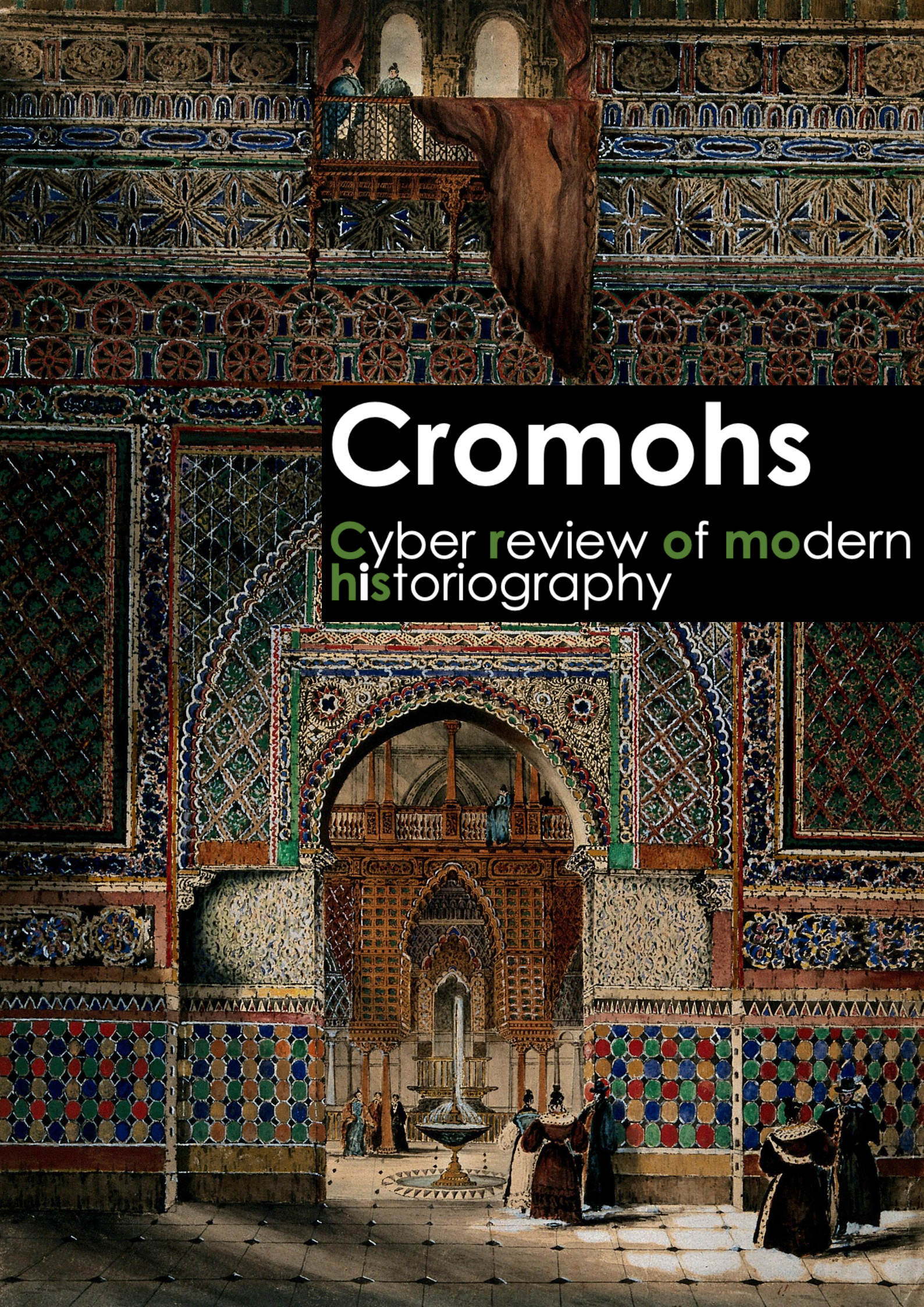

Cromohs

Cyber review of modern historiography

Cromohs is a peer-reviewed, open-access electronic history journal published in English, and over the last two decades has established a solid reputation for scholarly rigour. With a marked international outlook, it aims to encourage methodological debate arising from original and creative dialogue between scholarly traditions, and to promote innovative approaches to archival research. *Cromohs* acts as a focal point and forum for challenging and fresh scholarship on fourteenth- to nineteenth-century intellectual, social and cultural history in a global perspective. It seeks to move beyond a strictly regional and Eurocentric approach, with a preferential view towards histories of transcultural contacts and connections. Articles relating to Muslim societies (fourteenth-nineteenth centuries) are most welcome. More generally, *Cromohs* strongly encourages contributions engaging with extra-European cultures and societies. *Cromohs* invites theoretically informed work from a range of historical, cultural and social domains that interrogate cross-cultural and connected histories, intersecting the history of knowledge, emotions, religious beliefs, ethnography, cartography, the environment, material culture and the arts.

Cromohs

Cyber Review of Modern Historiography

Issue 24

2021

The thematic section in this issue of *Cromohs* is based upon work from COST Action 'People in motion: Entangled histories of displacement across the Mediterranean (1492–1923)', CA18140, supported by COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology).

Funded by the European Union

Published by Firenze University Press

University of Florence, via Cittadella, 7, 50144 Florence, Italy

ISSN 1123-7023 (online)

https://oajournals.fupress.net/index.php/cromohs/

Cromohs is indexed in:

ANVUR – National Agency for the Evaluation of Universities and Research Institute: classe A, DOAJ – Directory of Open Access Journals, EBSCO, UlrichsWeb Global Serials Directory, ERIHPLUS – European Reference Index for the Humanities and Social Sciences, Thomson Reuters Web of Science, Scopus

Cover image: Alcázar Palace, Seville: the Salón de Embajadores (Hall of the Ambassadors). Watercolour, attributed to E.S., nineteenth century. Wellcome Collection. Public Domain.

Contents

Bibliographical Essays

Book Reviews

Gibbon all'italiana
The Italian Restoration Edition of
The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire

MARIA PIA CASALENA
University of Bologna

Translation, betrayal, manipulation

> Translation is, of course, a rewriting of an original text. All rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics, and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way.
>
> ANDRÉ LEFEVERE, *'Translation, Rewriting, & the Manipulation of Literary Fame'*.[1]

In the early 1990s, prominent translation studies theorists began to impose a rethinking of the relationship between source works and their translations. They identified the many processes of betrayal and manipulation adopted by mediators over the years in order to adapt texts to the public they intended to address. As highlighted by André Lefevere and Susan Bassnett in particular, in addition to the many strategies used by the translators themselves, there are also those – sometimes overlapping – adopted by the patrons of the cultural world: as publishers, academics, scholars, critics and reviewers.

Therefore, whilst we can no longer consider a published translation to be merely a naïve transfer of an original work from one language to another, we should, however, continue to contextualise manipulation strategies in their cultural sphere and historical and political framework. What seems less important, is knowing the various mediators' level of language knowledge given that strictly linguistic issues seem to be of secondary importance. As the field of translation studies indicates, translated books should be considered to all effects an integral part of national cultures. This points to a broader and more problematic approach to the cultural history of modern nations which will inform this article.[2]

---

[1] ANDRÉ LEFEVERE, *Translation, Rewriting, & the Manipulation of Literary Fame* (London: Routledge, 1992), VII.

[2] SUSAN BASSNETT and ANDRÉ LEFEVERE, eds *Constructing Cultures: Essays in Literary Translation* (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 1998).

Cromohs (Cyber Review of Modern Historiography), ISSN 1123-7023, 24/2021

DOI: 10.36253/cromohs-12753

This article will seek to retrace the events surrounding the translation and publishing history of the Italian version of a very unusual work: *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* by Edward Gibbon. So deeply imbued with scepticism, even before it reached the Italian peninsula Gibbon's great work had already been singled out – both in his homeland and abroad – as a scandalous and dangerous composition.[3] A relatively short period of time separated the conclusion of the original edition from the first Italian translation that appeared in Pisa, between 1794 and 1796, written by an 'anonymous' hand, behind which was the notorious figure of Monsignor Angelo Fabroni.[4]

When Gibbon's first Italian translation appeared, the era of 'beautiful and unfaithful' translations, which had been the pride of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century literature,[5] already seemed a distant memory. However, there was certainly some manipulation in the edition of the first eight volumes that another Pisan publisher printed between 1795 and 1799. What the readers in the Grand Duchy of Tuscany were offered then was a Gibbon that had been brutally censored, rebuked and corrected, and unwillingly returned to orthodoxy – moreover, to strictly observant Catholic orthodoxy.[6] There seemed to be a desire to offer it as a proof of the errors incurred by scepticism when not accompanied or corrected by vigilant Roman theology.

However, if that was the operation conducted in the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, how radically would *Decline and Fall* need to be corrected twenty years later, in the middle of the Restoration and in the Lombardy of 1821–24, troubled as it was by conspiracies and anti-revolutionary ideas? Moreover, what intervention would be made in the face not only of errors linked to the faith of the censors, but also Gibbon's addition of a clear nostalgia for republican forms and mixed governments, accompanied by an anti-tyrannical verve?

Yet, the 13 volumes of *Decline and Fall*, which in Italian had become *Storia della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*[7] and appeared in Milan from 1820 to 1824 published by Nicolò Bettoni, included the entire original work, without abridgements or semantic distortions. This time even the name of the translator was known: the prolific but at

[3] DAVID WOMERSLEY, *Religious Scepticism: Contemporary Responses to Gibbon* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1997).

[4] An ultra-moderate Jansenist, Fabroni (1732–1803) owed his fame primarily to the creation of the Pisan *Giornale de' Letterati*. See Ugo Baldini, *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* s.v. 'Fabroni, Angelo' (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1994), 44. The story behind this translation was dealt with in 1962 by Salvatore Rotta, who hypothesised that Fabroni was the only Pisan translator. See Salvatore ROTTA, 'Il viaggio di Gibbon in Italia,' *Rivista storica italiana*, 74 (1962), 325–55, in part. 334–35.

[5] ROGER CHARTIER, *Le migrazioni di testi. Scrivere e tradurre nel XVI e XVII secolo* (Rome: Carocci, 2020).

[6] In this sense, we will come across different arguments from the ones used by the first Anglican critics rediscovered by Womersley.

[7] EDWARD GIBBON, *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano tradotta dall'inglese di Edoardo Gibbon* (Milan: Bettoni, 1820-1824), 13 vols.

the same time controversial Davide Bertolotti.[8] His work was limited to volumes IX to XVI, as the first eight were merely the re-edition of the aforementioned Pisan edition achieved in 1799.

As stated, the entire translation was faithful. Yet Nicolò Bettoni was certainly neither a revolutionary nor a non-believer, at least not in 1820 and was not seeking to stir up a scandal.[9] Thus, in order to appreciate the Bettoni's handling of Gibbon, we must once again take heed of the warnings issued by translation studies that linguistic faithfulness is not tantamount to ideological solidarity.

In the paragraphs that follow, I will briefly cover the most scandalous sections of *Decline and Fall*, as read by a Catholic public. Indeed, the focus of my studies is the only complete Italian version of *Decline and Fall* that would see the light in pre-Unification Italy. Neither the Pisan translator first, nor Davide Bertolotti later, removed any of the irony that coursed through the original. I will then carry out a detailed study of this publishing operation, undoubtedly sensitive to the sirens of the market, in which extraordinary innovation and a conservative attitude managed to co-exist, at length and apparently unhindered, throughout the most troubled years of the early Restoration in Milan.

The many 'errors' of a masterpiece of historiography

The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire certainly requires no introduction, given that, just like its author Edward Gibbon, it has been the focus of extremely prolific international historiographical debate.[10] However it may be useful to recall or,

[8] On Bertolotti and other professional translators from Milan, the pages of MARINO BERENGO, *Intellettuali e librai nella Milano della Restaurazione* (Turin: Einaudi, 1980), still apply. See also Giovanni Ponte, *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, s.v. 'Bertolotti, Davide' (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1967), vol. 9.

[9] On N. Bettoni see FRANCESCO BARBERI, *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, s.v. 'Bettoni, Nicolò' (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1967), vol. 9.

[10] For many years, studies of Gibbon included a set of prominent titles. However, others have recently been added, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world. I shall point out just the main studies from different phases of the historiographical history at the basis of my research: GIUSEPPE GIARRIZZO, *Edward Gibbon e la cultura europea del Settecento* (Naples: Istituto italiano per gli studi storici, 1954); ARNALDO MOMIGLIANO, 'Gibbon's Contribution to Historical Method,' *Historia* 2 (1954), 450–63; EDWARD JAMES OLIVER, *Gibbon and Rome* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1958); MICHEL BARIDON, 'Edward Gibbon en Italie,' *Etudes Anglaises* 15 (1962), 131–37; ARNALDO MOMIGLIANO, 'Edward Gibbon dentro e fuori la cultura italiana,' *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa. Classe di Lettere e filosofia*, s. III vol. VI (1976), 78–95; JOHN W. BURROW, *Gibbon* (Oxford: OUP, 1985); Roy Porter, *Edward Gibbon: Making History* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1988); PATRICIA CRADDOCK, *Edward Gibbon, Luminous Historian* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); JOHN G.A. POCOCK, *The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999); CHARLOTTE ROBERTS, *Edward Gibbon and the Shape of History* (Oxford: OUP, 2014); *The Cambridge Companion to Edward Gibbon* (Cambridge: CUP, 2018). Particularly useful is the study by DAVID WOMERSLEY, *Gibbon and the 'Watchmen of the Holy City': The Historian and His Reputation, 1776-1815* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002).

in the very least, briefly outline the themes and interpretations that would have been most unacceptable in Italy during the Restoration.

As we will see, what most upset the censors were the work's theological deviations, starting with Chapters XV and XVI, which for many years would remain notorious and almost unsurpassed examples of non-adherence to Christian orthodoxy.[11] Indeed, the theme was the spread of Christianity and, in Chapter XVI in particular, the dissemination of its Church. Just a few chapters later, Gibbon indulged in measured adulation of Julian the Apostate and went so far as to state that the anti-Christian persecutions had been exaggerated. Furthermore, when he examined the reasons for the 'fortunes' of Christianity in the Roman-Barbarian West, he basically reduced all of the points of conversion and faith to the level of the most intuitive superstition and popular credulity. He was not kind towards many of the early saints and martyrs, insinuated suspicion regarding the material greed that accompanied apostolic fervour and, above all, cast considerable doubt on the good faith of many council decisions, to the point of challenging the authority of the four canonical Gospels.[12]

Basically, Gibbon often vastly exceeded the criticism of Catholic doctrine made by Protestant theologians. He sometimes went so far as to express radical scepticism, which he backed up with a series of carefully examined sources. He was not too indulgent with late imperial paganism either: it was undoubtedly still a cult that did not recognise hierarchies or frontiers, yet in the third century AD it too showed signs of corruption and decline.

We have already mentioned the anti-tyrannical nature of the first part of *Decline and Fall*. However, we should add that the emperor most heavily criticised by Gibbon was not strictly a tyrant. Constantine was instead responsible for moving the capital to the East, anticipating the supreme guilt of Theodosius – in other words, the enforced conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity. In a balanced and well-thought-out analysis, he treated Diocletian a little better, although the golden era of the Antonines had, by then, passed forever. Basically, Gibbon not 'only' criticised religious fanaticism and the ecclesiastical authorities, in *Decline and Fall* he also presented a complex political and state ideal that was unequivocally rooted in classical and Renaissance republicanism, adapted to a progressive interpretation of the post-revolutionary British model.[13] On closer inspection, political prejudice was no less important than religious criticism. Equally clear was the focus on contemporary Europe, judged using the parameter of conciliation between political freedom and religious emancipation.

---

11 JOHN G.A. POCOCK, 'Gibbon and the Invention of Gibbon. Chapters 15 and 16 Reconsidered,' *History of European Ideas*, 35 (2009), 209–16.

12 DAVID WOOTTON, 'Narrative, Irony and Faith in Gibbon's Decline and Fall,' *History and Theory* 33 (1994), 77–106.

13 EDOARDO TORTAROLO, 'Gibbon e la libertà naturale: è possibile trasformare la libertà naturale in libertà politica?,' in *Ragione e immaginazione. Edward Gibbon e la storiografia europea del Settecento*, ed. Girolamo Imbruglia (Naples: Liguori, 1996), 190–214.

Rather than appeasing the repulsion felt by reactionary and orthodox readers, one of the elements that instead made it even worse was the irony with which Gibbon laced his work. In the first instance, it was focused on rituals, dogmas and miracles. It was often introduced by a phrase, comment or digression; at other times, it was a feature of the entire narrative and the concatenation of themes. If the aim was to make the work more 'acceptable', the irony could have been eliminated, but page after page would have had to be cut out of the original, leaving entire chapters incomplete.

The reception of *Decline and Fall* in Europe was surprising. Even during the late eighteenth century, Gibbon was censored, cut, rewritten and ultimately even 're-Christianised'. In the following century, he would instead be adopted as a benchmark author in certain highly conservative Protestant apocalyptic currents.[14] Numerous comments and annotations were written with the aim of reworking the text to make it comply with the orthodoxy of one church or another; suffice it to think of the work completed by Henry Hart Milman in 1845 that would accompany almost every 'popular' edition of *Decline and Fall* in Britain for over a century.

Even before its translation during the 1790s, in Italy too, Gibbon's work was immediately censored and criticised, a trend which continued throughout the nineteenth century. Likewise, the anti-tyrannical declamations, thoughts on republican virtues and preference for a mixed government and political liberalism remained constant. Others took it upon themselves to defuse the situation and show that *Decline and Fall* was merely a brilliant work but strewn with 'errors' – at least as far as Christianity, Catholicism, Rome and the Pope were concerned. In Italy too, Gibbon was 're-Christianised', but not by means of brutal cuts or complete rewriting. Initially, in late eighteenth-century Pisa, this was done by opposing different authorities and then in 1823–24 Milan, by appending a series of historical and theological notes ultimately designed to refute the entire text.

'Biblioteca storica di tutte le nazioni'

In 1818, Nicolò Bettoni (1770–1842) disseminated a prospectus in the Milan area of what would be the first series of books on modern international historiography.[15] The name chosen for the series was the 'Biblioteca storica di tutte le nazioni' (Historical Library of All Nations), and one of the inaugural titles was no less than *Universal History*, by the Swiss-born Johannes von Müller.

A conservative and at times even nostalgic feudalist, siding with reactionary oligarchies and hostile to enterprising bourgeoises, von Müller's peers already held him

[14] STEPHEN D. SNOBELEN, 'A Further Irony: Apocalyptic Readings of Edward Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,' *Canadian Journal of History* 33 (1998), 387–407.
[15] NICOLÒ BETTONI, *Biblioteca storica di tutti i tempi e di tutte le nazioni ai colti italiani* (Padua: Bettoni, 1818). Among the few appreciations reserved for Bettoni, we should mention PIERO BARBÈRA, *Niccolo Bettoni: avventure d'un editore* (Florence: Barbèra, 1892).

to be one of the rediscoverers of the Middle Ages.[16] Reputable on a political and religious level, Johannes von Müller also stood out for his beautiful style and ability to draw on sources. Müller was the author best suited to inaugurate a series that, just like its publisher, sought to prove that its books were modern yet still compliant with the political and religious agenda.

Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* followed in the list proposed by Nicolò Bettoni. It was presented as the first in a series of titles dedicated to the best of English and Scottish historiography. Indeed, the series was also to include the *History of Britain* by David Hume and the *History of America* by William Robertson.

This, in itself, was quite significant in the early 1820s. While Milan had already established itself as the Italian capital of translations and soon afterwards would experience the phenomenon that was Walter Scott, the fact remained that most Italian translations tended to be of French works or translations of translations into French. In terms of xenophilia, Bettoni was certainly not one of the most enterprising publishers in Lombardy; in fact, up until then, most of his titles had been translations of Greek and Latin classics into vernacular. Nevertheless, at the time, history could prove profitable, if not as much as novels, at least more than vernacular translations or minor Italian literature. Indeed, the most dynamic Neapolitan typographers had already begun to realise this. Whilst guilty of counterfeiting fiction novels published in Milan, in the field of historiography they proved to be more original, and as early as 1819 the first volumes of the 'Bellezze della Storia' (The Wonders of History) series went into print in Naples.

With good reason, therefore, Bettoni sought to guarantee himself a market that was fuelled by a new hunger for history in Milan and the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia. This demand focused on the Middle Ages and national histories, in particular. In that respect, *Decline and Fall* was not the most congenial title and although the eight volumes by the Pisan translator were ready, the entire post-imperial part that focused primarily on the Italian peninsula, and especially the Lombard and French north, had yet to be translated. After all, Gibbon had been one of the first to promote Muratori's great work. Of course, certain inferences and excesses needed to be amended, but it was still a work of undisputed repute.

Before and during the Gibbon operation, Bettoni could rely on the well-founded certainty of having a catalogue that was reputable for the less indulgent. Not only did the vernacular not offend anyone, but the remainder of the 'Biblioteca storica di tutte le nazioni' could help guarantee the publisher's conformism too. Although the series on British authors could be deemed compromising, Bettoni had after all begun with von Müller and at the same time he was also publishing a number of edifying works for children and adults, mainly by French counter-revolutionaries.

16 DORIS and PETER WALSER-WILHELM, and MARIANNE BERLINGER KONQUI, eds, *Geschichtsschreibung zu Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts im Umkreis Johannes von Müllers und des Groupe de Coppet* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2004).

If we look at the historiographical supply available in Milan and the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia in general when Bettoni launched his series, we can say, without hesitation, that such supply was fairly meagre. Anti-revolutionary typographers from the provinces of Lombardy, such as Gian Battista Orcesi, had introduced both the more prominent and minor writings of authors such as the anti-Napoleonic Michaud with his *History of the Crusades*. The two most important titles of the limited number imported to Milan between 1815 and 1820 were undoubtedly *A History of the Italian Republics* by Simonde de Sismondi and *The Life and Pontificate of Leo the Tenth* by Roscoe (published the same year in Pisa was his even better-known work, *The Life of Lorenzo de' Medici: Called the Magnificent*). In the meantime, the publication had begun of the first volumes of Ségur's *Universal History*, which would continue at irregular intervals for a long period of time. This catalogue of translations really amounted to very little if we compare it not only to the considerable number of titles in the medical and scientific field, but also to the dozens of famous travel stories Sonzogno had begun to specialise in and even the much later explosion of the historical novel genre.[17] Quite rightly, Nicolò Bettoni saw a gap for which there was diversified demand.

Indeed, Bettoni focused on multi-volumes works, releasing the individual books at more or less regular intervals. Together with Gibbon, Hume and Robertson, he also published Salaberry and Villemain from France. His catalogue also included the first volumes of the immense *History of the French* by Sismondi, one of the most anti-clerical and anti-tyrannical reviews of the long history of Italy's neighbour, *History of the Swiss* by Paul-Henri Mallet, far removed from the feudal nostalgia of von Müller, and the work of William Coxe, the historian of the Habsburgs. When his activities ceased in 1841, Bettoni could rightly claim to be a pioneer of translated history books.

Some of the titles were extraordinarily reassuring, whilst others were quite problematic and required some intervention. Of all those listed, *Decline and Fall* was perhaps the most controversial, especially in the role of inaugural book of the British series.

In actual fact, in issuing the thirteen volumes of the complete Italian version of *Decline and Fall*, Nicolò Bettoni was publishing at least four different works; two were wholly unaltered reproductions of the Pisan second edition interrupted in 1799, whilst the other two were directly from the Milanese theologian-censors of the early 1820s. In addition, Chapter XVI was followed by Nicola Spedalieri's well-known *Refutation Essay* of Chapters XV and XVI. Furthermore, a series of anonymous letters addressed to two British Catholic priests were included at various points up to the end of the Italian volume VIII. Bettoni took these materials from the second Pisan edition, and the six original volumes that completed the work and that were basically by Davide Bertolotti were no less significant. It was merely that the strategy had changed; there

[17] MARIA PIA CASALENA, 'Nascita di una capitale transnazionale: le traduzioni nella Milano dell'Ottocento,' in *Stranieri all'ombra del duce. Le traduzioni durante il fascismo*, ed. Anna Ferrando (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2019), 37–51.

were now precise annotations full of theological, historical, moral and even rhetorical amendments and corrections, followed in turn by a general assessment of the errors of the last five volumes. The Pisan materials and Milanese annotations amounted to dozens of pages which ultimately entirely demolished the part of *Decline and Fall* dedicated to Christianity and its role in the Western and Eastern Roman world.

Bettoni offered some kind of justification for this sort of intervention in the introduction to the 13-volume series. He chose not to do so personally, preferring instead to entrust this task to the translator Bertolotti.

> I present you, dear Reader, the *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* written by Edward Gibbon and here fully and faithfully translated from the *original English* language into Italian. Not a single idea or important word has been removed from it, changed or added. […]
>
> My work consists in two parts: one concerns the amendment of volumes of this work already available in Italian in the Pisan publications of Monsignor Fabbroni, the other focuses on the remaining volumes, translated into our language by myself for the first time.
>
> […] I must now add one other thing. The scepticism of Edward Gibbon on religious matters has attracted considerable and intense censorship. His main critics include Nicola Spedalieri, famous author of "Diritti dell'Uomo" and a worthy rival for such an illustrious historian and philosopher. To calm the minds and offer, as others have said, an antidote to the poison, at the end of Chapter 16 I have added the Compendium of the Refutation of Gibbon, written by the apologist of the Roman Church. The three *letters addressed to Mr. Foothead and Mr. Kirk, English Catholics*, will follow Chapter 25 and hence, allay the fears of the most servile.
>
> I could have included many erudite notes, relying for this purpose on the work of several prominent foreigners. But those by the Author are already so abundant I deemed it inopportune to bury the text under more notes and limited my intervention to appending very few brief annotations that you will find printed in Italics. For these alone can I be expected to be accountable.[18]

Davide Bertolotti was taking too much credit; of course, it would not have been very strategic to present a work while admitting that half of it was not original. Furthermore, in another excerpt he claimed to have corrected many errors in the Pisan translation, almost certainly meaning linguistic errors. Yet, the text of the Italian version of the first eight volumes appeared extremely uniform, following the English original literally, whereas the volumes by Piedmont-born Bertolotti suggested a certain reliance on the French versions. Nevertheless, regardless of the linguistic details, the later Pisan edition had already presented Spedalieri's brief essay and other contentious material, as was indeed stated in the page that Bettoni's edition proposed again at the end of the eighth volume:

[18] GIBBON, 'Avvertimento,' in *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*, I, V–VIII.

> The Reader will undoubtedly have admired far-reaching and profound erudition in this work and an incisive and energetic style and in its Author a mind capable of great things. We therefore wish him long life and leisure in his old age; however, at the same time, we also urge him to be more respectful of the divine religion of Jesus Christ and the illustrious Champions that supported it […]. It will always harm the fame of a writer who often speaks of a religion, whose only fear is not being understood, to show that indeed, he does not understand it and moreover, that he does not recognise this. If this can be said of Mr Gibbon, it is because of the many annotations, either separate or in the form of a letter, we made in the previous eight volumes and individually, in the solid refutation […] by Mr. Abbate Niccola Spedalieri, who is also responsible for the Essay we included in the third tome.[19]

Theology and historiography

Nicola Spedalieri's *Refutation* dated back to 1784. The Pisan publisher had succeeded in gleaning a comprehensive summary from it, placing it precisely where Gibbon attributed to Christianity some of the responsibility for the fall of the Roman Empire. Doubtless more famous for his essay on human rights, Spedalieri had nevertheless been one of the earliest critics of *Decline and Fall*, brilliantly providing the 'modern' and 'Italian' response[20] to the bad cosmopolitan teachings represented by the British historian.

> In proposing the topic of the chapter, despite the ambiguity with which Christian opinion is explained and the claims he [Gibbon] makes of *respecting the primary reason for the rapid progress of the Christian Church*, he induces the reader sufficiently to realise that he intends to prove that nothing in this event is seen as supernatural, but is entirely due to *natural causes*. If this were true, religion would be stripped of the virtuous proof, that in favour of its divine origin is gathered by the way in which it established itself and the speed with which it spread. He leaves no stone unturned to demolish this proof; although we shall make very little effort to support it. / However, our analysis in not important for this reason *alone*. Aversion for the supernatural has again led the Author to deny the miracles of the early centuries, those by the Apostles, those by Jesus Christ and other miracles in general, and to even exercise his biting sarcasm against the mysteries and morality of the Revealed Religion […].[21]

Spedalieri had not withdrawn from this challenge, deciding to organise his *Refutation* dialectically and to demolish Gibbon on the plane of logic, before doing so on the terrain of faith. Therefore, the southern Italian philosopher identified the theses and challenged them using the weapons of Roman theology to demonstrate, firstly, their many contradictions and unfoundedness. Spedalieri was fully aware that the most serious accusation Gibbon had made against the early Christians was that they had first

---

[19] GIBBON,'Avvertimento,', 197–98.

[20] GIUSEPPE CIMBALI, 'Nicola Spedalieri e le sue apologie del Cristianesimo', *Rassegna Nazionale* 8 (1886), 3–31 and 229–58.

[21] GIBBON, 'Saggio di confutazione de' due capi XV e XVI dell'Istoria di Edoardo Gibbon spettanti all'esame del Cristianesimo. Compendio di un'opera di Nicola Spedalieri,' in *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero roman*o, III, 114–233: 117–18.

weakened and ultimately extinguished the civil and military power of the Romans. Although Gibbon only openly claimed this in another chapter, Spedalieri identified the tainted core of the entire work as Chapters XV and XVI and many of the objections he made in 1784 would resurface in the later appendices and notes to Bettoni's edition.

> Moving from Jerusalem to Rome, the Author marvels that Christians, as Gibbon stated, were so horrified by any sign of national cult. […] The Author teases on the devil, as if without his intervention Idolatry were not the most heinous of all sins. *Demons were creators, patrons and objects of Idolatry* as they tempted men against the precept of honouring God, as every day they tempt them with other duties. / All that was missing in the history of the overindulgences of the human spirit was to make a panegyric of Idolatry. The Author filled the empty space: however, his eulogy can only be appreciated by those whose ideas and longings end in the senses. *Superstition always appeared under the guise of pleasure and often of virtue* and we know what pleasure it delivered in triumph. Virtue and sensual pleasure form a newly invented complex idea.[22]

Despite remaining faithful to dialectic rigour, Spedalieri did not hesitate to attack Gibbon even on more strictly historical ground. In so doing, he prepared the ground for the work of the author of the Milanese addenda 30 years later. He necessarily concluded that Gibbon's sin was not 'only' that of heterodoxy – or the preferred term of the time, 'scepticism' – what is more, he was not even a very good historian.

> The Author having believed he had proved that Christianity was indebted in its establishment and progress to purely natural causes put it – as he says – into a *historical framework*, but really it is imaginary and has the aim of confirming his intent. In so doing, falsifying the testimony of Chrysostom and abusing of an extract by Origen and another by Eusebius, he makes an ideal calculation of the number of Christians in a single place and then is even in the habit of deducing general conjectures. He then criticises the ancient writers, both Gentiles and Christians who, with a single voice despite having different objectives, were astounded by the spread of the Gospels; and troubles himself in particular, with an extract from Pliny with such vain efforts that he succeeded in achieving nothing more than revealing that clear spirit of bias he sought to conceal.[23]

Naturally, Spedalieri did not address the considerations on the government, institutions, army and politics that the author had sown in the first 14 chapters. What he sought to defend was the Christian Empire that had been the cradle of the throne of the Pope of Rome and the theatre of the most genuine interpretation of the Gospels.

One of Spedalieri's priorities was to reiterate the verity of the Tridentine faith and, above all, to defend the cult of miracles. It was necessary to defend it immediately because, when turning his focus to the Barbarian centuries, Gibbon announced he was going to take his ironic treatment of the exploitation of popular credulity even further.

[22] GIBBON, 'Saggio di confutazione de' due capi XV e XVI dell'Istoria di Edoardo Gibbon,' 129–30.
[23] GIBBON, 'Saggio di confutazione de' due capi XV e XVI dell'Istoria di Edoardo Gibbon,' 171.

> Being committed [Gibbon] to proving that the miracles attributed to the ancient Church were illusions or deceptions, trying thereafter to seriously prove that *deceptions and illusions helped to convince the Infidels* would have been tantamount to contradicting himself. / So, we must consider as laughable the fact that the Gentiles would renounce their own religion and enter the Church, persecuted by the principle of mere *curiosity*. It would be a new moral principle to cause a change of heart and move it from libertinism to the extreme of a pure and austere life. […] At that time, the Romans were too illuminated […] Now, having joined the Church too easily, how could they remain there were their expectations not met? If there were no miracles performed, the Proselytes could not find any. Who enchanted them? […] / It would be puerile to wish to persevere in such palpable absurdity: let us rather look at what the efforts of the adversary really focus on. He did not want miracles of any kind or at any time: he attacked the miracles of the early centuries, those of the Apostles and Jesus Christ and in general, any event that was not in the order of nature. […] / […] let us be allowed to reflect on the fact and say that, if the Gentiles came to the faith in droves, this is clear proof of the verity of the miracles that were said to have taken place.[24]

The next 15 chapters of *Decline and Fall* were interspersed with three *Anonymous Letters* addressed to two English Catholic priests. Set out as a sort of diary, the three letters focused on and attacked precise points and topics which were particularly inherent to the history of the Christian Church. Although the comments used were of a more specifically historiographical nature compared to Spedalieri, they still concluded that Gibbon was an unreliable historian. Focusing primarily on chapters XVII to XXXII, the interlocutors involved in these *Letters* found themselves having to verify and dispute several references not only to religious, but also political and civil history. These included the chapters on Julian the Apostate,[25] Constantine and Theodosius, as well as events surrounding the first councils, including the definitive formation of the dogmas of Catholicism.[26] The two recipients, Mr Foothead and Mr Kirk, were presented as deacons about to be ordained as priests in their homeland: hence, they were two authorities, who, in the England of 1822–23, also represented a community that had been driven to the margins of the government and institutions so dear to Edward Gibbon. The *Test Acts* had not yet been abolished so, in their homeland, Foothead and Kirk were not too far from the proselytes of the early centuries of the Christian era. By addressing them, rather than having his criticism then issue directly from the authority of the Roman Papacy, the anonymous author also managed to show the truths and triumphs of a Church that was still suffering, even more so after the violence of the Great Revolution. However, as such, he also succeeded in the

[24] GIBBON, 'Saggio di confutazione de' due capi XV e XVI dell'Istoria di Edoardo Gibbon,' 139–43.
[25] GLEN W. BOWERSOCK, 'Gibbon and Julian,' in *Gibbon et Rome à la lumière de l'historiographie moderne* (Geneva: Droz, 1977), 191–217.
[26] GIBBON, 'Riflessioni d'ignoto autore sopra i capitoli XVII, XVIII, XIX, XX, XXI, XXII, XXIII, XXIV e XXV della Storia della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano di Edoardo Gibbon divise in tre lettere dirette ai Sigg. Foothead e Kirk cattolici Inglesi,' in *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*, V, 113–70.

enterprise of exonerating England – bastion of the anti-French reaction – from what thus became Gibbon's specific mistake due to his overly passionate reading of Voltaire.

> I think I see in Mr. Gibbon a writer who is, in truth, elegant and erudite, but who at times disgracefully contradicts himself and at others does not question certain facts of Ecclesiastical History that whilst they may not be entirely false, are at least doubtful or undefined; on the contrary, he denies and refutes those that have been authenticated and are more certain. This is always done with the aim of damaging and demoralizing Catholicism and always demonstrating an unspeakable disdain for the Holy Fathers, faithful depositaries and tireless supporters of those venerable dogmas he hardly knows and yet disfigures.[27]

The first letter concentrated in particular on the figure of Julian the Apostate and even more so on the affirmation that the Christians had taken the anti-Christian persecutions out of perspective. In many respects, Gibbon admired the young emperor, but he also considered him to be overly concerned with philosophy. While he had not given in to admiration without exception, in the words of the anonymous author, however, it seemed that in the pages of *Decline and Fall* Julian the Apostate had become the hero *par excellence* – an even more serious fact after the dreadful treatment of Constantine.

> You can already imagine that he [Julian the Apostate] would be the hero for Mr. Gibbon and basically, that is the case. The virtues of Julian, he says, were inimitable and his throne was the seat of reason, of virtue and perhaps of vanity; vanity that our very same Critic, forgetting the perhaps, calls excessive. […] I shall only ask Mr. Gibbon firstly, did Julian constantly or at least often *remember that fundamental maxim of Aristotle, that real virtue is found equidistant from opposite vices?* Now, he will reply *that the nature of Julian was to rarely remember*. Therefore, his throne was not the seat of reason and virtue and so Mr. Gibbon has contradicted himself. I ask you secondly, are injustice, ingratitude, dishonesty and frivolity reasonable and virtuous?[28]

In the third letter, the judgement was even clearer, refuting many of Gibbon's thesis concerning the 'internal' reasons for the crisis of paganism. Thus, Gibbon did not limit himself to defending 'idolaters' and defaming Christians and Catholics. Gibbon was an advocate of idolatry, a pagan out of time. Once again, religion and politics were mixed in the letter addressed to the two English priests. By even wishing to see the Roman Senate at work at the time of Theodosius, the British historian was careless, if not indeed at fault.

> I believe that Mr. Gibbon demanded that, before promulgating any penal law against the rites of Paganism, the Caesars should let the Senate decree which cult should form the religion of the Romans. Well, Theodosius, whom he attempts to make more odious

[27] GIBBON, 'Riflessioni d'ignoto autore sopra i capitoli XVII, XVIII, XIX, XX, XXI, XXII, XXIII, XXIV e XXV della Storia della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano di Edoardo Gibbon divise in tre lettere dirette ai Sigg. Foothead e Kirk cattolici Inglesi,' in *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*, V, 113–70: 115.

[28] GIBBON, 'Riflessioni d'ignoto autore sopra i capitoli XVII, XVIII, XIX, XX, XXI, XXII, XXIII, XXIV e XXV,' 120–21.

> than any other, as if the government of Rome were still on the foot it was on when the licence of the Bacchanals was solemnly prescribed, granted the Senate such a decision. And those honourable ranks decided it should be the cult of JESUS CHRIST. Such a beautiful and noble act and even more glorious for Theodosius as it was not necessary, should have been applauded by a real historian; but the malicious need to be coherent must always add *fatto pulcherrimo atque justissimo imposturae calumniam*. So it is that we expect from Mr. Gibbon the *freedom of those votes* granted by Theodosius for *affectation*, indeed *removed from the hopes* and *fears inspired by his presence*.[29]

It seems rather peculiar that the only extensively political refutations were addressed specifically to English subjects. Taking up the baton from the same writer of these letters, the theologian-censor of the Milanese edition would limit himself to recalling, only occasionally and in a fairly concise manner, that the duty of every Catholic is obedience to the legitimate sovereign and government. However, the opportunities for those *reminders* were very few and they never gave rise to specific discussion. As mentioned above, Gibbon's work was basically able to be published on the Italian peninsula at the cost of significant interventions on the historical-religious sections, whilst its examination of political aspirations went almost untouched.

Basically, the *Refutation* by Spedalieri and the three *Letters* to the Englishmen could have been missed by readers of either of the two versions. Around 1820–24, non-English- or French-speaking readers who wished to read Gibbon would certainly make no mistake as to the different points of view held by the author and Spedalieri. Those wordy materials could easily be ignored. This is what Nicolò Bettoni and the censors close to him must have thought when deciding how to present the continuation to the work. A different kind of intervention on the many hundreds of pages translated by Bertolotti was required. This intervention was more precise, more detailed and more far-reaching. It was necessary to disrupt the reading of the faithfully translated text by adding new notes at every turn and making them sufficiently easy to detect to ensure they would immediately stand out.

In books IX to XIII of the Bettoni edition there are over 150 notes written by N.N. Most of these are fairly short, some a little longer and others are up to three or four pages long; some are even critical notes about the notes written by Gibbon. At the end of the work, about halfway through volume XIII, ten more pages of footnotes refer back to and further expand on some of the author's more controversial sections or supposed errors. Together, these notes amount to the same number of pages as the critical materials of the first volume. Written entirely in italics and separate from the rest of the text, they could not easily be ignored, also because they were, on the whole, so clear and conclusive that they provided comprehensive analysis in just a few

[29] GIBBON, 'Riflessioni d'ignoto autore sopra i capitoli XXIX, XXX e XXXI della Storia della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano di Edoardo Gibbon divise in tre lettere dirette ai Sigg. Foothead e Kirk Inglesi cattolici,' in *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*, VI, 232–71: 249–50.

sentences. Indeed, N.N. came across as a theologian and he undoubtedly had an understanding of the exigencies of episcopal and papal censorship.

> In writing the notes to the final five volumes of the great work by Edward Gibbon we have mainly aimed, by developing and describing the dogmatic content and ecclesiastical history, to make the things he said on dogmatic or other important issues innocuous and to provide the reader with strong and concise sections that could make a strong impression were they not educated in the Holy Scriptures or ecclesiastic and civil history. Moreover, we did not set out to, nor do we claim to have purged Gibbon's work of everything the good believer cannot accept. The undertaking and difficult execution of a complete refutation would have almost doubled the volumes of the work; a serious drawback. We trust our work shall not be disagreeable to the learned and shall be useful and pleasing to those who are not.[30]

From volumes IX to XIII of the Bettoni edition there was still room, more than once, to correct Gibbon's approach. More specifically, the Milanese censor focused on recalling and validating the Tridentine Catholic orthodoxy. This was even at the cost of refuting entire chapters and, as a result, rejecting every single point of solidarity towards all of the text's novation. As mentioned above, this extended to the political field, although only insofar as strictly necessary. In conclusion, I perceive a strong censorship also from the 'theologians' of Restoration-era Lombardy-Veneto, who specifically focused on every suspicion of spiritual or civil heterodoxy and on eliminating, in a 'balanced' but equally firm manner, the many vestiges of revolutionary religious vandalism remaining in the text. Nevertheless, if what bothered the Pisan publishers about *Decline and Fall* was its anti-Christian or neo-pagan spirit, thirty years later, in Milan they inveighed primarily against Gibbon's diffused incredulity, scepticism and presumed agnosticism, mainly shown through an irony now considered veritable iconoclastic sarcasm. Furthermore, this time, the chapters dealt with the Catholic cult and some of its foundations, which were still clearly functioning in the early nineteenth century.

With regard to heresies, the clarifications were mainly clear-cut and concise, unless it proved necessary to correct entire paragraphs. For example, when Gibbon theorised a certain natural tendency of Christian theology to lead to discord, N.N. immediately reacted:

> Discord was introduced amongst the followers of Christ because many of them, in other words, the first heretics, drifted away from the righteous belief of the New Testament, from where the terms Orthodox and Heterodox, Catholic and Heretic came. The decisions of the general councils determining Orthodoxy, in other words the system of correct judgements around the divinity of Jesus Christ, did not disagree amongst each other and explaining righteously and fully the Gospel, established the dogmas that people were to believe as different and incorrect opinions emerged, such as the heresies

[30] GIBBON, *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*, XIII, 353.

> by certain bishops and priests even assembled in clandestine meetings known as *Conciliabules*, to distinguish them from legitimate and Orthodox councils.[31]

And when Gibbon found the cult of Mary ridiculous:

> Having been decided by the Councils as legitimate interpreters of the Old and New Testament, that (as we saw) the Word Jesus Christ, humanized by the same substance as God the Father, was born of the Virgin Mary not by the hand of man, but by the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Holy Trinity, and thus clearly that Mary was the Mother of God, the Latins or in other words, Western Christians, were not superstitious as not all Catholics are today, if they believed and still believe in a separate cult worshipping this marvellous Virgin […]. The cult of the Virgin Mary is not therefore, a superstitious act that is not established and approved by the Councils, that is, by the Church. At least, the expression used by the Author, *elevated almost to the rank of a Goddess* is extremely unfortunate […].[32]

However, even the Milanese censor-theologians had learnt the lesson of the pastoral most sensitive to the reformed and the illuminist criticisms. They had to concede that some of their attacks were indeed valid. It was, therefore, a matter of admitting that certain things had happened, while nevertheless refuting how Gibbon derived from this a general mocking condemnation of the entire Roman theological and ecclesiastical set-up.

We can briefly look at some examples. In volume IX, when Gibbon exposed the crimes of certain prominent bishops, the reply was: 'N.N.: There was no need to manifest such unpleasant things to the faithful: we know that there were and there will be sinful Bishops, the court of Penitence has been created for them too.'[33] Then, a little later, when Gibbon narrated the rebellions of some sects: 'N.N.: Such were the cries of a troop of rioting and insurrectionary monks, disapproved by real Christians that love peace and that are obedient to their sovereigns.'[34] And in response to the historian's apparent justification of the right to resistance when speaking of the heresy of the Paulicians: 'N.N. We remind the reader that rebellion is always an act that deserves punishment not triumph.'[35]

Lastly, when Gibbon openly condemns the policy of indulgences at the time of the First Crusade:

> N.N.: The ill of those times, which involved lay people and ecclesiasts equally, and the errors of the very discipline they intended to remedy, have already been described at length by historians. The progress of civilization, the system of laws, the notions of real public good and good philosophy, which began and has grown slowly but steadily following the cultivation of literature and the arts, that disposed and elevated souls,

[31] GIBBON, *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*, IX, 5–6.
[32] GIBBON, *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*, IX, 112.
[33] GIBBON, *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*, IX, 64.
[34] GIBBON, *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*, IX, 74.
[35] GIBBON, *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*, XI, 25.

> would lead us to an exceedingly superior state, hence we look back with compassion on those past centuries, in which we had a false sense of indulgence.[36]

As has become clear, the theologians decided to make a deal with modern historiography and its monuments from Protestant (and even sceptic) Europe. There could be no denying what had been documented; rather, a recommendation was made by faithful Catholics to interpret it correctly. It was not a matter of reason, but a question of good sense strewn with reverence. Thus, the new European historiography that began in the eighteenth century in a Protestant land was able to gain right of citizenship in restored, absolutist and Catholic countries without having to either totally reject or betray or cut the text.

I have skipped volume X, which was entirely consecrated to the first chapters on Mohammed and Islam. It is, however, a privileged vantage point for measuring the strategies of N.N. given that, as we know, Gibbon had attributed considerable recognition to the Mohammedan revolution,[37] basically comparing Islam to other monotheisms and commenting, on several occasions, on the 'goodness' of the first Islamic civilization.[38] As with Julian the Apostate, while the historian had not abandoned himself to boundless uncritical admiration, in some parts he could appear more inclined towards Mohammedan theology than towards the Catholic orthodoxy.

According to N.N., Islam was clearly one of the many forms of 'deism'.[39] Therefore, Gibbon was mistaken on everything. Yet, on the whole, the volume aroused very few, short comments, almost as if it were simply a matter of thwarting contagion from Gibbon's exoticism. Here they are, in order:

> Mohammed's flag is not sacred for the Christian reader; this adjective is poorly applied to the flag of the fortunate leader of enthusiasts who, with their weapons, spread their religion rapidly in many vast regions of Asia and Africa.[40]

> The Latin Church believes, as revealed, that Mary conceived by the hand of the Holy Spirit, it also believes that she was immaculate in her conception and does not need to take this latter belief from the book of Mohammed, known as the Koran; if the Immaculate Conception is indicated in it, this can only be even more in favour of this belief.[41]

> […] nor does Jesus Christ need that fawning respect Mohammed professed towards him and even less does it matter to Christians that Muslims venerated Jerusalem.[42]

---

[36] GIBBON, *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*, XI, 286.
[37] ROLANDO MINUTI, 'La cultura illuministica e l'Islam,' in *Alterità. Esperienze e percorsi nell'Europa moderna*, ed. Lucia Felici (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2014), 87–99.
[38] BERNARD LEWIS, 'Gibbon on Muhammad,' *Daedalus* 105 (1976), 89–101.
[39] GIBBON, *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*, X, 115.
[40] GIBBON, *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*, X, 20.
[41] GIBBON, *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*, X, 59.
[42] GIBBON, *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*, X, 212.

> The fanatism of Muslims, that made them victorious and propagators of their religion, should not be compared nor confused with the zeal that fuelled Christians to defend the Holy Sepulchre.[43]
>
> It is true that, basically, orthodox does not mean other than a man of righteous opinions; it is true that Mohammedan Arabs believed their religious opinion was such and that it was therefore, orthodox for them; however, according to our theology, the word orthodox can only be used to described Catholics and it is poorly applied to Mohammedans.[44]

However, what seemed most to irk N.N., even in a work full of errors, was precisely Gibbon's style: in other words, his widespread derision of the things sacred to Catholicism. I offer three examples, concerning very delicate arguments which are, respectively, the thesis of the Council of Chalcedon, the dogma-mystery of Transubstantiation and the miracles attributed to the Holy Sepulchre.

> Extremely serious and respectable matters should never be treated with rhetorical figures that enclose a trick; we must handle them with theological reason.[45]
>
> Instead of curiosity (it being Transubstantiation) it should have been called a serious consideration of the theologians, still with the aim of explaining the mysterious extracts of the Gospel, to remove the apparent objections, that could present themselves and to show believers the reasons for credibility, in order to hold firm the faith.[46]
>
> Since Jesus Christ, who performed many miracles as we know from the Gospels, could operate this too, the expression *pious fraud* should not have been used.[47]

Despite tackling the causes of the terrible decline of Rome and presenting a vindication of Italian secular humanism, including Lorenzo Valla, which N.N. would certainly not have liked, the final chapters of *Decline and Fall* did not contain a single note.

As mentioned, there were 150 notes in five volumes. The style had changed considerably compared to both Spedalieri and the sender of the three letters: it was much simpler and more direct and tending, in a word, towards the 'popular' rather than the erudite. Undoubtedly, the Milan edition of Gibbon offered a precious essay on the behaviour of Lombard-Veneto theologian-censors in the early Restoration and their ability to mediate between authority and imposed modernity, a skill that recent studies have proven was possessed by some censors of the other 'directly' Habsburgian state of the Italian peninsula, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany.[48]

The most radical readers could enjoy Gibbon in the original language or in French. Soon after, around the mid-1830s, translations would literally explode onto

---

[43] GIBBON, *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*, X, 213.
[44] GIBBON, *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*, X, 247.
[45] GIBBON, *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*, IX, 65.
[46] GIBBON, *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*, IX, 253.
[47] GIBBON, *Istoria della decadenza e rovina dell'Impero romano*, XII, 259.
[48] DOMENICO MARIA BRUNI, *Con regolata indifferenza, con attenzione costante. Potere politico e parola stampata nel Granducato di Toscana (1814-1847)* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2015).

the Milanese literary scene, which still heavily favoured novels and theatre or science, technology or medicine rather than modern historiography. Even on the eve of 1848, the Milanese, who were the most fortunate Italian readers, could still only choose from very few truly interesting historical titles and many of these came, paradoxically, from one of the new enemies of the liberal-national movement.

Bettoni's version would remain the only complete Italian version of *Decline and Fall* for the whole of the nineteenth century. Readers in the Reign of Italy could ignore the appendices and the notes by N.N., as undoubtedly many readers had done in the 1820s and 30s. Certainly, until 1861, the translated one was an exclusively Lombard-Veneto or perhaps Tuscan Gibbon.[49] As for Davide Bertolotti, although he translated a great deal from English and French, he never enjoyed a good reputation amongst critics in northern Italy; they even accused him of furtively translating Anglo-Saxon works from the available French versions. As I have suggested, this is probably what happened with Gibbon too.

In conclusion, neither on the strictly specialist level nor in the histories of Lombard publishing, and even less so in liberal-national commemorations, would the Gibbon-Bettoni operation or even the entire 'Biblioteca storica di tutte le nazioni' collection enjoy public recognition. Although the merits of the series are undeniable, to this day this Bettoni's operation should be examined as part of the history of translations in Italy. It was the Gibbon venture that made the works of the 'Scottish school' and then liberal French Romanticism acceptable at a time when, almost year on year, Milan was publishing the masterpieces of Chateaubriand and the apologetic and devotional works most cherished by the Jesuits, whilst in Venice, little was translated at all, and in nearby Turin, under Carlo Felice, the 'champion' of translations was an ultra-Catholic publisher – Giacinto Marietti.

Conclusions

In the last decade, in Italian historiography there has been tangible interest in the practices and strategies of the translation of foreign works. Still indebted to translation studies, these debates have tackled the specific problems of translating historiographical language and the mediation of historical knowledge and research with regard to the international standards of the discipline.[50] The useful poly-system category used by the earlier translation studies obliges us to also consider translated works as elements of national production, in literature, and both the human and social sciences.

The analysis carried out in this article considers an extremely well-known work. Its introduction to Italy took place in three stages, the latter of which has been studied

[49] A partial forgery appeared a decade later for Tipografia Lao in Palermo. Later still, in 1841, a version also appeared by a publishing house based in Lugano.

[50] See, for example, the forums: 'Storiografie a confronto: linguaggi e concetti nelle traduzioni,' *Storicamente* 11 (2015); 'Racconto, interpretazione, immaginazione. Tradurre la saggistica storica,' *Tradurre* 20 (2021).

here The early Restoration was a difficult period for politics and culture, but nevertheless seminal to the formation of historiographic science and practice, not only in Italy, but throughout Europe. In Gibbon's *Decline and Fal,l* we also saw the national histories of Hume, Robertson and leading French authors (re)enter the Italian peninsula in the age of Romanticism. With the practice of linguistic transfer, a scandalous masterpiece could finally creep into the folds of the common 'historical sense' that was taking hold along with national sentiment and that was the primary cause of the censors' alarm, and zeal.

Bettoni and his theologian cohorts implemented a complex strategy of incorporating and including hybrid materials and interventions, without, however, ever touching on the specifics of faithful linguistic yield. It was the same strategy implemented for other controversial modern works although, sometimes – as in the case of Stefano Ticozzi, who tackled Sismondi[51] – the translators themselves were the first to intervene on the notes too. We know, from the studies that emerged on Ticozzi, who was also from Milan, that the Lombard censors usually did not tackle lengthy works consisting of many volumes, considering them to be a luxury destined to few purchasers and more often than not, rarely read in their entirety. Yet, Nicolò Bettoni initially concentrated on multi-volume works. There were no other editions of Gibbon – as there were no further editions of Robertson, Hume or von Müller or much later, of *Cours* by François Guizot – therefore, we need to assess the level of popularization achieved by the efforts of the Pisan translator and Davide Bertolotti.

The nineteenth-century Italian edition of *Decline and Fall* has proven to be suited to highlighting all the apparent paradoxes invariably linked to the work of cultural mediation in such a closed historical-political context as the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia in 1820–24. A scandalous, inaccurate, misleading and morally harmful text was allowed to get through in full respect of its spirit, or rather in the detailed precision of every single affirmation, whilst a significant number of materials and notes were entrusted with contradicting many of these points. Sometimes taken from the first books of the British edition, sometimes from the French version, nobody doubted that the translation should keep faith with the original. Even in the twentieth century, other phases in the history of books in Italy would trace fairly different outlines of the role of the translator, who not infrequently would be asked to betray, distort, cut and rewrite the original texts. This was not the case in the Milan of the Habsburgs and, from existing studies, we can presume that often this was not the case in the divided Italy of the age of the Risorgimento either.

Although certainly a minority compared to novels, opera librettos or other types of theatre pieces, and often even less common than technical-scientific works too, at least the prominent cases of translations of modern historiographical works in Italy prior to 1848 deserve to be analysed. The analysis should take account of the existence

[51] MARIA IOLANDA PALAZZOLO, 'La censura e la Storia delle Repubbliche di Sismondi,' in *Sismondi e la civiltà toscana*, ed. Francesca Sofia (Florence: Olschki, 2001), 199–212.

of a North-South divide (as well as internal divisions in both the North and South), in order to reconstruct the historical culture of Italians in the 'century of history' more accurately and enthusiastically, but also in order to reconstruct the exotic elements that helped make up the common collective historical imagination of the era. Taking into account the time delays, it is possible to appreciate in greater detail how the eighteenth century and Enlightenment continued to circulate during the golden years of the Romantics.

Returning, in conclusion, to Lefevere and Bassnett, and translation studies, we should remember that every operation in the field of cultural mediation, as indeed every other cultural operation, must take into account many variables including, in the first instance, the various *patrons*. Here, we saw half-hearted Tuscan Illuminists, modern turncoat entrepreneurs of the early Restoration, a controversial translator, commentators and champions of Tridentine orthodoxy, and zealous theologian-censor-annotators at work. As well as the great historians, we also need to take these players into account every time we tackle issues surrounding the circulation and transfer of national historiographies in the contemporary world.

The Marzocco and the Shir o Khorshid:[*] *The Origin and Decline of Medici Persian Diplomacy (1599–1721)*

DAVIDE TRENTACOSTE
University of Teramo - Université Sorbonne Nouvelle-Paris 3

Introduction

The Mediterranean and Levantine vicissitudes of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany have, in recent years, attracted increased interest from scholars of the Early Modern period, particularly in the light of historiographical trends that place their focus on connected histories and global history. Although given its regional dimension the history of Tuscany can in actual fact be approached (at least in some respects) with a micro-historical lens, it should always be borne in mind that the extremely active policy conducted by the Grand Dukes, at least in the first 20 years of the seventeenth century, is a *unicum* in the Italian scenario of the time. The Grand Duchy of Tuscany was indeed the only one of the pre-unitary states of the peninsula to adopt a global foreign policy on a par with that of major states such as, for instance, England or Spain. This means that the Grand Dukes were the only sovereigns of a pre-unitary state to seek to enter the nascent global trade circuits (dominated by the Iberian countries and later by the English and Dutch), to try to establish colonies in the Americas and Africa, and to establish and maintain relations with distant states, such as Persia, not only for the sake of prestige.[1]

[*] Although generally associated with the lily, one of the most meaningful symbols of the city of Florence was the Marzocco lion, whose best-known image is undoubtedly Donatello's sculpture of a mighty lion with one paw resting on a lily shield. Born in the Republican era, and maintained during the Grand Duchy period, it symbolised the power and independence of Florence, and was such an important symbol of Florentine identity that for the duration of the Medici rule, the Grand Dukes kept a seraglio with lions near Palazzo Vecchio. The Shir o Khorshid is the Persian symbol of the lion and the sun which was used in Persia from the time of the Achaemenid Empire. It was revived under the Safavid dynasty and used as an emblem on banners, armour and even on coins.

