and Spain were about to launch a crusade against the Porte. This was while the Shah had already been irritated by the European powers who made deals with the Porte, without keeping the Safavid Court informed, and, indeed, betrayed their previously claimed anti-Ottoman agendas.⁶²⁸ In one of the Shah's conversations with the Medici ambassador in Isfahan, Shah Abbas had complained to Michelagnolo Corai about the Papacy for not seizing the opportunities to unite the Christians in a vigorous war against the Ottomans. He also faulted the other Christian princes for being at war with each other which would only damage their unity in confronting the Ottomans.⁶²⁹ The Shah was disappointed with the Pope for sending empty promises to the Court of Persia and with the King of Spain, who (according to Shāh Abbās) found every means to wage war against his fellow Christians (meaning the Dutch), not find a way to make war with the Ottomans, despite all the proposals the Shah had sent to his court.⁶³⁰

Shah Abbas had this apprehensive perception about the European powers abandoning him in his armed struggles against the Ottomans, when the new Grand Duke of Tuscany refused to observe the exigency of the Shah's proposal in his correspondence. Moreover, there is no trace of the Admiral, Guidubaldo Brancadoro, at the Court of Persia or even of him setting foot in the Safavid jurisdictions. Brancadoro was recalled by his master, Cosimo II, a few months after his departure, without any success achieved.⁶³¹ In the

⁶²⁸ Barāzish, *Ravābiṭ-i siyāsī - dīplumātīk-i Īrān va jahān dar 'ahd-i Ṣafavīyah* =, 643–44.

⁶²⁹ The Shah had heard about the Anglo-Dutch alliance against Spain.

⁶³⁰ Chick, *A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia*, 178–79.

⁶³¹ Alessandro Lamberti, the ambassador of Lucca, wrote on May 1610: “L'armata di que' galeoni che l'anno passato uscì fuori col preteso fratello del Gran Signore, et con preparazioni et speranze di gran successo nelle parti del Levante, senza haver fatto però fino ad hora cose considerabili, è stata revocata da S. A., et come s'intende, sarà a Livorno in breve...” in S. Bongi, op. Cit., p.223.

meantime, Robert Shirley proceeded to Rome, Spain, and after a few months of negotiations, found his way to England, and did not return to Isfahan until 1615.⁶³² Due to all the miscommunications, the shift of power at the Court of Tuscany, and the Shah's insecurities about the Christian powers' anti-Ottoman approaches, the Persians witnessed the new Grand Duke's passivity towards their alliance in Syria, and the disappointed Shah resorted to simply maintaining his strongholds in his war against the Ottomans.⁶³³

Emir Fakhr ad-Dīn II

Cosimo II's campaign in Lebanon and Syria was stirred by yet another pretender to the Ottoman throne, Emir Fakhr ad-Dīn II al-Ma'ni (d.1635), with whom Ferdinando I had forged a secret alliance in 1608, to use the Lebanese ports of Tyre and Sidon as vassals to transfer goods to the Eastern Mediterranean, in addition to a mutual anti-Ottoman support.⁶³⁴ A well-connected (Papacy, France, and Spain) and relatively independent ruler in the Mount of Lebanon, Druze (*Al-Muwahhidūn*- an ethno religious Muslim community of the Ma'ni dynasty) Emir Fakhr ad-Dīn II was appointed by the Ottomans, when they were engrossed in their war against the Safavids only in the first decade of the seventeenth century, to fight the Shi'a Persians in the area.⁶³⁵ Prior to his blatant rebellious attempts in 1611, the Druze emir was extending his control over Ottoman Lebanon and Syria and had secretly supported 'Ali Pasha Janbulād in his anti-Ottoman endeavors.⁶³⁶ When Cosimo II's fleet arrived in Sidon in Spring 1610, Emir Fakhr ad-Dīn

⁶³² Kāwūsī 'Irāqī, *Asnād-i rawābiṭ-i daulat-i Ṣafawī bā ḥukūmathā-i Ītālīyā*, 76; Barāzish, *Ravābiṭ-i siyāsī - dīplumātīk-i Īrān va jahān dar 'ahd-i Ṣafavīyah*, 646; PONTECORVO, "VIRGILIO PONTECORVO," 170; Davies, *Elizabethans Errant: The Strange Fortunes of Sir Thomas Sherley and His Three Sons, as Well in the Dutch Wars as in Muscovy, Morocco, Persia, Spain, and the Indies*, 228–36.

⁶³³ The war lasted between 1603 and 1612.

⁶³⁴ N. I. Matar, *Europe through Arab Eyes, 1578-1727* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 81.

⁶³⁵ Salibi, "The Secret of the House of Ma'n," 126–30.

⁶³⁶ Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 98.

II offered Yahyā a fortress in Lebanon, arms, and men, not only to support the young pretender to the Ottoman throne, but also to reinforce his pact with the Grand Duchy of Tuscany.⁶³⁷

Shift of Power in Tuscany and Policies of Alliance with Persia

Although, for an array of political and economic reasons, this campaign did not bear fruits for Yahyā, the alliance between the Grand Duke of Tuscany and Emir Fakhr ad-Dīn II was securely re-established to the extent that in 1613, the emir and his entire family were sheltered in Tuscany for about two years, following an Ottoman detest of the Ma'ani ruler.⁶³⁸ The overtures of the Emir's provocative-yet-reciprocally advantageous "exile" at the Medici court is out of the scope of this research; however, some factors in this association illuminate basic determinants that eventually effected the nature of the Medici-Safavid approaches in their anti-Ottoman policies.⁶³⁹ In the case of Emir Fakhr ad-Dīn II, as well as with Yahyā and Janbulād, the Medici Grand Dukes intensified their strategy towards the Porte of incorporating Ottoman affiliated rebels against the Sultan in order to infiltrate the political and commercial network of the Ottomans in the Levant, particularly, and to extend their power in the eastern Mediterranean market.

In regard to the Grand Ducal Medici anti-Ottoman policies, Ferdinando I was ambitious in exploiting the Persians' hostility in their mutual struggles against the Porte. Ferdinando

⁶³⁷ Catualdi, *Sultan Jahja dell'imperial casa ottomana od altrimenti Alessandro, conte di Montenegro, ed i suoi discendenti in Italia: nuovi contributi alla storia della questione orientale e delle relazioni politiche fra la Turchia e le potenze cristiane nel secolo xvii*, 71.

⁶³⁸ Matar, *Europe through Arab Eyes, 1578-1727*, 81–87.

⁶³⁹ Paolo Carali, Ettore Rossi, and Ottoroni Montenovesi, *Fakhr ad-Dīn II, principe del Libano e la Corte di Toscana: 1605 - 1635* (Roma: Reale accademia d'Italia, 1936); Kaled El Bibas, *L'emiro e il granduca. La vicenda dell'emiro Fakhr ad-Din II del Libano nel contesto delle relazioni fra la Toscana e l'Oriente*, *Le vie della storia* 77 (Firenze: Le lettere, 2010); Rosangelo Cuffaro, "Fakhr ad-Din II alla corte dei Medici (1613-1615). Collezionismo, architettura e ars topiaria tra Firenze e Beirut," *Marburger Jahrbuch Für Kunstwissenschaft* 37 (2010): 209–17.

I sponsored and instructed Corai to carry out his mission at the Court of Persia.⁶⁴⁰ In a letter on August 10, 1609, Corai had reported to Florence from Isfahan about his endeavors to acquire some pieces of lapis lazuli for the Grand Duke Ferdinando I (of whose death Corai was still not informed), but instead he had received some azure stone (turquoise blue) from a court painter of Shah Abbas for which he was grateful.⁶⁴¹ This report not only indicates the manifold activities of Ferdinando's envoy at the court of Shah Abbas, but also reveals the Grand Duke's assessment of the political and commercial pragmatism of his Persian ally.⁶⁴²

A letter of Michelagnolo Corai from Isfahan, in October 1611, echoes the shift of power and political vision in Tuscany. In this letter, Corai complained to the Prime Secretary of the State, Belisario di Francesco Vinta (d.1613), about his poverty in Persia due to the Grand Duke Cosimo II, who was ignoring Corai as the Medici ambassador at the Court of Isfahan.⁶⁴³ By July 1612, a few months after this letter, Shah Abbas had assigned Corai as the head of mining operations in Persia, which offered the envoy absolute access to the rare substances in the area, namely precious stones and metals, such as lapis lazuli, silver, and copper. The Syrian-born Medici agent kept updating the Grand Duke with the outgrowth of trade in foreign merchandise, from Indian fabrics, dyes, and jewels, to Venetian glassware and the flow of valuable diplomatic gifts, including gilded weapons, richly embroidered brocades, and Ottoman trophies in Safavid Persia, but Cosimo II

⁶⁴⁰ ASF, MP 4275, fol.56r-56v, fol. 22-23 (letters of the Grand Duke Ferdinando I to Shāh Abbās).

⁶⁴¹ ASF, MP 4275, fol. 245.

⁶⁴² Besides Corai, the Grand Duke Ferdinando I's supervisor of *pietre dure* production, Costantini de' Servi (1554-1622) had also travelled as far as Persia to acquire lapis lazuli with veins of glimmering gold, for the Grand Duke's collection of rare material and for commissions of Florentine *commessi* (mosaic inlay), like the 1605 "Last Supper" by Cristofano and Giovan Battista Graffurri now in the chapel of *Palazzo Pitti* or other examples in *Museo dell'Opificio delle Pietre Dure*. See Dalu Jones, ed., *A Mirror of Princes: The Mughals and the Medici* (Bombay: Marg Publications, 1987), 126-150.

⁶⁴³ ASF, MP 4275, fol. 291.

preferred to ignore Corai's position and focus on his Ottoman-affiliated allies in the Mediterranean and al-Maghrib.⁶⁴⁴

On the other side, the Safavids were seeking two principal approaches to suffocate the Porte. The Persians' foremost plea was a reliable military alliance with Europe to crush the Ottomans on land and sea, on both frontiers. The second scheme of the Persians was to divert the Euro-Asian trading routes from Ottoman jurisdictions to the Safavid southern ports in the Persian Gulf, most notably Hormuz, and sail Persian silk from there to Europe. Concurrent with Shirley's mission in Europe, Shah Abbas had dispatched an embassy to Philip III with fifty bales of fine Persian silk, silk brocades, precious stones (jewels), and a letter. In his proposal, the Safavid shah had negotiated to exploit Hormuz and Indian ports, then under Spagnolo-Portuguese control, to set sail his silk for Europe.⁶⁴⁵ With those bales of silk, Shah Abbas had explicitly expressed his commercial impetus to the King of Spain.⁶⁴⁶ This was while, in 1601, the Safavid army, under the command of the militant governor of Fars and Bahrain, Emāmqolī Khān (d.1632), had expelled the Portuguese from their footholds and recaptured ports and Islands of Bahrain in the Persian Gulf.⁶⁴⁷

In response to the embassy that the Habsburg King of Spain had dispatched to the court of Isfahan in 1608, Shah Abbas sent the ambassador back to Philip III with one of his Turkman courtiers, Dengiz Beg Rumlu (d.1613), to pursue his anti-Ottoman military

⁶⁴⁴ ASF, MP 4275, fols. 230-235, 309. Federici, "A Servant of Two Masters: The Translator Michel Angelo Corai as a Tuscan Diplomat (1599–1609)," 95.

⁶⁴⁵ Falsafi, *Siyāsat-i ḥāriḡī-i Īrān dar daurān-i Šafawiya*, 35–37.

⁶⁴⁶ Falsafi, 49–50, no.1.

⁶⁴⁷ Falsafi, 27–28; Juan R. I. Cole, "Rival Empires of Trade And Imami Shi'ism in Eastern Arabia, 1300–1800," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19, no. 2 (May 1987): 186, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743800031834>.

alliance and negotiate the Persian silk trade through Portuguese vassals from Hormuz to Europe.⁶⁴⁸ The Augustinian missionary, Antonio de Gouvea (d.1628), who delivered Philip III's letter to Shah Abbas in 1608, had already transmitted the Spanish king's concerns regarding the rise of English merchants in the Persian Gulf. He had requested that the Shah forestall trading activities in the area, in an earlier mission to Persia (1602) immediately after the fall of Bahrain to the Safavids and the Shirley- Bāyāt mission (1599-1601). In his response letter (1602- through Allāhverdi Beg) to the earlier Spanish mission, Shah Abbas strategically postponed acting on all his obligations to a time when the King of Spain and the Pope had officially embarked on war against the Ottomans.⁶⁴⁹

In his 1608 response (through Dengiz Beg Rumlu), the Shah addressed the English agents who had been negotiating over the Persian silk trade in Europe. By this time, the Shah was devastated over hearing the news of the 1606 peace treaty between the Holy Roman Emperor, Rudolph II (1576-1612), and the Ottoman Sultan, Ahmed I (Peace of Zsitvatorok). In his account, Antonio de Gouvea narrated the Shah's frustration and relayed that he accused all European potentates (including the Spanish) under the Influence of the Pope, of betrayal to their previous anti-Ottoman commitments and alliance with Persia.⁶⁵⁰ This was while Robert Shirley was anticipating the Spanish

⁶⁴⁸ Carlos Alonso Vañes, "La embajada persa de Denguiz-Beg y Antonio de Gouvea, osa, a la luz de nuevos documentos," *Archivo Agustiniiano* 64 (1980): 49–115; Carlos Alonso Vañes, "El P. Antonio de Gouvea O.S.A. y La Embajada Persa de Dengiz Beg (1609-1612)," *Analecta Augustiniana* 38 (1975): 63–94; Carlos Alonso Vañes and Saturnino López Zamora, "Due lettere riguardanti i primi tempi delle Missioni Agostiniane in Persia," *Analecta Augustiniana* 24 (1961): 152–201.

⁶⁴⁹ Falsafi, *Siyāsat-i hārigī-i Irān dar daurān-i Šafawiya*, 29–32; Falsafi, *Zendagānī-e Šāh 'Abbās Awwal (The Lifehistory of Shāh Abbās I)*, 68–90.

⁶⁵⁰ António de Gouvea, *Jornada do Arcebispo de Goa Dom Frey Aleixo de Meneses Primaz da India Oriental Religioso da Ordem de S. Agostinho. Quando foy as Serras de Malawar & lugares en que morão os antigos Christãos de S. Thome, & os tirou de muytos erros, & heresias em que estavam, & reduziu a nossa Fe Catholica & obediencia de Santa Igreja romana da qual passava de mil annos que estavam apartados, recopilada de diversos tratados de pessoas de autoridade que a tudo foram presentes, por Frey Antonio Gouvea, Coimbra, 1606*; tr. F. J. de Glen as *Histoire Oriental des grans progrès de l'Eglise Cath.*

King's response to Dengiz Beg's and his own proposals in Madrid. Shirley's stay at the court of Philip III was futile and provoked the Englishman to proceed to his king, James I of England (r.1603-1625), despite his concerns about the King's attitudes towards Robert's conversion to Catholicism and his anti-Ottoman proposals.⁶⁵¹

In October 1611, Shirley presented to the King of Scotland, England and Ireland a treaty-proposal on behalf of the Shah, upon which the English merchants could establish trading firms in two of the southern ports in the Gulf and settle diplomatic agents in both centers to deal with the affairs of the English East Indian Company (1600). In exchange for the franchise, the Shah requested the purchase of ships from England to sail Persian silk through English centers in the Persian Gulf, to Southern Africa, and from there to Europe. Moreover, a military alliance with England was ratified to oppose any potential offense from the Portuguese. The hypocritical English policies in playing the Ottomans off against the Persians requires another study. Suffice it to say that the Anglo-Safavid alliance cut the extensive duties and taxes gained by the Ottomans in allowing the transit of the Persian merchandise to Europe. This consequently triggered economic warfare by the Safavids against the Ottomans. However, this war was not as extended as the Shah's

Apost. et Rom. En la Réduction des anciens Chrestiens, dits de S. Thomas, de plusieurs autres Squismatiques et Hérétiques à l'Union de la vraye Elgise: conversion encore des Mahométanes, Mores & Payens, pas les bons devoirs de Rome & illustre Sr. Don Alexis de Ménèsès, de l'Ordre des Ermites de S. Augustin, Archeveque de Goa et Primat en tout Orient, Brussels, 1609. António de Gouvea, *Relaçam em que se tratam as guerras e grandes vitórias que alcançou o grande Rey de Persia Xá Abbas, do grão Turco Mahometo, e seu filho Amethe as quaes resultarão das Embaxadas que por mandado da Catholica Real Majestade de Rey D. Felipe II de Portugal fizerão alguns Religiosos da Ordem dos Ermitas de Santo Agostinho à Persia*, Lisbon, 1611; tr. A. de Meneses as *Relation des grandes guerres et victoires obtenues par le roy de Perse Cha Abbas contre les empereurs de Turquie Mahomet et Achmet son fils, ensuite du voyage de quelques religieux de l'ordre des Hermites de Saint-Augustin envoyés en Perse par le Roy catholique Don Philippe second roy de Portugal*, Rouen, 1646. Roberto Gulbenkian, *L'ambassade en Perse de Luís Pereira de Lacerda et des pères portugais de l'Ordre de Saint-Augustin, Belchior dos Anjos et Guilherme de Santo Agostinho, 1604-1605*, Lisbon, 1972. Rudi Matthee, "Gouvea, Antonio de", *Encyclopedia Iranica*, Vol. XI, Fasc. 2, pp. 177-179.

⁶⁵¹ Falsafi, *Siyāsāt-i ḥāriḡī-i Īrān dar daurān-i Šafawiya*, 132–38; Barāzish, *Ravābiṭ-i siyāsī - dīplumātīk-i Īrān va jahān dar 'ahd-i Šafavīyah*, 747–53.

initial plan, in which all European powers would crosscut the Ottoman paths and shift their trade routes to southern Persia. By 1614, the English merchants had settled in the port city of Jāsk in the Gulf of Oman on the right side of the Strait of Hormuz. The rise of the English in the sea trade of India and the Anglo-Safavid military alliance eventually resulted in the expulsion of the Portuguese from Hormuz in 1622 and the fall of the Spagnolo-Portuguese trading empire in the Persian Gulf.⁶⁵²

Shah Abbas's Gifts:

Among the numerous rich gifts that the Shah sent in his 1608 official mission to Sigismund III of Poland, Rudolph II, Pope Paul V, and other European princes were trophies of Persian arms, ornamented scimitars, bows, quivers, shields, and bejeweled-sheathed Damascus knives. Moreover, the embassy took several impressively precious gemstones (amber, topaz, diamond, amethyst, and pearl) with either healing values, apotropaic qualities, exquisitely carved features with religious themes, or rarity in terms of size, material, and color.⁶⁵³ As already argued, the ceremonial armor insinuated the mission's military ambitions in Europe against the common enemy. As also promoted in Corai's reports, the semi-precious stones and jewels alluded to the flowering market of international merchandise in Persia under Shāh Abbās, a newcomer into the global

⁶⁵² Falsafi, *Siyāsat-i ḥāriḡī-i Īrān dar daurān-i Ṣafawiya*, 141–45; Penrose, *The Sherleian Odyssey: Being a Record of the Travels and Adventures of Three Famous Brothers During the Reigns of Elizabeth, James I, and Charles I*, 179–88.

⁶⁵³ Archivio Segreto Vaticano, *Fondo Borghese*, s. IV, 52, ff.346r-348v (minuta). Piemontese, "I due ambasciatori in Persia ricevuti da Papa Paolo V al Quirinale," 388; Sydney Carlyle Cockerell and John Plummer, eds., *Old Testament Miniatures: A Medieval Picture Book with 283 Paintings from the Creation to the Story of David*, New ed. (London: Phaidon, 1969), 14–15; Shirley and The Roxburghe Club, *The Sherley Brothers, an Historical Memoir of the Lives of Sir Thomas Sherley, Sir Anthony Sherley, and Sir Robert Sherley, Knights*, 73.

market of the seventeenth century.⁶⁵⁴ Furthermore, I argue, the latter category of gifts drew attention to the exotic taste and marvels of Persia, a land rich in natural minerals, herbs, and metals, on the crossroad to India, a global source of spices, jewels, and hard stones.⁶⁵⁵

The nature and the material culture of the gifts brought nuance to Robert Shirley's embassy for a Persian-European action in war and commerce. Besides, the richly embroidered Persian silk fabrics worn by the English ambassador overloaded his mission with a role to exhibit the Shah's silk enterprise in Europe.⁶⁵⁶ However, instead of a repetitive overview of the list of objects, already discussed in this section, that had bridged diplomacy and trade, I turn my focus to the single gift to the Grand Duke of Tuscany that showcases the category of a "selected" gift for a specific European/Christian recipient. It is important to remember that all the gifts and letters brought by Robert Shirley, were originally intended for Ferdinando I; nonetheless, by the time the embassy arrived in Florence, the latter had died and his son, Cosimo II, had succeeded to the throne of Tuscany.

The *Maṭnawīye Ma'nawī*

Jalāl-al-Din Moḥammad Balkhī Rūmī (d.1273), also known as *Mawlānā* (our master) or *Mawlawī*, the Persian poet of the *Maṭnawīye Ma'nawī* (Spiritual Rhymed Couplets), was a Sufi philosopher, whose mysticism and teachings were rooted profoundly in the Islamic

⁶⁵⁴ Lisa Golombek, Robert B. Mason, and Patty Proctor, "Safavid Potters' Marks and the Question of Provenance," *Iran* 39 (2001): 207.

⁶⁵⁵ Library of Congress, *A Thousand Years of the Persian Book* (Washington, D.C: Library of Congress, 2014); Jones, *A Mirror of Princes*, 10–56, 108–112, 126. Karl J Schmidt, *An Atlas and Survey of South Asian History*, 2015, 100 (no.45).

⁶⁵⁶ Niyayesh, "The Fabric of Silk Power in the Sherley Portraits," 205–220.

tradition, the soul of Qur'anic messages, and the *Ḥadīths* (the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad). Nevertheless, the theological content of his works imparted mystical teachings and subverted basic Islamic tenets. In this regard, *Mawlānā*'s ("Mulla Rum") *Maṭnawī*, offered, particularly, a Persian reading of the Qur'an.⁶⁵⁷ This rendering of a spiritual text that promoted mystical knowledge over scholastic religiosity, with its principal goal of overcoming the self (*nafs*) to experience the divine, merged meaningfully with the patron's desire for the European ally to know his Persian associates as elegant moral believers, rather than barbaric infidels.

At the very end of the manuscript (fol. 307r), there is a central inscription that marks the price of the manuscript in Safavid currency. The inscription indicates that the gift was 14,000 "Tabrīzī (?) Dinars." [Fig 6, Ch.4, Sec.2] As a common practice in the gift giving tradition among the Muslim courts, the *Maṭnawī* at the Medici collection also holds a price tag to show its monetary value to its beholder.⁶⁵⁸ As a sign of impressive respect to the stately receiver, the monetary value of this gift, which was presumably created in the royal workshop of the Safavid court (*kitabkhana*- House of Books), equaled about 280 *metqāls* (4.6 grams each/560 grams) of silver.⁶⁵⁹ A simple comparison between an early seventeenth-century Florentine silver coin (lire) that contained about 4.46 grams of pure

⁶⁵⁷ Jawid Mojaddedi, "Rumi," in Andrew Rippin, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān*, (Oxford, 2006): 60-68.

⁶⁵⁸ Komaroff, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, *Gifts of the Sultan*, 28.

⁶⁵⁹ At this time, the official Safavid currency was *šāhī* (silver coins) and *ašrafī* (gold coins); however the Tabrīzī *metqāls* contained 4.6 grams of silver in a *šāhī*. One *šāhī* equaled about fifty Dinars. This brings the whole value of the manuscript to 280 *šāhīs* or 1288 grams of silver. See Rūmlū Ḥasan Beg, *Aḥsān Al-Tawārikò (Second Half of the Sixteenth Century)*, ed. 'Abd-al-Ḥosayn Navā'i (Tehran, 1349), 122; H. Farahbakhsh, *Iranian Hammered Coinage : 1500- 187AD, 900- 1296AH : Savavis, Afghans, Afshars, Zands, Ghajars* (Berlin: Kantstr, 1975), 12. Stephen Album, Michael L. Bates, Willem Floor, "COINS AND COINAGE," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. VI, no. 1 (December 15, 1992), pp. 14-41.

silver, and the Persian illuminated *Maṭnawī* suggests that the monetary value of the gift was about 289 Lire.⁶⁶⁰

To appeal to the Christian recipient for a politico-commercial alliance against a mutual enemy, I argue, the Safavid Shah targeted the Grand Dukes' curiosity in "Oriental" manuscripts and cultures, which was revealed earlier by Vecchietti's expedition in Persia (1584-1588).⁶⁶¹ By sending an exquisitely illuminated manuscript with moral content of Persian spiritual poetry as a gift, the Shah took this courtly discourse to another level to express his recognition of the Grand Duke's favors and deliberately exalt his own intellectual qualities in Islamic wisdom. This choreographed reputation, in my view, was to consolidate the Shah in his trans-religious alliance with the Medici Court and to entice the Grand Duke to stand next to his Muslim Asiatic ally in Persia.

Shah Abbas was an "Impeccable Guide" (*moršed-e kāmel*), meaning he had reached the status of the most accomplished spiritual leader within the Sufi order in the Safavid administration. Shāh Abbās's ancestor, Esma'īl I, was the descent of the mystic Shaikh Ṣafī-al-Dīn Eshāq Ardabīlī (d.1334), the founder of the dervish order of Sufis (1301) that later evolved into the Safavid imperium in 1501.⁶⁶² Hence, Sufism and the Sufi culture added a distinct mode of legitimacy to the Persian identity of the Safavids that alluded to the historical longevity of the order, on the one hand, and the spirituality of its Muslim

⁶⁶⁰ Carlo M. Cipolla, *Money in Sixteenth-Century Florence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 36–60.

⁶⁶¹ Angelo Michele Piemontese, "Leggere e scrivere Orientalia in Italia," *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa* 3, no. 23 (1993): 427–53; Michele Bernardini, "Giovann Battista and Gerolamo Vecchietti in Hormuz," in *Acta Iranica: Portugal, The Persian Gulf and the Safavid Persia*, ed. Rudi Matthee and Jorge Manuel Flores, *Acta Iranica* 52 (Leuven]: Peeters, in association with the Iran Heritage Foundation and the Freer Gallery of Art & Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 2011), 265–81.

⁶⁶² Kathryn Babayan, "The Safavid Synthesis: From Qizilbash Islam to Imamite Shi'ism," *Iranian Studies* 27, no. 1/4 (1994): 135–36.

disciples, on the other.⁶⁶³ At this time, in Ardabīl (northwest Persia), where Shaikh Ṣafī-al-Dīn had founded the Safavid order of Sufis and was later buried, Shah Abbas transferred his private property into *waqf* (charitable endowment in Islamic tradition), to the Shrine of the Shaikh (Ṣafī-al-Dīn Eshāq Ardabīlī).⁶⁶⁴ Among those invaluable endowments was a large number of richly illuminated and illustrated Persian poetic and historical manuscripts, from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.⁶⁶⁵ The gifting of a book of poetry was common practice between the Persians and other Muslim courts of the period.⁶⁶⁶ However, the gifting of a manuscript of poems with mystical content from a Safavid Shah, whose lineage was often referred to as “Sophy” (also Sofi) in non-Persian chronicles, to a Christian ruler, whose interest in Persian literary sources had laid the foundation for an enhanced alliance between the two courts is self-defining.

Whether this exact manuscript was one of the Shah’s private properties is not clear. However, the simultaneity of this gift-giving with Shah Abbas’s *waqf* of numerous Persian manuscripts implies that this treasure may have also been in the Shah’s personal collection prior to its re-identification as a gift to the Grand Duke of Tuscany. Besides this volume’s modification from a book of mystical poetry at the Court of Persia to a diplomatic gift in the Medici Court of Tuscany, the manuscript embraces this intricate part of the history that tied the two courts beyond their political visions. Amid the struggles over a military alliance against a mutual enemy and the shifts of power that

⁶⁶³ Babayan, 155.

⁶⁶⁴ Komaroff, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, *Gifts of the Sultan*, 51–78.

⁶⁶⁵ Komaroff, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 247.

⁶⁶⁶ Michael Morony, “Gift Giving in the Iranian Tradition,” in *Gifts of the Sultan; The Arts of Giving at the Islamic Courts* (Yale University Press, 2012), 33–47; Arcak Casale, “Gifts in Motion: Ottoman-Safavid Cultural Exchange, 1501-1618.”

constantly changed political expediencies, this gift of spiritual content distinguished the gift-object from other gifts with military and commercial connotations and forged a reciprocal recognition and perception of the two cultures in relation to one another.

Although the anti-Ottoman military alliance never materialized between Persia and Tuscany (or any other European power of the seicento), the two courts remained in civilized coordination in various ways. In January 1610, one of the Shah's Armenian ambassadors, Khāwje Safar Ğūlāwhī (Cugè Sefer Armeno in Florentine documents), arrived in Florence.⁶⁶⁷ A member of Khāwje Safar's mission was to recover some purchased commodities and clothes that belonged to Shah Abbas but were sequestered in Venice. The Grand Duke assisted the Armenian ambassador to retrieve the Shah's belongings and, prior to his departure, Cosimo II gave Khāwje Safar another gold chain worth of 300 ducats and some travel expenses.⁶⁶⁸

In another communication on October 6, 1615, the Grand Duke wrote a response to Shah Abbas that was delivered by Robert Shirley in his second European mission, in which he had Cosimo expressed his gratitude over receiving the Shah's ambassador and reassured the Shah about his anti-Ottoman attempts and policies.⁶⁶⁹ At the end of the letter, the Grand Duke communicated that he had verbally transmitted some messages to Robert Shirley. To this, add another two letters in July 1619, both of which pertain to the commercial activities of Armenian merchants in the service of the Shah and the Grand

⁶⁶⁷ ASF, MP 4274a, ins. X, fol. 631.

⁶⁶⁸ ASF, MP 302, fol. 57, 59. Kāwūsī 'Irāqī, *Asnād-i rawābiṭ-i daulat-i Šafawī bā ḥukūmathā-i Ītālīyā*, 77; Barāzish, *Ravābiṭ-i siyāsī - dīplumātīk-i Īrān va jahān dar 'ahd-i Šafavīyah*, 646–47; Baskins, "Framing Khoja Sefer in the Sala Regia of the Quirinal Palace in Rome (1610-1617)."

⁶⁶⁹ Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli, manoscritto cit. F. Also a copy of the letter is at The Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tehran, P. 86L.

Duke's facilitating response.⁶⁷⁰ The anti-Ottoman objectives brought the two courts of Tuscany and Persia in close contact. However, despite the disappointments over a martial coalition, the Perso-Tuscan relations went through a series of modifications, specifically after the 1609 shift of power in the Medici Court.

Cosimo II relayed some secret messages to Shah Abbas, which, for political and/or security reasons, he decided to transmit verbally to the Shah's envoys. In one of the two 1619 letters to Shah Abbas, Cosimo II noted that a part of his message was verbally conveyed to Khāwje Safar to be communicated to the Shah. In Cosimo II's response to Robert Shirley's second mission in 1615 with another verbal message for the Shah, one hypothesis emerges that there may have been a "behind the scene" alliance that was not even reflected in the written communications and documents, so that the Ottomans would not discover it. Inferred from those last courtly exchanges, Persia remained a "potential" military ally of the Medici Court. Nevertheless, this political allegiance was ostensibly a commercial alliance between the two courts throughout the reign of Shah Abbas (d.1629). This historical overview may shed light on the history of those objects in the Medici collection with obscure provenance, such as the two seventeenth-century "Polish" carpets (Persian origin) and the Kashan prayer rug at *Museo degli Argenti*, in *Palazzo Pitti*, Florence.⁶⁷¹

⁶⁷⁰ Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli, manoscritto cit. F.116. Also, a copy of the letter is at The Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tehran, P. 1071 [left] and 108R [Right].