[1] For an overview of the 'global' opening of Tuscany in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, see GUSTAVO UZIELLI, *Cenni storici sulle imprese scientifiche, marittime e coloniali di Ferdinando I Granduca di Toscana (1587–1609)* (Florence: G. Spinelli, 1901); GIUSEPPE MARCOCCI, 'L'Italia nella prima età globale (ca. 1300–1700),' *Storica* 60 (2014): 7–50, see 33–36; BRIAN BREGE, *The Empire That Wasn't: The Grand Duchy of Tuscany and Empire, 1574–1609* (PhD dissertation, Stanford University, 2014); BREGE, 'Renaissance Florentines in the Tropics: Brazil, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany and the Limits of Empire,' in *The New World in Early Modern Italy, 1492–1750*, eds Elizabeth Orodowich and Lia Markey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 206–22; BREGE, *Tuscany in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021); NICHOLAS SCOTT BAKER and BRIAN JEFFREY MAXSON, eds, *Florence in the Early Modern World* (London: Routledge, 2019); FRANCESCO FREDDOLINI and MARCO MUSILLO, eds, *Art, Mobility, and Exchanges in Early Modern Tuscany and Eurasia* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

Cromohs (Cyber Review of Modern Historiography), ISSN 1123-7023, 24/2021

DOI: 10.36253/cromohs-12905

There is no need to list all the attempts that Tuscany made to go beyond the bounds of the Mediterranean frontiers (such as the attempt to establish colonies in America or Africa, or to create long-range relations with distant states) but it is necessary to remark that of all the roads that the Grand Dukes tried to follow, the only one that brought some concrete results was the one directed towards Persia. The 'Persian path' was taken, almost by chance, by Ferdinando I (r. 1587–1609) who came into contact with Shāh ʿAbbās I (r. 1587–1629) in the early seventeenth century, and was continued in part by his successor Cosimo II (r. 1609–21). Despite the fact that, after the deaths of Cosimo II and Shāh ʿAbbās, relations between Tuscany and Persia became rarer and more occasional, they lasted until the end of the Safavid dynasty in 1722, that is, until the reign of Cosimo III (r. 1670–1723).

Although we are generally aware, at least in broad outline, of the development of these relations during the first two decades of the seventeenth century, namely the period when Persian diplomacy towards Europe was most active, thanks to the bold and resolute Shāh ʿAbbās I, scholars have never really dealt with their beginning. The same can be said about what happened after Shāh ʿAbbās's death in 1629 and how relations between Tuscany and Persia evolved following the peace between Persia and the Ottoman Empire in 1639.[2] There are several reasons for this: first of all, the dearth of sources, which, regarding Tuscan-Persian relations, became increasingly rare in Florence precisely from the end of the reign of Shāh ʿAbbās I (a reign whose duration also included those of the two most active Grand Dukes, namely Ferdinando I and Cosimo II).[3] Secondly, because of their scarcity, the sources have been studied with a more 'Orientalist' approach by scholars more interested in the documents themselves, their cataloguing and publication. This has meant that the documents have only been analysed in the light of the events closest to them, without placing them in the wider context of Mediterranean relations between Italy, Europe and the non-European world.[4] Thirdly, relations between Tuscany and Persia have usually only been analysed as mere bilateral relations aiming to create an alliance against the Ottomans, without other aspects being taken into account.[5] Finally, it must be remembered that the history

[2] The Treaty of Zuhāb (or Qaṣr-e Shīrīn) finally ended the wars between the Ottoman Empire and Persia, at least until the fall of the Safavid dynasty.

[3] While Tuscan sources are scarce, Safavid sources are almost non-existent, and not only with regard to relations with Tuscany. On this, see in particular JEAN-LOUIS BACQUE-GRAMMONT, 'Documents safavides et archives de Turquie,' in *Etudes safavides*, ed. JEAN CALMARD (Paris: Institut Français de Recherche en Iran, 1993), 13–16; GIORGIO ROTA, 'Diplomatic Relations Between Safavid Iran and Europe,' in *The Safavid World*, ed. Rudi Matthee (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), 588–609. Many thanks to Giorgio Rota for providing me with an advance copy of his essay.

[4] I am thinking, for instance, of the large compilations and catalogues of MICHELE AMARI, *I diplomi arabi del Regio Archivio Fiorentino* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1863); ITALO PIZZI, *Catalogo dei Codici Persiani della Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1886) and ANGELO MICHELE PIEMONTESE, *Catalogo dei manoscritti persiani conservati nelle biblioteche d'Italia* (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato Libreria dello Stato, 1989).

[5] VIRGILIO PONTECORVO, 'Relazioni tra lo Scià Abbas e i Granduchi di Toscana Ferdinando I e Cosimo II,' *Atti della Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei. Rendiconti. Classe di Scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, Serie 8, no. 4 (34) (1949): 157–82; ANGELO TAMBORRA, *Gli stati italiani, l'Europa e il problema turco dopo Lepanto* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1961), 77.

of both Tuscany and Persia from the 1630s onwards has generally been considered the history of two states in slow but progressive decline, less and less able to act, and react, in a decisive and effective way and unable to maintain important long-distance connections. This reading is only partially true as historians in recent years have tended to reconsider the extent of the decline of both Tuscany and Persia, at least from an economic point of view since it was undeniable in military and political terms.[6] However, in truth, both states were able not only to maintain relations between themselves and with other states, but in some cases also managed to expand their connections.[7]

This article is not intended to show the whole evolution of relations between Medici Tuscany and Safavid Persia during the seventeenth century but rather to focus on the earlier and later parts of these relations. In this way, it will be possible to identify the moment when these relations arose, clarifying the historical context, and the moment when they ended, thus showing how long they actually lasted.

The twofold aim of this article is therefore to propose both a more precise reframing of the relations between Medici Tuscany and Safavid Persia within the Mediterranean and global framework, and a new chronology, all in the light of new archival evidence. To be clear: when I speak of a 'global context', I mean events that took place outside the Mediterranean region, of which Tuscany was part (geographically, politically, diplomatically and economically), but which could have had consequences for the foreign policy of the Grand Duchy.[8]

This analysis will also make it possible to outline new research perspectives, especially with regard to Tuscany's foreign policy and its relations with the East.

Historical background

Relations between Tuscany and Persia are traditionally traced back to the period when Pope Gregory XIII (r. 1572–85) appointed Cardinal Ferdinando de' Medici (brother

[6] Until recently, historiography tended to regard the seventeenth century as a period of crisis in all sectors. However, the Tuscan situation has been re-evaluated, particularly with regard to its economic situation, underlining how actually in seventeenth-century Tuscany there was still a fair amount of wealth and the possibility of economic expansion (perhaps, however, slightly overestimating the role of the port of Livorno). See TIM CARTER and RICHARD A. GOLDTHWAITE, *Orpheus in the Marketplace. Jacopo Peri & the Economy of Late Renaissance Florence* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 349–58. On Livorno see FRANCESCA TRIVELLATO, *The Familiarity of Strangers. The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); COREY TAZZARA, *The Free Port of Livorno and the Transformation of the Mediterranean World, 1574–1790* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). On the Safavid decline, see RUDI MATTHEE, *Persia in Crisis: Safavid Decline and the Fall of Isfahan* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012); MATTHEE, 'The Decline of Safavid Iran in Comparative Perspective,' *Journal of Persian Studies*, 8 (2015): 276–308. See also ROTA, 'Diplomatic Relations,' 598–99, in particular n. 69.

[7] This is certainly true for Persia, as Giorgio Rota rightly notes in his very recent essay. See ROTA, 'Diplomatic Relations,' 598–99.

[8] For example, the contrasts with the Ottomans in Mesopotamia or the wars against the Uzbeks in Central Asia are events that took place outside the Mediterranean context. However, they then had consequences for Tuscan foreign policy when the Shah was free of threats from the East or when he sought allies to resume hostilities against the Sultan.

of Grand Duke Francesco I and future Grand Duke) as Protector of Eastern Christians. In this role, the cardinal devoted much effort to the evangelisation of the East, also establishing a printing house, known as the *Tipografia Medicea Orientale* ('Medici Oriental Press' or 'Typographia Medicea'), which specialised in publishing Oriental works and printing Bibles and Gospels in Levantine languages (Syriac, Arabic, Persian, etc.), in addition to producing a polyglot Bible.[9]

In 1584 the Pope decided to contact the King of Ethiopia and the Shah of Persia to persuade them to enter an anti-Ottoman alliance and to do so he decided to send two diplomatic missions which were placed under the supervision of Cardinal Ferdinando. The men chosen for this duty were Giovanni Battista Britti (1550s–86?) and Giovanni Battista Vecchietti (1552–1619), both natives of Cosenza even though Vecchietti's family came from Florence.[10] While Britti went to Ethiopia, Vecchietti reached Persia and stayed at the court of Shāh Mohammad Khodābande (r. 1577–87) in Qazvin (Safavid capital from 1555 to 1598 when it was replaced by Isfahan) for about a year. Persia was engaged militarily against the Ottoman Empire and the war (which began in 1578) was not going well for the Shah: in 1586, he was forced to quickly abandon the city of Tabriz, which fell to the Ottomans along with several western provinces of Persia.[11] Giovanni Battista Vecchietti left for Europe in 1587 and arrived in Lisbon at the end of 1588 with the reply letter from the Shah, which was presented to Gregory XIII's successor, Pope Sixtus V (r. 1585–90), in 1589. During the same period the Grand Duke Ferdinando I (the Cardinal de' Medici who had taken the place of his brother, Francesco I, after his death in the autumn of 1587) became interested in the possibility of sending Tuscan military engineers to assist the Shah in his war against the Ottomans.[12] Since these men were supposed to reach Persia via the Portuguese sea routes to India, which at that time were controlled by Spain, the Grand Duke instructed his ambassador in Spain to ask the Spanish King Philip II (r. 1556–

[9] On the Medici Oriental Press, see GUGLIELMO ENRICO SALTINI, 'Della Stamperia Orienta le Medicea e di Giovan Battista Raimondi,' *Giornale storico degli Archivi Toscani*, IV (1860): 257–96; BERTA MERACCHI BIAGIARELLI, 'La Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana. Una nuova sala per l'attrezzatura della Stamperia Orientale,' *Accademie e Biblioteche d'Italia* 1–21 (1971): 83–99; ALBERTO TINTO, *La Tipografia Medicea Orientale* (Lucca: Fazi, 1987); 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* (Amsterdam: Brill, 1994), 88–106; SARA FANI and MARGHERITA FARINA, eds, *Le vie delle lettere. La Tipografia Medicea tra Roma e l'Oriente* (Florence: La Mandragora, 2012); ANGELO MICHELE PIEMONTESE, *Persica-Vaticana. Roma e Persia fra codici e testi* (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2017), 199–238.

[10] A lot has been written about Giovanni Battista Vecchietti, so here I will just cite the very recent entry by Mario Casari for the *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, whose bibliographies include the main works on the two brothers: MARIO CASARI, 'Vecchietti, Giovanni Battista,' *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (*DBI*), accessed 25 October 2021, https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovanni-battista-vecchietti_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/. On Britti, see GASPARE DE CARO, 'Britti, Giovanni Battista,' *DBI*, accessed 25 October 2021, https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovanni-battista-britti_(Dizionario-Biografico)/.

[11] On the 1578–90 war between the Ottomans and Persians, see RUDI MATTHEE, 'The Ottoman-Safavid War of 986–998/1578–1590: Motives and Causes,' *International Journal of Turkish History*, 20, 1-2 (2014): 1–20.

[12] State Archive of Florence (ASFi), *Mediceo del Principato* (*MdP*), 4920, f. 23.

98) for permission. However, the Grand Duke's proposal remained unfulfilled and after that Tuscany made no more serious projections towards Persia for several years.[13]

Although we should not ignore these first contacts between Cardinal Ferdinando de' Medici and Safavid Persia during the 1580s, we should not give them undue importance either. In fact, it was only an indirect connection for Tuscany, since it was actually a contact between Persia and the papacy: Vecchietti was an agent of Ferdinando, who at that stage was a cardinal, rather than the later Grand Duke. Indeed, Ferdinando ascended the throne during Giovanni Battista Vecchietti's return journey to Europe, namely after his mission had already been completed. Moreover, the same can be said of the accession to power of Shāh ʿAbbās, the most 'pro-European' of the Safavid rulers, who replaced his predecessor after Vecchietti had already left the Persian court and was probably in Hormuz waiting to leave Persia. This is clearly not a secondary aspect of the question since, as already mentioned, it was during the reign of Shāh ʿAbbās that relations between Persia and Europe reached their zenith. Furthermore, as far as relations with Tuscany were concerned, everything is usually reduced to the relationship between ʿAbbās and Ferdinando I, as if ascending the throne at the same time had created a sort of 'privileged relation' between the two and there had been no other relations apart from those between these two sovereigns.[14] Actually, as we shall see, there was no 'privileged relation' between Tuscany and Persia in the 1580s but only a convergence of interests that gradually led to the first 'encounter' of the two sovereigns between 1599 and 1601, and not before.[15]

Converging interests: The origin of Tuscan-Persian diplomacy (1599–1601)

The origin of direct diplomatic relations between Tuscany and Persia is to be found in the geopolitical context of the late 1590s, which saw the Tuscan Grand Duchy heavily involved in the Mediterranean area while Persia was engaged in defending its own both western and eastern borders. Indeed, before the end of the last decade of the sixteenth century, Grand Duke Ferdinando intervened in the civil war in France, supporting Henry IV (r. 1594–1610) both militarily and financially.[16] For his part, Shāh ʿAbbās had inherited such a desperate military situation from his predecessor that the only thing he could do was to try to minimise the losses: with the ongoing war against the

[13] On this issue, see BREGE, *Tuscany in the Age of Empire*, 299–301.

[14] I am referring here in particular to the article of Mahnaz Yousefzadeh which refers several times to a 'privileged relation' between Ferdinando I and Shāh ʿAbbās. See MAHNAZ YOUSEFZADEH, 'The Sea of Oman: Ferdinand I, G. B. Vecchietti, and the Armour of Shah ʿAbbās I,' *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* XC, 1–4 (2017): 51–74, see 51, 57, 59, 61, 71.

[15] Although the presence of a couple of undated letters, whose seals bear dates much earlier than 1599, suggests that there may have been contact between Ferdinando I and Shāh ʿAbbās at least ten years earlier, there is actually no concrete evidence that this took place. Mahnaz Yousefzadeh writes that Virgilio Pontecorvo dates both letters to 1590–91; YOUSEFZADEH, 'The Sea of Oman,' 61 n. 37. However, in his article Pontecorvo states very clearly that despite bearing seals with earlier dates, these two letters definitely arrived in Florence after 1601, that is, after Ferdinando I received the embassy led by Sir Anthony Sherley; PONTECORVO, 'Relazioni,' 159–63.

[16] On relations with Henry IV and Tuscan participation in the civil war in France, see FURIO DIAZ, *Il Granducato di Toscana – I Medici* (Turin: UTET, 1987), 285–87.

Ottomans and the constant Uzbek threat to the eastern provinces, he was forced to make a costly peace with the Sultan in which he officially ceded all the provinces that Persia had already lost. Peace was concluded in 1590 with the Treaty of Constantinople, after which Shāh ʿAbbās devoted himself to restoring order in the East and reorganising the state.[17] In this situation, the Shah does not seem to have been very keen on contacting any Western state, and certainly not the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, whose contribution to the Persian cause, at a time when Persia was in great crisis, would have been negligible.[18]

Something changed in 1599, however, when simultaneously the Shah began to plan a Persian 'resurgence' and the Grand Duke decided to change his strategy in the Mediterranean: the ambitions of the two sovereigns met and coincided, albeit for different reasons and, one might say, almost by chance.

Aware of the economic damage that the lack of trade with the Ottoman East represented for Tuscany, Ferdinando tried to re-establish trade relations with the Ottoman Sultan (as his predecessors had already done in the late 1570s) by sending a diplomatic mission to Constantinople in 1598. However, it failed miserably in its purpose and confirmed the Ottoman Empire's refusal to collaborate with Tuscany.[19] Officially, the main reason for the Ottoman resolution was that the Grand Duke was not inclined to stop the raids against the Ottomans by the ships of the Knights of St Stephen who, despite supposedly constituting an autonomous chivalric order, depended directly on the Grand Duke of Tuscany (the St Stephen Grand Master) and were an integral part of the Grand Duchy's maritime forces.[20] So, the Ottoman Empire could not be the commercial partner that Ferdinando had hoped for up to that moment and thus became the Grand Duke's number one enemy. This obviously does not mean that before the failure of the Grand Duchy's diplomatic mission relations between Tuscany and the Ottoman Empire had been good: in fact, the Sultan was always regarded as the greatest threat to Catholic Europe, but it was still possible to

[17] COLIN P. MITCHELL, *The Practice of Politics in Safavid Iran. Power, Religion and Rhetoric* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009), 176–82.

[18] On Shāh ʿAbbās's lack of interest in Europe in the last decade of the sixteenth century, see AURELIE CHABRIER-SALESSE, 'Les Européens à la cour de Shah 'Abbas Ier: stratégies et enjeux de l'implantation européenne pour la monarchie safavide,' *Dix-septième siècle* 1, 278 (2018): 9–24, see 14; ROTA, 'Diplomatic Relations,' 595–96.

[19] Although Tuscan merchants had various ways of trading indirectly with the Ottoman Empire, the total ban imposed by the Sultan on the presence of Tuscans in his empire was an extremely serious problem for the Tuscan economy. In fact, being able to trade with the Ottomans through foreign merchants (English and Dutch) or through other states (such as Ragusa) could in no way replace the possibility of direct access to Ottoman ports. The situation only gradually changed during the seventeenth century, particularly in the second half. On relations between the Ottoman Empire and the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, and the failure of diplomatic negotiations, see ÖZDEN MERCAN, 'Medici-Ottoman Relations (1574–1578): What Went Wrong?,' in *The Grand Ducal Medici and the Levant*, eds Marta Caroscio and Maurizio Arfaioli (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), 19–31; MERCAN, 'A Diplomacy Woven with Textiles: *Medici-Ottoman Relations During the Late Renaissance*,' *Mediterranean Historical Review* 35, 2 (2020): 169–88.

[20] On this aspect, see NICCOLÒ CAPPONI, 'Sul ponte sventola bandiera rossocrociata: L'altra faccia della marina medicea nel Levante,' in *The Grand Ducal Medici and the Levant*, eds Marta Caroscio and Maurizio Arfaioli (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), 55–64.

trade with him, as the Venetians did. However, up to this stage the anti-Ottoman military activities of the Medici Grand Duchy had been limited to piracy, both because the Grand Duke hoped to reopen trade with the Ottomans and because of his military involvement in France.

The Ottoman refusal convinced the Grand Duke that the only way to achieve what he wanted in the East (i.e., to at least succeed in undermining the Venetian monopoly in trade with the Levant) was to try by force. To do so, Ferdinando would present himself as the model of the crusading prince, committed to the front line against the infidel, thereby giving his ambitions a noble end. Thus, on 1 May 1599 the Tuscan fleet attacked the Greek island of Chios, an Ottoman possession since 1566. However, it was a somewhat different attack to usual, because instead of merely looting, the Grand Duke's forces attempted to occupy some strategic points, perhaps with the aim of conquering the island. Although the Tuscans were eventually repelled, the attack was a sort of message to the Sultan: the Grand Duke was warning him that he had gone from being a potential trading partner to his worst enemy.[21]

While Ferdinando was waging his 'permanent war' against the Ottomans in the Mediterranean Sea, Shāh ʿAbbās was beginning to plan his war of revenge against the Ottoman Empire. The peace he had to make with the Sultan in 1590 gave him the opportunity to reform the state, restore his power and repel the Uzbek threat to the East.[22] It seems that in the spring of 1599, the Shah was planning to send an ambassador to Hormuz, a Portuguese territory controlled by the Spanish, from where he would then travel to Spain with the probable aim of negotiating a military alliance against the Ottomans before starting hostilities.[23] Right at that moment, some European adventurers led by the English brothers Anthony and Robert Sherley reached the Shah in Persia.[24] Anthony Sherley managed to gain the favour of the Shah,

---

21 On the attack on the island of Chios, see PHILIP PANDEY ARGENTI, *The Expedition of the Florentines to Chios (1599): Described in Contemporary Diplomatic Reports and Military Dispatches* (London: John Lane, 1934); JACOB LEVEEN, 'An Eye-Witness Account of the Expedition of the Florentines against Chios in 1599,' *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 12, 3-4 (1948): 542–54; CESARE CIANO, *I primi Medici e il mare. Note sulla politica marinara toscana da Cosimo I a Ferdinando I* (Pisa: Pacini Editore, 1980), 94–95; MIKAIL ACIPINAR, 'Anti-Ottoman Activities of the Order of the Knights of St. Stephen During the Second Half of the 16th Century,' in *Sea Power, Technology and Trade. Studies in Turkish Maritime History*, eds Dejanirah Couto, Feza Gunergun and Maria Pia Pedani (Istanbul: Piri Reis University Publications/Denizler Kitabevi, 2014): 165–72.

22 Shāh ʿAbbās reorganised the state, the bureaucracy and the army, creating a new armed corps that allowed him to break away from the power of the military caste, which had created serious problems for his predecessors. On the administrative and military reforms see, respectively, MITCHELL, *The Practice of Politics*, 176 ff.; SUSSAN BABAIE et al., *Slaves of the Shah. New Elites of Safavid Iran* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004).

23 This information is reported by Uruch Beg, one of the four secretaries of the Persian delegation that left for Europe in July 1599 together with Anthony Sherley. See GUY LE STRANGE, ed., *Don Juan of Persia. A Shi'ah Catholic 1560–1604* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1926), 232–33.

24 There is a large and still growing bibliography on the Sherley brothers, particularly on the figure of Anthony. Here I will just mention EVELYN PHILIP SHERLEY, *The Sherley Brothers, an Historical Memoir of the Lives of Sir Thomas Sherley, Sir Anthony Sherley, and Sir Robert Sherley, Knights. By One of the Same House* (Chiswick: From the Press of Charles Whittingham, 1848); BOIES PENROSE, *The Sherleian Odyssey. Being*

who changed his mind about sending an ambassador to Spain via the Portuguese routes and decided to appoint the Englishman as his ambassador and send him to Europe through Muscovy.

So, while the Persian mission was on its way to Europe, the Grand Duke was looking for a way to strike the Ottoman Empire as hard as possible and, in so doing, achieve something concrete for himself other than military glory. In December 1599, a Syrian dragoman named Michelangelo Corai (Italianised name of Fathullah Qurray) arrived in Florence, claiming to have been sent to Europe by Shāh ʿAbbās with the task of preparing the terrain for the arrival of a wider diplomatic mission.[25] Ferdinando, who, as already mentioned, was embarking on a particularly aggressive and ambitious Mediterranean policy, immediately took an interest in the dragoman's words: the Shah had sent his ambassadors in the hope of establishing an anti-Ottoman alliance with the Catholic states; in return he offered free access to European merchants who were the subjects of his allies, religious freedom for Catholics and protection for Europeans who came to his dominions. Considering that he was already waging his own personal war against the Ottomans, the Grand Duke immediately acted and instructed his agents in Venice (where the embassy was expected to arrive soon) to secretly contact the ambassadors upon their arrival.[26]

---

a Record of the Travels and Adventures of Three Famous Brothers During the Reigns of Elizabeth, James I, and Charles I (London: Wessex Press, 1938); DAVID W. DAVIES, *Elizabethans Errant. The Strange Fortunes of Sir Thomas Sherley and His Three Sons* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967); LUIS GIL FERNÁNDEZ, *El Imperio luso-español y la Persia safavida* (Madrid: Fundacion Universitaria Espanola, 2007–9, 2 vols.), *passim*; GIL FERNÁNDEZ, *De pirata inglés a república español: vida e industrias de Antonio Sherley (1565–1633)* (Madrid: Ediciones Complutense, 2018); SANJAY SUBRAHMANYAM, *Three Ways to Be Alien. Travails and Encounters in the Early Modern World* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2011), 88–132; GIORGIO ROTA, 'Real, Fake or Megalomaniacs? Three Suspicious Ambassadors, 1450–1600,' in *Dissimulation and Deceit in Early Modern Europe*, eds Miriam Eliav-Feldon and Tamar Herzig (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 168–73; KUROSH MESHKAT, *Preserving the Memory of So Memorable an Action: Narrative, Example, and Politics in Sir Anthony Sherley's Relation of His Travels into Persia (1613)* (PhD dissertation, Queen Mary University of London, 2015); DAVIDE TRENTACOSTE, *Granducato di Toscana e Persia Safavide. Informazione, politica e diplomazia mediterranea e levantina nel XVII secolo* (PhD dissertation, Università degli Studi di Teramo/Université Sorbonne Nouvelle-Paris 3, 2021), 226–65; TRENTACOSTE, 'Information and Propaganda. A Brief Relation of Shāh ʿAbbās' Victories, by Robert Sherley,' *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* (forthcoming).

[25] Michelangelo Corai had arrived in Persia together with the Sherley brothers (with whom he had left Venice in May 1598) and like Anthony he was probably able to make himself well liked by the Shah. On Corai, see EDWARD K. FARIDANY, 'Signal Defeat: the Portuguese Loss of Comorao in 1614 and its Political and Commercial Consequences,' in *Portugal, the Persian Gulf and Safavid Persia*, ed. Rudi Matthee and Jorge Flores (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 119–41 (125, 127–29, 131); 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 Communicating Power from the Middle Ages to the Modern Era*, eds Dario Tessicini and Federico M. Federici (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 81–104. For archival documents concerning the arrival of Michelangelo Corai in Florence, see ASFi, *MdP*, 4275, ff. 3–5. On Corai as Tuscan ambassador in Syria, see BRIAN BREGE, 'Making a New Prince: Tuscany, the Pasha of Aleppo, and the Dream of a New Levant,' in Freddolini and Musillo, *Art, Mobility, and Exchanges*, 19–32.

[26] On the wait in Tuscany for the Persian embassy, see DAVIDE TRENTACOSTE, 'Incontri "quasi" casuali: l'ambasciata persiana a Firenze nel 1601,' in *Attraverso la Storia. Nuove ricerche sull'età moderna in Italia*, ed. Egidio Ivetic (Naples: Editoriale Scientifica, 2020), 475–87.

One of the things Corai told Ferdinando was that his name was well known in Persia, and this was probably due to the mission Vecchietti had carried out at the time of his cardinalate.[27] This should not make us think that Ferdinando was a name familiar to the Shah since, as already mentioned, Giovanni Battista Vecchietti dealt with Shāh Mohammad Khodābande and left before Shāh ʿAbbās took power. Instead, it means that there was a memory in Persia of the diplomatic missions sent from Rome more than a decade earlier and nothing more. Moreover, considering that Corai later entered the service of the Grand Duke, we can imagine that when he arrived in Florence he 'embellished' the truth to win Ferdinando's sympathy.

The Persian ambassadors arrived in Florence in March 1601 and, after two weeks of negotiations, proceeded to Rome to deal with the Pope. Ferdinando gladly accepted the Shah's offers and expressed his willingness to continue the war against the Ottomans and to work to ensure that the other Catholic States also participated.[28] It is necessary to dwell on this point briefly in order to better analyse the diplomatic context: Shāh ʿAbbās was not yet at war with the Ottoman Empire (he would declare war in September 1603), but it is clear that he was preparing to break the peace made in 1590. Although Persia under his leadership had entered a period of modernisation, a century of virtually uninterrupted wars against the Ottomans had taught the Shah that the Ottomans were generally stronger and had more means than the Persians (or at least a better military capacity). As a result, the Shah was prepared to offer a great deal in return for Catholic participation in the war, so that it might relieve Ottoman pressure in the East. From the Grand Duke's point of view, Persia was offering a lot in compensation for something which he was already doing (waging war against the Ottomans) and which he would have done even without Persian friendship. Ferdinando, therefore, could only gain from good relations with Persia: diplomatically, since the alliance with the Shah would sanction the importance of his role in the Mediterranean; economically, because if Persia defeated the Ottomans then he could succeed in carving out his own space in the Levant, which would allow him direct access to trade from the East; politically, since any success in the Levant and the Mediterranean would certainly strengthen the Grand Duke's position within his state, in Italy and in Europe.[29] And if the war was disastrous for the Shah and he was defeated

[27] ASFi, *MdP*, 4275, f. 3.

[28] Although there are currently no specific studies on the negotiations between Ferdinando I and the Persian ambassadors, the following works can be cited on the permanence of the latter in Tuscany: Le Strange, *Don Juan of Persia*, 281–83; FRANZ BABINGER, *Sherleiana* (Berlin: Gedruckt in Reichsdruckerei, 1932), 24–26; PENROSE, *The Sherleian Odyssey*, 104–5; DAVIES, *Elizabethans Errant*, 132; GIL FERNÁNDEZ, *El Imperio luso-español*, I, 115; GIORGIO ROTA, 'Real, Fake or Megalomaniacs?,' 165–83. Several copies of the report of the Tuscan Chancellery on the reception of the Persian delegation are kept in the State Archives of Florence: ASFi, *Guardaroba Medicea, Diari di Etichetta*, 1, f. 127; 2, ff. 121–22; 3, ff. 163–64; *Manoscritti*, 131, 'Diario Fiorentino, VI,' ff. 237–38. Extracts from this report have been published in Babinger, *Sherleiana*, 24–26; ANNA MARIA CRINÒ, *Fatti e figure del Seicento Anglo-Toscano* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1957), 12–13.

[29] Just to give one particularly significant example, the conquest of Cyprus would have brought the Grand Duke not only the possession of a strategic territory in the Levant, but also the title of King of the island (since it was a kingdom) and this would have consequently raised his rank from 'grand ducal' to 'royal.'

by the Sultan, then the situation for the Grand Duchy of Tuscany would be the same as before the alliance.

It is no coincidence that in the months immediately following the embassy of March 1601, the Grand Duke and the Pope began to seriously consider the idea of undertaking military action, perhaps together with the Knights of Malta (and anyone else who wished to participate), against the Ottoman territories: in particular, they harboured the idea of attempting to conquer some Greek islands (Cyprus *in primis*, but also Rhodes or some smaller islands) in order to make them a base for further enterprises.[30] Probably, the belief that he had a powerful ally like Persia behind him made the Grand Duke more audacious in the Levant: the activity of his fleet increased considerably and when the Ottoman Empire was struck by numerous revolts during the first decade of the seventeenth century, the Grand Duke immediately tried to take advantage of the situation by supporting some rebellious pashas and emirs who were supposed to repay his help with commercial privileges and exclusive access for Tuscans to certain ports.[31] In this context, Persia remained an essential element for the success of the Tuscan plans. In 1606, Ferdinando sent one of his agents to Syria to personally assess whether there was a real possibility that the Pasha of Aleppo might be victorious in his confrontation with the Ottomans and that it was therefore worthwhile to help him. When the agent returned to Florence, he produced a report which very clearly stated that without the support of a Christian prince (i.e., the Grand Duke) and above all the King of Persia, there was no hope that the Pasha's revolt would succeed.[32] In the summer of the following year, 1607, encouraged by the military successes that Shāh ʿAbbās was achieving against the Ottomans, Ferdinando attempted the conquest of

[30] ASFi, *Mdp*, 3317, ff. 464–65.

[31] The scholar William Griswold even raises the possibility that Ferdinand I supported the rebellion of ʿAli Jānbulād with the aim of creating a puppet state of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany in Syria. Although fascinating, this possibility is somewhat exaggerated, both in view of actual Tuscan capabilities and recent studies, notably those by Brian Brege. See WILLIAM GRISWOLD, *The Great Anatolian Rebellion, 1000–1020/1591*–1611 (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1983), 84–85; BREGE, *Tuscany in the Age of Empire*, 247–51. On the anti-Ottoman revolts in the first decade of the seventeenth century, see Griswold, *The Great Anatolian Rebellion*; KAREN BARKEY, *Bandits and Bureaucrats. The Ottoman Route to State Centralization* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), *passim*; SURAIYA N. FAROQHI, ed., *The Cambridge History of Turkey. Volume 3. The Later Ottoman Empire, 1603–1839* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 91, 191–92; SAM WHITE, *The Climate of Rebellion in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 163–86; OKTAY ÖZEL, 'The Reign of Violence: The Celalis c. 1550–1700,' in *The Ottoman World*, ed. Christine Woodhead (London: Routledge, 2011), 184–202.

[32] '... la Soria non si può reggere, né stabilire meglio; che col mezzo delli aiuti del Re di Persia essendo convicino, con numeroso esercito di sua sudditi, et disciplinati soldati; la quale potenzia è sommaria in tali parti à quella del Gran Turcho: sì che con tale mezzo si manterria tali ribelli con potente rigore; al Gran Turcho sarà difficile di ricuperare la Soria per havere a condurre una unita forza competente, o maggiore cominciando a raquistare il perso, dove è necessario che ci sia intervallo di tempo con molto suo disavantaggio per havere a raquistare il tutto, con la lontananza in che si trova; accompangnato dalle molte necessità che à di dovere militare in molte partj.' See ASFi, *MdP*, 4275, ff. 14–15. These considerations have been erroneously attributed to Michelangelo Corai by Federico Federici, whereas they should be more correctly attributed to Giovanni Altoni, a military engineer and Tuscan captain who carried out the mission to Syria by order of the Grand Duke. The documentation relating to his mission, and showing that the report was written by him, is as follows: ASFi, *MdP*, 4275, ff. 11–13 (and ff. 14–15). Federici's point can be found in FEDERICI, 'A Servant of Two Masters,' 93–94.

Cyprus (which failed for a variety of reasons related to Venetian hostility to Tuscan ambitions).[33] Then, in the autumn he established a military alliance with the Pasha of Aleppo, ʿAli Jānbulād, and instructed his ambassador (who incidentally was the dragoman Michelangelo Corai) to endeavour to put the Pasha in touch with the Shah so as to coordinate their actions.[34] Unfortunately for the Grand Duke, less than a month after the alliance was signed, the Pasha of Aleppo was defeated by the Ottomans and forced to flee (maybe to Persia). In this situation, the dragoman Michelangelo Corai thought that instead of returning to Tuscany he would serve the Grand Duke better by going to Persia to attempt to convince the Shah to support the Pasha of Aleppo militarily.[35] Corai then went to Persia where he remained until about 1612/1613, when he was forced to flee because of the growing tension with Shāh ʿAbbās.[36] However, during his time at the Safavid court he did much to keep relations between Tuscany and Persia alive, although the Grand Dukes (first Ferdinando and then Cosimo II) never really appreciated the dragoman's free decision-making and the fact that he had presented himself in Persia as the official Tuscan ambassador when this role had never really been formalised (this is clear from a copy of a letter addressed to him in 1612 by the Secretary of State, Curzio Picchena, in which Corai was literally 'dismissed' by the grand ducal government).[37]

It is therefore in this context that we can find the actual moment when the Grand Duchy of Tuscany's Persian diplomacy began.

This sort of pro-Persian Mediterranean policy was also pursued by Ferdinando I's successor, Cosimo II, although with less determination. He likewise received a Persian embassy in 1609, this time led by Robert Sherley, Anthony's younger brother, thus confirming the good relations existing between the Grand Duke and Persia.[38] This

[33] On the Tuscan raid on Cyprus, see MARIOS HADJANASTASIS, 'Corsair Tactics and Lofty Ideals: the 1607 Tuscan Raid on Cyprus,' in *City of Empires: Ottoman and British Famagusta*, ed. Michael J. K. Walsh (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 22–36; MIKAIL ACIPINAR, 'Ferdinand I's Eastern Mediterranean Policy and the 1607 Attack of the Tuscan Navy on Famagusta,' *Tarih İncelemeleri Dergisi*, XXX / 2 (2015): 357–84; DAVIDE TRENTACOSTE, 'Grand Ducal Ambitions and Venetian Counter-intelligence. The Tuscan Failure in the 1607 Attack on Cyprus,' *Revista Historia Autonoma* 18 (2021): 59–74.

[34] ASFi, *MdP*, 4275, ff. 51–52. There is also a draft of a passport to allow Michelangelo Corai to travel to Persia should the need have arisen: ASFi, *MdP*, 4275, f. 57.

[35] On his flight to Persia, see BREGE, *Tuscany in the Age of Empire*, 288–91; TRENTACOSTE, *Granducato di Toscana e Persia Safavide*, 270–86.

[36] On his flight, see FARIDANY, 'Signal Defeat,' 127–29; TRENTACOSTE, *Granducato di Toscana e Persia Safavide*, 284–85.

[37] '… l'andare in Persia senza ordine ò commessione fu errore non piccolo. Et se pure ella ci voleva andare per suo particolare commodo, non doveva spacciare il nome del Gran Duca, né presentare al Re la sua lettera, la quale non era scritta se non con intenzione e fine diverso, et il Gran Duca allora l'hebbe molto per male [...]. Vostra Signoria sa che non ha in questa corte il più vero né il più costante amico di me, e può credere ancora che io non habbia mancato di fare ogni buono officio per lei; ma in effetto la materia era troppo repugnante; sì che la prego à scusarmi, e dal Signore Iddio le desidero ogni prosperità.' ASFi, *MdP*, 4275, f. 308.

[38] Robert Sherley arrived in Florence in August 1609 and stayed with Cosimo II for almost a month during which the negotiations were largely conducted by the secretaries of state Belisario Vinta and

depiction of the Grand Dukes as great friends of the Shah remained stable throughout the century, even as the Grand Duchy (like much of Mediterranean Europe) entered into a general decline that gradually led it to become less and less important. In this context, Tuscany's attention to the East also gradually dwindled. What is more, in the decades following Robert Sherley's embassy, interest in Persia also decreased until, in 1639, Persia and the Ottoman Empire established lasting peace with the Treaty of Zuhāb. This put an end to the role that Persia had until then played as a potential ally of Catholic Europe (and therefore of Tuscany) against the Ottomans, but it did not put an end to relations with Europe, which continued for commercial reasons in particular and for reasons related to the presence of Catholics in the East.[39]

At least from a diplomatic point of view, the Grand Dukes still had some credit to spend at the Persian court: a credit built up during the reigns of Ferdinando I and Cosimo II.[40] Indeed, as we shall see, almost every time some Catholic state needed to contact the Shah, it did so by requesting a letter of credence from the Grand Duke as well: I am thinking, for instance, of the different missions sent by Venice during the war of Candia (1645–69) and the war of Morea (1684–99) to ask for support from Persia.[41]

Between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: A new chronology for Tuscan-Safavid relations

I concluded the previous section, devoted entirely to the origin of diplomatic relations between Tuscany and Persia, with a brief overview on how the two states continued to interact in one way or another in the decades following the Sherley brothers' embassies, without going into detail. This is essentially for two reasons: first, because after 1610 and until at least the years of the Candian War relations between the two states were negligible. Secondly, because, as specified in the introduction, the aim of the article is not to deal with relations between Tuscany and Persia throughout the seventeenth century but to focus specifically on the beginning and the end. This part is, therefore, devoted to the analysis of the last decades of the seventeenth century and

Curzio Picchena, assisted by Giovanni Battista Vecchietti. The various meetings between the Persian ambassador and the grand ducal government were mainly to confirm the friendship between the two states and, on the Tuscan side, to reiterate the engagement of the grand ducal fleet against the Ottomans and Cosimo's efforts to form an anti-Turkish alliance with the other Catholic states and the Pope. Since there are no specific studies on Robert Sherley's embassy to Florence in 1609, I refer to TRENTACOSTE, *Granducato di Toscana e Persia Safavide*, 258–65.

[39] Giorgio Rota states that, apart from the missions concerning Catholic matters in Persia, the last Safavid Shāhs were able to establish and maintain a wide network of international relations. See ROTA, 'Diplomatic Relations,' 598–99.

[40] For instance, Michelangelo Corai, who remained at Shāh ʿAbbās's court for a few years (1608–13), wrote more than once of the Shah's great interest in Tuscan anti-Ottoman naval operations and his frequent statements that the Grand Duke of Tuscany alone did more against the Ottomans than all the other Catholic powers together. See ASFi, *MdP*, 4275, ff. 248, 250.

[41] Some examples of these joint missions are given in GIORGIO ROTA, 'Diplomatic Relations between Safavid Persia and the Republic of Venice. An Overview,' in *The Turks* 2, eds Hasan Celal Güzel, C. Cem Oğuz and Osman Karatay (Ankara, 2002): 580–87, see 582, 583.

the first two of the next, showing the nature of the relations and especially how long they lasted, thus proposing a new chronology for the diplomatic ties.

A reliable chronology has probably never been proposed for the diplomatic relations between Medici Tuscany and Safavid Persia: indeed, while their origin can generally be traced back to the time of Giovanni Battista Vecchietti's mission, no precise moment has ever been identified for their end. Some letters dating back to the 1660s concerning the situation of Catholic missionaries in Nakhchivan could be considered the last exchange of correspondence between the two courts. These documents are also mentioned in the essay by Virgilio Pontecorvo (1949), who was mainly concerned with the publication and translation of the Persian letters of the time of Shāh ʿAbbās. Nevertheless, he points out in the concluding part of his essay that in addition to these letters there was at least one other, dating from the end of the reign of Ferdinando II (r. 1621–70) and relating to the Dominicans in Armenia.[42] These can also be found in the catalogue of Persian manuscripts compiled by Angelo Michele Piemontese in 1989.[43] However, new documents now make it possible to extend by a few decades the period during which the Medici Grand Dukes maintained correspondence with the Safavid Shahs.

Assuming that real official relations between Tuscany and Persia began at the end of 1599 with the arrival in Florence of Michelangelo Corai (although we could move this moment to the arrival of Anthony Sherley's embassy in 1601), we can now focus on the latter part of the seventeenth century and the first two decades of the eighteenth.

As already mentioned, starting from the period following the deaths of Cosimo II (d. 1621) and Shāh ʿAbbās I (d. 1629), relations between the two courts became less intense, or at least so it would seem from the available documentation. With the help of material in other archives (some of which was published in the second half of the nineteenth century) it is possible, even in the absence of Tuscan documentation, to trace some of the Grand Duchy's relations with Persia after 1639 (the 1630s are very poorly documented from a diplomatic point of view). This is precisely the case of some missions sent jointly during the Candian War which I have already mentioned. The first one left Venice immediately after the outbreak of the war and was entrusted to a certain Domenico De Santis, who carried letters from the Pope, the King of Poland, the Republic of Venice, the Emperor and the Grand Duke of Tuscany.[44] Unfortunately, at least apparently, no traces of this mission are left in the records of

42 PONTECORVO, 'Relazioni,' 174.
43 PIEMONTESE, *Catalogo dei manoscritti*, 129.
44 GUGLIEMO BERCHET, *La Repubblica di Venezia e la Persia* (Turin: Tipografia G. B. Paravia, 1865), 215, doc. XLVI. See also ROTA, 'Diplomatic Relations between Safavid Persia and the Republic of Venice,' 583–84; GIORGIO ROTA, 'Safavid Persia and Its Diplomatic Relations with Venice,' in *Iran and the World in the Safavid Age*, eds Willem Floor and Edmund Herzig (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012), 149–60, see 151, 155–56.

the Florence State Archives,[45] and De Santis himself is ambiguous about it: while in a letter he sent to the Venetian Senate he wrote that he also had a letter from the Grand Duke with him, when he found himself journeying to Persia with the well-known traveller Jean Baptiste Tavernier and the Capuchin father Raphaël du Mans, he did not mention the Tuscan letter, but instead listed the names of the other senders.[46]

About 20 years later, another mission was sent, this time apparently on the initiative of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, who had also advocated the appointment of the envoy, the Dominican father Antonio Tani, as Vicar of the East.[47] While there are not many traces left of this diplomatic mission, unlike the case of De Santis, something has remained. The State Archive of Florence has a copy of a credential letter produced by the Venetian Senate for the envoy Tani, who appears to have been a Tuscan and papal envoy:[48] in fact, the mission did not only concern the Candian War (which was still going on) but, above all, some religious issues related to the Catholic missions in Nakhchivan. The envoy was very well received, in 1665, by Shāh ʿAbbās II (r. 1642–66), as can be seen from the report in the National Central Library of Florence.[49] Most of the report concerns the reception of Tani and his companions in Isfahan and specifies that although the Shah had been asked for a private audience, he instead decided to welcome the European delegation with the most possible pomp.[50] In this regard, Tani writes that the Shah expressed to him his much greater appreciation of the European delegation, composed of a few people with a few gifts, to that of the ambassador of the Mughal Emperor, also present in Isfahan at that time, who had instead arrived with an enormous entourage and rich gifts.[51] This leads one to think that the pompous welcome reserved by the Shah for the Europeans was almost a way of humiliating the ambassador from India, with which Persia, at that time, was in dispute over certain Afghan cities. Concerning the subjects to be negotiated, Tani wrote that, in his opinion, the Shah would certainly accept the demands concerning

45 A report by Domenico De Santi is kept in the State Archives of Venice: ASVe, *Collegio*, Relazioni, 25, fasc. Q, n. 1, f. 4a.

46 JEAN-BAPTISTE TAVERNIER, *Les six voyages de Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, ... : qu'il a fait en Turquie, en Perse, et aux Indes...* (Paris: Clouzier-Barbin, 1676, 2 vols.), I, 181.

47 BERCHET, *La Repubblica*, 55, 243 (doc. LXII); Rota, 'Diplomatic Relations between Safavid Persia and the Republic of Venice,' 583–84.

48 On Tani's mission, see ROTA, 'Diplomatic Relations between Safavid Persia and the Republic of Venice,' 583 (where Tani is mistakenly referred to as 'Tassi'); ROTA, 'Safavid Persia,' 151, 155–56. Some mention of Tani, as Antonino Tani, can also be found in CHRISTIAN WINDLER, *Missionare in Persien. Kulturelle Diversität und Normenkonkurrenz im globalen Katholizismus (17.–18. Jahrhundert)* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2018), 165–66, 217. For the letter produced by the Venetian Senate, see ASFi, *MdP*, 3032, f. 828. Documentation relating to Antonio Tani's mission is kept in the Propaganda Fide Archives (Archivio de Propaganda Fide, *SOCG*, 443). There is also a text written in Latin by Tani himself, and printed twice in Rome and Florence, which unfortunately I was not able to see. It should contain some news about the situation in Persia and what Tani did during his mission. See ANTONIO TANI, *Brevis narratio eorum, quae gesta sunt in Persia a R.P.F. Antonino Tani magistro domicano ex provincia Romana post secundum ex Persia in Italiam regressum, summo pontifici bonae memoriae Clementi XI oblata, Latine ex italico sermone translata, ad commodiorem usum RR.A.PP. in comitis generalibus congregatorum* (Rome: 1670, repr. Florence: 1672, sub signo Stellae).

49 Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze (BNCF), *Panciatichiano*, 219, ff. 139–53.

50 BNCF, *Panciatichiano*, 219, f. 143.

51 BNCF, *Panciatichiano*, 219, ff. 152–53.

the Catholic missions, but that he would definitely refuse to join the war against the Ottomans.[52]

From this time onwards, Tuscan diplomacy towards Persia was increasingly linked to issues related to the protection and recommendation of Catholic missionaries, as suggested by the copies of Italian translations of some Persian letters addressed from the Shah to Pope Clement IX (r.1667–69) held in Florence.[53] These letters were probably brought to Rome in 1673 by some Dominican friars and received by Clement X (r. 1670–76).[54] Together with the letters to the Pope, the friars also brought a reply from the Shah to a letter sent earlier by Grand Duke Ferdinando II (which has not yet been found). The Grand Duke had died in 1670 and was succeeded by his son Cosimo III (r. 1670–1723), who immediately prepared a very courteous reply for the Shah confirming Tuscany's friendship with Persia.[55]

Cosimo III was very active diplomatically towards Persia and maintained fairly regular correspondence with the last Safavid Shahs. While little is known of this aspect of his foreign policy, his great interest in the East and the world, more generally, is well documented.[56] However, unlike his predecessors, the complicated domestic and international situation he inherited in Tuscany meant that he was unable to achieve much concrete action, unlike Ferdinando I, Cosimo II and, to a certain extent, Ferdinando II. Nevertheless, this did not prevent him from being very active in relations with the East, presenting himself as one of the protectors of Eastern Christians and imagining great military and commercial ventures with Persia.[57]

Still in the 1680s, the Grand Duke had two other letters prepared for the Shah: one thanking him for the protection granted to all foreigners and Christians who travelled to and settled in Persia,[58] and another referring to the envoy of the Dominican *magistro* Guglielmo Felle to Persia to negotiate stronger protection for the Christians

52 BNCF, *Panciatichiano*, 219, f. 152.
53 ASFi, *Mdp*, 4274a, ins. VI, ff. 298–99, 299v–300, 300v–301v; *Miscellanea Medicea*, 326, ins. 91, ff. 1–2, 2v3, 4–5; *Carte Strozziane*, I, 239, ff. 63–67.
54 See ANGELO MICHELE PIEMONTESE, 'La corrispondenza epistolare tra i papi e i re di Persia (1263–1936),' in *Incorrupta Monumenta Ecclesiam Defendunt. Studi offerti a mons. Sergio Pagano, prefetto dell'Archivio Segreto Vaticano. III, Inquisizione romana, Indice, Diplomazia pontificia*, eds Andreas Gottsmann, Pierantonio Piatti and Andreas E. Rehberg (Vatican City: Archivio Segreto Vaticano, 2018), 455–74 (458–59, n. 17).
55 ASFi, *MdP*, 1027, ff. 838.
56 For a brief overview of Cosimo III's interest in the Orient (and the 'exotic'), see LORENZO MAGALOTTI, *Scritti di corte e di mondo, a cura di Enrico Falqui* (Rome: Colombo Editore, 1945), 225–28; Carla Sodini, *I Medici e le Indie orientali. Il diario di viaggio di Placido Ramponi emissario in India per conto di Cosimo III* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1996); FRANCESCO MORENA, 'Cosimo III de' Medici e Pietro il Grande, una passione comune: l'Oriente,' in *The Grand Ducal Medici and the Levant*, ed. Marta Caroscio and Maurizio Arfaioli (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), 137–47; ANGELO CATTANEO and SABRINA CORBELLINI, *The Global Eye: Dutch, Spanish and Portuguese Maps in the Collection of the Grand Duke Cosimo III de' Medici* (Florence: La Mandragora, 2020).
57 ERIC COCHRANE, *Florence in the Forgotten Centuries, 1527–1800: A History of Florence and the Florentines in the Age of the Grand Dukes* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1973, repr. 2013), 269.
58 ASFi, *MdP*, 1028, f. 609.

and Dominicans in the Shah's territories.[59] Previously, as reported in an *avviso* to the Grand Duke, Felle had only been allowed to travel to Persia because of the Grand Duke's recommendations.[60]

At the outbreak of the Morean War (1684–99), Cosimo III was willing to send military aid to the Venetians, who were fighting against the Ottoman Empire. In addition, he tried to find out whether Persia still had the capacity to fight against the Ottomans. The clearest answer to this issue came from the French traveller Jean Chardin (1643–1713), his great friend and correspondent for many years, who wrote to him that the Persians were no longer able to fight because of the idleness and luxuries to which they had fallen prey in recent decades.[61] Indeed, between the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century, like Tuscany, Persia experienced a gradual decline, which may have been more limited economically than previously thought, but was certainly significant from a political and military point of view.

In the last decade of the seventeenth century, Cosimo III sent several more missives to Persia, again in favour of the Catholic missions and the religious travellers who had to journey through or to those lands. Shāh Sultān Hosein (r. 1694–1722), the last Safavid sovereign, usually replied gladly to the Tuscan letters, once again demonstrating how, even in a historical moment considered to be one of general crisis, Tuscany and Persia maintained diplomatic ties.

The almost perpetual state of war between Catholic Europe and the Ottoman Empire, however, did not prevent the Church from continuing to send missionaries to the East. For their journeys, the missionaries needed many credentials. These credentials were an integral part of diplomatic practices in the modern era: the issue of being able to identify with certainty the person one was dealing with or who claimed to be the envoy of some sovereign was of primary importance. The secretariats of the various states were extremely concerned about this issue and credentials were essential.[62] Moreover, besides proving that the person carrying them was an official representative of a ruler, they were the main feature of the ceremonies in which the

[59] ASFi, *MdP*, 1028, ff. 610–11. According to information reported by the scholar Ettore Rossi, Guglielmo Felle entered the Dominican order in 1655 and travelled extensively between Europe and the East. See ETTORE ROSSI, 'Relazioni tra la Persia e l'Ordine di San Giovanni a Rodi e a Malta,' *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 13, 4 (1933): 351–61, see 357, n. 1.

[60] ASFi, *MdP*, 1028, f. 611.

[61] 'A l'égard des Persiens, s'ils sont capables de faire la guerre au Turc, je dirais à Votre Altesse Sérénissime qu'ils sont aujourd'hui fort ammollis par le luxe et par l'oisiveté : ils n'ont point fait la guerre depuis près de cinquante ans, si ce n'est en quelque coin de leur empire à de petites occasions, et il n'y a nul seigneur à cette Cour qui en entende l'art.' See ANNE KROELL, 'Douze lettres de Jean Chardin,' *Journal Asiatique* 170, 3 (1982): 295–338 (329). On the liaison between Chardin and Cosimo III, see DIRK VAN DER CRUYSSE, *Chardin le persan* (Paris: Fayard, 1998), *passim*.

[62] NICK WILDING, *Galileo's Idol. Gianfrancesco Sagredo and the Politics of Knowledge* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 120.

ruler, in this case the Shah, would welcome the ambassador.[63] This kind of letter was regularly provided by all Catholic rulers, but those of the Grand Duke of Tuscany were in great demand, particularly for those journeying to Persia. For instance, already in 1684, the French monk Louis Marie Pidou de Saint-Olon (Bishop of Baghdad from 1687 to 1717) had travelled to Persia thanks to a grand ducal recommendation,[64] and in 1691 (c.) the same Saint-Olon requested a letter from Cosimo III allowing him to travel to Isfahan to deal with some matters with Shāh Sultān Hosein, saying that grand ducal letters were always well received at the Persian court.[65]

In 1693, the above-mentioned Guglielmo Felle was again authorised by the Congregation of the Propaganda Fide to go to the East,[66] and once again he asked for the support of the Grand Duke, who had a new letter of recommendation drawn up for him.[67] As with Pidou de Saint-Olon's request, it was emphasised that grand ducal credentials were particularly appreciated in Persia.[68]

In 1694, Cosimo III wrote a letter to the Shah requesting that the Discalced Carmelites be allowed to return to their houses in New Julfa, from which they had been expelled. In this message, the Grand Duke emphasised that he appreciated the fact that his 'intercessions' were always welcomed by the Persian court and that he hoped that this request would also be granted.[69]

Other documents relating to Persia prove the diplomatic support the Grand Duke continued to give the missionaries, also through foreign ambassadors: in a missive written by the Discalced Carmelite Friar Elia of St Albert we find thanks for a letter that the Grand Duke had written to the Shah in favour of the Catholics, which had been presented to the Persian ruler by the Portuguese ambassador Gregorio Pereira Fidalgo on his mission between 1696 and 1697.[70]

In 1697 Pietro Paolo Palma, Archbishop of Ankara, asked the Grand Duke to write letters in favour of the Catholic missions throughout the East. For this, Cosimo provided him with a letter for the Shah and the Mughal emperor.[71]

One of the last contacts between Medici Tuscany and Safavid Persia concerned the mission of the Capuchin Felice Maria da Sellano (1656–1720), who was sent as

63 I mentioned earlier the embassy led by the Dominican Antonio Tani, and a report he sent to Grand Duke Ferdinando II in which he described the great ceremony with which he had been received by the Shah and the reading of the letters of credence he had brought.
64 ASFi, *MdP*, 1028, f. 704.
65 For the request to the Grand Duke, see ASFi, *MM*, 368, ins. II, f. 1147. For Cosimo's letter of recommendation, see ASFi, *MdP*, 1028, ff. 1119–24.
66 ASFi, *MdP*, 1028, f. 1248; ROSSI, 'Relazioni,' 357, n. 1.
67 ASFi, *MdP*, 1028, ff. 1246–47.
68 ASFi, *MdP*, 1028, f. 1248.
69 ASFi, *MdP*, 1029, ff. 289–91.
70 On the embassy of Gregorio Pereira Fidalgo, see JEAN AUBIN, *L'ambassade de Gregório Pereira Fidalgo à la cour de Châh Soltân-Hosseyn: 1696–1697* (Lisbon: Fundacão Calouste Gulbenkian, 1971). The letter of Friar Elias of St Albert can be found in ASFi, *MdP*, 1078, f. 259.
71 ASFi, *MdP*, 1029, ff. 449–50. Pietro Palma had also requested the same credentials from Innocent XII and the Venetian Senate, see BERCHET, *La Repubblica*, 56, 247.

ambassador by the Pope to the Shah of Persia after a mission in Georgia from 1693 to 1698.[72] The embassy in Persia was motivated by the problems encountered by the Catholic missionaries in the region of Georgia stemming from the bad relations with the Orthodox community there: since the Georgian kingdoms were vassals of the Shah of Persia, his protection would be essential for the maintenance of the Capuchin mission in the region.[73] Felice Maria da Sellano himself wrote the story of his journey, his mission and an account of the embassy in *Relazione dell'Ambasciata fatta al Re di Persia, dal Padre Felice Maria da Sellano, Missionario Cappuccino della Provincia dell'Umbria, dall'Anno 1699 sino all'Anno 1702*, kept in the State Archives of Vienna and published first by Charles Schefer and later by Francesco da Vicenza.[74] In 1699, armed with a papal letter for the Shah, the Capuchin reached Florence and obtained a letter of recommendation from Cosimo III, who 'wrote to the King of Persia a very effective letter, in accordance with the wishes of His Holiness, written in golden ink and enclosed in a very fine purse.'[75] Felice Maria da Sellano returned to Europe in 1702 and, after a stop-off in Rome to report on his mission to the Pope, he went on to Florence to deliver in person the reply letter from the Shah to the Grand Duke. In his edition of Felice Maria da Sellano's report, Father Francesco da Vicenza claims to have conducted, either personally or through others, research in the archives of the Vatican, Venice and Florence in search of the Shah's letters of reply to the European rulers. He was, however, unable to find any copies or traces of them.[76] The letters of reply to Venice and Rome were identified, respectively, by Lajos Fekete and Angelo Michele Piemontese,[77] while the one to the Grand Duke was found during my research in the State Archives of Florence, together with the contemporary Italian translation.[78]

---

[72] For a biography of Felice Maria da Sellano, see FRANCESCO DA VICENZA, *Francesco da Vicenza (1880–1956) archivista dei cappuccini Umbri. Miscellanea delle sue ricerche* (Vicenza: G. Rumor, 1930, repr., 'P. Felice Maria da Sellano Ambasciatore del Papa al Re di Persia,' in *Francesco da Vicenza (1880–1956) archivista dei cappuccini Umbri. Miscellanea delle sue ricerche*, Assisi: Curia Provinciale Frati Minori Cappuccini Umbri, 1997), 405–40. For an overview of the Capuchin missions, see GIOVANNI PIZZORUSSO, 'I cappuccini della provincia dell'Umbria nelle missioni *ad gentes* tra XVII e XVIII secolo,' in *I cappuccini nell'Umbria tra Sei e Settecento. Convegno Internazionale di Studi, Todi 24–26 giugno 2004*, ed. Gabriele Ingegneri (Rome: Istituto Storico dei Cappuccini, 2005), 145–69. On his diplomatic mission to Persia in 1699–1702, in addition to the texts already mentioned, see HERBERT CHICK, ed., *A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia and the Papal Mission of the XVIIth and XVIIIth Centuries* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1939, 2 vols.), I, 487–89, 498–99; GIORGIO ROTA, 'Persia 1700–1800: Some Views from Central Europe,' in *Crisis, Collapse, Militarism & Civil War: The History & Historiography of 18th Century Iran*, ed. Michael Axworthy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 183–213 (184).

[73] PIZZORUSSO, 'I cappuccini,' 159–62; Rota, 'Persia 1700–1800,' 184.

[74] CHARLES HENRI AUGUSTE SCHEFER, *Estat de la Perse en 1660 par le P. Raphaël du Mans, supérieur de la mission de capuchins d'Ispahan. Publié avec notes et appendice par Ch. Schefer, membre de l'Institut* (Paris: Ernest Leroux Editeur, 1890), 376–97; FRANCESCO DA VICENZA, *Francesco da Vicenza (1880–1956)*, 414–40.

[75] SCHEFER, *Estat de la Perse*, 378; FRANCESCO DA VICENZA, *Francesco da Vicenza (1880–1956)*, 417. The news is also reported in the Chronicle of the Carmelites: CHICK, *A Chronicle*, I, 498. The draft of the letter Cosimo had prepared can be found in ASFi, *MdP*, 1606, f. 1rv.

[76] FRANCESCO DA VICENZA, *Francesco da Vicenza (1880–1956)*, 439–40.

[77] LAJOS FEKETE, *Einführung in die persische Paläographie: 101 persische Dokumente* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1977), 549–51; PIEMONTESE, *Persica-Vaticana*, 468.

[78] ASFi, *MdP*, 1078, ff. 278–79, 436.

Another letter, dated 1698, arrived in Florence from the Shah assuring that the Grand Duke's request for permission for the Discalced Carmelites' return to New Julfa to restore their church had been granted.[79] It is probably a reply to the letter sent in 1694, perhaps through Elia of St Albert or the Portuguese ambassador Pereira Fidalgo. Indeed, according to the Latin translation provided to the Grand Duke, the Shah had ordered the text to be drafted in 1698, a date that would coincide with the years of the aforementioned Portuguese mission.[80] Cosimo's reply was prepared on 15 August 1705, which confirms the hypothesis that the Persian letter, albeit dated 1698, reached Florence in the early years of the following century. It is interesting to see how Cosimo III both expressed his satisfaction with the Shah's decision and reminded him of his devotion to his friendship with Persia, which had endured since the time of the heroic Shāh ʿAbbās the Great ('[...] da tempi antichi, nominatamente dal di eroica memoria CIAH ABBAS MAGNO').[81]

A draft of a letter to the Shah dated 19 September 1714 contains a very curious request from the Grand Duke: Cosimo III asked Shāh Sultān Hosein to send a young boy of about 12 years old from one of the most remote regions of the empire to Tuscany, and as a gift he sent the Shah a white handkerchief made of a fireproof material ('un fazzoletto bianco composto di tali materie, che a porlo sulla fiamma del fuoco non brucia, ma resiste').[82] This request was joined by another in which Cosimo asked the Persian ruler to intervene in favour of the Catholic missionaries in Georgia.[83]

A few years later, in 1718, another letter was written requesting protection for the Catholic missionaries in Georgia:[84] both this and the earlier letters from the start of the eighteenth century have no Persian replies (or at least they have not yet been found).

The situation in Georgia did not improve much, as in February 1719 Cosimo III again requested the 'strong patronage' of the Shah, without which the Catholics in the Persian territories could not live in safety.[85] News from the same period informed the Grand Duke that the Orthodox Patriarch of Tiflis, who had persecuted the Catholic mission in Georgia to a considerable extent, had been brought to trial before the governor of Yerevan by order of the Shah. This suggests that, even though no Persian letters have been found on the subject, Shāh Sultān Hosein had agreed to the requests received from the Pope and Cosimo III.[86]

What is probably the last letter addressed from the Grand Duke to the Shah is dated 1721 and was written on behalf of Clement XI (r. 1700–21), who had expressly

[79] ASFi, *MdP*, 1030, f. 200.
[80] ASFi, *MdP*, 1030, f. 202.
[81] ASFi, *MdP*, 1030, ff. 203–4.
[82] ASFi, *MdP*, 1032, f. 176. Unfortunately, I cannot say whether this exchange ever took place.
[83] ASFi, *MdP*, 1032, ff. 177–80.
[84] ASFi, *MdP*, 1032, ff. 381–83.
[85] ASFi, *MdP*, 1033, f. 126.
[86] ASFi, *MdP*, 1033, ff. 127–28.

requested one of the Grand Duke's convincing letters about Persian matters.[87] The issue this time concerned the appointment of the Dominican Angelo Ferri (or Arcangelo Ferri) as Archbishop of Nakhchivan after the death of his predecessor.[88] It is possible that the Shah never replied to these letters since, exactly one year later, Persia was invaded by an Afghan army which besieged and conquered Isfahan, thus causing the end of the Safavid dynasty and therefore also cutting off relations between the Safavids and the Medicis.

Final remarks and research perspectives

The Medici dynasty ended just over a decade after the Safavid dynasty, during the reign of Gian Gastone (r. 1723–37), putting a definitive stop to the relations between Tuscany and Persia that had begun more than a century before.

It is evident, however, that just as the last Grand Dukes of Tuscany were able to maintain contact with Safavid Persia until the end, the Hapsburg-Lorraine dynasty could have done the same with the dynasties that came to rule Persia thereafter. In this sense, one possible direction of research could be to analyse any relations there may have been between the Grand Duchy of Tuscany after the change of the ruling dynasty and Persia following the fall of the Safavids.

Rereading Tuscan-Persian diplomacy by placing it in the broad context in which Grand Duke Ferdinando I sought to operate has clarified both how and why these relations were born and developed, as well as who the main actors were. The figure of the dragoman Michelangelo Corai in particular, although increasingly the focus of historians' attention, still deserves to be explored in greater depth.

On the other hand, in the light of the new and more extensive chronology proposed from new archival evidence regarding relations between the Medicis and the Safavids, it is certainly useful to rediscover Tuscan foreign policy, particularly from the reign of Cosimo III (but also of Ferdinando II). Cosimo's reign has indeed always been considered a mere period of decline, aggravated by his wasteful expenditure to obtain the royal treaty. Yet, as we have seen, it was also a moment when Tuscany was still extremely vital and 'deeply immersed' in the global world of the time. Cosimo III was a person with many interests and, above all, a ruler with a high conception of his role. These personality characteristics need to be rediscovered since this is what led him to engage in a great deal of diplomacy, maintaining an extensive exchange of correspondence with agents, travellers, missionaries and sovereigns, even from very distant kingdoms such as those of the Shah or the Mughal emperor. Moreover, the continuous diplomatic participation in favour of the religious missions in Armenia and Georgia also opens up prospects for research into the relations between Tuscany, the papacy, the religious representatives in those regions and their rulers.

[87] ASFi, *MdP*, 1033, f. 231. See also PIEMONTESE, *Persica-Vaticana*, 469.
[88] ASFi, *MdP*, 1033, f. 230.

It is also possible to reassess the diplomacy conducted by the last Shahs like Shāh Soleimān (r. 1666–94) and Shāh Sultān Hosein, whose reigns have always been depicted as mere periods of decline, despite the expansion of their diplomatic networks.

Moreover, I think it is necessary to once again emphasise the great importance of research on Italian sources regarding Safavid matters, as pointed out by Jean Aubin in the past.[89] The Italian documentation demonstrates the importance of the role played by Persia in the global strategy of a small European power like Tuscany, and provides new elements to understand the political and cultural attitude of Safavid Persia towards Europe: information that we would hardly find in Persian sources. A rediscovery of Italian sources, mainly from archival research, is therefore also essential in order to 'correct' the historiographic perception of relations between Safavid Persia and Europe, which is inevitably dominated by the study of relations between the Safavids and the great powers. Indeed, they can show that in the seventeenth century, and even a little beyond, there were still small and medium-sized states capable of pursuing their own more or less ambitious policies.

The time when Ferdinando I came into contact with Persia was particularly favourable for a dynamic ruler like him. The alliance with Persia was only one of the many paths the ambitious Grand Duke tried to take, and perhaps the only one that was not a dead end. In a time when there seemed to be plenty of opportunities to achieve something concrete in the Levant, Persia seemed to be the perfect ally to rely on. However, even after the failure of these ambitions and the beginning of a period of less intense contacts, and right until the brutal end of the Safavid dynasty, relations remained cordial as is also shown by the curious exchange of 'gifts' in 1714 (a fireproof handkerchief in exchange for a Tatar boy).[90]

Both the Mediterranean and global contexts of the period remain of fundamental importance in framing the Persian affairs of the Tuscan Grand Duchy. Nevertheless, there is a great difference between the late seventeenth century and the early part of the eighteenth, which can also be reflected in the way Tuscan-Safavid relations are analysed. With regard to the beginning of the seventeenth century and the development of these relations, it is unthinkable that their nature can be understood without considering the broader framework of international relations. With regard to the reign of Cosimo III, on the other hand, it is perhaps possible to conduct a somewhat more circumscribed and less 'global' analysis, given that between the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth these relations were also of more limited.

---

[89] JEAN AUBIN, 'Chroniques persanes et relations italiennes. Notes sur les sources narratives du règne de Šâh Esmâ'il Ier,' *Studia Iranica* 24, 2 (1995): 247–59. Although Jean Aubin's article focuses on travel accounts and chronicles concerning the period of Shāh ʿIsmāʿil's reign, his discussion about the relevance of Italian sources regarding Safavid history can be extended to the entire duration of the Safavid dynasty as well as to archival sources.

[90] ASFi, *MdP*, 1032, f. 176.

Precolonial African Historiography as a Multidisciplinary Project: The Case of the Bahurutshe of the Marico[*]

JACOBUS ADRIAAN DU PISANI[1] AND KIM KWANG-SU[2]
[1]North-West University, [2]Hankuk University of Foreign Studies

Introduction

In 1822, the London Missionary Society missionary John Campbell published an account of his visit to South Africa two years earlier. His book included several chapters on his sojourn at Kaditshwene, the main settlement of the Bahurutshe[1] in the Marico region.[2] It was published before Setswana, the language spoken by the Bahurutshe, existed in written form and was the first written eye-witness account dealing with the Bahurutshe in precolonial times. Up to that point, Hurutshe history had been orally transmitted from generation to generation.

This article reviews the historiography of the Bahurutshe in the Marico in the precolonial period by analysing the contribution of different disciplines and different types of sources. Although researchers started collecting ethnological data about the Batswana from the late nineteenth century, the Bahurutshe remained outside the mainstream of South African history for the greater part of the twentieth century. Since around 1970, when the histories of precolonial African societies in South Africa became a specialised focus of research, the historiography of the Bahurutshe in the precolonial period has followed the general trend of precolonial African historiography, evolving into a multidisciplinary project. Historians recording the precolonial history of the Bahurutshe have relied mainly on oral tradition, supplemented by the findings of archaeological research at sites inhabited by the Bahurutshe during the Iron Age. Apart from ethnological and archaeological data, historians have also started to incorporate knowledge produced by other disciplines such as linguistics and environmental sciences into their narrative, thereby increasing knowledge about and understanding of the early history of the Bahurutshe.

The sources for the writing of the history of precolonial African societies differ from those of literate societies in other parts of the world. Therefore, western ideas

[*] This work was supported by the National Research Foundation of Korea Grant funded by the Korean Government (NRF-362-2010-1-B00003) and the Hankuk University of Foreign Studies Research Fund of 2022.

[1] The prefix Ba- forms part of the noun denoting a people. Thus, Bahurutshe means the Hurutshe people. Hurutshe has no prefix when it is used as an adjective, e.g., a Hurutshe settlement.

[2] JOHN CAMPBELL, *Travels in South Africa Undertaken at the Request of the London Missionary Society: Being the Narrative of a Second Journey in the Interior of That Country* (London: Westley, 1822), 222–77 (chapters XX–XXIII).

Cromohs (Cyber Review of Modern Historiography), ISSN 1123-7023, 24/2021

DOI: 10.36253/cromohs-13366

about historical research and history-writing cannot be applied in an unaltered form. Following from this, our main argument is that the Hurutshe case study confirms that the writing of precolonial African history has to be based on multi- or interdisciplinary collaboration. We furthermore contend that, although the writing of precolonial Hurutshe history is a complex multidisciplinary project, it has significance and relevance for the present. Issues raised by this historiography can be linked to post-apartheid discourses in South Africa and the data collected and interpreted can contribute to a better understanding of controversial aspects of South African history.

The African context: the move towards interdisciplinarity in the study of the precolonial period

Until the end of the colonial period, most western historians believed that sub-Saharan Africa had neither a proper civilisation nor a significant history and that early African history was unknowable, because non-literate African societies had not left records that historians could use. They did not recognise non-written evidence as proper sources for historical research and preferred to leave the study of the African 'people without history'[3] to scholars from other disciplines, such as anthropology and archaeology. Therefore, historical studies on the indigenous black societies of Africa in the period before their contact with white immigrant groups remained undeveloped.[4]

For many years, African studies were dominated in the academic domain by American and European scholars. Most western-based historians, with their Eurocentric perspectives of Africa and their 'othering' of Africans, focussed on the colonial period. They paid scant attention to the precolonial past, which they regarded as a time of primitive tribalism in Africa. Colonial perceptions of Africa became so ingrained in the academic world that 'one never quite gets away from the colonial construction of African history.'[5]

---

[3] See ERIC R. WOLF, *Europe and the People Without History*, 2nd rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

[4] L.D. NGCONGCO, 'Problems of Southern African Historiography,' in *The Historiography of Southern Africa*, proceedings of the experts meeting held at Gaborone, Botswana, from 7 to 11 March 1977, *The General History of Africa, Studies and Documents* 4 (Paris: UNESCO, 1980), 17; ESPERANZA BRIZUELA-GARCIA, 'Decolonising African History: Crises and Transitions in African Historiography, 1950-1990' (PhD thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 2000), 20–1; FREDERICK COOPER, 'Africa's Pasts and Africa's Historians,' *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 34, no. 2 (2000): 298–336, see 300; FUNSO AFOLAYAN, 'Historiography and Methods of African History,' 2012, accessed 12 December 2018, http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199846733/obo-9780199846733-0011.xml; CATHERINE COQUERY-VIDROVITCH, 'African Historiography in Africa,' trans. JPD Systems, *Revue Tiers Monde* 216, no. 4 (2013): 111–27, see 112.

[5] COOPER, 'Africa's Pasts and Africa's Historians,' 308. See also Brizuela-Garcia, 'Decolonising African History,' 90, 272; DAVID SCHOENBRUN, 'African Pasts for African Futures in a Time of Radical Environmental Change,' in *History and Policy in Africa's Reconstruction*, ed. Robert Launay, keynote address, PAS working paper no. 17 (Evanston, IL: Program of African Studies Northwestern University, 2006), 5; PAUL TIYAMBE ZELEZA, 'The Disciplinary, Interdisciplinary and Global Dimensions of African Studies,' *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies - Multi-, Inter- and Transdisciplinarity* 1, no. 2 (2006): 195–220, see 197, 201.

When the process of African decolonisation was gaining momentum in the second half of the twentieth century, struggles were waged to 'decolonise' African historiography and introduce an 'African point of view' in the discourse about the African past. This led to a focus on precolonial history because of the need to prove that Africa had had a significant history previous to colonial intervention. African and Africanist historians were seeking to restore agency and initiative to precolonial Africans and respectability to the historicity of the African past. They started challenging Eurocentric notions that precolonial Africa was barbaric and static, and that civilisation and written sources constitute the only rational bases for historical scholarship.[6]

From the 1960s, realising that they needed to incorporate data produced by other disciplines to fill the gaps in historical knowledge, historians started engaging in multi- and interdisciplinary research to help them interpret the distant African past. At first most of them were not well equipped to embark on interdisciplinary research. However, multidisciplinary teamwork was facilitated by the structure of African studies as a regional project at American and European universities, where the pioneering academic work in the study of the continent was done. Within the emerging field of African area studies, disciplines exchanged information, techniques, methodologies and theories.[7]

Anthropology had been investigating Africa for several decades and had a large body of information on the classification of African peoples and traditional African practices and institutions available, which historians started incorporating in their studies of precolonial societies. Ethnography, in particular, provided indispensable data for the reconstruction of early African history.[8]

Academic historians started tapping into the abundant, but formerly unexplored, body of oral testimonies that had been transmitted in African societies from generation to generation. The pioneering work of the Belgian anthropologist, Jan Vansina, on the value of oral tradition for historiography[9] initiated an expanding literature on the

---

[6] DAVID L. SCHOENBRUN, 'A Past Whose Time Has Come: Historical Context and History in Eastern Africa's Great Lakes,' *History and Theory* 32, no. 4, Beiheft 32: *History Making in Africa* (1993): 32–56, see 36, 39, 40, 48–49, 54, 56; BRIZUELA-GARCIA, 'Decolonising African History,' 99–100, 162, 270; ZELEZA, 'The Disciplinary, Interdisciplinary and Global Dimensions of African Studies,' 196, 199, 201, 203.

[7] BRIZUELA-GARCIA, 'Decolonising African History,' 163, 171; COOPER, 'Africa's Pasts and Africa's Historians,' 311; ZELEZA, 'The Disciplinary, Interdisciplinary and Global Dimensions of African Studies,' 198; CARLA DE YCAZA, 'Competing Methods for Teaching and Researching Africa: Interdisciplinarity and the Field of African Studies,' *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 38, no. 3 (2015): 63–76.

[8] BRIZUELA-GARCIA, 'Decolonising African History,' 171; KATHRYN M. DE LUNA, JEFFREY B. FLEISHER, and SUSAN KEECH MCINTOSH, 'Thinking Across the African Past: Interdisciplinarity and Early History,' *African Archaeological Review* 29 (2012): 75–94, see 81.

[9] Vansina's *De la tradition orale*, published in French in 1961, was translated into English and published with the title *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology* (London: Aldine, 1965). A revised edition, *Oral Tradition as History* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985) was published 20 years later. It remains the standard text on the nature, collection, analysis and use of various categories of oral sources.

methodology of fieldwork for oral historiography and its application to specific case studies.[10] Although the evidential value of oral accounts has limitations, oral tradition has become recognised as a valid historical source when it is subjected to rigorous and critical appraisal. It can seldom be used as stand-alone proof of what happened in the past and its veracity is dependent upon verification of its compatibility with the evidence contained in other sources.[11]

Archaeology has been a leading and crucial contributor to the study of Africa's past.[12] Hard archaeological evidence proves that socially complex societies, cities and states existed in precolonial Africa.[13] The interpretation of the structures, spaces and artefacts at archaeological sites in the continent produces valuable knowledge for historians specialising in precolonial history. Dating of sites offers the basis for a chronology of African history. Evidence of change and continuity can be found in the archaeological record. By interpreting the representational qualities of the ordinary material things that precolonial Africans made and used, scholars gain insight into the non-material inner worlds of the users of those objects, the way in which they organised their domestic space, their economic and social organisation and development, and their relationship with the environment. Archaeological research enriches the historian's understanding of historical processes and complexities, and lends depth to the understanding of Africa's pasts.[14] In combination with other

[10] See e.g., DANIEL F. MCCALL, *Africa in Time-Perspective: A Discussion of Historical Reconstruction from Unwritten Sources* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969); ALAIN DELIVRÉ, *L'histoire des rois d'Imerina: Interprétation d'une tradition orale* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1974); JOSEPH C. MILLER, ed., *The African Past Speaks: Essays on Oral Tradition and History* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1980); DAVID HENIGE, *Oral Historiography* (London: Heinemann, 1982); ELIZABETH TONKIN, *Narrating Our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History (*New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

[11] Afolayan, 'Historiography and Methods of African History'; ROBERT S. BURRET, 'Review of Five Hundred Years Rediscovered,' *South African Archaeological Bulletin* 64, no. 189 (2009): 97–98, see 98; JAN C.A. BOEYENS, 'The Intersection of Archaeology, Oral Tradition and History in the South African Interior,' *New Contree* no. 64 (2012): 1–30, see 10; DAVID SCHOENBRUN, 'Early African Pasts: Sources, Interpretations, and Meanings,' 2018, 18–21, doi: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.147.

[12] The literature on African archaeology is extensive. See e.g., PETER T. ROBERTSHAW, ed., *A History of African Archaeology* (London: James Currey, 1990); T. SHAW et al., eds, *The Archaeology of Africa*: *Food, Metals, and Towns* (London: Routledge, 1993); DAVID W. PHILLIPSON, *African Archaeology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); LAWRENCE BARMAH and PETER MITCHELL, *The First Africans: African Archaeology from the Earliest Toolmakers to Most Recent Foragers* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008). The methodological approaches and interpretative frameworks that have informed archaeological research in Africa are examined by SUSAN KEECH MCINTOSH, 'Archaeology and the Reconstruction of the African Past,' in *Writing African History*, ed. John Edward Philips (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2005), 51–85.

[13] ANN BROWER STAHL, ed., *African Archaeology: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005); GRAHAM CONNAH, *African Civilizations: An Archaeological Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[14] *The Historiography of Southern Africa*, 91; BRIZUELA-GARCIA, 'Decolonising African History,' 164; ANN B. STAHL and ADRIA LAVIOLETTE, 'Introduction: Current Trends in the Archaeology of African History,' *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 42, no. 3 (2009): 348, 350; DAVID SCHOENBRUN, 'Mixing, Moving, Making, Meaning: Possible Futures for the Distant Past,' *African Archaeological Review* 29 (2012), 295; DE LUNA, FLEISHER, and MCINTOSH, 'Thinking Across the African Past: Interdisciplinarity and Early History,' 83; SCHOENBRUN, 'Early African Pasts: Sources, Interpretations, and Meanings,' 17.

sources, such as oral tradition and historical linguistics, archaeology makes its most valuable contribution to historiography. Connah argues that archaeology contributes to a 'total' history of Africa, spanning several millennia, which helps to overcome the dichotomy between prehistory and history.[15]

A number of recently expanding fields of study, associated with archaeological research, provide information on the interaction of humans and their environments and the spread and development of agriculture in precolonial Africa. Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR), a form of remote sensing, helps with the identification and location of archaeological sites.[16] Bio-archaeology, zoo-archaeology and archaeobotany focus on the relations between plants, animals and humans. The study of plant and animal DNA has generated considerable insight into precolonial farming and herding practices. Geochemical and geo-archaeological studies of soils and sediments assist with the reconstruction of landscape dynamics over long time frames.[17]

Historians have acknowledged the value of linguistic studies for the study of the distant past, where other sources are lacking or inadequate. They introduced evidence about the history and connotations of words into their studies of precolonial Africa.[18] Christopher Ehret and his co-researchers did pioneering work in this field.[19] Historical linguists and archaeologists worked together in an archaeo-linguistic approach to reconstruct early African history. Applying linguistic techniques such as lexicostatistics, glottochronology and the words-and-things method, they studied language groups in different regions of Africa to collect information about the origin, diffusion and migration of African languages and peoples. Their contributions to proving the Bantu expansion hypothesis, the assumption that the original proto-Bantu-speaking population spread from a nucleus in West-Central Africa across much of sub-Saharan Africa, were vital.[20] One historian, Kate de Luna, classified languages in a part of Africa

15 GRAHAM CONNAH, *Three Thousand Years in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

16 KARIM SADR, 'Kweneng: A Newly Discovered Pre-colonial Capital Near Johannesburg,' *Journal of African Archaeology* 17, no. 1 (2019): 1-22, doi: 10.1163/21915784-20190001.

17 PAUL LANE and ANNA SHOEMAKER, 'Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Precolonial Sub-Saharan African Farming and Herding Communities,' 2017, doi: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.70, see 1, 11–12, 27–8.

18 DAVID DALBY, ed., *Language and History in Africa* (London: Cass, 1970); DEREK NURSE, 'The Contribution of Linguistics to the Study of History in Africa,' *Journal of African History* 38 (1997): 351–91.

19 The case studies were published in CHRISTOPHER EHRET and MERRICK POSNANSKY, eds, *The Archaeological and Linguistic Reconstruction of African History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982). For his more recent work, see e.g., CHRISTOPHER EHRET, 'Writing African History from Linguistic Evidence,' in *Writing African History*, ed. John Edward Philips (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005), 86–111; EHRET, *History and the Testimony of Language* (Berkeley, LA: University of California Press, 2011); EHRET, 'Historical Linguistics,' in *The International Encyclopedia of Anthropology,* ed. Hilary Callan (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018).

20 JAN VANSINA, 'New Linguistic Evidence and "The Bantu Expansion",' *Journal of African* History 36, no. 2 (1995), 173–95*;* BRIZUELA-GARCIA, 'Decolonising African History,' 166; DE LUNA, FLEISHER, and MCINTOSH, 'Thinking Across the African Past: Interdisciplinarity and Early History,' 76, 82; JONES M. JAJA, 'Interdisciplinary Methods for the Writing of African History: A Reappraisal,' *European Journal of Scientific Research* 5, no. 4 (2008), version available via Researchgate,

by reconstructing portions of their vocabulary.[21] In their research in different parts of Africa, Vansina, Klein-Ahrendt and Gonzales demonstrated how linguistic, ethnographic and archaeological evidence can be linked to enhance precolonial African historiography, while illuminating the changing practices of people's daily lives by which they created, organised and maintained their communities.[22] Schoenbrun argued that 'conceptual metaphor,' which offers cognitive processes as a common ground for empirical research in different disciplines, can be used as tool by means of which historians can combine linguistic and archaeological evidence to proceed beyond establishing the settlement sequences, chronologies and basic outlines of the economic practice of precolonial societies to explore their social relations, political culture and technological advances.[23]

Advances in palaeogenetic DNA research and improvements in genetic sampling have confirmed the potential of genetic analysis to illuminate historical processes in precolonial Africa by documenting human population genetic variability in the regions of the continent. It can supply detail about the movement of individual bodies through particular locales. Palaeogenetic research in Africa is still limited, but collaborative archaeology-palaeogenetic research programmes are encouraged.[24]

From the above it is clear that many historians, who study precolonial Africa and have a conceptual understanding of the value of multi- and interdisciplinary team work despite the challenges that inhibit collaboration across disciplinary boundaries, have adapted to new approaches and methodologies of historical research. They participate in interdisciplinary research to better explain the complexities and interconnectedness of human societies. Collaboration across an increasing number of disciplinary boundaries has become a reality in African precolonial studies. Historians involved in interdisciplinary projects not only borrow data produced by a variety of other disciplines, but also apply the techniques and methodologies of those disciplines

---

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263576261_JAJA_JM_2008_INTERDISCIPLINARY_METHODS_FOR_THE_WRITING_OF_AFRICAN_HISTORY_A_REAPPRAISAL, accessed 30 April 2022, see 5, 9, 10, 11, 13; KOEN BOSTOEN, 'Pots, Words and the Bantu Problem: On Lexical Reconstruction and Early African History,' *The Journal of African History* 48, no. 2 (2007): 173–99.

[21] KATHRYN M. DE LUNA, 'Scales and Units: Language Movement and Change in Precolonial Central Africa,' in *Tracing Language Movement in Africa*, eds Ericka Albaugh and Kathryn de Luna (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); KATHRYN M. DE LUNA and JEFFERY B. FLEISHER, *Speaking with Substance: Language and Materials in African History* (New York: Springer, 2018).

[22] JAN VANSINA, *Paths in the Rainforest: Towards a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990); REINHARD KLEIN-AHRENDT, *Die traditionellen Eisenhandwerke der Savannen-Bantu: Eine sprachhistorische Rekonstruktion auf lexikalischer Grundlage* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2004); RHONDA M. GONZALES, *Societies, Religion and History: Central East Tanzanians and the World They Created, c. 200 B.C.E. to 1800 C.E.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

[23] SCHOENBRUN, 'Mixing, Moving, Making, Meaning: Possible Futures for the Distant Past,' 297, 299, 314; SCHOENBRUN, 'Early African Pasts: Sources, Interpretations, and Meanings,' 7–8, 22, 25, 26. See also DAVID SCHOENBRUN, 'Words, Things, and Meaning: Linguistics as a Tool for Historical Reconstruction,' in *The Oxford Handbook of African Languages*, eds Rainer Vossen and Gerrit Dimmendaal (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 961–72.

[24] DE LUNA, FLEISHER, and MCINTOSH, 'Thinking Across the African Past: Interdisciplinarity and Early History,' 83–6; SCHOENBRUN, 'Mixing, Moving, Making, Meaning: Possible Futures for the Distant Past,' 293.

to their historical research for a more comprehensive and reliable interpretation of the distant African past.[25]

Through the use of an array of sources and methodologies from several disciplines, each of them reflecting the past in different ways, remarkable progress has been made in the postcolonial era in the study of the history of precolonial African societies.[26] According to Schoenbrun, early African history now has a depth and breadth akin to the histories based on written sources in archives.[27] That John McNeill, in his presidential address to the AHA in 2020, regarded precolonial African history, based mainly on research without written documents, as a 'guide to our future as historians,' was a testimony to the advances made in this field.[28]

The rest of this article deals with the evolution of the historiography of the Bahurutshe in precolonial times to reach an assessment on how far knowledge about the distant past of this group has advanced within the broader context of precolonial African historiography. From this assessment, the identification of gaps and suggestions about future research can flow.

Geographical and historical context of the Bahurutshe

The Bahurutshe form part of the larger Sotho-Tswana group in South Africa, whose people inhabit the Highveld, a plateau in the South African interior. The map below indicates where they resided in precolonial times and which other groups lived in neighbouring areas.

The geography of the area in which the Bahurutshe settled played a decisive role in their history. Morton's statement that 'our appreciation of Tswana history prior to 1820 can be improved by taking into consideration the diverse types of landscape the many Tswana groups attached themselves to'[29] is applicable. Environmental aspects, such as the availability of water resources and the impact of droughts, were decisive in the history of precolonial African societies.[30]

---

25 JAJA, 'Interdisciplinary Methods,' 2, 3, 25; ZELEZA, 'The Disciplinary, Interdisciplinary and Global Dimensions of African Studies,' 198–9; COOPER, 'Africa's Pasts and Africa's Historians,' 311.

26 TERENCE O. RANGER, 'Towards a Useable African Past,' in *African Studies Since 1945: A Tribute to Basil Davidson*, ed. Christopher Fyfe (London: Longman, 1976), 17–30; J. KI-ZERBO, ed., *UNESCO General History of Africa*, vol. 1, Methodology and African Prehistory (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); CAROLINE NEALE, *Writing Independent History: African Historiography, 1960–1980* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1985); SCHOENBRUN, 'A Past Whose Time Has Come,' 35 and 'African Pasts for African Futures in a Time of Radical Environmental Change,' 15; JOSEPH O. VOGEL, ed., *Encyclopedia of Precolonial Africa: Archaeology, History, Languages, Cultures, and Environments* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira, 1997), 247–560; BRIZUELA-GARCIA, 'Decolonising African History,' 163.

27 SCHOENBRUN, 'Early African Pasts: Sources, Interpretations, and Meanings,' 1.

28 J.R. MCNEILL, 'Peak Document and the Future of History,' *The American Historical Review* 125, no. 1 (February 2020): 1–18.

29 FRED MORTON, 'Settlements, Landscapes and Identities Among the Tswana of the Western Transvaal and Eastern Kalahari Before 1820,' *The South African Archaeological Bulletin* 68, no. 197 (2013): 15–26, see 15.

30 JAN C.A. BOEYENS, 'The Late Iron Age Sequence in the Marico and Early Tswana History,' *The South African Archaeological Bulletin* 58, no. 178 (2003): 63–78, see 70, 74.

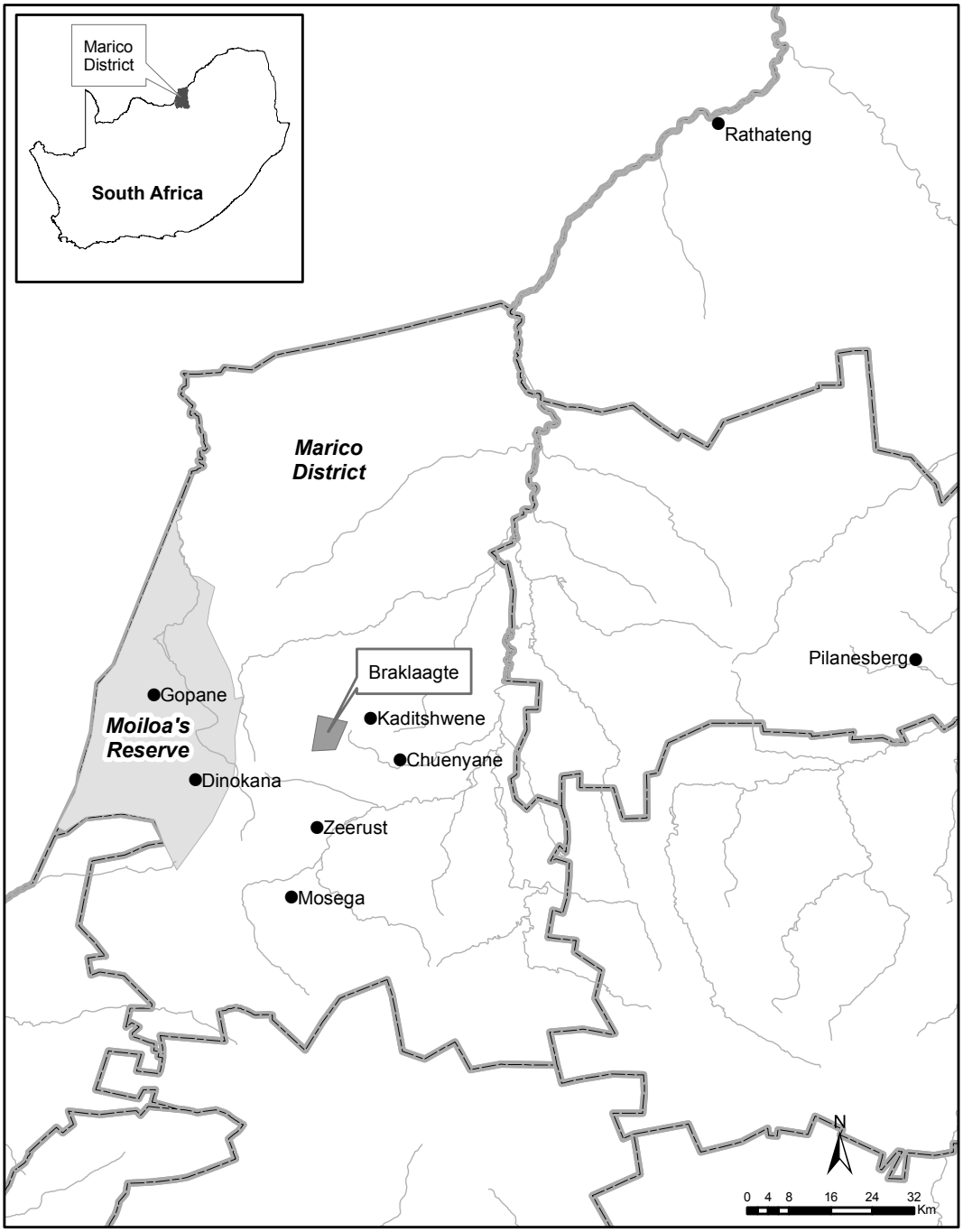

Figure 1. Lehurutshe, the section of the Marico region where the Bahurutshe have resided for more than 500 years, is indicated on the map. Surrounding merafe (peoples) in the precolonial period included the Bangwaketse to the west, the Bakgatla and Bakwena to the north, the Barolong to the south, and the Bafokeng to the east.

The timeline below includes some of the main events in the history of the Bahurutshe in the precolonial period.

Timeline of Hurutshe history 1200–1823 CE	
1200–1500	Mogale first chief mentioned in oral tradition c.1300 Southward migration into southern Africa and settlement near present town of Rustenburg Westward migration The Bahurutshe, Bakwena and Bakgatla, three groups from the same line of succession, separated
Sixteenth century	The Bahurutshe emerged as an identifiable group Spread from the confluence of the Marico and Crocodile rivers (Rathateng) Adoption of *tshwene* (baboon) as totem
Seventeenth century	Settlement at Tshwenyane (Chuenyane) between present-day Zeerust and Groot-Marico
Eighteenth century	Main body of Bahurutshe moved to Kaditshwene (Karechuenya) under chief Mênwê Reign of chiefs Moiloa (Moilwa) I and Sebogodi I Kaditshwene expanded into a megasite
Beginning of Nineteenth century	Reign of Diutlwileng Visits of John Campbell (1812–3, 1820)
1823	'Mantatee' invasion and sacking of Kaditshwene

Oral tradition as a source of Hurutshe historiography

Because no written record of early Hurutshe history exists, the oral tradition, which goes back as far as the fourteenth century CE, has remained indispensable for the reconstruction of the distant past. Oral tradition contains an undisputed evidentiary base, but when it is passed down from generation to generation it loses detailed historical information. Therefore, for the period before 1600 the historical information contained in the oral tradition of the Bahurutshe is limited and unreliable. We do not

have accurate information about their origins, early migration or settlement.[31] Based on genealogical lists of chiefs, the southward migration of the Bahurutshe-Bakwena is calculated to have occurred between 1350 and 1450 CE.[32]

In the nineteenth century, missionaries and colonial government officials started capturing ethnographic data of African societies in southern Africa, but the early historical and anthropological works by Theal, Cory and Stow contained only the most basic information on the Bahurutshe.[33] From the early twentieth century, the government and social anthropology departments at universities played the leading role in recording the oral tradition of African societies in South Africa. A British-based social anthropologist, Isaac Schapera, did extensive fieldwork among the Batswana, produced numerous publications and emerged as the foremost expert on Tswana society and culture. Although his fieldwork on the Bahurutshe was focused on the section of this group in Bechuanaland (present-day Botswana), not in South Africa, his work contains much generic information that contributes to a better understanding of historical events in the region where the Bahurutshe have lived for centuries.[34]

One genre of oral tradition featured in Schapera's work is the praise poem (*lebôkô*) paying homage to the *kgôsi* (chiefs).[35] Praise poems for several chiefs of the Bahurutshe have been recorded. They have limitations as historical sources, because they are meant to eulogise traditional leaders and are, therefore, subjective. They provide a one-sided representation of past reality and lack historical accuracy.[36] Nevertheless, the text of praise poems, containing the names of individual people, groups and places, are acknowledged as potentially valuable storehouses of historic facts. They provide clues to fill in gaps in the historical record and enable researchers to 'animate the precolonial material record with remembered places, peoples and personalities.'[37] In the praise poem for Diutwileng, who was *kgôsi* of the Bahurutshe at Kaditshwene at the start of the nineteenth century, a series of names of people and places provide information that can be used by historians to establish the dates and locations of as well as the participants in battles involving the Bahurutshe.[38]

---

31 JAN BOEYENS and SIMON HALL, 'Tlokwa Oral Traditions and the Interface Between History and Archaeology at Marothodi,' *South African Historical Journal* 61, no. 3 (2009): 457–81, see 462–63; B. MORTON, 'Narrativity and Tswana Oral Tradition,' *Botswana Notes and Records* no. 43 (2011): 52–63, see 61.

32 BOEYENS, 'The Late Iron Age Sequence in the Marico and Early Tswana History,' 67.

33 George McCall Theal's *History of South Africa* and George Cory's *The Rise of South Africa* consisted of many volumes and George W. Stow's *The Native Races of South Africa* was first published in 1905.

34 For an assessment of Schapera's legacy and a bibliography of his works, see SUZETTE HEALD, 'The Legacy of Isaac Schapera,' *Anthropology Today* 19, no. 6 (2003): 18–19; HEALD, 'Isaac Schapera: A Bibliography,' *Pula: Botswana Journal of African Studies* 12, nos 1 and 2 (1998): 100–15.

35 ISAAC SCHAPERA, *Praise-Poems of Tswana Chiefs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965).

36 VANSINA, *Oral Tradition as History, 187–90*; J. OPLAND, 'Praise Poems as Historical Sources,' in *Beyond the Cape Frontier: Studies in the History of the Transkei and Ciskei*, eds C. Saunders and R. Derricourt (London: Longman, 1974), 1–37; N.P. MAAKE, 'Trends in the Formalist Criticism of "Western" Poetry and "African" Oral Poetry: A Comparative Analysis of Selected Case Studies' (PhD thesis, University of South Africa, Pretoria, 1994), 162, 204.

37 BOEYENS, 'The Intersection of Archaeology, Oral Tradition and History,' 15.

38 See PAUL LENERT BREUTZ, *The Tribes of Marico Fistrict* (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1953), 28–9.

The most significant contribution of praise poems to Hurutshe historiography is that they have supplied information, not available anywhere else, to trace the line of succession of Hurutshe chiefs in ancient times with a measure of accuracy.[39] They also provide an insider's interpretation of the Hurutshe society of old and clues to an understanding of the 'feel' of the time when they were created.[40] Therefore, the study of Hurutshe praise poems and the linking of their content with the archaeological and anthropological record remains a facet of Hurutshe historiography.

Ethnologists employed by the South African government made major contributions to the recording of the oral tradition of African communities in the country. G.P. Lestrade and N.J. van Warmelo, working for the Ethnological Section of the Native Affairs Department (NAD), focussed their research on creating a 'scientific' basis for racial segregation policies.[41]

Paul Lenert Breutz, who served as government ethnologist from 1948 to 1977 under National Party rule, made a major contribution to Tswana historiography. During fieldwork trips, Breutz systematically collected a huge amount of ethnological data through oral interviews in Tswana communities scattered over a wide geographical area. He supplemented the raw data he collected with information from archival records, published travellers' accounts and secondary literature. He produced many publications, including a series of eight volumes on the different Tswana 'tribes' in South Africa. Breutz's work has been criticised as being flawed as a result of his pro-apartheid views and his use of outdated theories. However, his collected data is acknowledged as one of the richest, most reliable and indispensable sources of information dealing with the Batswana. Despite the inconsistencies and contradictions in Breutz's data, his publications have served generations of historians, archaeologists and anthropologists as the most important source in reconstructing the Tswana's precolonial past.[42]

Breutz paid at least one hundred visits to the Bahurutshe and interviewed the chiefs and councillors of the different Hurutshe groups, with whom he built a close

[39] Breutz compiled lineage charts for the Tswana subgroups. For a 'skeleton genealogy' of the chiefs of the Bahurutshe ba ga Moiloa, see BREUTZ, *The Tribes of Marico District*, 142–43.

[40] MORTON, 'Narrativity and Tswana Oral Tradition,' 61; R.M. DORSON, ed., *Folklore and Traditional History* (The Hague: Mouton, 1973), 52–53; VANSINA, *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology*, 149; SCHAPERA, *Praise-Poems of Tswana Chiefs*, 10.

[41] See G.P. LESTRADE, *Miscellaneous notes on laws and customs of the Bahuruthse, fieldnotes and preliminary summary of information obtained at Gopane and Motsoedi with regard to laws and customs of the Bahurutshe, Moiloa Reserve*, Marico District, manuscripts 276 and 277 (London: Royal Anthropological Institute, 1926); N.J. VAN WARMELO, *A Preliminary Survey of the Bantu Tribes of South Africa* (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1935); VAN WARMELO, 'Grouping and Ethnic History,' in *The Bantu-Speaking Tribes of South Africa*, ed. I. Schapera (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1946), 43–66.

[42] JAN BOEYENS and FRED MORTON, 'The Tswana's Antiquarian: The Life and Work of State Ethnologist Paul-Lenert Breitz (1912–1999),' *Southern African Humanities*, no. 32 (2019): 109–34. See also MORTON, 'Settlements, Landscapes and Identities among the Tswana of the Western Transvaal and Eastern Kalahari before 1820,' 17; FRED MORTON, 'To Die For: Inherited Leadership (*bogosi*) among the Tswana before 1885,' *Journal of Southern African Studies* 43, no. 4 (2017): 699–714, see 709; Jan C.A. Boeyens, 'In Search of Kaditswene,' *South African Archaeological Bulletin* 55, no. 171 (2000): 3–17, see 5.

rapport as knowledgeable informants.[43] His research on the Bahurutshe was incorporated in one of the volumes in the tribes series titled *The Tribes of Marico District*. Under his standard set of subheadings, in this publication Breutz supplies detailed information about various aspects of different sections of the Bahurutshe. It includes valuable information for historians on – amongst others – migrations, the history and genealogy of chiefs, age regiments, political organisation, population size, social structure, beliefs and religion, agriculture, material culture and economics.[44] In many instances including the only account of personalities and events of the distant Hurutshe past, Breutz's work will continue to serve as a starting point for historians and archaeologists working on the Bahurutshe.[45]

The oral tradition recorded by Breutz and others plays a fundamental role in ascribing a historical identity to the many Late Iron Age stone-walled sites attributed to Tswana groups. Archaeologists can link the references in oral tradition to political lineages to specific sites. Oral tradition was, for example, used to accurately locate Kaditshwene, the Hurutshe Iron Age megasite.[46]

An important issue in the historiography of the Bahurutshe in the precolonial period is their status in the larger Tswana context. Andrew Smith noted in his diary in 1835 that the Bahurutshe was regarded as the senior group among the Tswana *merafe*, because according to oral tradition they had first come out of the Matsieng waterhole, the place of origin of the Batswana.[47] For the greater part of the twentieth century, mainly as a result of the findings of government ethnologists, the Bahurutshe continued to be regarded as the senior group of the Batswana in South Africa. G.P. Lestrade, the first ethnologist employed by the NAD, regarded them so.[48] F.J. Language described the Bahurutshe as the core from which the other main Tswana groups originated.[49] Breutz, relying on oral evidence, agreed that the Bahurutshe, who are the descendants of the eldest son of Malope, formed the senior 'tribe' of the Batswana that dominated the western Highveld up to the eighteenth century. This seniority was acknowledged by allowing the chief of the Bahurutshe to perform the ceremony of the first fruits. Nobody in the region was allowed to eat the first fruits of the season before the Hurutshe chief had rubbed his body with *lerotse* leaves. The Hurutshe chief also announced the harvesting season and the commencement of the period of initiation. It was also he who performed the ritual of selecting the best young

43 BOEYENS and MORTON, 'The Tswana's Antiquarian: The Life and Work of State Ethnologist Paul-Lenert Breitz (1912–1999),' 119–20.
44 BREUTZ, *The Tribes of Marico District*, 139–94.
45 BOEYENS and MORTON, 'The Tswana's Antiquarian: The Life and Work of State Ethnologist Paul-Lenert Breitz (1912–1999),' 120; MORTON, 'Settlements, Landscapes and Identities among the Tswana of the Western Transvaal and Eastern Kalahari before 1820,' 68–9.
46 BOEYENS and HALL, 'Tlokwa Oral Traditions and the Interface between History and Archaeology at Marothodi,' 457–8.
47 P.C. KIRBY, ed., *The Diary of Dr Andrew Smith, 1834–1836* (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1940), 221–22.
48 LESTRADE, *Miscellaneous notes on laws and customs of the Bahuruthse*.
49 F.J. LANGUAGE, *Inleiding: stamregering by die Thlaping* (Introduction: Tribal Rule among the Thlaping) (Pro Ecclesia: Stellenbosch, 1943), see 9.

bulls before the weaker bulls could be castrated.[50] According to Mpotokwane's interpretation of oral tradition, the Bahurutshe and Bakwena were the offspring of Malope's children, Mohurutshe and Kwena. He states that the Bahurutshe are said to be the senior stock of all Tswana ethnic groups.[51]

Claims about the seniority of the Bahurutshe have been challenged. In an Afrikaans textbook on the 'Bantu' of South Africa, J.P. van S. Bruwer, professor of cultural anthropology (*volkekunde*) at Stellenbosch University, identified the Bakwena as the senior Tswana 'tribe.'[52] Ngcongco rejected the idea that the Bahurutshe was the parent group of the Batswana and asserted that both the Bahurutshe and the Bakwena split from the original Kwena-Hurutshe cluster between c. 1475 and 1505 CE.[53] In his in-depth study of Hurutshe history, Andrew Manson takes a similar neutral position by pointing out that all Tswana lineages descended from the same founding ancestors (Masilo, Mokgatla and Morolong) and that the united *Phofu*[54] cluster divided into the Bahurutshe and Bakwena in the time of chief Malope I. Only in certain periods were the Bahurutshe the dominant group in the Marico region.[55] Legassick viewed the Bakwena, and Mbenga the Barolong, as the senior Tswana groups.[56] Regardless of the status of the Bahurutshe among the Tswana groups in the region, they were notable actors in the history of the Marico.

Although anthropological data, in the same way as archaeological data, constitute a major source for writing the history of the Bahurutshe in precolonial times, Manson sounds the warning that ethnologies tend to be bogged down in the time when the fieldwork is performed and also mostly have a top-down perspective, focussing on the traditional leaders and excluding ordinary people, women and the youth.[57]

The contribution of archaeology to precolonial Hurutshe historiography

Archaeological evidence is an indispensable source of information about the history of the Bahurutshe in the time before first-hand written records. More than a thousand stone-walled Iron Age settlements have been recorded in the Marico basin.[58] Archaeologists have used data from studies of some of these sites to identify patterns of migration, settlement and interaction between groups. Manson points out that

50 BREUTZ, *The Tribes of Marico District*, 16.
51 JAMES MPOTOKWANE, 'A Short History of the Bahurutshe of King Motebele, Senior Son of King Mohurutshe,' *Botswana Notes & Records* 6, no. 1 (1974): 37–45, see 37, 44.
52 J.P. VAN S. BRUWER, *Die Bantoe van Suid-Afrika* (The Bantu of South Africa) (Johannesburg: Afrikaanse Pers-Boekhandel, 1956), 22.
53 NGCONGCO, 'Origins of the Tswana,' 28, 33, 34.
54 *Phofu* is the Tswana name for the eland, the antelope that in early times was the totem of both the Bahurutshe and the Bakwena.
55 MANSON, 'The Hurutshe in the Marico District of the Transvaal, 1848–1914,' ii, 37–40.
56 BERNARD MBENGA, 'Bafokeng and Bahurutshe,' *H-Africa discussion group*, University of Pennsylvania, African Studies Center, 2000.
57 ANDREW MANSON, 'The Hurutshe in the Marico District of the Transvaal, 1848–1914' (PhD thesis, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, 1990), 22–23.
58 REVIL J. MASON, 'Transvaal and Natal Iron Age Settlements Revealed by Aerial Photography and Excavation,' *African Studies*, 27, no. 4 (1968): 167–80; J.D. SEDDON, 'An Aerial Survey of Settlement and Living Patterns in the Transvaal Iron Age: Preliminary Report,' *African Studies* 27, no. 4 (1968): 189–94.

although archaeologists have been prone to reaching flawed assumptions, they have produced indispensable data for the historical research of the Bahurutshe.[59]

The first major archaeological study at a Hurutshe site in South Africa was completed by Jan Boeyens for his doctoral thesis on Kaditshwene.[60] He combined a comprehensive archaeological study of the site with supporting data from other sources, especially the text of John Campbell's account of his visit to Kaditshwene in 1820 and the paintings he made during his stay there. The thesis deals with the migration and settlement of the Bahurutshe between c. 1200 and 1848 CE. Their main group moved to Kaditshwene (or Karechuenya), which in the late eighteenth century became a megasite, with a population of between ten and twenty-five thousand, probably the largest town in southern Africa at that time. Boeyens found that the Bahurutshe had only one main settlement at the time at Kaditshwene and not a dual capital as suggested by Mason and Breutz. He included data on the material culture, agriculture, hunting, iron-smelting and trade of the Bahurutshe, which shed light on their economic activities and lifestyle. Kaditshwene's archaeological remains confirm that the Bahurutshe had big herds of cattle and worked iron on a large scale.[61]

Archaeological research has been at the centre of the discourse on the applicability of the Central Cattle Pattern (CCP) to the history of the Batswana. This ethnological model of spatial organisation, focussing on the centrality of cattle in the culture of the southern Bantu, was derived from Adam Kuper's explanation of the typical layout of homesteads[62] and confirmed by the archaeological research of Tom Huffman and others.[63] In Tswana communities, the spatial arrangement of the settlement, with the cattle kraal in the centre, indicated economic, political and social relationships. Cattle were significant as a source of wealth and power, were the key

[59] MANSON, 'The Hurutshe in the Marico District of the Transvaal, 1848–1914,' 18–22.

[60] Kaditshwene, the name of a hill and the stone-walled settlement built on it, is probably derived from the phrase 'ga se ka ditshwene,' translated as 'what an incredible number of baboons.' See JAN C.A. BOEYENS, 'A Tale of Two Tswana Towns: In Quest of Tswenyane and the Twin Capital of the Hurutshe in the Marico,' *Southern African Humanities*, 28 (2016): 1–37, see 4.

[61] JAN C.A. BOEYENS, 'Die latere Ystertydperk in Suidoos- en Sentraal-Marico' (The Later Iron Age in Southeastern and Central Marico) (PhD thesis, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, 1998), ix, 50, 88–91, 200, 229, 239. See also BOEYENS, 'A Tale of Two Tswana Towns: In Quest of Tswenyane and the Twin Capital of the Hurutshe in the Marico,' 1–37; JAN C.A. BOEYENS and I. PLUG, '"A Chief is Like an Ash-Heap on Which Is Gathered All the Refuse": The Faunal Remains from the Central Court Midden at Kaditshwene,' *Annals of the Ditsong National Museum of Natural History* 1 (2011): 1–22; NEIL PARSONS, 'Prelude to Difaqane in the Interior of Southern Africa c. 1600–c. 1822,' in *The Mfecane Aftermath*, ed. Carolyn Hamilton (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1995), 330–31; Etherington, *The Great Treks*, 99; REVIL J. MASON, *Origins of Black People of Johannesburg and the Southern Western Central Transvaal AD 350–1880* (Johannesburg: Archaeological Research Unit, University of the Witwatersrand, 1986), 840.

[62] A. KUPER, 'Symbolic Dimensions of the Southern Bantu Homestead,' *Africa*, 50, no. 1 (1980): 8–23.

[63] T.N. HUFFMAN, 'Archaeology and Ethnohistory of the African Iron Age,' *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 11 (1982): 133–50; T.N. HUFFMAN, 'Iron Age Settlement Patterns and the Origins of Class Distinction in Southern Africa,' *Advances in World Archaeology*, 5 (1986): 291–338; HUFFMAN, 'Architecture and Settlement Patterns,' in *Encyclopedia of Precolonial Africa: Archaeology, History, Languages, Cultures, and Environments*, ed. J.O. Vogel (London: AltaMira Press, 1997), 149–55; HUFFMAN, 'The Central Cattle Pattern and Interpreting the Past,' *Southern African Humanities*, 13 (2001): 19–35.

form of surplus storage in precapitalist Tswana societies and formed the basis of a feudal system of allegiance.[64] The CCP became the dominant model to interpret Late Iron Age southern Bantu communities, but its applicability to earlier times has been challenged.[65] Boeyens' study of Kaditshwene confirmed the existence of the CCP among the Bahurutshe in the Late Iron Age, but studies of older sites will be required to establish how far into the past it can be traced.

Archaeologists use data from other disciplines to help them interpret archaeological sites and their artefacts, thus creating a model for writing a deep-level history for non-literate societies.[66] In his doctoral study of Kaditshwene and subsequent articles, Boeyens used material from ethnology, linguistics (particularly the etymology of place names) and art (John Campbell's paintings and copies of Hurutshe mural art) to help him interpret the archaeological data.[67]

As a major source for the study of African precolonial societies, archaeology sheds light on people and places not mentioned in the written record. Archaeological discoveries verify and explain aspects of oral tradition, although a precise correlation between the data contained in oral tradition and archaeological study is seldom achieved. By strengthening the *longue durée* perspective, archaeology is able to investigate long-term change. However, archaeology has limitations. Its evidence is often fragmentary and inconclusive. Artefacts contain important information about the material culture of precolonial people, but extrapolation based on this information is hardly adequate to explain immaterial aspects such as the thought processes of people.[68]

The earliest written accounts of the Bahurutshe and their territory

In the early nineteenth century, when the north-western frontier zone in and adjacent to the Marico had started opening up and the precolonial period in that region was coming to an end, European travellers, hunters and missionaries started visiting the Marico. Some of them wrote accounts of their visits to and sojourn in the area, thus producing the first written accounts of the Hurutshe people and the land where they lived. For the late precolonial and early colonial periods there is only a limited number of these accounts.

---

64 PARSONS, 'Prelude to Difaqane in the Interior of Southern Africa c. 1600–c. 1822,' 324.
65 SHAW BADENHORST, 'The Central Cattle Pattern during the Iron Age of Southern Africa: A Critique of Its Spatial Features,' *The South African Archaeological Bulletin* 64, no. 190 (2009): 148–55.
66 See e.g., DAVID LEE SCHOENBRUN, *A Green Place, a Good Place: Agrarian Change, Gender, and Social Identity in the Great Lake Region to the 15th Century* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998); HENRY DREWAL, 'Signs of Time, Shapes of Thought: The Contribution of Art History and Visual Culture to Historical Methods in Africa,' in *Writing African History,* ed. John Edward Philips (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2005), 329–47.
67 BOEYENS, 'In Search of Kaditswene,' 3–17; BOEYENS, 'The Late Iron Age Sequence in the Marico and Early Tswana History,' 63–78; JAN C.A. BOEYENS and DESMOND T. COLE, 'Kaditshwene: What's in a Name?,' *Nomina Africana* 9, no. 1 (1995): 1–40.
68 BOEYENS, 'The Intersection of Archaeology, Oral Tradition and History,' 7–8; BOEYENS and HALL, 'Tlokwa Oral Traditions and the Interface between History and Archaeology at Marothodi,' 460, 463.

The first written documents in which information relevant to the Bahurutshe appeared were the reports by the Truter-Somerville expedition of 1801 and by Lichtenstein after his 1811–12 visit to the region.[69] Campbell's account of his sojourn in Kaditshwene in 1820, referred to in the introduction of this article, is by far the most detailed eye-witness description of life in a Hurutshe community in the period before the destruction of Kaditshwene and the dispersal of the Bahurutshe before and during the *difaqane*. It provides valuable information on life at Kaditshwene and the leaders of the Bahurutshe, *kgôsi* Diutlwileng, who reigned till 1823 when he was killed during the sacking of Kaditshwene, and the young Moiloa, later *kgôsi* Moiloa II, who reigned from the 1840s to the 1870s at Dinokana.[70]

Missionaries made a major contribution to the recording of information about the Batswana in the nineteenth century. During the 1820s, the *difaqane* wars in the interior, after invasions from the east across the Drakensberg mountains, almost totally disintegrated the Bahurutshe. Their capital, Kaditshwene, was attacked and destroyed by the invaders. They were forced to move southward and lost all their cattle.[71] When Mzilikazi's Ndebele shifted their main settlements to the Marico valley in the 1830s, the majority of the Bahurutshe moved further south.[72] The removal from their land brought along political, social and economic disruption for the scattered Hurutshe communities.[73] The journals and letters of Robert and Mary Moffett, who worked at the LMS mission station at Kuruman, provide valuable information about the turmoil in the Hurutshe territory in the 1820s and 1830s. This material was edited and published by Isaac Schapera in 1951.[74]

Apart from transcribed oral tradition and archaeological studies, as far as the period up to the early nineteenth century is concerned, historians have to rely on these early written accounts by travellers, hunters and missionaries, who recorded aspects of the history and culture of the Batswana.[75]

---

[69] MANSON, 'The Hurutshe in the Marico District of the Transvaal, 1848–1914,' 25.