⁶⁷¹ "Un tappeto persiano di seta con oro, lungo br. 3, largo br. 1 5/6, dall'Inventario segn. A, ne 13 luglio, 176" "Due tappeti persiani di seta con oro, lunghi br. 3 1/2, larghi br. 2 1/2 per ciascuno, da detto, 176" ASF, *Guardaroba Medicea*, 1301 bis, General Inventory (1691), fol. 360r. "con oro e argento, con cerri di seta verde, lungo br. 3, largo br. 1 7/8" ASF, *Guardaroba Medicea*, 741 (1666), General Inventory, fol. 97r. Look at Spallanzani, *Carpet Studies*, 159–65. Alberto Boralevi, "Three Rugs in the Museo Argenti in Florence," *HALI* 3, no. 1 (1980): 48; Alberto Boralevi, "Tappeti di corte, storia di un nome. Tre capolavori a Palazzo Pitti," *Casa Vogue, Antiques* 202 (November 1988): 75–77; Alberto Boralevi, *Islam*,

Section 3: Seicento Rome

In this section, I analyze visual representations that memorialized Persian diplomatic missions in Rome during the first three decades of the seventeenth century. By looking at the visual documents and correlating them to the textual evidence in Italian archives and Persian chronicles, I argue that those illustrations were designed to form Italian perceptions of Persians within the cultural and political hierarchies set by the Roman Catholic Church. However, the discrepancy between the Safavid Shah's military ambitions and the Vatican's missionary aspirations in their intercultural correspondence eventually caused those diplomatic ties to evolve into an extended network for the burgeoning global trade, in which Shah Abbas's overseas silk trade took pride of place.

The Fresco Cycle of the Church of Sant'Onofrio

The road that Pope Sixtus V had commissioned in 1586 to connect the port of Ospedale di Santo Spirito in Sassia (Rome) to the Church of Sant'Onofrio was paved by the new pope, Clement VIII (r.1592-1605) in 1600, and the convent cloister of the church was decorated by twenty-eight frescoes of the life and miracles of Sant'Onofrio.⁶⁷² As already noted in the previous chapter, Sant'Onofrio was believed to be a prince of ancient Persia. The cloister frescoes in Sant'Onofrio enlivened and memorialized this belief. The cycle launches with a scene of a Persian king kneeling at an altar praying to have a son. [Fig 1, Ch.4, Sec.3] Complementary inscriptions in frescoed frames beneath the pictorial scenes caption the fresco cycle. In the first scene, the Persian king wears a golden crown. His

Specchio d'Oriente (Florence, 2002), 146; Alberto Boralevi, "Fascinazione Ottomana," in *Nelle Collezioni Statali Fiorentine dai Medici ai Savoia* (Istanbul, 2003), 153.

⁶⁷² Angelo Michele Piemontese, "La diplomazia di Gregorio XIII e la lettera del re di Persia a Sisto V," *Miscellanea Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae* 14 (2007): 399.

hands are crossed on his chest and he humbly kneels on a cushion towards the altar. Two figures on the right corner of the composition have distinctive white headgear and mantles. One of the figures faces the viewer and looks at the other figure on his right, who has his back turned to communicate with his partner. These two figures are depicted right above the inscriptions below the scene and with their hand gestures toward the framed epigraphs draw attention to the text that unravels the story.

In the second scene, the king is depicted remorseful on his majestic throne disputing despondently with a demon-like figure. In the far left side of the background, a crowned female figure, presumably the queen, rests on a bed with two maids on either side. One of the maids is leaning against the wall with her hands gripping her head in a pensive manner. The epigraph relays that the demon insinuates to the king that the son is born of adultery and he must burn the baby. [Fig 2, Ch.4, Sec.3] The third scene shows the baby alive in the midst of modest praying gestures with his hands crossed on his chest and bending knee in the middle of scorching flames. An angel is swooping down to the fire with projecting golden rays that extinguish the fire threatening the baby. [Fig 3, Ch.4, Sec.3] The Persian king and his entourage are horrified by the flying angel. A female figure, also presumably the queen, on the counter side of the king kneels in front of the fire with her hands clutched against her face and looks astonishingly at the unmarked body of the infant amidst the flaming fire.

The epigraph beneath the scene of the burning baby narrates that an angel appeared to the king and ordered him to baptize his son and name him “Honofrio.” The following scene shows the Persian king and queen holding their son upon the baptismal font. The epigraph reiterates that the king obeyed the angel’s command and named his baptized

son, Honofrio. [Fig 4, Ch.4, Sec.3] The proceeding frescoes unravel the life and miracles of Honofrio, from the moment his father consigned him to monastic life to the instant after his death when his body was taken up to the skies in form of a white dove via angels sent by Christ. His miracles of receiving bread from Christ Child in his early life and miraculously receiving food from angels and palm trees for thirty years as a hermit were celebrated in the cloisters of the church that housed his relics. The theological and artistic values of those twenty-eight frescoes acquire prominence in the history of the Roman Church, memorializing the life history of a saint who was born to a Persian monarch in an era when Persians were attempting to bond with Christian Europe against a common enemy. This commission is also impregnated with political aspirations.

One of the principal strategies of Clement VIII's pontificate was to promote missionary activities in order to reinforce the Catholic league's alliances.⁶⁷³ To this end, the pope aimed to extend the intervention initiated by the Portuguese Augustinians and Carmelites in Persia. In early 1601 he dispatched two nuncios to Shah Abbas.⁶⁷⁴ The former Jesuit priest, Francesco da Costa, and Diego de Miranda were two Portuguese residents of Goa who arrived at the Safavid court as papal ambassadors with letters of introduction imparted by the pope's nephew and Secretary of State, Cardinal Cinzio Aldobrandini (1551-1610).⁶⁷⁵ In his letter, he wished for a stable and continued alliance with the Shah

⁶⁷³ Maria Teresa Fattori, "Clemente VIII e il suo tempo negli studi storici (1592–1605)," *Cristianesimo nella Storia* XXII (2001): 23–64; Maria Teresa Fattori, *Clemente VIII e il Sacro Collegio 1592-1605. Meccanismi istituzionali ed accentrimento di governo*, Ppste Und Papsttum, Bd. 33 (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 2004).

⁶⁷⁴ For a brief overview and bibliography, see Francis Richard, "Carmelites in Persia," *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (New York, 1996).

⁶⁷⁵ Carlos Alonso, "Una Embajada de Clemente viii a Persia (1600–1609)," *Archivum Historiae Pontificiae* 34 (1996): 7–125.

of Persia, a “potent and noble” country, and mentioned the Persian martyr saints worshipped by the Catholic Church.⁶⁷⁶

As noted in the previous chapter, the relics of a Persian family, who were martyred by the Goths on their pilgrimage in Rome, had been excavated in 1589.⁶⁷⁷ The memories of those Paleochristian Persian saints, Mario, Marta, and their two sons, Audifax and Abbacuc (Audiface and Abaco), were honored in Sixtine Rome in an ambitious attempt to revive the cult. Cardinal Cinzio’s remark on the re-evaluation of the Persian reputation in Rome was, in my view, a political statement in alignment with other commissions that promoted Persia as an old pro-Christian ally. The fresco cycle of the life and miracles of Sant’Onofrio was, as well, in agreement with those political moves that manipulated Persia’s religious history to establish both a moral basis for the alliance and to situate Persia favorably within a cultural and political hierarchy set by the Roman Church. In these re-alignments, Persians were represented as saints, Catholic converts, and pious adherents of the Catholic Church. In the next few paragraphs, I will elaborate on a number of illustrations and visual documents that recorded the Safavid-Vatican communications in the first three decades of the seventeenth century. These visual representations are mobilized within a complex network of anti-Ottoman diplomacy, cross-religious missionary activities, and the development of global trade.

⁶⁷⁶ Klaus Jaitner and Deutsches Historisches Institut in Rom, eds., *Die Hauptinstruktionen Clemens’ VIII: für die Nuntien und Legaten an den europäischen Fürstenhöfen, 1592-1605*, *Instructiones Pontificum Romanorum* (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 1984), 655–62; Angelo Michele Piemontese, “I due ambasciatori in Persia ricevuti da Papa Paolo V al Quirinale,” in *Miscellanea Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae*, vol. 12, 2005, 360–61.

⁶⁷⁷ Piemontese, *La memoria romana dei santi martiri persiani Mario, Marta, Audiface e Abaco*.

Representation of Persians in Sala Clementina

In the Sala Clementina of the Palazzo Apostolico Vaticano are two turbaned figures represented on the east wall of the *Baptism of San Clemente* fresco by two painter brothers Giovanni and Cherubino Alberti, in 1601.⁶⁷⁸ [Fig 5, Ch.4, Sec.3] The two figures were previously interpreted as the “infidel Orientals.”⁶⁷⁹ Angelo Piemontese suggested an alternative identification for them. The aged white-bearded figure was, in his view, the Turkish “Bascia Senex” who had converted to Catholicism shortly before, in 1601, and was renamed Pietro Aldobrandini.⁶⁸⁰ The elderly figure is extending his hand towards the north wall to the baptizing scene to draw the attention of the second figure, who is a mustached young man, standing behind the old man’s shoulder. The young man holds a letter in his hand, which led Piemontese to interpret it as a sign that he was an ambassador and infer that the young turbaned character was “Clement Ossat Persiano.” Clement VIII converted him, along with two other Shi’a Persians, nine Jews, and one Turk in the Basilica di San Giovanni in Laterano in the same year.⁶⁸¹

Piemontese identified the Persian character in the Sala Clementina as the private secretary of the Persian ambassador Husayn `Ali Beg Bāyāt, Anthony Shirley’s companion in the anti-Ottoman mission to Europe. The embassy had left Isfahan in July 1599 and arrived in Rome in April 1601. Uruch Beg, the prime secretary and diarist in Shirley-Bāyāt embassy, did not record the names of the three Persian converts in his

⁶⁷⁸ Morton C. Abromson, “Clement VIII’s Patronage of the Brothers Alberti,” *The Art Bulletin* 60, no. 3 (September 1978): 531-547.

⁶⁷⁹ Stefania Macioce, *Undique splendent: Aspetti della pittura sacra nella Roma di Clemente VIII Aldobrandini (1592-1605)* (Roma: De Luca edizioni d’arte, 1990), 190.

⁶⁸⁰ Archivio di Stato di Roma (ASR), Camerale I, Giustificazioni di Tesoreria, 29, fasc. 1. Ff. 1r, 3r, 9r, 19r, 34r; fasc. 8 (libro 1602-03), pp. 3, 4; fasc. 8 (libro 1603-04), p. 4; fasc. (1604), p. 16.

⁶⁸¹ Piemontese, “I due ambasciatori in Persia ricevuti da Papa Paolo V al Quirinale,” 364.

travel account.⁶⁸² However, in a letter by Clement VIII to Shah Abbas, the names of the three Persians were revealed as “schiah Ossein, Risa, and Alli.”⁶⁸³ Piemontese suggested that the Persian character in the Sala Clementina (“Clement Ossat”) was Bāyāt’s ex-secretary who later came back to the political scene as an interpreter at the court of Pope Paul V (r.1605-1621), in “late August- early September of 1609.”⁶⁸⁴ I will come back to this mission after analyzing the Sala Clementina’s frescoes of the two turbaned figures.

A notable element in this imagery is that both figures wear turbans. This implies their Islamic faith. Turbans were a fundamental part of male Muslims’ clothes. Following a prophetic tradition, Muslims of high official positions would appear in public with their turbans on the entire time.⁶⁸⁵ In the Italian perspective, Muslims were defined as turbaned figures, however, with distinctive forms of this headgear that conveyed their different religious faiths and political affiliations. For example, in an illustrated manuscript on habits of various occupations in the early-modern Venice, now in the Biblioteca del Museo Correr (Venice), Persian, Egyptian, and Ottoman Turkish delegates were depicted with their characteristic headgear for the contemporary viewer, particularly artists, to infuse those features in their visual perception of Muslim costumes.⁶⁸⁶ [Fig 6a-b-c, Ch.4, Sec.3] Another example was Jacopo Ligozzi’s costume album that inspired Lodovico

⁶⁸² Strange, *Don Juan of Persia A Shi’ah Catholic 1560-1604.*, 287.

⁶⁸³ Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Arm. XLIV, 45, f. 224v. The Conversion of the three Persians was registered by Giovanni Paolo Mucanzio, the papal diarist, on June 6, 1601: ASV, Fondo Borghese, s. I, 801, f. 674r-v. Piemontese, “I due ambasciatori in Persia ricevuti da Papa Paolo V al Quirinale,” 362.

⁶⁸⁴ Piemontese, “I due ambasciatori in Persia ricevuti da Papa Paolo V al Quirinale,” 364.

⁶⁸⁵ Prophet Muhammad’s *Hadith*: “العمائم تيجان العرب، إذا وضعوا العمائم وضع الله عزهم” (Turbans are Arabs’ crowns, if they put them away, God will send grief to them). Look at:

جامع الأحاديث - الجامع الصغير وزوائده والجامع الكبير - قسم الأقوال الجزء السادس. ص. 236 (14598).

⁶⁸⁶ Biblioteca del Museo Correr, *Gli abiti de veneziani di quasi ogni età con diligenza raccolti e dipinti nel secolo XVIII*, seconda metà “Ambasciadore Persiano,” “Ambasciadore Turco,” “Ambasciadore del soldano di Egitto.”

Buti's *Persiano armato* (1589) fresco on the Uffizi ceiling, as noted in the previous section.

There are also visual references that testify to the association between removed turbans and conversion, in the Italian view of the period. The most revealing of those examples is Vittore Carpaccio's (1472-1526) *Baptism of the Selenites* tempera (1507) in the Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni (Venice). [Fig 7, Ch.4, Sec.3] The Venetian artist represented the conversion scene of two "non-believers" by the missionary saint, George of Cappadocia (d. 303 AD), from the thirteenth-century Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend* (*Legenda aurea*).⁶⁸⁷ In this painting, Carpaccio dramatized the act of conversion by depicting a giant turban thrown on the steps leading to the scene where the crusading saint baptized the "pagan" king and queen. The contemporary Turkish turban on the steps of a medieval church was a visual anachronism suggesting Venetian period desire to overcome the Ottoman menace. In a broader perspective, the discarded turban implied conversion, and in a bigger picture, Christian missionaries' ambitions as *militia Christi* to suppress the infidels through conversion.⁶⁸⁸

In another example, Titian (1488-1576), perpetuated the old tradition in an oil painting that memorialized the 1571 victory of the Holy league over the Ottoman fleet at Lepanto in the Corinthian Gulf. [Fig 8, Ch.4, Sec.3] Commissioned by Philip II of Spain (r.1556-1598), one of the main supporters of the Catholic forces, whom Titian depicted at the center of the composition holding his newly born male heir Fernando up to receive the

⁶⁸⁷ Carboni, Institut du monde arabe (France), and Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.), *Venice and the Islamic World, 828-1797*, 131–32.

⁶⁸⁸ Emily D. Kelley, ed., *Saints as Intercessors between the Wealthy and the Divine: Art and Hagiography among the Medieval Merchant Classes*, Sanctity in Global Perspective (New York: Routledge, 2019), 256.

palm of victory from an angel descending from the skies.⁶⁸⁹ The accompanying *cartellino* augured still greater victories for the baby.⁶⁹⁰ In this painting, now at the Museo del Prado (Madrid), Titian summarized the devastating defeat of the Muslim Ottomans by the naval forces of the major Catholic States of the Mediterranean in an Ottoman turban cast off on the ground.⁶⁹¹ A chained figure sitting next to the turban remorsefully looks at it to dramatize the grand triumph of Christendom and the Ottomans' catastrophe. Jacopo Ligozzi also used the same symbolism at the Medici court of Tuscany, where he celebrated the military glory of the Order of St. Stephen on the ceiling of the Conventual Church of St. Stephen (Pisa) in a painting that shows the return of the fleet of the Order after the Battle of Lepanto with captive Ottoman Turks being forced by a knight to embark on a boat.⁶⁹² [Fig 9, Ch.4, Sec.3] In this 1604 painting, Ligozzi depicted the captured Muslims without turbans. At the very center of the composition, Ligozzi placed an Ottoman figure holding his turban under his right arm to emphasize the "overthrown" Muslims.⁶⁹³

The turbaned figures of the Sala Clementina were not exceptions in signifying Muslim identity through their headgear. Moreover, the turbans display minute characteristics of Safavid headgear with twelve gores and an untucked end lying on the side. An identical headgear is also depicted in an engraving by the Flemish artist Ægidius Sadeler II (1570-

⁶⁸⁹ Paul K Davis, *100 Decisive Battles: From Ancient Times to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 195.

⁶⁹⁰ Davis, 195.

⁶⁹¹ Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant, 1204-1571: The Sixteenth Century*, III:1045–1104.

⁶⁹² Christina Strunck, "The Barbarous and Noble Enemy : Pictorial Representations of the Battle of Lepanto," in *Turk and Islam in the Western Eye* (Farnham, 2011), 217–40.

⁶⁹³ Stephen Klimczuk and Gerald Warner, *Secret Places, Hidden Sanctuaries: Uncovering Mysterious Sites, Symbols, and Societies* (New York: Sterling Ethos, 2009), 90.

1629), of the Persian ambassador “Cuchein Olli Beag” (Husayn `Ali Beg [Bāyāt]).⁶⁹⁴ [Fig 10, Ch.4, Sec.3] On the bottom of the engraving, there is an inscription in Persian that identifies the figure as Husayn `Ali Beg Ilchī (legate) and a Latin autograph inscription by the sculptor dated Prague 1601. Prior to Rome, the Shirley-Bāyāt embassy composed of forty-one individuals had entered Prague in October 1600 to negotiate a treaty of alliance against the Ottoman Court (Porte) with the Habsburg Holy Roman Emperor, Rudolf II (r.1576-1612).⁶⁹⁵

In Sadeler’s engraving, the gores of Husayn `Ali Beg’s turban wrap up one side of the sash which is tucked in while the other hangs down loosely on his left shoulder. His turban is topped with a short baton-like *taj* (crown) with a bulbous end in the traditional Safavid fashion of headgear.⁶⁹⁶ In Alberti’s rendition of Muslim personages in the Sala Clementina, the standing figure wears a mustache with long straight sides similar to the one in Sadeler’s engraving of Husayn `Ali Beg’s portrait. The mustached figure with a recognizable Safavid turban and a letter gripped in his hand presumably represents the Persian ambassador Husayn `Ali Beg Bāyāt, who together with Anthony Shirley, led Shah Abbas’s first official embassy to multiple European courts and states, at the turn of the seventeenth century. Therefore, I conclude, the other figure in Sala Clementina who

⁶⁹⁴ Isabelle de Ramaix et al., eds., *The Illustrated Bartsch. 72 Pt. 2: Supplement: Aegidius Sadeler II [...]* (New York, NY: Abaris Books, 1998), no. 7201 (.323 S2 Cambridge UK); Waldemar Deluga, “The Oriental Portraits of Aegidius Sadeler,” *Print Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (December 2008): 424–26.

⁶⁹⁵ Barāzish, *Ravābiṭ-i siyāsī - dīplumātīk-i Īrān va jahān dar ‘ahd-i Ṣafavīyah*, 658–61; Strange, *Don Juan of Persia A Shi’ah Catholic 1560-1604*, Chapter Five (p.272-278).

⁶⁹⁶ Barbara Schmitz, “On a Special Hat Introduced during the Reign of Shāh ‘Abbās the Great,” *Iran* 22 (1984): 103–12.

also wears a Safavid turban is a symbolic representation of those [prospective] Persian converts in Husayn `Ali Beg's entourage prior to his baptism by Pope Clement VIII.⁶⁹⁷

This observation challenges the previous assumptions about the Turkish origin of any of the figures. The inclusion of two Safavid legates in the pictorial program of Sala Clementina in the Palazzo Apostolico Vaticano was a political initiative to bolster the prominent role of Pope Clement VIII as a missionary of the Roman Church. While Clement VIII's nuncios were developing Catholic communities in Shah Abbas's empire and achieving leading roles in the foreign diplomacy of the Persian Shah, the representation of the Safavid delegates in the Sala Clementina insinuated equality within the cross-religious diplomacy between the two courts. However, the proportional hierarchy between the turbaned figures with their body gestures of astonishment and the imposing scene of the Baptism of San Clemente on the north wall stressed the grandeur and desired dominance of the Roman Church over the "others." This visual hierarchy, I argue, modified the cultural and political status of Persia within its intercultural relations with the Vatican for the Italian/ European audience.⁶⁹⁸ While on the Safavid side, the

⁶⁹⁷ In addition to the three Persians who converted in Rome, three more were baptized when the embassy arrived in Spain. Among those three converts were Husayn `Ali Beg's nephew, Ali Gholi Beg, who changed his name to "Don Philip" in respect to Philip III of Spain, and Uruch Beg, who then changed his name to "Don Juan." Strange, *Don Juan of Persia A Shi'ah Catholic 1560-1604.*, 287-89, 292-93, 300-303; Naşrallāh Falsafi, *Siyāsāt-i ḥārīgī-i Īrān dar daurān-i Şafawīya*, 2015, 26–27.

⁶⁹⁸ This idea of forming the perception of the contemporary audience through visual articulations set within the cultural hierarchies of a community was not confined to the European courtly patronage of the early modern period. Vivid examples of such ideas can be found in Shah Abbas's illustrated commissions in royal palaces of Isfahan, particularly in *Chehel Sotun* ("Forty Columns"), in which foreign delegates are represented deliberately in smaller scales and humble body gestures, such as semi-bowed figures or tilted necks, which allude to their lower ranks in presence of the Shah. One of the most revealing examples in *Chehel Sotun* palace is the mural representing Shah Abbas's reception of the *Uzbek* emir of Turkestan, Vali Mohammad Khan (r. 1605–1611), in around 1611 (1020 A.H), painted on the northwestern wall of the central hall. However, since this dissertation looks exclusively at Italian commissions memorializing the Persian missions, I will save this comparison in the patronage of the two cultures for the future when this work is being transformed into a book manuscript. For Shah Abbas's painting commissions, Cfr. Anthony Welch, "Painting and Patronage under Shah ` Abbas I," *Iranian Studies* 7, no. 3–4 (September 1974): 458–507. For Isfahan palaces and their wall paintings, Cfr. Sussan Babaie, *Isfahan and Its Palaces: Statecraft*,

Shah's tolerance towards the missionary activities in Persia and the conversions were in exchange for a tenable military alliance against the Ottomans, in the Vatican Safavid legates were represented as "Muslims" impressed by the Christian culture, with no reference to their political deals.⁶⁹⁹

Giovanni Orlando's Engraving of Pope Paul V Receiving the Persian Embassy

This visual modification was intensified by the representations of Shah Abbas's next grand embassy to Europe in an engraving after which a later lunette fresco in the Sala Paolina of the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana was modeled.⁷⁰⁰ [Fig 11-12, Ch.4, Sec.3]

In this engraving, now in the Biblioteca Angelica in Rome, Pope Paul V is on his majestic papal throne in profile on the right side of the composition with seven cardinals seated in a row in the background facing the viewer. At the center, five turbaned figures are kneeling in front of the pope, who is in response blessing the crowd. One figure with distinctive European costume and no turban kneels before the pope and looks directly at the Supreme Pontiff with his left palm up towards the pope suggesting devotion. Of the five turbaned figures, four are kneeling behind the European figure with hand gestures insinuating submission and one is by his side in the front row bends over to kiss the cross

Shi'ism and the Architecture of Conviviality in Early Modern Iran, Edinburgh Studies in Islamic Art (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018); Sussan Babaie, "Abbas II, The Conquest of Qandahar, Chehel Sutun and Its Paintings," *Muqarnas* 11 (1994): 125–42; Eleanor G Sims, *Late Safavid Painting: The Chehel Sutun, the Armenian Houses, the Oil Paintings*.

⁶⁹⁹ Mansour, "Picturing Global Conversion," 546; H. Chick, ed., *A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia: The Safavids and the Papal Mission of the 17th and 18th Centuries* (London: New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 177179; Barāzish, *Ravābiṭ-i siyāsī - dīplumātīk-i Īrān va jahān dar 'ahd-i Ṣafavīyah*, 621–22.

⁷⁰⁰ Roma, Biblioteca Angelica, Ms. 1214, fol. 84r. " *Modo et ordine dell'Audienza data da N. S. Papa Palo Quinto ad ALI Goli Bek Mordar Amb. re mandato da Xa Abbas Re di Persia alli 30 d'Agosto 1609, del quale è stato interprete Do' Clemente Osat Persiano. Sta'pato in Roma a' Pasqiono con lisenia d'Superiori, apress. Giovanni Orlando.*" Piemontese, "I due ambasciatori in Persia ricevuti da Papa Paolo V al Quirinale," 405–6; Annibale Bugnini, *La chiesa in Iran* (Roma: Edizione Vincenziane, 1981), appendix fotografica. For the Sala Paolina fresco, Cfr. Giovanni Pietro Chattard, *Nuova descrizione del Vaticano, o sia, della sacrosanta basilica di S. Pietro*. (Roma: Eredi Barbiellini, 1762), 59; Agostino Maria Taja, *Descrizione del Palazzo Apostolico Vaticano* (Roma, 1750), 457.

on the pope's slippers (*pantofole papali*). The genuflecting figure in the front holds a letter in his right hand as a sign of embassy and leans on the steps with his left hand and right knee to kiss the cross.

An inscription below the illustration reads "Ali Goli Bek Mordar," the ambassador sent by Shah Abbas of Persia, who received an audience on August 30, 1609, with Pope Paul V, in which he was the interpreter of "Do'[n] Clemente Osat Persiano." The document is signed by Giovanni Orlando in Rome. The epigraph testifies that the turbaned crowd were Safavid Persians, an identity already announced by the distinctive Safavid headgear worn by the figures. In Orlando's rendition of the audience, a Muslim Persian is about to kiss the cross on the pope's slipper and concurrently receives benediction from him. In the diary of the *ceremoniere pontificio* by Giovan Paolo Mucante (1557-1617), when Husayn `Ali Beg Bāyāt was received by Pope Clement VIII on April 26, 1601, the ambassador genuflected three times and kissed the foot on a "*cassock*" in order not to force him to kiss the cross embroidered on the pope's sandal. According to this document, Husayn `Ali Beg and his entourage had their turbans on their heads the entire time and except for the ambassador the other Persians greeted the pope from afar with a single genuflection.⁷⁰¹ Uruch Beg also relayed in his account that the ambassador "duly" kissed the pope's feet and the Holiness gave his blessing saying "May God make you Christians."⁷⁰²

A comparison between Uruch Beg-Mucante's descriptions of the reception of the former Safavid embassy by Pope Clement VIII and the illustrated audience of the Persians by

⁷⁰¹ Carlos Alonso, *Embajadores de Persia en las cortes de Praga, Roma y Valladolid: 1600-1601*. (Roma: Instituto espanol de historia eclesiastica, 1989), 86.

⁷⁰² Strange, *Don Juan of Persia A Shi'ah Catholic 1560-1604.*, 285.

Orlando in 1609 illuminates multiple notions in the latter's engraving. First is the conclusion that the figure genuflecting in the front row is the primary ambassador of Shah Abbas with his letter in hand. Contextualized by the inscriptions below the illustrated reception, the ambassador was `Ali G[h]oli Be[y]g Mordar (*mohrdār*, the bearer of the Shah's seal) who had the Persian convert, Clement Osaat, as his interpreter. Substantiated by a variety of textual documents at the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana in Rome, `Ali Goli Beg Mordar (or Ali Golibeh Mordar in some documents) and his entourage arrived in Rome on August 27, 1609, in a solemn entrance and a subsequent procession.⁷⁰³ The Persian embassy had the first public audience on August 30 in the Palazzo Quirinale and a private audience on September 6, before its departure on September 12, 1609. According to the reports, the members of the Persian embassy had their turbans on the entire time ("*cum turbante in capite semper*") and read the letters in Persian while the interpreter translated them into Italian.⁷⁰⁴ A contemporary engraving now at the Biblioteca Museo Correr also shows the ambassador in Safavid courtly fashion with a distinctive turban and a letter of embassy in hand. An epigraph below the illustration substantiates his reception in Rome in August 1609.⁷⁰⁵ [Fig 13, Ch.4, Sec.3]

Second, Orlando's engraving shows the Persian ambassador about to kiss the cross on the pope's feet. A similar tradition in Persian court culture existed as "*pā-būs*" (*baciapiede*-kissing the foot [of the king]) in which officials of lower rank would kiss the toe of the

⁷⁰³ Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (BAV), Vat. Lat. 12295, ff. 500v-502v. BAV. Vat.lat 12320, ff. 312v-320r. BAV. Vat.lat.12429, ff. 140r-142v. BAV. Urb.lat. 1077, *Arrivo*, ff. 413v-414r, *Entrata solenne*, f. 415v, *Le visite e il ritratto*, 425v-426v, *La ritrattista* 430r, *Inviti* 441r-v, *Il ritratto del Papa in dono* 445r-v, *Udienza pontificia e missione diplomatica*, 457v-458r, *Onori*, 468-469, *Congedo*, ff.439v,440v. Diario di Paolo Alaleone, *cerimoniere pontificio*. Piemontese, "I Due Ambasciatori in Persia Ricevuti Da Papa Paolo V al Quirinale," 373-75.

⁷⁰⁴ "*Interpres explicauit nostra lingua*," Cfr. *Audientia publica data à Papa Oratori Regis Persarum* in BAV Vat.lat. 12295 and another copy at ASV. Misc. Arm. XII, 43.

⁷⁰⁵ Biblioteca del Museo Correr, Venezia. MS.I. No. 247 (MS.Cigogna 2727).

king.⁷⁰⁶ However, kissing the “cross” connotes conversion, or in a delicate manner, it conveys submission to the supremacy of the pope and Christianity. While in Mucante’s description, the Muslim ambassador had placed a piece of cloth to interrupt direct contacts with the cross, in Orlando’s rendition of the Safavid reception, the artist memorialized the very moment of kissing the cross enthusiastically. There are no documents supporting `Ali Goli Beg Mordar’s conversion, a statement stressed by his Safavid turban on his head at the time of genuflection.⁷⁰⁷ This, again, unravels another visual representation that, in my view, were designed to shape European perceptions of these intercultural correspondences and also served the propagandistic purposes of the Christian commissioner.

Persian chronicles are totally silent about `Ali Goli Beg Mordar’s mission in Rome. Two letters of Shah Abbas now in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, one to Pope Paul V and the other to Philip III attest that the Shah had decided to send an ambassador named “Aali Guli Beiq” to the pope, with whom Francesco da Costa was going back to Europe.⁷⁰⁸ For this reason, Piemontese identified the figure next to the Persian ambassador in Orlando’s

⁷⁰⁶ Eskandar Beg Monshi, *The history of Shah `Abbas the Great* (Tārīk-e `ālamārā-ye `Abbāsī), translated by Roger M. Savory, vol.1/2. Boulder, Colorado, (Westview Press 1978):499.

⁷⁰⁷ In 1601, other than the three Persian who converted to Catholicism in Rome, three others were baptized when Husayn `Ali Beg and his few remaining entourage arrived in Spain. Ironically, one of the converts was the ambassador’s nephew `Ali Goli Beg who changed his name to “Don Philip” in respect of Philip II, King of Spain. However, there are no documents substantiating that “`Ali Goli Beg Mordar” was the same “`Ali Goli Beg” (Don Philip) who had converted in 1601, as Don Philip resided in Spain afterwards. Moreover, the turban on `Ali Goli Byg Mordar’s head at the time of kissing the cross denies every assumption over the ambassador’s Christian faith, as I will shortly elaborate on a scene in which a Catholic ambassador of Shah Abbas was received by the pope and took off his turban before kissing the cross. For 1601 Persian conversions, Cfr. Strange, *Don Juan of Persia A Shi`ah Catholic 1560-1604.*, 284–304.

⁷⁰⁸ BAV, *Borghese II*, Vol. 20, fol. 63 (*Carta de Abbas I, rey de Persia, al papa sobre la embajada de Francisco da Costa.*) and Archivio Segreto Vaticano, *Fondo Borghese*, s. II, 33-34, ff. 363r-364r; BAV, *Borghese II*, vol. 20, fol. 121 (*Carta de Abbas I, rey de Persia, a Felipe III, rey de Espana, en recomendación de Francisco da Costa.*). For transcriptions, Cfr. Alonso, “Una Embajada de Clemente viii a Persia (1600–1609),” 120–22.

engraving as the papal nuncio in Persia, Francesco da Costa.⁷⁰⁹ Regardless of the actual identity of the figure, his turban-less costume denotes that he was not a Muslim. In addition to his dress, his direct look at the pope and his pious hand gesture toward the Catholic pontiff revealed him as an agent submissive to the papacy's missionary activities.