[70] CAMPBELL, *Travels in South Africa Undertaken at the Request of the London Missionary Society: Being the Narrative of a Second Journey in the Interior of That Country*, 222–77. Stephen Kay, a Methodist missionary, visited Kaditshwene in 1821, but made only brief mention of the Bahurutshe. See STEPHEN KAY, *Travels and Researches in Caffraria, Describing the Character, Customs and Moral Condition of the Tribes Inhabiting That Portion of Southern Africa* (New York: Harper Bros, 1834).

[71] BOEYENS, 'Die latere Ystertydperk in Suidoos- en Sentraal-Marico,' 50–51; BREUTZ, *The Tribes of Marico District*, 141.

[72] R. KENT RASMUSSEN, *Migrant Kingdom: Mzilikazi's Ndebele in South Africa* (London: Rex Collings, 1978), 97, 100, 102.

[73] GEORGE W. STOW, *The Native Races of South Africa* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1910), 558; HENDRIK VAN DER WATEREN, 'Die materiële kultuur, vervaardiging en bedryfslewe van die Bahurutshe van Motswedi' (The Material Culture, Production and Industrial Life of the Bahurutshe of Motswedi) (PhD thesis, Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, Potchefstroom, 1974), 144–51.

[74] ISAAC SCHAPERA, ed., *Apprenticeship at Kuruman Being the Journals and Letters of Robert and Mary Moffatt 1820–1828* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1951).

[75] B. MORTON, *Pre-colonial Botswana: An Annotated Bibliography and Guide to the Sources* (Gaborone: Botswana Society, 1994), 33–4.

Historians' role in the interpretation of source material dealing with Hurutshe society in the precolonial period

It is no easy task to interpret, explain and understand the precolonial past. Because the evidence is thin, it is hard for the historian to establish the sequence and connection of events, to understand how people thought, to explain human actions and to interpret the political, social and cultural frameworks by which human beings ordered their lives.

To bridge the divide between the precolonial and colonial periods, historians' task is to integrate the different types of source material in a multidisciplinary project to construct a coherent narrative of the African past. Because of the paucity of the written record in the case of the Bahurutshe, historians have to rely heavily on ethnological, archaeological and linguistic data. To achieve an understanding of the nature and dynamics of precolonial Hurutshe communities, the data sets of the different disciplines need to be combined, taking account of both disjunctures and convergences between them and using the principle of convergent verification to affirm findings. Interpretation is most reliable where the evidence contained in the data sets converges. Consonance and dissonance between the various evidential sources require careful scrutiny of the mentions and silences in the different records.[76]

The first extensive text by a historian on Hurutshe history in the precolonial period was J.J. Snyman's master's dissertation completed in the 1940s. Apart from the existing secondary literature and ethnographic data available at the time, he also made use of the oral evidence supplied by Afrikaans farmers of the Marico region contained in their memoirs. These memoirs were not first-hand accounts, but oral tradition passed on from generation to generation. Writing from an Afrikaner nationalist perspective, Snyman focused on conflict in which the Bahurutshe were involved, including intergroup conflict, for example, conflict with the Barolong, and intragroup conflict stemming from succession and leadership struggles, which often resulted in fission as factions split from groups and moved away to settle at other localities. Snyman's study was in line with Afrikaner nationalist thinking at the beginning of the apartheid era about the ethnic divisions within the African population in South Africa.[77] Two decades later, P.J. Oosthuizen completed his master's dissertation on the history of Marico, which followed the same Afrikaner nationalist historiographical line as Snyman by emphasising the conflicts and tendency of fission among the 'Bantu tribes' in the region. He argued that the Bahurutshe had been living too thinly scattered

[76] BOEYENS, 'The Intersection of Archaeology, Oral Tradition and History,' 14–15; BOEYENS and HALL, 'Tlokwa Oral Traditions and the Interface between History and Archaeology at Marothodi,' 479.
[77] J.J. SNYMAN, 'Die naturellestamme in Marico vanaf die 18de eeu tot die verdrywing van die Matabelestam in November 1837' (The Native Tribes in Marico from the 18th Century to the Ousting of the Matabele in November 1837) (MA dissertation, Department of History, University of South Africa, Pretoria, 1949).

to maintain their unity. A series of secessions had led to the formation of an ever-increasing number of subgroups.[78]

In his early publications on the Sotho-Tswana, based on his research for his doctoral thesis, Martin Legassick formulated his critique of the frontier tradition in South African historiography, which was also applicable to the Bahurutshe owing to their finding themselves in a frontier zone for the greater part of the nineteenth century. Legassick investigated the instability, dynamism and temporary nature of the frontier zone and argued that it was a fluid space where there was no single source of legitimate authority and where acculturation took place. Legassick's work initiated renewed debate about the importance of the precolonial frontier situation in South Africa for the establishment of ideas of race, the development of racial prejudice and, implicitly, the creation of segregationist and apartheid systems.[79]

To counter the Afrikaner nationalist view of pervasive fission in Tswana societies, which bolstered government policies of segregation based on ethnic differences, liberal and radical historians argued that alternate phases of fission and fusion could be identified in early Tswana history. In specific conditions, certain factors promoted the fission of groups into smaller communities and in other conditions a different set of factors promoted the fusion of groups into larger units. Through these processes, chieftaincies and headmanships, related to one another, came into existence and proliferated.[80] Manson contends that a pattern of alternating processes of centralisation and fragmentation characterises Hurutshe history over the last five centuries. From the mid-seventeenth century and towards the end of the eighteenth century, the Hurutshe population was concentrated under powerful chiefs at major centres, notably Kaditshwene, where the powerholders increased their control over resources and the number of their adherents. Increased cohesion promoted state-formation. However, around the turn of the eighteenth century, from 1790 to 1820, surrounding Tswana states challenged the Hurutshe dominance and, plagued by succession disputes, the Bahurutshe started losing power.[81]

There has been a tendency in the different disciplines contributing to the historiography of the Bahurutshe in the precolonial period to focus mainly on

78 P.J. OOSTHUIZEN, 'Die geskiedenis van Marico tot 1900' (The History of Marico up to 1900) (MA dissertation, Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir Christelike Hoër Onderwys, Potchefstroom, 1971).

79 M.C. LEGASSICK, 'The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana, and the Missionaries, 1780–1840: The Politics of a Frontier Zone' (PhD thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1969). The thesis was published as a book by Basler Afrika Bibliographien in 2010. See also MARTIN LEGASSICK, 'The Sotho-Tswana Peoples before 1800,' in *African Societies in Southern Africa*, ed. Leonard Thompson (London: Heinemann, 1969), 15–35; MARTIN LEGASSICK, 'The Frontier Tradition in South African Historiography,' in *Economy and Society in Pre-industrial South Africa*, eds S. Marks and A. Atmore (London: Longman, 1980), 44–79; JARED MCDONALD, 'Review of The Politics of a South African Frontier by Martin Legassick,' *Historia* 56, no. 1 (2011): 159–61.

80 LEGASSICK, 'The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana, and the Missionaries, 1780–1840: The Politics of a Frontier Zone,' 87, 98–99, 124.

81 MANSON, 'The Hurutshe in the Marico District of the Transvaal, 1848–1914,' 21, 36–37, 40–42, 50–53. See also PARSONS, 'Prelude to Difaqane in the Interior of Southern Africa c. 1600–c. 1822,' 323–24, 335–36, 344, 345, 346, 348.

intergroup conflict. Historians and archaeologists agree that continual conflict was a feature of early Tswana history because of the jostling for land, cattle, trading positions and ultimately power between armed chieftaincies.[82] These conflicts resulted in movements of people and realignments of power, but disease, droughts and warfare restricted the ability of any single kingdom to sustain a dominant role for any length of time. The argument that from the seventeenth century onwards the increase in human population heightened the competition for resources and caused an intensification of conflict among Tswana groups in the western Highveld is persuasive. The fact that the remains of most of the Iron Age settlements are located on hilltops has been interpreted as an indication that the people who built them sought defensible sites against attacks by neighbouring groups.

Unfortunately, the focus on conflict may lead to a one-sided perspective, which creates the impression that interaction between Tswana groups was predominantly conflictual rather than collaborative. To bring balance, historians of the Bahurutshe should strengthen research on the thread of centralisation and collaboration in Hurutshe history in periods of strong leadership.

The significance of the precolonial history of the Bahurutshe

Building on the groundwork laid by ethnologists and archaeologists, historians started interpreting aspects of early Hurutshe history to produce a cohesive narrative. Because the level of 'reliving' that is required for good history-writing is hard to attain for non-literate societies in precolonial times, it has been and will continue to be an arduous task. Is it a worthwhile exercise to go to so much trouble to compile scraps of information from different sources to construct the early history of the Bahurutshe? Does the history of precolonial African societies still have significance in the twenty-first century, hundreds of years later?

While writing about the Bahurutshe from different historiographical perspectives, historians brought to the fore some typical and topical issues informing the national discourse in both the apartheid and post-apartheid eras. Two matters that have received attention are ethnicity and land ownership.

Ethnicity, the sense of belonging to a group that is rooted in a notion of shared cultural peoplehood, is one of the most controversial issues.[83] The existence of

[82] See e.g., ANDREW MANSON, 'Conflict in the Western Highveld/Southern Kalahari c. 1750–1820' and SIMON HALL, 'Archaeological Indicators for Stress in the Western Transvaal Region between the Seventeenth and Nineteenth Centuries,' in *The Mfecane Aftermath*, ed. Carolyn Hamilton (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1995), 351–61 and 307–21. See also the cited works by Parsons, Etherington and Boeyens.

[83] The complex phenomenon of ethnicity has been investigated from different perspectives. See e.g., WSEVOLOD W. ISAJIW, 'Definition and Dimensions of Ethnicity: A Theoretical Framework,' paper, Joint Canada-United States Conference on the Measurement of Ethnicity, Ottawa, 1992, https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/68/2/Def_DimofEthnicity.pdf, accessed 27 May 2022; ELLIOTT D. GREEN, 'Redefining Ethnicity,' paper, 47th Annual International Studies Association Convention, San Diego, CA, 2006, available at https://personal.lse.ac.uk/GREENED/ISA.pdf,

different ethnic groups in South Africa is a historical fact that has evolved over many centuries.[84] However, the classification by Breutz, a white ethnologist working for the apartheid government, of the components of the Tswana population in terms of different 'tribes' and ethnic subgroups has been challenged. By identifying 'tribes' culturally, Breutz gave the 'tribe' a real, but specious, identity. Although the value of his data was beyond dispute, his ideological outlook was under suspicion. Breutz's ethnic classification was used by the apartheid government, which manipulated ethnic differences in order to divide and rule the black majority in South Africa and perpetuate white minority domination. It was rejected as unacceptable by liberal and radical scholars who regarded ethnicity as 'false consciousness' and its use by the government as retrogressive and divisive 'tribalism.' Critics argued that there was little point in trying to identify people by clear-cut ethnic characteristics, because ethnic identities did not remain 'pure' throughout the centuries.[85]

Colonial concepts of ethnicity need to be broadened when writing Africa's early history. According to anticolonial insights, the concepts of 'tribe' and ethnic distinctions are inventions of the colonial mind. 'Tribe,' with its connotation of primitive and static African communities, was used by colonialists in an imprecise way to refer to groups, identified variously by shared language, ancestry or allegiance to the same ruler, whereas the combination of these different characteristics was seldom contained within one clearly defined African group. Ethnicity as a social construct has often been used to promote political agendas. Both colonial and postcolonial rulers used ethnic categories as a tool of domination.[86]

In a pathbreaking study, Ronald Atkinson responded to the question of whether ethnicity was a creation of the colonial period or whether it was a reality in precolonial times. He found that, although the British colonisers of Uganda manipulated the notion of an Acholi 'tribe,' the process of the formation of Acholi ethnic identity had started in the seventeenth century, a long time before the colonial period. He emphasised that the socio-political groupings of the present cannot simply be read back into the past, because ethnicity is not an unchanging, single-dimensional phenomenon, but the changing product of an unfinished process of identity formation. The development of ethnicity should be regarded as a link between the precolonial and colonial past.[87]

---

accessed 27 May 2022; HANNA ZAGEFKA, 'The Concept of Ethnicity in Social Psychological Research: Definitional Issues,' *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 33 (2009): 228–41, doi: 10.1016/j.ijintrel.2008.08.001.

[84] See e.g., ISAAC SCHAPERA, *The Ethnic Composition of Tswana Tribes* (London: Routledge, 1952).

[85] *The Historiography of Southern Africa*, 90.

[86] SCHOENBRUN, 'A Past Whose Time Has Come,' 47; SCHOENBRUN, 'Early African Pasts,' 28; ATJENO ODHIAMBO, 'Review of Ronald R. Atkinson, *The Roots of Ethnicity: The Origins of the Acholi of Uganda before 1800*,' *American Historical Review* (April 1996): 535–36, see 536.

[87] RONALD R. ATKINSON, *The Roots of Ethnicity: The Origins of the Acholi of Uganda before 1800* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994). See also ATKINSON, 'The Evolution of Ethnicity among the Acholi of Uganda: The Precolonial Phase,' *Ethnohistory* 36, no. 1 (Winter, 1989): 19–43, see 19–20.

The semantics of ethnicity has been 'retooled.'[88] Today many scholars agree that the idea of clearly identifiable ethnic groups is not applicable to precolonial African groups, because their identities were fluid, permeable, overlapping and complex.[89] Landau regards the concept of entrenched ethnic identities as not a natural cultural residue from the distant past, but a Eurocentric invention that developed in the colonial period. In his view, the 'Bechuana people' were not an ethnicity, a tribe, or even a single racial type.[90]

Ethnicity remains a controversial issue in the diverse society of South Africa. The significance of Hurutshe precolonial history for current South African debates around ethnicity lies in the fact that it reveals the roots of ethnic formation in the country. The way in which the Phofu cluster, the larger Bahurutshe-Bakwena formation, split into ever-increasing subgroups was typical of the origins of different ethnic groups in the country.

More research (perhaps modelled on the example of Atkinson) is required to test the conflicting viewpoints in the discourse on Breutz's work and obtain a clearer understanding of how ethnicity among the Batswana was manifested in precolonial times. In the case of the Bahurutshe, research on aspects such as totemism[91] may bring greater clarity on whether this group functioned as a relatively homogeneous ethnic group from the sixteenth century CE onwards.

Another controversial issue in South African historiography to which oral tradition and archaeology have made contributions is the question about the time of arrival of different groups in different parts of the country and their claims of being 'indigenous people.' When the definition of 'indigenous people' as people who have always lived in a particular place rather than having arrived from another place is applied to South Africa, the question raised is whether any group can claim to be indigenous. Commenting on the claims by the San and Khoi that they should be recognised as South Africa's 'first people,' Crowe notes that DNA evidence reveals that all groups currently living in South Africa should be regarded as 'settlers' and 'colonisers.' The ancestors of the San arrived here about 140,000 years ago, those of

88 SCHOENBRUN, 'A Past Whose Time Has Come,' 48.

89 GABRIELLE LYNCH, 'Ethnicity in Africa,' *Oxford Research Encyclopedias, African History*, 2018, doi: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.32.

90 PAUL S. LANDAU, *Popular Politics in the History of South Africa, 1400–1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 41, 64, 121. See also the description of ethnic distinctions as a 'consciously crafted ideological creation' in LEROY VAIL, 'Introduction: Ethnicity in Southern African History,' in *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, ed. Vail (University of California Press E-Books Collection, 1989), par. 7, http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft158004rs/.

91 For more information on the switch from the *phofu* (eland) to the *tshwene* (baboon) as the totem of the Bahurutshe, see BREUTZ, *The Tribes of Marico District*, 19; PAUL LENERT BREUTZ, *A History of the Batswana and Origin of Bophuthatswana: A Handbook of a Survey of the Tribes of the Batswana, s'Ndebele, Qwaqwa and Botswana* (Margate: Breutz, 1987), 226; PARSONS, 'Prelude to Difaqane in the Interior of Southern Africa c. 1600–c. 1822,' 323–50, see 330, 332.

the Khoi about 2,000 years ago, those of the Bantu-speaking black Africans fewer than 1,700 years ago and those of the Europeans fewer than four centuries ago.[92]

Colonial and Afrikaner nationalist historians tried to justify the historical fact that in the colonial period people of European descent took possession of the largest part of South Africa. They did it by means of the 'empty land myth,' alleging that whites and blacks arrived at the southern tip of the continent at roughly the same time and that the white pioneers moved into a largely uninhabited interior.[93] Shula Marks successfully refuted the empty land myth by using archaeological evidence to prove that the ancestors of the Bantu-speakers arrived in southern Africa long before the first European settlers.[94] The African nationalist point of view is that the African ancestors can claim indigeneity by virtue of their very early arrival in southern Africa.[95] However, research established that the Bantu-speakers did not arrive so early: in the case of the Bahurutshe in Marico somewhere between 1200 and 1600 CE. Therefore, neither the colonial and Afrikaner nationalist versions nor the African nationalist version of the arrival of the different groups is based on hard empirical evidence.

The claims of early arrival in southern Africa and of indigeneity represent a significant input into current debates on the land issue, one of the most controversial aspects of policy in the country.[96] This input is certainly applicable to the land claims of the Bahurutshe, who arrived in the Marico region centuries before the white farmers who, from the nineteenth century, gradually supplanted them.

We argue that Hurutshe history has major significance in the bigger picture of the South African past. It fits into the broader pattern of the country's history and has relevance for the understanding of current debates around controversial issues such as ethnicity and land claims.

---

92 TIM CROWE, 'How the Origin of the Khoisan Tells Us that "Race" Has No Place in Human Ancestry,' *The Conversation*, 2016, https://theconversation.com/how-the-origin-of-the-khoisan-tells-us-that-race-has-no-place-in-human-ancestry-53594, accessed 27 May 2022.

93 See e.g., G.M. THEAL, *History of South Africa before 1795*, 3rd ed., vol. III (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1922), 128–30; F.A. van Jaarsveld, *From Van Riebeeck to Vorster, 1652–1974: An Introduction to the History of the Republic of South Africa* (Pretoria: Academica, 1975), 54; South African History Online, 'The Empty Land Myth,' 2015, https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/empty-land-myth, accessed 27 May 2022.

94 SHULA MARKS, 'South Africa – "The Myth of the Empty Land",' *History Today* 30, no. 1 (1980), https://www.historytoday.com/shula-marks/south-africa-myth-empty-land, accessed 27 May 2022. See also CLIFTON C. CRAIS, 'The Vacant Land: The Mythology of British Expansion in the Eastern Cape, South Africa,' *Journal of Social History*, 25, no. 2 (1991): 255–75.

95 LEONARD NGCONGCO, 'Origins of the Tswana,' *Pula: Botswana Journal of African Studies* 1, no. 2 (1979): 21–46, see 26, 28, 39.

96 For details about these debates, consult F. HENDRICKS, L. NTSEBEZA, and K. HELLIKER, eds, *The Promise of Land: Undoing a Century of Dispossession in South Africa* (Auckland Park: Jacana, 2013); P. HEBINCK and B. COUSINS, eds, *In the Shadow of Policy: Everyday Practices in South African Land and Agrarian Reform* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2013); LUNGISILE NTSEBEZA and RUTH HALL, eds, *The Land Question in South Africa* (Pretoria: HSRC Press, 2017); WILLIAM BEINART, PETER DELIUS, and MICHELLE HAY, *Rights to Land* (Auckland Park: Jacana, 2017).

Conclusion

In the colonial frame of mind, the history of precolonial African societies was regarded as unknowable and insignificant. This resulted in the misrepresentation of these societies as fixed, passive, isolated, unenterprising and unenlightened. We now know that the history of precolonial African societies, spanning a much longer period than the history of European settlement in southern Africa, was eventful and characterised by interaction, flux, mixing and adaptability.

In this article, the three sources from which historians obtain their material for the research of the Bahurutshe in the precolonial era have been discussed: oral tradition, archaeological studies of Iron Age sites, and the oldest written accounts by European visitors to the Marico. I have shown that because the Batswana were non-literate societies before the nineteenth century, the study of their early history has to be a multidisciplinary project requiring the inputs of anthropologists, archaeologists and linguists. Boeyens states that the different sources 'must be studied conjunctively and comparatively to gain a more complete understanding of the past.'[97]

Compared to the advances in the breadth and depth of the historiography of precolonial societies in West, Central and East Africa, the knowledge about the distant past in southern Africa has lagged behind, partly owing to the fact that decolonisation happened later in the southern part of the continent. Already in the 1970s, participants in the project to compile UNESCO's *General History of Africa* observed this backlog and called for a multidisciplinary approach to the study of the history of the subcontinent.[98]

In order to redress this situation, scholars from different disciplines launched the Five Hundred Year Initiative many years later in 2006. Its objective is to overcome the lack of interdisciplinary vision and cooperation that resulted in the circumscribed use of documentary, oral and material records which limited integration and historical depth in the study of the precolonial period in southern Africa. It aims to promote interdisciplinary research involving archaeologists, oral historians, social anthropologists, linguists and others in order to reconnect erstwhile disparate sources into a coherent intellectual agenda. A comprehensive digital database of precolonial material related to the southern African region is being created. Participants of this initiative strive to reinterrogate the last five hundred years and generate a more comprehensive understanding of modern southern Africa.[99]

---

97 BOEYENS, 'The Intersection of Archaeology, Oral Tradition and History,' 2.
98 *The Historiography of Southern Africa*, 19, 89.
99 P.L. BONNER et al., 'Introduction' and JOANNA BEHRENS and NATALIE SWANEPOEL, 'Historical Archaeologies of Southern Africa: Precedents and Prospects,' in *Five Hundred Years Rediscovered: Southern African Precedents and Prospects*, eds Natalie Swanepoel, Amanda Esterhuysen, and Philip Bonner (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2008), 1–20 and 23–40 respectively, see 23. More information about the FHYA is available at Archive and Public Culture, http://www.apc.uct.ac.za/apc/research/projects/five-hundred-year-archive, accessed 27 May 2022.

What progress has thus far been made by means of multi- and interdisciplinary projects in the production of historical knowledge about the Bahurutshe in the precolonial period? When the latest developments in precolonial African historiography, as described earlier in this article, are considered, it is clear that as far as the Bahurutshe are concerned, the desired level of synthesis of disciplines has not yet been achieved. It is true that by combining multidisciplinary inputs, factual knowledge about the Bahurutshe in precolonial times has been expanded to form the basis of an emerging coherent history. However, there is much scope for future interdisciplinary research.

Historians studying the Bahurutshe should build upon the methodological innovations applied to other parts of the continent, where interdisciplinary collaboration over a period of several decades has resulted in a remarkable increase in knowledge about peoples living in the distant past. More research in the field of the environmental history of the Marico is required, because information about environmental conditions in the region in different periods, the impacts of these conditions on the human population and their responses to adapt to them can potentially be very important for a better understanding of Hurutshe history. Inputs from light detection and ranging (LiDAR), bio-archaeology, zoo-archaeology, archaeobotany, geo-archaeological studies of soils and sediments and palaeogenetics are still lacking at well-documented archaeological sites, such as Kaditshwene, but have the potential to considerably expand scientific data. Hopefully, the Five Hundred Year Initiative can play a role in facilitating this kind of interdisciplinary team research.

The further development of the precolonial historiography of the Bahurutshe (and other South African communities) through interdisciplinary research has the potential to realise McNeill's expectation that precolonial African history may prove to be a 'guide to our future as historians.' It may have significance beyond the country's borders for historians using similar sources in their research on the distant past of people in other parts of the world.

Emotion, Diplomacy and Gift Exchanging Practices in the Ottoman Context

Ed. by Rosita D'Amora

Emotion, Diplomacy and Gift Exchanging Practices in the Ottoman Context[*]

ROSITA D'AMORA
University of Lecce

In recent years, an increasing number of studies on diplomatic gifts in the Ottoman context have emphasised, through a variety of different approaches, the central roles played by gift exchanges in the performance of diplomatic interactions taking place both in the capital of the empire, Istanbul – one of the crucial nodes of early modern diplomatic networks – and during ad hoc Ottoman ambassadorial missions abroad.[1] More generally, these studies have also contributed to a growing literature on how gifts enhanced the establishment and development of complex and globally interconnected practices.[2] Contextually, over the last two decades, historians have started approaching diplomatic history, traditionally grounded in legal and political theory, from an interdisciplinary perspective, introducing new themes and wider cultural and social understandings of diplomatic connections.[3] The articles that make up this thematic section, *Emotion, Diplomacy and Gift Exchanging Practices in the Ottoman*

[*] This thematic section of *Cromohs* is based upon work from COST Action CA18140 'People in Motion: Entangled Histories of Displacement across the Mediterranean (1492–1923)' (PIMo), http://www.peopleinmotion-costaction.org/, Workgroup 1 – *Things in Motion*, and proposes three essays selected among those presented in an online workshop entitled *Emotion and Memories in Gift Exchanging Practices*, held at the Nicolae Iorga Institute of History in Bucharest on 12 March 2021 and organised by Dana Caciur, Rosita D'Amora and Michał Wasiucionek.

[1] See, among the others, HEDDA REINDL-KIEL, 'East is East and West is West, and Sometimes the Twain Did Meet. Diplomatic Gift Exchange in the Ottoman Empire,' in *Frontiers of Ottoman Studies. State, Province, and the West*, eds Colin Imber and Keiko Kiyotaki (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 113–24; SINEM A. CASALE, 'Iconography of the Gift: Diplomacy and Self-Fashioning at the Ottoman Court,' *The Art Bulletin* 100, no. 1 (2018): 29–123; MICHAEL TALBOT, 'Gifts of Time: Watches and Clocks in Ottoman-British Diplomacy, 1693-1803,' *Jahrbuch für Europäische Geschichte* 17 (2016): 55–79 and the recent TRACEY A. SOWERBY and CHRISTOPHER MARKIEWICZ, eds, *Diplomatic Cultures at the Ottoman Court, c.1500-1630* (New York: Routledge, 2021).

[2] See ZOLTAN BIEDERMANN, ANNE GERRITSEN, and GIORGIO RIELLO, eds, *Global Gifts: The Material Culture of Diplomacy in Early Modern Eurasia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018) see in this volume, in particular as regards the Ottoman context, the articles of ANTONIA GATWARD CEVIZLI, 'Portraits, Turbans and Cuirasses. Material Exchange between Mantua and the Ottomans at the End of the Fifteenth Century,' 34–55; LUCA MOLÀ, 'Material Diplomacy. Venetian Luxury Gifts for the Ottoman Empire in the Late Renaissance,' 56–87; and BARBARA KARL, 'Objects of Prestige and Spoils of War. Ottoman Objects in the Habsburg Gift-Giving in the Sixteenth Century,' 119–49.

[3] ZOLTAN BIEDERMANN, ANNE GERRITSEN, and GIORGIO RIELLO, 'Introduction: Global Gifts and the Material Culture of Diplomacy in Early Modern Eurasia,' in *Global Gifts*, eds Biedermann, Gerritsen, and Riello, 8–9; TRACEY A. SOWERBY and CHRISTOPHER MARKIEWICZ, 'Introduction: Constantinople as a Centre of Diplomatic Culture,' in *Diplomatic Cultures at the Ottoman Court, c.1500-1630*, eds Tracey A. Sowerby and Christopher Markiewicz (New York: Routledge, 2021), 27–28.

Cromohs (Cyber Review of Modern Historiography), ISSN 1123-7023, 24/2021

DOI: 10.36253/cromohs-13686

Context, draw on the existing scholarship and take a step in a new direction by posing challenging questions regarding the emotional implications of the processes of exchanging gifts in the framework of Ottoman diplomatic encounters.

Gifts were a central yet particularly conflict-ridden aspect of the interactions between different states. Diplomatic gifts, and the practices and ceremonies through which they were given, received, requested or even demanded, inevitably conveyed either subtle or at times quite clear messages of power, alliance, trust and friendship or, on the contrary, submission, hostility, wariness and rivalry. The authors of this section reflect on how, in this intricate web of often contrasting sentiments, gifts can help us understand the emotions that drove and characterised diplomatic exchanges. This reflection is shaped by several further questions. Which emotions (for example, hope, amazement, curiosity, sense of superiority, disappointment, anxiety, suspicion, weakness, fear) accompanied the giving and receiving of gifts? Could the choice of certain gifts communicate how the giver regarded and felt about the receiver and convey information about the person who had sent them? How did the receiver perceive the gifts and use them by attributing new meanings or constructing new self-narratives and narratives about the other? Is it possible to reconstruct the individual agency and emotional involvement of the different actors engaged in choosing, producing, delivering or receiving gifts, and the way they felt and regarded their roles? Which emotions were the receipt and presentation of gifts intended to evoke in the general public attending the aptly choreographed ambassadorial receptions? The main objective of this section is to address these and other related questions through three case studies from the Ottoman context.

In the opening article, Hedda Reindl-Kiel sets out to detect traces of emotions in 'Ottoman gift traffic' by looking at various Ottoman archival sources from different periods, such as notes that accompanied gifts exchanged in the domestic sphere, like the ones from the legate of Silahdar Mustafa Pasha referring to the first half of the seventeenth century; notes accompanying gifts sent to foreign rulers, like the letter from Hürrem, Süleyman the Magnificent's wife, dispatched between 1548 and 1549 to the Polish king, Sigismund II Augustus; or treasury registers, like a register of daily expenses from the time of Beyazid II (r. 1481–1512) listing several sets of diplomatic gifts sent to Muslim monarchs. The scrutiny of these sources, in which it is very difficult to detect the expression of real emotions, apart from the codified and formulaic references to the emotional sphere contained in commonly used locutions, leads Reindl-Kiel to suggest that in Ottoman society, at least until the eighteen century, the concept of gift would continue to be mostly based on the notion of *pişkeş*, a sort of compulsory gift almost resembling a tribute that on certain occasions had to be offered by an inferior to an individual of higher rank and that did not necessarily entail reciprocity. This makes Ottoman gift-giving appear a somewhat impersonal practice. The author also shows different instances in which the emotions, although not clearly expressed in writing, were occasionally conveyed by the kind of gifts chosen in certain circumstances – the 'two pairs of underpants

with waist-strings' donated by Hürrem to the Polish king signalling intimacy and friendship, for example. At the same time, considering the difficulty to understand different semiotic codes, the emotional messages expressed by gifts in diplomatic interaction might have been misunderstood on no rare occasion.

Michał Wasiucionek's fascinating essay explores the loaded meanings and expectations that accompanied diplomatic gift exchanges and the different emotional responses that they produced. Using ambassadorial accounts and related texts, the article focuses on the context of Polish-Ottoman and Polish-Moldavian diplomatic relations and covers a period from 1623, when, after a brief stop in the Moldavian capital of Iași, the grand Polish-Lithuanian embassy led by Prince Krzysztof arrived in Istanbul, to 1700, the year in which Rafał Leszczyński's mission to the Sublime Porte took place. During the course of the seventeenth century, trade, direct contacts and complex diplomatic networks facilitated largely peaceful relationships along the vast frontier between the Ottoman Empire and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, spanning from eastern Ukraine to the heart of Central Asia. Wasiucionek shows how, in the course of these diplomatic interactions, gifts were always a particularly charged topic and a recurrent source of concern and anxiety. Polish-Lithuanian ambassadors, Ottoman officials and Moldavian boyars were all aware that gifts were part of the currency that facilitated connections, alliances and, more in general, friendship – in the sense of lack of conflict and absence of hostility – a highly emotional rhetoric constantly reiterated by all parties. In Wasiucionek's words, gifts as necessary 'tokens of friendship' were also invariably a 'source of dissent' because, being strictly connected to a hierarchical expression of power and authority, they were used as tools to affirm and impose vertical subordination by the Ottomans over the Poles and, in turn, by the Poles over the Moldavian elite. If, when visiting Constantinople, the Polish-Lithuanian diplomats implemented different strategies so that their gifts would not be interpreted and employed by their hosts as an acknowledgement of the Commonwealth's inferior status vis-à-vis the sultan, instead, when dealing with the Moldavian voyvodes, they tried to put pressure on them to recognise their superiority. In analysing the interplay between the expression of mutual affection conveying the necessity to maintain good and at least apparently balanced diplomatic relationships, and the carefully choreographed encounters where gift exchanges had a prominent and highly symbolical role, Wasiucionek's article also brings another important emotional layer to the discussion: the Polish-Lithuanian diplomats' necessity to construct the narratives of their ambassadorial accounts in such a way that this would evoke positive emotions and receive approval back home.

The need to construct an effective narrative around gift-giving in diplomatic exchanges that could serve specific political or propagandistic aims is also explored in Rosita D'Amora's article, this time in the context of the events surrounding the official visit of a special envoy sent by the Ottoman sultan, Mahmud I, to the court of King Charles of Bourbon in Naples. The highly fêted visit of Hacı Hüseyin Efendi took place between August and October 1741, its intention to celebrate in Naples the

signing of a treaty of peace, commerce and navigation (*'ahdname*) between the two states and to bring the sultan's gifts to the king. This visit was followed, exactly one year later, in November 1742, by the arrival of another exotic guest, this time an elephant that, despite being presented to the Neapolitan public as another gift from the sultan, had actually been explicitly requested by King Charles. D'Amora examines these events in the light of an anonymous contemporary account commissioned by the Neapolitan court to describe the envoy's visit and, in particular, the public audience he had with king. The author also makes use of other related visual and textual sources and archival documents that complement the propagandistic and pristine narrative of the state-sponsored pamphlet, offering not only further information but also showing all the challenges that the Neapolitan court faced during the visit of the sultan's envoy. What clearly emerges is that the visits of both the envoy and the elephant were 'staged' and used by the newly established monarchy, keen to affirm itself internationally, as a tool to cement a political connection with an important ally such as the Ottoman Empire, as well as to promote state formation and shape the internal political landscape. All these texts contain an important material dimension (the materiality of the diplomatic documents, the materials used to furnish the palace in which the envoy was hosted and the locations where he was received and entertained by the court, the dress used during the ceremonies, the materiality of the gifts) but it is difficult to find in them a clear expression of the emotional responses to this diplomatic encounter. However, the entire narrative is permeated by feelings: the desire for domestic self-presentation and legitimation, the political ambition of the ruling monarchy eager to show its close connections with powerful and at least apparently culturally distant allies, the fear of disappointing the guest, the curiosity and astonishment the envoy and his retinue aroused in the Neapolitan public.

Sources about Ottoman diplomatic relationships very rarely contain explicit references to the emotional responses gift exchanges produced in either the individuals directly involved in the negotiations and ceremonies or in the addressees of the textual and visual representations of these exchanges. Yet, by looking at the choice of the gifts, and the way they were given, received, requested, presented, staged and narrated, we can also see their function as broader tools for understanding the interplay between gift exchanging practices and the emotions connected to them.

Ottoman Messages in Kind
Emotions and Diplomatic Gifts

HEDDA REINDL-KIEL
University of Bonn

A diamond is forever

About 75 years ago, a smart copywriter coined a new tag line – 'A diamond is forever' – for his client, De Beers. A new symbol of eternal love was created, and the diamond became the almost obligatory gem of election for engagement rings.[1] In the Middle Ages through to early modern times, however, these stones carried a connotation of boldness and were predominantly worn by men.[2] In the early modern Ottoman context, diamonds were evidently a symbol of power, for in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries we find diamonds mainly in the possession of high-ranking viziers.[3] In gift-giving, they played practically no role outside the royal family and courtly circles, although they do appear in diplomatic gifts in the eighteenth century.[4]

Ottoman society and love

Since the methodological 'emotional turn' more than a decade ago, a vast corpus of literature has emerged in this field.[5] In this short article I will mainly draw on a

[1] See ELEONOR PICCIOTTO, "'A Diamond is Forever" Became More Than Just a Tagline,' *The Eye of Jewellery*. https://theeyeofjewelry.com/de-beers/de-beers-jewelry/de-beers-most-famous-ad-campaign-marked-the-entire-diamond-industry/ (accessed 6 May 2022).

[2] SAMUEL TOLANSKY, 'Some Folklore and History of Diamond,' *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 109, no. 5062 (September 1961): 747–48.

[3] HEDDA REINDL-KIEL, 'Diamonds are a Vizier's Best Friends: Merzifonlu Kara Mustafa Pasha's Jewelry Assets,' in *Living the Good Life: Consumption in the Qing and Ottoman Empires of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Elif Akçetin and Suraiya Faroqhi (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 409–32.

[4] Istanbul, T.C. Cumhurbaşkanı Osmanlı Arşivi (formerly: T.C. Başbakanlığı Osmanlı Arşivi. Henceforth: BOA) Cevdet Saray 832; Mal. Müd. 9054, p. 675, and Tokapı Sarayı Müzesi Arşivi (henceforth: TSMA) E. 70. The list of gifts for Empress Maria Theresia is dated 11 Muharrem 1161/11 February 1748.

[5] This is not the place to detail a bibliography of emotion studies, hence I shall mention only a few of the more significant titles: JONAS LILIEQUIST, ed., *A History of Emotions, 1200-1800* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012), esp. 'Introduction,' and BARBARA H. ROSENWEIN's chapter, 'Theories of Change in the History of Emotions,' 1–6, 7–20. See also GERHARD JARITZ, ed., *Emotions and Material Culture* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2003); MONIQUE SCHEER, 'Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (and is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuian Approach to Understanding Emotion,' *History and Theory* 51 (May 2012): 193–220. This literature focuses on European history, and mainly on the Middle Ages. For a more differentiated view, it might be useful to consult VICTOR KARANDASHEV, *Cultural Model of Emotions* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, [2021]).

Cromohs (Cyber Review of Modern Historiography), ISSN 1123-7023, 24/2021

DOI: 10.36253/cromohs-13631

paper by Walter Andrews on emotions in the Ottoman realm.[6] Andrews constructs a conceptual diagram showing a 'cycle of emotion generators' centring on 'love.'[7] Among the features incorporated in this cycle he includes a 'political node' (also termed 'livelihood' or 'subsistence node'), encompassing 'structures of gift and reward.' He concedes, however, that in this political sphere 'we are least likely to take seriously […] the Ottoman focus on the emotional content.'[8] In this context he instances the example of a miniature depicting a beautiful young male proffering flowers to the sultan. Andrews terms the picture a 'typical Ottoman love scene,'[9] which is true but in Ottoman reality, outside an idealised poetic sphere, presenting flowers was more often than not a method for squeezing a 'reward' (usually some money) out of the recipient.[10] Indeed, the miniature in Andrew's example refers to the poet Sehi's plea to become the *defterdar* (finance minister).[11]

The nature of Ottoman gift traffic

Before trying to detect traces of emotion in Ottoman gifts, we should first take a short look at the Ottoman system of giving and receiving presents, which at least until the eighteenth century largely rested on the notion of *pişkeş*,[12] gifts, pretty close to a tribute, presented by an underling and graciously received by an individual of higher rank. To some extent in contrast to Marcel Mauss's theory expounded in his classic *Essai sur le don*,[13] the Ottomans did not always practise reciprocity. A higher-ranking individual might respond to a present from an inferior with a favour or general benignity. The concept of *pişkeş* is a case that calls into question the voluntariness of a gift. It operated much like a tribute in the sense that it was by and large normal for such presents to be demanded from inferiors. Moreover, lavish gifts were required when needing to rely on someone's help or favour. Diplomatic gift traffic did not substantially differ from the domestic mode of pleasing and honouring colleagues and superiors with official presents. During the sixteenth century, Ottoman protocol demanded a similar approach to the diplomatic traffic of objects, namely, lavish gifts would primarily be

6 WALTER ANDREWS, 'Ottoman Love: Preface to a Theory of Emotional Ecology,' in *A History of Emotions, 1200-1800*, ed. Jonas Lieliequist (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012), 21–47. On love in early Ottoman political thought and language, see NIL TEKGÜL, 'Early Modern Ottoman Politics of Emotion: What Has Love Got to Do with It?,' *Turkish Historical Review* 10 (2019): 132–54.

7 ANDREWS, 'Ottoman Love,' 25.

8 ANDREWS, 'Ottoman Love,' 38.

9 ANDREWS, 'Ottoman Love,' 38.

10 See HEDDA REINDL-KIEL, *Leisure, Pleasure – and Duty. The daily life of Silahdar Mustafa, éminence grise in the final years of Murad IV (1635-1640)* (Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2016), 43. STEPHAN GERLACH, *Stephan Gerlachs deß Aeltern Tage-Buch/Der von zween Glorwürdigsten Römischen Kaysern/Maximiliano und Rudolpho, Beyderseits den Andern diese Nahmens/Höchstseeligster Gedächtnüß/An die Ottomanische Pforte zu Constantinopel Abgefertigten/… Gesandtschaft* (Franckfurt am Mayn: In Verlegung Johann-David Zunners. Gedruckt bey Heinrich Friesen, 1674), 318.

11 ANDREWS, 'Ottoman Love,' 39.

12 On the term, see FİLİZ KARACA, 'Pişkeş,' in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* 34 (Istanbul, 2007): 294–96; ANN K.S. LAMBTON, 'Pishkash,' in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, new ed., VIII (Leiden, 1993), 312–13 and LAMBTON, 'Pīshkash: Present or Tribute?,' *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 57, no. 1 (1994): 145–58.

13 MARCEL MAUSS, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W.D. Halls (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990).

bestowed on a partner whose power outshone one's own position. This mode of giving actually dated back to the late fifteenth century, but was less visible due to the political entanglements of the time. This approach meant that the Porte largely avoided making offerings to rulers of countries not regarded as equals.

Luxury for Matthias Corvinus

After Bayezid II came to the throne in the late fifteenth century, there was a lively dispatching of gifts to Europe despite the Ottomans ranking Europe's rulers and people as inferior, since they were non-Muslims.

As early as October or November 1484, it is recorded that the sultan dispatched his master of the stables, İlyas Beğ, to the king of Hungary (in these years Matthias Corvinus, r. 1458-90) with an offering worth approximately 47,000 *akçe*. The assortment, containing several luxury fabrics, carpets and silverware,[14] was a classic set of gifts for a Christian ruler. The background behind this relatively sumptuous package was Bayezid II's tricky situation following his brother Cem's defection to the Knights of St John in Rhodes in 1482, from where they took him to France. He was highly coveted as an extraordinarily valuable pawn in European and Mamluk power play. As such, Matthias Corvinus had shown particular persistence in trying to get hold of the unfortunate prince.[15] In all likelihood, the official reason for İlyas Beğ's mission to Buda was to ratify the peace treaty ('*ahdname*) of 1483, which, by covering the Hungarian king's back, enabled Hungary to march against Vienna in 1485. After the '*ahdname* had been agreed, however, its future was jeopardised by Bayezid's conquest of Kilia and Akkerman in the summer of 1484. Therefore, the intention behind the

[14] TSMA, E. 857. The consignment contained: two dress-lengths (? or bolts?) of gold-brocaded velvet from Bursa with dots (*benek*), probably referring to the three dots of the *chintamani* pattern; two dress-lengths (? or bolts?) of gold-brocaded voided velvet (*çatma*); ten pieces (dress-lengths?) of *kemha* (a thickly woven silk fabric with a lampas structure and brocaded surface; HÜLYA TEZCAN, *Atlaslar Atlası: Pamuklu, Yün ve İpek Kumaş Koleksiyonu/Cotton, Woolen and Silk Fabrics Collection* (Istanbul: YKY, 1993), 32) in the style (or from the area) of Yazd; four pieces of striped (*alaca*) velvet from Bursa; six pieces of *muş dendan* (lit. 'mouse tooth,' probably referring to a pattern), a fabric (?) I was not able to identify; four pieces of white *bayramî* fabric; two sashes (*kuşak*) in the style (or from the area) of Yazd; two gold-brocaded sashes from Bursa; ten (dress-lengths? bolts?) of *sof* (camelot); six pieces of uncut velvet (*iplik kadife*); ten pieces of red (*kırmızı*) *kemha* from Bursa; four pieces of gold-brocaded Armenian *kemha*; 20 pieces of *peşorî kemha*; five carpets (*kalî*) from Menemen; four *niello* (? lit. 'mixed') silver tankards; four silver trays (*tepsi*); and 20 silver goblets, four of them large (*deve tabanı*) and 12 *Lazî* (Laz). Michael Rogers has found cups of this type in Bayezid II's treasury inventory of 1505 and located the origin of the silver used as the area of Gümüşhane: J. MICHAEL ROGERS, 'An Ottoman Palace Inventory of the Reign of Beyazid II,' in *Comité international d'études pré-ottomanes et ottomanes: VIth Symposium, Cambridge, 1^{rst}-4th July 1984*, eds Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammont and Emeri van Donzel (Istanbul: Divit Matbaacilik ve Yayincilik, 1987), 50.

[15] See L[OUIS] THUASNE, *Djem-Sultan, fils de Mohammed II, frère de Bayezid II (1459–1495) d'après les documents originaux en grande partie inédits. Étude sur la question d'Orient à la fin du XV^{e} siècle* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1892), 127–28, 143–50. Nicolas Vatin, *Sultan Djem. Un prince ottoman dans l'Europe du XV^{e} siècle d'après deux sources contemporaines: Vâkı'ât-ı Sulṭân Cem, Œuvres de Guillaume Caoursin* (Ankara: TTK and IFEA, 1997), 38.

dispatch of quite a high official, such as the master of the stables,[16] with gifts of such a substantial value would definitely have been for appeasement in the delicate matter of Prince Cem.

The traffic of diplomatic gifts to European courts continued over the following years. But after the death of the ill-fated prince in 1495, the stream of offerings sent by Bayezid II to western powers began to dry up, even more so after Cem's body was eventually returned to his homeland in 1499. During the sixteenth century, diplomatic gifts to western rulers were a rarity since in practice the Porte's foreign policy was mainly in the hands of governors administrating border provinces. While they would sometimes send small presents to the other side, these items (such as carpets, horses, saddles and other horse tack) were more like the sort of official gifts given in the domestic sphere and exchanged between governors and their colleagues in neighbouring provinces. Thus, the difference between diplomatic and domestic gifts became blurred. Since both types belonged to the same concept of official giving and depended on each other, they will be discussed together in this article. This broad approach should enable us to discern whether there are in fact any traces of emotion in the Ottoman gift cycle.

Notes accompanying the gifts

At first glance, the most promising source of evidence for emotional practices seems to be the notes that accompanied gifts in the domestic sphere. But the rather small number of examples I have studied,[17] mainly from the legate of Silahdar Mustafa Pasha (approx. 1609–42),[18] are either just lists of the items dispatched or nevertheless fairly homogenous in their content.

A document from 10 June 1639 names a number of gifts[19] sent by Ebubekir Pasha.[20] Two expense registers of Mustafa Pasha[21] mention Bekir Pasha. In May 1636, he appears in a *defter* (register) as governor of Temeşvar, but a few days earlier an entry in another document referring to the same gifts presents him as administrating the

16 Normally, the Porte would send lower ranks, such as *çavuşes*, on diplomatic missions; see for example MARIA PIA PEDANI, 'Ottoman Diplomats in the West: The Sultan's Ambassadors to the Republic of Venice,' *Tarih İncelemeleri Dergisi* 11, no. 1 (1996): 187–202, here 187–88. KEMAL BEYDİLLİ, 'Sefaret ve Sefaretnâmeler Hakkında Yeni bir Değerlendirme,' *Journal of Ottoman Studies* XXX (2007): 13.

17 Due to the pandemic, I have had to rely on a few notes I made 17 years ago. I used TSMA, E. 992/2; E.992/3; E. 992/4; E. 992/5; E. 992/6; E. 992/8; E. 992/9; E. 992/10; E. 992/11; E. 992/12; E. 992/13; E. 992/14; E. 992/15; E. 992/16; E. 992/17; E. 992/18; E. 992/19.

18 See REINDL-KIEL, *Leisure, Pleasure – and Duty,* and the literature quoted there.

19 TSMA, E 992/2; the document lists two banners from Fes, two coral rosaries, two young male 'Frankish' slaves, two rifles, one jewelled fan, two 'Frankish' chairs, two blankets (*velense*) ornamented with gold, three silken sofa covers (*ihram*) ornamented with gold, three camlet (*sof*) sofa covers ornamented with gold, four red sofa covers, three pairs of stirrups, three wrappers of serge (*saye çuka*), three wrappers of 'Frankish' satin (*atlas*), one velvet wrapper and silk turbans (*serbend*) ornamented with gold.

20 Ebubekir (Bekir) Pasha became admiral (*kaptan-ı derya*) in 1644, but died three months after his appointment; see İSMAİL HÂMİ DANİŞMEND, *Osmanlı Devlet Erkânı* (Istanbul: Türkiye Yayınevi, 1971), 191 note 60.

21 TSMA, D. 525 and D. 3194.

province of Kanije (Kanizsa in West Hungary).[22] The *beğlerbeği* of Temeşvar, Bekir Pasha, was executed in late autumn of that year.[23] A document refers to the governor of Kanije of that name for the years 1630 and 1631, but a slightly later record, dated 16 August 1631, calls him a 'former governor of Kanije' who now had the *sancak* (sub-province) of İstolni Belgrad (Székesfehérvár in Hungary) as *arpalık*.[24] For the period between February 1634 and September 1641, we do not know who occupied the governorship of Kanije.[25] Yet, it is not implausible that Bekir Pasha was reinstalled in Kanije. Thus, we cannot be sure whether the Bekir Pashas in Silahdar Mustafa's records always refer to the same person. However, were they different namesakes, we might expect to find some hints such as bynames in the bookkeeping. The connection between Bekir and Silahdar Mustafa must have begun prior to May 1636, since in November of that year Silahdar Mustafa spent 1,000 *akçe* 'for the corps of Şahin the Elder, who had come from Bekir Pasha.'[26] As the gift package from May 1636 apparently did not encompass a slave, Şahin must have been an earlier gift. He died during an epidemic (the plague?) which carried off many of Silahdar Mustafa's slaves, and his master paid for his burial. For May 1637 and late March 1638 we find references to Bekir as governor of Rhodes.[27] The objects and slaves he offered do not point to a very close relationship between the two pashas. I shall deal below with the question of slaves as gifts. Bekir Paşa's note from 1639 reads in translation:

> After I rubbed [my] face in the blessed dust of the felicity of [Your] Excellency, my fortunate and auspicious sultan,[28] my insignificant petition is this: I do not have a little something which would be appropriate for the dust of the glory of [Your] Excellency, my fortunate and auspicious sultan. [Hence] it is pleaded to excuse the deficiency. For the rest, my sultan has the order and command. [Your] servant Ebubekir.

This document deserves our attention for several reasons. The style resembles a petition to the sultan. To rub one's face in the dust (of the ruler's feet) describes the performance of a *proskynesis* and is often a metaphor for attending a royal audience. In this respect, we must not forget that Silahdar Mustafa Pasha was Murad IV's favourite and acted in a way as his *alter ego*. The diction of the letter also reveals subservience to and a certain distance from the recipient. In all likelihood, Bekir Pasha's gift-giving was

22 D. 525, fol. 69a (dated 12 Zilhicce 1045/18 May 1636). D. 3194, fol. 2b (dated 30 Zilka'de 1045/6 May 1636) registers the same gift package (two rifles and one silver battle axe). I am grateful to Feridun Emecen who deciphered the place name for me.

23 NAÎMA MUSTAFA EFENDİ, *Târih-i Na'îmâ (Ravzatü'l-Hüseyn fî Hulâsati Ahbâri'l-Hâfikayn)*, II, ed. Mehmet İpşirli (Ankara: TTK, 2007), 852–3.

24 AZİZ ALTİ and SALIH BAŞKUTLU, 'Kanije Eyaleti İdareciler,' *SDU Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 50 (August 2020): 207–8. I thank Kemal Beydilli for the reference. An *arpalık* is an income from a province which the usufructuary does not administer; see CAHİT BALTACI, 'Arpalık,' in TDV *İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, 3 (Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, İslâm Ansiklopedisi Genel Müdürlüğü, 1991), 392–3.

25 ALTI and BAŞKUTLU, 'Kanije Eyaleti İdareciler,' 208.

26 D. 3194, fol. 37a: *Büyük Şahin meyyitine, Bekir Paşa'dan gelmiş idi.*

27 D. 3194, fol. 8b. Here he appears as donor of a male 'Frankish' slave, two Algerian rifles, four Algerian blankets (*valence*), four red sofa covers (*ihram*), four belts, three low couches (*mak'ad*) and two dress-lengths of velvet. D. 3194., fols. 12a/b, Bekir Pasha sent another comparable collection, but this time it did not contain a slave.

28 The term *sultanım* here is an honorific address, comparable to 'my lord.'

part of a strategy to further his career. Maybe he did not yet consider his aspirations fulfilled.

Even more formal and distant is the letter Defterdar Mehmed Pasha attached to his list of gifts for Silahdar Mustafa. After apologising for not having something worthy enough[29] he writes that he submits the presents 'insolently (*ber-vech-i küstahî*) into the dust under the foot' of Mustafa Pasha.[30]

A note that seems much more personal is the address of the governor of Egypt[31] calling the recipient of his dispatch 'your excellency, my excellent and auspicious son Silahdar Pasha' (*'izzetlü ve sa'adetlü oğlumız Silahdar Paşa hazretlerine*).[32] In his enumeration of gifts for Mustafa Pasha, grand vizier Bayram Pasha[33] used much the same address.[34]

Although this appellation has a familiar tone, the term 'my son' points primarily to the donor's superior status as well as a difference in age. After all, the Ottoman approach to hierarchy within the family was characterised by obedience to the father. Thus, the writer of the first address was in all likelihood Hüseyin Pasha, who might have been 15 to 20 years Mustafa's senior, while Sultanzade Mehmed Pasha was much closer to Silahdar Mustafa in terms of age. Additionally, both dignitaries, Hüseyin and Mustafa, had a common background in the royal palace. In one case, we do not know when Hüseyin Pasha endowed Silahdar Pasha with a black eunuch slave, who also became an epidemic victim in early 1638.[35]

Towards the end of 1639, Mehmed Pasha dispatched a ('not appropriate' according to the conventions) gift package to Mustafa that, alongside some minor

---

[29] This remark is a standard component of notes accompanying gifts. We also find it in a letter (probably from 1548) from Hürrem Sultan to the Polish king: see UĞUR ÜNAL and WŁADYSŁAW STĘPNIAK, eds, *Yoldaki Elçi: Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Türk-Leh İlişkileri/Poseł w drodze: Stosunki turecko – polskie od czasów osmańskich do dnia dzisiejszego* (Istanbul: T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2014), 36–37, note 18.

[30] E. 992/6 (dated 20 Cemazi II 1049/18 October 1639). The gifts consisted of a suit of armour and a multitude of textiles, many of them ornamented with gold.

[31] Silahdar Mustafa was on very friendly terms with (Deli) Hüseyin Pasha (governor of Egypt 1635–7); D. 525, fol. 27b; D. 3194, fols. 9a, 31a, 41b, 122b. Both men had begun their careers in the royal palace where they received their education. For Hüseyin Pasha, see TAHSİN YILDIRIM, 'Girit Serdarı Gazi Deli Hüseyin Paşa Hayatı, İcraatı ve Hayratı' (MA thesis: Fatih Sultan Mehmed Vakf Üniversitesi, 2019). Mustafa Pasha was on good terms with Hüseyin Pasha's successor (Sultanzade), Mehmed Pasha (governor of Egypt 1637–40), as well. D. 3194, fols. 10b, 116a. For Mehmed Pasha, see FERİDUN EMECEN, 'Mehmed Pasha, Sultanzâde,' in *TDV Diyanet İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, Ek 2 (Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, Islâm Ansiklopedisi Genel Müdürlüğü, 2019), 227–29.

[32] E. 992/8. The document is unfortunately not dated, so we do not know for certain which governor of Egypt was the sender. The record has only two lists of the sent items (ten purses of cash (*guruş*), a horse completely equipped with golden tack, flank armour and unbelievers' stirrups, two saddled horses), the second being 'gifts hopefully given from Konya' (a fully equipped horse with golden tack and everything else needed, four saddled horses, a robe lined with sable fur, ten *surre guruş* in cash, a kind of kaftan, two *surre gurus*, two wrappers with rarities, 15 camels).

[33] For Bayram Pasha, see GÜLNUR HEDİYE ÇINAR, 'Sadrazam Bayram Paşa ve icraatları' (MA thesis, Fatih Sultan Mehmed Vakf Üniversitesi, 2016).

[34] E. 992/17 (dated 16 Muharrem 1048/30 May 1638). The document reads: '*izzetlü sa'adetlü oğlumız hazretlerinin huzur-u 'izzetlerine gönderilecek hediyedir: nakdiye, kese on; altun raht ve yancığı ile mükemmel at ve yelkendez iki at*.'

[35] D. 3194, fol. 41b.

items, comprised two black eunuchs. The accompanying letter does not address Mustafa as 'my son,' but beyond good wishes for his health, expresses the hope that Mustafa would not deprive the writer of his protection (*saye*).[36] This is a clear indication of a relationship of soft dependency.

While the expression 'my son' in Ottoman correspondence does not necessarily indicate intimate friendship but stresses superior rank, there are terms of endearment that do signal close ties and love. We see this in a note[37] signed *bende Mahmud*, bearing the address *benim sa'adetlü birtanem* ('my auspicious only one') and accompanying a collection of fabrics for Silahdar Mustafa Pasha. This Mahmud must be the pasha's younger brother who had every reason to call Mustafa 'my only one'; in 1636, the pasha had bestowed no fewer than 100,000 *akçe* on his brother Mahmud.[38]

Even our very limited range of samples suggests that in the Ottoman context gifts did not necessarily carry a message of the donor's positive feelings such as love. In many cases, offerings were purely a matter of duty and convention. We have to bear in mind that donor and recipient in the domestic gift traffic of the Ottoman ruling elite were mostly heads of a household that, next to their family, encompassed the servants, slaves and guards living under their control. Sumptuous gift packages containing multiple fabrics were often not so much destined to the single recipient as the members of the household. In this respect, the approach of the royal court to diplomatic gifts did not differ very much from domestic giving in the upper echelons of society. Furthermore, the tradition of gift-giving rested upon the clear notion of *pişkeş*, as already said. These features made gifting a somewhat impersonal practice.

Objects of affection

A closer look into the records of gifts shows, however, that the items being offered could themselves communicate cordiality and affection. In contrast to our present-day diamonds, upmarket luxuries did not convey such a personal message. Rather, underwear did: it signalled intimacy and friendship, unlike in modern times bearing no sexual connotation.

The most famous example of this symbolism is a gift that Hürrem Sultan,[39] Süleyman the Magnificent's beloved wife, dispatched (in 1548 or 1549) to the Polish

[36] E. 992/9. The letter is undated, but a small note that a 'complete' silver pencase had been gifted to the chamberlain (*çukadar*) bears the date 8 Ramazan 1049/2 January 1640. Mehmed Pasha's other presents were four purses of *akçe*, ten sword blades and eight ornamented bows, one of which was propellered (? *pervane*). In spring 1638, Mehmed Pasha had sent six purses of *guruş*, two purses of *akçe* and a complete set of horse equipment

[37] E. 992/15 (undated).

[38] REINDL-KIEL, *Leisure, Pleasure – and Duty*, 12 note 41. In this period, an unskilled construction worker would earn approximately 15 *akçe* per day; see ŞEVKET PAMUK, *İstanbul ve Diger Kentlerde 500 Yıllık Fiyatlar ve Ücretler, 1469-1998/500 Years of Prices and Wages in Istanbul and Other Cities* (Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü, 2000), 70.