Pope Paul V Receiving the Persians: Giovanni Battista Ricci's Fresco in Sala Paolina, Vatican Library

Orlando's engraving inspired another artist, Giovanni Battista Ricci (1537-1627), to execute a lunette fresco in the first (of the two) Sala Paolina of the Vatican Library, in around 1611.⁷¹⁰ [Fig 12, Ch.4, Sec.3] The patron of the *Sala Paoline* decorations was presumably the librarian Cardinal Scipione Borghese (1577-1633) who was titled the Librarian of the Roman Catholic Church between 1608 and 1618 by Pope Paul V.⁷¹¹ In Ricci's account of 'Ali Goli Beg Mordar's reception, Cardinal Scipione replaced the three figures flanking the pope's seat in Orlando's engraving. The librarian cardinal sits on the left side of the papal throne in the right corner of the composition, looking out at the viewer with his white gloves in his hand as a sign of his high status. The Pope's throne is shifted diagonally deeper into the composition to view the central scene in a three-quarter position. The gestures of four cardinals in the background animate the picture with their anxious reactions to the ceremony. At the center of the composition, a male figure in a dark cape and no headgear is kneeling before the pope while looking up

⁷⁰⁹ Piemontese, "I due ambasciatori in Persia ricevuti da Papa Paolo V al Quirinale," 406.

⁷¹⁰ Deoclecio Redig de Campos, *I Palazzi Vaticani* (Bologna: Cappell, 1967), 210–11.

⁷¹¹ J. Rysschaert, "Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana," in *Il Vaticano e Roma Cristiana*. (Città del Vaticano, 1975), 316; Piemontese, "I due ambasciatori in Persia ricevuti da Papa Paolo V al Quirinale," 406.

at him. The Catholic pontiff in response blesses the figure and looks directly back at him. In the foreground of the painting, closest to the viewer, is a prostrating figure with Safavid headgear and ambassadorial letter in his right hand, about to kiss the cross on the pope's sandal.

Cardinal Scipione on the right corner deliberately directs attention via his left hand towards the scene with the Safavid Persians kneeling in front of the pope.⁷¹² An epigraph below the fresco in the Sala Paolina alludes to the embassy of `Ali Goli Beg Mordar at the court of Pope Paul V in 1609.⁷¹³ In the letter he sent via this ambassador to Paul V, Shah Abbas bragged about his military prowess in confronting the Ottomans and the overtures of Francesco da Costa's presence at his court, especially his role in the Shah's campaign in Azerbaijan, which the Safavid shah had recently retaken from the Ottomans. Shah Abbas explained his intention by sending one of his trusted ones, namely `Ali Goli Beg, by willing him to come back with similar missionaries like Francesco. The Shah explicitly reminded the pope about their alliance in forming a league with the Christian princes against the Ottomans and induced the pope that he had kept his promises. Shah Abbas again asked for military support and pleaded with the pope to persuade the Christian princes to unify and attack the Ottomans from all sides. In this alliance, Shah Abbas guaranteed to maintain his prompt promise to obey the Supreme Pontiff in "making the world secure" by assaulting the Ottomans.⁷¹⁴

⁷¹² Taja, *Descrizione del Palazzo Apostolico Vaticano*, 457; Chattard, *Nuova descrizione del Vaticano, o sia, della sacrosanta basilica di S. Pietro*, 59.

⁷¹³ PAVLUS. V. PONT. MAX. ALI. GOLI. BEL. MORDAR XA. ABBAS. REGIS. PERSARUM. LEGATUM. AD PEDUM. OSCULUM. ADMISIT. ANNO. C.IX PONTEFICI. V.

⁷¹⁴ Archivio Segreto Vaticano, *Fondo Borghese*, s. II, 33-34, ff. 363r-364r.

Shah Abbas's letter substantiates `Ali Goli Beg Mordar's mission in his embassy to Pope Paul V.⁷¹⁵ The ambassador was sent by the Safavid Shah to develop Christian missionary activities in Persia in exchange for the Shah's request for military support. Nonetheless, Orlando's engraving, as well as Ricci's lunette fresco, refrain from including any visual references to that agreement between the two courts of Persia and the Vatican. In fact the Italian representations of `Ali Goli Beg's mission in Rome memorialized it as a group of Muslims paying homage to the Supreme Pontiff of the Catholic Church rather than as equal partners in a military alliance against a mutual enemy. In the response letter (September 9, 1609), Paul V stressed his enthusiasm for the longevity of their friendship and assured the Shāh that he would not resist any endeavors to attack the Ottomans.⁷¹⁶ However, none of the above-mentioned settlements were reflected in the two illustrated records of `Ali Goli Beg Mordar's mission at the court of Pope Paul V.

Papal Commissions of Persians' Portraits

At the time of the Persians' departure, a pontifical commission was made, presumably by Cardinal Scipione, for portraits of the seventy-three-year-old `Ali Goli Beg and of Shah Abbas, in addition to a portrait of the pope to be delivered to the Safavid Shah. The papal commission was to the Bolognese female artist, Lavinia Fontana (1552-1614), who had been invited to Rome by Pope Clement VIII in 1604 and since then had become the portraitist at the papal court. No traces of the portraits remain today. However, Giulio Cesar Mancini (1559-1630), the Siennese doctor of Pope Urban VIII (r. 1623-1644),

⁷¹⁵ For Italian record of his embassy, Cfr. Biblioteca del Museo Correr, Venezia. MS.I. No. 247 (MS.Cigogna 2727)-Fig. 13 of this section.

⁷¹⁶ Archivio Segreto Vaticano, *Arm.* XLV, 5, n. CV, ff. 47r-48r. For Latin transcriptions, Cfr. Piemontese, "I due ambasciatori in Persia ricevuti da Papa Paolo V al Quirinale," 414-416.

recorded his fascination with Lavinia's portraits in the account of his Roman voyage (1614-1621). Mancini added details to the artist's biography recalling her meeting with the Persian ambassador to execute his portrait and that of Shah Abbas, whose appearance was described by the ambassador to the painter.⁷¹⁷

According to Mancini and the artist's biographer, Lavinia Fontana's portrait of Shah Abbas was a visual translation of the ambassador's descriptions. However, there is at least one visual document that indicates there might have been visual representations of the Shāh available at the time in Italy. Among the engravings of the Flemish artist, Dominicus Custos (1560-1612), at the court of Rudolph II in Prague, there is a print of the Englishman Anthony Sherely, of which a print is now in the Biblioteca Museo Correr in Venice.⁷¹⁸ [Fig 14, Ch.4, Sec.3] In this print, Anthony Shirley is shown in a noble European costume with white neck ruffles and fur sleeves. Around his neck, Anthony wears a double chain with a hanging medallion. On the medallion, there is a portrait of a turbaned figure in profile. As noted before, Anthony, together with Husayn `Ali Beag Bāyāt, led a grand diplomatic mission in Europe between 1599 and 1601, in which he presented Shah Abbas's proposal for a military alliance against the Ottomans to a number of European princes. In this historical framework, the portrait on Anthony's medallion

⁷¹⁷ For Lavinia's career at the papal court, Cfr. BAV, *Barb.lat* 4315, ff. 103v-104v. Giulio Mancini, *Considerazioni Sulla Pittura* (Roma: Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 1956), vol. I, 233-35; vol. II. 132-133; For the artist's life and works, Cfr. Maria Teresa Cantaro and Lavinia Fontana, *Lavinia Fontana, Bolognese: "Pittora Singolare," 1552-1614* (Milano: Jandi Sapi, 1989), 15-16; Lavinia Fontana, Vera Fortunati Pietrantonio, and National Museum of Women in the Arts (U.S.), eds., *Lavinia Fontana of Bologna, 1552-1614* (Milan: Electa, 1998), 154; Piemontese, "I Due Ambasciatori in Persia Ricevuti Da Papa Paolo V al Quirinale," 384. For women artists in the early modern era, Cfr. Jane Fortune and Linda Falcone, *Invisible Women*, 2. ed, The Florentine Press (Florence, Italy: The Florentine Press, 2010); Sheila Barker, ed., *Women Artists in Early Modern Italy: Careers, Fame, and Collectors*, The Medici Archive Project Series (London ; Turnhout: Harvey Miller Publishers, an imprint of Brepols Publishers, 2016).

⁷¹⁸ Venezia, Museo Correr Biblioteca, E 587. "ANTONIUS SCHERLEYNS ANGLUS E. Ques aurat. Magni Sophi Persarum ad Cæsarem & Christianos Principes cæteros legatus." Cuchel.

presumably represents Shah Abbas. Anthony's medallion might have been a circulating visual reference for European artists to envision the facial features of this Safavid Shah.

In the print collection of the same Flemish engraver in Venice, there is a bust portrait of Shah Abbas with a straight-sided mustache and European-style dress of a fur cloak on a silk cape with frog buttons in the front.⁷¹⁹ [Fig 15, Ch.4, Sec.3] In this print, the Safavid Shah wears a giant bulbous turban with a cross-shaped jewel in the front, a feather attached on the right side and topped by a bulging cone with a crown. Although Shah Abbas's costume is European, his turban suggests Ottoman headgear with its spherical shape and a cone-like top. In fact, the Shah's turban in this print is similar to those of the Ottoman figures in the same collection, which implies that the artist lacked visual references for the Shāh's costume, yet presumed his turban to be a typical Turkish/Oriental headgear.⁷²⁰ This conveys that the Flemish artist at Rudolph II's court in Prague had only known some major characteristics of the Shāh's facial features, namely a dark straight mustache and a long nose, but not his costume. Therefore, I infer from Custos's print that the artist had the bust portrait on Anthony Shirley's medallion as a visual reference for Shah Abbas's portrait and improvised the rest based on his own assumptions.

A brown ink and wash portrait of Shah Abbas in an oval frame by the Bolognese artist Guido Reni (1575-1642), now in the Gabinetto dei Disegni e delle Stampe (Uffizi, Florence) shows similar facial features to those in Custos's image in the Biblioteca Museo Correr (Venice). It is, however, in a distinctive Safavid fashion.⁷²¹ [Fig 16, Ch.4,

⁷¹⁹ Venezia, Biblioteca Museo Correr, E 587. "SCHACH ABAS PERSARUM REX"

⁷²⁰ See AMURATHES III SULTANUS in the same collection at Biblioteca Museo Correr.

⁷²¹ Firenze, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi, Fondo Santarelli 3459 S.

Sec.3] In Reni's portrait, Shah Abbas is represented in three-quarter length with his right hand posed on his waist next to a *Khanjar* (dagger) hanging from his belt. The Shah wears a Safavid turban with visible gores and an untucked loose end, surmounted by a projecting baton-like crown. The characteristic mustache with strict sides and the long nose in Reni's portrait both recall Custos's engraving.⁷²² Guido Reni was among the leading painters during the papacy of Paul V. In 1609, he was assigned to be the principal artist in charge of the designs of the Oratorian Order by Cardinal Scipione Borghese.⁷²³ Reni's presence at the court of Paul V at the exact time when Persian embassies were received there substantiates his source of inspiration for memorializing the Safavid Shah whose delegates delivered the Persian ruler's proposals, one after the other, for a military alliance. In fact, Reni's interpretation of Shah Abbas's appearance provided some tangible clues into the subject's characteristic mustache and distinctive costume, as well as insights into his military prowess stressed in his steady body posture and his hand ready to grab the dagger on his belt.

The contemporary portraits of Shah Abbas by Persian and Mughal artists testify to the accuracy of Guido Reni's interpretation of the Safavid ruler. In a 1618 commission, the court artist of the Mughal Shāh Jahāngīr (r. 1605-27), Bishan Dās (1583-1645), who had accompanied that Mughal Emperor to the court of Shah Abbas, executed a portrait of the Persian prince on a single-page painting.⁷²⁴ [Fig 17, Ch.4, Sec.3] In this portrait, Shah

⁷²² For an alternative attribution of this ink-wash, Cfr. Guido Reni and Babette Bohn, *Le "Stanze" di Guido Reni: Disegni del Maestro e Della Scuola*, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe Degli Uffizi 95 (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 2008), 123–24.

⁷²³ Olga Melasecchi and D. Stephen Pepper, "Guido Reni, Luca Ciamberlano and the Oratorians; Their Relationship Clarified," *The Burlington Magazine* 140 (1998): 596. See Chick, *A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia*, 384.

⁷²⁴ The British Museum, London. Portraits of Hindu Princes and Chiefs, no. 1920,0917,0.13.2.

Abbas is represented against a plain dark green background in a lively orange tunic, a rich green striped Safavid turban, carrying a sword in a blue sheath and a dagger on his sash. The plain background directs the gaze of the viewer to the Shah who stands tranquil with his hands tucked into his sash right next to his royal armor. His pose evokes confidence and prudence and his gaze to his far right suggests foresight and wisdom.⁷²⁵ Shah Abbas's dark mustache with lengthy sides and long nose recall Reni's record of his face. His gold-embroidered turban with green, blue, and red stripes and an ornamental crest (*jīqqā*) of feathers attest to his Islamic princely significance. This, too, reinforces the accuracy of Guido Reni's representation of Shah Abbas in his princely Safavid fashion the likelihood that the artist had an indigenous Persian consultant.⁷²⁶

Guido Reni's ink and wash must drawing have been executed around the time of Lavinia's portraits of the Persian ambassador and the Shāh since both Bolognese artists were active in the papal court in 1609. The exact sequence of the two portraits is unclear, yet Reni's renders close attention to the actual Safavids' fashion which implies the artist had either seen Lavinia's portrait or known about the ambassador's descriptions of the Shāh. This also supports the hypothesis that Lavinia's now-lost portrait of Shah Abbas had a similar or identical treatment to Guido Reni's ink and wash drawing. Lavinia Fontana's Shah Abbas is lost, but another engraving at the Gabinetto Nazionale delle Stampe in Rome conserved the legacy of Guido Reni's portrait of the Shah to this day.

[Fig 18, Ch.4, Sec.3]

⁷²⁵ Canby, *Shah 'Abbas*, 38.

⁷²⁶ Another contemporary portrait of Shah Abbas by the Persian artist Muhammad Qasim in 1627 shows similar facial features. See Houchang Nahavandi and Yves Bomati, *Shah Abbas: Emperor Of Persia (1587-1629)*, ed. Parviz Amouzegar (Ketab Corp, 2017), 162.

1609: Luca Ciamberlano's Engraving of the Persian Mission

The engraving is signed by the Urbinese artist Luca Ciamberlano (d. 1641) who was responsible for a series of engravings from the life of Saint Philip Neri (d.1595) in the Oratory where Guido Reni was the principal designer.⁷²⁷ A frontispiece in the Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe (Uffizi) holds an inscription on top that reads “the original designs by the Bolognese painter Guido Reni.”⁷²⁸[Fig 19, Ch.4, Sec.3] At the center, there is a bust portrait of Paul V in an oval frame with the Borghese stemma of a dragon and eagle appearing on either side. Below is an inscription in a cartouche signed “*di Luca Ciamberlano da Urbino.*” In 1998, Olga Melasecchi and Stephen Pepper argued that this frontispiece suggests Ciamberlano was presumably collecting Guido Reni's designs for the Oratory as a reference for his own engravings for the same project.⁷²⁹ Ciamberlano's eight engravings of the Passion modeled after designs by another Urbinese painter Raphael (d. 1520), Guido Reni, and other painters in a collection dedicated to Cardinal Scipione demonstrate the artist's fascination by Reni's designs and his cemented connections to the Borghese.⁷³⁰ Ciamberlano's engraving of Shah Abbas and the Persian ambassadors is only another proof of this artistic association with Guido Reni at the papal court of the Borghese. However, the credibility of this engraving as a “visual document” is under question.

⁷²⁷ Melasecchi and Pepper, “Guido Reni, Luca Ciamberlano and the Oratorians; Their Relationship Clarified,” 596.

⁷²⁸ Uffizi, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, *Fondo Santarelli* 3472 S. “*Disegni originali dell'Ecc.te Pittore Sig. Guido Reni Bolognese.*”

⁷²⁹ Melasecchi and Pepper, “Guido Reni, Luca Ciamberlano and the Oratorians; Their Relationship Clarified.”

⁷³⁰ Bartsch XIX_XXVII; *The Illustrated Bartsch*, XLIV, Paolo Bellini and Mark Carter Leach eds. (New York, 1983), 77.

The engraving is composed of three bust portraits in oval frames with a dark-mustached figure crowned with a Safavid turban and two others with similar headgear juxtaposed below. Marginal inscription around the frames identify the effigies. On top, with distinguished frame decorations is the “Great Sophi King of Persia,” which was another title for Shah Abbas. Below the Shāh’s effigy on the left is “Don Robert Shirley, the English Count and Knight, the Ambassador to the High Pontiff” and next to him, on the right is “‘Ali Goli Bek Mordar, the Ambassador to the High Pontiff, 73 years old.” At the center, where the oval frames of the Shah and his two ambassadors connect, there is a squished face of a gorgon-like creature. Below the effigies, there is a larger frame holding a representation of a papal reception scene with elaborate decorations of curved leaves around it similar to the one around Shah Abbas’s portrait. An epigraph below the illustrations captions “The Ambassadors of the Shah of Persia to Pope Paul V, one of whom ‘Ali Goli made a solemn entrance to Rome on August 27, 1609. And another one who is Count Don Robert Sherely, the English Catholic, who entered Rome on September 28 of the same year, 1609.”⁷³¹

Robert Shirley, Anthony’s younger brother, who had stayed in Persia to serve the Safavid army while Anthony left for the Persian embassy to Europe in 1599, was assigned by Shah Abbas in February 1608 for yet another embassy to Europe.⁷³² Anthony had never returned to the court of Shah Abbas. After many quarrels between Anthony Shirley and Husayn ‘Ali Beg Bāyāt over precedence and credentials, when the embassy arrived in

⁷³¹ Roma, Gabinetto Nazionale delle Stampe, 34. H. 24 inv. 31538. “*Imbasciatori del Re di Persia alla sta di N. S. Papa Paolo. V. Uno dei quali cioè Ali Goli/ Fece intrata solenne in Roma alli 27 di Agosto 1609. Et l’altro cioè il Conte Don Ruberto/ Sherleyns, Inglese Cattolico, quale fece intrata in Roma adi 28 di Settembre, del’sless. Anno/ 1609.*”

⁷³² Falsafi, *Siyāsāt-i ḥāriġī-i Īrān dar daurān-i Ṣafawīya*, 33.

Rome in April 1601, Husayn `Ali Beg accused Anthony of thievery of the Shah's precious gifts of royal armor and brocades for the pope. I will return to the argument shortly. Those arguments afforded Anthony enough excuses to discharge him from his ambassadorial responsibilities and leave the embassy for Venice.⁷³³ On February 12, 1608, Robert Shirley left Isfahan for the Caspian Sea to embark for Europe to pick up from where his older brother had left off. In June 1609, Robert arrived in Prague at the court of Rudolph II, where the emperor honored him with the high courtly titles of “*comes palatinus*” (Count Palatine) and “chevalier” (imperial knight).⁷³⁴

Following his embassy in Europe, Robert entered Rome on September 28, 1609, only sixteen days after `Ali Goli Beg had left the papal court. On September 29, Robert gave an oration in the Italian language in his public audience. Pope Paul V listened in priestly garb sitting under an elaborate baldachin in the Palazzo Quirinale. The ambassador of the Shah of Persia was bedecked in a black velvet kaftan and turban topped with a bejeweled crucifix.⁷³⁵ The accounts about Robert's public reception relay that the *bonafide* emissary of Shah Abbas had his turban removed at the time of his genuflection to kiss the cross on the pope's shoes.⁷³⁶ Robert had converted from Protestantism to Roman Catholicism while in Persia.⁷³⁷ Ciamberlano's engraving minutely recorded this act of the Catholic ambassador in his reception at the court of Paul V.

⁷³³ Strange, *Don Juan of Persia A Shi'ah Catholic 1560-1604.*, 284–85.

⁷³⁴ Falsafi, *Siyāsāt-i hāriḡī-i Īrān dar daurān-i Šafawiya*, 32–37.

⁷³⁵ BAV, *Vat.lat.* 12295, ff. 502v-504v.

⁷³⁶ “... *et factis tribus genuflexionibus sine turbante discoperto capite osculatus est pedem Pape...*” in “Audientia publica Oratoris Persarum” Archivio Stato di Roma, *Misc. Arm.* XII, f.43.

⁷³⁷ Thomas Middleton, Gary Taylor, and John Lavagnino, *Sir Robert Sherley His Entertainment in Cracovia*, Paperback [ed.], The Oxford Middleton (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010), 671.

In the lower scene, the pope seated in profile under his royal baldachin on the left blesses a genuflecting figure who is about to kiss his feet. Next to the prostrating figure is a headpiece with a miniature crucifix on top. This headgear reflects Robert Shirley's personalized turban that incorporated his Safavid allegiance and Catholic associations within a single turban.⁷³⁸ The prostrating figure is, consequently, Robert Shirley, who received the jewel-encrusted crucifix on top of his turban from the pope as a reward of his conversion to Roman Catholicism. In addition to the bust portrait of Robert above his reception scene in Ciamberlano's engraving that shows the English ambassador of Shah Abbas with his characteristic turban, another engraving in the Biblioteca Angelica in Rome memorialized Robert's mission at the court of Paul V with the same distinctive turban.⁷³⁹ [Fig 20, Ch.4, Sec.3] Depicted against a represented scene of his "noble" entrance to Rome, Robert Shirley is portrayed in half-length, wearing a giant Safavid turban crowned by a crucifix with a loose end laid on his right shoulder. An inscription below the engraving recounts Count Don Robert Shirley's entrance into Rome in September 1609. A letter in Robert's right hand and his courtly Safavid attire attest to his official embassy on behalf of the Shah of Persia.

In Ciamberlano's engraving, three turbaned figures are kneeling in front of the pope at a distance behind the Catholic ambassador. Those were Safavid Persians in Robert's embassy whose Islamic faith is revealed through their headgear. This contrast between Robert Shirley's uncovered head in his reception by the pope and other Safavid figures depicted with their turbans not only accentuates the Catholic faith of the Englishman to

⁷³⁸ Niyayesh, "The Fabric of Silk Power in the Sherley Portraits," 214–15.

⁷³⁹ Roma, Biblioteca Angelica, Ms. 1214, f. 75r.

whom his Safavid costume was rather a mode of visual reconciliation with the contemporary Persian courtly fashion, but also highlights the traditional status of turbans in Islamic court culture. In Shah Abbas's credential letter for Robert Shirley, the Safavid Shāh addressed the pope as "the emperor of all the Christian princes" and noted that the "fathers" (*padre*) who were the pope's nuncios in Persia were seen by him as signs of the friendship and union between the two courts. Shah Abbas explained that he had assigned the illustrious noble Robert Shirley for this embassy due to his Catholic faith and expertise in the Shah's European diplomatic policy when pursuing either war or peace. Shah Abbas explicitly shared his strategies in the ways to attack the common enemy referring to their previous communications on this subject and guaranteed that his army would wage war immediately after the pope declared attack.⁷⁴⁰

In the letter delivered by Robert Shirley, Shah Abbas debated peaceful coalition with Christian Europe and war against their mutual enemy. In other words, Robert's mission in Europe was to convey the Shah's proposal over a military alliance against the Muslim Ottomans. While 'Ali Goli Beg Mordar's mission had been to facilitate the development of Catholic organizations in Persia, Robert Shirley, who had himself served in the Shah's army against the Ottomans, was in charge of persuading the European princes to ally themselves with Shah Abbas against the Porte. In the Shah's view, Catholic developments in Persia were part of a deal with the "emperor of the Christian princes" (the papacy) in exchange for the latter's military support of the Safavid forces in actual war against the Ottomans. In his response to Shah Abbas, Paul V quoted his private

⁷⁴⁰ Archivio Segreto Vaticano, *Fondo Borghese*, s. II, 33-34, f. 368r-v. (issued February 1608, delivered September 1609).

audience with Robert Shirley, referring to him as “our son” (“*cum dilectus filius Nobilis sir Robertus Sherleius Anglus*”), concerning the details of negotiations over the “necessary war,” but deferred the decision to the King of Spain. The pope welcomed the Shah’s proposal about nuncios in Persia and the establishment of “Catholic Archbishopric” in Greater Armenia, then under Safavid sway. At the end, the pope declared that he was praying for the conversion of the powerful king of Persia.⁷⁴¹

The pope’s letter indicates that Shah Abbas had offered to expand missionary activities in Persia beyond the *kāšša* lands under his direct authority to the *mamālek* provinces, where the Shah’s vassals controlled the revenue to finance Safavid administrative and military infrastructures.⁷⁴² Greater Armenia had fallen under Safavid rule in the beginning of the sixteenth century; however, it was never counted as *kāšša* land.⁷⁴³ The pope’s welcoming remark on the establishment of a “Catholic Archbishopric” (*Archiepiscopo Catholico*) in Greater Armenia, in addition to his constant desire to convert the royal family in Persia, was an indication of the ultimate goal of the Roman Church in this interreligious correspondence. Nevertheless, the pope strategically refused to make a clear declaration of war against the Ottomans. Persian-Vatican relations provided an outlet for the papal nuncios to foster Catholicism in Persia, while for the Safavid Shāh those communications envisioned a diplomatic union of the two courts.

⁷⁴¹ Archivio Segreto Vaticano, *Arm.* XLV, 5. No. CXXXVI, ff. 57v-58r. (dated October 9, 1609)

⁷⁴² Raphaël du Mans, *Estat de La Perse En 1660.*, Publications de l’École Des Langues Orientales Vivantes, 2e sér. v. 20 (Paris: Hachette Livre-Bnf, 2012), 226; John Chardin and Pierre Gaudon, *Voyages en Perse* (Paris: Phébus, 2007), 249–50, 394–95; François Sanson, *Voyage Ou Relation de l’état Present Du Royaume de Perse : Avec Une Dissertation Curieuse Sur Les Moeurs, Religion & Gouvernement de Cet État* (Paris: Chez la veuve Mabre Cramoisi, 1695), 91.

⁷⁴³ Chardin and Gaudon, *Voyages en Perse*, 251; ‘Alī Naqī Naṣīrī and Willem M. Floor, *Titles & Emoluments in Safavid Iran: A Third Manual of Safavid Administration*, 1. ed (Washington, DC: Mage Publ, 2008), 154–56, 195, 203, 215, 245, 282, 302.

The Gifts

The gifts exchanged between the two ambassadors of Shah Abbas received at the Borghese papal court of the seventeenth century highlight the principal discrepancy between Shah Abbas's military expectations and the Roman Church's religious aspirations in their intercultural correspondence. In Ciamberlano's engraving, scimitars, axes, bows, quivers, arrows and shields on either side of the Shah's portrait suggest examples of the actual embroidered royal armor brought by the Persians as gifts.⁷⁴⁴ As remarked in the previous chapters, decorative armor, such as the pearl-incrusted shield given to the Medici Grand Duke and the gold-embroidered iron gauntlet offered to the Republic of Venice, often comprised a noticeable portion of Shah Abbas's gifts in his anti-Ottoman diplomacy.⁷⁴⁵ Although the jewel-encrusted royal armor that Shah Abbas had sent with the Shirley-Bāyāt embassy never reached the papal court, due to an alternative sea route suggested by Anthony Shirley for a "safe" delivery of the royal gifts in Rome, which instead turned to the "loss" of the presents. However, the records indicate that they were similar to the armor in Ciamberlano's engraving.⁷⁴⁶

By gifting royal armor Shah Abbas conveyed his military ambitions and pleaded for actual warfare equipment to confront the Ottomans. Nonetheless, in return, Paul V

⁷⁴⁴ Piemontese, "I due ambasciatori in Persia ricevuti da Papa Paolo V al Quirinale," 404.

⁷⁴⁵ For Shah Abbas's gifts to the *Serenissima*, Cfr. Elisa Gagliardi Mangilli, Ciampiero Bellingeri, and Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia, eds., *I doni di Shah Abbas il Grande alla Serenissima: relazioni diplomatiche tra la Repubblica di Venezia e la Persia Safavide*; [mostra; Venezia, Palazzo Ducale, 28 settembre 2013 - 12 gennaio 2014] (Venezia: Marsilio, 2013), 28–38; For gift giving in the Safavid court culture, Cfr. Linda Komaroff, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, eds., *Gifts of the Sultan: The Arts of Giving at the Islamic Courts*, 1st ed (Los Angeles): New Haven [Conn.: Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Yale University Press, 2011), 115–49. For a brief overview on gift giving in the Safavid period, Cfr. Rudi P. Matthee, "GIFT GIVING iv. In The Safavid Period," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, X/6, pp. 609–614.

⁷⁴⁶ Abel Pinçon, *Relation d'un Voyage fait es ennees 1598 et 1599 in Relatione Veritables et Curieuses* (Paris 1651). For English translation see Ross, *Sir Anthony Sherley and His Persian Adventure*, 100. For the story of the chests of gifts, Cfr. Strange, *Don Juan of Persia A Shi'ah Catholic 1560-1604*, 261–62.

presented Robert Shirley a portrait of himself, an image of the Madonna illuminated with gold and silver leaves, a reliquary, a silver crucifix, and gold and silver medallions with his effigy imprinted on them, plus his travel expenses to the King of Spain.⁷⁴⁷ A few days prior, the pope had gifted `Ali Goli Beg three golden medallions and eight silver ones with his imprint, gold-embroidered purple and white brocades, and a Florentine gold-embroidered yellow velvet along with 175 scudi for his travel expenses to Bologna.⁷⁴⁸ There is a distinguishable discrepancy in the military nature of the gifts Shah Abbas entrusted in his diplomatic missions to the pope and the papal gifts of royal and liturgical objects that in my view revealed an inconsistency in the perception of the two courts in regard to each other's cultural and political biases, expediencies, and realities.

A document in the State Archive of Rome reveals that Robert Shirley also received medallions, crowns, rosaries, crosses, religious images, as well as "extracted relics from churches in Rome," a confirmation of the privileges granted to him by Emperor Rudolph II, and the faculty to establish Catholic institutions and universities in Persia and cultivate scholars in "Sacred Theology."⁷⁴⁹ In a letter dated July 6, 1610, some Armenians, "Ministers and People of the Church of the Holy Mother of God," in Isfahan had asked to confide in Cardinal Borghese (*Cardinale protettore*).⁷⁵⁰ In the same year, a Spanish papal

⁷⁴⁷ Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, *Urb. Lat.* 1077, f. 535r-v. (October 17, 1609)

⁷⁴⁸ For medallions, Cfr. Archivio di Stato Roma (ASR), *camerale*, I, 989 (Registro de mandati, I.II 1609-31.XII.1610) f. 10v. *Camerale*, I, 1866 (Libro della dispoiteria generale di papa Paolo V dell'anno 1609), p. 128. For brocades, Cfr. ASR, *Camerale*, I, 989, f. 13v. *Camerale*, I, 1866, p. 157. See Piemontese, "I due ambasciatori in Persia ricevuti da Papa Paolo V al Quirinale," 384.

⁷⁴⁹ ASV, *Sec. Brev.*, Reg. 596, f. 482r-v and 483v. Also see Piemontese, "I due ambasciatori in Persia ricevuti da Papa Paolo V al Quirinale," 400.

⁷⁵⁰ ASV, *Fondo Confalonieri*, 22, f. 271r. For the letter in Original Armenian and its Italian translation, Cfr. BAV *Boncompagni E* 24, ff. 305-314 (Card. Borghese agli armeni di Esfahan-29.VI.1610 f. 319). Also see Piemontese, 401. There are other letters on this matter with the code entitled *Officio et eprotettioni dell' Illmo et Rmo Sigr cardle Borghese* in ASV, *Fondo Borghese*, s. I, 535, f. 22r and about Armenians f. 21r-v.

nuncio Fr. Vincent (1574-1623) arrived in Rome from Persia to receive his passport for the establishment of a mission in Hormuz.⁷⁵¹ When in Rome, he brought with him a memorial from the Catholic Armenians of the Church of the Holy Mother of God in Shah Abbas's capital city, signed by nine clerics and a number of laymen. Fr. Vincent asked for a Latin patriarch and an Italian of high rank with at least three hundred established devotees for the head of the "Three Churches" in Yerevan (Erivan), "in order to impress the Shah."⁷⁵² He also transmitted the request of the Carmelite father Fr. John Thaddeus (Jean-Thaddée de St.-Elisée, 1574-1633) in Isfahan to create a college in Rome for Armenians to be trained as priests and return to Persia. This was welcomed at the papal court.⁷⁵³ These documents reveal that the Armenians of Isfahan and New Jolfā and Robert Shirley's endeavors played efficacious parts in reconciling the Roman Church with Persia. However, those ties did not promote the Safavid court to the status of an equal ally of the Catholic Church in its anti-Ottoman position.

Besides the subtle allusion to the military ambitions of the Persian embassies in Ciamberlano's engraving made by the replicas of Persian trophies on either side of the upper corners, the distorted monstrous face at the center, where the three oval frames of the Safavid Shah and his two ambassadors converge, may evoke the mutual desire to crush the Porte. However, no other compositional elements directly suggest a military alliance between the two courts. The Persians were instead represented as devoted agents absorbed in the authority of the Roman Church as opposed to allies of the Christian

⁷⁵¹ Chick, *A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia*, 1022–26.

⁷⁵² Chick, 191–92.

⁷⁵³ For Carmelite missions in Persia during the reign of Shah Abbas, Cfr. Chick, 66–307. For a brief overview on the same topic, Cfr. Francis Richard, "Carmelites in Persia," *Encyclopedia Iranica* Vol. IV, Fasc. 7 (1990), pp. 832–834.

league in the military offenses against their common enemy. This undertone was preserved in two other representations of Safavid Persians at the court of Paul V, one in a fresco cycle in a hall today known as “Sala dei Corazzieri” on the Quirinale Hill, and the second on the funeral monument of Paul V in Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome.

Palazzo Quirinale: Representations of Shahs Abbas’s Envoys in Sala Regia

In the Sala Regia (today’s Sala dei Corazzieri) of the Palazzo Quirinale in Rome, within a pictorial program that illustrated the diplomatic actions of Paul V, three figures represented Safavid Persia.⁷⁵⁴ The hall was designed by the Italian Baroque architect Carlo Maderno (1556-1629) for papal receptions of foreign dignitaries. In 1616-17, the Parmese artist Giovanni Lanfranco (1582-1647) and his assistants Agostino Tassi (1578-1644) and Carlo Saraceni (1579-1620) memorialized ambassadors from faraway lands who were received by Paul V in illusionistic loggias on the two side walls. On the north wall, Tassi depicted the ambassador of Shah Abbas ‘Ali Goli Beg Mordar with a white beard and a large Safavid turban looking curiously down at the hall where he had been received in August 1609. [Fig 21, Ch.4, Sec.3] Along with ‘Ali Goli Beg are three other Persians with Safavid costumes, among whom is likely to be a portrait of the Safavid diplomat in ‘Ali Goli Beg’s entourage who converted to Catholicism while in Rome in January 1610 and picked the name “Camillo Borghese Persiano.”⁷⁵⁵ The four Persians were depicted in their courtly fashion with Safavid attributions. A shimmering gold cloth

⁷⁵⁴ Giuliano Briganti, *Il Palazzo del Quirinale* (Roma, 1962), 35–36; Kr. Hermann-Fiore, “Testimonianze storiche sull’evangelizzazione dell’oriente attraverso i ritratti nella Sala Regia del Quirinale,” in *Da sendai a Roma: un’ambasceria giapponese a Paolo V* (Roma: Office Move (catalogo della mostra), 1990), 91–103; Francesco Colalucci, “La Sala Regia, degli Svizzeri, dei Corazzieri,” *Restauri al Quirinale Bollettino d’Arte. Volume Speciale* (1999): 181–83; Piemontese, “I due ambasciatori in Persia ricevuti da Papa Paolo V al Quirinale,” 409–10.

⁷⁵⁵ BAV, *Urb. Lat.* 1078, I, f. 70v-71r; ASR, *Camerale*, I, Giustificazioni di Tesoreria, 35, fasc. 2, ff. 3r, 3v, 15r. See Piemontese, “I due ambasciatori in Persia ricevuti da Papa Paolo V al Quirinale,” 403–4.

embellished with dark vegetal patterns hanging over the baluster intrudes into the space of the hall, suggestive of a cloth of honor and the Venetian tradition of adorning windows and balconies with oriental carpets overlooking important public ceremonies.⁷⁵⁶

On the opposite side of ‘Ali Goli Beg’s representation, on the south wall, Saraceni represented the young English ambassador of Shah Abbas, Robert Shirley, in rich garments and a white Safavid turban. [Fig 22, Ch.4, Sec.3] Surprisingly, Robert’s turban lacks its jewel-encrusted crucifix on top. Instead, it is adorned by a golden clasp with three big hanging pearls, a sizeable ruby at the center, and feathers projecting on top. The English ambassador of Persia wears a bright red velvet cape over a green coat with golden frog buttons. A thick gold chain is wrapped around Robert’s chest several times. On his solemn entrance into Rome, Robert wore the chain of gold costing 800-crowns that he had received from the Grand Duke of Tuscany.⁷⁵⁷ This chain is presumably the same gift represented in his Quirinale portrait to state the ambassador’s connections to the Medici court, which was the sponsor of the chivalric Order of Santo Stefano.⁷⁵⁸ The same chain appears in the engraving of him in the Biblioteca Angelica in Rome (already noted) and in the engraving by the German artist active in Rome Matthias Greuter (1564-1638). [Fig 20 & 23, Ch.4, Sec.3] With a letter of embassy in his right hand, Robert grabs his rich velvet cape, stands prestigiously behind a balustrade adorned with a gold embroidered reddish cloth, and looks directly out. Four other figures occupy the space in the background in Robert’s portrait, one of whom is a black slave with a red cap. The two

⁷⁵⁶ Walter B. Denny, “Tessuti e tappeti orientali a Venezia,” in *Venezia e l’Islam, 828 - 1797* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2007), 192.

⁷⁵⁷ Shirley and The Roxburghe Club, *The Sherley Brothers, an Historical Memoir of the Lives of Sir Thomas Sherley, Sir Anthony Sherley, and Sir Robert Sherley, Knights*, 63.

⁷⁵⁸ Capponi, “Sul ponte sventola bandiera rossocrociata: L’altra faccia della marina medicea nel Levante,” 55-64.

flanking figures wear Safavid headgear and look in astonishment at the hall, one towards Cappella Paolina on the west and the other at the eastern wall.

In another loggia on the north wall, there is a figure wearing a dark mustache, a Safavid headgear with a similar pendant to the one on Robert Shirley's turban, and a cylindrical container tucked in his sash. [Fig 24, Ch.4, Sec.3] In 2015, Cristelle Baskins identified this figure as the Armenian merchant of the New Jolfā, Khāje Safar Azaria, whom Shah Abbas dispatched to Europe in April 1609 and Paul V received in Rome in July 1610.⁷⁵⁹ Khāje Safar's mission was to retrieve some goods in Venice, including weapons, suits of armor, knives, and nine European paintings, that belonged to Shah Abbas.⁷⁶⁰ However, archival discoveries illuminated that he was a diplomatic courier who conveyed a number of Shah Abbas's letters as well as an interlocutor between the Armenians of the New Jolfā and the Christian leaders of Europe.⁷⁶¹ In fact, the *stuccio* (qalamdān-pen case) in which Persian envoys kept their credential letters, depicted on his side in the Sala Regia was an allusion to Khāje Safar's diplomatic function.⁷⁶² Upon his reception, the pope honored him with the same titles as Robert Shirley, a Count Palatine and a Knight of the Golden Spur.⁷⁶³ In Tassi's fresco, Khāje Safar is shown anxiously evading the

⁷⁵⁹ Baskins, "Framing Khoja Sefer in the Sala Regia of the Quirinal Palace in Rome (1610-1617)."

⁷⁶⁰ Berchet, *La Repubblica di Venezia e La Persia*, 1976, 209.

⁷⁶¹ ASV, Arm. XLV, vol.6, f. 35, no. 64 for Paul V's response letter to Shah Abbas via Khāje Safar. Archivio di Stato di Napoli and Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, P. 44L. for a copy of Shah Abbas letter to the "Head of the Cramelite Order." For Farsi transcripts, Cfr. Kāwūsī 'Irāqī, *Asnād-i rawābiṭ-i daulat-i Ṣafawī bā ḥukūmathā-i Ītālīyā*, 218–19. For Khāje Safar's mission, Cfr. Levon Bogos Zekian, "XOĞA SAFAR AMBASCIATORE DI SHĀH 'ABBĀS A VENEZIA," *Oriente Moderno* 58, no. 7/8 (1978): 357–67. For Shah Abbas's letters to three other Christian rulers delivered on July 28, 1610, presumably by Khāje Safar, Cfr. ASV, Arm. XLV, vol. 6, f.80 (letters to Emperor Rudolph II), f. 81 (to Philip King of Spain), f. 82 (to Cosimo Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany).

⁷⁶² Linda Komaroff, "Pen-Case and Candlestick: Two Sources for the Development of Persian Inlaid Metalwork," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 23 (1988): 89–102; A S Melikian-Chirvani, "State Inkwells in Islamic Iran," *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* 44 (1986): 70–94.

⁷⁶³ ASV, *Sec. Brev.*, Reg. 457, f. 482r-v. f. 483r (...conte Palatino et cabaliero Ogia Safer Zulfalino Armeno fattor generale del Re di Persia.) see Chick, *A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia*, 192.

illusionistic frame to join the papal entourage in the hall below. While his pictorial features resemble Guido Reni's treatment of Shah Abbas's, it is likely that Tassi, too, referred to the same visual source when it came to representing a Safavid legate of whom no particular visual documents had remained.

The pendant on Khāje Safar's headgear is similar to those on Robert Shirley's and the second figure from the right in 'Ali Goli Beg's frame. Both Khāje Safar and Robert Shirley were Catholic Christians. Given the archival documents of the conversion of the Persian diplomat in 'Ali Goli Beg's entourage, Camillo Borghese, it is presumably he who is denoted by the pendant on his turban, depicted behind the Persian ambassador in the Sala Regia of the Quirinale. To conclude, in the three frames in which Persian representatives were depicted, at least one Catholic devotee was included. However, none was shown without his turban, and each turban was marked by a jewel-encrusted pendant. Even the famed crucifix on top of Robert Shirley's turban was replaced by a pendant, visually unifying him with the other two Safavid Catholics. I detect an underlying politics of how visual images may have served various agendas.⁷⁶⁴ The ambassadors of Shah Abbas came to facilitate the formation of an anti-Ottoman military alliance with European princes in exchange for developing the Roman Church's missionary activities in Persia. The Italian illustrations downplayed the military aspect of those negotiations in favor of establishing hierarchies of cultural and political status for their own audience.

⁷⁶⁴ Mansour, "Picturing Global Conversion."

Cappella Paolina Borghese: *Paul V Receiving the Persian Ambassadors*

This strategy of shaping the Italian perception of Persians in their relations with Christian Europe reached its zenith on the tombstone of Paul V erected in the Cappella Paolina Borghese in S. Maria Maggiore in Rome.⁷⁶⁵ [Fig 25, Ch.4, Sec.3] Executed by the Milanese architect and sculptor Flaminio Ponzio (1559-1613) in the first decade of the seventeenth century, the funeral monument of Pope Paul V was commissioned by Cardinal Scipione Borghese. In the upper right corner of the monument, a white marble bas-relief shows two turbaned figures with Safavid attributes, one of whom holds a letter as sign of embassy, genuflecting in front of the pope. [Fig 26, Ch.4, Sec.3] A document at the State Archive of Rome reveals two payments to the Italian restorer and sculptor Cristoforo Stati for the “histories of the ambassadors of the king of Persia and Congo in marble” in 1614, which suggest a confirmed subject matter, date, and artist for those carved representations.⁷⁶⁶ A Latin inscription incised in gold on a black marble plaque beneath the effigy of the pope at the center of the monument celebrates Paul V’s missions in spreading Catholicism as far as the Congo, Ethiopia, Japan, and Persia in Asia.⁷⁶⁷ The monument is a proud testimony to Paul V’s missionary maneuvers in distant lands.

⁷⁶⁵ M.C Dorati, “Gli scultori della Cappella Paolina di Santa Maria Maggiore,” *Commentari; rivista di critica e storia dell’arte* XVIII (1967): 231–60; Steven F. Ostrow, *Art and Spirituality in Counter-Reformation Rome: The Sistine and Pauline Chapels in S. Maria Maggiore*, Monuments of Papal Rome (Cambridge [England] ; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁷⁶⁶ ASR, *Camerale*, I, 1544, f. 8r and 10v. Piemontese, “I due ambasciatori in Persia ricevuti da Papa Paolo V al Quirinale,” 408; Anna Maria Corbo and Massimo Pomponi, eds., *Fonti per la storia artistica romana al tempo di Paolo V*, Pubblicazioni degli Archivi di Stato. Strumenti 121 (Roma: Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali, Ufficio centrale per i beni archivistici, 1995), 95, 102.

⁷⁶⁷ “porrò inter Catholicorum obsequia longè ab externarum gentium est adoratus à Congesi ex finibus Aethiopiae à Voxio ex Japonis à Persia ex Asia” Cappella Paolina Borghese, Basilica S. Maria Maggiore, Rome.

Above Stati's bas-relief with the two Safavid delegates is a 1613 fresco by Guido Reni depicting the *Victory of Heraclius over Chosroes of Persia*. [Fig 27, Ch.4, Sec.3] The fresco represents the battle between the Byzantine emperor Heraclius (d.641) who regained the True Cross that the Persians had stolen from Jerusalem in 614 and overthrew the Sassanian king Khosrow II (Chosroes, r. 590-1628), resulting in the expulsion of the Persians from Asia Minor (Anatolia).⁷⁶⁸ The victorious posture of Heraclius with his left foot on the dead body of the Sassanian king echoes favorably with the message of the low relief where contemporary Persians modestly kneel before the Supreme Pontiff on his throne. The triumphant Heraclius gratefully looks at the *Assumption of Mary* on the banner held by a figure in the background facing towards the [Borghese] Chapel. At the center of the mausoleum, the effigy of Paul V oriented towards the altar prays at the icon of the *Madonna Salus Populi Romani*.⁷⁶⁹ This coherence between Paul V and Heraclius suggests the Borghese pope as another Heraclius as a *militia Christi* and a missionary. The pictorial scheme of the tombstone reinforces the curated realignment of Persia as an old friend of Christianity and a contemporary annex to the cultural and political hierarchy set by the Catholic Church.

Anthony van Dyck's Double Portraits of Robert Shirley and Theresa

Two portraits of Robert Shirley and his Circassian wife, Theresa Sampsonia (d.1668), by the Flemish artist Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641) painted in 1622, Petworth House in England, reveal how Shah Abbas's diplomatic ambitions in the first decade of the

⁷⁶⁸ Abolala Soudavar, "The Significance of Av. Čiθra, OPers. Čiça, MPers. Čihr, and NPers. Čehr, for the Iranian Cosmogony of Light," *Iranica Antiqua*, 2006, 177–81; Abolala Soudavar, *Decoding Old Masters: Patrons, Princes and Enigmatic Paintings of the 15th Century* (XI, 154 S, 2008), 112.

⁷⁶⁹ Piemontese, "I due ambasciatori in Persia ricevuti da Papa Paolo V al Quirinale," 407–9.

seventeenth century evolved into triggers of his overseas silk trade throughout his reign.⁷⁷⁰ [Fig 28-29, Ch.4, Sec.3] Also known as “Lady Shirley” in English literature, Sampsonia was the daughter of a Circassian Chieftain who entered Shah ‘Abbās’s *Haram Sarā* (*harem*) at the age of four with her paternal aunt who was a favorite wife of the Shah. She was baptized in Persia and took the name Theresa in honor of the Carmelite nun and reformer, Saint Theresa of Ávila (1515-1582).⁷⁷¹

Theresa married Robert Shirley in February 1608 and accompanied him on several of his diplomatic journeys.⁷⁷² The couple were both Catholic converts and were significantly influential in the development of Christian organizations in Persia. In 1609, Robert petitioned Paul V to support the Carmelite missionaries who had been established in Persia since 1604 (arrived in 1607) and received liturgical stipulations to construct Roman churches in Persia.⁷⁷³ Theresa, on the other hand, was originally an Orthodox whose conversion to Roman Catholicism was another nod to the agency of faith in power negotiations of the early seventeenth century Persia with its European allies.⁷⁷⁴

In van Dyke’s portrait, Robert is represented while on his third mission accompanied by Theresia as an ambassador of Persia in Rome, in July 1622.⁷⁷⁵ Robert is standing in contrapposto with half of his bright silk tunic exposed beneath a sumptuous gold-silk

⁷⁷⁰ Petworth Castle, National Trust, UK. Acc, no. 38. See Canby, *Shah ‘Abbas*, 56–57.

⁷⁷¹ Harem: “the separate part of a Muslim household reserved for wives, concubines, and female servants.” Oxford Online Dictionary.

⁷⁷² Bernadette Andrea, ““Lady Sherley: The “First” Persian in England?,”” ed. Nabil Matar and Bindu Malieckal, *Special Issue of The Muslim World: Muslim and Non-Muslim Women in the Empires of Islam, 1453–1798* 95, no. 2 (2005): 279–95.

⁷⁷³ Piemontese, “I due ambasciatori in Persia ricevuti da Papa Paolo V al Quirinale,” 412.

⁷⁷⁴ Andrea, *The Lives of Girls and Women from the Islamic World in Early Modern British Literature and Culture*, 29–35.

⁷⁷⁵ BAV, Vat, lat, 12323, Diario di P. Alaleone, ff. 346r-349v, 350v, 355r. See Piemontese, “I due ambasciatori in Persia ricevuti da Papa Paolo V al Quirinale ,” 412, no. 142.

robe with a design of female figures holding long-necked bottles of wine and floral patterns in stylish Safavid silk and velvet patterns produced during the reign of Shah Abbas.⁷⁷⁶ The subject has his [invisible] right hand on his waist beneath the golden cloak to fully showcase the richness of the stylish design and the luxurious material of his garment. There is a sword tucked in his sash, of which only the handle is visible, and an arrow loosely held in his left hand. The armor is noticeably subdued by the abundance of silken brocades. His headgear is wrongly knotted, yet still conjures his Safavid association.⁷⁷⁷ The portrait is overloaded with Persian silk (*abrīšam*), Shah Abbas's principal export in the seventeenth century.⁷⁷⁸

In Theresa's portrait, a humble church with its adjacent bell tower in the background raises her position as an advocate of the Roman Church, while her Persian attributions associate her missionary role in Persia. Van Dyck romanticized Theresa's environment with a lavish Persian carpet with wrinkles on the edge that recalls a delicate silk carpet which naturally rippled beneath the cushion in the right corner. On the right side of Theresa, a raised silk brocade with gold embroidered floral patterns suggests the luxurious textile produced in Safavid workshops in Persia that were often exported to Europe. Theresa's shimmering gown and Safavid royal headpiece, her opulent jewels, and bright direct look with a deliberate smile on her face conjure a woman with a high

⁷⁷⁶ For iconographical details on Robert's robe, Cfr. Niyayesh, "The Fabric of Silk Power in the Sherley Portraits." For general knowledge on Safavid fashion and silk patterns, Cfr. Layla S. Diba, "Clothing x. In the Safavid and Qajar periods," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. V, No. 8, pp. 785-808.

⁷⁷⁷ Souren Melikian, "In Western Fantasies of the East, Flights from Accuracy," *International Herald Tribune* 2, no. 3 (August 2008): 9.

⁷⁷⁸ Baghdiantz McCabe, *The Shah's Silk for Europe's Silver*.

courtly position and conspicuous shrewdness whose interlocutory role between Persia and the Roman Church deserved an individual commission to celebrate her bona fides.

Anthony van Dyck's portrait of Robert and Theresa Shirley embodied the development of Shah Abbas's foreign diplomacy and commerce in the seventeenth century that, in my view, was an outgrowth of the earlier political alliances founded on previous forms of diplomacy and gift-exchange.⁷⁷⁹ Van Dyck's portraits of the Shirleys marked a trading pattern established through the political negotiations between Persia and its European allies in which material objects were the vehicles to expand those developing forms of correspondence into a network of global trade. In the same year that Shirley's portrait was commissioned in Rome, Shah Abbas's army, in an alliance with English forces, expelled the Portuguese from Hormuz and allocated the port city of Jāsk on the right side of the Strait of Hormuz as a new vassal in southern coast of Persia to the English East Indian Company. In return, the Shāh received military support from this comparatively new power in the trade scene of the Indian Ocean and acquired ships to sail his silk through the Persian Gulf to Europe, avoiding Ottoman territories.

The Shirleys appearance in van Dyck's portraits are a nod to the pinnacle of Shah Abbas's global silk trade. Robert Shirley had previously displayed gifts received from Christian leaders in Europe. The jewel-encrusted crucifix that he once received from the pope in honor of his conversion to Catholicism in Persia surmounted his Safavid turban in his first mission to Europe. The gold chain Robert had received from Cosimo II the Grand Duke of Tuscany prior to his Roman voyage in 1609 was represented in his portraits in Rome. The visual documents of the period materialized the English

⁷⁷⁹ Niyayesh, "The Fabric of Silk Power in the Sherley Portraits," 212–17.

ambassador's accessories as portable signs of his political ties and religious associations.

Anthony van Dyck's portraits reveal the Shirleys clad in bales of fine Persian silk to materialize instead Shah Abbas's blooming silk trade that far exceeded his previous political and cultural boundaries.

Chapter-5

“Conclusion: Visual Evidence in Final Dialogue with the Textual History, the Rise and Fall of a Muslim Ally in the Early Modern Italian Perception”

In a critical inquiry of the objective culture of the modern world and the dynamic human-object relations, the author Bill Brown argued that those stimuli constantly reconstitute meaning in objects based on the peoples’ desire for those objects to function in a particular mode. Brown wrote:

...fed up with Lacan as with deconstructions of the Wolf-Man, a doctoral student looks up at a filthy window epiphanically thinks, “I must have *things*.” He relinquishes theory to relish the world at hand: “A real, very dirty window, shutting out the sun. A *thing*...” These days, history can unabashedly begin with things and with the sense by which we apprehend them; like a modernist poem, it begins in the street... Can’t we learn from this materialism instead of taking the trouble to trouble it? Can’t we remain content with the “real, dirty window, a thing” as the answer to what ails us with turning it into an ailment of its own? ⁷⁸⁰

Brown’s theory grounds on the role of “things” in providing clues that words come short in doing so. In this thesis, Persian gifts and painted representations of the Persian embassies in Italy were the “things” that elucidated some intricacies in the relationships between Muslim Persia and early modern Italian centers that stemmed out of a mutual sentiment against the Porte. This concluding chapter responds to the research questions laid out in the opening chapter Persia’s anti-Ottoman ambitions set the tone for its diplomatic relations with Europe. However, the vicissitudes in the political, religious, economic, and cultural dynamics in Persia as well as Europe’s multifarious strategies towards the Ottomans and the challenges caused by the Reforming movements, gradually

⁷⁸⁰ Bill Brown, “Thing Theory,” *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1 (Autumn 2001): 2-3.

gave rise to an evolution in the nature and quantity of the gifts throughout time, from Aq Qoyunlu Persia through the reign of Shah Abbas I of the Safavid Empire.

Gift giving in Islamic court culture was a fundamental part of communications between Muslim rulers and their foreign counterparts. Exchanging *hadayya* (gifts) was encouraged by the Prophet Muhammad as a beneficial practice on human relations that “removes rancor from the heart.”⁷⁸¹ There is more than one word for “gifts” in Islamic cultures, in which the “hierarchical relations” between the patron and the recipient of the gifts stipulate the specific category of the gifts.⁷⁸² Islamic gift giving played an important role in forming and maintaining political, social, and religious relations in a vast network of cross-cultural correspondence. From displaying the largesse of the patron to a mark of military alliance, luxurious, rare, and exotic items, which often held price tags, formed parts of gifts’ nature to recognize their recipients and impress them. Diplomatic gifts were an integral part of the trans-imperial negotiations between Persia and their European allies to express loyalty and solidify alliances.⁷⁸³ However, by considering the articulation of anti-Ottoman sentiments in looking at the Persian gifts and their documented

⁷⁸¹ For sayings of Prophet Muhammad about gift giving, Cfr. al-Sayyid Sabiq, *Fiqh al-Sunnah*, vol.1, 3 vols. (Al Maktba Al Assrya, 1965): 537. For gift giving as a tradition in Muslim communities, Cfr. Ghādah Ḥijjāwī Qaddūmī and Aḥmad ibn al-Rashīd Ibn al-Zubayr, eds., *Book of Gifts and Rarities: Kitāb al-Hadāyā Wa al-Tuḥaf: Selections Compiled in the Fifteenth Century from an Eleventh-Century Manuscript on Gifts and Treasures*, Harvard Middle Eastern Monographs 29 (Cambridge, Mass: Distributed for the Center for Middle Eastern Studies of Harvard University by Harvard University Press, 1996), 4; Ibn Qutaybah, *Uyūn Al-Akhbār* (“*The Book of Choice Narratives*”), vol. 3, 10 vols., p.34.

⁷⁸² Linda Komaroff, “The Art of the Art of Giving at the Islamic Courts,” in *The Gifts of the Sultan; the Arts of Giving at the Islamic Courts* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011), 20, 30, no.22; For the various terms referring to different types of gifts, Cfr. Qaddūmī and Ibn al-Zubayr, *Book of Gifts and Rarities*, 4; *Encyclopedia of Islam* 2, vol 3. s.v. “Hiba,” (gift of a personal property voluntarily transferred from one person to the other with no expectations to return) p. 342 ff. *Encyclopedia Iranica*, s.v. “*pīškaš*” (revenue, tribute), “*hadīya*” (Arabic word for gift), “*tohfa*” (rarities). Also see Rudi P. Matthee, “Gift Giving In The Safavid Period,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, X/6, pp. 609-614.

⁷⁸³ Qaddūmī and Ibn al-Zubayr, *Book of Gifts and Rarities*, 3–5; Komaroff, “The Art of the Art of Giving at the Islamic Courts,” 21.

provenance, this study complicates the period's image of the "Muslim World" and brings nuance to the diversity of cultural spheres in Islamic courts.

Beginning with the fifteenth-century Turkman court of Persia, Uzun Hasan broadcast his anti-Ottoman sentiments immediately after his ascension in 1453 and sent embassies to Europe to join the crusade. The Sunni king of Persia often associated his political image with that of the warlord Timur, who had brought the Ottoman sultan Bayezid I to his knees in a devastating defeat in 1402 (Ankara) and universally eternalized his valor. A revealing visual exemplar of this connection is the Florentine cassone with the image of the victorious figures of Uzun Hasan and the posthumous Timur on the triumphal chariot adjacent to the Emperor of Trebizond, David Komnenos. The scene celebrates the victory of the Aq Qoyunlu-Komnenos coalition over the Ottomans in Trebizond in around 1460. Uzun Hasan's marriage to the imperial family of Trebizond associated him with the Byzantine heritage of the Komnenos Trebizond. The fifteenth-century wedding chest boasted about this "prosperous" marriage for the contemporary Florentine couple to model theirs after those whose historical alliance diminished their enemies. The pictorial program on the cassone also materialized Timur's ethos that was enlivened by Uzun Hasan; it was a self-legitimizing ploy in a propagandistic program of the Turkman ruler that found its way to Quattrocento Italian visions of the Aq Qoyunlu king of Persia.

His gift choices such as the ninth-century *Turquoise Glass Bowl* with Byzantine embellishments to the Signoria of Venice, as well as the Hellenistic cameo (*Tazza Farnese*) that once Timur had plundered and later Uzun Hasan had retained in the Timurid treasuries of Herat and Tabriz, to the Papacy embodied that image of his court splendor that Uzun Hasan desired his European allies to envision. The material and visual

culture of the gifts Uzun Hasan sent to Italy acted as agents in a broader politics of imperial self-fashioning to vindicate his reign as a rightful heir to that of Timur and to consolidate his political position in his vast reign stretching from Byzantine Trebizond in the west to the Timurid heritage in the east.

In the fifteenth century, religion was a common ground between the Porte and Aq Qoyunlu Persia, as both were Sunni Muslim empires. On the other side, a number of European monarchs were attempting to muster a crusade against the Muslim Ottomans to recapture Istanbul. The shared Islamic faith between Persia and the Porte was a point that needed to be reconsidered in the conception of the contemporary Italian partners in their alliance with Persia against another Sunni Muslim court. At the same time, Uzun Hasan's gifts reflected his endeavors in demonstrating his knowledge of his Italian allies' cultural and historical traditions. To this end, one of the most revealing of such gifts was the *Turquoise Glass Bowl* to one of Persia's first Italian partners in battling the Ottomans, Signoria of Venice, that the gift's provenance, visual, and material cultures conveyed his alliance with Byzantine Imperial traditions, his perception of Venice's courtly style, and his linkage to Timur. However, Uzun Hasan's Italian allies responded to the period's needs in the emergence of another figure in the guise of Timur to best serve both sides' political expediencies in facing the common enemy. The visual records of the quattrocento Italy decode the Christian conception of those alliances with Persia that often required some historical rehabilitations.

The Italian commissions that memorialized these intercultural interactions were an attempt to establish both a moral basis for the alliance and situate Persia favorably within a cultural and political hierarchy set by the Roman Church. For that reason, for example,

in both Pinturicchio's frescoes, *The Arrival in Ancona* in Siena and *The Disputation of Saint Catherine of Alexandria* in Vatican, Persian ambassadors were depicted as they sided with the leaders of the crusaders. This was not only to shape the Italian conception of the Muslim Persia as the "enemy of the enemy" of the Church, but also to visually underscore the associations between the Aq Qoyunlu Persians and the anti-Ottoman challengers of the period. This realignment was only stimulated by Uzun Hasan's endeavors in staging his state as an heir to that of Timur, while the quattrocento humanists often referred to this Turco-Mongolian warlord as the "king of Parthia (Persia)" and glamorized Uzun Hasan as an illustrious companion of Timur and other Persian formidable kings.⁷⁸⁴ In this historical re-alignment of Persia, one of the most revealing memoranda was the three-day theatrical performance in March 1473 in Rome in which Uzun Hasan was reenacted as the victorious king whose alliance with the Christendom could materialize the "Reconquista" of Constantinople (Istanbul).

Besides European supporters of the crusade, there were other Christian centers, including Florence, which had developed close political and commercial relations with the Porte in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. However, even those centers were susceptible to the ripples of the historical realignments of the Muslim enemies of the Ottomans in Europe. The Medici sovereigns of Florence, whose alliance with Mehmed II paved the way for their flourishing trade in the Levant, were also immersed in the quattrocento "romanticizing" of Persia's political position in Italy.⁷⁸⁵ Benozzo Gozzoli's *The Procession of the Magi* in the Medici Palace Chapel in Florence, in which the major

⁷⁸⁴ Margaret Meserve, *Empires of Islam in Renaissance Historical Thought*, Harvard Historical Studies ; 158 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2008), 218–23.

⁷⁸⁵ Margaret Meserve, *Empires of Islam in Renaissance Historical Thought*, Harvard Historical Studies ; 158 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2008) 218-231.

members of the Medici family were represented in the guise of the magi, was a blatant attempt by the Medici patrons to legitimize their monarchy. Nonetheless, the classical Zoroastrian identity of the magi, the protectors of the eternal fire in ancient Persia, embodied a convoluted network of associations between the Medici and the ancient Persians beyond their political conflicts in relation to the Ottomans.

In fifteenth-century Florence, Zoroaster's ideology was taught at the Platonic School as one of the six principal ancient theologies. Furthermore, Bracciolini's translation of Xenophon's *Cyropedia* into Latin in 1450 and Filelfo's complementary translation of this ancient source in 1470 invigorated the idea of Persia as an ancient Empire founded by virtuous monarchs whose political savvy was inherited by its contemporary rulers. These readjustments distinguished Persia from other Islamic empires, specifically that of the Ottomans, and promoted it into a virtuous kingdom with a noble past, whose sovereigns were the paragons of royal wisdom. Therefore, the Medici conjoining themselves with the men of Persian history whose initial recognition of Christ's divinity immortalized them in the religious history of Florence echoed seamlessly with their propagandistic purposes to legitimize the family's political hegemony over Florence in the second half of the fifteenth century. Despite the then-opposing political expediencies, this commission was a nod to the deep perception of Persian history in Florence that set the stage for a reliable diplomatic relationship in the next two centuries by the Medici Grand Dukes and the Safavid Shahs of Persia.

The infusion of Persian visual references into fifteenth-century Italian painted commissions reached its zenith in Federico da Montefeltro's propagandistic program in Urbino. In the four illustrations analyzed in the section on Urbino, Federico's recognition

of his Persian allies was reflected both by including Persian human agents and visual codes such as the gifts presented to him on behalf of the court of Persia. In an altarpiece representing the *Corpus Domini*, a Persian ambassador is depicted among the duke's entourage in a scene in which Christ is delivering the Host to his apostles. In another illustration, Federico and the Renaissance humanist Cristoforo Landino are shown on the frontispiece of Filelfo's Latin translation of *Cyropedia* behind a balustrade with a Persian rug hanging over it. Federico's dynastic portrait with his only heir, Guidobaldo, also included a Persian gift of a pearled conical bonnet. The Persians' connections to Federico were attributed to the duke's anti-Ottoman agendas. The rich gifts of the carpet and the pearl-encrusted hat were also a means to fashion Federico's perception of Persian courtly opulence and cultural visions. Nevertheless, the inclusion of Persian agents in Federico's courtly commissions served the duke in his imperial self-representations that often tended to boast his own qualities as a condottiere prince and a Renaissance humanist who embraced the political requirements of the period and legitimized Christendom's alliance with fifteenth-century Persia as the descendant of its moral ancient monarchs.