[39] See LESLIE PEIRCE, *Empress of the East: How a Slave Girl Became Queen of the Ottoman Empire* (London: Icon Books, 2020).

king, Sigismund II Augustus. In the accompanying note she informed him that she was sending 'two pairs of underpants with waist-strings and vests, six towels and one napkin' lest her letter [full] of affection (*mektub-ı muhabbet*) remain unaccompanied.[40] This message is a key to understanding the notion of underwear as a gift. Although Hürrem Sultan seems to have helped make the various pieces with her own hands, the nature of the gift and the letter were undoubtedly more the product of Ottoman protocol than her personal initiative.[41] As we have noted, during most of the sixteenth century, the Porte had avoided the dispatch of gifts to European rulers, fearing that such offerings could be used for propaganda purposes. In the Ottoman archives, I did not find a single trace of diplomatic gifts to Poland throughout the whole sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, except the objects listed in Hürrem Sultan's letter (which is kept in the Central Archives of Historical Records in Warsaw). It is questionable whether we can classify this type of 'private' offering of modest value from monarch to monarch as a diplomatic gift, for the distinction is fluid.

Presents of underwear belonged to the private sphere and were fairly popular in the upper echelons of Ottoman society,[42] perhaps because they were an inexpensive means to assure a dignitary of the donor's sincere friendship. We must not forget that the social pressure to incessantly present gifts also entailed a serious financial burden. Indeed, we might well compare the emotions of donors with our own feelings today when paying taxes. Belonging to the same category as these more private and personal gifts are pillows (*yüz yastığı*),[43] at times offered together with underwear or other smaller textile items, such as napkins or turban covers,[44] and perhaps face towels. Yet the favourite means of making friendship visible and tangible remained underwear. Formal gift packages (in domestic as well as diplomatic traffic) of an official nature would by contrast never contain underwear or pillows.

As our knowledge of Ottoman gifting practices is largely based on treasury and expenses registers, some types of presents tend to be less visible. Nevertheless, next to textiles, the most frequent gifts among the ruling elites and to a certain degree in the diplomatic traffic of gift items were probably noble horses. They do not usually appear in treasury or expenses registers since they were incorporated into the recipients' stables and recorded in separate ledgers. Noble horses with exquisite equipment were an essential signifier of status for members of the elite, including the royal court.

---

[40] ÜNAL and STĘPNIAK, eds, *Yoldaki Elçi*, 36–37.

[41] The Ottoman protocol must have seen this arrangement as a diplomatic masterpiece. For the background to this dispatch, see HEDDA REINDL-KIEL, 'Learning the Language of Things: Glimpses into Ottoman Inventories of the 16th and 17th Centuries,' in *Festschrift Claudia Römer* (forthcoming).

[42] See HEDDA REINDL-KIEL, 'Pracht und Ehre. Zum Geschenkwesen im Osmanischen Reich,' in *Das Osmanische Reich in seinen Archivalien und Chroniken*, eds Nejat Göyünç zu Ehren, Klaus Kreiser, and Christoph K. Neumann (Istanbul: Franz Steiner, 1997), 177–79.

[43] See, for example, TSMA, D. 2014, fols. 10b and 12b.

[44] BOA, MAD 14724, pp. 3, 4, 16, 22, 27, 28.

Slaves as gifts

Furthermore, as we have seen, the upper echelon of society favoured another type of living gift: slaves.[45] In 1592, Lorenzo Bernardo, a former Venetian *bailo* to Constantinople, remarked that Turks showed their '*grandezza* with a multitude of slaves and horses.'[46] Thus, a great number of slaves signalled a powerful person and household. This in turn made slaves a perfect gift between Ottoman grandees, particularly because considerable affluence was required to feed and clothe these individuals over time.[47]

Madeline Zilfi states that during the fifteenth and the early seventeenth century, 'slavery showed a pronounced masculine tilt.'[48] It seems, however, that in the later seventeenth century, the ratio between male and female Ottoman slaves more or less struck a balance and, by the mid-eighteenth century, Ottoman slavery had a predominantly female face.[49] More often than not, these individuals received a solid training and education in the donor's household before being given away. Hence, they would spend a longer period of time under the control and influence of the donor, who would do his best to ensure that his slaves were linked to his household with a bond of loyalty or even affection. Well-trained slaves were not only expensive, they could gain influence in the beneficiary's household and eventually play a bridging function between donor and recipient. This also applied to the valuable, much sought-after black eunuchs, who not only served as guardians and intermediaries of elite harems, but often achieved positions of special trust in the household and beyond. These individuals were lucky to end up in an elite household where they were usually treated well, as their owners relied on them.

Many grandees' treasury and expenses registers suggest that dignitaries would pass the larger part of the gifts onto the servants and slaves within their household. In

45 Ottoman slavery is no longer a neglected topic among historians; for an excellent introduction into and evaluation of the considerable literature, see SURAIYA FAROQHI, *Slavery in the Ottoman World: A Literature Survey* (Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2017); EHUD R. TOLEDANO, *Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998); TOLEDANO, *As If Silent and Absent: Bonds of Enslavement in the Islamic Middle East* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); TOLEDANO, 'The Concept of Slavery in Ottoman and Other Muslim Societies. Dichotomy or Continuum,' in *Slave Elites in the Middle East and Africa*, eds Toru Miura and John Edward Philips (London: Kegan Paul International, 2000), 159–75; and HAKAN Y. ERDEM, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and Its Demise, 1800-1909* (London: Macmillan, 1996).

46 Lorenzo Bernardo, 'Relazione dell'Impero Ottomano di Lorenzo Bernardo, 1592,' in EUGENIO ALBÈRI, *Relazioni degli ambasciatori Veneti al senato*, Serie III[a] – Volume II[0] (Florence, 1844), 368: *La parsimonia poi, secondo fondamento della grandezza turchesca, era prima grandissima fra di loro: perchè il Turco prima non curava il delicato mangiare, nè li ricchi addobbamenti di casa, ma solo si contentava di pane e riso, e del solo tappeto e cuscino; tutta la sua grandezza la mostrava nel numero dei molti schiavi e cavalli, con li quali potesse servir meglio al suo signore; onde non è meraviglia se ha potuto tollerare tante fatiche, e sopportare tanti disagi solo per vincere e dominare.*

47 See MADELINE C. ZILFI, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire: The Design of Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 192.

48 ZILFI, *Women and Slavery*, 191.

49 ZILFI, *Women and Slavery*, 195.

some cases, elite slaves almost became family members[50] and achieved high positions, so that their status as slaves might have been almost imperceptible. All in all, we can be confident in assuming that gifts of slaves implied feelings of friendship towards the recipient.

Well-trained male slaves could also be a part of diplomatic gifts, as long as the political climate between the donor and recipient allowed for it. I have, however, never come across female slaves as presents. As for Christian rulers or heretical Muslim monarchs, such as the shah of Iran, a political foe and champion of the Twelver Shi'a, they would of course never have received slaves of any gender as a gift of diplomatic traffic.

Slaves for the sultan of Egypt

A so-called *in'amat defteri* ('register of benefactions,' actually a register of daily expenses, *ruznamçe defteri*) from Bayezid II's time lists several sets of diplomatic gifts to Muslim monarchs. On 11 July 1507, the head of the Ottoman *'ulufeci*s (palace troops), Kemal Beğ, was sent marching off to the Sultan of Egypt[51] (Qansawh al-Gawrī, r. 1501–16) with a lavish collection of gifts. Kemal Beğ brought the sultan 30 male slaves, a range of luxury fabrics from Italy and of domestic production, and an assortment of fur plates (*tahta*),[52] of sable, lynx (the precious fur from the belly), ermine and blue (*kebud*) miniver (*keremün*) fur,[53] nine of each sort.[54] As the number nine is a sacred number in

[50] DROR ZE'EVI, 'My Slave, My Son, My Lord: Slavery, Family and State in the Islamic Middle East,' in *Slave Elites in the Middle East and Africa*, eds Toru Miura and John Edward Philips (London: Kegan Paul International, 2000), 79–80.

[51] *İrsaliye be-Sultan-ı Mısır*, Istanbul, Atatürk Kitaplığı, Muallim Cevdet (henceforth: MC) 71, fol. 107b. Ibn Iyâs reports on the Ottoman embassy to Egypt in autumn 1507 but makes no mention of gifts: see IBN IYÂS, *Alltagsnotizen eines ägyptischen Bürgers*, trans. Annemarie Schimmel (s.l. [Munich]: Goldmann Verlag, 1988), 88–9. ELIAS I. MUHANNA, 'The Sultan's New Clothes: Ottoman-Mamluk Gift Exchange in the Fifteenth Century,' *Muqarnas* XXVII (2010): 195 note 47 (following Feridun Ahmed Beğ, *Mecmu'a-yı Münşe'at al-Selatin*, I ([Istanbul]: 1848), 341) gives 18 October 1507 as a date for the embassy, but states that no gifts are mentioned. On the mutual form of address and titles between Ottoman and Mamluk rulers, see CİHAN YÜKSEL MUSLU, 'Attempting to Understand the Language of Diplomacy between the Ottomans and the Mamluks (1340s-1512),' *Archivum Ottomanicum* 30 (2013): 247–67.

[52] The term is used for a piece which is sewn together with several parts of fur of matching colour and derivation, fairly similar to modern fur 'plates' (or 'bodies'). Unlike modern 'plates'/'bodies,' however, the Ottoman term does not indicate a fixed size; see HÜLYA TEZCAN, 'Furs and Skins Owned by the Sultans,' in *Ottoman Costumes: From Textile to Identity*, eds SURAIYA FAROQHI and CHRISTOPH K. NEUMANN (Istanbul: Eren, 2004), 66.

[53] The colour blue in this context is less outlandish than may seem at first sight. Furs were dyed from early times onward, and indigo was an export product from Russia, the main source for Middle Eastern luxury furs: see ALEXANDRE BENNIGSEN and CHANTAL LEMERCIER-QUELQUEJAY, 'Les marchands de la cour ottoman et le commerce des fourrures moscovites dans la seconde moitié du XVI^{e} siècle,' *Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétique* 11, no. 3 (1970): 368.

[54] The dispatch also comprised gifts to the grandees of the Mamluk Empire, such as the *ulu beğ* (meaning the *amir al-kabir*, at that time Korkmas min Arkmas); the governor (*na'ib*) of Damascus, (Şam) Sibay; the head of the armoury (*emir al-silah*), Dawlat Bey; the *na'ib* of Aleppo, Hayir Bek min Yilbay; the *kâtib al-sır*, Mahmud b. Aca; the *nâẓır al-hass*, 'Ala' al-din b. al-İmam; the head of the chancellery (*davâdâr*; *divitdar* in the document), Azdamur min 'Ali Bay (or, after the latter's death in September or October 1507, Tumanbay al-Aşraf) and the caliph (*halife*), al-Mustamsik billah Ya'kub. The document does not give the names, only the offices of the Mamluk dignitaries receiving gifts. (I would very much like to thank my

Turco-Mongol tradition, this measure was an old-fashioned Turkic convention for sending gifts.[55] The magical number of nine for presents to neighbouring Muslim rulers points to a shared semiotic code.

The reason for the opulent Ottoman token of friendship for the otherwise rather problematic Mamluks must have been the Porte's concerns about the aggressive wheeling and dealing of the Persian shah, Ismail, who attracted not only followers from Anatolia but, in the spring of 1507, had also crossed the Ottoman border on a punitive expedition against Alaeddevle, the prince of Dulkadır.[56] The arrival of the Ottoman delegation with the gifts in Cairo coincided with the news that Safavid troops had attacked the Mamluk frontier and advanced as far as Malatya.[57] Thus, the Ottoman offerings were an overture to a possible alliance of convenience and the slaves embodied the hope that a pro-Ottoman faction would come to the fore at the Mamluk court. This example indicates that the motivation for presenting male slaves as gifts was not very different in diplomatic traffic to the domestic sphere; in both cases, the mantle of friendship disguised an aspiration for influence, which ultimately meant an expansion of personal power.

Negative feelings, diplomatic gifts and Realpolitik

Due to the nature of the sources (mainly treasury registers and the like), we cannot discern any negative emotions in domestic gift traffic. In diplomatic offerings, however, we sometimes sense anger, threat and contempt. Yet, narrative sources reporting such instances are not always reliable and their use requires much care, as the following case shows.

On 30 November 1510, the Ottoman sultan dispatched a set of offerings to Shah Ismail of Iran.[58] Although the gift package complied with the standard sacred number of nine, the Ottoman record does not label the recipient as a 'shah,' but 'sheikh' and calls him *mir-i vilayet-i 'Acem* ('lord of the dominion of Persia'). This debasing reference points to negative feelings on the Ottoman side, but in all likelihood, it was only used in the domestic documentation, not in the letter actually accompanying the gifts. The Porte engaged in a similar practice when dealing with the

colleague Christian Mauder who generously shared his knowledge of late Mamluk prosopography and political atmosphere with me.) However, Kemal Beğ brought the gifts for these people (except for the *ulu beğ*) back on 27 December 1507, and they were incorporated into the royal treasury. The story behind this strange refusal to accept the Ottoman state gifts remains untold.

55 See GERHARD DOERFER, *Türkische und mongolische Elemente im Neupersischen* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1965), vol. II, 624–9, note 976. For evidence of this practice at the Mamluk court, see IBN IYÂS, *Alltagsnotizen*, 206. The Mamluks had even adopted a Turkish word for it, which they Arabianised as *toquziât* ('gift of nine items'); IBN IYÂS, *Alltagsnotizen*, 206.

56 See FARUK SÜMER, *Safevî Devletinin Kuruluşu ve Gelişmesinde Anadolu Türklerinin Rolü. (Şah İsmail ile Halefeleri ve Anadolu Türkleri)* (Ankara: Güven Matbaası, 1976), 28–9; HANNA SOHRWEIDE, 'Der Sieg der Safawiden in Persien und seine Rückwirkung auf die Schiiten Anatoliens im 16. Jahrhundert,' *Der Islam* XLI (1965): 142.

57 CIHAN YÜKSEL MUSLU, *The Ottomans and the Mamluks: Imperial Diplomacy and Warfare in the Islamic World* (London: Tauris, 2014), 167. IBN IYÂS, *Alltagsnotizen*, 88.

58 MC 71, fol. 207a.

German *Kaiser*, who in the Porte's domestic records bears the title *Bec* or *Nemçe kralı* ('king of Vienna' or 'of Austria') up to the year 1700, but after 1606 this term is not used in the official correspondence.[59]

Despite the offending form of address, as far as we can see, Bayezid II's offerings to his Persian antagonist in 1510 were devoid of any hidden hostile message. Even religious asides matching the title of 'sheikh' were absent. The gifts were put together in two instalments; a number of fabrics, mainly different varieties of velvet (probably from stocks in the royal treasury), were taken on 11 November 1510, while the bulk of the items were recorded 19 days later, on 30 November.[60]

The second set of gifts was clearly meant for a ruler and can be considered a classic package for the sixteenth century. It contained what was at this time a virtually obligatory silver drinking set, composed of tankards, trays, longneck-bottles, water jugs (*maşraba-yı abî*), large wine cups (*deve tabanı*) and an assortment of goblets. The goblets originated in Hungary, Dubrovnik and Trabzon, thus indicating – at least for the pieces from Hungary and Dubrovnik – that they were recycled gifts.[61] The fabric section predominantly comprised velvets, imports from Italy (*Frengî* in the document),[62] but also weaves from Bursa. The Italian fabrics were crimson velvet heavily worked with gold (*müzzeheb-i sengin*); gold-brocaded voided velvet (*müzehheb-i çatma*) in crimson, light grey (*serma'î*), violet (*benefş*) and honey yellow; gold-brocaded dotted (*benek*) velvet; plain double-napped (*dü-havî*) velvet; light satins (*atlas*), plain, dotted and with a *çatma* (i.e., embossed) pattern; and plain *kemha* in crimson, lemon yellow and azure. The fabrics from Bursa included voided and dotted brocaded velvet, as well as striped (*alaca*) and uncut (*rişte*) velvet. Pigeon blue (*kefterî*) *kemha*, listed without its provenance, might have been an Ottoman product and the same is definitely true for the camelot (*murabba'*) from Ankara. A further luxurious woollen material destined for the royal court of Tabriz was scarlet (*sikarlat*), its place of production (probably Venice) again not being given. *Peşorî*, a *kemha* fabric, appears again without specifying its provenance. Three fur plates of sable, ermine and miniver (*keremün*) respectively, thus forming the magic number nine, rounded off the clothing section. Nine bows (the register does not refer to arrows) alluded to the royal diversion of hunting, while nine walrus tusks (*dendan-ı mahî*)[63] indicated the sultan's access to exotica from alien lands. These items

[59] HEDDA REINDL-KIEL, 'Symbolik, Selbstbild und Beschwichtigungsstrategien: Diplomatische Geschenke der Osmanen für den Wiener Hof (17.-18. Jh.),' in *Frieden und Konfliktmanagement in interkulturellen Räumen: Das Osmanische Reich und die Habsburgermonarchie in der Frühen Neuzeit*, eds Arno Strohmeyer, Norbert Spannenberger and Robert Pech (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2013), 268–75.

[60] MC 71, fol. 207a.

[61] ROGERS, 'An Ottoman Palace Inventory,' 43, suspects *üngürüs* to be an allusion to the Hungarian florin (*ongaro* in Italian) 'as the source of the metal.'

[62] For the identification of *Frengî* as Italian for fabrics in sixteenth-century Ottoman records, see ROGERS, 'An Ottoman Palace Inventory,' 44.

[63] For the identification of 'fish teeth' as walrus ivory, see BERTHOLD LAUFER, 'Arabic and Chinese Trade in Walrus and Narwhal Ivory,' *T'oung Pao* Second Series 14, no. 3 (1913): 317–18, 333 and 337–38 and MATTHEW ELLIOTT GILLMAN, 'A Tale of Two Ivories: Elephant and Walrus,' *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma*, Serie VII, Historia del Arte (N. Época) 5 (2017): 86. For the significance of walrus tusks in the

would have emphasised his power and wealth, while at the same time highlighting the royal status of the recipient.

Iran was famous for its silk production, and Persian raw silk formed the basis of Bursa's silk industry. To send Italian and Ottoman silk fabrics and woollens to Tabriz looks at first glance like carrying coals to Newcastle. Yet, plain broadcloth and velvets were rare in Iran and had to be acquired from Portuguese traders in the Persian Gulf, as Marc'Antonio Pigafetta reported in 1567.[64] These fabrics would therefore have been most welcome in Tabriz.

Robes of honour for the sultan?

This gift parcel had an antecedent. Hasan Beg Rumlu reports that in 1504–5 an envoy of Bayezid II brought 'appropriate presents'[65] for Shah Ismail. This embassy was sent to felicitate Shah Ismail on his success in conquering Fars and Iraq. Bayezid's envoy is, however, reported to have been severely humiliated at the court of Tabriz.[66] According to Hasan Beg Rumlu, the Persian counter-gift, sent with the returning ambassador, contained robes of honour.[67] This account seems to point to an insult, as robes of honour were always given in a downward movement and thus they were here clearly intended to abase the recipient.

Drowning the envoy in opulence

Our archival source, the *'in'amat defteri*, on 23 July 1505 lists a number of gifts handed over to 'Ahmed Beğ, head of the divan secretaries (*parvanciyan*), messenger of Ismail, sheikh, [and] lord (*mir*) of the dominion of Persia.'[68] Ahmed Beğ received the enormous sum of 40,000 *akçe* cash (5,000 *akçe* labelled 'service pay,' *'ulufe*, and 35,000 *akçe* 'honorarium,' *teşrif*)[69], a sur-kaftan of red 'Frankish' (Italian) velvet heavily worked with

Ottoman context, see HEDDA REINDL-KIEL, 'Solomon's Unicorn,' in *Kanûnî Sultan Süleyman ve Dönemi: Yeni Kaynaklar, Yeni Yaklaşımlar/Suleyman the Lawgiver and his Reign: New Sources, New Approaches*, eds M. Fatih Çalışır, Suraiya Faroqhi, and M. Şakir Yılmaz (Istanbul: İbn Haldun Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2020), 340–1.

64 MARC'ANTONIO PIGAFETTA, *Itinerario da Vienna a Costantinopoli*, ed. Daria Perocco (Padua: Il Poligrafo, 2008), 246. SİNEM ARCAK, 'Gifts in Motion: Ottoman-Safavid Cultural Exchange, 1501-1618' (PhD thesis, University of Minnesota, 2012), 60.

65 HASAN BEG RŪMLŪ, *A Chronicle of the Early Safawīs: Being the Ahsanu 't-Tawārīh of Hasan-i Rūmlū* (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1931), vol. I, 86, vol. II (English translation), (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1934), 37 (paraphrase). ARCAK, 'Gifts in Motion,' 11.

66 SIDNEY NETTLETON FISHER, *The Foreign Relations of Turkey, 1481-1512* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1948), 94.

67 HASAN BEG RŪMLŪ, *A Chronicle of the Early Safawīs*, vol. I, 86–7. ARCAK, 'Gifts in Motion,' 12. Much later, in 1583, Shah Khodabande sent a dark green silk velvet kaftan to Murad III: TIM STANLEY, 'Ottoman Gift Exchange: Royal Give and Take,' in *Gifts of the Sultan: The Arts of Giving at the Islamic Courts*, ed. Linda Komaroff (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 150, fig. 134; yet we do not know whether the Safavid court called this piece a robe of honour.

68 MC 71, fol. 68b.

69 In these years, an unskilled construction labourer would earn around 5 *akçe* per day, see PAMUK, *İstanbul ve Diger Kentlerde 500 Yıllık Fiyatlar*, 69.

gold, a red *mirahorî*-dress[70] of plain Italian velvet, three sorts of velvet from Bursa, which were gold-brocaded with the dots of the *chintamani* pattern, striped (or multi-coloured) and uncut, all in two dress-lengths respectively. Red *kemha* from Amasya is noted in the same lengths, while *peşorî*,[71] apparently a variety of *kemha*, came in ten dress-lengths. Two plates of sable fur completed the sartorial part. In addition, four 'mixed' (*memzuç*; in all likelihood niello) tankards, four silver trays and ten wine goblets were included in the gift package. Four of them were large, called 'camel sole' (*deve tabanı*), and the others are termed *Lazî*.[72]

Eight men of the envoy's retinue were outfitted as well, and two of them were able to pocket 3,000 *akçe* each. Furthermore, the group's treasurer was awarded a 'customary bonus' (*'adet*) of 8,420 *akçe* and the *çavuş* accompanying the delegation took 1,160 *akçe* with him.[73] The envoy and his retinue thus received the full programme of first-rate honours. This cornucopia of presents seems at first glance to suggest that at least a part of them were destined for the shah in Tabriz.

In this context it is interesting to see that on 16 April 1504 the register lists almost the same inventory of gifts for the envoy of the Akkoyunlu Prince Alvand, who is designated – in the same manner as Ismail – 'lord of the dominion of Persia'(*mir-i vilayet-i 'Acem*).[74] He had been defeated by Shah Ismail and fled to Diyarbakır, where he died at on uncertain date after early October 1504.[75] Around the same time (20 April 1504), for the legate of Mengli Giray, the khan of the Crimean Tatars, the Ottoman protocol prescribed a treatment that was considered honourable, albeit much less opulent. He obtained 7,000 *akçe* and two luxurious robes of honour[76] and was thus for the Porte almost on the same social level as the envoy of the Hungarian king (23 July 1504).[77]

Big cats for the sultan

It is hardly likely that Shah Ismail's envoy would have arrived empty-handed at the royal court of Istanbul. The mere fact that he got the whole range of top-notch presents contemplated by Ottoman protocol suggests a delivery of clearly honorific gifts from Iran. Robes of honour would undoubtedly have been embarrassing and

[70] This is a robe of honour frequently mentioned in registers of the sixteenth century. According to Michael Rogers it is an adaption of a Mamluk robe of honour: ROGERS, 'An Ottoman Palace Inventory,' 45.
[71] The fabric appears in the document quoted in note 14 as *kemha-yı peşorî* and also among the gifts (*in'am*) for Khan 'Adil Giray on 17 February 1554; BOA, D.BRZ d. 20617, p. 39. See also MİNE ESİNER ÖZEN, 'Türkçe'de Kumaş Adları,' *Tarih Dergisi* 33 (1980–1): 321.
[72] We find further mentions of this type in later bookkeeping entries (in the *ruznamçe* register) of the royal inner treasury, BOA, D.BRZ d. 20614, pp. 27, 144, 152.
[73] MC 71, fol. 68b.
[74] ÖMER LÜTFÜ BARKAN, 'İstanbul Saraylarına ait Muhasebe Defterleri,' *Belgeler* IX, no. 13 (1979): 365 note 383.
[75] See JOHN E. WOODS, *The Aqquyunlu Clan, Confederation, Empire: A Study in 15th/9th Century Turko-Iranian Politics* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1976): 169–77 and 294 note 129.
[76] BARKAN, 'İstanbul Saraylarına,' 366 note 385.
[77] MC 71, fol. 34b. The envoy of the Hungarian king received less money though (5,000 *akçe*).

certainly resulted in less friendly treatment by the Ottoman side. Thus, it is rather implausible that Hasan Beg Rumlu's allegations of Bayezid II receiving robes of honour were based on reality. Moreover, our register has an entry saying that the four 'leopard-keepers (*parsçıyan*) who came with the messenger of Sheikh Ismail' received a gracious gift of 1,000 *akçe* per person.[78] These keepers must have been accompanying some leopards (or cheetahs) brought as presents for the sultan.[79] If so, this was a true royal gift. In the Ottoman (and probably also the Safavid) context, offering a big cat such as a panther or leopard to a foreign monarch evidently went hand in hand with acknowledging the recipient's royal status.

The question of whether or what kind of gifts legates presented to a political foe would have always involved a dimension of propaganda, and narratives such as chronicles were flagships for this kind of image projection. Hence, it is quite natural that the archival evidence should show a different image from the one we read from the narrative presented by Hasan Rumlu, who clearly embellished his account with *topoi*.

Robes of honour as a message in kind

Depending on the political situation, diplomatic gifts were a perfect means for subtly communicating messages the donor did not want to state in so many words. A good example is the addition of robes of honour in gift dispatches to the court of Vienna in the seventeenth century. The Peace of Zsitvatorok, in 1606, had in the Habsburg's eyes ended the tributary relationship with the Ottoman Empire, a viewpoint the Ottoman side did not share. The 1616 Peace of Vienna, however, solidified the Viennese position. The Porte reacted again and again with demands for tribute and in 1650 and 1665 added robes of honour to their gifts for the *Kaiser*.[80] This was a clear message, although the demand for tribute proved to be unenforceable in Realpolitik, the Ottoman view remained unchanged. While sending robes of honour to Muslim monarchs usually meant a serious threat of war, the court of Vienna might not even have understood the implication. Thus, the message only had effect at domestic level.

Threats

The practice of diplomatic gifting gave ample opportunity for gruesome threats. After his victory over the Uzbeks in the battle of Marv, in 1510, Shah Ismail sent the cranium of Uzbek khan, Shaybani, parcelled in a nice box and accompanied by a Koran and a

[78] MC 71, fol. 68b. At that time, an unskilled building labourer would have to work more than half a year to earn this sum; see PAMUK, *İstanbul ve Diger Kentlerde 500 Yıllık Fiyatlar*, 69.
[79] According to Ibn Iyâs, in the summer of 1512 an envoy of Shah Ismail brought gifts to the Mamluk court, among which seven cheetahs. Originally nine of these animals had been sent, but two died on the way. Before being presented to Qansawh al-Gawrī, they were caparisoned with silken covers; IBN IYÂS, *Alltagsnotizen*, 148.
[80] See REINDL-KIEL, 'Symbolik, Selbstbild und Beschwichtigungsstrategien,' 268–74.

prayer carpet, to Qansawh al-Gawrī.[81] Allegedly, Ismail dispatched the rest of Shaybanī's straw-stuffed severed head to Bayezid II.[82]

Marino Sanuto reports another telling case in one of his diaries: in 1516 Selim I 'the Grim' sent a messenger to Venice to convey the news about the sultan's victory over the Safavids in the region of Mardin. As tangible proof, the envoy brought the severed head, stuffed with straw, of a senior Safavid commander. The sultan writes in his accompanying letter that 'because of the good friendship and peace between [him] and the Signoria' he 'was sending his slave, the *çavuş* Mustafa with the head of one of the notables (*di uno primo signor*) of Bagdad, named "Gasbin".'[83] Of course, the real purpose of this macabre gift was to menace the Serenissima and thwart potential military actions in the West during Selim's expeditions of conquest in the East. Ghoulish threats of this kind were part of the toolkit of foreign policy, particularly during Selim I's reign. In 1515, his envoy had shocked Qansawh al-Gawrī by presenting him with three severed heads: of the Dulkadirid Alaeddevle, his son and his vizier.[84] As the Mamluks regarded the principality of Dulkadir as their own backyard, this signalled doom, although its territory had long been a buffer zone and apple of discord between the two empires.

Conclusion

Our brief tour through a number of sources dealing with gifts has shown that positive emotions such as affection and friendship tend to be the exception rather than the rule in Ottoman gift traffic. This makes the applicability of Andrews' love theory somewhat questionable. In the domestic sphere as well as on the diplomatic stage gifts defined the donor's self-view and image of the recipient. Between individuals of (approximately) equal standing the gifts had to be fitting for the recipient's rank, thus showing approval of the person's place in society. Diplomatic offerings from ruler to ruler were, in general, no different. As one of the fundamental principles in Ottoman society was *kendü halinde olmak* (lit. 'to be in the condition of the self'), which meant in pre-modern times to behave in conformity with one's social status, giving a suitable gift could help to persuade proper conduct on the part of the recipient. This might have been the idea behind the Ottoman dispatch of robes of honour to Vienna, for from the perspective of the Porte, it indicated to the unbelievers their appropriate place vis-à-vis the Ottoman sultan.

In another field of cultural history we observe a similar approach. Christiane Czygan points out that Shah İsmail and Selim I, two antagonistic rulers, used both poetry as a means of propaganda. İsmail's target group were the unrefined masses of Turkoman nomads and dervishes, while Selim's poems intended to fit into the image of an ideal Islamic ruler mastering sword and pen at the same high level. Czygan

[81] IBN IYÂS, *Alltagsnotizen*, 135.
[82] ARCAK, 'Gifts in Motion,' 12–13.
[83] MARINO SANUTO, *I Diarii*. XXII (Venice, 1887), c. 460 and 462. The letter was sent on 2 July 1516 in Konya.
[84] IBN IYÂS, *Alltagsnotizen*, 203.

suggests that Selim I's sophisticated poetry also 'served to teach the Shah a lesson in proper manners', 'befitting the dignity of a ruler', i.e. not to associate with nomads and other rural folk,[85] which the Ottoman elite disdained and usually ignored. To teach others their proper place in society in such an indirect manner must have been a well-tried method to 'educate' ignorant persons of rank.

In the Ottoman elite, including the royal family, there was a common code for expressing emotions. Individuals would communicate their affections and feelings of friendship by gifting objects close to the body, symbolising intimacy.

In the field of diplomatic traffic, serious warnings could be transmitted with horrifying items that were certainly effective in spreading terror. It is probably no accident that negative emotions in diplomatic gifts are easier to discern than positive ones. Ottoman chronicles centring on the sultan as the ultimate source of power refer time and again to the ruler's wrath but scarcely mention his positive emotions. Should we understand this as a means of communicating royal power?

Although Selim the Grim's diplomatic 'gifts' seem to tell another story, in general it was Realpolitik and prudence that determined the Porte's approach to its antagonists. Ottoman protocol directed all the anger to the chancellery records at home, while sending, albeit between gritted teeth, honorific gifts to the foe. Evidently, the Ottoman administration preferred discretion when coping with anger or contempt. A telling act in this respect (in the late seventeenth century) was the Grand Vizier's regular visit to the toilet directly before receiving a non-Muslim envoy, who would kiss the hem of his kaftan in greeting.[86] Expressing emotions with gifts was however an extremely rare practice for the officials who were responsible for diplomatic gifts.

In any case, we can conclude that both in the domestic cycle as well as on the diplomatic stage, Ottoman gift traffic was used as a – costly – means of communication, even though recipients outside the Middle Eastern realm might not have fully understood its semiotic code. For the Ottomans, despite not expressing all they had hidden in their hearts, gifts were expensive messages in kind.

[85] CHRITIANE CZYGAN, "Masters of the Pen: the Divans of Selimi and Muhibbi", in Abdulrahim Abu-Husayn, ed., *1516: The Year that Changed the Middle East.* (Beirut: American University of Beirut Press, 2021), 114.

[86] See HEDDA REINDL-KIEL, 'Audiences, Banquets, Garments and Kisses: Encounters with the Ottoman Sultan in the 17th Century,' in *The Ceremonial of Audience: Transcultural Approaches*, eds Eva Orthmann and Anna Kollatz (Göttingen: Bonn University Press-V&R unipress, 2019), 179.

On Gifts and Friendship: Polish-Lithuanian Ambassadors and Gift Exchanges in Istanbul and Iași

MICHAŁ WASIUCIONEK
Nicolae Iorga Institute of History - Research Institute of the University of Bucharest

In October 1622, the inhabitants of the Moldavian capital of Iaşi were able to witness an uncommonly lavish and solemn event, as the Polish-Lithuanian grand embassy, led by Prince Krzysztof Zbaraski, passed through the town and was received by the incumbent voyvode, Ștefan Tomșa II (r. 1611–15, 1621–3). Iași was not the final destination for the envoy, whose main task was to secure a new *'ahdname* from the sultan, following the full-scale war that had taken place the previous year.[1] Although merely a waypoint en route to Istanbul, Zbaraski's stay in Iaşi was nonetheless important; sandwiched between the two East European great powers, the Moldavian principality was a contested territory between the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Sublime Porte, both of which claimed suzerain rights over the local ruler.[2] Moreover, there was no love lost between Ștefan Tomșa II and Poland-Lithuania: throughout his reign in the principality, the voyvode gained notoriety as a sworn enemy of the Commonwealth, cracking down on pro-Polish members of the Moldavian elite, aligning himself with 'hawks' within the Ottoman establishment and assisting Tatar raiders in predatory expeditions in the borderlands.[3] In fact, one of the priorities for Zbaraski was to secure the voyvode's removal from the throne and his replacement with a more amiable candidate. Thus, it was to be expected that tensions would flare up and the ceremonies would transform into a contest of one-upmanship between the ambassador and the voyvode. According to a later account by Miron Costin, the quarrel culminated with Tomșa calling the departing Zbaraski a 'Polish dog';[4] returning from his mission in Istanbul, the latter would not tempt fate and took a longer route across Transylvania.

---

[1] On this conflict and Zbaraski's mission, see LESZEK PODHORODECKI and NOJ RASZBA, *Wojna chocimska 1621 roku* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1979); DARIUSZ MILEWSKI, 'Polskie oczekiwania i polityka wobec obsady tronu mołdawskiego w okresie pochocimskim 1621-1624,' *Saeculum Christianum* 20 (2013): 99–108.

[2] ILONA CZAMAŃSKA, 'Mołdawia i Wołoszczyzna w stosunkach polsko-tureckich XV-XVII wieku,' *Balcanica Posnaniensia* 4 (1989): 301–12; VENIAMIN CIOBANU, *Politică și diplomație în secolul al XVII-lea. Țările române în raporturile polono-otomano-habsburgice (1601-1634)* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 1994).

[3] VICTOR OSTAPCHUK, 'The Ottoman Black Sea Frontier and the Relations of the Porte with the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Muscovy, 1622-1628' (PhD diss., Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, 1989), 4–8; DARIUSZ KOŁODZIEJCZYK, 'Slave Hunting and Slave Redemption as a Business Enterprise. The Northern Black Sea Region in the Sixteenth to Seventeenth Centuries,' *Oriente Moderno* 86, no. 1 (2006): 149–59.

[4] MIRON COSTIN, *Opere*, ed. Petre P. Panaitescu (Bucharest: Editura Academiei RPR, 1958), 89.

Cromohs (Cyber Review of Modern Historiography), ISSN 1123-7023, 24/2021

DOI: 10.36253/cromohs-13683

This was by no means the only controversy in which Zbaraski was involved during his mission. The Porte's officials were taken aback both by the size of the ambassador's entourage, which some allegedly joked was too large for an embassy, but to small an army to conquer the city, as well as the haughty behaviour of the ambassador and his challenges to the norms of Ottoman court ceremonial. Most notoriously, Zbaraski caused an uproar by galloping his horse through the first two courtyards of the Topkapı Palace before being forced to dismount next to the Divan chamber. While accounts of the diplomat's clashes with his hosts abound, the prince was by no means unique in this respect; reports from other embassies in the course of the seventeenth century similarly include moments of high drama, where the honour and dignity of the ambassador and – by extension, the Polish crown – was at stake. Even though none of the Polish-Lithuanian envoys did cause a scandal by punching an imperial *kapıcı*, as French ambassador Charles de Ferriol would do in January 1700,[5] the issue of honour, prestige and diplomatic status were ever present on the minds of Polish-Lithuanian ambassadors to the Sublime Porte, both in Istanbul and in Iași.

The frequently dramatic and emotionally charged episodes that proliferated throughout the seventeenth century were by no means incidental; instead, they bear witness to the importance and complexity of Polish-Ottoman and Polish-Moldavian relations in this period. For the Commonwealth, the relations with the Sublime Porte were of utmost importance, given the military might of the empire and a number of contentious issues, such as Cossack and Tatar raiding in the borderlands, suzerainty over Moldavia, as well as the broader geopolitical context of the period.[6] Despite its self-definition as *antemurale christianitatis*, the Commonwealth's elite was not particularly eager to follow calls to arms against the Ottomans and preferred to maintain amicable relations with its more powerful neighbour.[7] On its part, the Sublime Porte was generally reluctant to engage Poland-Lithuania on the battlefield in the course of the sixteenth century, trying to keep the Commonwealth out of the Habsburg camp. As early as 1533, Sultan Süleyman granted King Sigismund I an 'eternal peace,'[8] while his successors applied considerable diplomatic pressure to prevent the election of a

[5] On this episode and its interpretation, see CHRISTINE VOGEL, 'The Caftan and the Sword. Dress and Diplomacy in Ottoman-French Relations Around 1700,' in *Fashioning the Self in Transcultural Settings. The Uses and Significance of Dress in Self-Narrative*, eds Claudia Ulbrich and Richard Wittmann (Würzburg: Ergon-Verlag, 2015), 25–44.

[6] For an overview of Polish-Ottoman relations in the early modern period, see DARIUSZ KOŁODZIEJCZYK, *Ottoman-Polish Diplomatic Relations (15th-18th Century). An Annotated Edition of* 'Ahdnames *and Other Documents* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

[7] On the concept of Poland-Lithuania as *antemurale christianitatis*, see WIKTOR WEINTRAUB, 'Renaissance Poland and "Antemurale Christianitatis",' *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 3-4, no. 2 (1979–80): 920–30; JANUSZ TAZBIR, *Polska przedmurzem Europy* (Warsaw: Twój Styl, 2004); JERZY URWANOWICZ, 'Wokół ideologii przedmurza chrześcijaństwa w Rzeczypospolitej w drugiej połowie XVII w.,' *Odrodzenie i Reformacja w Polsce* 29 (1984): 185–99.

[8] KOŁODZIEJCZYK, *Ottoman-Polish Diplomatic Relations (15th-18th Century)*, 117–19; ANDRZEJ DZIUBIŃSKI, *Stosunki dyplomatyczne polsko-tureckie w latach 1500-1572* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2005), 94–98.

Habsburg to the Polish-Lithuanian throne in the last quarter of the sixteenth century.[9] In the course of the seventeenth century, these amicable relations deteriorated and nearly a third of the following century would be consumed by prolonged and ultimately inconclusive military conflicts. Thus, even from the point of view of the geopolitical context, the sheer scale of the issues and controversies meant that the task expected from Polish-Lithuanian ambassadors to the Porte was a difficult one.

Still, a language of affection permeated diplomatic correspondence and the declared ideal was one of 'friendship' rather than peace, emphasising the emotional bond between the king and the sultan, as well as between their polities. However, what each side meant by friendship and how it should be expressed differed significantly and often raised the stakes rather than abated potential conflicts. While the emphasis on an affective bond as an ideal relationship between the rulers was shared by both sides and fit into the broader framework of the early modern *société des princes*,[10] the Polish-Lithuanian court and its diplomatic agents saw it in terms of parity and affinity between equals. In turn, while the Ottoman diplomatic practice and court ceremonial did not rule out friendship with Christian monarchs, the imperial elite saw it in terms of the vertical subordination of other political and diplomatic actors to the superior position of the sultan – which was understandably unacceptable to the Poles. As a result, while declaring friendship, both sides would frequently clash and demonstrate negative rather than positive emotions in the course of their interactions with one another, with frequent bursts of anger and expressions of disappointment, hostility or fear. Within this context, Polish-Lithuanian envoys to the Porte had to walk a fine line between standing their ground on matters of prestige and preventing the breakdown of negotiations, sometimes without success.

However, it is not only the emotions of those involved that shine through the ambassadorial accounts; they also had to be described in ways that would resonate with their intended audience back home. In this respect, the political culture of self-perception of the Commonwealth's noble estate (*szlachta*) played a crucial political role, developing a self-definition and habitus that would prove challenging to reconcile with the realities of a diplomatic mission to the Sublime Porte. According to the theories of representation in the Commonwealth, the ambassador did not just represent the ruler, but also the whole *res publica* of citizen-nobles, entrenched in their liberties and uncompromisingly hostile to perceived despotism. Consequently, the ambassador was expected to conform to safeguard the dignity and honour of the state and the noble class in face of the sultan, seen as the embodiment of an absolute ruler. Since this imperative was often impossible to reconcile with the ceremonial and political environment of the Sublime Porte, ambassadors had to take into account the attitude of their noble peers and shape their accounts in a way that would gain their approval and evoke positive emotions. These two emotional layers – of those involved in the

[9] KEMAL BEYDILLI, *Die polnischen Königswahlen und Interregnen von 1572 und 1576 im Lichte osmanischer Archivalien. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der osmanischen Machtpolitik* (Munich: Trofenik, 1976).
[10] LUCIEN BELY, *La société des princes, XVIe-XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 2014).

negotiations and the public to which the accounts were addressed – form the first anchor of the present paper.

Gifts and their exchanges between Polish-Lithuanian diplomats and their Ottoman and Moldavian hosts provide the second point of gravity in the argument. The exchange of precious objects, money and tokens of friendship constituted bread and butter of early modern sociability, both in Poland-Lithuania and the Ottoman Empire. Thus, the importance of gifts for lubricating social ties and cultivating positive emotions and friendly relations with the Porte was perfectly clear for the Commonwealth's envoys, themselves steeped in the emotion culture and habitus of the Polish-Lithuanian elite. Nonetheless, the issue of gifts was a particularly charged topic and cause for anxiety during such embassies. The major concern was the threat that the gifts' nature would be consciously misconstrued by the Ottoman officials: aware of the multiple notions of gifts within the Ottoman context, the diplomats and their principals feared that a voluntary gift would be interpreted by their hosts as an acknowledgement of the Commonwealth's inferior status vis-à-vis the sultan, which they tried to avoid at all costs; a related fear was that, once offered, a gift would create a precedent and raise the expectations of Ottoman officials. Similarly, gifts bestowed by the sultan and other members of the imperial establishment were far from innocent, raising similar concerns on the part of the envoys. Therefore, they had to carefully navigate gift exchanges, balancing between the imperatives of sociability in the Ottoman capital and the prestige of the Commonwealth.

The present paper seeks to tackle this intersection between gift exchanges and emotional responses within the field of diplomatic relations between Poland-Lithuania on the one hand and the Ottoman and Moldavian elites on the other, covering the period between 1623 (Zbaraski's embassy) and 1700 (mission of Rafał Leszczyński). In order to do so, I examine ambassadorial accounts and related texts through the lens of the ample scholarly literature on practices of gift-giving and emotions in the early modern period.[11] As I argue, the subject of transcultural diplomatic encounters between Polish-Lithuanian ambassadors, Ottoman officials and Moldavian boyars should be analysed with keen awareness of the habitus of the respective elites and should not be dissociated from the emotion cultures that they produced. This was facilitated by the institutional scaffolding of Polish-Ottoman and Polish-Moldavian relations which continued to rely on ad hoc embassies and encouraged the selection of ambassadors on the basis of their prestige and wealth rather than expertise. However, the conflicts surrounding gifts were not caused by a lack of familiarity and accidental misunderstandings, but rather the keen (albeit not always full) understanding of the other party's desire to impose its own framework. Moreover, in such instances each side was under considerable cultural and political pressure to stand its ground on

[11] BARBARA H. ROSENWEIN, *Generations of Feeling: A History of Emotions, 600-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); WILLIAM M. REDDY, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); EMMANUEL LEMÉE, 'Harnessing Anger and Shame: Emotional Diplomacy in Early Modern Context,' *Diplomatica* 3, no. 1 (2021): 1–22; VALENTINA ŠOŠTARIĆ, *Dubrovački poklisari. U potrazi za novim teritorijima* (Zadar: Sveučilište u Zadru, 2021).

the matter; while full victory was frequently beyond the reach of the Polish-Lithuanian diplomats, they subsequently sought to redact, elide and adjust the compromises they had to make in order to legitimise themselves to the audience back home.

In order to examine this issue, the paper is divided into three parts. In the first section, I focus on the institutional, political and cultural framework of Polish-Lithuanian missions to Moldavia and the Sublime Porte. The absence of a permanent diplomatic representation of the Commonwealth in Istanbul had far-reaching consequences for the dynamics of Polish-Ottoman relations. At the same time, the radical differences that existed between the Commonwealth and the Porte and the corresponding divergent habitus and protocols of power posed an additional challenge to the conduct of diplomatic affairs which put a premium on representation rather than negotiation. In the following section, I shift my attention to gift exchanges and the accompanying emotions. Whereas the concept of friendship as the basis of mutual relations was invoked by all parties and the role of gifts as a token of friendship was recognised, the divergent concept of this affective relationship transformed it into a particularly thorny issue. Finally, in the third section, I shift to the Polish-Lithuanian ambassadors' strategies of narrating their experiences, gift exchanges and emotional states – both their own and those of their Ottoman and Moldavian counterparts. As I argue, whereas the process of conducting diplomatic affairs required a balance and often uneasy compromise for the mission to succeed, narrating the mission to the noble public in Poland-Lithuania required a different balance that would emphasise the virtues of the ambassador and his unwavering commitment to the self-definition and values cherished by the *szlachta*. While these strategies included eliding, redacting or altering the humiliating events that took place at the Ottoman and Moldavian courts, they also took advantage of gift exchanges and emotions to represent the virtues that stood at the basis of the Commonwealth's political ideology.

Confronting the despot: the institutional and cultural framework of Polish-Ottoman and Polish-Moldavian diplomatic relations

Beginning in the second half of the sixteenth century, an increasing number of European embassies established a permanent presence on the shores of the Bosphorus, thus joining the well-established Venetian *bailo* and transforming the Ottoman capital into one of the crucial nodes of early modern diplomatic networks. Although the scholarship on the rise of early modern diplomacy has generally turned to the Italian peninsula to explain its evolution, a growing number of scholars have pointed out the importance of Istanbul as a crucial breeding ground for new practices.[12] However, among the increasing ranks of resident ambassadors entrusted with handling affairs at the Porte, one would in vain search for a representative of the Polish-

12 DANIEL GOFFMAN, 'Negotiating with the Renaissance State. The Ottoman Empire and the New Diplomacy,' in *Early Modern Ottomans. Remapping the Empire*, eds VIRGINIA H. AKSAN and DANIEL GOFFMAN (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 61–74; TRACEY A. SOWERBY and CHRISTOPHER MARKIEWICZ, eds, *Diplomatic Cultures at the Ottoman Court, c.1500-1630* (New York: Routledge, 2021).

Lithuanian Commonwealth, which continued to rely on ad hoc embassies to resolve conflicts and renew peace agreements.

The absence of a Polish-Lithuanian embassy at the Porte may seem puzzling, given the importance of direct diplomatic contacts between the two polities. Embassies began to travel between the two courts at the beginning of the fifteenth century and, as early as January 1533, Sultan Süleyman granted peace in perpetuity to King Sigismund I. In the sixteenth century, the relations between Poland-Lithuania and the Porte were generally amicable and the Commonwealth's elite displayed considerable reluctance to take up arms against the Ottomans.[13] However, by the beginning of the seventeenth century, a number of contentious issues had accumulated that threatened – and frequently led to – open conflict.[14] Thus, it seemed that establishing a resident embassy in Istanbul would facilitate conflict resolution and prevent the outbreak of armed conflicts; indeed, Ottoman officials encouraged the Polish king to set up such an embassy.[15] However, these overtures were politely, but firmly rejected; a Polish agent would eventually take up residence by the court in 1678, but the role was limited and bilateral relations continued to be managed through ad hoc envoys.[16]

As Tetiana Grygorieva points out, this refusal stemmed from several principal reasons.[17] First, there was a financial rationale at play for the cash-strapped royal treasury and the nobility, who considered a permanent resident an unnecessary burden on the exchequer. However, there was also an internal political dimension behind this reluctance, namely the tension *inter maiestatem ac libertatem*.[18] Permanent residents would inevitably fall under the authority of the king, with little room for control by the *sejm*; indeed, permanent representatives were considered royal agents.[19] Thus, there was a concern that expanding the permanent diplomatic network would inevitably enhance royal authority and upset the balance of power within the Commonwealth. This reluctance was further augmented by a set of concerns pertaining to the realities at the Sublime Porte. Establishing an embassy in Istanbul could be interpreted by the Ottomans as an acknowledgement of sultanic superiority and a sign of submission.

---

13 URWANOWICZ, 'Wokół ideologii przedmurza chrześcijaństwa w Rzeczypospolitej w drugiej połowie XVII w.'

14 CZAMAŃSKA, 'Mołdawia i Wołoszczyzna w stosunkach polsko-tureckich XV-XVII wieku'; VICTOR OSTAPCHUK, 'The Human Landscape of the Ottoman Black Sea in the Face of the Cossack Naval Raids,' *Oriente Moderno* 20, no. 1 (2001): 23–95.

15 KOŁODZIEJCZYK, *Ottoman-Polish Diplomatic Relations (15th-18th Century)*, 171.

16 In fact, a more permanent diplomatic presence in Istanbul only emerged in the second half of the eighteenth century, see KOŁODZIEJCZYK, *Ottoman-Polish Diplomatic Relations (15th-18th Century)*, 171.

17 TETIANA GRYGORIEVA, 'The Tricks and Traps of Ad Hoc Diplomacy. Polish Ambassadors' Experiences of Ottoman Hospitality,' in Sowerby and Markiewicz, *Diplomatic Cultures at the Ottoman Court, c.1500-1630*, 194–216, 195f.

18 On the issue of Polish-Lithuanian concepts of *monarchia mixta* and its dynamics, see STEFANIA OCHMANN, 'Rzeczpospolita jako „monarchia mixta" — dylematy władzy i wolności,' in *Kultura - polityka - dyplomacja. Studia ofiarowane Jaremie Maciszewskiemu w 60. rocznicę Jego urodzin*, ed. Andrzej Bartnicki (Warsaw: PWN, 1990), 263–78.

19 ZBIGNIEW WÓJCIK, 'Dyplomacja polska w okresie wojen drugiej połowy XVII w. (1648-1668),' in *Historia dyplomacji polskiej*, ed. Zbigniew Wójcik, vol. 2 (Warsaw: PWN, 1981): 163–330, 243–44.

Thus, in order to avoid this peril and claim an equal footing, continued reliance on ad hoc diplomacy seemed like a less treacherous path to follow.

This solution had tremendous consequences for the conduct of missions to the Porte and the attitudes of the envoys towards their hosts. The task of representing the Polish king and the Commonwealth fell on two types of ambassadors: ordinary envoys (*posłowie*) and grand ambassadors (*posłowie wielcy*). The difference between the two categories was constituted not by the ambassador's broader prerogatives, but instead by the solemnity and pomp that accompanied them.[20] As Grygorieva argues, this distinction suggests that the main goal of an ambassador was representation rather than negotiation, similarly reflected in the choice of envoys themselves.[21] The absence of a permanent embassy deprived the Commonwealth of an institutional framework that would allow the training of its diplomats. While we find 'area experts' in the seventeenth century, their education took place in non-formal settings and they usually occupied subordinate positions during the embassies. For grand ambassadors, in turn, the criteria of wealth and social status overrode the need for experience.

All of this had far-reaching consequences on the diplomats' reference frame. Rather than an autonomous field, the behavioural patterns of the envoys were tethered to the Polish-Lithuanian political culture of the *szlachta* and its concepts of representation. Tetiana Grygorieva correctly draws a connection between the nobility's representative assemblies as the central loci where the *szlachta*'s attitudes were forged and their impact on diplomacy.[22] A clear example in this respect is the work of Andrzej Maksymilian Fredro, who defined two categories of legations – *quae intra Regnum, vel quae ad exteros* – but saw their nature as essentially identical.[23] In short, diplomats were to act in a similar way to the noble deputies to the *Sejm*, a connection further evidenced by the format of the instructions and their limited mandate.[24]

This link between political culture and diplomatic practice made contacts with the Porte a particularly delicate matter. The ideological foundations of the Polish-Lithuanian polity drew on the tradition of republican political thought, emphasising liberty, virtue and political participation as the cornerstone of the *szlachta*'s self-definition, embodied in the Commonwealth's institutional framework. Drawing on the concepts of *monarchia mixta*, the *szlachta* envisioned a *res publica* of free, equal nobles with inalienable political privileges and the limited authority of a freely elected king. As

[20] TETIANA GRYGORIEVA, 'Zur Selbstdarstellung polnisch-litauischer Botschafter im frühneuzeitlichen Istanbul,' in *Die Audienz. Ritualisierter Kulturkontakt in der Frühen Neuzeit*, eds Peter Burschel and Christine Vogel (Cologne: Böhlau, 2014), 81–100, 82–4; WÓJCIK, 'Dyplomacja polska w okresie wojen drugiej połowy XVII w. (1648-1668),' 261–2.

[21] GRYGORIEVA, 'Zur Selbstdarstellung polnisch-litauischer Botschafter im frühneuzeitlichen Istanbul,' 81.

[22] GRYGORIEVA, 'Zur Selbstdarstellung polnisch-litauischer Botschafter im frühneuzeitlichen Istanbul,', 85–91.

[23] ANDRZEJ MAKSYMILIAN FREDRO, *Viri consilii monitis ethicorum nec non prudenatiae civilis* (Lviv: Typis Collegij SJ, 1730), 423.

[24] GRYGORIEVA, 'Zur Selbstdarstellung polnisch-litauischer Botschafter im frühneuzeitlichen Istanbul,' 82.

the description of Krzysztof Zbaraski shows, the contrast with the Ottoman political system could hardly be greater:

> in Turkey there are – and have always been – only two estates, even if subdivided into more ranks and categories. The first [order] is the ruler himself; the second are his slaves. To the ruler belongs *absolutum dominium* and he is, as if an earthly deity, the source of all the fortunes and misfortunes that befall this nation.[25]

For the *szlachta*, for whom the notion of *absolutum dominium* was anathema in the political discourse, the political system built around sultanic household and political slavery constituted the antithesis of the ideal social order of the Commonwealth. The association between absolute monarchical power and the person of the sultan was exploited in political pamphlets of the seventeenth century, in the form of forged letters from the sultan promising to abolish the institutions and quash the liberties that the nobles cherished so much.[26]

While not as prominent in the Commonwealth's early modern discourse, the perception of the Moldavian (*Wołoszа*) elites provided a different model of arbitrary power and its perils. In contrast to the powerful Porte, Moldavia was not perceived as a threat and occupied an inferior position within the region. In the past, the local voyvodes had been vassals of the Polish Crown, before the Ottoman advance turned them into sultanic tributaries. Nonetheless, Moldavia served as a cautionary example of arbitrary power; rather than anxiety, the emotion usually expressed towards the local elite was one of contempt. Moldavians were usually described as duplicitous, downtrodden and lacking virtue due to the unchecked power of their rulers. In 1553, Hieronim Otwinowski claimed that 'there is no true nobility among Moldavians, since all of them are equal in that one day you herd goats, just to become a grand lord overnight.'[27] Whereas at the Porte, the ambassadors were on the defensive against their hosts, in Iași their goal was to demonstrate superiority vis-à-vis the local elite.

These remarks demonstrate that the alleged corruption of Ottoman and Moldavian despotisms was not just institutional, but moral as well. In line with early modern republican thought, the *szlachta* saw the issues of the political system and citizens' qualities as intimately connected and mutually reinforcing. Within this framework, liberty constituted a precondition for virtue, while both qualities were essential for the proper functioning of the *res publica*; similarly, the latter's decline would inevitably lead to moral decline.[28] Hence, for Polish authors, true virtue and liberty was

---

[25] JANUSZ WOJTASIK, 'Uwagi księcia Krzysztofa Zbaraskiego, posła wielkiego do Turcji z 1622 r.-o państwie ottomańskim i jego silach zbrojnych,' *Studia i Materiały do Historii Wojskowości* 7, no. 1 (1961): 333–46.

[26] DARIUSZ KOŁODZIEJCZYK, 'Native Nobilities and Foreign Absolutism. A Polish-Ottoman Case,' *Studia Caroliensia* 3-4 (2004): 303–8.

[27] Hurmuzaki, Supp. II/1, 193.

[28] For recent discussions of Polish-Lithuanian political thought, see BENEDICT WAGNER-RUNDELL, *Common Wealth, Common Good. The Politics of Virtue in Early Modern Poland-Lithuania* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 4–10; ANNA GRZEŚKOWIAK-KRWAWICZ, *Queen Liberty. The Concept of Freedom in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

impossible to cultivate under despotism.[29] Thus, the link between the Ottoman and Moldavian political systems and the apparent lack of moral qualities made both polities not only the institutional, but also the moral antithesis of the ideal embodied in the Commonwealth.[30] Consequently, a Polish-Lithuanian ambassador had an obligation to uphold the Commonwealth's dignity and prestige, while also conducting negotiations in an environment seen not only as hostile, but also morally corrupt.

A glimpse into the envoys' approach can be glimpsed in Ławryn Piaseczyński's short treatise entitled *Ambassadorial Duties*.[31] Piaseczyński was not an armchair pundit, but an active diplomat who performed several missions to Moldavia and the Crimean Khanate between 1601 and 1603; he was also a five-time deputy from his province to the *Sejm*.[32] Rather than a theoretical work on ambassadorial qualities, the work he penned provides a practical manual on proper conduct, which demonstrates the emphasis on representation over negotiation. According to the author, 'one should not remove, nor alter, nor add anything to the instructions ... for the apprentice should not consider himself above his master.'[33] He instructs the reader to keep negative emotions, such as anger and outrage, in check, instead advocating modesty, and patience towards one's hosts. Much of this short work focuses on upholding one's dignity through body language, utterances and etiquette; a diplomat should show kindness and respond to insults in a way that would not cause a scandal, since 'the matter does not only pertain to you, but also to your master.'[34] While Piaseczyński admits that the task can be difficult in a hostile environment, he is quick to reassure the reader that 'it is unheard of that a Turkish emperor or a Tatar tsar [i.e., khan] would disfigure or execute an envoy, but the envoy should not give a reason not only to the lord, but also to other foreign people [to do so], since his duty is to perform a mission, not to quarrel.' Finally, he pays considerable attention to behaviour during the audience, emphasising a clear oral delivery of his diplomatic instructions and stately manner, while giving indications, among others, not to pick one's nose in public.