While in the first decades following the fall of Constantinople the Italian centers were attempting to establish a moral basis for their alliances with Persia against another Sunni Muslim court, a momentous conversion in the political and religious biases in Persia intensified the tripartite tensions with the Porte. The rise of Uzun Hasan's grandson, Esmā'īl I Safavi to power at the turn of the sixteenth century and his conversion to the Twelver Imami Shi'ism generated new conflicts between Safavid Persia and the Sunni Ottomans. Persian gifts with religious connotations, such as coins with inscriptions of Shi'a mottos expressing allegiance to 'Alī Ibn Abī Ṭāleb and his descendants and Persian

translations of Christian holy books, indicated a shift in the strategies of the first Safavid Shahs in utilizing religious conflicts as a common ground to associate themselves with Europe in stemming their mutual religio-political enemy. At the same time, the establishment of Shi'ism in Persia protected the Safavid territories from being usurped by the Ottoman Sunni Caliphate, as the Porte had already claimed supremacy over all Sunni jurisdictions.

By 1515, the Portuguese had formally occupied the island of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf as a crossroad to their Indian trading center of Goa (*Estado da India*). Conceded by the Holy See to the Portuguese Crown, the *Padroado Português do Oriente* mission established Augustinians in Hormuz as part of their framework of organizational evangelization and ecclesiastical administration.⁷⁸⁶ These Catholic missions resulted in the emergence of Christian communities within the religious fabric of Shi'a Persia. Moreover, the Safavid shah's tolerance toward developing Christian communities on the southern coast of Persia enhanced the frequency of intercultural communications in matters regarding the Catholic missionaries in Hormuz, which also provided a platform for their negotiations concerning the Ottomans. One of the most outstanding mediators in these matters was Giovanni Battista Vecchietti whose bifurcated mission in Persia between 1584 and 1588 as papal envoy and book agent of the *Stamperia Orientale Medicea* entailed frequent correspondence between the Medici Grand Duchy of Tuscany, the Hispano-Portuguese court of Philip II, the Papacy, and Persia about a military alliance

⁷⁸⁶ On Safavid-Portuguese relations, Cfr. García de Silva y Figueroa, Jeffrey Scott Turley, and George Bryan Souza, *The Commentaries of D. García de Silva y Figueroa on His Embassy to Shah Abbās I of Persia on Behalf of Philip III, King of Spain*, European Expansion and Indigenous Response, volume 26 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2017); Luis Gil Fernández, *El Imperio Luso-Español y La Persia Safávida (1582-1605)* (Madrid: Fundación Universitaria Española, 2006).

against the Ottomans approaching Hormuz. Vecchietti's expedition as Medici book agent in Persia also opened up a way for volumes of Persian manuscripts and resources to enter Italian treasuries and the studies of the contemporary Italian intellectuals. As more Persian trophies and ambassadors arrived in Italy toward the end of the century, another round of realignment of Persian history began in Italy that encompassed discoveries of ancient Persian saints and martyrs in cinquecento Rome.

The ascension of the fifth Safavid Shah, 'Abbās I, to the throne of Persia in 1587 veered the diplomatic relationship to a much elevated power negotiation between a Shi'a Muslim court with a standing army and a renowned silk industry that soon became a royal monopoly, and his extended network of European allies. While the Ottomans were in pursuit of capturing Hormuz and invading the western borders of Persia in the last two decades of the sixteenth century, Shah Abbas dispatched emissaries to Italy to ask for a military support against the common enemy. A splendid gift of a Safavid *separ*, rich in mother of pearl, gold, and silver to the Medici Grand Duke of Tuscany around 1588 revealed the Shah's military ambitions, yet friendly relations with the court of Tuscany. Embroidered arms and armor were among the most common gifts exchanged between the Muslim courts. In a few decades prior to Shah Abbas's gift to the Medici Grand Duke, in 1555 a Safavid ambassador (Shah Quli) had arrived in Amasya with bejeweled Damascus scimitars and ceremonial shields as diplomatic gifts to the Ottoman Sultan.⁷⁸⁷ In another example, the Ottoman delegate Hasan Aga arrived at the court of Shah Ṭahmāsp in Qazvin with gifts of bejeweled swords and daggers for the Safavid ruler of Persia in

⁷⁸⁷ Ogier Ghiselin Busbecq and Edward Seymour Forster, *The Turkish Letters of Ogier Ghiselin Busbecq, Imperial Ambassador at Constantinople 1554-1562* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1927), 62.

1560-1.⁷⁸⁸ In another reception in 1619, the Indian ambassador arrived in Shah Abbas's court with gifts including jewel-encrusted swords and other arms.⁷⁸⁹ To this effect, the military nature of Shah Abbas's gift of a ceremonial shield reiterated the common symbolic implication of gifts of armor as signs of status among Muslim rulers.

The gift of the pearled shield that Shah Abbas presented to Ferdinando I de' Medici was meaningfully exceptional in its visual and material culture. The abundant application of mother of pearl alluded to the pearl-fishing gulfs of Persia and Oman that were then under serious threat by the Ottoman forces. The defensive function of the shield echoed Shah Abbas's plea for a military alliance to assault the Porte. The pictorial program of the gift with a princely scene of festivity, fruitful plants, and courtly animals glorified the Medici perception of the splendor of the Shah's court. This was while Vecchietti had specifically presented Ferdinando's proposal for sending arms and military experts to Hormuz to Philip II in 1588 and asked him for his support in battles against the Ottomans on the southern coast of Persia. The gift highlights the ways in which objects contributed to shaping perceptions of Persia. It was purposely selected by the Persian Shah to establish his empire's worthiness as a reliable diplomatic partner with an honorable past, already renowned in Florence, and an illustrious present boasted in the luxurious material, artistic expertise, and visualized rich courtly culture portrayed on the shield.

By the turn of the seventeenth century, Shah Abbas's gift giving routine took a new path in conveying two principal messages about the ongoing military alliance against the

⁷⁸⁸ 'Abdī Beyg Šīrāzī, *Takmelat Al-Akbār: Tārīk-e Šafawiya Az Āgāz Tā Sāl-e 978 Hejri Qamari*, ed. 'A.-H. Navā'ī (Tehran, 1990), 117–18; Iskandar Beg Munshī, *The History of Shah 'Abbas the Great (Tārīk-e 'ālamārā-Ye 'Abbāsī)*, 192.

⁷⁸⁹ Pietro della Valle, *Viaggi di Pietro della Valle*, vol.I (Brighton, 1943), 833–34.

Ottomans and diverting the Euro-Indian commercial itinerary from areas in Ottoman jurisdictions to the sea routes in the Persian Gulf. The shah's aspiration was to suffocate the Porte by deducting the noteworthy tax revenue and fees that the Ottomans charged on the products crossing their lands. At the same time, the Shah's flourishing silk industry hit the summit of its glory in the seventeenth century as it became Persia's main export to Europe; the trade required secured outlets to the overseas markets. The Shah's extravagant gifts of bales of silk and embroidered arms to Christian princes in the first two decades of the seventeenth century embodied his military and commercial ambitions in dealing with Europe. Silk carpets, precious brocades, shawls, and turbans, as well as bejeweled weapons, were among common gifts of the Safavid shahs to foreign rulers, mainly their Muslim counterparts.⁷⁹⁰ For instance, in 1567, Shah Tahmasp dispatched an embassy to Istanbul with gifts including twenty silk carpets, including large gold-embroidered silk carpets and prayer rugs. Likewise, in 1555, small silk carpets and large carpets were among other gifts Shah Quli presented to the Sultan.⁷⁹¹

Shah Abbas took this tradition to a new extreme by sending customized gifts in large quantities, often exploiting fine Persian silk to concurrently assess his European allies' market for these commodities. In 1600, the Shah sent a gift of a velvet with gold-embroidered scenes of the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary woven in repeating patterns

⁷⁹⁰ 'Abd-al-Hosayn Navā'i, ed., *Asnād Wa Mokātabāt-e Sāsī-e Īrān Az Sāl-e 1038 Tā 1105 Hejrī-e Qamarī* (Tehran, 1991), 46–48; Carlos Alonso, *Embajadores de Persia en las Cortes de Praga, Roma y Valladolid: 1600-1601* (Roma: Instituto español de historia eclesiastica, 1989), 102; Francois Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire Volume 1*. (Place of publication not identified: Theclassics Us, 2013), 147; H. Reindl-Kiel, "Pracht Und Ehre: Zum Geschenkwesen Im Osmanischen Reich," in *Das osmanische Reich in seinen Archivalien und Chroniken*, ed. K. Kreiser and C.K. Neumann (Istanbul, 1997), 186.

⁷⁹¹ Hasan Rūmlū, *Aḥsan Al-Tawārīk*, ed. 'A.-H. Navā'i (Tehran, 1349), 567. Also see J. M. Rogers, "Europe and the Ottoman Arts : Foreign Demand and Ottoman Consumption," in *Europa e Islam Tra i Secoli XIV e XVI*, ed. Michele Bernardini (Naples, 2002), vol. II, 721. For 1555 list of gifts, Cfr. ASVe, Senato, Dispacchi Constantinopoli, Filza 2, 515a.

to the Republic of Venice. In another embassy in 1603, this number escalated to nine plain and patterned brocades with gold and silver threads and another gold-embroidered velvet with the figures of Christ and Mary for the Church of San Marco. In 1613, two Persian envoys transported fifty bales of silk with a number of diamonds to Venice, and in 1622, another Persian embassy led by Shahsavār and Hāji Avaz-e Tabrizi took four carpets and fifty pieces of other cloths in different colors to the Republic. With Anthony Shirley and Husayn `Ali Beg Bāyāt embassy to Europe, Shah Abbas accompanied thirty-two chests of precious gifts composed of royal brocades and embroidered weapons. In 1610, the Shah dispatched the Armenian merchant khāje Safar to Europe with fifty bales of fine silk and another pack (one-hundred bales in total) of raw silk to the Spanish court via another embassy (de Gouvea-Rumlu).⁷⁹² The erroneous interpretation of the latter consignment as gifts to the Spanish king resulted in the Shah's wrath at the Persian envoy which led to his execution and the confiscation of all his and his family's assets.⁷⁹³ I will elaborate on this incident shortly, but this brief narrative reveals that the Shah's largesse in sending large amounts of raw silk and silk-woven brocades to Europe was not necessarily a demonstration of his liberality and generosity in gift giving; instead, it was a means of his new strategy in diplomatic marketing for his silk monopoly by finding European outlets to which to sell his products. It was within this political and commercial complexity that the Shah strove to convert the trade routes to the Persian Gulf not only to own the revenues of the developing global trade and export the Persian silk extensively

⁷⁹² Alonso Vañes, "La embajada persa de Denguiz-Beg y Antonio de Gouvea, osa, a la luz de nuevos documentos," 456–59.

⁷⁹³ della Valle, *Viaggi di Pietro della Valle*, vol.II, 169. Iskandar Beg Munshī, *The History of Shah 'Abbas the Great (Tārīk-e 'ālamārā-Ye 'Abbāsī)*, 862–63.

and freely in an international network, but also to mount a commercial battle against his Turkish rival-enemy, the Porte.

The 1606 Peace of Zsitvatorok between Rudolph II and the Ottoman Sultan Ahmed I brought nothing but disappointment to the Shah of Persia. The rising hostilities between the Dutch and Habsburg Spain led to intermittent years of war (ending in 1648- Peace of Münster). The Venetians' and the Medici Grand Duke's hesitation in offending the Ottomans for "hypothetical" advantages in allying with the Persians, and the papacy's empty promises to Persia about a military alliance gradually withered Shah Abbas's every hope that his allies would finally unite with each other and with Persia in a real battle against the Porte. In Italian visual records, such as Gabriele Caliari's painting in the Palazzo Ducale Venice, the political aspect of relations with Persia is totally masked by disguising illustrations of Persians offering gifts to the Republic of Venice in a hierarchical fashion that bolsters the supremacy of Venice. Caliari's painting captured the Persian embassy of 1603 at the moment when precious gifts of gold-embroidered silk brocades of the Shah were being offered to the Republic of Venice. In another example in the Vatican, Ricci memorialized 'Ali Goli Beg Mordar's reception by Pope Paul V by showing the Muslim Persian ambassador kissing the cross on the pope's feet. In none of the above mentioned or other examples analyzed in this thesis, is the military aspect of these intercultural negotiations evoked; instead, the Persian alliance deliberately served the broader propagandistic programs of the Italian rulers.

As the Catholic princes of Europe disappointed the Shah's anti-Ottoman campaign, Shah Abbas turned his attention to the commercial aspect of his international relations beyond the Catholic centers. Meanwhile, English agents, most notably of all Robert Shirley,

seized the opportunity to put the needs and desires of the two courts in dialogue and to circumvent the burgeoning challenges of the precarious coalitions between Persia and the Catholic princes of Europe.⁷⁹⁴ By 1602, Shah Abbas reclaimed Bahrain in a strategic move to the Portuguese strongholds in the Persian Gulf.⁷⁹⁵ In reaction, Philip III dispatched an embassy in February 1602 led by the Augustinian Fr. António de Gouveia (d.1628) to reinforce his multi-lateral relations with Persia and prohibit the Shah from signing any possible treaties with the English merchant.⁷⁹⁶

Nonetheless, the Peace of Zsitvatorok frustrated the Shah; he took his complaint to de Gouveia and asked him to go back to Europe and persuade the pope to break the peace and wage war against the Ottomans. Along with de Gouveia, the Shah dispatched another Persian ambassador Dengiz Beg Rumlu (d.1613) to Spain and Rome. This is the embassy in which the Shah invested a hundred bales of raw silk, apparently as a means of assessing the Spanish market for Persian silk. However, the two ambassadors gave the precious consignment to the Spanish King. According to Persian chronicles, the noticeably high quantity of the silk cocoons seemed perplexing to Philip III who immediately questioned the Shah's intention by accusing him of mistaking the Spanish king for a "woman, to be entertained with spinning."⁷⁹⁷ The king passed the bales of silk to the queen, who then donated them to an Augustinian Monastery in Spain. As a result,

⁷⁹⁴ The incorporation of the English East India Company in December 1600 brought hundreds of shareholders of the company to the trade scene of the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf, while the Spanish and Portuguese had already established their interest in the area over a century earlier.

⁷⁹⁵ In the same year, the Dutch joined the English in opposing other powers seeking trade in Southeast Asia. See Falsafi, *Siyāsāt-i ḥāriḡī-i Īrān dar daurān-i Šafawīya*, 27–28.

⁷⁹⁶ The Shah responded with another embassy to Spain (1604) and encouraged the king to unite other Christian princes of Europe against the Ottomans. In his response, the Spanish king lamented the Shah for taking over Bahrain, which was previously under Portuguese Hormuz, and stressed on maintaining peaceful relations.

⁷⁹⁷ Falsafi, *Siyāsāt-i ḥāriḡī-i Īrān dar daurān-i Šafawīya*, 50.

the Shah's finest export ended up in a Christian storehouse, instead of opening up a new market in Spain. Upon their return to Persia, de Gouvea and Rumlu were summoned by the furious Shah, who first asked if the Spanish king had at least responded to his silk consignment with befitting gifts. Learning that the king's gifts were valued at one-fifth of the Shah's silk, the Shah executed Rumlu and left no other choice for de Gouvea but to abscond.

Amid the overtures of the European-Persian correspondence within the anti-Ottoman campaign, the material objects played crucial roles in establishing, or in some cases derailing, pathways of intercultural exchanges. As in the case of the de Gouvea-Rumlu embassy, the Shah entrusted samples of his luxurious silk to arouse interest in dealing with Persia, a strategy that Shah Abbas had also practiced with Venice. However, the high amount of silk bales sent to Spain or to other European centers in the seventeenth century conveyed the commercial intentions embedded in the Persian diplomatic missions. In 1615, only four months after his return, Robert Shirley, along with an Augustinian friar, departed Isfahan for Europe, through way of Hormuz. In the same year, Shah Abbas allied with the British navy to take the port city of Gombarū from the Portuguese and renamed it after himself as *Šahrū*. In reward, the Shah exempted the English from all duties and offered them half of the customs' revenue as well as two vessels in the Gulf to protect their shipping.⁷⁹⁸ While the tension between the Persians and the Portuguese on the southern coast of Persia was rising, Robert Shirley led another embassy to Spain that resulted in a series of diplomatic correspondences between the two

⁷⁹⁸ On Gombarū (today known as Bandar Abbas), Cfr. X. De Planhol, "BANDAR-E 'ABBAS(I) i. The City," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, III/7, pp. 685-687, available online at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/bandar-e-abbasi> (accessed on 30 December 2012).

courts.⁷⁹⁹ However, a comparative study between the monetary value of the gifts exchanged within those overtures implies Persia's disappointment in the coalition with the King of Spain and-more comprehensively-the Roman Catholic league.⁸⁰⁰

The 1618 peace treaty between the Safavids and the Ottomans following the Shah's campaign in Azerbaijan obviated the Shah's need for the European alliance against the

⁷⁹⁹ On behalf of the Shah, Robert guaranteed to the Spanish King that if the Spanish fleet blocked the Ottoman routes in the Red Sea to the commercial centers of India, Hejaz, and Egypt, Shah Abbas would return the port of Gombarū to the Portuguese in Hormuz. Nonetheless, Philip III required that Bahrain as well as Gombarū be returned to the Portuguese, an ambitious demand that led the English ambassador of Persia to leave Spain empty handed and take the same proposal to Rome, and afterwards to England. By December 1616, the British settled in Jāsk, a port on the southeast coast of Persia, which would serve as a crossroad to their initial base in Gujarat (Surat port). A Spanish mission of 1617 in Persia brought gifts worth over 100,000 Spanish Eco (equal 90,000 Safavid Tomans). Among those were three-hundred loads of Indian pepper, silver, gold, and crystal bowls, precious stones and jewels, a box with sixty chains embroidered with turquoise, diamond, and other jewels, gold embroidered saddles, bejeweled bows, arrows, weapons, and other arms; the bejeweled dagger and sword that Philip III wore on his wedding day were highlights of this largess. Nevertheless, even the marvelous gifts of the Spanish King did not persuade Shah 'Abbās to mend relations between the two courts. See Falsafi, *Siyāsat-i ḥārīgī-i Īrān dar daurān-i Ṣafawiya*, 63, 80-82; Della Valle, *Viaggi di Pietro della Valle*.

⁸⁰⁰ After receiving the Spanish ambassador, Don Garcia de Silva y Figueroa (d. 1624), and the gifts, Shah Abbas left for a military campaign against the Ottomans in Azerbaijan. The Spanish had no recourse but to await his return to Isfahan. See Carlos Alonso, *Embajadores de Persia en las Cortes de Praga, Roma y Valladolid: 1600-1601*, Quién Es?, no. 14 (Badajoz: Departamento de Publicaciones, Excma. Diputación Provincial de Badajoz, 1993). The Shah's homecoming took over a year; meanwhile, Don Garcia was still in Persia dealing with matters regarding the Safavid-Portuguese conflicts. Upon his return, in October 1619, the Shah discharged the Spanish diplomat with a letter and gifts worth only 9,000 Tomans (one-tenth of the gifts brought by Don Garcia). Prior to his departure, in a reception on October 2, the Spanish ambassador, along with the director of the Carmelites in Isfahan, Fr. John Thaddeus, conveyed a proposal to the Shah asking for his protection of the Portuguese, Spanish, and Italian Christians in Persia and permission to construct churches in Isfahan. The Shah immediately approved the Spanish proposal and affirmed his support toward the Christian communities under his sway. Don Garcia then asked for Shah Abbas's friendly attitude in dealing with the Portuguese in Hormuz and prohibited him from signing treaties with such "pirates" as the British and similar freebooters who were enemies to the Portuguese. The Shah interrupted the Spanish ambassador and reminded him that poor behavior of the Portuguese toward Muslims in Hormuz and their forceful conversion of Muslim citizens were the main reasons for the strained relationship between the two courts. Shah Abbas also rejected the ambassador's claim for returning Bahrain and Gombarū by noting that he had retained the former from the Muslim emir of Hormuz (not the Portuguese). According to the Shah, in either case the Portuguese had to deal with a Muslim ruler. Concerning Gombarū, the Shah emphasized his rights in taking over the port city as it was located on Safavid territories, not in the Portuguese jurisdictions in Hormuz. At the end, Shah 'Abbās expressed his disappointment at the European princes in facing the Turkish menace by counting his 366 victories over the Porte while the Christian rulers did not even conquer a "manger" in Ottoman territory. The meaningful discrepancy in the price value of the Shah's gifts in comparison with those he received from the Spanish king explicitly echoed his disappointment in Hispano-Portuguese relations with Persia. Falsafi, *Siyāsat-i ḥārīgī-i Īrān dar daurān-i Ṣafawiya*, 80-82.

Porte.⁸⁰¹ Meanwhile, the Shah's tactics in refashioning his diplomatic alliances into an overseas commercial network flourished in new partnerships with the English and the Dutch in the Persian Gulf. In 1622, the Anglo-Safavid alliance conquered Hormuz and a year later, the Dutch East Indies Company (*Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie*) established settlements in Gombarū (today known as Bandar 'Abbās) with a rest house in Lār en route from Isfahan to the southern coasts of Persia.⁸⁰² The English and Dutch companies became the new outlets for Persian products, especially silk; in return, the southern coast of Persia grew into a toll-free crossroad in the Asian trade of the Anglo-Dutch companies.⁸⁰³ Despite the Hispano-Portuguese conflicts with the Safavids and a number of unsuccessful attacks to recover Hormuz, in 1625, the Portuguese only received Shah Abbas's permission to build a fortress and a factory in another port, Bandar-e Kong, in the Persian Gulf to conduct a pearl fishing business in the Sea of Oman.⁸⁰⁴ This

⁸⁰¹ An account entitled *Totius legationis suae et Indicarum rerum Persidisque commentarii* of Figuera's mission in Persia has survived and is now preserved at the National Library in Madrid. For a brief account on his mission, see Michele Bernardini, "FIGUEROA, GARCÍA DE SILVA Y" in *Encyclopedia Iranica* Vol. IX, Fasc. 6, pp. 612-613.

⁸⁰² Among the trophies were two bells from the church in Hormuz, donated by the Portuguese women in 1609. In a self-aggrandizing gesture, Shah 'Abbās relocated the two bells to the main portal of the Qeysarriyeh Bazaar (Grand Bazaar) in Isfahan to celebrate his prowess in military, politics, and commerce. See Falsafi, *Siyāsāt-i ḥārīgī-i Īrān dar daurān-i Šafawiya*, 107.

⁸⁰³ The Portuguese were in constant competition to regain their strongholds in the Persian Gulf. For updates on the English and Dutch trade network in the Persian Gulf, Cfr. Laurence Lockhart, *The Fall of the Šafavī Dynasty and the Afghan Occupation of Persia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), 361–63; R. W. Ferrier, "The Trade between India and the Persian Gulf and the East India Company in the 17th Century," *Bengal: Past and Present* LXXXIX (December 1970); Ferrier, "The Armenians and the East India Company in Persia in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries"; Steensgaard, *The Asian Trade Revolution The East India Companies and the Decline of the Caravan Trade.*; Niels Steensgaard, *Carracks, Caravans and Companies. The Structural Crisis in the European-Asian Trade in the Early 17th Century*, Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies Monograph Series, 17 (Lund, Studentlitteratur, 1973); Alfred C. Wood, *History of the Levant Company*, First issued in paperback (London: Routledge, 2015).

⁸⁰⁴ This was a strategic move by Shah 'Abbās to keep the Portuguese in the competition so that he could exploit their alliance in case of a revolt by the English and the Dutch companies whose growing shipping leverage in the area had turned to a potential threat to the Shah's influence in the Euro-Asian sea trade. See Falsafi, *Siyāsāt-i ḥārīgī-i Īrān dar daurān-i Šafawiya*, 110; Willem M. Floor and Farhad Hakimzadeh, *The Hispano-Portuguese Empire and Its Contacts with Safavid Persia, the Kingdom of Hormuz and Yarubid Oman from 1489 to 1720: A Bibliography of Printed Publications 1508 - 2007*, Acta Iranica 45 (Lovanii: Peeters [u.a.], 2007), XXIII-XXV.

overview of the power struggles in the southern waters of Persia provides the window to see through the nuances that within a few decades shifted Persia's political trajectories from anti-Ottoman diplomacy with Europe to a rigid participation in the development of the global commerce that at its center Persian silk earned pride of place. Notwithstanding, material objects remained as the essential components of the new alliances.

Concurrent to the fall of Hormuz into the hands of Shah Abbas, Robert Shirley and his wife Theresa departed Isfahan for yet another expedition in Europe representing the Safavid court. This mission was memorialized by the Dutch artist Anthony van Dyck in Rome. In two companion portraits of the Englishman and Circassian woman, van Dyck depicted his subjects clad in splendid silk garments from head to toe.⁸⁰⁵ There are no vivid traces of political embassy, such as letters, in those portraits; instead, Robert and his wife function as human models for the exhibition of their rich Persian costumes. In this mission, Robert received a public audience with Pope Gregory XV (r.1621-1623) on Sunday, July 31, 1622, followed by three private receptions and another audience accompanied by his Catholic wife.⁸⁰⁶

The two portraits of Robert and Theresa captured the last phase of Safavid political negotiations with the Catholic princes of Europe, before the Shah's dissolution of his diplomatic alliances for new trading partnerships. In 1622, right after his victories over the Hispano-Portuguese forces in Hormuz, Shah Abbas instigated a reign of reacting

⁸⁰⁵ For Theresia Sampsonia, Cfr. Bernadette Andrea, *Women and Islam in Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 42–52; Andrea, *The Lives of Girls and Women from the Islamic World in Early Modern British Literature and Culture*, 29–37.

⁸⁰⁶ BAV, Vat. lat. 12323, Diario di P. Alaleone, ff. 346r-349v, 350v, 355r. Angelo Michele Piemontese, "I due ambasciatori di Persia ricevuti da papa Paolo V al Quirinale," in *Miscellanea Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae*, vol. 12, 2005, 412, no142.

against the conversion of Persian Muslim citizens by executing a number of Safavid Catholic converts and forcing the Armenian communities, whom he had transplanted in the early years of the seventeenth century to the “New Jolfā,” to convert to Islam.⁸⁰⁷ In 1627, the couple returned to Persia; however, Robert’s death in 1628 and the tumultuous position of the Catholic missionaries in Persia during the last few years of the reign of Shah Abbas left Theresa no other way than to seek shelter at the papal court of Urban VIII (r.1623-1644). The pope entrusted Theresa to the Carmelites in the convent of Santa Maria della Scala in Rome, which later (1668) housed her remains and those of Robert, transported from Persia to the Eternal City.⁸⁰⁸

The objects analyzed in this thesis unravel both the Persians’ and the Italians’ perceptions of each other’s cultural identity and political agendas. Looking at the Persians’ gift culture across almost two centuries illuminates how fundamental this tradition was in articulating alliances, hierarchies, cultural boundaries, and self-presentation in Persian court culture and in the Italian centers. As gifts played key roles in defining the Persian kings’ courtly prowess and political proposals, the Italian commissions conveyed their own desired perspective for these intercultural encounters to be seen and remembered by their audiences. Their mutual anti-Ottoman sentiments generated a common ground between Muslim Persia and Christian Italy, within which the diplomatic and cultural exchanges provided a platform for a wide variety of objects to travel as agents of their benefactors’ political pragmatism and reflect their recipients’ political biases.

Nonetheless, between the objects’ point of origin and their final destination there was a

⁸⁰⁷ Bugnini, *La chiesa in Iran*, 54–59.

⁸⁰⁸ H. Chick, ed., *A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia: The Safavids and the Papal Mission of the 17th and 18th Centuries* (London: New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 290; Piemontese, “I due ambasciatori in Persia ricevuti da papa Paolo V al Quirinale,” 413.

vast network of associations that contributed to the accumulation of new meanings in those objects in motion. Looking at the material objects from Persia in transit to their Italian destinations within the context of their anti-Ottoman correspondence disrupts our perception of “Islamic” visual cultures as a cohesive concept into heterogeneous cultural tastes that often categorized objects produced in the Muslim lands as agents of opposing ideologies. While there are hundreds of various objects with unknown itineraries in Italian and European collections of “Islamic” objects, this study provides the theoretical and historical framework for future research to expand our knowledge of distinctive visual and material cultures and their implicit meanings in different Muslim dynasties of the early modern period.

Maps & Illustrations

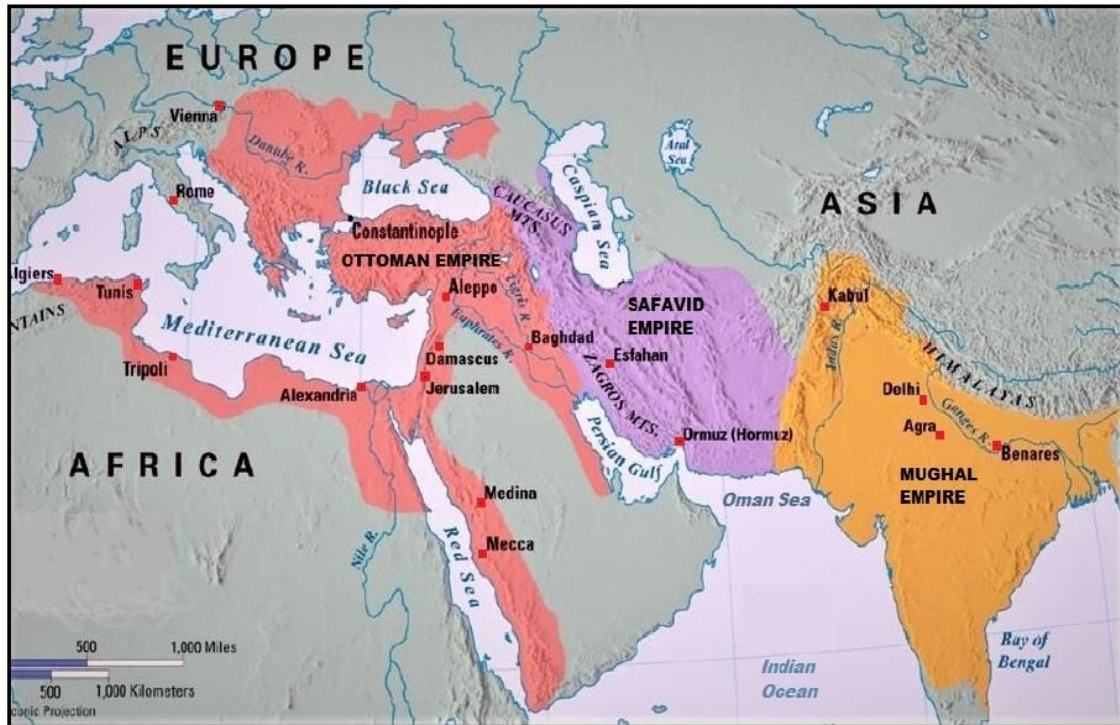
Chapter 1: Introduction



Map 1) Aq Qoyunlu Confederation (Āq Qoyunlū/ White Sheep), late-14th century-1501.



Map 2) Timurid Empire, late-14th century-1507.



Map 3) Safavid Empire, 1501-1722.

Chapter 2-Section1: Quattrocento Florence



Fig 1, ch.2, sec.1: Benozzo Gozzoli, *Adoration of the Magi*, 1459-60 Fresco. Palazzo Medici Riccardi, Florence.



Fig 2, ch.2, sec.1: The Three Magi, mosaics, completed in 565 AD, Basilica of Sant' Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna, Italy.



Fig 4, ch.2, sec.1: Gentile da Fabriano, *Adoration of the Magi*, 1423, Tempera on panel, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.



Fig 5, ch.2, sec.1: Workshop of Apollonio di Giovanni di Tomaso, *Trebizond Cassone*, ca. 1460. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Fig 6, ch.2, sec.1: Pisanello, *St George and the Princess of Trebizond*, 1436-38 Fresco, Pellegrini Chapel, Sant'Anastasia, Verona



a)

Fig 8, ch.2, sec.1: Bertoldo di Giovanni, *Mehmed II's Medal*, 1480, low tin bronze, Galleria Estense, Modena (9105). (a) portrait of Mehmed the Conqueror on the obverse.



b)

Fig 8, ch.2, sec.1: Bertoldo di Giovanni, *Mehmed II's Medal*, 1480, low tin bronze, Galleria Estense, Modena (9105). (b) a chariot with the emblem of Aragonese of Naples, led by Mars the ancient Roman god of war and the guardian of agriculture abducting Constantinople, Greece, and Trebizond, the three major conquests of Mehmed II on the reverse.

Chapter 2-Section 2: Quattrocento Venice



Fig 1, ch.2, sec.2: *Turquoise Glass Bowl*, Glass, Silver-Gilt, cloisonné Enamel, Stone. Glass: Persia (Iran) 9th century. Enamel: Byzantium 11th century. Plaques and Filigree Work: Venice reused Byzantine fragments and 15th century filigree work. H:60 D: 186 mm. Treasury of San Marco, Venice.



Fig 2, ch.2, sec.2: *Chalice with Hares*, Glass, Silver-Gilt, Enamel, Pearls, Stones. Cup: Islamic, 8th-9th century. Metalwork: Byzantine, 11th century.

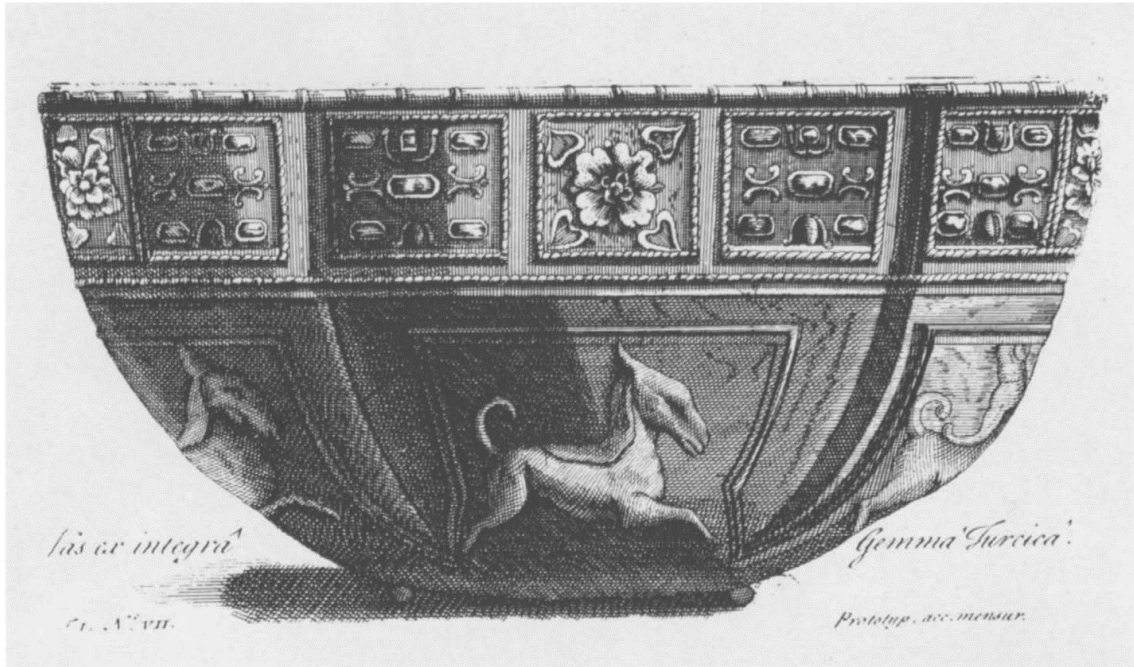


Fig 3, ch.2, sec.2: Aubert de La Mottraye, drawing of the Turquoise Bowl of San Marco, in *Voyages en Europe, Asie et Afrique*, La Haye, 1727, page. 72.

Chapter 2-Section 3: Quattrocento Rome



Fig 1, Ch.2, Sec.3: Pinturicchio, *Pope Pius II Arrives in Ancona*, 1502-08, Fresco, Piccolomini Library, Duomo, Siena.



Fig 2, Ch.2, Sec.3: Workshop of Gentile Bellini, *Standing Turk*, late fifteenth century, pen in brown ink, 29.9 x 20.3 cm, Musée de Louvre, Paris, 465



Fig 3, Ch.2, Sec.3: Persian Painting(Turkman), *Divan of Hidayat*, 883 H. / AD 1478. Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, Republic of Ireland (Manuscript 401).

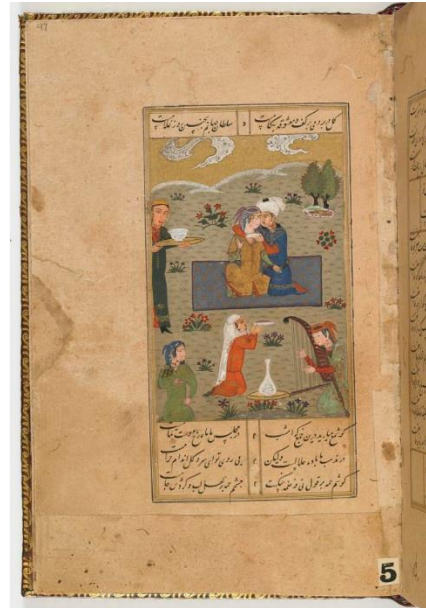


Fig 4, Ch.2, Sec.3: Persian Painting, Aq Qoyunlu dynasty, Turkmen period, late 15th century, repainted in India. Now at Smithsonian Institution. Accession Number: F1907.275.



Fig 5, Ch.2, Sec.3: Pinturicchio, *St Catherine's Disputation*, 1492-94, Fresco with gold leaf, Palazzi Pontifici, Vatican

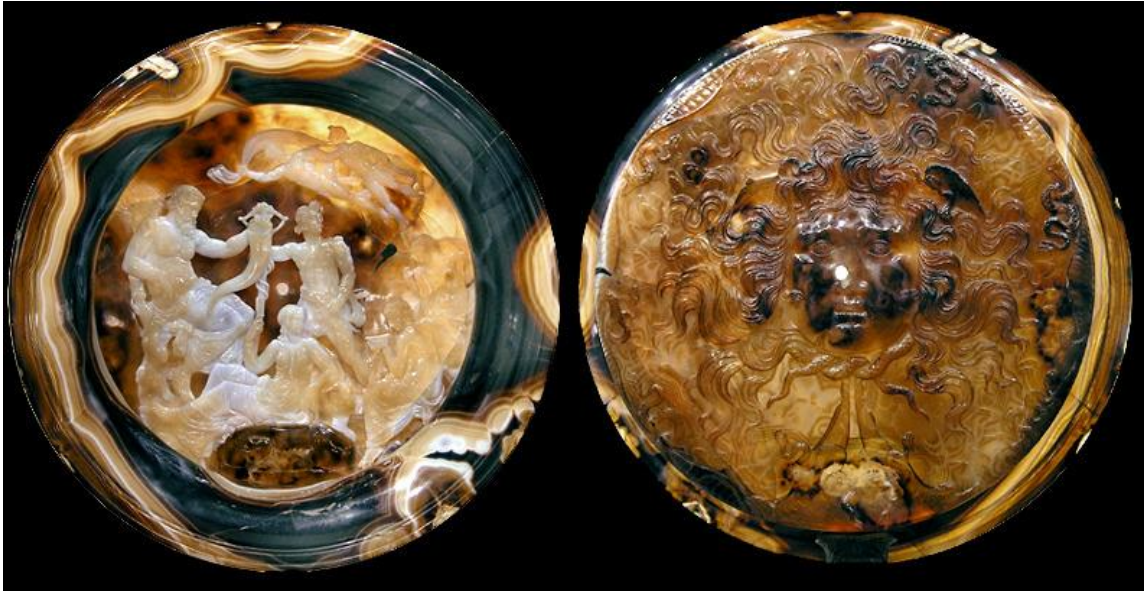


Fig 6, Ch.2, Sec.3: *Tazza Farnese*, 2nd century B.C., Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli



Fig 7, Ch.2, Sec.3: Mohammed-i Khayyām, now in Collection of Islamic Paintings (4 *Mueqqa'* volumes), Staatsbibliothek, Berlin.

Chapter 2-Section 4: Quattrocento Urbino



Fig 1, Ch.2, Sec.4: Justus of Ghent, *The Institution of the Eucharist*, 1473-75, oil on wood. Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Urbino.



Fig 2, Ch.2, Sec.4: Paolo Uccello, *Miracle of the Desecrated Host* (predella paintings), 1465-69. Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Urbino.



Fig 3, Ch.2, Sec.4: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Urb.lat.410 fol. 1r

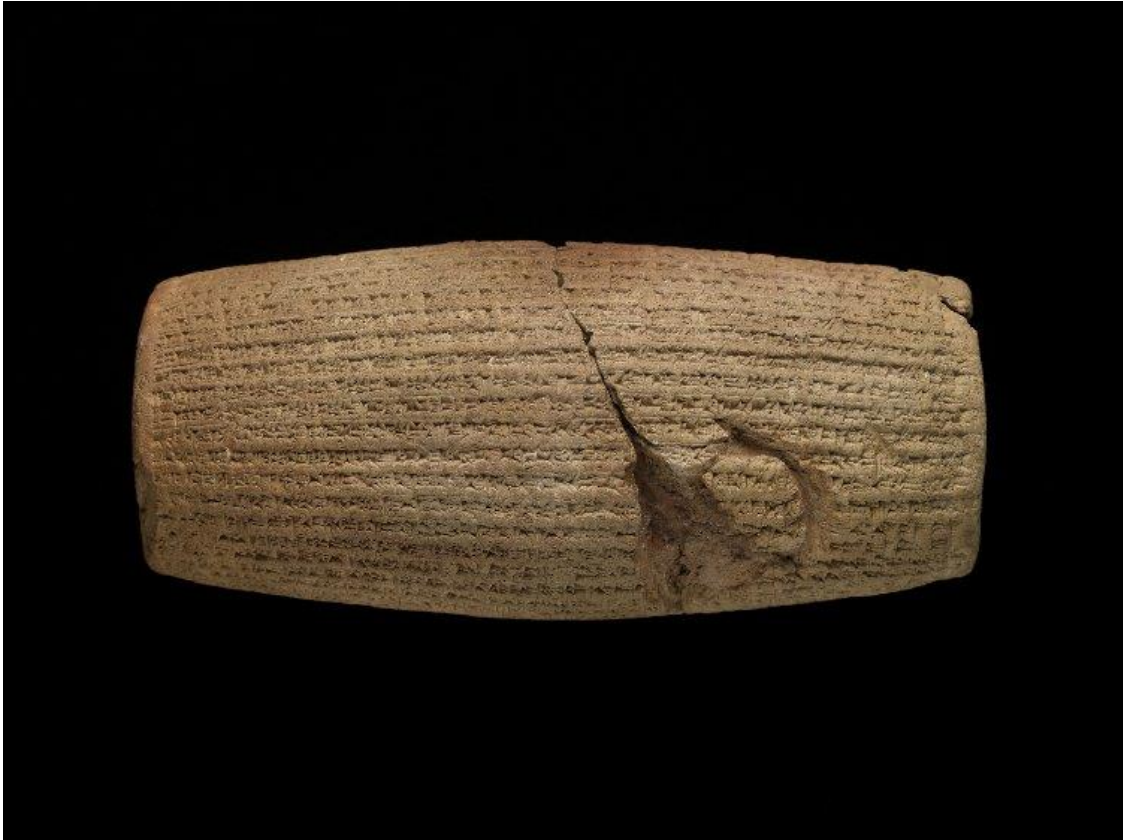


Fig 4, Ch.2, Sec.4: *Cyrus Cylinder*, ca. 539 B.C. Babylonia. The British Museum.



Fig 5, Ch.2, Sec.4: Pedro Berruguete, *Portrait of Federico da Montefeltro and his Son, Guidubaldo*, 1480-81 Oil on panel, Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Urbino



Fig 6, Ch.2, Sec.4: Francesco di Giorgio Martini (?). Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Manuscript (Urb. lat. 508) Cristoforo Landino: *Disputationes camaldulenses*, 1472-73.



Fig 7, Ch.2, Sec.4: "Baysunghur ibn Shahrukh Seated in a Garden" From a Kalila u Dimna of Nizamuddin Abdu'l-Ma'ali Nasrullah, Herat, dated Muharram 833 (October 1429).

Chapter 3-Section 1: Cinquecento Venice



Fig 1, Ch.3, Sec.1: Shah Esmā'īl I coin, 908-23 H./ Silver. Obv: Shi'a Shahada, in the margin: names of twelve Shi'a imams

Rev: Esmā'īl Bahador Shah, in the margin: Al-Sultan, Al- Ādel, Al-K āmel, Al-Hādī, Al-Wālī, Khaladallāh Molkahu wa Sultanahu

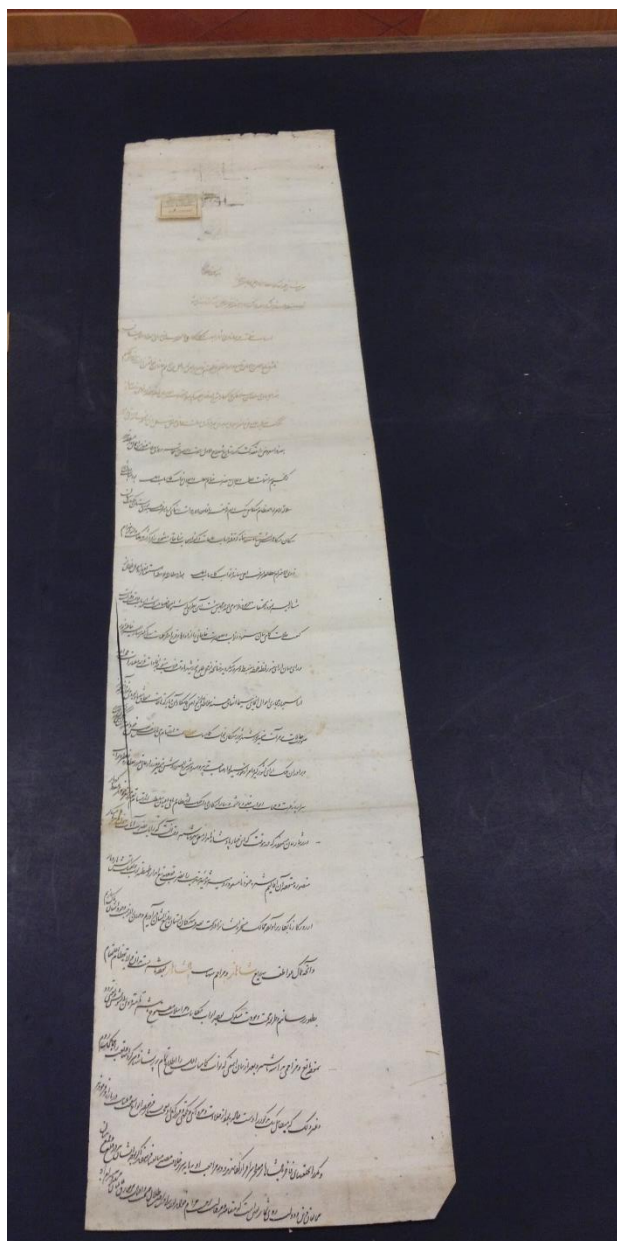


Fig 2a, Ch.3, Sec.1: Archivio Stato di Venezia (ASV), S. R.M, S. LXXXIII.9. Shah Tahmasp I to Doge Gritti, 1539.

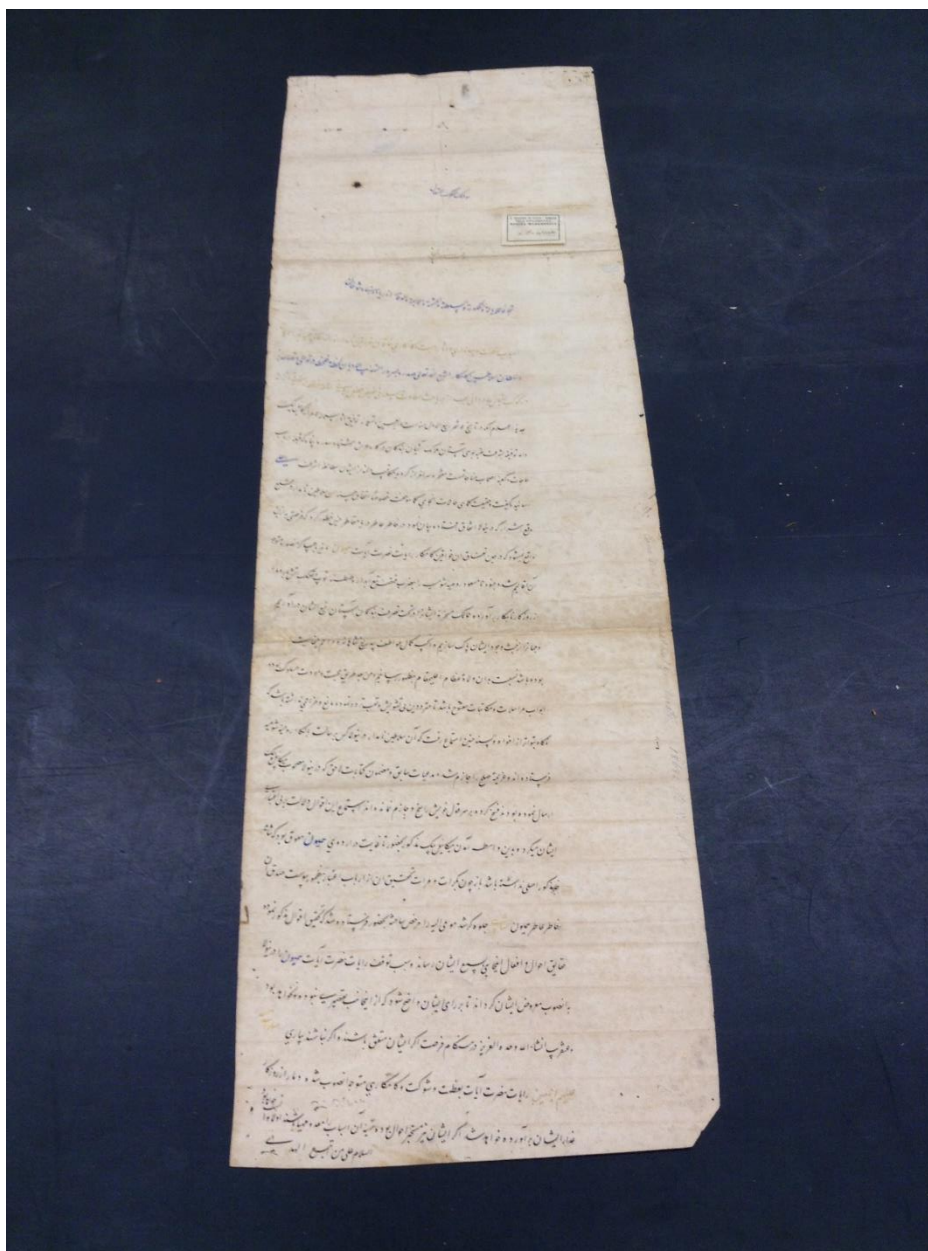


Fig 2b, Ch.3, Sec.1: ASV, S.R.M. S. LXXXIII.1. Shah Tahmsp I to Doge Gritti, 1540.

Chapter 3-Section 2: Cinquecento Rome

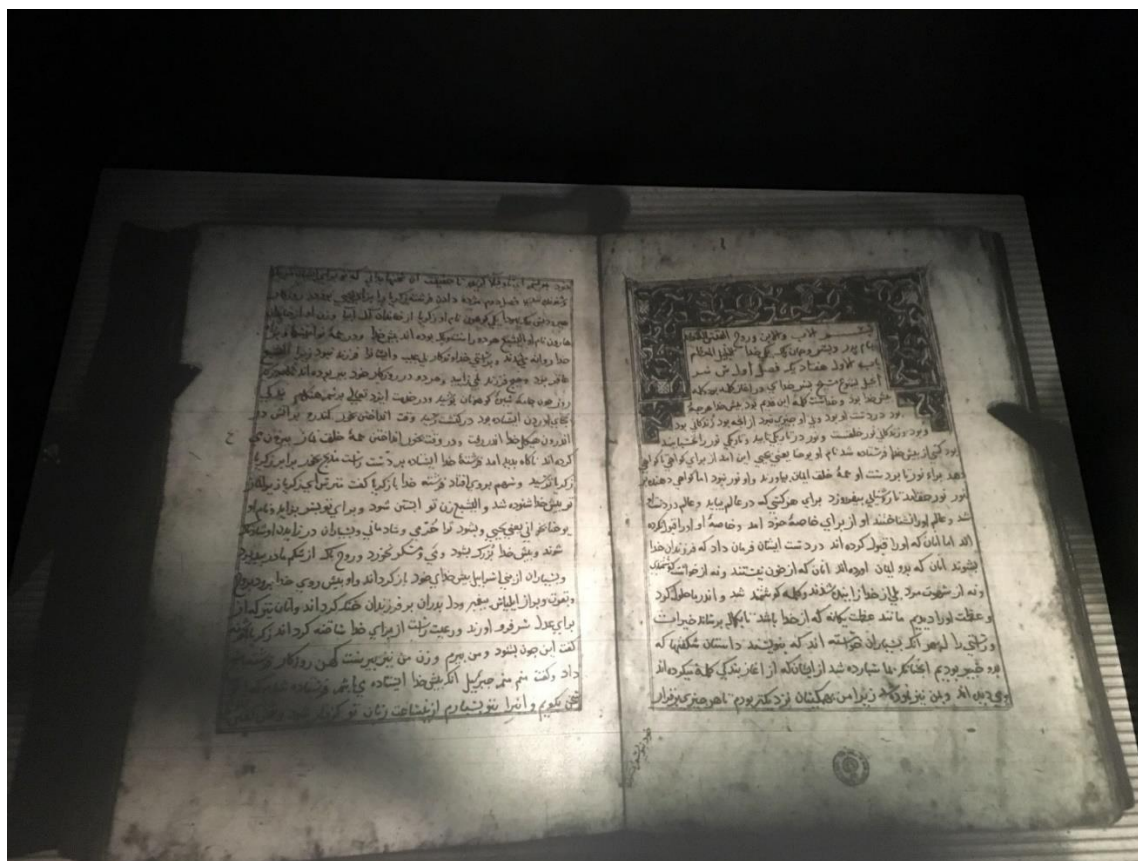


Fig 1, Ch.3.Sec.2: Grande Vangelo, Ms.Or.81 (and Or. 399), Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana in Florence.

Chapter 3-Section 3: Cinquecento Florence



Fig 1, Ch.3. Sec3: *Sipar* (rotella), Late-Sixteenth Century. Gold damascened steel, Indian cane, silk, mother-of-pearl, leather and velvet, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence

751. M. 1631
 Una Armad. di ferro biancho da Cavalleg. con Loro Dono
 avo macinato con Celato 1000 stini bracciai Corsiali o
 scarsi di Goleto e mangole n. 1
 Una Armad. di ferro biancho da farli gli Granata con
 monioni bracciai Goleto scarsi mangole lavorate
 e ruberate con laro di 1/11 con ligna forte n. 1
 Una Armad. di ferro nero con Goleto alla 100. e bracciai
 scarsi e corsiali 1000 estier, porion e mangole
 quarz. di Vell. nero e rosso n. 1
 Un Laro di bracciai ferro simili alla petra di ferro n. 1
 Venti due Celato bianchi di poi fogg. tutti di ferro n. 20
 Una Celato di ferro da Cavallo donato in parti e uno adda
 bianchi tutti lavorati di basso Rilievo 100. di Vell. rosso n. 1
 Quattro Morion di ferro moderni 100. lavorati alla agimian doni n. 4
 Due lavorati di basso Rilievo donati n. 2
 quattro scudi o vetelli di ferro lavorati simili a dotti morion n. 4
 Un Morion alantichis rubato di fogg. di basso Rilievo nero e
 donato a fuchs e poi stato arg. a nido n. 1
 Uno scudo di ferro con add. drento di fogg. e quattro scudi di ferro
 donato con scompartmenti drento di sei figure aonati di arg. n. 1
 donato quarz. di fragin di pag. con fogg. di Vell. rosso n. 1
 aonati
 Un Morion da farli apri di ferro simili e lavorati
 simili al 100. scudo n. 1
 Uno scudo di ferro lavorati con oro macinato e fragin
 di petra turchina Vecchia n. 1
 Uno scudo di ferro bianco liscio quarz. di fragin rosso n. 1
 Uno scudo di ferro bianco a punta di Demati con fogg. rosso n. 1
 Un Rotella di ferro nero con una mangole abocata con due
 quadi nido e forata e far. drento della spada n. 1

Fig 2, Ch.3. Sec3: ASF, Miscellanea Medicea, 719, fol. 3. 1631

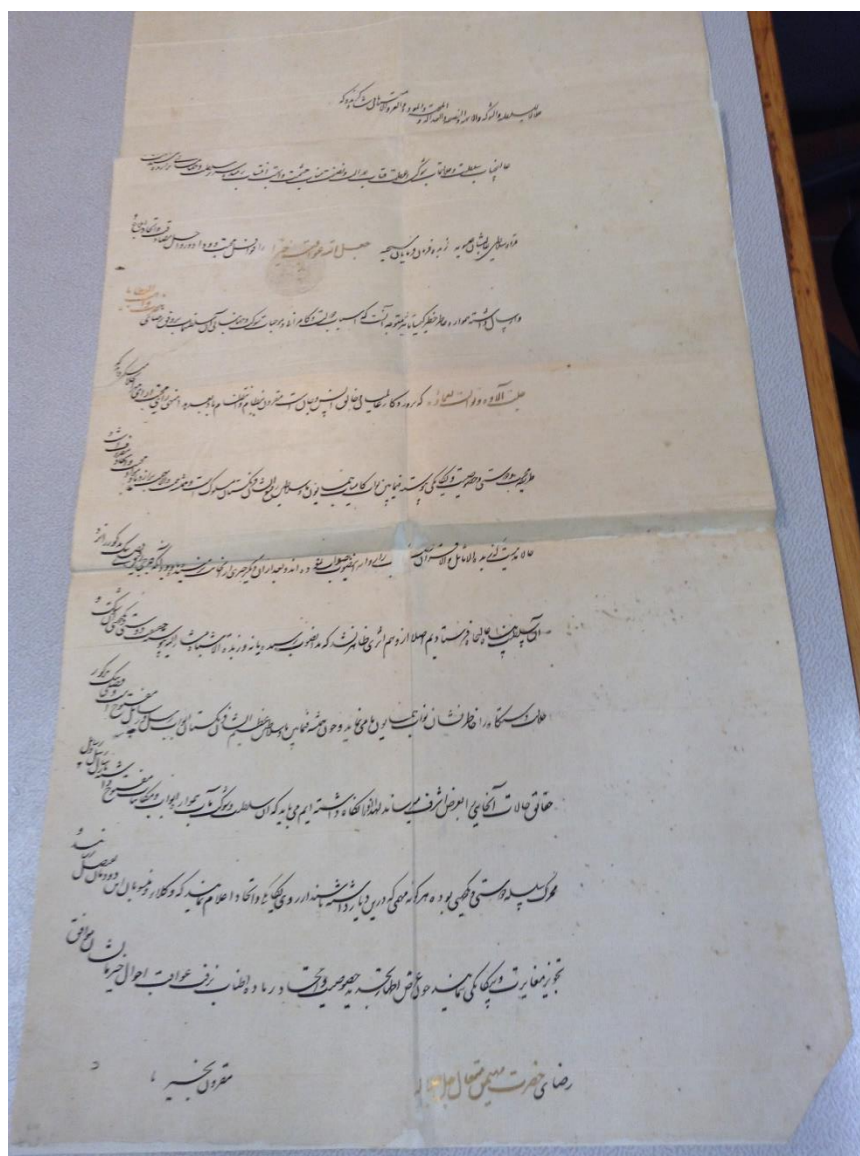


Fig 3a, Ch.3. Sec3: ASF, Archivio medico del Principato, 4274a, X c.4.

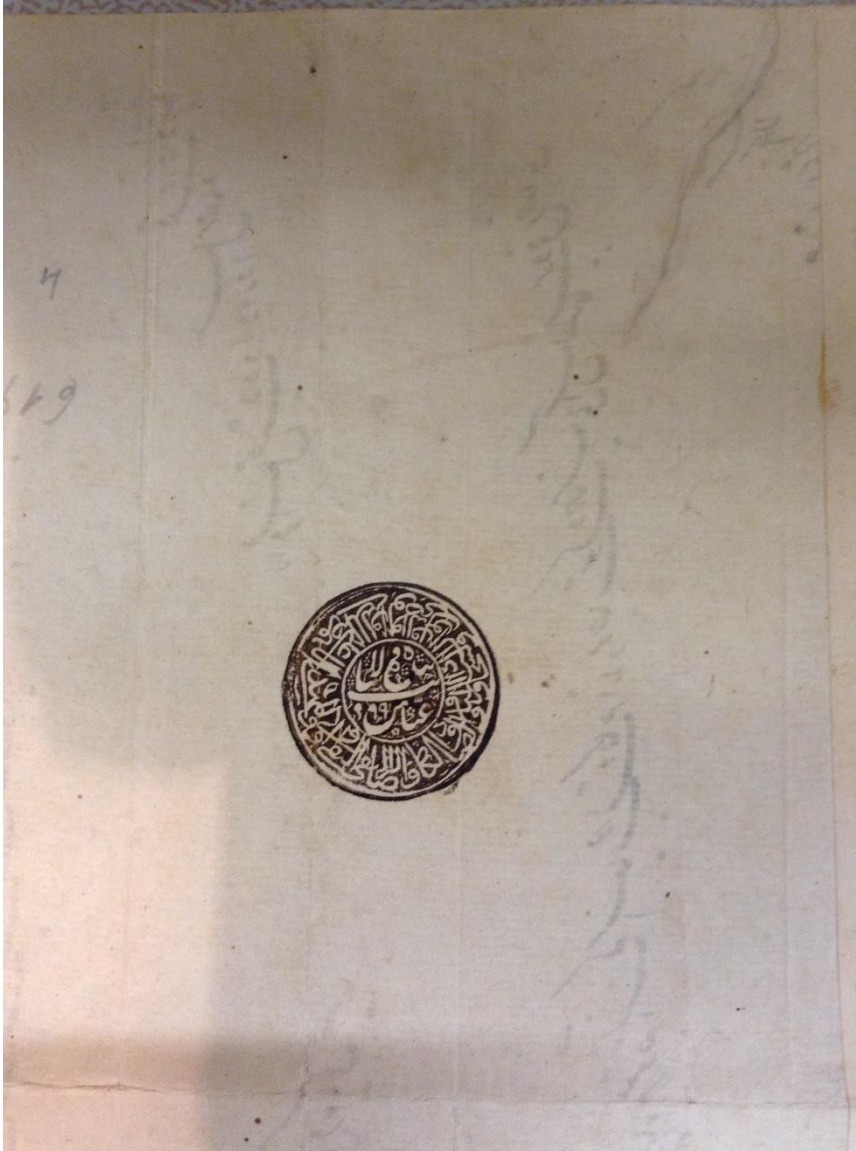


Fig 3b, Ch.3. Sec3: ASF, AMP 4274a, X c.4 (reverse), Shah Abbas Stamp 999/ 1590

[illegible]

Fig 4a, Ch.3. Sec.3: ASF, AMP 4274a, ins. VI. 28.