Although the treatise contains references to *ius gentium*, the norms he advocates are perfectly applicable to the patterns of *szlachta* behaviour at assemblies in the Commonwealth. The overt focus on rhetorical skill and sociability constituted the cornerstone of behaviour at the *Sejm* and local dietines (which Piaseczyński was familiar with), while the emphasis he places on prudence and moderation resonates with the cultural models of the nobility, influenced by Neostoic thought. With this conceptual apparatus at their disposal, Polish-Lithuanian ambassadors to the

[29] See, for instance, EDWARD TRYJARSKI, 'Ein literarisches Porträt des Türken, von Mikoaj Rej (16 Jh.) dargestellt,' *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 76 (1986): 307–13.
[30] PIOTR TAFIŁOWSKI, *Imago Turci. Studium z dziejów komunikacji społecznej w dawnej Polsce (1453-1572)* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2013), 164f.
[31] The text is published in STANISŁAW BODNIAK, 'Ławryna Piaseczyńskiego "Powinności poselskie" z początku XVII wieku,' *Pamiętnik Biblioteki Kórnickiej* 4 (1947): 164–72.
[32] WOJCIECH SOKOŁOWSKI, *Politycy schyłku Złotego Wieku. Małopolscy przywódcy szlachty i parlamentarzyści w latach 1574-1605* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, 1997), 182.
[33] BODNIAK, 'Ławryna Piaseczyńskiego "Powinności poselskie" z początku XVII wieku,' 167.
[34] BODNIAK, 'Ławryna Piaseczyńskiego "Powinności poselskie" z początku XVII wieku,' 170.

Commonwealth would have to confront a political and diplomatic culture that significantly diverged from the *res publica* of noble citizens and in many respects seemed antithetical to the habitus of the *szlachta*. The task was not easy to accomplish within the Ottoman – and Moldavian – ceremonial framework.

Upon arrival in Istanbul, ambassadors would come face to face with ceremonial protocols of power that invoked a world order centred around the sultan as a universal monarch, both through carefully choreographed encounters and the gifts exchanged between participants. Thus, whereas both sides embraced a highly emotional rhetoric of friendship, for the Ottomans the contents of these notions ruled out any equality between the king and the sultan. Thus, the Polish-Lithuanian ambassadors' two overarching goals were to resist the Ottoman demands, while at the same time swaying key figures in the imperial establishment in order to fulfil their mission. Given their position of comparative weakness vis-à-vis their hosts, they had to walk a fine line between standing their ground and offending Ottoman officials. In Moldavia, where the balance of power was reversed, so were the objectives: it was the envoys that were on the offensive, trying to pressure the voyvodes to acknowledge their superior status. In both loci, this was manifested largely in disputes over affections, hostility and gifts.

Tokens of friendship, sources of dissent

Although the Ottomans, Moldavians and Polish-Lithuanian ambassadors shared the basic premise that the scope of gifts was to cultivate positive emotions and serve as tokens of friendship, in practice gift-giving would frequently become a sore point and spark anything but amicable attitudes. In Polish sources, the prevailing mood in this regard was one of anxiety, apprehension and concern over the potential ramifications. Although some exchanges sparked joy and affection, just as frequently matters degenerated into fierce disputes. These conflicts were not accidental misunderstandings. They stemmed from a keen awareness on both sides that gifts were not innocent, but intimately connected to power hierarchies that transformed them from tokens of friendship into potentially dangerous instruments of power. Of particular concern for the Polish-Lithuanian ambassadors was the way that their gifts could be integrated into the framework of authority in the Ottoman capital.

Gifts played a prominent role in Ottoman politics and sociability, as reflected in the elaborate terminology and multiple social contexts. According to Hedda Reindl-Kiel, they constituted 'a part of a person's honour and hence an essential element of etiquette,'[35] signifying one's position within socio-political hierarchies. As she argues, it is possible to boil down the plethora of contemporary terms to several principal

[35] HEDDA REINDL-KIEL, 'East is East and West is West, and Sometimes the Twain Did Meet. Diplomatic Gift Exchange in the Ottoman Empire,' in *Frontiers of Ottoman Studies. State, Province, and the West*, eds Colin Imber and Keiko Kiyotaki (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 113–24, 114.

circuits, each structuring relations between the parties in a distinct manner.[36] Although exchanges sometimes took place between peers, the majority of gifts flowed vertically, between superiors and subordinates. Obviously, this was particularly true for exchanges involving the ruler himself, asserting his lynchpin role within a broader imperial and cosmic order. Of particular importance in this respect were two types of gift flow: *pişkeş* provided to the sultan by his servants, as well as the distribution of robes of honour (*hil'at*) by the ruler. These flows were not restricted to the imperial establishment, with ambassadors part of the ceremonial order culminating in the sultan.

The nexus between gifts and political-ceremonial order was not lost on the Polish-Lithuanian ambassadors, forming a source of concern for them. Both Polish-Lithuanian and Ottoman actors invoked friendship (as opposed to war) as the desired relationship between the king and the sultan, in line with the personal and affective rhetoric of early modern diplomacy. One would expect that gift exchange – an expression of friendship acknowledged by both parties – would thus be a natural and uncontroversial issue. However, control over the interpretation of these tokens was a controversial matter, since Polish-Lithuanian envoys in Istanbul feared that they had limited control over defining the gifts. In 1623, this concern was voiced by Krzysztof Serebkowicz: 'other ambassadors … are obliged to deliver gifts, and they are bound to do so, since they currently reside at the Porte.'[37] In other words, the diplomat feared that, if he offered voluntary gifts, the Ottomans would reinterpret them as *pişkeş*, a notion that connoted the subordination of their giver to the recipient and blurred the line between gift and an obligatory contribution.

The danger was real, since the Commonwealth repeatedly clashed with the Porte and the Crimean khans over the nature of 'gifts' (*podarki*) paid to the latter to forestall Tatar raiding of the Crown's borderlands. The nature of this payment was hotly debated; whereas Polish diplomats insisted that they were voluntary and compensation for Crimean military assistance, the khans viewed them as an obligatory tribute and threatened to attack the Commonwealth if payments stopped. Moreover, such disbursements were inserted in Ottoman *'ahdname*s and ominously described as *pişkeş* or even 'tax' (*vergü*), suggesting Poland-Lithuania's subordination to the sultan.[38]

To combat this threat, the Polish-Lithuanian envoys' instructions embraced a different and apparently paradoxical discourse regarding gifts and friendship. Ambassadors were instructed that under no circumstances should anything be offered on behalf of the king and the Commonwealth; instead, the diplomats were expected to mobilise their skills of rhetoric and persuasion, offering an alternative interpretation

[36] HEDDA REINDL-KIEL, 'Breads for the Followers, Silver Vessels for the Lord: The System of Distribution and Redistribution in the Ottoman Empire (16th -18th centuries),' *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 42 (2013): 93–104, 102.

[37] Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych, Warsaw, Libri Legationum, vol. 30, 436.

[38] DARIUSZ KOŁODZIEJCZYK, *The Crimean Khanate and Poland-Lithuania. International diplomacy on the European periphery (15th-18th century): A Study of Peace Treaties Followed by Annotated Documents* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 129.

of friendship that excluded both hierarchy between the parties and the very need for gift exchanges. An instruction for Wojciech Miaskowski from 1640 contained the argument that the value of friendship between the Polish king and the sultan was so great that it rendered any gifts redundant:

> [The ambassador] should not give any gifts, since such a close friendship between the states, as well as between the ancestors of His Royal Majesty and those of the Ottoman Lord, a mutual respect of established pacts […] has always been the greatest gift.[39]

In this critique of the nexus between gift and friendship, the main goal was to address the issues of hierarchy and equality in a way that would not endanger the position of the king or the Commonwealth. Whereas ceremonial gift exchanges at the Porte were inherently lopsided, hetman Stanisław Koniecpolski, a key figure in Polish-Ottoman relations, sought to present an alternative reading of affection:

> With regard to gifts that they will expect […] First, gifts between equals [inter pares] are customarily reciprocated, but the Turkish emperor does not offer them to His Royal Majesty; thus, why should His Royal Majesty offer them, if he recognises no superior except God?[40]

Developing his argumentation, Koniecpolski included a discussion over the nature of a genuine gift and genuine friendship. According to the hetman, the Ottomans demanded gifts from the Commonwealth out of ambition and hubris, acting in a way that was ultimately detrimental to the Porte itself:

> Whoever demands gifts, does it out of poverty, greed or ambition. Turkish emperors are not downtrodden, as they are among the greatest monarchs of the time. As for greed, this is also not of concern; since we have no treasures or bullion and just busy ourselves with arms, they would gain little satisfaction from our gifts. […] Whoever gives someone forced gifts, cannot be his friend. […] Whoever offers gifts of their own volition, does so on their own accord. If taken by force, they are not gifts, but tribute. They would be fleeting, since the one who was forced to give them would constantly seek to overturn them. The Persians are a clear example; why are they constantly breaking the peace? They wage war at any opportunity […] There cannot be such a sincere and durable friendship as with us, as we have taken nothing from the emperor.[41]

In a different document from 1633, Koniecpolski similarly claimed that a genuine gift is one that is not expected, while juxtaposing Ottoman demands with the notion of sincere affection: 'gifts reek of servitude when someone exchanges them for friendship, since the latter knows neither price nor value.'[42] Similarly, in 1623 Zbaraski discussed the issue, drawing the attention of his Ottoman interlocutors to the fact that the Porte's greatest enemies tend to be the ones most generous with gifts: 'the Christian emperor offers a watch or a different gift, then wages war upon you for twenty years.

[39] ADAM PRZYBOŚ, ed., *Wielka legacja Wojciecha Miaskowskiego do Turcji w 1640 r.* (Cracow: PWN, 1985), 172.
[40] AGNIESZKA BIEDRZYCKA, ed., *Korespondencja Stanisława Koniecpolskiego hetmana wielkiego koronnego 1632–1646* (Cracow: Societas Vistulana, 2005), 592.
[41] PRZYBOŚ, *Wielka legacja Wojciecha Miaskowskiego do Turcji w 1640 r.*, 176.
[42] BIEDRZYCKA, *Korespondencja Stanisława Koniecpolskiego hetmana wielkiego koronnego 1632-1646*, 160f.

The Persian king gives you silk that they make and fights you for eighty years. As for us, we live in peace for two centuries and we even ceded Wallachia and Moldavia; which [friendship] is more valuable?'[43]

Needless to say, such arguments were not well received at the Porte, although the actual reaction depended on the changing political circumstances. Romaszkiewicz, sent to Istanbul in 1639, reported on a calm discussion he had with *kaymakam* Mehmed Pasha, who argued 'it is appropriate that the ambassador brings gifts with him, since [the king] is a great ruler and all rulers have a custom to exchange gifts through their envoys.'[44] In 1623, Zbaraski met with a more hostile response from Gürcü Mehmed Pasha; the vizier tried to convince the ambassador by citing Safavid envoys and their lavish gifts before inquiring about the gifts from the Polish king. Upon Zbaraski's refusal to present anything, the atmosphere immediately cooled and Mehmed Pasha insisted that the ambassador could not be granted an audience with the sultan, venting that what he really expected was 'the promised tribute of 30,000 thalers, either in money or wares' in an unsuccessful bid to intimidate Zbaraski.[45]

Rhetorical flourish aside, the Polish-Lithuanian ambassadors were aware that, for a mission to be successful, there was no avoiding distributing gifts, both to the sultan and among imperial officials. While the necessity to engage in exchanges was acknowledged, an effort was made to dissociate them from the Commonwealth. Thus, envoys were instructed to insist that the objects were offered not in the name of the king, but rather by the ambassador in a private capacity; to drive the point home and avoid deliberate misrepresentation, they were to be handed over in an unofficial setting, such as a private garden.[46] Indeed, the envoys were quick to shower Ottoman officials with presents. A member of Wojciech Miaskowski's mission duly noted that the ambassador gave the sultan multiple ermine furs, bottles covered with gold leaf, two clocks, a silver 'windmill,' a hunting rifle and a powder pouch; grand vizier Kara Mustafa Pasha would receive precious furs and two clocks, including one encrusted with amber.[47] At the same time, the envoys had to fight off Ottoman attempts to raise the value of ceremonial gifts. In 1634, the gifts brought Aleksander Trzebiński – including two cuckoo clocks and ermine furs – were apparently well received at the Porte. However, a discussion emerged when one of the officials offered to provide additional ermine furs. To his interlocutor's surprise, Trzebiński 'refused and told him to give up the idea, since I will not offer them. […] God be my witness, these are from none other, but only in my name and should be received graciously without putting them on display or announcing in whose name they are given.'[48]

[43] 'Poselstwo Krzysztofa Xięcia Zbaraskiego do Turcyi w roku 1622,' *Dziennik Wileński* 3 (1827): 3–27, 101–25, 237–73, 339–71, 124–25.
[44] BIEDRZYCKA, *Korespondencja Stanisława Koniecpolskiego hetmana wielkiego koronnego 1632-1646*, 569.
[45] 'Poselstwo Krzysztofa Xięcia Zbaraskiego do Turcyi w roku 1622,' 119.
[46] GRYGORIEVA, 'The Tricks and Traps of Ad Hoc Diplomacy,' 202.
[47] PRZYBOŚ, *Wielka legacja Wojciecha Miaskowskiego do Turcji w 1640 r.*, 145.
[48] BIEDRZYCKA, *Korespondencja Stanisława Koniecpolskiego hetmana wielkiego koronnego 1632-1646*, 228.

These quotations show that, in spite of the official rhetoric of selfless friendship, Polish-Lithuanian envoys were aware that they had to enter Ottoman gift-giving circuits to cultivate amicable relations with the imperial establishment. In order to reconcile these apparently mutually exclusive stances, the ambassadors exploited their own double personae: as the ruler's alter ego, as well as in their private individual capacity. By doing so and removing gift exchanges from the ceremonial setting, their goal was to disarm them and prevent them from acquiring a legal quality, while allowing for the gift exchanges necessary to carry out the mission. Indeed, the envoys could be quite liberal in this respect. While en route to Istanbul, Rafał Leszczyński received from the serasker 'two velvet kaftans and two cloaks of French cloth'; the ambassador gladly reciprocated the gift and sent the Ottoman official 'a small silver box with crystal bottles of sherbet and a crystal spoon *di Montania* with diamonds.'[49] In Istanbul, he continued to distribute numerous gifts, including clocks, tableware, dogs and amber; the Moldavian voyvode Antioh Cantemir, his wife and his brother Dimitre (the future historian of the empire) would likewise be offered tokens of friendship.[50] As chroniclers of these missions were quick to assure, such gifts were reciprocated, although with presents of comparably lesser value, particularly fruits and flowers.[51] In such instances, the diplomats had no qualms about gift exchanges with the Ottomans.

Still, some ceremonial gifts could not easily be rejected. This was particularly the case of robes of honour (*hil'at*) distributed by the Ottomans.[52] Attire was a crucial issue at the imperial court and Porte officials insisted on ambassadors donning kaftans for their audience with the sultan. Changing clothes carried symbolic importance on two accounts: first, it demonstrated the Ottomans' capacity to impose their ceremonial protocol and, secondly, it reinforced hierarchies between the sultan and the foreign ambassadors.[53] The robes also carried more nuanced messages, their recipients carefully registering their quality and quantity to gauge their position at the court. Thus, among members of the European diplomatic corps the attitude towards kaftans was ambiguous: they denoted subjection, but also provided a mechanism of establishing and upholding a particular position at the Porte.

Unlike Ferriol, no Polish-Lithuanian ambassador caused a brawl over a kaftan, but their bestowal created tensions and disputes with the Ottoman hosts nonetheless. A matter for concern was the appropriate quality of the garment; in 1700, Rafał Leszczyński demanded that 'because I am the one who arrives with perpetual peace, I demanded the same kaftan as the imperial [ambassador] received from the emperor.'[54] This was by no means a trivial affair: after a lacklustre performance during the Holy

[49] ILONA CZAMAŃSKA, ed., *Poselstwo Rafała Leszczyńskiego do Turcji w 1700 roku. Diariusze i inne materiały. Collab. Danuta Zydorek* (Leszno: Urząd Miasta Leszna, 1998), 149.
[50] CZAMAŃSKA, *Poselstwo Rafała Leszczyńskiego do Turcji w 1700 roku*, 258f.
[51] CZAMAŃSKA, *Poselstwo Rafała Leszczyńskiego do Turcji w 1700 roku*, 163.
[52] AMANDA PHILLIPS, 'Ottoman Hil'at. Between Commodity and Charisma,' in *Frontiers of the Ottoman Imagination. Studies in Honour of Rhoads Murphey*, ed. Marios Hadjianastasis (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 111–38.
[53] CHRISTINE VOGEL, 'Gut ankommen. Der Amtsantritt eines französischen Botschafters im Osmanischen Reich im späten 17. Jahrhundert,' *Historische Anthropologie* 21, no. 2 (2013): 158–78.
[54] CZAMAŃSKA, *Poselstwo Rafała Leszczyńskiego do Turcji w 1700 roku*, 75.

League War, the envoy was concerned that the Commonwealth could be treated in a manner inferior to the Habsburgs. This was indeed what happened: the Ottomans argued that, apart from being the envoy of the head of all Christian rulers, the latter also brought gifts in the name of his monarchs, whereas Leszczyński bore presents in his name only. Nonetheless, the general tone of the discussions was pleasant and the number and quality of kaftans consoled the magnate.

This was not the case for one of Leszczyński's predecessors, Franciszek Kazimierz Wysocki, during his spectacularly contentious embassy of 1670–2. During his mission, the envoy was entrusted with the almost impossible task of averting the looming Polish-Ottoman war, while lacking funds and the appropriate status.[55] A hostile environment and Ottoman stonewalling took a toll on Wysocki's psyche, as he took to drinking and became increasingly erratic. Mistreated by the hosts, the ambassador took a radical step and rejected the kaftans bestowed by the grand vizier: 'he said that even if it rained, he and his men would manage without Turkish garments' and threw away the robes of honour.[56] Wysocki's brash actions, however, made him an outlier; nonetheless, other envoys – such as Leszczyński – also had problems in keeping their entourage in check when kaftans were being distributed, embarrassing them in the eyes of their Ottoman hosts.[57]

Although in the imperial capital, the Ottomans' clear advantage steered the ambassadors away from such gestures, in the more favourable environment of Iaşi, the visitors tended to be more assertive and react firmly to perceived insults. On his way to Istanbul in 1636, Jerzy Kruszyński was poorly received by the incumbent voyvode Vasile Lupu, who refused to accommodate the envoy's ceremonial requests; in retaliation, Kruszyński rejected an invitation to a banquet and refused to see the voyvode.[58] However, when Kruszyński was returning through the principality, Vasile Lupu – aware of the mission's relative success – tried to mend bridges by showering the envoy with gifts. The diplomat was mistrustful, arguing that 'this was not out of friendship, but due to the orders of the *kaymakam*' and let Lupu know that he considered him 'an enemy of His Royal Majesty.'[59] In 1640, Miaskowski similarly clashed with the same voyvode: 'The voyvode wanted me to come to his castle. I spelled out my conditions that he come to my lodgings and ask for forgiveness. He tried to avoid it by providing lavish gifts; I did not accept them and refused to visit him.'[60] A member of Miaskowski's entourage had even harsher words to vent against

[55] ILONA CZAMAŃSKA, 'Czy wojna z Turcją w 1672 roku była nieunikniona? Poselstwo Franciszka Kazimierza Wysockiego do Turcji w latach 1670-1672,' *Kwartalnik Historyczny* 92, no. 4 (1985): 769–90.
[56] Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych, Warsaw, Libri Legationum 25, 274.
[57] CZAMAŃSKA, *Poselstwo Rafała Leszczyńskiego do Turcji w 1700 roku*, 77.
[58] K. KANTECKI, ed., *Z podróży Ośmięcima. Turcja-Francja-Niemcy-Włochy* (Lviv: E. Winiarz, 1875), 10.
[59] ROBERT KOŁODZIEJ, 'Wokół poselstwa Jerzego Kruszyńskiego do Turcji w 1636 r.,' in *Między Lwowem a Wrocławiem. Księga jubileuszowa profesora Krystyna Matwijowskiego*, eds Bogdan Rok and Jerzy Maroń (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2006), 493–502, 500.
[60] PRZYBOŚ, *Wielka legacja Wojciecha Miaskowskiego do Turcji w 1640 r.*, 47.

the Moldavian hosts in his private diary, wishing that they would be 'die a disgraceful death.'[61]

To sum up, Polish-Lithuanian envoys, Ottoman officials and Moldavian voyvodes ostensibly agreed that gift exchange constituted an important tool for establishing and maintaining mutual affection. However, the reality on the ground, stemming from divergent interpretations of gifts and the concerns over prestige of the parties involved, did not always corroborate this lofty rhetoric. For the Ottoman officials, ceremonial gifts tied in with the affirmation of the sultan as a peerless figure towering over all the rest; thus, a friendship with the Polish king could only be a lopsided one, with gifts indicating subordination of the Polish monarch. The latter's envoys, aware of this fact, sought to counteract the threat by developing a divergent notion of friendship in their dealings with the Ottoman officials. Whereas they acknowledged the nexus of gifts and affection when exchanging gifts with members of the imperial elite, they also advanced a different interpretation of friendship, which juxtaposed true affection and gift exchange. Thus, in a contradictory manner, their arguments and behaviour sought to reconcile two mutually exclusive visions: on the one hand, engaging in distributing gifts to win over friends, while at the same time arguing that true friendship was a relationship that did not require such presents. Needless to say, this did not sit well with their Ottoman hosts, leading to open conflicts and negative emotions towards the envoys. Yet, this discursive division was not always maintained beyond Istanbul: in Iași, when facing a much weaker partner, the same diplomats did not feel obliged to accommodate the hosts and were quick to reject the gifts offered to them as signs of true friendship in order to uphold the honour of the Polish monarch.

Packaging gifts

Like their Venetian counterparts, the missions of Polish-Lithuanian ambassadors were not concluded with their return to the Commonwealth, but rather with a final report delivered to the king and the *sejm*. Although the obligation to present a written account was formally introduced in 1669, it had already been an established practice throughout the seventeenth century. Presenting the report, both orally at the *sejm* and in writing, was crucial not only to brief the king and the nobility of the events, but it could make or break careers too. Given the prominence of the *szlachta*'s public opinion in the political dynamics of the Commonwealth, the envoy had to present his accomplishments, justify any failures, but also fashion himself in a way that would resonate with his audience. Considering the place of the Ottomans in the Commonwealth's political discourse, such reports offered ambassadors considerable opportunities, but also carried significant risks.

As Tetyana Grygorieva has pointed out, the structure of ambassadorial reports in the course of the seventeenth century differed from western European accounts, most likely due to recurrent difficulties in maintaining correspondence between the

[61] PRZYBOŚ, *Wielka legacja Wojciecha Miaskowskiego do Turcji w 1640 r.*, 115.

ambassador and the Polish-Lithuanian court.[62] In effect, rather than a structured report, these accounts took the form of daily notes of the mission and negotiations, more akin to a travelogue. At the same time, in spite of this seemingly unprocessed form, they put together a relatively coherent and well-defined corpus. Moreover, the reports of past embassies were perused by subsequent envoys, who consulted them for information on the empire and its ceremonial protocols.[63] Some reports or their derivative reworkings circulated widely among the *szlachta*, providing a blueprint for the evaluation of the ambassadors' conduct, including gift exchanges.

Throughout the seventeenth century, the narrative of Krzysztof Zbaraski's mission (1622–3) retained particular prominence, being constantly cited by generations of diplomats until the beginning of the eighteenth century. Interestingly, this was not due to the magnate's outstanding performance as a negotiator, but rather the pomp and splendour of his entourage. Moreover, the amount of texts produced by the embassy was considerable: apart from a final report of the mission, Zbaraski also composed a treatise – closer in form to the Venetian *relazione* – in which he outlined a number of opinions regarding the current state of the Ottoman Empire.[64] At the same time, the prominent poet Samuel Twardowski adapted Zbaraski's report into an epic poem, which he published in print in 1633, two years after the magnate's demise.[65] Twardowski's work would be published again in 1639 and 1706, along with two reworkings, by Samuel Kuszewicz in Latin prose (1645) and by Wojciech Wolski (1693–1702).[66] Given that no other account appeared in print until 1700, it comes as no wonder that Zbaraski's mission became the most influential point of reference for subsequent embassies to the Porte and shaped the *szlachta*'s perception of how an envoy should perform.

As Roman Krzywy points out, the genre that Twardowski employed in many respects determined the presentation of its protagonist. Although the author stated that his goal was to present Zbaraski's *res gestae*, the magnate is depicted more as a literary type and role model rather than an individual, being referred to solely as 'the Prince' and failing to appear in anything but official capacity.[67] Given that, it comes as no surprise that the characteristics conformed to the ideals of the Commonwealth

[62] GRYGORIEVA, 'Zur Selbstdarstellung polnisch-litauischer Botschafter im frühneuzeitlichen Istanbul,' 91–9.

[63] MICHAŁ WASIUCIONEK, 'Hermeneutics of Ceremonial Lore. Glipmses of the Idealized Diplomatic Protocol as Revealed in the Polish-Lithuanian Accounts (1677-1763),' *Archivum Ottomanicum* (2018): 135–53.

[64] 'Poselstwo Krzysztofa Xięcia Zbaraskiego do Turcyi w roku 1622'; WOJTASIK, 'Uwagi księcia Krzysztofa Zbaraskiego, posła wielkiego do Turcji z 1622 r.-o państwie ottomańskim i jego silach zbrojnych.'

[65] SAMUEL ZE SKRZYPNY TWARDOWSKI, *Przeważna legacyja Krzysztofa Zbaraskiego od Zygmunta III do sołtana Mustafy*, ed. Roman Krzywy (Warsaw: IBL, 2000).

[66] SAMUEL KUSZEWICZ, Narratio legationis Zbaravianae, et rerum apud Otthomanos anno 1622 gestarum (Danzig: Georg Forster, 1645); WOJCIECH WOLSKI, 'Legacyjej do cesarza tureckiego Mustafy przez jaśnie Oświeconego księżę Zbarawskie J.Mci. M.P. Krzysztofa […] roku 1622 odprawionej, a przez Samuela Kuszewicza […] do druku podanej, pilne opisanie,' in *Hemerologejon abo nowy i stary kalendarz na rok 1693* (Cracow: Drukarnia Akademicka, 1692).

[67] TWARDOWSKI, *Przeważna legacyja Krzysztofa Zbaraskiego od Zygmunta III do sołtana Mustafy*.

nobleman, defending his homeland at the very seat of despotism. Moreover, episodes of the mission that the *szlachta* could see as humiliating were carefully excised or obscured. One of the most illustrative examples in this respect is the frontispiece of Kuszewicz's *Narratio legationis Zbaravianae* of 1645, which depicts the magnate's audience with the sultan. Contrary to our knowledge of the Ottoman ceremonial order, where two *kapıcı*s would hold the arms of the envoy and force him to kow-tow (*başvurmak*),[68] Zbaraski is presented performing a graceful bow in line with the etiquette of the Polish-Lithuanian nobility. Indeed, with the exception of Mariusz Jaskólski in 1657, no ambassadorial report mentioned the *başvurmak*; instead, what we find are elaborate speeches akin to those at noble assemblies and incongruous with the ceremonial at the Porte.[69] By making this portrait, the authors sought to address their audience and reinforce the worldview shared by the whole estate. Twardowski's was as much an epic poem as it was a didactic work intended to convey the values and qualities that the *szlachta* cherished the most.[70]

The discussion of sentiments is similarly subject to this overarching objective and show the way emotions of both the envoy and his Ottoman and Moldavian counterparts aimed to amplify the difference between them. In line with the argument that true virtue is available under conditions of liberty, Twardowski depicts both the Ottoman grand vizier Gürcü Mehmed Pasha and Moldavian voyvode as sorely lacking in noble qualities and a moral compass. Instead, their actions are shown as being driven by self-interest and emotions that they failed to control. Moreover, the presentation of gifts also offered an opportunity to argue for the hosts' intellectual inferiority. Twardowski does just that when he describes four watches that Zbaraski presented to the Ottoman officials, the most impressive one (including a mechanical parrot) being a gift for the *defterdar*. While clocks were a popular diplomatic gift for Ottoman officials, the Polish poet exploits the occasion to include the surprising statement that 'The pagans do not stand clocks/thinking that they are magic and enchanted/and whatever Europe considers skill/they attribute to devils and Megiera.'[71] Obviously, this stands in contrast with the taste for clocks among members of the Ottoman elite;[72] nonetheless, it allows a comparison to be drawn in favour of the Polish-Lithuanian *szlachta* over the ignorant Ottomans.

---

[68] DARIUSZ KOŁODZIEJCZYK, 'Semiotics of Behavior in Early Modern Diplomacy. Polish Embassies in Istanbul and Bahçesaray,' *Journal of Early Modern History* 7 (2003): 3–4, 245–56.

[69] Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych, Warsaw, Archiwum Koronne Warszawskie, Dz. Turecki, t. 421, doc. 724.

[70] TWARDOWSKI, *Przeważna legacyja Krzysztofa Zbaraskiego od Zygmunta III do sołtana Mustafy*, 9; KOŁODZIEJCZYK, 'Semiotics of Behavior in Early Modern Diplomacy,' 255.

[71] GERHARD OESTREICH, *Neostoicism and the Early Modern State*, ed. Brigitta Oestreich and H. G. Koenigsberger with David McLintoc (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). See CHRISTOPHER BROOKE, *Philosophic Pride. Stoicism and Political Thought from Lipsius to Rousseau* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 35f.

[72] PETER BURSCHEL, 'A Clock for the Sultan,' *The Medieval History Journal* 16, no. 2 (2013): 547–63; MICHAEL TALBOT, 'Gifts of Time. Watches and Clocks in Ottoman-British Diplomacy, 1693–1803,' *Jahrbuch für Europäische Geschichte* 17 (2017): 55–79.

Twardowski's choices certainly played a role in fashioning a literary portrait of Zbaraski, emphasising his restraint, prudence and mastery of his emotions. However, the same virtues are very much present in the report that Zbaraski authored himself. While one could ascribe this stance as compatible with the habitus of the *szlachta* and its republican tradition of moral discourse, the magnate seems to have a different, more personal source of inspiration: Neostoic thought. This intellectual current gained considerable popularity in late sixteenth-century Poland-Lithuania, with Justus Lipsius; in fact, he was the last western political thinker to resonate with the Polish-Lithuanian intellectual tradition prior to the late seventeenth century.[73] However, the *szlachta*'s reception of Lipsius was a selective one. Whereas thinkers such as Andrzej Maksymilian Fredro struggled with the concepts of monarchy advocated by Lipsius, particularly in *Politicorum siue ciuilis doctrinae libri sex*,[74] other aspects of the latter's thought resonated widely with the Polish-Lithuanian noblemen. The Lipsian emphasis on prudence, *comitas*, *constantia* and *benevolentia*, as well as *ingenium et iudicium* were ubiquitous in works by Polish authors throughout the seventeenth century.[75] Thus, whereas Gerald Oestreich has associated the rise of Neostoicism and the contributions of the Leuven-based scholar with the rise of disciplinary society and absolutism, in Poland-Lithuania his moral and didactic agenda was embraced not only by Jesuits and regalists, but also proponents of the republican tradition.[76]

While the popularity of Lipsius in Poland-Lithuania was a general phenomenon, Krzysztof Zbaraski's ties to Neostoicism were more intimate. Hailing from one of the most prominent magnate families in Ukraine, the prince and his older brother, Jerzy (d. 1631), followed the established pattern of pursuing education by making a grand tour through western European universities and royal courts. Setting out from the Commonwealth in summer 1601, the young magnates travelled to the Low Countries, where Krzysztof became a student at the University of Leuven, while Jerzy was most likely a private student of Lipsius.[77] Although the sojourn in Leuven was relatively short and the following year Zbaraskis left for Padua to study with Galileo, Lipsius would have a lasting impact on the brothers. As Urszula Augustyniak points out, Jerzy Zbaraski would subsequently cite Lipsius in his political works, most

[73] URSZULA AUGUSTYNIAK, *Wazowie i "królowie rodacy". Studium władzy królewskiej w Rzeczypospolitej XVII wieku* (Warsaw: Semper, 1999), 26–31; ANDRZEJ BOROWSKI, 'Justus Lipsius and the Classical Tradition in Poland,' in Iustus Lipsius Europae Lumen Et Columen. Proceedings of the International Colloquium, Leuven 17-19 September 1997, eds Gilbert Tournoy, J. de Landtsheer, and Jan Papy (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1999), 1–16, 10; Justyna Dąbrowska-Kujko, *Justus Lipsjusz i dawne przekłady jego dzieł na język polski* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2010).

[74] MAREK TRACZ-TRYNIECKI, 'Dopasować monarchę do republiki. Wpływ Politicorum Justusa Lipsjusza na Zasady panowania władców chrześcijańskich Andrzeja Maksymiliana Fredry,' *Myśl Polityczna* 3 (2020): 7–32.

[75] RICHARD TUCK, *Philosophy and Government, 1572-1651* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 51–4.

[76] URSZULA AUGUSTYNIAK, '"Wolę mieć religionem frigidam niż nullam." Jerzy i Krzysztof Zbarascy wobec rekatolicyzacji i zmiany systemu rządów w Rzeczypospolitej za Zygmunta III Wazy,' *Odrodzenie i Reformacja w Polsce* 58 (2014): 73–104, 88.

[77] WANDA DOBROWOLSKA, 'Młodość Jerzego i Krzysztofa Zbaraskich,' *Rocznik Przemyski* 7 (1926–1927), 5–236, 122f.

prominently in *Septuaginta graves et ardua rationes*.[78] At the same time, the Zbaraskis would emerge in the 1620s as prominent representatives of the republican tradition against the regalist camp and, despite their fervent Catholicism, staunch opponents of the Jesuits. Given the close relations between the brothers throughout their lives, it is safe to say that the younger Krzysztof shared the castellan of Cracow's predilections and worldview, including his preference for their former tutor.

In fact, reading Zbaraski's report from the perspective of Lipsian philosophy reveals clear parallels between the latter's ideals and the persona that the prince and subsequent authors sought to fashion for him, nevertheless in line with the Polish-Lithuanian republican reading of the Leuven-based philosopher. Obviously, the emphasis on peace (*pax*) as the overarching goal within an account of a diplomatic mission is to be expected; however, the stress on the role of *prudentia* as a chief virtue possessed by Zbaraski directs us towards Neostoic thought; the same goes for the crucial role of proper *maiestas* and moral rectitude as a key feature befitting the prince and, by extension, his representative. Lipsius himself carefully crafted his own persona as a model Stoic. This was precisely the persona that Zbaraski sought to create for himself in his report and that would subsequently be expanded in the work of Twardowski and its derivatives. With this both widespread and enticing model for crafting their report, later ambassadors would try to follow this blueprint. This was the preferable route, particularly given the fact that seeking alternative strategies could have grave consequences. Franciszek Kazimierz Wysocki's oral account of his 1670–2 mission was badly received by his audience, who found it vague and bungled, with the envoy's expression of joy at the imminent war with the infidel raising questions about his mental health.[79] This poor reception effectively put paid to Wysocki's public career and served as a cautionary tale against challenging the established ways of describing one's sojourn at the Porte.

Conclusion

In the correspondence between Ottoman, Moldavian and Polish-Lithuanian courts in the seventeenth century, references to friendship and affection were ubiquitous. Thus, one would expect that gift exchanges would be a natural form of triggering and reinforcing amicable relations; however, the visions of friendship that each side tried to impose as dominant were the very source of discord. For the Ottomans, friendship could be established with Poland-Lithuania within the hierarchical framework that guided the protocols of power at the imperial court. Thus, for them true friendship meant that the Polish kings and their alter egos – ambassadors arriving from the Commonwealth – would accept the superiority of the Ottoman sultan. Naturally, this demand was inacceptable for their counterparts who argued that the friendship between both sovereigns was only possible on the principle of relative equality. In turn, Moldavian voyvodes sought to find a place within the framework in order to have their

[78] AUGUSTYNIAK, "'Wolę mieć religionem frigidam niż nullam',' 88

[79] JOANNA MATYASIK, *Obóz polityczny króla Michała Korybuta Wiśniowieckiego* (Warsaw: Neriton, 2011), 274.

status on the diplomatic plane enhanced and acknowledged. In short, each player's standpoint on what friendship implied was impossible to reconcile with the others, giving rise to tussles over which interpretation should prevail.

The issue of gifts and their status was crucial in this struggle. Since gift exchanges structured hierarchies at the imperial court, the ceremonial presentation of gifts by the Polish-Lithuanian diplomats would inevitably imply the latter's concession to Ottoman demands; in turn, outright rejection could readily be interpreted as turning down friendship with the Porte, an alternative which meant war. Hence, Polish-Lithuanian diplomats developed a divergent discourse regarding friendship between monarchs, arguing that true affection made gifts not only unnecessary, but in fact juxtaposed to true and honest affection. Consequently, envoys were not to present gifts in the name of the king, a strategy that could easily offend the hosts and trigger a spiral of negative emotions, anger, fury and hostility. In order to reconcile the need for peace with anxiety over possible ceremonial subordination, the envoys played on the double identity of ambassador – on the one hand, a private individual, while on the other alter ego of the king and the Commonwealth. Thus, gift exchanges were to be removed from the ceremonial framework and restricted to the realm of interpersonal sociability. While this also created tensions with the Ottoman dignitaries, the strategy usually worked. Nevertheless, there is little doubt that the twofold interpretation of the relationship between gifts and affection was due to the Ottomans' superior position in the negotiations. In Moldavia, facing a weaker adversary, Polish-Lithuanian envoys were quick to reject gifts offered by the voyvodes on the grounds that they were not a sign of true friendship, but merely an attempt at bribery.

Finally, apart from representing the king and the Commonwealth at the Porte, the envoys also had to successfully craft the account of their mission in order to win over the *szlachta* and increase their prestige. As such, they had not only to present their success in negotiating with the Porte, but also fashion their persona as model citizens of the Commonwealth, upholding the notions of virtue and liberty in the face of the sultan and his servants, perceived as the embodiment of despotism. As I have argued, the way in which this was accomplished was by drawing on the political culture of the nobility in its public life and parliamentary institutions, while at the same time emphasising the qualities of prudence, restraint and control of emotions, in contrast to the image of Ottoman officials as lacking true virtues and driven by emotions and avarice. The dominant blueprint for such a narrative was presented by Krzysztof Zbaraski's embassy of 1622–3, which would become a source of perusal for later ambassadors. This constant reference to Zbaraski's account had an important consequence in that the attitude towards emotions of the prince himself – a follower of the Lipsian tradition of Neostoicism, but in its republican form – coloured diplomatic accounts until the end of the seventeenth century.

Gift Exchanging Practices between the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and the Ottoman Empire: 'Cose Turche' and Strange Animals

ROSITA D'AMORA
University of Salento, Lecce

Hacı Hüseyin Efendi, special envoy of the Ottoman sultan, Mahmud I (b. 1696, r. 1730–54), landed in Naples on 31 August 1741, together with a large retinue of more than 60 people, and rich gifts for King Charles of Bourbon (Carlo di Borbone, b. 1716, r. 1734–59 as King of the Two Sicilies and 1759–88 as Charles III of Spain, Carlos III de España).[1] The envoy had first stopped in Sicily, in the port town of Messina, where he arrived almost two months earlier, on 7 July, in order to spend there the required 12 days of *sciorino* (the exposure of goods in the fresh air so that they could be purified) and a quarantine period of 40 days, which was later reduced to 30 in consideration of the good health of the special envoy, his retinue and the entire crew. The envoy spent the days of *sciorino* on the boat and was then hosted in a place called 'Paradiso,' in the palace of Prince Borracchini, which, allegedly, had been tastefully furnished beforehand 'in Turkish style with various sofas covered with rich fabrics, curtains, carpets, mirrors, crystals, and other pieces of furniture, all rich and of a good taste.'[2] Throughout his stay in Messina, the king's representative in town, the Marquis of Torreblanca, together with other local nobles, made every effort to look after and entertain the Ottoman envoy. They visited him on several occasions, sent him abundant refreshments and organised different entertainment, such as harquebus shooting expeditions as well as boat and riding excursions in the surrounding area. He was also presented some locally produced merchandise that, it seems, he had expressly requested to see, buying 'some rolls of silk and various carpets' (*alcune pezze di drappi di seta, e varj tapeti*)', while also ordering some other products for his personal use, which

[1] On the historical and political circumstances that determined the arrival of Hacı Hüseyin Efendi in Naples and, in particular, on the treaty of peace, commerce and navigation drawn up in Constantinople on 7 April 1740 between the Porte and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, see ROSITA D'AMORA, 'The Diplomatic Relations Between Naples and the Ottoman Empire in the Mid-Eighteenth Century: Cultural Perceptions,' *Oriente Moderno* 22 (83), no. 3 (2003): 716–20. Not much is known about Hacı Hüseyin Efendi. His *lakab* (nickname) was Küçük ('small') and he was an employee of the Ottoman government in the department dedicated to the collection of the *jizya*, the head tax imposed on non-Muslims. He died in 1155 H. (1742), shortly after his return from Naples and he was buried in the cemetery of the Gazi Atik Ali Paşa mosque in the Çemberlitaş neighbourhood of Istanbul. See SEMAYI EYICE, 'Bir Türk Elçisinin Portesi,' *Belletten* 41, no. 163 (1977): 555–63.

[2] 'all'uso turco con varj sofà coperti di ricche stoffe, e con cortine, tappeti, specchi, e placche di cristallo, e altri mobili tutti ricchi, e di buon gusto.' See *Relazione della Venuta di Hagi Hussein Effendi Inviato straordinario della Porta Ottomana. E della pubblica Udienza, che ha avuto dal Re Nostro Signore il giorno 18 Settembre 1741* (Naples: Per Francesco Ricciardi Impressore del Real Palazzo, 1741). Hereafter quoted as *Relazione*.

Cromohs (Cyber Review of Modern Historiography), ISSN 1123-7023, 24/2021

DOI: 10.36253/cromohs-13645

he would collect when passing Messina again on his way back to Constantinople. On 15 August the Ottoman envoy was invited to go and admire a *gran festa* that was celebrated in Messina every year,[3] and to attend, on that same day, a *serenata* and a ball organised expressly in his honour in the palace of the Prince of Villafranca.[4] The Ottoman envoy declined both invitations, pleading that it was contrary to the customs of his country to make a public appearance before having been received by the king. Finally, on the night of 19 August, after he was presented with 'various edibles' (*varj comestibili*),[5] Hacı Hüseyin Efendi, together with his retinue, boarded for the capital of the kingdom on the same Neapolitan war ships that had brought him to Messina: the *San Filippo il Reale* and the *San Carlo*. Due to the unfavourable winds, though, the ships could not leave the Messina harbour till 22 August when they eventually set sail at around ten o' clock in the morning.

All these details, and many others, are related in a fascinating anonymous contemporary account describing the arrival and stay of the Ottoman envoy in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and dealing, in particular, with the public audience he had with King Charles of Bourbon on 18 September 1741, which was also represented in a beautiful and detailed etching by Francesco Sesoni (b. 1705–?), accompanying the text.[6] Many other details and very interesting behind-the-scenes information about this visit can also be gathered through the rich documentation, largely still unexplored, kept in the Archivio di Stato di Napoli (hereafter ASN), covering the history of the political, commercial and cultural relations between the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and the Ottoman Empire from the events leading to the stipulation of the 1740s treaty until 1861, when the diplomatic relations between the two states came to an end due to the annexation of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies to the Kingdom of Italy.[7]

A close reading of the *Relazione*, comparing its rhetoric and the information that it provides with the information contained in the archival documents, sheds useful light on the rather theatrical visit of the Ottoman envoy to the capital of the Kingdom

[3] The *gran festa* is most probably the Feast of the Assumption, also known in Messina as *La vara* (or *La bara*), celebrated there on 15 August at least since the sixteenth century. During the religious procession accompanying the celebrations, a coffin of the Virgin and a pyramid-like structure are paraded through the town to symbolise the Virgin Mary's death and assumption into heaven.

[4] In the first half of the eighteenth century, a *serenata* was a musical composition that usually had a congratulatory purpose. Serenades were vocal-instrumental compositions mostly written to Italian texts, situated somewhere between a *cantata* and an *opera*. They were very popular with the royal courts of Europe, usually accompanying celebrations or other important events in the lives of monarchs and the nobility. The *serenata* organised for the Ottoman envoy in Messina was entitled *La Fortuna a piè di Messina ovvero La Costanza premiata dalla Virtù*.

[5] *Relazione*.

[6] *Relazione*. The quotations regarding Hacı Hüseyin Efendi's stay in Messina are on pages A2*r*–A3*r* of the *Relazione*. Not all pages are numbered. On the text of the *Relazione*, see also D'AMORA, 'The Diplomatic Relations Between Naples and the Ottoman Empire,' 721–22.

[7] For a preliminary discussion of the documents concerning the relationships between the Ottoman Empire and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies kept at ASN, see ALDO GALLOTTA, 'Le relazioni tra l'Impero ottomano e Napoli,' in *Atti del Convegno sul tema: Presenza araba e islamica in Campania. (Napoli–Caserta, 22–25 novembre 1989)*, ed. Agostino Cilardo (Naples: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1992), 323–35.

of the Two Sicilies and the exchange of gifts that took place on this occasion. Archival documents also help clarify some circumstances regarding the preparation of the *Relazione* itself and its narrative celebrating a significant diplomatic accomplishment by King Charles, as well as quite clearly showing how the ruling monarchy was very keen on having this text published and distributed at the earliest possible time.

Indeed, the *Relazione* was printed by Francesco Ricciardi, 'Impressor di Real Palazzo,' immediately after Hacı Hüseyin Efendi's departure from Naples on 18 October 1741, which is the last event described in the account. In the *Relazione* the envoy's departure date is referred to as 'Mercoledì 18 dell'andante'[8] clearly showing the promptness with which the account was published. This is confirmed by a document from Antonio Coppola, dated Monday 23 October 1741 and addressed to the state secretary, the Duke of Salas (1698–1771), in which we learn that the writer, informed by the duke of the king's express request to have the *Relazione* printed that same week, decided to prompt the artist, Francesco Sesoni, to finish the etching (*lamina di rame*) representing the public audience so that it could be inserted at the beginning of the *Relazione*.[9]

From the same document we also learn that, having personally visited Sesoni in his house, Antonio Coppola verified that 'the lower part of the etching representing people' (*la parte di basso colli Personaggi*)[10] still had to be completed, and, since this was, according to Sesoni, a very difficult task to accomplish in such a limited time, he asked the authorisation to be helped by his apprentice Abbate Alessandro D'Andrea. His request was granted so that 'with both of them working, and with one working while the other was resting, the etching could be finished within the prescribed time' (*faticando ambidue e, l'uno in quelle ore che si riposa l'altro, possa complirsi nel termine prescritto la lamina*). Sesoni must have accomplished his commission in time, even though, probably for editorial reasons, the etching was inserted at the end of the text rather than at the beginning as previously planned. In a series of documents dated between 31 December 1741 and 4 February 1742, the Regia Giunta asked to determine what could be a fair payment for Sesoni, and resolved that the remuneration for a similar etching would normally be 15 ducats. However, in consideration of the promptness Sesoni showed in carrying out the work and other things he had to arrange, it was decided that he should be paid 18 ducats.[11] Furthermore, in another document with no signature or date (but datable after 23 October 1741), also urging the etching to be finished, it is mentioned that the *Relazione* was already printed and that 'new copies' (*nuovij esemplari*) had to be issued the following Tuesday.[12] This could set the date of the publication of

[8] *Relazione*.
[9] ASN, Ministero Affari Esteri 4174 unnumbered documents.
[10] ASN, Ministero Affari Esteri 4174 unnumbered documents.
[11] ASN, Ministero Affari Esteri 4174 unnumbered documents.
[12] ASN, Ministero Affari Esteri 4174 unnumbered documents. As 23 October was a Monday, we could assume that the following Tuesday could be 24 October, or 31 October at the latest.

the text even earlier and might explain why some copies of the *Relazione* do not include Sesoni's etching.[13]

The city as a stage: performing power and the politics of pageantry

Why was the king so eager for the account on the visit of the Ottoman envoy to be published in such haste? I would argue that the *Relazione* must have been conceived and promoted as a relatively easy-to-divulge text, and final, tangible act of a rigorously choreographed event that took place in Naples between the end of August and mid-October 1741. Indeed, the *Relazione* was a pamphlet sponsored by the newly established monarchy both to satisfy the natural curiosity of the public for the presence in the Bourbon capital of the members of the Ottoman legation with their eccentric and luxurious appearance, and to promote, in a propagandistic style, the prestige of the ruling house by exalting the new and important Ottoman ally, the precious gifts he had brought from the sultan to the king and the sumptuous reception prepared for the sultan's representatives.

The Kingdom of Naples and Sicily, with Charles of Bourbon as its first ruling monarch, had become an independent state in 1734, only a few years before the arrival of Hacı Hüseyin Efendi and his retinue in Naples. The first years of Charles's reign are generally considered the 'heroic age' of the new dynasty, a distinctive moment fostering a process of profound renewal that in the king's intentions was to eventually lead to the creation of a state able to compete with the other major European monarchies. The many political and administrative reforms promoted by the new Bourbon king and his entourage were coupled with his clear determination to transform Naples into a vibrant capital city. Starting from 1737 he fostered the civic rebirth of Naples, reshaping its architectural fabric through ambitious urban projects, from Europe's most celebrated opera house, the Reale Teatro di San Carlo, bearing the royal name, to one of its largest poorhouses, the Reale Albergo dei Poveri. At the same time he renewed the royal palace of Naples, while ordering the construction of three other majestic residences outside the city: the royal palace of Capodimonte and the royal palace of Portici, whose construction started in 1738, and, later on, the royal palace of Caserta, initiated in 1752.[14] Furthermore, Charles of Bourbon promoted a foreign policy clearly aimed at encouraging the economic development of the kingdom, guaranteeing security, especially of its long and highly exposed Mediterranean borders, and consolidating the monarchy. The stipulation of the treaty with the Ottoman Empire was one of the first and probably most important and acclaimed results of this policy and it was still celebrated, with great pomp, more than a year later on the occasion of the arrival in Naples of Hacı Hüseyin Efendi.

---

13 This is the case, for example, of the copy of the *Relazione* kept in the library of the Società Napoletana di Storia Patria in Naples.

14 For a comprehensive study on how Charles of Bourbon's architectural and urban programme served as a prominent tool of statecraft and was used to help consolidate the monarchy, see ROBIN L. THOMAS, *Architecture and Statecraft. Charles of Bourbon's Naples 1734–1759* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013).

From this point of view, while providing a detailed account of the events occurring during the stay of the Ottoman envoy, the *Relazione* presents a narrative that revolves entirely around the need to validate and promote the ruling dynasty by meticulously describing how the Bourbon's power was displayed and performed.[15] In the description of each stage of the envoy's visit, emphasis is given to the magnificent receptions prepared by the court, the strict observance of the protocol, the great care paid to every detail and the enthusiastic reactions both of the Ottoman legation for the favourable reception received and the Neapolitan *popolo* for the unusual oriental extravaganza taking place right before their eyes in the streets of their city. In this reconstructed narrative, the city of Naples itself becomes the natural and central stage of this power performance, while the 'prodigious crowd' (*prodigiosa folla*)[16] of its citizens are the enthusiastic and acclaiming public of spectators. The impression is that, at least in the textual reconstruction of the events drawn up a posteriori in the *Relazione*, nothing is left to chance. A completely different scenario emerges from the documentation kept in the ASN, recording what was actually happening behind the scenes, from the difficulty of making ends meet due to the considerable expense, to the constant urging of different artisans to finish their works, as we have seen in Francesco Sesoni's case.

For example, almost two pages of this 18-page-long report of the 'flawless' visit of Hacı Hüseyin Efendi are devoted to the praise of the beauty and pleasantness of the palace of the Prince of Teora in Chiaia[17] where the envoy was hosted and the very detailed description of the refurbishments made before the guest's arrival, also underlining the great effort that had been made 'to decorate [the Palace] according to the Turkish Style' (*per ornarlo alla maniera turca*).[18] Even more detailed is the description of the public audience that Hacı Hüseyin Efendi had with the king and the display of the gifts he brought to Naples for him.

The anonymous reporter starts by illustrating how, on the day, different troops of soldiers of the Bourbon Army were meticulously lined up in the streets along the route between the residence of the envoy and the royal palace, while also recounting 'the confusion of the uncountable people' (*confusione dell'innumerabile Popolo*) belonging to every social class and thronging the streets, terraces, balconies and windows in order to witness the event. Then, with a wealth of details, he describes the viceroy's room in

[15] Two studies, although both focusing on the Spanish viceroy (1503–1707), offer a very good perspective on public rituals in Naples and the way they were used to project images of power as well as the reception they received from their diverse participants: GABRIEL GUARINO, *Representing the King's Splendour. Communication and Reception of Symbolic Form of Power in Viceregal Naples* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010); JOHN A. MARINO, *Becoming Neapolitan. Citizen Culture in Baroque Naples* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2011).

[16] *Relazione*.

[17] The construction of Palazzo Mirelli di Teora (previously called Palazzo Barile di Caivano) was started in the seventeenth century by architect and sculptor Cosimo Fanzago (1591–1678) for the aristocratic family Barile di Caivano and then completed by architect Ferdinando Sanfelice (1675–1748) (see infra) in 1703 for the new owner Carlo Mirelli, Prince of Teora.

[18] *Relazione*, A3*r*–A4*r*.

the royal palace where the reception took place, together with the 'temporary structure' (*apparato effimero*), realised ad hoc by the highly regarded Neapolitan architect Ferdinando Sanfelice (1675–1748).[19] Once again, the accent is on the grandeur of the staging and the valuable objects, textiles and materials used for this performance of power as well as the elegance, precious garments and jewels of those members of the court who took part in the ceremony, and, most of all, the king himself whose ostentatious dress embodied the highest and most striking representation of the monarchy's power.[20] The last part of this section contains the account of the parade of the envoy from his residence to the royal palace, followed by the description of the reception itself, during which the envoy addressed the king and presented him his credentials and the gifts he had brought from Constantinople.

Staging the gifts: *superbi regali* for a most magnificent monarch

According to the *Relazione*, the day before his audience with the king, Hacı Hüseyin Efendi gave orders to deliver all the 'superb gifts' (*li superbi regali*) the sultan had sent to King Charles to the royal palace, where they were purposefully put on display on different tables in an anteroom close to the audience hall for their admiration. As the most tangible testimony of the recently concluded treaty and the consideration in which the sultan held the Neapolitan king, they naturally formed a central element of the narrative of the *Relazione*, the magnificence of the homage received being used to exalt the magnificence of the Bourbon court. In order to more effectively and vividly portray how the Ottoman envoy addressed the king as he presented him the sultan's gifts, while otherwise entirely written in the third person, in this case the *Relazione* resorts directly to the envoy's voice. This is reported through the Italian translation of the official discourse delivered by Hacı Hüseyin Efendi made by the 'royal dragoman' (*regio dragomanno*). What the anonymous author of the *Relazione* might have so appreciated in the envoy's address – or at least in its translation – as to include it in the text is the perfect symmetry in presenting the two monarchs. Besides the more specific epithets used for each of them (for example, Sultan Mahmud is called 'a servant of the two holy cities [i.e., Mecca and Medina]' or 'a refuge of the Ottoman faith,' while King Charles is remembered as 'King of the Two Sicilies' and 'Infante of Spain'), both are referred to as 'the most magnificent' (*magnificentissimo*), 'the most majestic' (*maestosissimo*), and 'the most powerful' (*potentissimo*).[21] To be put ideally on the same

[19] *Relazione*, A3*r*–A4*r*. This description is the textual counterpart of the aforementioned beautiful engraving realised by Francesco Sesoni.

[20] The *Relazione* expressly mentions that the diamonds and other precious stones decorating the king's clothes and hat alone were estimated to be worth much more than two million Neapolitan ducats, an exorbitant sum for the time, if, by means of comparison, we consider that the same *Relazione* mentions that the daily allowance given to the envoy and his retinue was one hundred Neapolitan ducats.

[21] Here is the transcription of the entire passage of the Italian translation of Hacı Hüseyin Efendi's address: 'Questi sono li regali, che l'Imperadore delle due Terre, Re delli due Mari, Servo delle due Sacre Città, magnificentissimo, maestosissimo, e potentissimo, Refugio dell'Ottomana fede, e potente Monarca, Sultano figlio di Sultano, Sultano Vittorioso Mahmud Han, mio Signore mi ha ordinato di presentare dall'Imperiale sua parte assieme con la sua amichevole Imperiale Lettera a Vostra Maestà Re delle due Sicilie, Infante delle Spagne, Fortissimo, Serenissimo, Magnificentissimo, Maestosissimo, e Potentissimo Re Carlo, che Dio eterni la gloria sua.' *Relazione.*

level as the ruler of the mighty Ottoman Empire would grant the young king of the newly established Neapolitan kingdom the possibility of boasting his court's internationally acquired prestige, further testified by the arrival of precious gifts. For the same reason, the gifts also had to be meticulously 'staged' not only, as mentioned above, in the immediate proximity of the audience hall on the day the envoy was received by the king, but also in the text of the *Relazione* itself. As such, they were carefully listed at the end of the account under the heading 'The gifts that the Sultan had his special envoy present to His Majesty are the following (*Li regali, che il Gran Signore ha fatto presentare dal suddetto suo Inviato Straordinario a S. M. sono li seguenti*)'. This very detailed list contains 75 entries for a total of approximately 150 items, some of which also indicating the kind of container they came in. Elsewhere the exact number of precious stones decorating the objects is clearly specified. The list records a total number of 2,432 precious stones: diamonds, pink diamonds, emeralds, rubies, sapphires, pearls and turquoises of various sizes, decorating different items such as a sword with a golden hilt and a horse tack.

The list opens with the most eye-catching gift, a Tatar-style tent (*Padiglione o sia Tenda alla Tartara*), which was pitched for display in one of the courtyards of the royal palace, and continues by enumerating structural elements, such as the four columns holding it up, and different furnishings like mattresses, blankets, pillows and the carpets decorating it. The material, colour and provenance of the furnishings are often mentioned in implicit reference to their rarity or high value. Another highlight of the list is clearly the four Arabic horses, which were instead kept in the royal stables, and a long roll of highly decorated riding equipment and accessories. Among the other objects there are firearms (gun and rifles, some of which produced in Greece or Constantinople), many different kinds of fabrics and, rounding off the inventory, a little bottle made out of precious rock and containing distilled rose water closed with the seal of the *Gran Signore*.