Fig 4b, Ch.3. Sec.3: ASF, MP 4274a, ins. VI, 28 (reverse), Shah Abbas Stamp 1016/1608

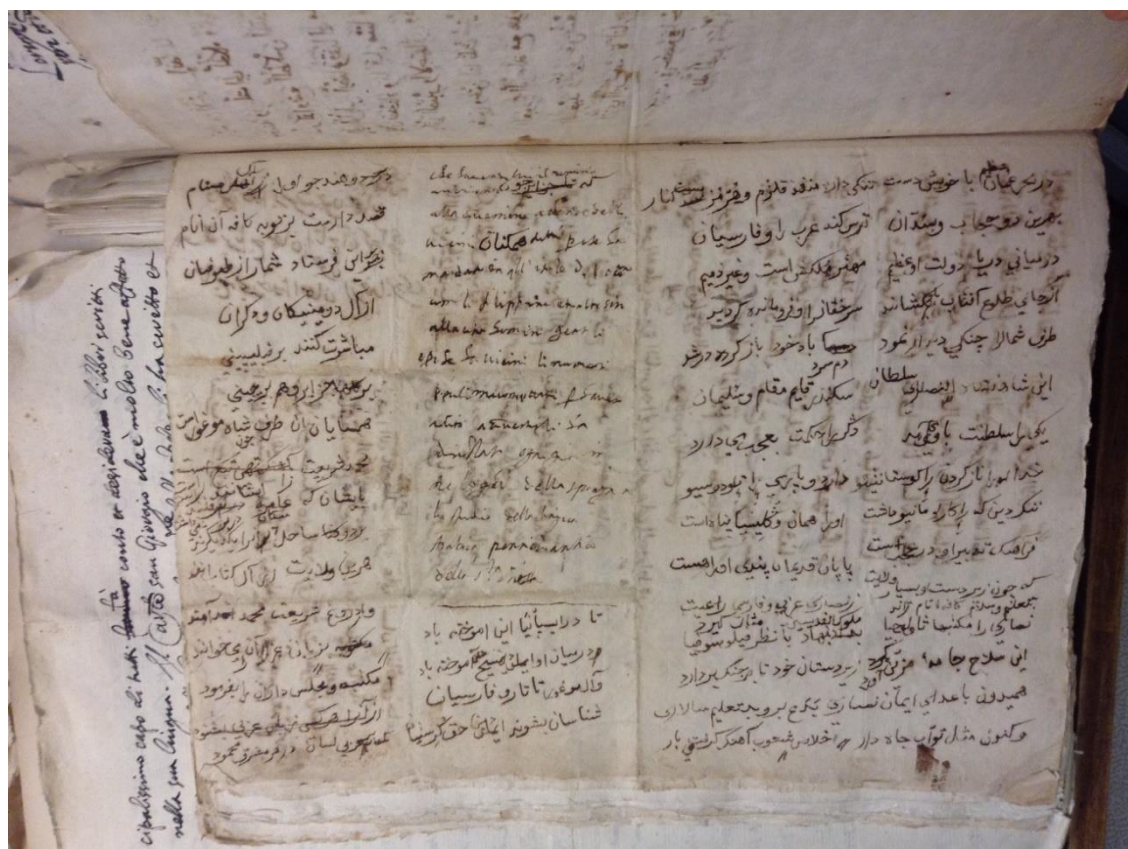


Fig.5, Ch.3. Sec3: ASF, Miscellanea Medicea 719, documenti archivi alla storia della Stamperia Orientale Medicea



Fig 6, Ch.3.sec3: Caravaggio, *Medusa*, oil on canvas applied on wooden shield, 1595-98, Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy

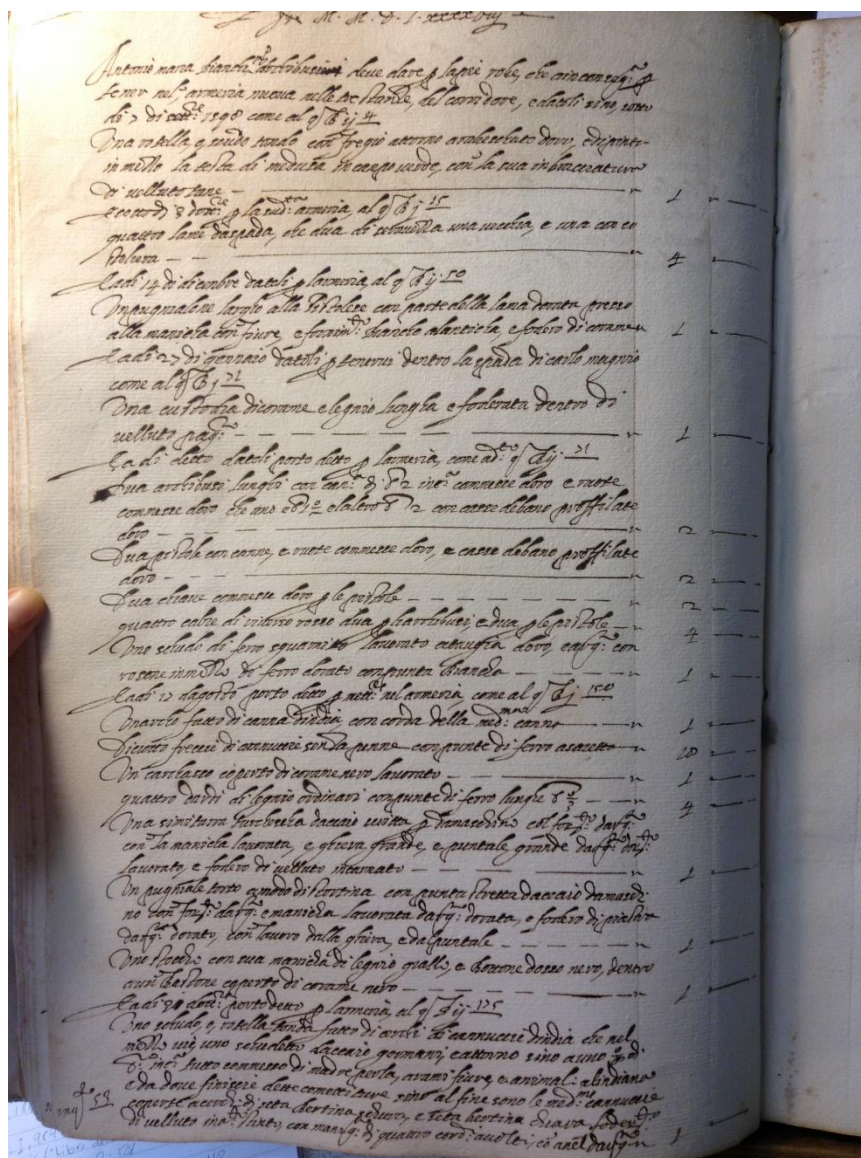


Fig 7, Ch.3.sec3: ASF, Guardaroba Medicea 204, fol. 18. 1598



Fig 8, Ch.3.sec3: *Tray*, mother of pearl inlay, Gujarat, late-16th-early-17th century, Aga Khan Museum, Toronto



Fig 9, Ch.3. Sec3: Benvenuto Cellini, *Perseus with the Head of Medusa*, bronze, 1554, Loggia dei Lanzi, Florence

Chapter 4-Section 1: Seicento Venice

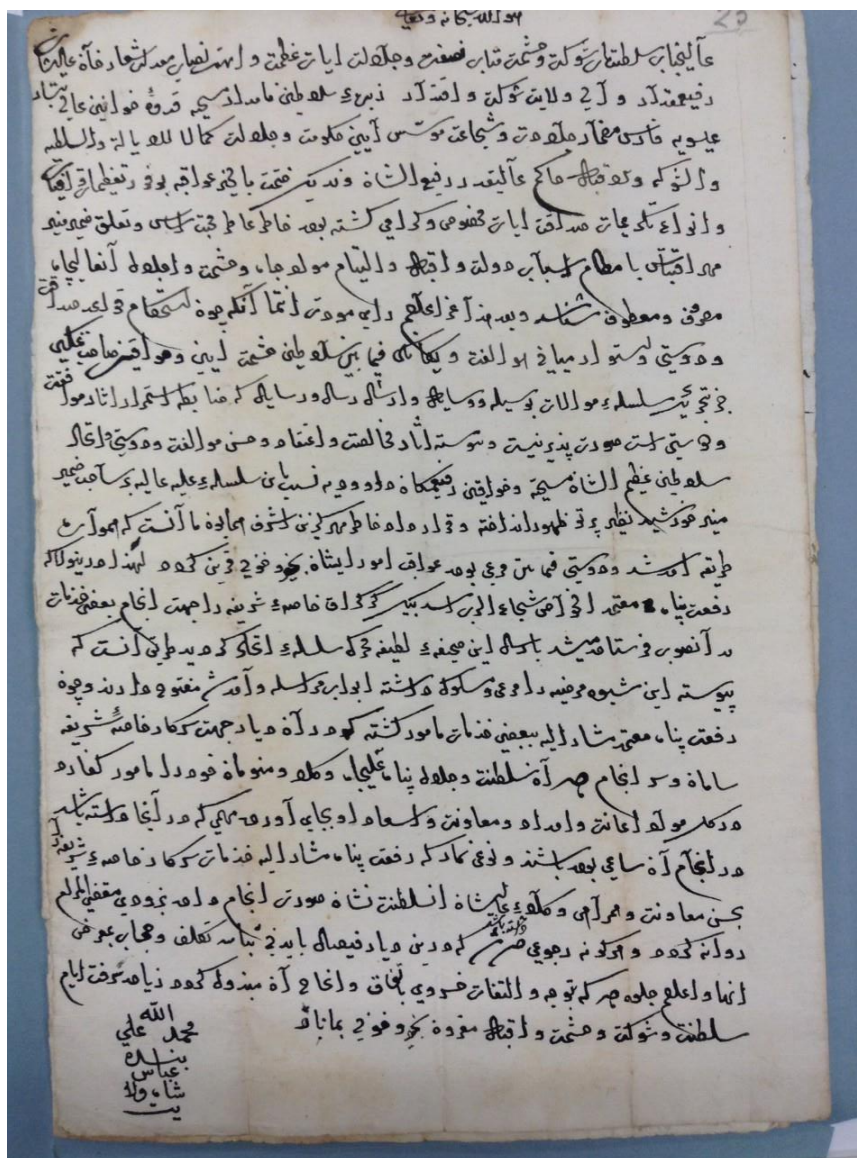


Fig 1, Ch.4, Sec.1: ASV, Fasc. Persia, Doc. 3, fol.26 (ex.XII.8.26) Šāh Abbās al doge (Persiano copia)

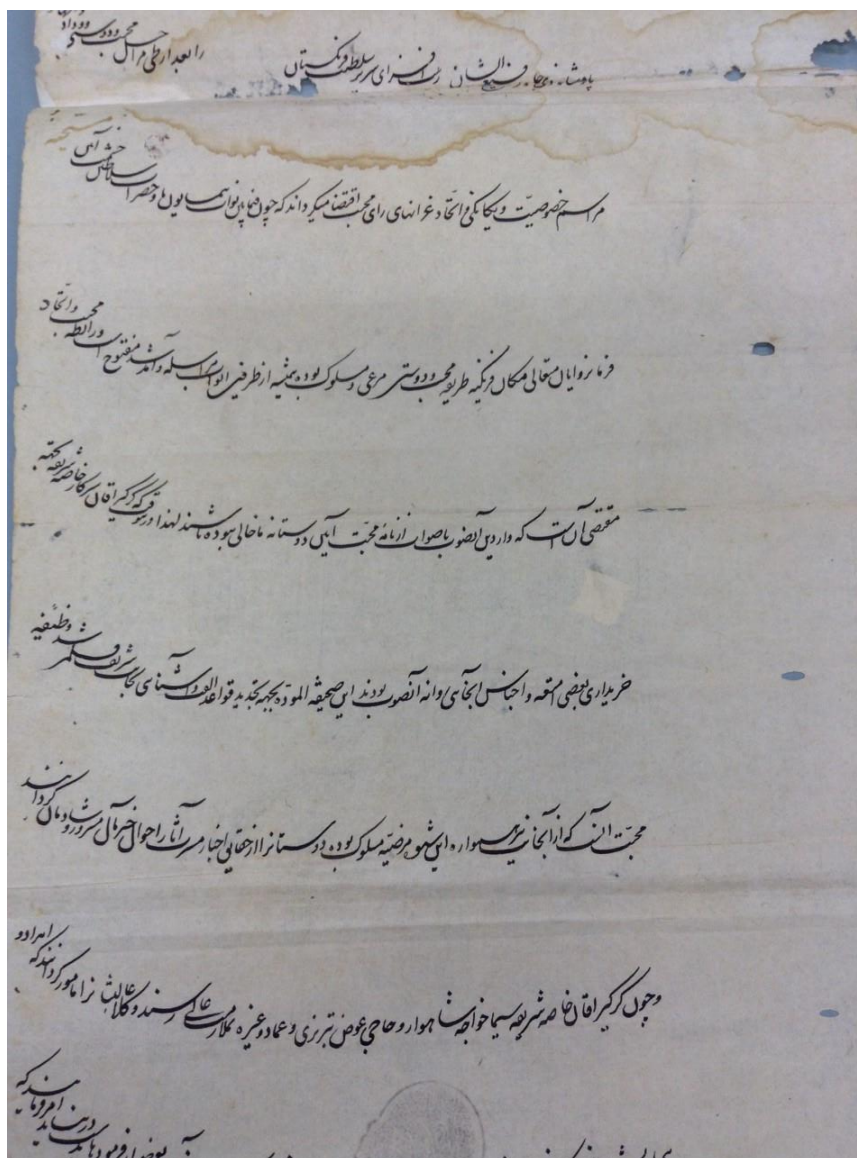


Fig 2, Ch.4, Sec.1: ASV, Firmani Persiani, no. 4, Firmano di Abbās portato di Fathi Bey (no di catalogo 99)



Fig 3, Ch.4, Sec.1: Gabriele Caliari, *Il Doge Marino Grimani riceve i doni degli ambasciatori persiani nel 1603*, oil on canvas, 367 x 527 cm, Venezia, Palazzo Ducale, Sala delle Quattro Porte



Fig 4, Ch.4, Sec.1: Silk Velvet with the figures of the Virgin Mary and Christ Child, Persia, Isfahan, late 16th and early 17th century, Venezia, Museo di Palazzo Mocenigo, CI. XXII, II.37



Fig 5, Ch.4, Sec.1: Ebn Ḥosām's *Kāvarān-nāma* (a Persian illustrated manuscript), Angel Gabriel invites Prophet Muhammad to observe the feats of 'Ali, illustrations by Ḍokā' Anvari, 830 H./1425-26, Tehran Museum of Decorative Arts and Golestān Palace Library (MS 5750).

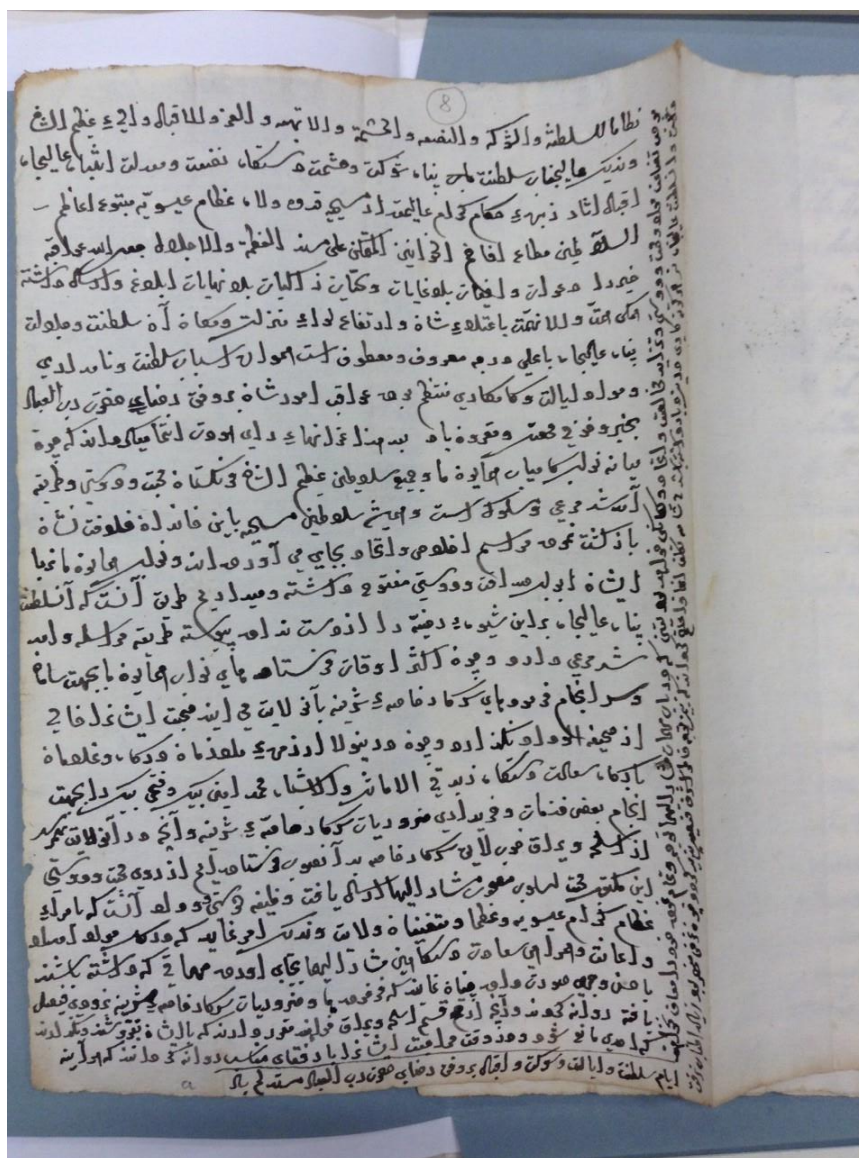


Fig 6, Ch.4, Sec.1: ASV, Fasc. Persia, Doc. 8, no. 25 (ex. XII.8.25) Persiano-copia

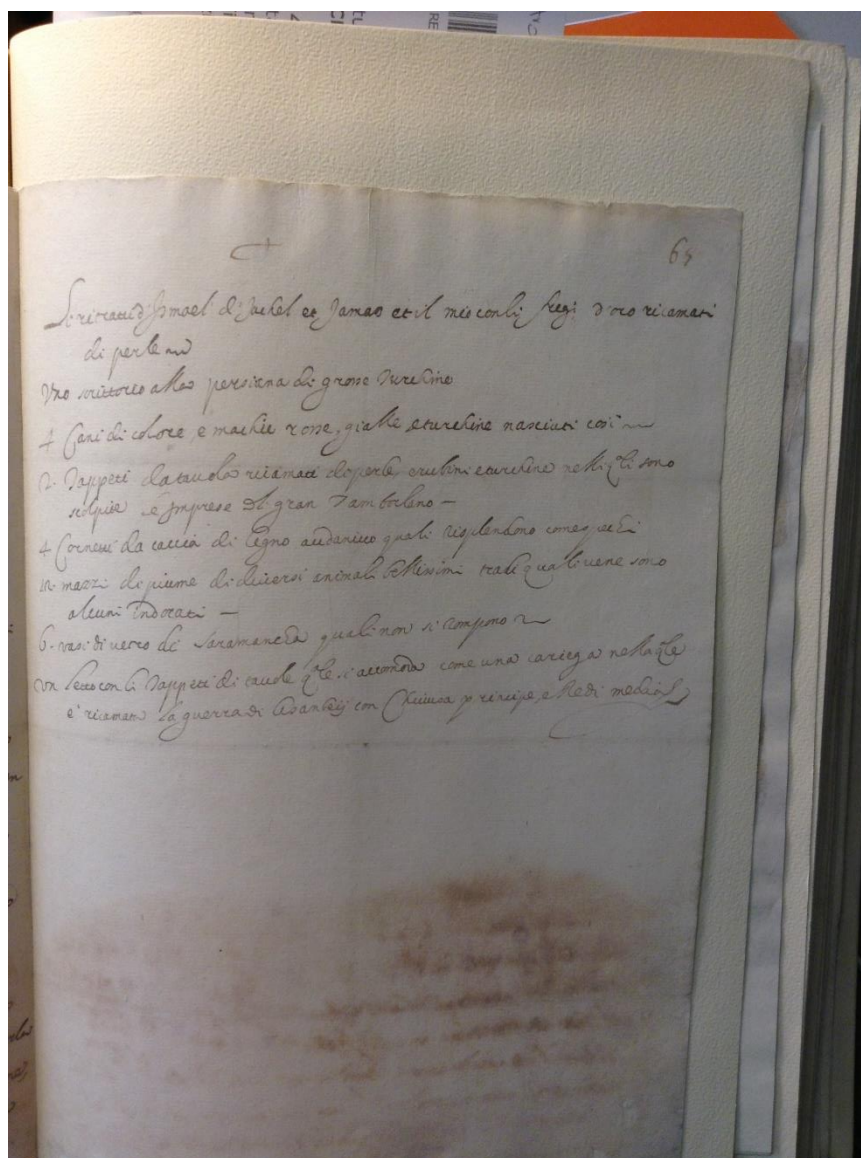


Fig 7, Ch.4, Sec.1: ASF, Carte Stroziane, Prima Serie, fol. 64

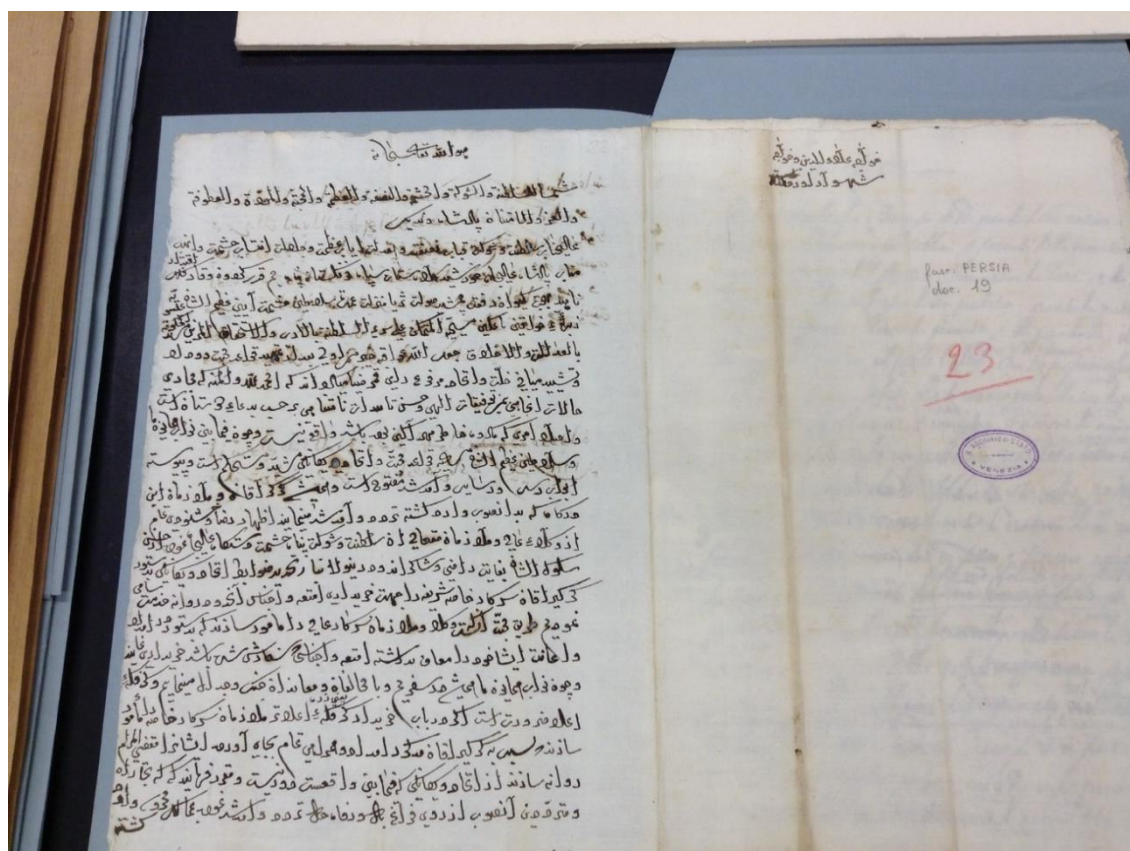


Fig 8, Ch.4, Sec.1: ASV, Fasc. Persia, doc. 19

Chapter 4-Section 2: Seicento Florence

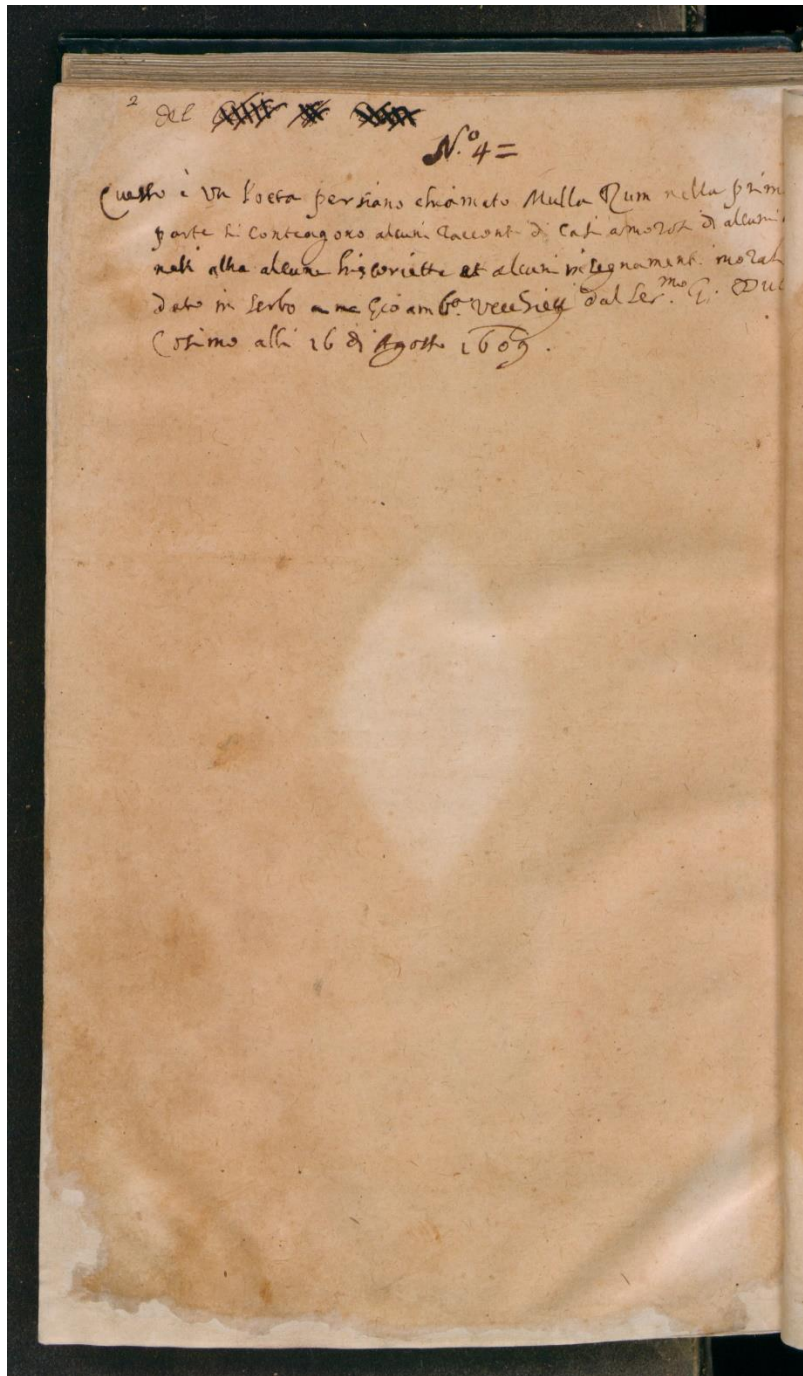


Fig 1, Ch.4, Sec. 2: The book of “ Mulla Rum” (*Maṭṭawīye Ma'nawī*), Cl. III. 49, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Florence



Fig 2, Ch.4, Sec. 2: The book of “Mulla Rum” (*sarlowh*/frontispiece), CI. III. 49, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Florence



Fig 3, Ch.4, Sec. 2: *The book of "Mulla Rum"* (cover), gilded leather, Cl. III. 49, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Florence

[illegible]

Fig 4, Ch.4, Sec. 2: ASF, MP 4274a, ins. VI, C. 28.

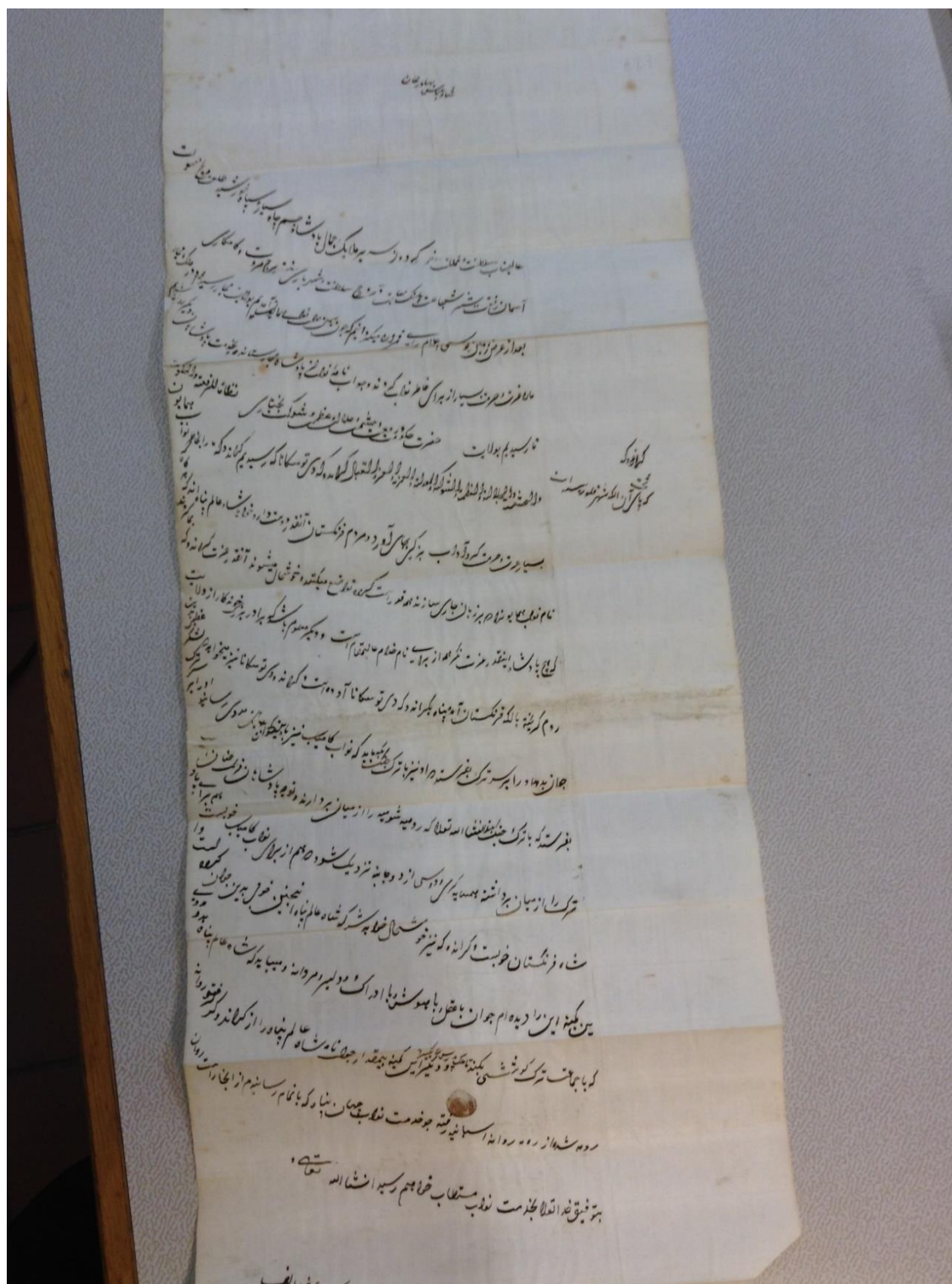


Fig 5, Ch.4, Sec. 2: ASF, MP 4274a, ins. X, C.6

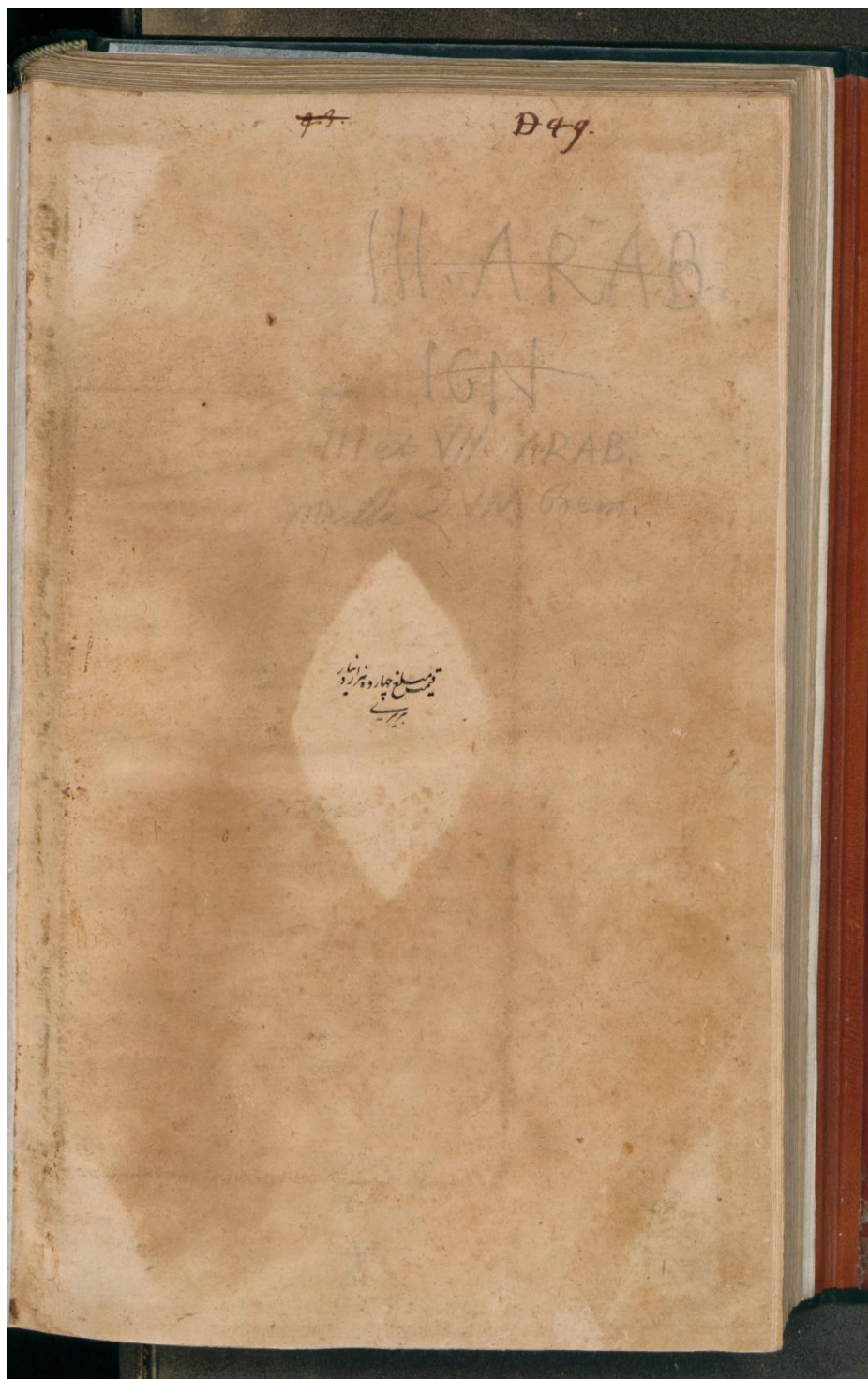


Fig 6, Ch.4, Sec. 2: The book of "Mulla Rum" (fol. 309r), CI. III. 49, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Florence

Chapter 4-Section 3: Seicento Rome



Fig 1, Ch.4.sec.3: Sant'Onofrio Cloister fresco cycle, Episode I, 1600, Rome



Fig 2, Ch.4.sec.3: Sant'Onofrio Cloister fresco cycle, Episode II, 1600, Rome



Fig 3, Ch.4.sec.3: Sant'Onofrio Cloister fresco cycle, Episode III, 1600, Rome



Fig 4, Ch.4.sec.3: Sant'Onofrio Cloister fresco cycle, Episode IV, 1600, Rome



Fig 5, Ch.4.sec.3: Giovanni and Cherubino Alberti, *Battesimo di san Clemente* (Baptism of St. Clement), 1601, Sala Clementina, Palazzo Apostolico Vaticano.