Interestingly, the list of the Ottoman gifts is preceded by a reference to the gifts personally received by the envoy while in Naples, in the very last episode of this very detailed account: a very beautiful, 'superbly dressed' (*superbamente guarnito*) horse which he mounted upon his arrival in Naples to reach the residence prepared for him and a farewell gift, a most valuable ring with 'three most perfect and beautiful brilliant-cut diamonds' (*con tre bellissimi, e prefettissimi brillanti di molto valore)* presented to Hacı Hüseyin Efendi two days before his departure. No mention is made of the presents the king had sent to Constantinople the year before[22] that the sultan's gifts were meant to reciprocate, the difficulty in meeting the large expenditures or the Neapolitans' disappointment when they realised that the Turks had stolen some of the furniture and

[22] Some information about these gifts can be found in SILVANA MUSELLA GUIDA, 'Relazioni politiche e commerciali tra il Regno di Napoli e la Porta Ottomana nei primi anni del regno di Carlo di Borbone. I doni per e da Mahmud I,' in *Mondi lontani*, Serie Quaderni di Palazzo Reale, ed. Annalisa Porzio (Naples: Associazione Amici dei Musei, 2014), 13–17.

fabrics from the palace where they were hosted. The narrative of the *Relazione* had to be flawlessly celebratory.

The envoy at the Regio Teatro di San Carlo

Even when the focus of the account is on the envoy, the narrative seems to be used mainly to reinforce the need to praise the Neapolitan ruling dynasty and its accomplishments. In describing the envoy's attire during the audience with the king, for example, the anonymous author of the *Relazione* underlines that the envoy 'was wearing the same clothes and ceremonial turban that the most important ministers of the Porte wear when they are received in the presence of the sultan' (*vestito coll'istessa veste, e turbante di cerimonia, con cui li principali Ministri della Porta sogliono andare all'udienza del Sultano*), implicitly hinting at the fact that, by using the same dress code as in the presence of the sultan of the Ottoman Empire, Hacı Hüseyin Efendi was granting equal dignity to King Charles. Similarly, when after the audience with the king, the Ottoman envoy expressly requested to see the highlights of the capital, according to the author of the *Relazione*, he was showing, 'very good taste and a refined mind' (*ottimo gusto e fino intendimento*). Furthermore, and rather significantly, among the places he visited, Hacı Hüseyin Efendi seems to have particularly admired two of the royal residences whose construction, as previously mentioned, was ordered by King Charles as part of his ambitious architectural renewal projects: the palace of Capodimonte, still under construction, which the envoy found 'grand and superb' (*grandioso e superbo*) and the royal palace of Portici, which it would seem he had explicitly expressed a 'great desire' to see.[23]

A few days before his departure for Constantinople, more precisely on 11 October 1741, Hacı Hüseyin Efendi made his last public appearance, attending a *serenata* in the 'magnificent and spacious' (*magnifico spazioso*) Regio Teatro di San Carlo that had also just been recently built. If Naples emerges from the *Relazione* as the natural stage for the performance of power of the Bourbon court, the visit of the Ottoman envoy also involved the staging of a real piece of theatrical entertainment.

In a passage from a document dated 4 October 1741,[24] we read that, probably during one of his visits around town, Hacı Hüseyin Efendi saw the Teatro di San Carlo 'without lights' (*senza lumi*) and was informed by his dragoman Ali Çavuş that it was not possible to appreciate a theatre when it was not properly illuminated. The envoy then admitted that he had actually hoped to be able to admire the theatre illuminated (*con li lumi*), but he had not dared to openly request it. Hacı Hüseyin Efendi was then officially informed that, anticipating his desire, the king had already instructed that a

[23] According to the anonymous author of the *Relazione*, Hacı Hüseyin Efendi also visited the Crypta Neapolitana – 'the marvellous grotto that leads to Pozzuoli' (*la meravigliosa grotta che conduce a Pozzuoli*) – and the countryside of Bagnoli, the hill of San Martino and its Carthusian monastery, the arsenal, the dock and other remarkable places. When in Portici, he also went to the nearby town of Torre del Greco, to observe the 'prodigious lava vomited by the Vesuvius' (*la prodigiosa lava vomitata del Vesuvio*) during its most recent eruption, which had occurred between the end of May and the beginning of June 1737.

[24] The document is entitled 'Relazione d'alcuni discorsi d'Ali Chiaous Dragomanno dell'inviato Straordinario della Porta,' see ASN, Ministero Affari Esteri 4174 unnumbered documents.

serenata be staged in his honour so that he could 'listen to the music of these countries and see the dances and the scenes.' The envoy was overjoyed and profusely expressed his appreciation to the king, promising to inform the sultan of his benevolence and generosity.[25]

As known from contemporary sources, Charles of Bourbon did not like music. According to Venetian adventurer Giacomo Casanova (1725–97), who met him in Madrid in 1768, the king 'had no taste for music' (*n'avait aucun goût pour la musique*); an opinion confirming what French scholar Charles de Brosses (1709–77) had noticed during the performance of the *dramma per musica* entitled *Partenope* at the Teatro di San Carlo in Naples on 4 November 1739, when, while impressed by the grandeur and magnificence of the newly built theatre, he could not hold back from remarking about the king: 'This man certainly does not like music' (*Cette home assurément n'aime pas la musique*).[26] Nevertheless, in early 1737, instead certainly interested in and well aware of the social importance of music, the king had ordered the construction of the San Carlo to replace the old Teatro San Bartolomeo. The new theatre named after the king was a natural architectural continuation of the royal palace and was inaugurated on 4 November of the same year on the occasion of the king's name day. The Teatro di San Carlo soon became one of the most prestigious theatres in Europe, as well as the visual and musical setting to represent the power of the Bourbon court.[27] It was therefore the ideal location for staging a farewell ceremony for the Ottoman envoy that could leave him with an impactful and long-lasting impression just before his departure.

Unfortunately, the great majority of the documents regarding the first years of activity of the Teatro di San Carlo were lost in a bombing raid during the Second World

[25] The transcription of the entire passage is as follows: 'Oggi doppo pranzo sono andato a vedere l'Inviato, gli hò dimandato, se aveva poi veduto il Palazzo reale, mi hà risposto di sì e che lo aveva trovato bello, e magnifico. Gli hò richiesto se aveva veduto anche il Teatro reale, mi hà replicato che l'aveva veduto, ma male perche non vi erano li lumi, senza de quali li aveva detto Ali Chiaous, che non si potevano ben vedere li Teatri, e che egli avrebbe avuto molto piacere di vederlo con li lumi, non ardiva di dirlo, nè di dimandarlo. Gli ho replicato, che non era nemen necessario, che lo dicesse, e lo dimandasse, perche S.M. aveva colla solita sua benignità prevenuto il suo desiderio, mentre aveva ordinato che gli si preparasse in detto Teatro una rappresentazione per fargli sentire la musica di questi Paesi, e vedere li Balli e le scene, che V. Ecc.za mi aveva ordinato espressamente di andar oggi da lui a ragguagliarlo di questa nuova grazia, che S.M. voleva fargli. Ne è rimasto contentissimo, e mi hà incaricato di pregare V. Ecc.za à fare per lui a S.M. li maggiori ringraziamenti, e dirle che mai si scorderà della benignità, e generosità di un così gran Rè, e che di tutto informerà puntualmente il Gran Sig.re.'

[26] See BENEDETTO CROCE, *I teatri di Napoli. Secolo XV–XVIII* (Naples: Presso Luigi Pierro, 1891), 345–46; PAOLO FABBRI, 'Vita e funzioni di un teatro pubblico e di corte del Settecento,' in *Il teatro di San Carlo 1737–1987. L'opera, il ballo*, eds Bruno Caglio and Agostino Ziino, vol. 2 (Naples: Electa, 1987), 61.

[27] The bibliography on the Teatro di San Carlo is vast and there are numerous sources on the history of the royal theatre, its origins, functions and repertoires. In particular, see FRANCO MANCINI, ed., *Il Teatro di San Carlo* 1737–1987, 3 vols (Naples: Electa, 1987); FRANCO CARMELO GRECO and GAETANA CANTONE eds, *Il teatro del re. Il San Carlo da Napoli all'Europa* (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1987); CARLO MARINELLI ROSCIONI, ed., *Il Teatro di San Carlo. La cronologia, 1737–1987*, 2 vols (Naples: Guida editori, 1987); PAOLOGIOVANNI MAIONE and FRANCESCA SELLER, eds, *Teatro di San Carlo di Napoli: Cronologia degli Spettacoli 1737–1799*, vol. 1 (Naples: Altrastampa Edizioni, 2005).

War.[28] The *Relazione della Venuta di Hagi Hussein Effendi* and a few documents in the Archivio di Stato di Napoli are the only remaining contemporary accounts of the *serenata* in honour of the Ottoman envoy. According to the *Relazione*, the *serenata* performed for Hacı Hüseyin Efendi was composed for six voices, 'the best ones and most excellent among the virtuosi (*le migliori e più eccellenti fra il ceto di virtuosi*)' and accompanied by the capital's most famous instrumentalists. It lasted for more than three hours. Between the first and second part, and at the end of the *serenata*, five men and five women all performed various very skilled dances, also impressing the public with their inventive and rich costumes, which, like those of the singers, were based on 'very ingenious models' (*ingegnosissimi modelli*). Furthermore, the *Relazione* includes other interesting details such as the seats from where the envoy and his retinue attended this 'theatrical feast' (*festa teatrale*) as well as the dainty and delicate refreshments that were served to them throughout the performance. However, no mention is made of the title or the contents of the *serenata*, neither have I been able to find a libretto that could be connected to it.[29] A few archival documents help us to shed some more light on this event though.

First of all, we learn that the *serenata* was originally scheduled for Monday 9 October, but it was then postponed to the following Wednesday after the request of the 'virtuosi cantanti' for more time to practice their parts.[30] We also learn that the king made sure that the *serenata* was accompanied by some dances[31], 'because, otherwise the ceremony will not be very pleasant', (*por que diferentemente la función no será tan gustosa*).[32] From different documents we can also gather that there was a lot of concern about which of the local nobles and members of state would be allowed to attend the performance, how to allocate the tickets to them and, in particular, which part of the theatre would be more appropriate for the envoy and his retinue to sit in so that they could properly appreciate the music and admire the scenes. In particular, the members of the *Giunta del Teatro* were especially worried that they would not be able to recognise the hierarchy of the various members of the envoy's retinue and make mistakes in allocating them a place not fitting for their rank. Therefore, they requested a detailed

[28] See CAROLINA BELLI, 'Il San Carlo attraverso le fonti documentarie,' in *Il teatro del re. Il San Carlo da Napoli all'Europa*, eds Franco Carmelo Greco and Gaetana Cantone (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1987), 174.

[29] Unlike the *serenata* organised for Hacı Hüseyin Efendi in Messina, the *Catalogo Sartori* does not list any libretto that could be linked to the *serenata* that took place in Naples. I would like to thank Suna Suner from the Don Juan Archiv Wien for the information about the *serenata* organised for Hacı Hüseyin Efendi in Messina and for having very kindly made materials from the *Catalogo Sartori* available for me.

[30] Letter dated 5 October 1741 and addressed to the Duke of Salas, ASN, Ministero Affari Esteri 4174 unnumbered documents.

[31] Apparently, while not so keen on other theatrical representations, King Charles was instead passionate about dance and when going to the theatre he would always request that at least two dances be performed. See CROCE, *I teatri di Napoli. Secolo XV–XVIII*, 343.

[32] Letter dated 10 October 1741 and addressed to Matteo Ferrante, a member of the *Giunta del Teatro* (the theatre management committee), ASN, Ministero Affari Esteri 4174 unnumbered documents.

note from the envoy's interpreter that could help them to solve this matter.[33] Finally, we learn that the envoy and the closest members of his retinue were assigned two boxes in the first row, the same ones that had been given on a different occasion to the ambassadors of Spain and Venice, while his other servants were to be placed in the fourth row.[34]

The archival documents do not report the title or the contents of the *serenata*. However, the letter addressed to the Duke of Salas from the *Giunta del Teatro* on 5 October 1741 clearly mentions all the names of the singers performing in it: Francesco Tolve, Giovanni Manzuoli, the Florentine castrato who was among the most admired singers of the time,[35] Vito Romito and the famous castrato Gaetano Majorano, better known as Caffarelli, notorious for his unpredictability and insolence, both on and off stage.[36] The female singers were Teresa de Palma and Anna Maria Strada, also known as Stradina. The document specifies that the singers for the *serenata* were chosen over other singers recently arrived in Naples, like Giovanna Astrua,[37] in order not to distract the latter from memorising their parts for the 'new opera' and keep them as a 'novelty' (*novità*) for that performance.[38] The 'new opera' the document refers to is *Ezio*, the *dramma per musica* (libretto by Pietro Metastasio, music by Domenico Sarro) that was staged a couple of weeks later, as was customary, on the occasion of the king's name day on 4 November 1741. The impression given by this document is that the staging of the new opera was given more attention than the performance in honour of Hacı Hüseyin Efendi. However, it must be considered that the king's name day was the most important date in the theatre's events calendar,[39] and that the cast chosen for the *serenata* was certainly not a second-rate option.

33 Letter dated 7 October 1741 and addressed to the Duke of Salas, ASN, Ministero Affari Esteri 4174 unnumbered documents. Unfortunately, this note, if ever provided, does not seem to be among the documentation of the ASN.

34 Letter dated 5 October 1741 and addressed to the Duke of Salas, ASN, Ministero Affari Esteri 4174 unnumbered documents. This information is confirmed by the *Relazione*: 'Fu il suddetto Ministro collocato con li primarj del suo seguito in due palchi della prima fila i quali ne componevano un solo per essersi levate espressamente le framezze, che li dividevano, e li restanti de' suoi domestici furono situati ne' Palchi superiori della quarta, e quinta fila,' see *Relazione*. The *Relazione* adds a few more details: the divider between the two boxes in the first row where the envoy was hosted was removed in order to create a larger single space and his servants also occupied the fifth row and not only the fourth as originally planned.

35 Francesco Tolve and Giovanni Manzuoli are also mentioned as performing in the *serenata* in CROCE, *I teatri di Napoli. Secolo XV–XVIII*, 400.

36 CROCE, *I teatri di Napoli. Secolo XV–XVIII*, 353–5.

37 Giovanna Astrua, considered by Voltaire 'the most beautiful voice in Europe' (*la plus belle voix de l'Europe*), arrived in Naples in 1741 when she was already quite famous and stayed there till 1747.

38 Letter dated 5 October 1741 and addressed to the Duke of Salas, ASN, Ministero Affari Esteri 4174 unnumbered documents.

39 As previously mentioned, this particular day was also chosen as the date of the theatre's inauguration in 1739.

The singers performing for Hacı Hüseyin Efendi and his retinue were all very active on the Neapolitan musical scene of the time[40] and some of them, like Giovanni Manzuoli, Caffarelli and Anna Maria Strada, were internationally acclaimed, taking part in many of the most important productions of that period.[41] Therefore, as put in the *Relazione*, they could be certainly considered among 'the best [voices] and most excellent among the virtuosi'(*migliori, e più eccellenti fra il ceto dei virtuosi*). We learn from the *Relazione* that the *serenata* was a big success. The Ottoman envoy uttered expressions of great satisfaction for the 'magnificent feast' (*magnifica festa*) that he apparently really did enjoy not only for the singing, dancing and exquisite spectacle, but also for the view of the theatre full of the most distinguished nobility of Naples. It is clear that two performances had taken place at the same time at the Regio Teatro di San Carlo on the night of 11 October 1741 – one on and the other off the stage – and that they had been both carefully arranged and performed.

Epilogue: the departure of the *Ministro del Gran Signore* and the arrival of the 'wondrous beast'

A week later the *Ministro del Gran Signore* boarded ship to return to Constantinople. However, not long after, another very peculiar 'guest' from the Ottoman Empire would arrive in Naples and was recounted, paraded, staged and later also displayed in a very similar manner. This time the new guest, which arrived on 1 November 1742 at the royal palace of Portici, was an elephant, a 'wondrous beast' as a local gazette defined him,[42] presented to the Neapolitan public as another gift from the Ottoman sultan to the king of Naples.[43]

As with the envoy, the elephant also aroused great pleasure and astonishment in the city, in addition prompting the immediate publication of an account accompanied by an engraving that was written by naturalist Francesco Serao (1702–1783), who was at the time *protomedico* of the kingdom, and printed by the same royal publisher that had

[40] These singers would often perform together. Caffarelli, Giovanni Manzuoli and Anna Maria Strada, for example, had played together in *Alceste in Ebuda* put on in the Teatro di San Carlo on 20 January 1741 on the occasion of King Charles's birthday. See CLAUDIO SARTORI, *I libretti italiani a stampa dalle origini fino al 1800. Catalogo analitico con 16 indici*, 7 vols (Cuneo: Bertola & Locatelli Editori, 1990–1994), I, 61.

[41] For example, in the *Ezio* staged on 4 November 1741, Caffarelli acted in the main role of Ezio. Another singer performing in the *serenata*, Teresa de Palma, was also in the cast of *Ezio* in the role of Onoria, SARTORI, *I libretti italiani*, III, 86.

[42] See D'AMORA, 'The Diplomatic Relations Between Naples and the Ottoman Empire,' 724.

[43] The elephant was not actually a gift but had been requested by the Neapolitan king together with other rarities and obtained, not without some difficulties, in exchange for 12 slabs of marble. On the nature of this present and the stay of the elephant at the Bourbon court, see MAURIZIO CRISPINO, 'Un elefante a corte,' in *Un elefante a corte. Allevamenti, cacce ed esotismi alla Reggia di Caserta, Catalogo della Mostra* (Naples: Fausto Fiorentino, 1992), 107–14; D'AMORA, 'The Diplomatic Relations Between Naples and the Ottoman Empire,' 724–5; GÜNER DOĞAN, 'Osmanlı İmparatorluğu-İki Sicilya Krallığı İlişkilerinin Başlaması ve İstanbul'dan Napoli'ye Diplomatik bir Hediye Sultanın Fili,' *Toplumsal Tarih* 275 (2016): 62–67.

published the *Relazione*.[44] The great impression that the arrival of the elephant must have left on the Neapolitan people is also clearly testified by the numerous works of art that this exotic animal inspired.[45] Most interesting is the fact that the elephant also seems to have made his remarkable appearance at the Regio Teatro di San Carlo, not as a guest of honour in this case, however, but to perform on the stage. On December 1742, the *Giunta del Teatro* asked the king's permission to use the elephant in a *mise-en-scène* of the opera *Alessandro nelle Indie* based on a libretto written in 1729 by famous librettist Pietro Metastasio (1698–1782), with the music of Domenico Sarri (1679–1744), who was *maestro di cappella* at the court at the time.[46] The opera was to be performed on occasion of the carnival from 20 January through 25 February 1743.[47] The members of the *Giunta* explained that they intended to use the elephant in the scene where gifts were presented, probably referring to the twelfth scene of the first act when Cleofide, queen of part of India, crosses the river and arrives at Alexander's camp while her servants bring him gifts.[48] In particular, they underlined that it would be of 'great acclaim' (*gran plauso*) if the elephant could appear on stage, 'for the rarity and beauty of the animal' (*per la rarità e la bellezza dell'animale*), and the novelty that it would be to admire such a big and rare animal in the royal theatre, 'arousing in

[44] FRANCESCO SERAO, *Descrizione dell'elefante pervenuto in dono dal Gran Sultano alla Regal Corte di Napoli il primo novembre MDCCXXXXII* (Naples: presso Francesco e Crisoforo Ricciardi, 1742). Despite the scientific approach in describing the animal that, in the author's intentions, was meant to satisfy the curiosity of the public, Serao's narrative also openly praises the Bourbon dynasty as worthy of such a precious present. On Serao's description, see also CRISPINO, 'Un elefante a corte,' 109–10. In the same year another Neapolitan doctor, Luigi Visone, sent to press a book inspired by the elephant, *Discorso di Luigi Visone intorno all'elefante*, provoking the immediate polemical response of Francesco Serao. See CARLANTONIO VILLAROSA, *Ritratti poetici di alcuni uomini di lettere antichi e moderni del regno di Napoli del marchese di Villarosa i.e. Carlantonio Villarosa* (Naples: Stamperia e carteria del Fibreno, 1834), 309.

[45] On the arrival of elephants as gifts to different European monarchs and the works of art of many court poets and painters inspired by what became a real 'elephantomania,' see STEVEN F. OSTROW, 'Pietro Longhi's Elephant. Public Spectacle and Marvel of Nature,' in *A Golden Age of European Art. Celebrating Fifty Years of the Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation*, eds James Clifton and Melina Kervandjian (Houston: Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation, 2016), 89–90. In particular, the 'Neapolitan' elephant appears in two famous paintings, one by Giuseppe Bonito, who had also portrayed the envoy and his retinue the year before, and the other by Pellegrino Ronchi, who reproduced the elephant clearly following the engraving contained in Serao's description; see D'AMORA, 'The Diplomatic Relations Between Naples and the Ottoman Empire,' 715–16, 725. The arrival of the elephant probably also inspired different representations of elephants for nativity scenes, see MUSELLA GUIDA, 'Relazioni politiche e commerciali tra il Regno di Napoli e la Porta Ottomana,' 26–27; GIOVANNA PETRENGA, 'Gli animali di attrazione e da compagnia nei dipinti della Pinacoteca della Reggia di Caserta,' in *Un elefante a corte. Allevamenti, cacce ed esotismi alla Reggia di Caserta, Catalogo della Mostra* (Naples: Fausto Fiorentino, 1992), 91. Furthermore, when the elephant died, a Spanish painter, Giovanni Alvarez Quiñon, was commissioned to portray its skeleton, which was reconstructed to be put on display, see CRISPINO, 'Un elefante a corte,' 110.

[46] In those years, Domenico Sarri set several of Metastasio's librettos to music, such as *Achille in Sciro*, the first opera put on in the Teatro di San Carlo on the day of its inauguration in 1737 and the previously mentioned *Ezio* staged on 4 November 1741.

[47] MAIONE and SELLER, *Teatro di San Carlo di Napoli*, 41–3. The previously mentioned Caffarelli, Giovanni Manzuoli and Giovanna Astrua were in the cast of this opera too.

[48] The story of *Alessandro nelle Indie* centres on the love between two Indian rulers, Poro and Cleofide, at the time of Alexander's Asiatic campaigns.

everybody great wonder' (*in tutti cagionasi meraviglia*).[49] Finally, they concluded that the presence of the elephant would encourage people to flock to the theatre to admire 'something that only the greatness of His Majesty the King could have made happen' (*cosa che solo per la grandezza di S.M. può aversi*). Moreover, they also reassured him that they would take all the possible precautions to make sure that the elephant would not be disturbed by the lights or the noises of the musical instruments.[50] It would seem that after initially refusing to grant permission for fear that the elephant could be hurt, afterwards the king probably changed his mind, there being some later references that seem to suggest he elephant's presence on stage the following January.

After this alleged great appearance in the Teatro di San Carlo, not much is known about the 'wondrous beast,' beside the fact that for some years to come it might have remained an attraction for many Neapolitans, who continued to go and admire it by tipping its keeper.[51] However, the elephant would acquire new fame after its premature death in 1756, most probably as a consequence of a bad diet. Following the king's orders, its body was given to the Accademia delle Scienze to be studied, and its skeleton was then reconstructed to be put on display first in the Museo Borbonico (now Museo Archeologico Nazionale), and then in 1819 in the Museo Zoologico where it still stands today.[52]

Between the end of the summer of 1741 and the spring of 1743, the streets of Naples, its newly built royal residences, as well as the majestic Teatro di San Carlo, inaugurated only a few years earlier, became the stage of a series of attentively choreographed events starring two special guests coming from the 'East'. Both the Ottoman envoy Hacı Hüseyin Efendi and the elephant, by virtue of their rarity and extraordinary appearances, became a public spectacle, aroused great interest and curiosity, and generated many both written and visual responses.

The city itself became a stage where the pomp and ceremony of parading and displaying these two guests to a curious general public at the same time enacted the legitimation and celebration of the new ruling monarchy. In particular, both architecturally and politically connected to the royal palace, the Teatro di San Carlo was the performative space where the presentation of the two visitors was staged within the frame of theatrical representations, both as guest of honour, as in the envoy's case, and as a special walk-on attraction in the case of the elephant.

The rich and fascinating written and visual narrative enabling the reconstruction of these events, and the archival documents providing behind-the-scenes information, openly show that the both on- and off-stage performances arranged to receive and present the envoy, and the gifts sent to the king of Naples and Sicily from the sultan, on one hand had the clear intent of leaving a positive and long-lasting impression on

[49] The original documents relating this episode are among those destroyed during the Second World War but they are quoted in CROCE, *I teatri di Napoli. Secolo XV–XVIII*, 407–8.
[50] CROCE, *I teatri di Napoli. Secolo XV–XVIII*, 408.
[51] CROCE, *I teatri di Napoli. Secolo XV–XVIII*, 407.
[52] 'Un elefante alla corte dei Borboni,' http://www.cmsnf.it/686/, accessed 7 April 2022.

the diplomat of the new Ottoman ally, and on the other hand aimed to assert the power of the Bourbon both in and outside the kingdom, while, in particular, leaving an even longer-lasting impression on the Neapolitans. In this context, the public and meticulously arranged staging of the 'superb gifts' brought to Naples by Hacı Hüseyin Efendi, as well as the presentation of the elephant as a gift, were clearly considered the most impressive, clear and tangible testimonies of the esteem and consideration with which the powerful Ottoman sultan regarded the Bourbon king. Hence, they were aptly used to legitimise the newly established monarchy by inspiring sentiments of wonder, admiration and devotion in the king's subjects.

Historians and Their Craft

An Interview with Joan-Pau Rubiés

GIULIA IANNUZZI
(University of Florence-University of Trieste)

Joan-Pau Rubiés graduated in Early Modern History at the University of Barcelona with an extraordinary degree prize, and in 1992 he obtained his PhD at King's College, University of Cambridge. He was subsequently Research Fellow at Queens's College, Cambridge; Jean Monnet Fellow at the European University Institute in Florence; Lecturer in Modern History at the University of Reading; and Reader in International History at the London School of Economics and Political Science. In 2012 he accepted the offer of a Research Professorship at the Catalan Institution for Research and Advanced Studies (ICREA), which he holds at Universitat Pompeu Fabra. He is specialised in the study of cross-cultural encounters in the early modern world, from a perspective combining the contextual analysis of travel accounts and other ethnographic sources with the intellectual history of early modern Europe. Recent work has focused in particular on the analysis of early modern ethnography (literary and visual) and its intellectual impact in the period 1500-1800. This has involved developing various lines of research, including the history of travel, cross-cultural diplomacy, religious missions, early orientalism, race and racism, and the history of cosmopolitanism. His publications include *Travellers and Cosmographers: Studies in the History of Early Modern Travel and Ethnology* (London: Ashgate, 2007) and *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance: South India through European Eyes (1250-1625)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), as well as the pioneering edited collection (with Jaś Elsner) *Voyages and Visions: Towards a Cultural History of Travel* (London, 1999). In recent years, he has been working on the development a global comparative perspective on these various topics (encompassing both Asia and the New World) that might help interrogate critically the Eurocentric categories of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. He is currently leading a research project in Barcelona on Ethnographies, Cultural Encounters and Religious Missions in the Early Modern Iberian World. He hopes to complete soon a new monograph *Europe's New Worlds: Travel Writing and the Origins of the Enlightenment* (with CUP), and for the Hakluyt Society, the critical edition, with an extensive introductory study, *Renaissance Methods for Travel.*

How did you become interested in early-modern ethnography?

I reached this topic by means of a more general question in what we might broadly define as cultural history. The starting point of my research career was a question about the study of changing perceptions, which in reality can be split in two issues: reconstructing how people from the past, in different societies with different cultural assumptions, perceived and thought about historical realities, and analysing how these perceptions and ideas changed with changing circumstances. During my undergraduate degree at the University of Barcelona in the mid 1980s, which

Cromohs (Cyber Review of Modern Historiography), ISSN 1123-7023, 24/2021

DOI: 10.36253/cromohs-13189

encompassed ancient, medieval and early modern history, I quickly became dissatisfied with the two main analytical categories then current amongst historians interested in such questions: "ideology", and "mentalities". The former, ideology, tended to reduce the historical significance of cultural discourses to justifications of political and social agendas, failing to capture the complex nature of human motivations and identities (this reductionism owes something to the influence of Marxism, which remained strong at Spanish universities during the country's transition to democracy). The latter, mentality, targeted a broader range of cultural beliefs and practices, but tended to reify cultures as collective systems of belief, and was often very vague when it came to defining internal plurality, individual agency and the mechanisms for cultural change. With these issues in mind, I did some pre-doctoral work on the history of historiography, with a study of the cultural and ideological assumptions of the fourteenth century chronicler of the Crown of Aragon Ramon Muntaner, and wrote a substantial thesis (what was then called a *Tesi de Llicenciatura*) on the political and economic though of a Catalan nobleman in Habsburg Spain, Don Francisco Gilabert, in the early seventeenth century. These two works of intellectual history, besides the obvious effort of connecting the expression of ideas to particular biographical experiences and historical contexts, allowed me to understand the importance of identifying in more detail the assumptions and possibilities provided by different educational backgrounds and literary genres. However, I felt the need to face the issue of cultural diversity more directly, that is, not simply by dealing with our ancestors as cultural others, but also by considering how they themselves perceived and interpreted cultural differences. For this reason, and in order to develop a model in the history of perceptions that offered a higher degree of analytical resolution, for my doctoral degree, which I fortunately (thanks to a full external scholarship from King's College) I was able to pursue at the University of Cambridge, I decided to focus on late medieval and early modern ethnographic sources, within the complex set of genres that constitute travel writing. The question I proposed to myself for the thesis that would become the basis for my *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance* (a book many years in the making) was not simply how members of one society may perceive other cultures, by means of a systematic analysis of specific travel accounts, but also how to distinguish the assumptions and motivations of different kinds of travellers; how to define and measure the cultural distance between observers and observed; how to reconstruct the process of cross-cultural interpretation (which led me to a stronger emphasis on the mechanisms for cultural learning); how to identify the specific possibilities and constraints posed by different genres, literary and visual; and finally how to reconstruct the dynamics of cultural and intellectual change over longer periods. Ethnography is a wonderful documentary source to explore all these questions. It also helped me develop my own methodology, one which placed the analysis of interactions alongside the analysis of discourse. In retrospect, what I was looking for was a hybrid between the new cultural history, and the history of ideas in contexts. I was lucky that the University of Cambridge was at that point, between 1987 and 1993, a privileged place

for both, although they were usually done quite separately, and I had to bring them together in my own research practice.

And what, in your personal journey, led you to tackle early-modern ethnography in the context of South India in your first monograph?

From the start, my aim was to tackle the early modern genre of travel writing in its variety, and to analyse ethnography a variety of contexts, all of which would require to work through a series of case-studies. Given that I was already quite familiar, through my education in Barcelona, with Spanish sources on the discovery and conquest of America, which of course I have always had in mind, it seemed to me that the more interesting challenge for my PhD in a British University was to widen my horizons to encompass what we may call the global Renaissance, and to tackle descriptions of Asia produced throughout the sixteenth century in Portuguese, Italian, English, French and any other languages I managed to read. This would have been almost impossible to do in Spain back in 1987, the bibliographical resources simply did not exist (this was of course before the internet and the world wide web became available). At that point Donald F. Lach's *Asia in the Making of Europe* became a wonderful resource, for which I was very grateful. There was also a lively debate about Edward's Said's *Orientalism* that invited a response. Although at first I read everything connected to the Portuguese *Estado da Índia* and the Catholic eastern missions, from Persia to India, South-East Asia, Japan and China, it soon became obvious that a systematic case-study for a period longer than a century demanded a much sharper regional focus. There were particularly rich and varied sources for South India, including the Malabar coast and the empire of Vijayanagara, that suggested the possibility of such a case study, and I soon found that there were additional intellectual reasons to pursue it: first, because India had always been part of the European imagination, not only through the legacy of ancient Greek sources, but also thanks to the existence of extraordinary late medieval travellers such as Marco Polo. This made it possible to deepen the analysis of changing perceptions in the *longue durée*. Second, South India was, unlike the Mughal empire, in large part ruled by Hindus, and this allowed me to devote particular attention to one important topic that interested me, the Renaissance conceptualisation of civilisation in relation to 'gentile' religious traditions, a distinction which prompted political and religious strategies different to those reserved for Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Let me add quickly that this Indian case-study was never meant to be the end of the matter, and I have subsequently continued to analyse sources concerning other parts of the world, including the Ottoman empire, Persia, China, Japan and the Philippines, as well as, of course, the New World.

Can you tell us something about the main influences and encounters that have oriented your intellectual trajectory?

I owe a first debt of gratitude to Josep Maria Salrach, an excellent Catalan medievalist who first prompted me to study the political, social and religious ideas of the medieval historians of the Crown of Aragon when I was still an undergraduate. In Barcelona I

also received much support for my research on Gilabert, a figure that had attracted the occasional attention of historians like Jim Amelang, but not yet a systematic monograph. It was, however, through my doctoral research that I was able to develop a more ambitious intellectual project. As I mentioned, in the late 1980s and early 1990s Cambridge was an ideal environment to pursue my research project, and I benefited immensely from many of the intellectual friendships I formed in that period, many of which lasted me for many years afterwards. I was supervised by Anthony Pagden, who besides being an excellent historian of the intellectual aspects of the European Encounter with the New World (his *The Fall of Natural Man* remains a classic), also introduced me to the seminars of the then flourishing Cambridge school in the history of political thought, which emphasised reconstructing with great rigour the intellectual context for the production and reception of early modern ideas, and developed strategies (albeit not always successfully executed) for the avoidance of anachronistic and teleological interpretations. Not only did I benefit from direct contact with scholars like Istvan Hont, Quentin Skinner, John Dunn, Mike Schoenscher and many others, but also (and probably more important) developed lasting personal and intellectual friendships with many of my no-less impressive contemporaries conducting doctoral and postodctoral research within that environment, including Peter N. Miller, Béla Kapossy, David Armitage and Melissa Calaresu (whom I also married, so in this case the personal aspect goes much further). However valuable this was for my development as an intellectual historian, my own project was quite far from the dominant focus on European political thought that characterised at that point what is known as the Cambridge School, and I found myself exploiting a much broader range of encounters and opportunities, including classicists, literary scholars, anthropologists, historians of science, and cultural historians more broadly. During Pagden's sabbatical Peter Burke became my second supervisor, and besides benefiting from his extraordinary learning, the seminars he led in the new methodologies in the cultural history of early modern Europe offered a wonderful complement to my exposure to the history of ideas. I also enormously enjoyed participating in an exciting reading group that included Simon Schaffer, an innovative historian of science who enhanced my appreciation of the value of a sociological and sceptical approach to the history of knoweldge (although I would not call myself a radical relativist as a result). One of my closest friends during those years, the brilliant classicist Jaś Elsner, was also interested in the question of historicising subectivity, and he has remained a permament interluctor – it was with him that we sketched a cultural history of travel from antiquity to scence fiction in *Voyages and Visions* (1999). I also benefited from friendship and conversations with literary scholars and historians of the book, such as Bill Sherman, and with a historian of medieval religious encounters, Harvey Hames. To sum up, although I had gone to Cambridge with clear research questions and methodological concerns in mind, there I was able to combine an extraordinary range of positive influences that had the benefit of marrying learning and friendship.

The story of course did not end in Cambridge, and over the years I have been privileged to be able to cultivate many other intellectual friendhips and collaborations

of lasting value. These include an outstanding historian of the Jesuit missions to India, Ines G. Županov, whom I met in Florence in 2001 at an important conference on the Jesuit missions, and who later hosted me in Paris; and the historian of early modern Catholicsm Simon Ditchfiled, with whom I often collaborated when he was editor of the *Journal of Early Modern History*. Dan Carey at the University of Galway has also become a long-term companion in the pursuit of a history of travel and travel writing. Among the many exciting opportunities provided by international conferences and events, I was particularly grateful for the invitation to re-think idolatry in a Princeton seminar organised by Jonathan Sheehan and Anthony Grafton, whose erudite scholarship is also, of course, another very important influence. At the University of Reading I devised a very satisfying course on the comparative history of early modern colonial empires that I later transferred, with equal success, to the London School of Economics and Political Science. Finally, the masters course I taught at the LSE on the history of cultural encounters from the Renaissance to modernity, first in collaboration with the historian of South Asia Joya Chatterji, and later with Sujit Sivasundaram, was central to the development of my expertise towards larger questions in imperial and colonial history. I still teach a version of this course in Barcelona, with my colleagues Manel Ollé, a sinologist, and Alexandre Coello de la Rosa, a historian of the Jesuit missions.

In your research, you have shown how visual sources are critical to our understanding of cultural exchange, the conceptualisation of human diversity, and the negotiations between European observers' pre-existent cultural palimpsests and actual cross-cultural encounters. What do you think about recent trends in the use of visual sources in (new) cultural history?

The new cultural history has given a strong impulse to rethinking how we use images as historical evidence. In reality there is a long and distinguished tradition of using art historical sources (and other kinds of material culture) to illuminate the cultural history of a period alongside literary ones, but you cannot ask exactly the same questions with the same methodologies, nor is it entirely satsfactory to simply use these materials to help draw the picture of 'the spirit of an epoch,' like Jacob Burckhardt did when interpreting the Italian Renaissance for the nineteenth century. Nowadays images and objects do not simply have an original context of production and an artisic genealogy, they also have multiple uses, and these tell us a great deal about changing perceptions and social practices. This is especially fruitful when we can interpret them contextually with the help of other kinds of sources. For the purposes of my research, visual sources with an ethnographic content are of course at the heart of my question about the history of perceptions, but there is the danger of simply assuming that a drawing or a painting is somewhat transparent, and can be simply used to illustrate what we know from textual sources, rather than offering a distinctive problem of interpretation. What is the difference between a mental image and an artistic image, and between an image and text, I asked myself? I was able to deal with some of these issues with my contribution to a British Museum project on the American drawings of John White,

who worked alongside Thomas Harriot in the first English colony in Virginia, and also thanks to another invitation that I received from Joan-Lluís Palos at the University of Barcelona to write about early modern artistic images of savages and civilised. In more recent years, I have started more systematic work on visual ethnographic albums of the sixteenth century, beginning with the Boxer Codex produced in Manila c. 1592, which has the distinctive feature that the texts written by Spanish and Portuguese observers were illustrated by a Chinese artist with access to Chinese books. It is a bit of an enigma, which I believe the book we recently published with Manel Ollé has helped clarify.

A logocentric historiography might be interpreted as epistemologically Eurocentric; from this perspective, do you think that recent trends, e.g. in the study of material culture, have helped to decolonise (new) cultural history? Are there other re-evaluations of themes and sources that you find particularly productive in this regard?

Let me answer this by saying that although I appreciate the value and potential in all kinds of historical sources, I am most familiar with textual analysis, and I believe that written sources remain indispensable for a vast range of historical questions, including those that have driven my research. As Peter N. Miller has shown in his magnificent work on the Provençal antiquarian Peiresc, those early modern scholars who first drew attention to the importance of material culture for understanding the past (including periods other than the ancient world) were polyglots and polymaths who treated the document itself as yet another object, and we can in turn study them because they left us written archives (Peiresc spent hours writing letters every day). The new fields of cultural history that deal with material culture are not unlike those who work with archaeology and art in that they must develop specific and often very sophisticated methodologies, but are best served by the ability to combine material evidence with textual evidence, and to treat textual evidence as material evidence. You do however raise an important issue, which is the bias generated by the irregular availability of textual sources across cultural traditions. This creates, indeed, a Eurocentric bias, but it would be more accurate to say that it creates a bias towards those literate civilisations whose records have been preserved. A historian of, let us say, the Mexica or the Incas will of course be able to exploit archaeological information, but must by necessity also take account of those sources written during the early stages of the Spanish colonial period, and will cautiously read these Spanish sources critically, even sceptically and 'against the grain,' with reference to all the assumptions and agendas of self-serving conquerors and settlers, or of those zealous missionaries who recorded Indian customs and religious beliefs in order to identify and annihilate what they believed was demonic idolatry. Historians of early modern global intellectual history and cultural encounters do thankfully have the opportunity to be able cross, or at least compare, European and non-European sources, and the latter are especially abundant in Arabic, Persian, Ottoman, Chinese, Japanese, and other Asian languages. Few scholars can alone read all these languages, but scholars can collaborate to do comparative history, or *histoire*

croisée, and of course scholarly translations and editions of significant sources remain a fundamental resource which we must never cease to foster and appreciate. I have recently explored the potential of a longue-durée comparative history of the genre of travel writing in Europe and China in collaboration with Manel Ollé, a colleague who is a sinologist at Universitat Pompeu Fabra, and I am hoping to be able to pursue a more ambitious project in the future with the inclusion of sources in Arabic and Persian. The archive of world history remains nonetheless heterogeneous in its quantity and quality, and this is a fact that we must acknowledge and learn to compensate for. The combination of a sceptical reading of European sources with the use of those non-European sources that are available, as well as material culture when possible, offers a more interesting possibility than simply ritually denouncing a Eurocentric bias.

Your most recent and ongoing work tackles how travel accounts contributed to some of the concerns that lie at the origins of the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment, a historical category that appears particularly susceptible of mobilising opinions - perhaps because it is never entirely retrospective, as Katherine O'Brien wrote in 2010 -, seems to have regained a special centrality since the 2000s. Recent years have seen historiographical (re)assessments, proposals for radical re-orientations of periodisations, canons, and geographical-linguistic corpora and case studies. What do you think a long-period perspective, and the study of processes straddling Renaissance and Enlightenment, can bring to current debates?

Thanks, this is a great question. You are right that I have been increasingly concerned with the intellectual impact of travel writing, first in relation to what we might term the global Renaissance, and more recently in relation to the origins of the Enlightenment. In both cases, the very categories of 'Renaissance' and 'Enlightenment' need to be interrogated critically, and as you rightly point out, this also involves taking account of how early modern European scholars and thinkers understood their own times, in relation to the classical past, and in relation to the future of mankind (because 'lumières' started as a celebration of the achievements of modern learning, and became in the end a project about rethinking critically human nature, human civilisation, and its capacity for progress). The sustained expansion of geographical horizons, and the massive production and circulation of detailed accounts of non-European religions, customs and systems of government, made a defining contribution to many of the philosophical and historiographical debates of the early modern period, including the very notion of global modernity and a cosmopolitan consciousness that was full of contradictions. Adopting a longue-durée perspective that encompasses the whole early modern period in its global dimensions (and sometimes even earlier periods) invites us to go beyond the specific, and necessary, debates about what the Renaissance or the Enlightenment were for contemporaries, or maybe for us as critical scholars, and leads us to address also the question of legacies. One of my concerns at this moment is using these debates in cultural and intellectual history in order to interrogate more generally the notion of global early modernity. The challenge is to develop a less Eurocentric

perspective on a formative period of world historical significance, without losing sight of the fact that there are very specific European dynamics that define its uniqueness. These questions often lead us to very current issues, for example on the topic of what a less Eurocentric cosmopolitan set of moral and political values might look like.

Let me add that in my view longue durée cultural and intellectual history can only be undertaken without abandoning all the insights derived from rigorous contextualisation, in particular when we assess the contexts of production and reception for any document. This was at least my ambition when in *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance* I adopted a long chronology from the mid thirteenth to the early seventeenth centuries. I am therefore in full sympathy with David Armitage's notion of serial contextualism.

What did your work on the concepts of race, racism, and ethnic discrimination in the early modern context suggest to you, in relation to the historiographical problem of the connection between racism and Enlightenment theories of civilisation and stadial development?

As you will see in my essay provocatively titled 'Were Early Modern Europeans Racist?,' as historians we need to decide what kind of understanding of race and racism will produce answers to specific questions, because we can adopt very broad definitions or very narrow ones, and all can be valid in the right context. My suggestion is that our task as historians is to introduce those distinctions that allow us to understand causality better, and from this perspective, what I have argued is that while the existence of racial distinctions based on lineage and phenotype, and even theories that support various forms of collective discrimination, is very general in human history, the existence of a *culturally dominant* racial discourse with scientific pretensions in Europe, one that encouraged large-scale racial discrimination in practice, is a product of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The Enlightenment theories of the history of civilisation contributed to this development because they cemented a hierarchical principle in the classification of human cultures that, unlike the classical opposition of the barbarian and the civilised, was connected to an idea of gradual social, scientific and political progress. However, this does not by itself explain the shift to the kind of pseudo-scientific racial thought that argued that the progress of civilisation was, in reality, beyond certain racial groups, thus establishing a natural rather than simply historical hierarchy within mankind. We must also consider the new emphasis on physical taxonomies in natural history, and the crisis of the anthropological monogenism of the biblical tradition, all of which helped erode what I have described as the orthodox consensus represented, for example, by the count of Buffon, in which the variety of men displayed degrees of cultural sophistication, social organisation and power over nature, not natural levels of rationality or sociability. Of course, ideas do not evolve in a vacuum, the experiences of the Atlantic slave trade and new forms of global imperialism brought these threads together. The final point I would emphasise is that the Enlightenment was ideologically plural and also included the critique of racial discrimination.

Many of your past and current projects are comparative in nature, and encompass both the Americas and Asia. How do you place your work in relation to the vast and varied field of historiography that today goes by the name of global history? And in relation to* histoire croisée*?

I believe I already began to answer this question when we discussed logocentrism. As a historian of travel writing and cultural encounters, and their European impact, my main task has been to interrogate critically the European narrative of early modernity, and I have approached early modern globalization through a revisionist interpretation of some of the cultural dimensions of colonial and imperial history. *Histoire croisée* invites us to mobilise non-European sources wherever possible, and my next ambition is to develop more collaborative projects with experts in non-European languages in order to undertake a comparative history of early modernity with specific reference to those ethnographic and historiographical sources that have become the central focus of my research. I am also very interested in comparative projects that are not afraid to ask the big questions, such as for example Alan Strathern's recent work on the changing relationship between religion and politics with the world-wide expansion of transcendentalist religions. I believe that both the study of global connections and of global comparisons must be pursued in parallel, although they are not exactly the same. For example, in a future publication I argue that the Renaissance of global connections is more obvious, but also more Eurocentric, than the Renaissance of global comparisons (for the latter, consider the problems raised by the idea of 'many Renaissances' proposed by Jack Goody). My aim will be to assess critically these two possibilities.

Major digitisation initiatives have revitalised discussions on archives and libraries, on which voices are represented in them and which struggle to find expression. What impact does the archive as an ideologically oriented construct have on your research work? What impact, if any, has the increasing availability of digitised sources had? What methodological cautions would you recommend?

Archives may have been created with a particular purpose in mind, but we historians are eclectic opportunists with our own agendas, and any scrap of information may be valuable. The Jesuit archives in Rome are a good example of a well-organised and accessible collection of exceptional value that secular historians have been exploiting with remarkable success. Members of the Society of Jesus have not only been good record keepers, but also often exemplary editors, and I certainly could not have done much of my work with original documents on the early modern missions without all those resources in place. I have therefore enormous respect for Jesuit scholars of an older generation who published many of these documents, like Henry Hosten, Josef Wicki and Georg Schurhammer, even if my interpretative perspective may often differ from theirs. Having said this, the very existence of an exceptional archive may also create a distortion, and I have often observed that the history of the early modern Catholic missions in the Spanish and Portuguese imperial jurisdictions suffers from a 'Jesuit bias' with respect to other religious orders like the Franciscans, Augustinians

and Dominicans, simply because we have a much better archive. More generally, what all these archives offer is the European (and male) perspective on the missions, and we must often struggle to retrieve a native perspective, although thankfully in some cases this can be done (for example, with Chinese, Japanese and Mughal sources).

The digitisation of many collections of documents and rare books offers wider accessibility, which is of course a positive development, but whenever possible it should only be supplementary to personal contact with original documents, because as I already noted, the document is not only a text, but also an object that tells a particular story. Faster research does not mean better research, in fact the contrary is often the case, and our age is certainly displaying some of the symptoms of information overload, with a lot of repetition and redundancy. What seems crucial here is to value perspective over the mere circulation of information: the perspective that allows us to pose important questions self-critically, to assess the value of particular kinds of evidence, and to organise the information accordingly. It is also perspective that allows us to know how we stand in relation to a historiographical tradition. Of course, we can acquire this perspective with digitised sources, but the pressure to publish quickly prevalent in modern academia, combined with the ability to locate sources very quickly at the click of a button, often militates against it, especially because those sources not yet digitised may tell a different story. And when a particular document is already known, there could be different copies, so let us consider the importance of taking account of textual variants and marginalia.

Even when we are only considering the best, more critical examples of historical scholarship, there is another potential cost to the prevalence of digitisation, which is losing the magic of discovery through direct contact with the document as a unique object that has survived the ravages of time. Certainly, my happiest moments as a historian are associated to the contact with new primary sources in their original form, in the rare books library or in the archive. I have devoted some effort to the time consuming but also constructive task of publishing annotated editions and translations of a few documents of special value, often previously unknown, such as the Jesuit Antonio Rubino's account of the history and religion of Vijayanagara, the Florentine Gionvanni di Buonagrazia's letter about his participation in the second expedition of Vasco da Gama to India, the report of the embassy of Don García de Silva y Figueroa to Shah Abbas by his secretary Saulisante, or (at the very start of my career) various political proposals by Don Francisco Gilabert.

In your work you have dealt with a number of themes and topics in religious history - from religious missions as settings of cross-cultural encounters, to* accommodatio *and comparative methods to be found in authors such as Lafitau. You have also reflected on the role of the Jesuits in the Enlightenment republic of letters. Are you developing any new projects in the area of missionary ethnography? And have you noticed any changes or novelties in the field of Jesuit studies in recent years?

I am hoping to complete soon a long overdue book on missionaries as ethnographers, based on some of the materials I have been working on over the last fifteen years. Let me add that, in my experience, religious history – which in my case has primarily focused on the history of religious missions, with special attention to reinterpreting the concept of religious dialogue – is central to cultural history for much of human history. It is, for the period I have studied, unavoidable. However, for the same reason, it does not constitute a separate realm of history, but rather belongs to the history of subjectivity in its many facets, involving beliefs, ideas, politics, and social practices. It should therefore be considered as an integral part of the kind of history of cultural encounters and their intellectual impact that I have sought to pursue. In turn, historians of encounters (not unlike cultural historians more generally) can contribute to historicising and re-conceptualising what the category of 'religion' actually means. This may sound unexceptional nowadays, but not so long ago the history of the early modern missions was primarily cultivated by members of the same religious orders that constituted the main object of study, notably in the case of the Jesuits, who still today have exceptional historians like Nicolas Standaert. In fact, not everybody is comfortable with historicising religious identities. Back in the early 1990s a famous historian at the European University Institute, upon hearing a preliminary version of what would become my first article on the Jesuit method of accommodation, 'Defining Cultural Dialogue', suggested to me in private that secular historians should stay away from religion. I did not of course follow this particular piece of advice.

Have you ever felt that chance or serendipity played a central role in your research? If so, is there any episode you would like to recount?

Perhaps I will simply say that physical environments very often help shape research. Jaś Elsner and I shared a house during the second year of my PhD, and we used to sit at the breakfast table and have extremely stimulating conversations about the nature of historical knowledge (we also talked about more fun things, not to be repeated here). Jamie Masters, another gifted classicist, also came to live with us, and it was for that reason that I ended up writing an article on the rhetorical construction of the figure of emperor Nero in Tacitus and in Tacitism for a pathbreaking book they were then editing (the subject of what may lie behind the myth of Nero as the archetypical tyrant is now, thirty years later, the focus of an exhibition at the British Museum). The University Library at Cambridge University, which over the years has remained one of my most fundamental resources, still has the wonderful capacity to let us browse open shelves organised thematically and discover things by chance, and the same can be said of the Library of the Warburg Institute in London, another institution to which I owe a great deal. I am less enthusiastic about increasing reliance on digitalized resources, although I must admit that they are very helpful when one lacks such excellent libraries and archives nearby, and that the world wide web has allowed us to continue working during the covid crisis.

What audience do you think of when you write about history? Is there any reflection you would like to share about the role of historical research and communication in

today's society? And is there any particular suggestion you would give in this regard to a historian at the beginning of his or her career?

The question of who our audience is a great one. I write of course for anyone interested, to begin the community of fellow historians (broadly understood across various disciplines), which I like to conceive of as the modern continuation of the early modern Republic of Letters, cosmopolitan, transnational and open to all who care. I try to write without assuming a large amount of previous knowledge, but without simplifications, and although I expect my published work to be understood by any student of history at the university level, I also suspect that many non-specialists might struggle with some of my writing, because the kind of questions that I pose are by definition rather specialised. Some pieces, like a short contribution to a 'handbook' or a 'companion' volume, are meant to be introductory, and I have done quite a few of these, but journal articles (or chapters in collective books) and monographs should aspire to push the boundaries of existing knowledge with new thinking (I fear that nowadays a lot is being published that surprises me for its relative lack of novelty and ignorance of previous work on the subject – partly the result of an exaggerated emphasis on publishing quickly in modern academia). Still, specialism should not become elitism. I believe that, as a community of historians, we should speak to society and avoid creating an ivory tower reserved for the elect, or indulge in a jargon that only the initiate can understand. In part this is a civic responsibility, because historical narratives matter to modern identities, but they can also be manipulated politically (and not just by politicians) with frightening ease. This danger is unavoidable, so we must sometimes be prepared to enter the fray. Hopefully, what I write will contribute to perfecting and empowering cross-cultural and cosmopolitan principles rather than narrow nationalist or religious agendas. In any case, we all need to learn how to address different audiences – personally I tend to reserve my more accessible mode for oral delivery. However, let me emphasise again that our task as scholars is to elevate public discourse through reasoned learning, not to erode the quality of historical analysis in order to reach a broader public. My aim as a professional historian is not to entertain, but rather to frame historical questions from my own original perspective, and to enhance our historical understanding of those questions through my research and writing. It is a long-term project whose impact is often slow, but which is perfectly compatible with the existence of other professionals who may devote themselves to making history available to a wider public (this includes of course fiction, TV and film – another minefield of potential manipulation).

What is your personal idea of the historian's craft? Working on early-modern sources, what specific skills did you need and challenges did you face? What do you think is the (desirable) role of linguistic knowledge and the use of translations in accessing primary sources? What would you recommend a young historian to pay special attention to in his or her training?

Behind history as I understand it lies a romantic impulse to think about humanity by crossing time, and often space too. This may bring us to understanding the

origins of where we are now historically, but also, more generally, to thinking about what we are anthropologically. The deepest challenge is to interpret the motivations of people culturally distant from us, not only with different technologies and information at their disposal, but also with different cultural values (taking account that cultural distances are of course relative). So your question brings us back to the beginning of this interview, to the project of writing a history of perceptions that is sensitive to the existence of such cultural differences, without giving up entirely the belief in our capacity to understand people form the past (this, in turn, requires the idea of a common nature and even a common rationality, however broadly defined). We approach this task by learning the languages of our primary documents to begin with, whenever we can, but this is only the starting point, because beliefs and cultural practices encompass something much broader than mere linguistic competence (this is why I have sometimes written about language-games instead, in order to capture the wider set of social, literary and artistic conventions that condition any act of communication). If our main subject as historians is interpreting the agency of culturally distant human beings, we must do so by acquiring the tools that will allow us to find an adequate midpoint between sympathy and scepticism. In order to achieve this, the imagination is the most powerful, but also the most dangerous, faculty of the historian. It allows us to acquire a perspective and create order out of the chaos of irregular, partial, and fragmentary information, but can also lead us to fall prey to our own interpretative prejudices, in particular to confirmation bias. I therefore understand the practice of history as an exercise in disciplining the imagination: by contrasting information, by considering different perspectives, by not assuming that you know what people from the past were thinking about only because they acted in certain ways, and of course by looking for alternative sources of evidence.

You kindly invite me to offer advice to young scholars. Many historical questions of an empirical nature only require clarifying individual agency and circumstance, but when it comes to interpreting historical causality in relation to complex cultural phenomena, especially in the longue durée, I advise looking for connections at different scales. It is also important to bear in mind that everything (including something as potentially abstract as intellectual life) has a local dimension, and in this respect reconstructing the relevant local contexts matters as much as delineating the general trends. When it comes to political analysis, early modernists (and probably historians of later periods too) should avoid focusing on the nation state as the only or most natural unit of political and cultural analysis. This does not mean that the state is irrelevant, far from it, but in an age of dynastic composite states, colonial empires, and fragmented jurisdictions, its nature is often complex, and national identities are seldom homogeneous. Last but not least, the historian must always cultivate writing skills (and rhetorical skills more generally, because oral delivery also matters to us). Personally I look for clarity, precision and conciseness, albeit appreciating that what works best in English is often a little different to what works in Spanish, Catalan or Italian. When it comes to our writing

and other linguistic skills, we must all keep working at improving and never assuming that we already know enough – but I guess this is true of everything we do.

Eric Hobsbawm: The Last of the Universal Historians?[*]

TEODORO TAGLIAFERRI
University of Naples Federico II

There is more than one reason why the historians, and the Italian historians in particular, must feel deeply grateful towards Richard Evans for his painstakingly researched and engagingly written life of Eric Hobsbawm.

According to a famous dictum by Edward Carr, before studying a historian's works, we would do well to study the historian himself.[1] Until today, when confronted with this task in the case of Hobsbawm, we had to rely on a mass of very uneven critical literature exclusively based on his copious published writings.[2] For the rest, we had to be satisfied with Hobsbawm's own autobiography, *Interesting Times*: a remarkable book on its own right indeed, in composing which, on the other hand, the author had deliberately restricted himself to what he defined the 'personal-political' dimension, to the almost complete exclusion of his more intimate and private *Erlebnisse*.[3]

Professor Evans' full-length and all-round biography draws on the vast amount of papers left by Hobsbawm (among which the more than six hundred pages of the manuscript diary he intermittently kept, mostly in German, from 1934 to 1951) in order to cast light on his 'inner life' and 'personal views, feelings and experiences' too, and provides therefore an indispensable new tool for applying Carr's injunction to one among the most globally influential historians of our times.[4]

Italy is among the countries where, since the early 1960s, Hobsbawm's books have been more regularly translated (and in a few cases originally published) and have enjoyed a relatively vast popularity among academics, university students, politicised and educated readers.[5] All the same, we should be careful not to take it for granted that the present generation of Italian students and younger researchers are fully aware of

[*] This article is an expanded version of my contribution to the Book Roundtable on Richard J. Evans, *Eric Hobsbawm: A Live in History* (London: Little, Brown, 2019), Naples, Scuola Superiore Meridionale, November 14, 2019.

[1] EDWARD H. CARR, *What Is History?*, The George Macaulay Trevelyan Lectures, delivered at the University of Cambridge, January-March 1961 (New York, Vintage Books, 1962), 26, 54.

[2] The invaluable EMILE CHABAL, ed., *The Eric Hobsbawm Bibliography*, https://www.hobsbawm.shca.ed.ac.uk/, also contains a short, not altogether satisfactory section of selected critical and biographical writings on Hobsbawm's life and work, see section 'Appraising Hobsbawm,' https://www.hobsbawm.shca.ed.ac.uk/category/appraising-hobsbawm.