Fig 6a,b,c, Ch.4.sec.3: Biblioteca del Museo Correr, Gli abiti de' veneziani di quasi ogni età con diligenza raccolti e dipinti nel secolo XVIII, seconda metà "Ambasciadore Persiano," (a) "Ambasciadore Turco," (b) "Ambasciadore del soldano di Egitto" (c).



Fig 7, Ch.4.sec.3: Vittore Carpaccio, *Baptism of the Selenites* tempera,1507, The Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni (Venice).



Fig 8, Ch.4.sec.3: Titian, *Allegory of the Battle of Lepanto*, Oil on canvas, 1571-75. Museo del Prado, Madrid

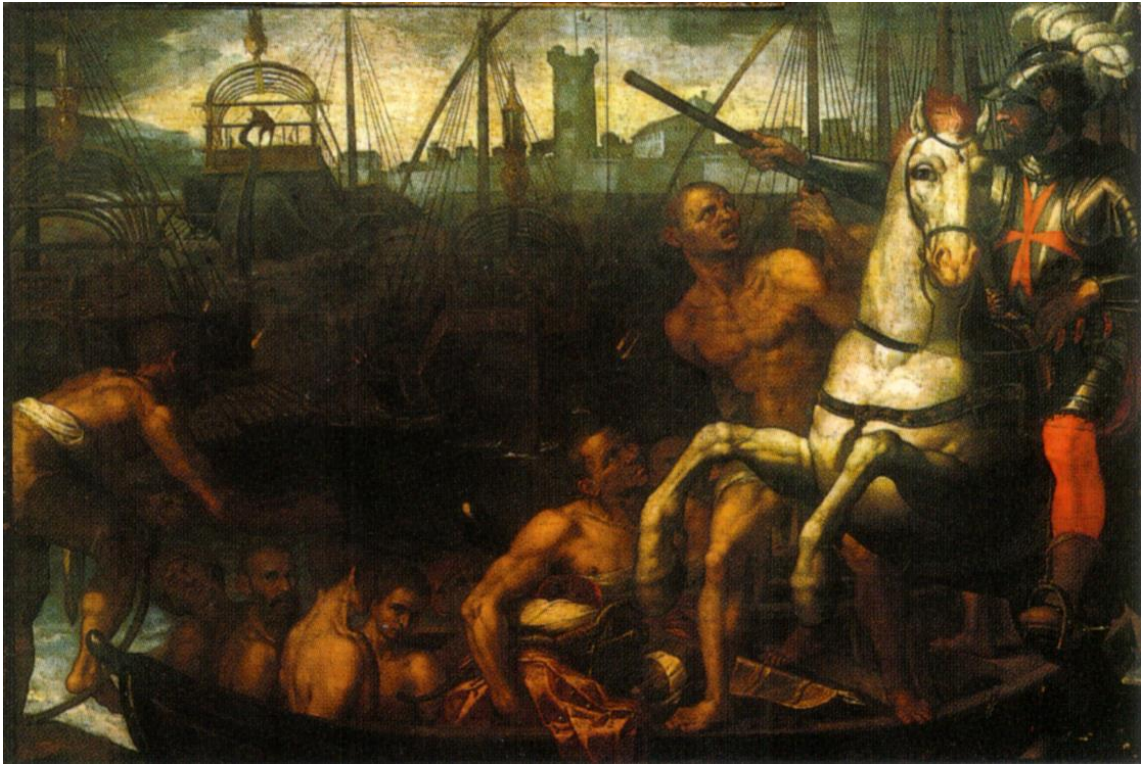


Fig 9, Ch.4.sec.3: Ligozzi, *The Return of the Knights of Santo Stefano from the Battle of Lepanto*, 1604-14, oil on canvas, Church of Santo Stefano dei Cavalieri, Pisa.



Fig 10, Ch.4.sec.3: Aegidius Sadeler II, "Cuchein Olli Beag," 1601, engraving, Prague.



Fig 11, Ch.4.sec.3: Giovanni Orlando, *Ali Goli Bek Mordar the Ambassador of Persia*, 1609, engraving. Ms. 1214, fold, 84r. Biblioteca Angelica, Roma.



Fig 12, Ch.4.sec.3: G. B. Ricci, *Ali Goli Bek Mordar the Ambassador of Persia*, 1611, fresco, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Rome.



Fig 13, Ch.4.sec.3: Ali Goli Bek Mordar (1609). Biblioteca del Museo Correr, Venezia. MS.I. No. 247 (MS.Cigogna 2727)

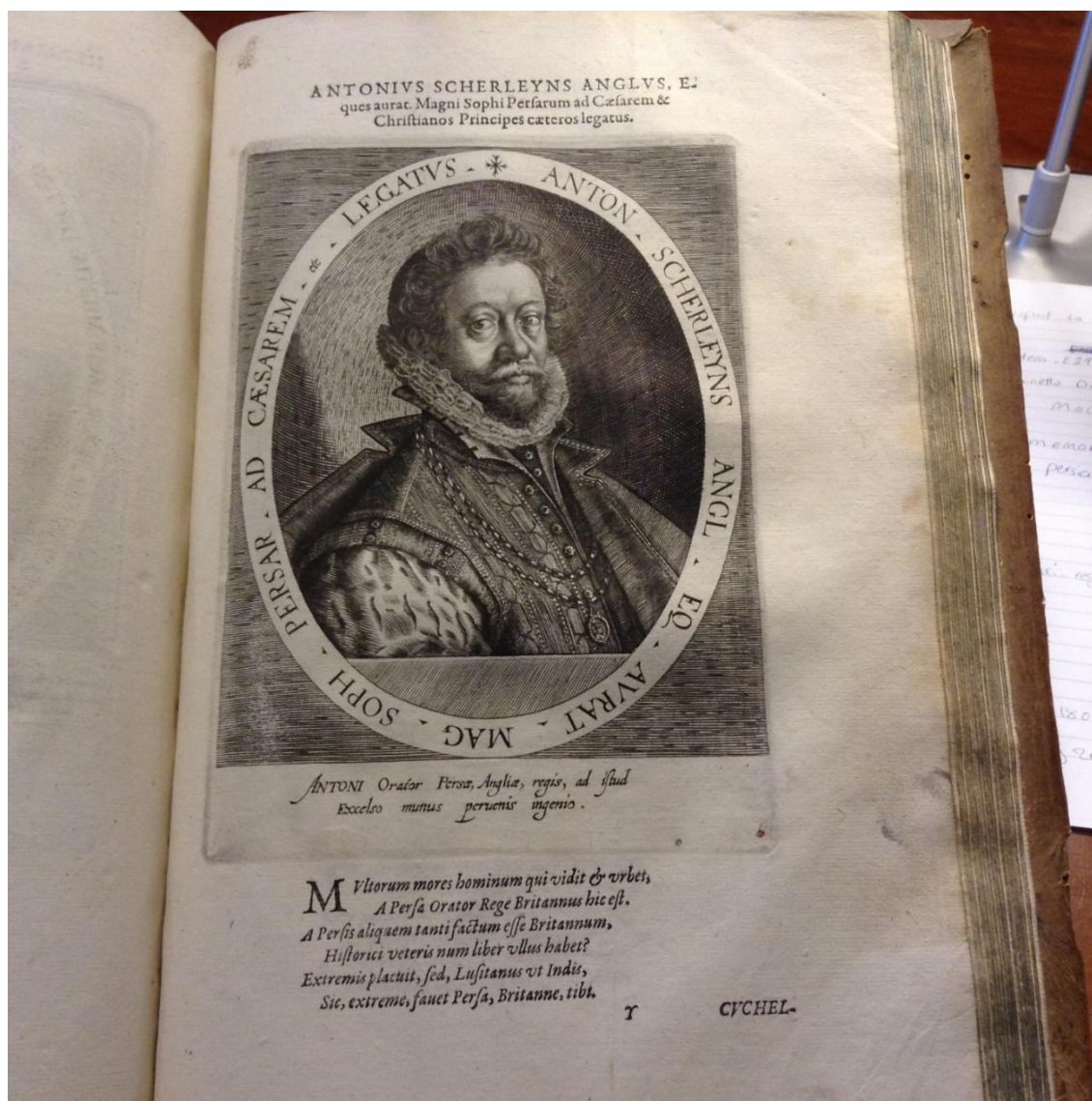


Fig 14, Ch.4.sec.3: Dominicus Custos, *Anthony Sherley*, 1601, engraving, Biblioteca del Museo Correr, Venezia. E 587.



Fig 15, Ch.4.sec.3: Dominicus Custos, *Shāh Abbās*, engraving, Biblioteca del Museo Correr, Venezia. E 587.



Fig 16, Ch.4.sec.3: Guido Reni, *Shāh Abbās*, ink-wash, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi, Fondo Santarelli 3459 S.

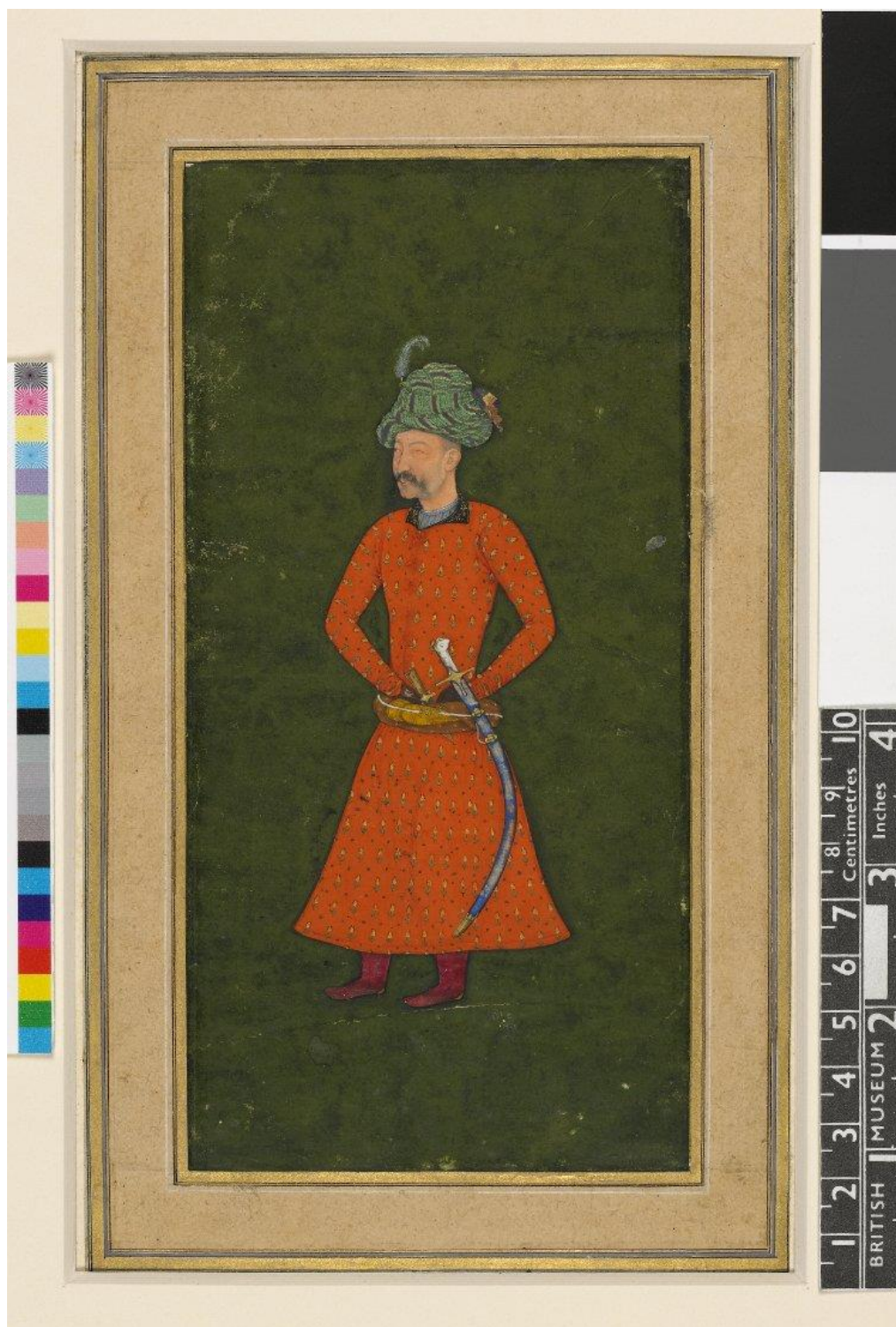


Fig 17, Ch.4.sec.3: Bishn Das, *Shāh Abbās*, 1618. Opaque watercolor and gold on paper. The British Museum.



Fig 18, Ch.4.sec.3: Luca Ciamberlano, *Ali Goli Bek Mordar* (on the right in the lower two images), 1609. engraving, Gabinetto Nazionale delle Stampe, Rome (34.H.24, inv. 31538).



Fig 19, Ch.4.sec.3: Luca Ciamberlano, Uffizi, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, Fondo Santarelli 3472 S.



Fig 20, Ch.4.sec.3: Robert Sherley, engraving. Biblioteca Angelica, Rome, Ms. 1214, f. 75r.



Fig 21, Ch.4.sec.3: Giovanni Lanfranco and his workshop (Agostino Tassi) *Persian Embassy* (*Aligholi Beyg*) *Visiting Pope Paul V* (1609), fresco 1615-1616, Sala dei Corazzieri, Palazzo del Quirinale, Rome.



Fig 22, Ch.4.sec.3: Carlo Saraceni, *Robert Sherley*, fresco 1615-1616, Sala dei Corazzieri, Palazzo del Quirinale, Rome.



Fig 23, Ch.4. Sec.3: Matthias Greuter, *Robert Sherley*, 1609, engraving. British Museum.



Fig 24, Ch.4.sec.3: *Khāje Safar Azaria*, fresco 1615-1616, Sala dei Corazzieri, Palazzo del Quirinale, Rome



Fig 25, Ch.4.sec.3: Flaminio Ponzio, *Cappella Paolina Borghese*, Basilica S. Maria Maggiore in Rome.



Fig 26, Ch.4.sec.3: Cristoforo Stati, *Persians at the Court of Paul V*, 1614, white marble, Cappella Paolina Borghese, Basilica S. Maria Maggiore in Rome.

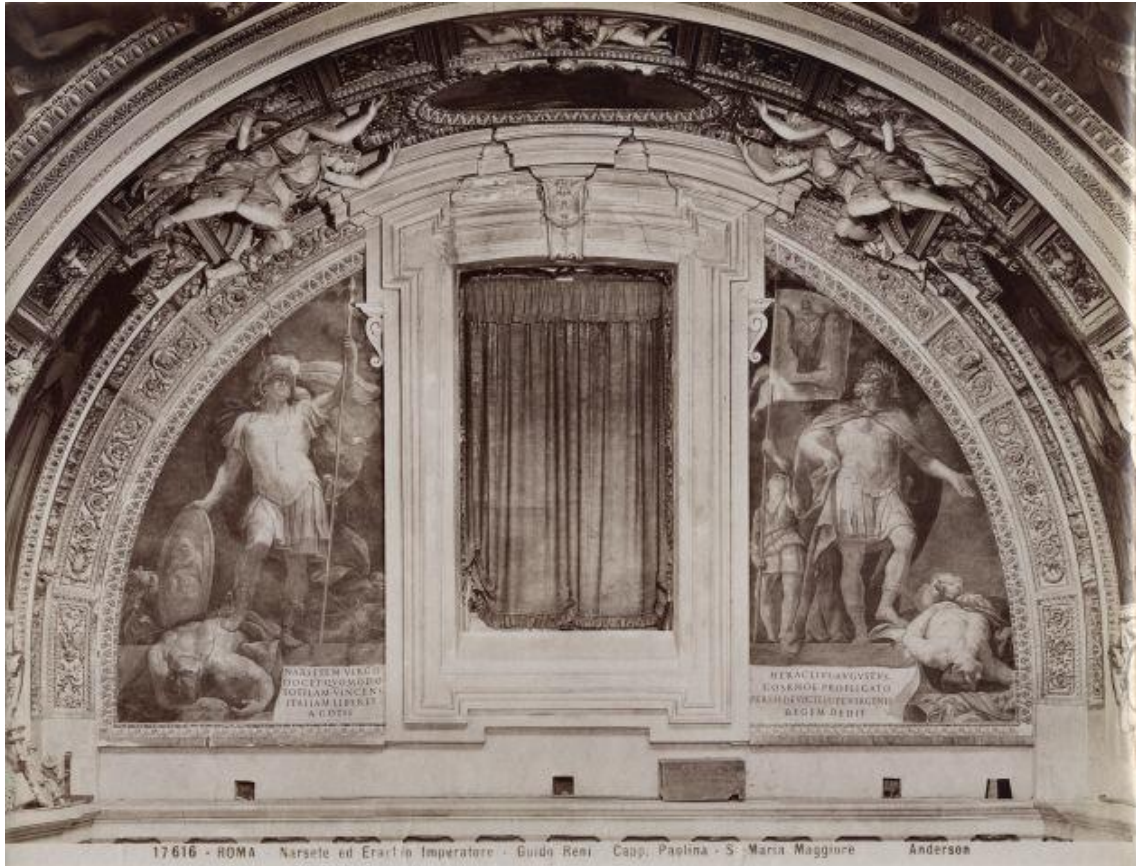


Fig 27, Ch.4.sec.3: Guido Reni *La Vittoria di Eraclio sopra Chosroes di Persia* (Victory of Heraclius over Khosrow of Persia), 1613, Cappella Paolina Borghese, Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore, Roma.



Fig 28, Ch.4.sec.3: Anthony van Dyck, *Robert Sherley*, 1622, National Trust, UK.



Fig 28, Ch.4.sec.3: Sir Anthony Van Dyck, *Lady Sherley*, Oil on canvas, 1622, Rome

Appendices:

Appendix 1

A Sixto quarto, potifice maximo

Dilecti filii, salute et apostolicam benedictionem, Nuperrime ad nos venit orator magni et potentis principis Assambeck, qui plura de illius apparatu optimoque animo invadendi communes inimicos Turchos nobis retulit, utpote qui dies ac noctes de salute Christianae reipublicae solliciti sumus. Oratorem quidem ipsum libenter vidimus et benigne audivimus. Qui, cum ad vos accedere statuerit, noluimus eum absque litteris nostris venire: hortantes vos velitis hominem hunc, pro consuetudine vestra, grato animo exipere at audire commendatumque habere, ac Principem ipsum per litteras vestras adhortari et excitare, ut in tam utili opere in dies magis perseveret.

Dat. Romae apud Sanctum Petrum, sub anulo piscatoris, die XVI aprilis 1475,
pontificatus nostri anno III.⁸⁰⁹

⁸⁰⁹ Arch. Di Firenze, Riformagioni: Carteggio dela Signoria, responsive, Copiari, V. Mueller, *Documenti sulle relazioni delle città Toscane coll'Oriente cristiano e coi Turchi fino all'anno MDXXXI / (Raccolti Ed Annot. Da Giuseppe Müller)*, 220. CLXXX

Appendix II

... Erat unus solum qui nobis aliquantulum adversabatur, hic etiam sponte humiliatus ad nos venit, et largiti sumus ei dominium de Corassan, laudetur Deus, incessanter. Sultan Cassan Baicona est nomen istius domini Corassan. Restat nunc alius secundus Sultan Graeciae sive Romaniae, qui inimicum facundus et magnus, presentim super Caramanos, quibus veteri et antiqua amicitia conjuncti sumus. Ipsi Caramani venerunt ad nos supplices usque ad provinciam Azimie, quibus visis, subito venimus in Tauris, inspeximus super negotia eorum, et cognovimus quod ipsi proprii malorum suorum causa fuere. De principio nostre lune Rabemel sive Juli 1472 ad partes eis propinquiores iter faciemus. Multa et alia in presenti dicere sumiturus, que hic medicine Doctor noster ad te in sermone prudens mittimus, magnus medicus Isaac fidelis in quem magnam fidem habemus oretenus tibi omnia de mandato nostro sufficienter narrabit, et quecumque pacta intrinseca et secreta cum eo tractabitis et ipsa suum habebimus rata grata et firma, tamquam si ad componenda ea presentes essemus.

Datum in principio lunae Rabemel sive Julii, anno Maumethi 877 secundum cursum nostrum.⁸¹⁰

⁸¹⁰ Archivio Cicogna, Marino Sanudo, Cronaca ms. Cfr. Guglielmo Berchet, *La Repubblica di Venezia e la Persia* (Tehran: Imperial Organization for Social Services, 1976), Doc. VIII.

Appendix III

هو مالک الملک المتعال

یا محمد یا علی

ائمه المعصومین

شجاعاً للایالة و الحکومة و السلطنة و الحشمة و الابهة و الوقار

اندريا دوزی و نتوخان

اسباب عظمت و جهانداری و آثار ابهت و کامکاری، خاقان الخواقین نامدار، نورالله تعالی قلبه به نور الایمان و سلطان سلاطین کامکار، اشرح الله تعالی صدره به سرور التهذیب الادیان لحظه فلحظه در توالی و تضاعد باد و کوکب اقبال جاودانی، بعد از دریافت سعادت مسلمانی به فیض فضل ربانی ساعده فسادت در ترقی و تزیید.

بعد هذا اعلام آنکه در تاریخ پنج شهرربیع الاول سنه ست و اربعین و تسعمائه توفیق آثار، سلائے الامرا میکائیل بیک دامه توفیقه به شرف عتبه بوسی آستان ملانک آشیان بندگان درگاه عرش اشتباه سدره پناه که قبله ارباب حاجات و کعبه اصحاب مناجات است مفتخر و سرافراز گردید، مکاتب دلنواز ایشان به مطالعه اشرف اعلی رسانید و کیفیت و حقیقت کماهی حالات آنجایی کما هو حقه خصوصاً اتفاق... میان سلاطین نامدار در قلع و قمع اشرار مه درین ولا اتفاق افتاده بیان نموده. در خاطر عاطر دریا مقاطر چنین خطور کرد فرصتی به ار این واقع نمی شود که در حین اتفاق آن خراقین کامکار رایات نصرت آیات همیون ما نیز با عساکره منصوره متوجه آن اقالیم شده جنود نامسعود رومیه شومیه را به ضرب قهقهه تیغ آبدار و طنطنه توپ و تفنگ آتشبار دمار از روزگار نابکار برآورده ممالک مسخره ایشان در تحت تصرف بندگان آستان رفیع الشان ایشان درآوریم و جهان را از خبیث وجود ایشان پاک سازیم و آنچه کمال عواطف بیدریغ شاهانه و مراحم بی نهایت پادشاهانه بوده باشد نسبت به آن ولایه عظام اعلی مقام به ظهور رسانیم و من بعد طریق محبت و مودت مسلوک بوده ابواب مراسلات و مکاتیب مفتوح باشد تا متردین بی تشویش و تعصب تردد نموده مانع و مزاحمی نداشته باشد، که ناگاه به تواتر از افواه و السنه چنین استماع رفت که آن سلاطین نامدار در این ولاکس به به رسالت به الکای رومیه شومیه فرستاده و عظیمت طلع را جازم شده مدعیات سابق و مضمون کتابات لاحق که در این ولا مصحوب میکائیل بیک ارسال نموده بودند فسخ کرده بر سر قول خویش راسخ و جازم نمانده اند. استماع این اقوال دلالت بر بی اعتباری ایشان میکرد و

بدین واسطه آمدن میکائیل بیک به حضور تا غایت در اردوی همیون معوق بوده که شاید خبر مذکور اصلی نداشته باشد و باز چون به کرات و مراتب تحقیق آن از ارباب اعتبار به ظهور پیوست صدق آن در خاطر عاظر همیون شاهی جلوه گر شد، مومی الیه را مرخص ساخته به ظهور فرستاده شد که تحقیق اموال مذکور را نموده حقایق احوال و افعال اینجایی به سمع ایشان رسانیده و سبب توقف آیات نصرت آیات همیون را در این ولا به آن صوب معروض ایشان گرداند تا برای ایشان واضح شود، که از اینجانب تقصیری نبوه و نخواهد بود و عنقریب ان شاء الله وحده العزیز در هنگام فرصت اگر ایشان متفق باشند و اگر نباشند به یاری صلوات الله علیهم اجمعین، آیات نصرت آیات به عظمت و شوکت و کامکاری متوجه آن صوب شده دمار از روزگار عذار ایشان برآورده شد، اگر ایشان نیز مستخیر احوال بوده تهیه آن اسباب را مُعَدّ و مهیا باشند اولی و انسب خواهد بود.⁸¹¹

⁸¹¹ ASV, S.R.M. S. LXXXIII.1. Shah Tahmosp I to Doge Gritti, 1540. The content of this letter is integrated in section 1 of Chapter 3.

Appendix IX

Le lettere di V. M. portateci dal valoroso Efet beg, ne sono state per ogni rispetto molto care, e gratissimo tutto ciò che ella si è compiaciuta di significarci, per espressioni del suo cortese animo verso la nostra Repubblica, la quale avendo conservata sempre antica e sincera amicizia colla sereniss. sua corona, riceve al presente singolare contento, che dalla M. V. le sia corrisposta con queste dimostrazioni amorevoli, da noi largamente meritate, per il desiderio che tenemo di darle maggiormente a conoscere che la stessa buona amicizia resterà in ogni tempo dal nostro canto fermamente stabilita sopra un sincerissimo affetto verso di lei, et accresciuta dall'amorevole protezione dei sudditi suoi che capitano in questa città, dove sogliono essere così ben veduti e trattati, che possono loro medesimi renderle indubitato testimonio, quanto riesca a noi di consolazione, che li nostri siano all'incontro favoriti da lei, onde il commercio abbia ad ampliarsi a maggior beneficio dei comuni sudditi; ed a perfetto stabilimento della nostra buona amicizia ed intelligenza, la quale siccome già vedemo conservarsi dalla M. V. perchè con abbondanza del suo affetto chiaramente espresso in esse lettere, ha voluto complir ad un tratto a tutti gli uffici, che per la distanza del paese non possono esser tra noi molto frequenti: così la pregamo di esser certa di non dover in alcun tempo mai desiderare migliore, nè più ben disposta volontà di quella, che avremo di comprobarle in tutte le occorrenze la ottima

corrispondenza del nostro sincerissimo animo; e gli anni di lei siano molti, accompagnati da continue prosperità e da ogni altro felice avvenimento.⁸¹²

⁸¹² ASV, Arch. Gen. Miscellanea atti turcheschi, Giugno 1600. Berchet, *La Repubblica di Venezia e la Persia*, 1976. Document XXXI, Al serenissimo re di Persia.

Appendix V

(English Translation)

Sender: Duke of Tuscany

Receipient: Shah Abbas

Date: 1609

Only God knows the extent of our devotion toward your court. You should be aware that the ambassador who came on your behalf proposed that we prevent our household in France from cordial relations with the Porte and wage war instead. You should know that the King of France is magnificent and I am not in a position that allows me to negotiate such matters with him.⁸¹³ However, I will inform the king of your intention and will communicate his insight to you, thus you know our good will. Moreover, the ambassador delivered your request about the prohibition of all European merchants from crossing the Ottoman territories. I should express how burdensome this task is to enforce on all routes, as it is a highly profitable mercantile enterprise. Nonetheless, the Papacy has banned transportation of artillery to Ottoman territories, as they have no fear of God and steal the armor. My father never did and I will never do that. With the help of God, I will equip my army to hold back all ships that are transporting arms or textiles to Rum (the Porte) and return all those [to the original place]. It should be evident to you that the Ottoman advances are dependent on your policies, since they purchase commodities that come from Indian lands [and bring them] to yours. If you forbid European [merchants] from crossing the Ottoman lands, the Papacy will likewise accompany us in mustering a Christian army and we will wage war together from land and sea against the Porte. We will never hesitate to exchange embassies. The sublimity of the Spanish king, who is

⁸¹³ Referring to Henry IV, King of France (r.1589-1610).

constantly at war with the Ottomans, is evident to the world,. As soon as we organize an army, I will inform you. Only God knows that I pray for the longevity of your kingdom, wishing you victories and dominance over the Porte. Wishing us lifelong companionship.⁸¹⁴

⁸¹⁴ A translated copy of this letter is preserved at the Archive of the Foreign Ministry of Iran (the Islamic Republic), p. 86r. The original is at Archivio di Stato di Napoli. This translation was made from the Farsi copy of the letter in Iran. For Farsi transcript of the letter, Cfr. Muḥammad Ḥasan Kāwūsī ‘Irāqī, ed., *Asnād-i rawābiṭ-i daulat-i Ṣafawī bā ḥukūmathā-i Ītālīyā*, Čāp 1 (Tih-rān: Markaz-i Asnād wa Tārīḫ-i Dīplumāsī, 2000), 93–94; Nasrollah Falsafi, *Zendagānī-e Šāh ‘Abbās Awwal (The Lifehistory of Shāh Abbās I)*, 4th ed. (Tehrān: Muhammad Ali Elmi, 1369), vol. 5, 1980.

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