[3] ERIC HOBSBAWM, *Interesting Times: A Twentieth-Century Life* (London: Allen Lane, 2002), xiv.

[4] RICHARD J. EVANS, *Eric Hobsbawm: A Live in History* (London: Little, Brown, 2019), electronic ed., 8, 439.

[5] ANNA MARIA RAO, 'Transizioni: Hobsbawm nella modernistica italiana,' *Studi Storici* 54, no. 4 (2013): 761–90; ANNA DI QUAL, *Eric J. Hobsbawm tra marxismo britannico e comunismo italiano* (Venice: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 2020).

Cromohs (Cyber Review of Modern Historiography), ISSN 1123-7023, 24/2021

DOI: 10.36253/cromohs-12814

the ground-breaking and long-lasting impact he made on an astonishing variety of disciplinary fields, international research trends and scholarly as well as ideological controversies.

Hobsbawm was a protagonist in the renewal of British labour history after 1945.[6] He sparked the debates on the general crisis of the seventeenth century and the effects of the first industrial revolution upon the standard of living of the English people.[7] He pioneered the study of the 'pre-political' forms of action, thinking and mobilization of the subaltern classes and the social history of jazz.[8] He composed a now classical fourth-volume history of the 'long nineteenth' and 'short twentieth' centuries.[9] He explored previously neglected aspects of the history of Marxism.[10] He launched or contributed to launch the ongoing vogues of the 'invention of tradition' and 'nations and nationalism' studies[11]. He was involved in the acrimonious post-Cold War disputes about the meaning of the Soviet and Communist experience and the state of the world after its collapse.[12]

But what I would like to emphasise today is that, even beyond all the achievements I've just listed, Hobsbawm played a central and in some respect unique role in the general development of professional historiography during the second half of the twentieth century. Through the paradigmatic example given with his empirical researches and the hypotheses advanced in his more generalising essays, his frequent interventions in methodological discussions,[13] his leading involvement in the workings of the key institutions of the discipline (scientific journals, societies and conferences, university teaching, publishing initiatives etc.), Hobsbawm established himself, in the decades after World War II, as one of the chief followers and promoters of the 'historiographical revolution' started in the interwar period by the *Annales* and their British counterparts and allies grouped around the *Economic History Review* and the

6 ERIC HOBSBAWM, *Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964).
7 ERIC HOBSBAWM, 'The General Crisis of the European Economy in the Seventeenth Century,' *Past and Present* 5, no. 1 (1954): 33–53; HOBSBAWM, 'The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century – II,' *Past and Present* 6, no. 1 (1954): 44–65; HOBSBAWM, 'The British Standard of Living, 1790–1950,' *The Economic History Review* new series, 10, no. 1 (1957): 46–68.
8 ERIC HOBSBAWM, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959), 2; HOBSBAWM [Francis Newton, pseud.], *The Jazz Scene* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1959); HOBSBAWM and GEORGE RUDÉ, *Captain Swing* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1969); HOBSBAWM, *Bandits* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969).
9 ERIC HOBSBAWM, *The Age of Revolution: Europe 1789–1848* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962); HOBSBAWM, *The Age of Capital, 1848–1875* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975); HOBSBAWM, *The Age of Empire, 1875–1914* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987); HOBSBAWM, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991* (London: Michael Joseph, 1994).
10 ERIC HOBSBAWM, *How to Change the World: Marx and Marxism, 1840–2011* (London: Little, Brown, 2011).
11 ERIC HOBSBAWM and TERENCE RANGER, eds, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); HOBSBAWM, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
12 HOBSBAWM, *The Age of Extremes*; HOBSBAWM, *Intervista sul nuovo secolo*, with Antonio Polito (Bari, Laterza, 1999); HOBSBAWM, *Globalisation, Democracy and Terrorism* (London: Little, Brown, 2007).
13 ERIC HOBSBAWM, *On History* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1997).

London School of Economics and Political Science (among whom Michael Postan, Hobsbawn's much-admired academic mentor at Cambridge in the second half of the 1930s).[14]

The economic and social historians operating on the northern side of the English Channel after the Great War had aimed to emancipate history from its traditional identification with the 'past politics.' They proposed to transform its study in an *histoire intégrale* engaged in a cross-fertilization with the social sciences and open to the contribution of Marxism, provided that Marxism was employed as a canon of historical interpretation rather than an empirically unfalsifiable and ideologically motivated general theory of society enslaved to party interests.[15]

Hobsbawm took part in the process of thematic, conceptual and methodological reorientation advocated by his senior colleagues as an exponent of a new generation of middle and lower middle class Marxist professional intellectuals who had converted to revolutionary Communism in the Red Decade in response to the Great Depression, the rise of Hitler to power and what they were disposed to regard as the success of Stalin's Soviet Union in giving birth to a 'new civilization' and in providing a bulwark against the rising tide of fascist barbarism.[16]

Recent research in the newly born field of the transnational and transcultural 'history of history' suggests that this peculiar 'Marxism of intellectuals,' as Hobsbawm himself termed it, contributed very significantly to the globalization of contemporary historiographical trends. In several extra-European countries the very beginnings of a modern tradition of scientific historiography sometimes coincided with the reception and adaptation of a variety of Marxist models.[17] In Western Europe, and especially in Britain, the Marxist professional historians belonging to Hobsbawm's generation cooperated to the enlargement of disciplinary horizons envisaged by the *Annales* School under an umbrella paradigm capable of gathering together a much wider range of scientific approaches and ethical and political stands (from the New Left to Hugh Trevor-Roper's moderate conservatism).[18]

---

[14] EVANS, *Eric Hobsbawm*, 99–102; PETER BURKE, *The French Historical Revolution: The* Annales *School, 1929–89* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).

[15] TEODORO TAGLIAFERRI, *La nuova storiografia britannica e lo sviluppo del welfarismo: Ricerche su R. H. Tawney* (Naples: Liguori, 2000), 251–309.

[16] BEATRICE WEBB and SIDNEY WEBB, *Soviet Communism: A New Civilization?*, 2 vols (London: Longmans, 1935); TEODORO TAGLIAFERRI, *'Storia scientifica' e reinterpretazione della Guerra Civile inglese nella prima produzione di Christopher Hill (1938–1957)* (Dissertation in History of Historiography, University of Naples Federico II, a.y. 1992–93), 82–187, 238–258.

[17] ERIC HOBSBAWM, 'Gli intellettuali e l'antifascismo,' in *Storia del marxismo*, 4 vols (Turin: Einaudi, 1978–82), III - *Il marxismo nell'età della Terza Internazionale*, tome II, *Dalla crisi del '29 al XX Congresso*, 443–92, see 475; DANIEL R. WOLF, *A Global History of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); DANIEL R. WOLF, ed., *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, 5 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011–12), V - *Historical Writing since 1945*, eds AXEL SCHNEIDER and DANIEL R. WOOLF, *passim*.

[18] CRISTOPHER HILL, RODNEY H. HILTON, and ERIC HOBSBAWM, '*Past and Present*: Origins and Early Years,' *Past and Present* 100 (1983): 3–14; HUGH R. TREVOR-ROPER, 'Fernand Braudel, the *Annales*, and the Mediterranean,' *The Journal of Modern History* 44, no. 4 (1972): 468–79.

As rightly underlined by Professor Evans in the conclusion of his book, Hobsbawm's individual 'contribution to the rise of the so called […] societal history cannot be divorced' from a series of 'collective' experiences he shared with various networks of 'colleagues, comrades and friends.'[19] The first decade of his career coincided in particular with his membership to the Historians' Group of the Communist Party of Great Britain.[20] The Group disintegrated after the vast majority of them (not including Hobsbawm and other key-figures like the older Maurice Dobb and Arthur Leslie Morton)[21] left the Party in 1956. But their collaboration survived the disruption of the Group thanks, above all, to the broader forum provided by *Past and Present*, the *Journal of Scientific History* that some members of the Group had conceived and launched in 1952 as the meeting ground for a sort of 'popular front of historians' uniting Marxist and non-Marxist scholars.[22]

Both before and after 1956, then, in loose alliance with other schools of innovators, Hobsbawm and the British Marxist historians were at the forefront of the efforts to bring into the purview of the discipline those aspects of the economic, social, political and cultural past, and those actors of historical change, which their predecessors had, in their opinion, unduly neglected. The Marxist historians devoted much energies to device both the categories and the technical tools which were necessary to make these innovations feasible in terms of their conformity to the empirical and evidential rules of professional historiography. What characterised as more specifically Marxist or Marxist-inspired Hobsbawm's and his comrades' (or former comrades') participation in the historiographical revolution of the twentieth century was, above all, their determination to overturn the conventional elitist bias of academic historiography, by 'returning agency' to the popular masses and by reinstating the people's struggles at the very centre of historical change. At the same time, they put a strong emphasis on the interconnectedness and mutual interaction between the class conflicts, the political dynamics and upheavals, the cultural, religious and intellectual movements related to the historical protagonism of the common people.[23]

Furthermore, and this is especially evident in the case of Hobsbawm, whose homonymous *Past and Present* articles started the still ongoing and expanding General

[19] EVANS, *Eric Hobsbawm*, 470, quoting and subscribing to Hobsbawm's self-assessment in 2008. See ERIC HOBSBAWM, 'Geschichtswissenschaft: Impulse für Menschen, nicht nur Fußnoten,' in GERHARD BOTZ, HUBERT CHRISTIAN EHALT, ERIC HOBSBAWM, JÜRGEN KOCKA, ERNST WANGERMANN, *Geschichte: Möglichkeit für Erkenntnis und Gestaltung der Welt: Zu Leben und Werk von Eric J. Hobsbawm*, Vorträge im Wiener Rathaus anlässlich der Verleihung der Ehrenbürgerschaft der Stadt Wien an Eric J. Hobsbawm am 22 Januar 2008 (Wien: Picus Verlag, 2008), 69–78.

[20] ERIC HOBSBAWM, 'The Historians' Group of the Communist Party,' in *Rebels and Their Causes: Essays in Honour of A. L. Morton*, ed. MAURICE CORNFORTH (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1978), 21–48.

[21] The authors of two foundational texts of the Group – ARTHUR L. MORTON's *A People History of England* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1938), and MAURICE DOBB's *Studies in the Development of Capitalism* (London: Routledge, 1946).

[22] JAMES OBELKEVICH, '*Past and Present*: Marxisme et histoire en Grande-Bretagne depuis la guerre,' *Le débat* 17, décembre 1981: 89–111, see 91.

[23] HARVEY J. KAYE, *The British Marxist Historians: An Introductory Analysis* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984); CHRISTOPHER A. BAYLY, 'Ashin Das Gupta,' *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 43, no. 1 (2000): 14–17, see 16.

Crisis debate,[24] Marxism was a major source of inspiration and encouragement to macro-historical generalization in a period of increasing specialization, providing a key-component to the background of the post-Cold War revival of world history.[25] This last circumstance risks being obscured by the predominant 'Eurocentrism' of Hobsbawm's approach to global history rightly underlined by Professor Evans.[26] It is therefore not out of place to observe that, when we read Christopher Bayly's first venture in the field of global history, his book on the rise of the Second British Empire, which was written in the second half of the 1980s, we come across the notion of a 'general crisis' that upset the entire chain of great Islamic empires extending from the Maghreb to Indonesia, and prepared the ground for the advent of European domination in India and elsewhere. What Bayly was overtly attempting to do here was to transpose and adapt to a hemispherical scale a thesis that had been tested on a pan-European scale for more than three decades in the discussions about the transition from feudalism to capitalism in order to highlight a parallel and analogous dynamics of change in the early modern societies of the Eurasian Orient. One of the reasons which can explain the world-wide resonance of the work of Hobsbawm and the Anglo-Marxist professional historians is that they elaborated conceptual tools which proved particularly well-suited, at least at an initial stage, to the needs of those of their colleagues who were beginning to try to 'return agency' to non-European actors too.[27]

A further important peculiarity of Hobsbawm's involvement in the historiographical revolution appears more directly linked to the passionate ethical and political commitment which ultimately was at the root of all his other methodological options. I'm alluding to his sensitiveness to the need of communicating specialised historical knowledge beyond the borders of the scientific community and exploring ways of presenting the past that could actually reach a much wider public of 'lay' or 'general readers.'[28]

---

[24] GEOFFREY PARKER and LESLEY M. SMITH, eds, *The General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2005); GEOFFREY PARKER, *Global Crisis: War, Climate Change and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century*, abridged and revised ed. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017).

[25] JÜRGEN OSTERHAMMEL, 'World History', in *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, V - *Historical Writing since 1945*, eds SCHNEIDER and WOOLF, 93–112.

[26] EVANS, *Eric Hobsbawm*, 345. It is important to observe, however, that in his last years Hobsbawm sympathised with Christopher Bayly's attempt to overcome the Eurocentrism of the classical Marxist approach to world history by giving prominence to the 'interactive' character of the global modernization. See Hobsbawm's noteworthy 'Préface' to CHRISTOPHER A. BAYLY, *La naissance du monde moderne (1780–1914)* (Paris: Les Éditions de L'Atelier, 2006), 9–14, see 13–14, and TEODORO TAGLIAFERRI, 'Bayly's Imperial Way to World History,' in *From the History of the Empire to World History: The Historiographical Itinerary of Christopher A. Bayly*, eds MAURIZIO GRIFFO and TEODORO TAGLIAFERRI (Naples: FedOA Press, 2019), 69–114, see 81, 88, 89.

[27] CHRISTOPHER A. BAYLY, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780–1830* (London: Longman, 1989), 24, 61. For further examples of Bayly's tendency to adopt Marxist or Marxistisant categories and terms at this stage in his research itinerary, see TEODORO TAGLIAFERRI, 'Christopher Bayly e "the return of universal history,"' in TAGLIAFERRI, *La persistenza della storia universale. Studi sulla professione di storico* (Rome: Bordeaux, 2017), 13–72, see 53, note 96.

[28] EVANS, *Eric Hobsbawm*, 293, 342; HUGH R. TREVOR-ROPER, *History: Professional and Lay*, An Inaugural Lecture delivered before the University of Oxford on 12 November 1957(Oxford: Clarendon Press,

For Hobsbawm and the British Marxist professional historians, the education of the people, the 'real maker' of history,[29] to a form of active, militant, non-subaltern citizenship, was part and parcel, indeed the very purpose of scientific historiography. In striving for a *nouvelle histoire* dressed in the left-wing garb of a people's history, they imagined to reconciliate a refashioned academic professionalism with their previous existential decision to live the life of the Marxist intellectual longing for the unity of theory and praxis. The resulting tension between the sincere adherence to the professional code and the introjected imperatives of ideology constitutes a *Leitmotiv* in Hobsbawm's biography, as exactly diagnosed by Professor Evans: 'Throughout his career as an historian, Eric was pulled one way by his Communist and, more broadly, his Marxist commitment, and another by his respect for the facts, the documentary records and the findings and arguments of other historians whose work he acknowledged and respected.'[30]

In 1978 Hobsbawm himself testified that at no time the readiness of the members of the Historians' Group to spontaneously adopt the stern attitude of Bolshevik 'cadres' was more apparent than in the course of the debates they held, at the beginning of the Cold War, about the social meaning of the English Revolution of the seventeenth century. The British Communist Party, in an attempt to legitimise its opposition to the Labour Government which was implementing the Welfare State, decided to celebrate as a major political event the tercentenary of the abolition of the 'feudal-absolutist' monarchy in 1649, which the Group, in an official statement published in the party press, duly interpreted as the highpoint of the necessarily revolutionary leap forward of English society to capitalism.[31]

The risk of succumbing to what a ferocious critic, Hugh Trevor-Roper, branded, not altogether unfairly, as a 'Procustean' handling of historical evidence, which contradicted the norms of their *métier* and stiffened their historical materialism into an *a priori* dogma, was obviously much higher when the Communist professional historians were engaged in the self-imposed task of creating a body of Marxist works specifically 'written for the people.' This short-lived experiment in "'popular" historical writing' aimed at countervailing the sedating influence of the history that the people learned at school and at emphasising the presence, continuity and centrality in English national history of a 'non-gradualist tradition' to which the Communists would have been the most faithful heirs.[32]

1957). Hobsbawm figures prominently in PETER J. BECK's *Presenting History: Past and Present* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 69–90, as a case study illustrative of the Marxist 'presenter of the past.'

[29] CHRISTOPHER HILL, 'Marxism and History,' *The Modern Quarterly*, new series 3 (1948): 52–64, see 59.

[30] EVANS, *Eric Hobsbawm*, 389.

[31] The sixteenth–seventeenth Century Section of the Historians' Group of the C. P. G. B., 'State and Revolution in Tudor and Stuart England,' *Communist Review* July 1948: 207–14; HOBSBAWM, *The Historians' Group*, 30–31. See DAVID PARKER, ed., *Ideology, Absolutism and the English Revolution: Debates of the British Communist Historians, 1940–1956* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2008).

[32] HUGH R. TREVOR-ROPER, 'Marxism and the Study of History,' *Problems of Communism* 5, no. 5 (1956): 36–42, see 40–41; ALLAN L. MERSON, *The Writing of Marxist History*,' *Communist Review* July 1949: 592–597, see 593, 596; HOBSBAWM, *The Historians' Group*, 43 (quoting Christopher Hill).

This particular kind of historiographical literature is well exemplified by Christopher Hill's famous 1940 essay on *The English Revolution*, which was reissued in second edition in 1949, or by *The Good Old Cause*, a collection of documents, also published in the year of the tercentenary, in which Hill selectively used and commented extracts from contemporary sources to buttress his thesis that the Civil War had been the English 'bourgeois revolution,' providing an easy target for polemical attacks by academic reviewers.[33]

Hobsbawm was fully involved in the most ambitious and ultimately unsuccessful collective attempt realised by the Group to give birth to a historiography that could be at once scientific and 'popular.' *The Good Old Cause* was part of a series of sourcebooks published under the title 'History in the Making' and the general editorship of Dona Torr (one of the most influential member of the Group). In 1948 Hobsbawm contributed to the Series the short volume relating to the founding of the modern British labour movement in the last two decades of the nineteenth century.[34]

This relatively minor episode goes strangely unmentioned in Professor Evans' book.[35] But its significance, in my view, lies in the fact that, according to Hobsbawm's own later testimony, the relative fiasco of the 'History in the Making Series' and some other similar editorial ventures made the Marxist professional historians fully aware of the absence of the very first condition for the take-off of their historiographical project, namely a sympathetic readership recruited among the ranks of politicised trade-unionists and the Workers' Educational Association, owing to the 'declining radicalism of the British people after 1950.'[36]

From the beginning of the following decade, the Anglo-Marxist academic historians devoted therefore a growing portion of their energies to disseminate their views within the ranks of their professional community. Their most important common initiative was the foundation of *Past and Present* in 1952. The experience of this review reveals that, under the latitudinarian definition of the historian's task outlined by Hobsbawm and his colleagues in the introduction to its first issue, the tension between professionalism and Marxist commitment could well result in the refashioning of Marxism into a heuristic model of increasing sophistication and its integration into an enlarged paradigm shared by the Marxists with other currents

[33] CHRISTOPHER HILL, 'The English Revolution,' in *The English Revolution, 1640: Three Essays*, ed. HILL (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1940), 9–82; CHRISTOPHER HILL and EDMUND DELL, eds, *The Good Old Cause: The English Revolution of 1640–60: Its Causes, Course and Consequences*, Extracts from contemporary sources (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1949), 30.
[34] ERIC HOBSBAWM, ed., *Labour's Turning Point, 1880–1900*, Extracts from contemporary sources (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1948).
[35] Professor EVANS had briefly referred to *Labour's Turning Point, 1880–1900*, in his 'Eric John Ernest Hobsbawm, 1917–2012,' *Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the British Academy* 14 (2015): 207–60, see 217.
[36] HOBSBAWM, *The Historians' Group*, 29; JOHN SAVILLE, *The Labour Movement in Britain: A Commentary* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), 115.

aiming at historiographical renovation which were autonomously attempting to absorb, in a more eclectic way, selected components of the Marxist theory.[37]

What remained unfulfilled, throughout the 1950s, was the persisting ambition of the British Marxist Historians to address and educate a broader non-specialist readership. This only began to become feasible in the next decade, as masterly reconstructed by Professor Evans in the substantial part of his volume justly dedicated to Hobsbawm's activities and triumphs as 'paperback writer.' The expansion of the secondary and university education, coupled with the fresh waves of radicalisation of the 1960s-1970s, generated a sizeable audience of scholars, students, general readers for an altogether new kind of popular historiography which acted at the same time as a powerful medium for the *haute vulgarisation* of the historiographical revolution at international level too. Hobsbawm was a key-protagonist in the invention of the multi-layered language which was necessary to address such a diverse constituency, so that his books stand out as essential documents for the study of the changes that have been affecting the global historical culture of our age.[38]

Here I come to a last, in my view the most unique aspect of Hobsbawm's contribution to the general reorientation of contemporary historiography, namely his work and achievements in the specific field of world history.[39] In 2005 The Folio Society of London has republished Hobsbawm's tetralogy (*The Age of Revolution*, *The Age of Capital*, *The Age of Empire*, *The Age of Extremes*) under the unifying title *The Making of the Modern World* in its collection of fiction and nonfiction 'classics.'[40] Only time will show if Hobsbawm will obtain or retain that status of a 'classic,' to be counted among the fifty or hundred 'key thinkers' on history 'von Homer bis Hobsbawm,' to which he has been often elevated even before his death in 2012.[41] In the meanwhile, we are on solid ground, I believe, in regarding Hobsbawm's four volumes as comparable to the most significant and representative specimens of a particular category of 'great historical enterprises.'[42]

Seen from a longer-term perspective, Hobsbawm's history of the modern world stands in fact at the confluence between two major trends in intellectual history – the twentieth century historiographical revolution and an older, thin line of authors running throughout contemporary historiography from Ranke onwards, of which Hobsbawm could be considered perhaps the last heir. What all these

---

37 TEODORO TAGLIAFERRI, '"Diventare storici anche del tempo presente": la crisi del 1956 e la storiografia marxista britannica,' *Studi Storici* 47, no. 1 (2006): 143–83, see 146–57.

38 EVANS, *Eric Hobsbawm*, 287–40. Some reviewers have taken exception to the detailedness of this aspect of his book but, from the standpoint of the history of historiography at least, one is compelled to disagree with them.

39 HARVEY J. KAYE, 'Eric Hobsbawm on Workers, Peasants and World History,' in KAYE, *The British Marxist Historians*, 131–66.

40 ERIC HOBSBAWM, *The Making of the Modern World* (London: The Folio Society, 2005).

41 MARNIE HUGHES-WARRINGTON, *Fifty Key Thinkers in History*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2007), 178–88; WERNER BERTHOLD and MARIO KESSLER, *Klios Jünger: Hundert Historiker-Porträts von Homer bis Hobsbawm* (Leipzig: Akademische Verlagsanstalt, 2011).

42 DAVID KNOWLES, *Great Historical Enterprises* (London: Nelson, 1962).

scholars have in common, whatever their obvious differences, is the firm belief that the ultimate goals of the historical profession should be, first, the explanation of the development of humanity as a whole, second, the production of synthetic and intelligible overviews of the human past which would transform this knowledge into the possession of mankind at large.[43]

In Hobsbawm's case, this interpretation of the professional historian's task was intimately connected (as we are now in the position to better understand thanks to the biographical materials put at our disposal by the work of Professor Evans) with his precocious, adolescent's choice to become a 'Marxist intellectual' searching for personal salvation in the community life of the global missionary 'Church' directed from Moscow.[44]

What the young Hobsbawm absorbed from his way of experiencing Marxism was, first of all, a set of meta-empirical and mythistorical assumptions which never ceased to pervade and shape his approach to the past. The most fundamental one was an ontological notion of the unity of human history – the idea, I mean, according to which history was a single secular process of self-realization of man in time whose essential content was '*progress*,' understood in the sense of an objectively given possibility to advance towards the goal depending, in the last resort, on human conscious efforts.[45]

From the pages of Hobsbawm's diary we discover that, during his school years in London, well before undertaking a historian's career, Hobsbawm developed the habit of organising his historical knowledge by combining together every bit of relevant information he came across into the comprehensive framework of what he continued to compare for a time to an edifice of 'bricks' – 'the house of my idea of history,' as he noted in 1940. 'While I read and listen,' he had written in 1935, referring to the conventional teaching of history at school,

> I put what is useful into my mental apparatus. Gradually I see […] how a picture of history is crystallizing out of it all. At the moment I just see individual contours – in some instances cornerstones, in other just simple rows and groups of bricks. The longer I study, the more I hope to enlarge my picture. Of course, you never put it together completely, but perhaps one day I'll have all the cornerstones there. *Thanks to the dialectic, I'm on the right way*.

But this holistic perception of the subject-matter of history (in which the whole, the vision of the overall plan of the house, intuitively and logically preceded the parts, the single factual bricks) was only one aspect of Hobsbawm's more general positivist-romantic attitude to reality. To be a Marxist meant in fact, for the seventeen years old Eric, to possess a wonderfully 'all-embracing,' cosmic

[43] TEODORO TAGLIAFERRI, *Dimensioni della storiografia contemporanea*, I - *Nel Secolo della Storia* (Naples: Giannini, 2013), 151–53.
[44] EVANS, *Eric Hobsbawm*, 64, 205.
[45] ERIC HOBSBAWM, 'Introduction,' in KARL MARX, *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1964), 9–65, see 12.

'*Weltanschauung*.'[46] Still sixty years later, in a 1995 interview, Hobsbawm dwelt on the enduring traces left upon him by his original approach to Marxism. Having been asked to explain why he had recently described himself as a 'paleo-Marxist,' Hobsbawm remembered how he had grown up as a Marxist in a tradition, leading from Engels to the Soviet Marxism of the Thirties, which believed that Marxism could be an interpretation of the entire universe, not simply of politics or human society. And he added that he had never found easy to escape from this combination of historical and dialectical materialism in subsequent decades.[47]

To be sure, in an article written for *Rinascita* in 1987, Hobsbawm recognised his debt towards Antonio Gramsci as the author who had helped the Marxists of his generation to free themselves from the interpretation of Marxism 'as a variant of determinist positivism' codified in the notorious chapter fourth of the Stalinist *Short Course of History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (1938).[48] Indeed, what clearly emerges from his papers is that Hobsbawm's juvenile enthusiasm for the Soviet Russian *DIAMAT* and the impersonal forces making for the socialist Last Judgment was inflected from the start by a belief and admiration in the creative powers of man. This humanist faith, on the other part, tended to focus on the heroic deeds of a minority of global revolutionaries and was tempered by a certain distrust in the ability of the mass of mankind as a whole (its 95 per cent, Hobsbawm wrote in 1934!) to rise above the level of the 'average human being' only by their own forces, in an admixture of stentorian determinism and elitist voluntarism which was after all typical, in different combinations, of the Marxism of the Third International.[49]

But these are only few examples of the multitude of hints scattered in the book, in particular in its first half. I've dwelt a little on the seemingly more abstract facets of Hobsbawm's biography because I wanted to draw attention to the profound relevance of Professor Evans' work to the history of ideas too. Lewis Namier once wrote that, underlying the ideas, there is a music of the emotions 'to which the ideas are a mere libretto, often of very inferior quality.'[50] I don't share in any way Namier's disparagement of ideas. But there is some truth in the first, more constructive part of his maxim. The very rare merit of Professor Evans' work, due in part to the extraordinary richness and literary quality of its sources, in part to the mastery with which the biographer managed to make the most of Hobsbawm's unpublished papers, is that his book provides invaluable insights into the emotional roots of the thoughts of a great historian, allowing the reader to understand his

[46] EVANS, *Eric Hobsbawm*, 49 (my italics), 56, 144.
[47] MICHAEL HANAGAN, LISE GRANDE, NASSER MOHAJER, and BEHROOZ MOAZAMI, 'History in the "Age of Extremes": A Conversation with Eric Hobsbawm (1995),' *International Labor and Working-Class History* 83 (2013): 14–30, see 19–20.
[48] ERIC HOBSBAWM, 'Per capire le classi subalterne,' *Rinascita*, February 28, 1987: 23.
[49] EVANS, *Eric Hobsbawm*, 50, 51.
[50] LEWIS B. NAMIER, 'Human Nature in Politics,' in NAMIER, *Personalities and Powers* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1955), 1–7, see 4.

ideas – so to say – from the inside out. It remains to be hoped that the music emanating from so many pages of Professor Evans' book will not go lost in a prospective Italian translation that we must look forward to see very soon on the shelves of our country's libraries and bookshops.

Research in Progress

Transforming the East: A New Research Project in Australia

FRANCESCO BORGHESI,[1] YIXU LÜ,[1] DANIEL CANARIS,[2] AND THIERRY MEYNARD[3]
[1]University of Sydney, [2]Nanjing University, [3]Sun Yat-sen University

Introduction to the project

The rising influence of China and Chinese culture over the last three decades has provided a stimulus to scholars to look to the beginnings of Sino-Western exchange in the early modern period. The primary protagonists of Europe's first intellectual encounters with Ming and early Qing China were Jesuit missionaries, who above all sought to convert China to Catholicism by accommodating the cultural and intellectual traditions of Confucianism to Christianity. Their accommodation rested upon a secularised interpretation of Confucianism as a political and ethical philosophy that was devoid of superstition.

Yet in their attempt to transform China, Europe itself was transformed: the Jesuits' idealisation of the Chinese state as the perfect realisation of Confucian virtue influenced the development of Enlightenment political theory and made a significant contribution to the emergence of Enlightenment values such as secularism and religious tolerance.

Europe first came into contact with Confucian classical texts through Jesuit translations. The Jesuits initially translated these texts to provide language primers for their missionary activities in China, but their translations served as the main vehicle for Enlightenment thinkers to form their own image of China.

In their translations, the Jesuits promoted a secularised interpretation of Confucianism as a political and ethical philosophy for the purpose of legitimising their toleration of Confucian rituals among Chinese converts. In this interpretation such rituals would be seen as purely civil rites. Enlightenment philosophers seized upon the secularity of Confucianism as evidence of the superfluity of religion in statecraft. Thus, the Jesuit translations of Confucian classics played a key role in the emergence of Enlightenment secularism.[1]

A project titled 'Transforming the East: Jesuit Translations of the Confucian Classics' is currently tackling these issues with funding from the Australian Research

[1] See PAUL A. RULE, 'The Religious Other as Perceived by the Chinese and by Early Western Missionaries,' in *Through Your Eyes: Religious Alterity and the Early Modern Western Imagination*, eds Giovanni Tarantino and Paola Wyss-Giacosa (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2021), 145–68, whose argument takes into account the Chinese perspective.

Cromohs (Cyber Review of Modern Historiography), ISSN 1123-7023, 24/2021

DOI: 10.36253/cromohs-13573

Council Discovery Project scheme.[2] This project aims at evaluating Europe's first encounter with Chinese thought through the Jesuit translations of the Confucian canon from the sixteenth- to the eighteenth-century. An interdisciplinary team of experts from the University of Sydney, Sun Yat-sen University and Nanjing University will work together to provide a comprehensive history of the dissemination of these translations in Europe. In carrying out this collective task, it also seeks to make primary and secondary sources in languages other than English accessible to anglophone scholars through critical editions based on each team member's individual skills and through a collaborative digital platform. In doing so, the project contributes mainly to two fields of study: the history of Sino-European intellectual encounters and the philological analysis of Jesuit translations.

Why this project?

Understanding China has always been a challenge. It has become more so at a time when China's rise is ever present in the balance sheets of economic experts and political strategists. The rising influence and importance of China and Chinese culture over the last three decades has provided a stimulus to scholars to look to the beginnings of European encounters with Chinese thought. It is commonly accepted that the Jesuits' idealising of the Chinese state as the perfect realisation of Confucian virtue influenced the development of Enlightenment political theory and that it made a significant contribution to the emergence of Enlightenment values such as secularism and religious tolerance, values that are now considered under threat in Western democracies.[3] However, despite the rapidly expanding scholarship on this entangled history, the study of the role played by China in the Enlightenment remains by and large separated from the philological study of Jesuit translations.

Research on the Jesuit China mission is still dominated by mission history and the Chinese Rites Controversy,[4] while cultural and intellectual historians continue to concentrate on European images of China and the apparent shift from 'Sinophilia' to 'Sinophobia'.[5] The 'slump of the Chinese stock' in European intellectual history, first

[2] ARC DP210100458: https://dataportal.arc.gov.au/NCGP/Web/Grant/Grant/DP210100458.

[3] DAVID E. MUNGELLO, *Curious Land: Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1989); JOHN GASCOIGNE, *The Enlightenment and the Origins of European Australia* (Cambridge-New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); JONATHAN ISRAEL, 'Admiration of China and Classical Chinese Thought in the Radical Enlightenment (1685-1740),' *Taiwan Journal of East Asian Studies* 4, no. 1 (2007): 1–25; WENCHAO LI, 'Confucius and the Early Enlightenment in Germany from Leibniz to Bilfinger,' in *The Globalization of Confucius and Confucianism*, eds Klaus Mühlhahn and Nathalie van Looy (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2012), 9–21; BETTINA BRANDT and DANIEL LEONHARD PURDY, eds, *China in the German Enlightenment* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016); SIMON KOW, *China in Early Enlightenment Political Thought* (London: Routledge, 2017).

[4] DAVID E. MUNGELLO, ed., *The Chinese Rites Controversy: Its History and Meaning* (Nettetal: Steyler Verlag, 1994); LIAM MATTHEW BROCKEY, *Journey to the East: The Jesuit Mission to China, 1579-1724* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); INES G. ŽUPANOV and PIERRE ANTOINE FABRE, eds, *The Rites Controversies in the Early Modern World* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

[5] COLIN MACKERRAS, *Sinophiles and Sinophobes: Western Views of China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); ISRAEL, 'Admiration of China and Classical Chinese Thought in the Radical Enlightenment (1685-1740)'; CHUNJIE ZHANG, 'From Sinophilia to Sinophobia: China, History, and Recognition,' *Colloquia Germanica* 41, no. 2 (2008): 97–110.

succinctly summarised by Dawson,[6] continues to be a major focus of scholarship in this area.[7] However, thinking in such binary opposites obscures the complex interactions between Chinese civilization and European thinkers. The latter often assimilated positive views on the Chinese state held by the Jesuits into their political philosophies, while maintaining an unflattering assessment of other aspects of Chinese culture.

In order to better understand the intellectual encounters between Enlightenment and Chinese thought, the study of the philosophical climate in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe must be combined with the philological study of Jesuit translations of the Chinese classics. Europe's transition to modernity can be accurately understood and assessed only by laying bare the ways in which the Jesuits changed and transformed Chinese thought in their translations to make them fit into European discourse, and by examining how such translations were disseminated.

The main challenge to such an endeavour lies in the need for a collaboration that unites specialised linguistic and cultural knowledge across a number of disciplines. Scholarship on the Jesuit translations, and on China in early modern Europe more generally, has tended to cluster around particular national contexts,[8] despite the fact that the Jesuit translations of the Chinese classics usually involved missionaries from highly diverse national backgrounds. Moreover, anglophone authors often ignore significant contributions in other languages, such as Chinese, French, German and Italian, because few scholars have the philological competence to engage directly with both the Jesuit translations and the secondary material in these other languages. Most conspicuously, very few Jesuit translations have appeared in English language editions that can be relied upon by anglophone scholars. Hence it is unsurprising that scholarship on the influence of the Jesuits' sinological activities tends to focus on the contribution of the Jesuits' portrait of China to the emergence of *chinoiserie* and orientalism, while skirting the philological background of the philosophical exchange.[9]

---

[6] RAYMOND DAWSON, *The Chinese Chameleon: An Analysis of European Conceptions of Chinese Civilisation*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967).

[7] DAVID ALLEN HARVEY, *The French Enlightenment and Its Others: The Mandarin, the Savage, and the Invention of the Human Sciences* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); JOANNE MIYANG CHO and DAVID M. CROWE, eds, *Germany and China: Transnational Encounters since the Eighteenth Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); BRANDT and PURDY, eds, *China in the German Enlightenment*; SIMON KOW, 'Enlightenment Universalism? Bayle and Montesquieu on China,' *European Legacy: Toward New Paradigms* 19, no. 3 (2014): 347–58; Kow, *China in Early Enlightenment Political Thought*; Daniel Leonhard Purdy, *Chinese Sympathies: Media, Missionaries, and World Literature from Marco Polo to Goethe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021).

[8] See, for instance: BRANDT and PURDY, eds, *China in the German Enlightenment*; HUIYI WU, *Traduire la Chine au XVIIIe siècle: les jésuites traducteurs de textes et le renouvellement des connaissances européennes sur la Chine* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2017); PURDY, *Chinese Sympathies*.

[9] NICHOLAS DEW, *Orientalism in Louis XIV's France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); URS APP, *The Birth of Orientalism* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); URS APP, *The Cult of Emptiness: The Western Discovery of Buddhist Thought and the Invention of Oriental Philosophy* (Rorschach and Kyoto: UniversityMedia, 2012); CHRISTOPHER M. S. JOHNS, *China and the Church: Chinoiserie in Global Context* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016).

This project aims to re-orient scholarship on Enlightenment discourse about Chinese thought with a renewed focus on its foundations, namely the Jesuits' translations of the Confucian corpus and their dissemination in the Enlightenment. Until now, while the studies by Sergio Zoli on China's presence in Italian culture between the sixteenth- and the eighteenth-century[10] have provided a synthetic approach to the Italian case, the most comprehensive overview of the Jesuit translations is David Mungello's *Curious Land*.[11] Mungello's work was ground-breaking in the sense that it was the first to stress the decisive role of the Jesuits in the development of Sinology in Europe. Yet Mungello focused on the Jesuits' initial translations, ignoring the vulgarised editions through which the Jesuit translations had their greatest impact on Enlightenment intellectual culture.[12] Moreover, since the book's publication, many additional sources have been uncovered[13] and more studies of Jesuit translations have been published in other languages.[14] Nevertheless, anglophone scholars still have to refer to Mungello's history as their main reference. The lack of a comprehensive and up-to-date history of Jesuit translations has greatly limited our understanding of the role played by China in the European Enlightenment.

Philological research on the Jesuit translations is currently at a cross-roads. Thierry Meynard's pioneering work[15] has laid the groundwork for a significant re-evaluation of the *Confucius sinarum philosophus* (1687), which featured the first full translation of three of the *Four Books* (四書)and a sophisticated neo-Scholastic reading of Confucian thought. However, the first complete and printed translation of all *Four Books* by the Flemish missionary François Noël, the *Sinensis imperii libri classici sex* (*Six Classic Books of the Chinese Empire)*, was not published until 1711. Noël's work served not only as a principal source for Jean-Baptiste Du Halde's portrait of Chinese philosophy in his *Description de l'empire de la Chine* (1735), an enormously influential work

[10] SERGIO ZOLI, *La Cina e la cultura italiana dal '500 al '700* (Bologna: Pàtron, 1973); SERGIO ZOLI, *La Cina e l'età dell'Illuminismo in Italia* (Bologna: Pàtron, 1974).
[11] MUNGELLO, *Curious Land.*
[12] DANIEL LEONHARD PURDY, 'China Circulating in Early Modern German Print Media,' *Monatshefte* 108, no. 3 (2016): 361–370.
[13] MICHELE RUGGIERI, *Confucio: La Morale della Cina*, ed. Eugenio Lo Sardo, trans. Isabel Turull (Rome: De Luca Editori d'Arte, 2016); LUISA M. PATERNICÒ, 'Translating the Master: The Contribution of Prospero Intorcetta to the *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*,' *Monumenta Serica* 65, no. 1 (2017): 87–121; MICHELE RUGGIERI, *La filosofía moral de Confucio, por Michele Ruggieri, SJ: La primera traducción de las obras de Confucio al español en 1590*, eds Thierry Meynard and Roberto Villasante (Madrid: Mensajaro-Sal Terrae-Comillas, 2018); MICHELE RUGGIERI, *Il primo Confucio latino: Il grande studio; La dottrina del giusto mezzo; I dialoghi*, ed. Michele Ferrero (Rome: Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 2019).
[14] WENCHAO LI, *Die Christliche China-Mission im 17. Jahrhundert: Verständnis, Unverständnis, Mißverständnis. Eine Geistesgeschichtliche Studie zum Christentum, Buddhismus und Konfuzianismus* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2000); 张西平 (XIPING ZHANG), 儒學西傳歐洲研究導論 (Ruxue xichuan Ouzhou yanjiu daolun) (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2016); 李新德 (XINDE LI), 明清時期西方傳教士中國儒道釋典籍之翻譯與詮釋 (Ming-Qing shiqi Xifang chuanjiaoshi Zhongguo Ru Dao Shi dianji zhi fanyi yu quanshi) (Beijing: Commercial Press, 2015); WU, *Traduire la Chine au XVIIIe siècle.*
[15] THIERRY MEYNARD, *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus (1687): The First Translation of the Confucian Classics* (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 2011); THIERRY MEYNARD, *The Jesuit Reading of Confucius: The First Complete Translation of the Lunyu (1687) published in the West* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2015).

for European intellectual history,[16] but also as one of the principal channels through which Chinese philosophy entered eighteenth-century German thought.[17] In the same year, Noël also published his *Philosophia sinica*,[18] which featured the first systematic analysis of Chinese metaphysics, ritual and ethics using a rich array of Chinese-language sources. Although this latter work was suppressed and had little influence, Noël's attempt to establish a dialogue between Aristotelian scholasticism and neo-Confucianism was innovative and represented a significant departure from his predecessors, who saw neo-Confucianism as a corruption of pre-Qin Confucianism. In recent years, a few scholars have turned their attention to Noël's translations and commentaries,[19] but a comprehensive philological study of Noël's translation of the Confucian canon and an accompanying philosophical commentary are still lacking. The English translation of and a commentary on Noël's *Philosophia sinica* to be undertaken in this project will therefore fill a significant gap in our understanding of how Confucian ideas dialogued with early modern and Enlightenment thought.

Objectives of the project

Drawing on the philological skills and research expertise of four scholars based in Australia and China, this project will provide a comprehensive history and fresh re-evaluation of attempts by Jesuit missionaries to translate the Confucian canon (*Four Books and Five Classics* 四書五經) and make both primary sources and existing scholarship, spread across multiple European languages and Chinese, accessible to anglophone scholars. Its three main objectives are as follows:

1) *To systematically examine the history of Jesuit translations of the Confucian corpus from 1590 to 1773*

The project will provide the first comprehensive overview of the Jesuit translations of the *Four Books* and *Five Classics* and map their dissemination. It will commence with the first known Jesuit translation of the *Four Books* by Michele Ruggieri (1543-1607) and conclude with the suppression of the Society of Jesus in 1773, when the Jesuit translation enterprise effectively ended. These translations will be compared against the original Chinese text to ascertain how the Jesuits' scholastic and Renaissance

16 VIRGILE PINOT, *La Chine et la formation de l'esprit philosophique en France (1640-1740)* (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1932); ISABELLE LANDRY-DERON, *La preuve par la Chine: La «Description» de J.-B. Du Halde, jésuite, 1735* (Paris: Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2002).

17 LI, *Die Christliche China-Mission im 17. Jahrhundert*.

18 FRANÇOIS NOËL, *Philosophia sinica tribus tractatibus, primo cognitionem primi entis, secundo ceremonias erga defunctos, tertio ethicam, juxta Sinarum mentem complectens* (Prague: Typis Universitatis Carolo-Ferdinandeae, 1711).

19 PAUL A. RULE, 'François Noël, S.J., and the Chinese Rites Controversy,' in *The History of the Relations between the Low Countries and China in the Qing Era (1644-1911)*, eds W. F. Vande Walle and Noël Golvers (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003), 137–65; VLADIMÍR LIŠČÁK, 'François Noël (1651-1729) and His Latin Translations of Confucian Classical Books Published in Prague in 1711,' *Anthropologia Integra* 6, no. 2 (2015): 45–52; CLAUDIA VON COLLANI, 'François Noël and His Treatise on God in China,' in *History of the Catholic Church in China: From Its Beginning to the Scheut Fathers and 20th Century* (Leuven: Ferdinand Verbiest Institute, 2015), 23–63; THIERRY MEYNARD, 'François Noël's Contribution to the Western Understanding of Chinese Thought: *Taiji Sive Natura* in the *Philosophia Sinica* (1711),' *Dao* 17 (2018): 219–30.

formation influenced their interpretation of Chinese philosophy. A new history of the Jesuit translations and their dissemination as well as a critical edition and English translation of Noël's sinological writings will give the next generation of scholars access to texts that were hitherto accessible only to specialists and a better informed understanding of the sources through which the Enlightenment thinkers encountered Chinese thought.

2) *To analyse how these Jesuit translations were read by coeval European thinkers and how they influenced the course of European intellectual history*

Combining digital search tools and archival research, this project will map the extent to which these texts were transmitted and read, and examine how European thinkers were shaped by their encounter with Chinese thought. Greater weight will be attached to European thinkers writing from the second half of the seventeenth century onwards, when Jesuits started to publish their translations more widely. While canonical thinkers like Leibniz and Voltaire will necessarily be included in our study, our mapping of the scholarly networks will pay attention to lesser-known thinkers, such as the Italian Paolo Mattia Doria (1667-1746) and the German Georg Bernhard Bilfinger (1693-1750), and formulate a more comprehensive understanding of how these translations were received in the broader scholarly community.

3) *To establish an international collaborative digital platform for research on Sino-European exchange in intellectual history*

As new archival materials are uncovered and digitised, traditional research outputs like monographs and edited volumes can quickly become outdated. In order to keep abreast of the rapid developments in the field, the project is supplementing the jointly authored monograph and critical editions with the first web-based point of reference dedicated to all Jesuit translations of the Confucian canon made between 1590 and 1773. The core of this information hub is a scalable and dynamic online database which records and cross-links the source documents and translations at section level. While it is now at the initial stage of development, as research advances it aims to provide multilingual search capabilities, the ability to drill-down into the texts, timeline display and network visualisation. Since the cross-disciplinary study of the Jesuit translations will draw great benefit from diverse expertise, opportunities will be provided for other scholars to contribute additional resources, marginal annotations and discussion around the documents. This database will grow over time and, once the Jesuit translations of the Confucian canon have been comprehensively covered, will eventually broaden its scope to encompass coeval translations of other Chinese texts.

Originality and innovation of the project

The chief innovation of the project lies in its interdisciplinary and multi-lingual approach that draws upon diverse fields: digital methods, philology, intellectual history and cultural history. Through the analysis of archival and bibliographic materials that have largely been neglected because of language barriers, the project is reinvigorating

the study of Sino-European encounters. The innovations can be summarised as follows:

1) Renewed focus on philology in intellectual history

New knowledge in the study of Eastern and Western encounters must be grounded on rigorous textual analysis. This project is conducting detailed archival research in Europe and China and producing a critically informed assessment of the translations of the Confucian classics. By systematically combing through citations of the Jesuit translations in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and carrying out a detailed textual analysis of the translations, it will not only advance knowledge of Sino-European encounters in general, but also shed new light on the specific question of how the Jesuit translations influenced the intellectual debates of the Enlightenment. As a result, it will promote a better understanding of the intellectual origins of key values in Western democracy, such as secularism and religious tolerance, which were informed and consolidated through the intellectual exchange with Chinese philosophy that the Jesuits effected.

2) Overcoming disciplinary divides through scholarly collaboration and digital humanities

New knowledge on the Jesuit translations can be achieved only by overcoming traditional disciplinary barriers. Notably, previous attempts to map Jesuit translations were predominantly the work of individual scholars who were trained in localised subject-specific fields such as 'Western Philosophy,' 'Chinese Philosophy,' 'European Literature,' 'Intellectual History' and 'Philology.' While individual specialists can acquire the rudiments of all these fields, it is difficult to master all the linguistic skills and intellectual background knowledge required to do full justice to the complexities of this cultural exchange. This project is conceived as intrinsically cross-disciplinary and collaborative from the outset, engaging the specialist expertise of each of its participants, who have been chosen to ensure all the disciplinary needs for the successful completion of the project are met. Feedback from other internationally renowned scholars of the Jesuit China mission is being sought through networking, workshops and conferences, ensuring that the scholarship will be at the cutting-edge of Jesuit studies.

3) Bringing philology up to speed with digital humanities

Digital humanities are at the core of the project to promote cross-disciplinary collaboration. The proposed digital platform, identifiable by the title of the project (https://textus-sinici.org/), draws inspiration from other successful China-focused websites designed overseas, such as the 'Bibliotheca Sinica 2.0' of the University of Vienna, the 'Beyond Ricci' project at Boston College, the 'Chine Ancienne' website, and the digitalisation of the Japonica-Sinica collection of the Roman Archives of the Society of Jesus (Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu). Although these websites have made a fundamental contribution to making rare resources more accessible to researchers, they are of limited usefulness for the specialised study of Jesuit translations because their aim was to digitalise entire collections. Our digital platform has a defined

focus on Jesuit translations of the Confucian canon and their dissemination in Europe, representing not only the content but also the connections and research around this content, thereby facilitating the comparison of corpora. Furthermore, the dynamic nature of the database-driven platform and its maintenance as part of a wider digital research support network, will ensure that the platform can continue to expand in scope beyond the completion of the three-year project and to incorporate Jesuit translations of other Chinese texts. Thus far, we have compiled a list of known sources including eighteen titles, such as Prospero Intorcetta's *Sinorum scientia politico-moralis* and Jean de La Brune's *La morale de Confucius* and we expect this list to grow further during the life of the project.

Methodology

At the heart of the project is the methodological postulate that intellectual history must be grounded upon a close reading of primary sources. In this regard, our methodology is indebted to the approach identified with the 'Cambridge School,' which has been generally understood as seeking historical understanding through the reconstruction of social, cultural and political contexts and an attentive consideration of the discursive language employed in texts.[20] However, this project will go beyond the Cambridge School by drawing upon the tools of philology, a discipline which has seen a resurgence in the humanities in recent years. In particular, the project draws inspiration from the insights of Pollock,[21] who argues that philology brings not only an awareness of the constructedness and changeability of disciplines such as sinology, but is also attuned to the multiple meanings that texts acquire through the exegetical process. Since China in the late Ming and throughout the Qing dynasty witnessed the emergence of textual practices (*kaozheng* 考證) that have been understood as analogous to European philology,[22] the philological focus of our methodology allows us to move beyond an Anglocentric model of intellectual history and to link more effectively the Chinese and European contexts. Our proposed history of the Jesuit translations and philological study of Noël's sinological works will not view these as static texts, but as dynamic works that respond to the interpretative triangulation of source, translator and reader.

While we appreciate postcolonial criticism's insights into the problematics of cultural appropriation, we are mindful that a dogmatic adherence to its conceptual framework can produce metanarratives that are divorced from the intellectual

[20] J. G. A. POCOCK, 'On the Unglobality of Contexts: Cambridge Methods and the History of Political Thought,' *Global Intellectual History* 4, no. 1 (2019): 1-14; KENNETH SHEPPARD, 'J. G. A. Pocock as an Intellectual Historian,' in *A Companion to Intellectual History*, eds Richard Whatmore and Brian Young (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), 113–25. By Pocock one should also see the collection of methodological essays: J. G. A. POCOCK, *Political Thought and History: Essays on Theory and Method* (Cambridge-New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009). More specifically, on Jesuits and globalization in a Renaissance studies perspective, PETER BURKE, 'The Jesuits and the Globalization of the Renaissance,' *Cultural History* 9, no. 2 (2020): 156–70.

[21] BENJAMIN A. ELMAN, 'Early Modern or Late Imperial? The Crisis of Classical Philology in Eighteenth-Century China,' in *World Philology*, eds Sheldon Pollock, Benjamin A. Elman and Ku-ming Kevin Chang (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2015), 225–24.

[22] SHELDON POLLOCK, 'Introduction,' in *World Philology*, 1-24.

concerns of the texts themselves in their historical context. Hence our analysis of the Jesuit translations requires a close reading of manuscripts and letters on the one hand, and, on the other, a critical examination of materials published at the time. In this way, we aim to elicit authorial intention and clarify the meaning of key terms. For instance, to understand the significance of the translation choices made in the *Confucius sinarum philosophus*, it is necessary to have expert knowledge not only of Chinese philosophy, but also of neo-Scholasticism, which was part and parcel of every Jesuit's training in the seventeenth century. Our analysis of the Jesuit translation enterprise utilises the multidisciplinary strengths of each participant in this project. It aims to achieve a detailed reconstruction of the discursive interplay within the Jesuit translations and reveal their inner workings.

Digital presence

To minimize common risks in developing a digital component, the team has adopted the open-source *Heurist* system (heuristnetwork.org). *Heurist* is developed at the University of Sydney, where the project is based, and the core of several long-running public-access projects developed with Australian Research Council funding such as the 'Digital Harlem' (digitalharlem.org), 'The Virtual Museum of Balinese Painting' (balipainting.org), and 'Beyond 1914/Expert Nation' (expertnation.org). As the system has a well-proven record of flexibility, functionality and sustainability, *Heurist* is also in use in several projects in the UK and in the European Union. Use of the system does not require skills in programming and allows the project team to describe and link entities, and to modify and extend the data model on the live database without downtime. As a shared service dependent on a common open-source codebase, the database and web platforms built on it will remain fully functional as long as the service is maintained, thus offering the prospect of longevity far beyond the project itself.

Heurist was established in 2005 to address the issue of unsuitability of interrelated and complex data for most databasing systems at the time by introducing an innovative design philosophy, which would separate programming skills from the ability of the humanities researchers involved to create, test and modify data structures to suit the needs of their projects without having to be (or become) database engineers. The original *Heurist* database was designed by Ian Johnson, its designer-in-chief, with the aid of the engineering skills of Artem Osmakov, *Heurist*'s chief developer. An archeologist at the University of Sydney, Ian Johnson had previously founded the Faculty of Arts' Archeological Computing Laboratory, which in a later reincarnation would become a founding member of the Australasian Association of Digital Humanities. Since then, Heurist has continued to provide scholars in the humanities with tailored solutions and has grown to host over 1,500 databases in Australia, Europe and the Americas.

In the case of 'Transforming the East,' the website supported by *Heurist*, apart from presenting basic information on the project and listing team member's publications and research activities, is equipped with a 'Map' section to allow users to

visualize the translations the team is working on and find specific translation via a search tool. It displays such translations in list mode so that basic bibliographic data is provided for those currently in the database as well as in map mode enabling viewers to check in which library or archive a translation is currently held and visualize a timeline for each translation. Since this section is programmed to update automatically as soon as a new translation is added to the database, the map will grow as the research progresses.

A connected section, 'Network,' is being planned to display the intricate connections between different translations that circulated in Europe. A diagram is currently presenting a simplified version of this analysis by showing the links between early translations of the Confucian classics and the classical source works they translated. The arrows go from the source work to the translation. As this early analysis shows, there were certain influential translations, such as Noël's *Sinensis imperii libri classici sex* (1711) and the *Confucius sinarum philosophus* (1687), which formed the basis of numerous other translations.

As the project proceeds, and the network analysis becomes more sophisticated, this section will provide a complex picture of how Europeans understood Chinese literature and philosophy at a crucial stage of Sino-European relations.

The research team

The project's team of researchers consists of specialists in philology and intellectual history based at the University of Sydney (Francesco Borghesi and Yixu Lü, the project's chief investigators), Sun Yat-sen University (Thierry Meynard) and Nanjing University (Daniel Canaris).

Borghesi and Lü bring expertise in European intellectual and cultural history, skills in textual analysis and translation, extensive experience of working in some of continental Europe's most important archives and libraries, which also hold the major collections and manuscripts for the project in question.

Francesco Borghesi has studied the paradigms used by European thinkers for cross-cultural dialogue. His ongoing research on the concept of concord (*concordia*) in the Renaissance (ARC DP150104077) will serve as the theoretical basis for mapping the scholastic and Renaissance background of the hermeneutic strategies employed by Jesuits in their translation of Chinese texts. His experience in preparing critical editions, translations and analyses of early modern texts in Latin and Italian will bring philological rigour to the study of Jesuit texts. With experience as lead researcher of the Sydney Digital Humanities Research Group at the University of Sydney and a key participant in digital humanities projects such as the Pico Project at Brown University, Borghesi is orchestrating the digital component of the proposed digital platform for the study of Jesuit translations.

Yixu Lü works on Sino-German encounters, and has held previous grants in this field (ARC DP0555935; ARC DP0877918). Trained as an historian as well as a

philologist in China and Germany, she is uniquely equipped to bring interdisciplinary depth to the research field of Sino-European encounters. Conversant with the most recent scholarship in the studies of Sino-European encounters, she will oversee the methodological approach of the project and its intellectual direction. Her broad research networks in Germany, China, Japan and English-speaking countries are engaged to connect scholars working in this field to the planned international platform of the project.

Thierry Meynard is an experienced scholar of Jesuit studies and has published works of translation, critical editions, philological analysis, and commentaries on Jesuit texts. His particular expertise in printed texts and archival documents written in Chinese and European languages is essential to completing the philological work of the project. As a member of the Society of Jesus, he has the capacity to facilitate access to Jesuit archives throughout the world.

Daniel Canaris' research focuses on early modern and Enlightenment intellectual history, with particular emphasis on the philosophical milieu of Naples and the cultural exchange between China and Europe. His contribution adds to this project expertise on the reception of China in the Italian and European Enlightenment and on the Jesuit China mission.

Together, the team possesses the ability to work in all languages essential to the aims of the project. These include classical and modern Chinese, Latin, French, German, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese. With this pool of linguistic expertise and experience in critical editions and intellectual history, the team is uniquely placed to establish a new international hub for research into Sino-European cultural exchange. Leveraging pre-existing research groups at the University of Sydney, such as the Sydney Intellectual History Network and the Translatability of Cultures Reading Group, the team is developing an international network to connect experts on Sino-European cultural exchange based in Australia, China, and Europe.

Developments

This project is aimed at deepening our understanding of the role played by Chinese culture in the emergence of Enlightenment thought and advance research on Sino-European intellectual encounters. Moreover, on a broader level, it aims to produce valuable insights into the linguistic, cultural and intellectual challenges that need to be considered when navigating cross-cultural relations and exchanges today.

The concrete benefits can be summarized as follows:

The project aims to

1) unearth hitherto unaccessed Jesuit translations of and commentaries on the Chinese classical canon and map their dissemination throughout Europe, thus producing new historical knowledge about the intellectual encounters between China and Europe.

2) produce the most comprehensive history of Jesuit translations of the Chinese canon in the English language. The open-access digital platform will democratise the field for future scholars, making available online manuscripts which could previously be accessed only by travelling to the related archives. The critical commentaries and translations will open up these texts to anglophone scholars and other interested readers. In addition, the project will improve national research infrastructure in digital humanities through the creation of a cutting-edge digital presence.

3) restore a philological focus to this important area of intellectual history, enhancing our understanding of the philosophical debates at the forefront of the Enlightenment and advancing an innovative approach in the study of intellectual history. The interdisciplinary and collaborative approach adopted by the project will strive to serve as a model for future research on Sino-European encounters.

4) strengthen existing connections between Australian and Chinese academics and further intellectual linkages with colleagues from Europe and the United States (within and beyond the already established and highly specialised scholarly community of 'China Christianity Studies') and provide training opportunities for future generations of researchers.

Case studies

Apart from a co-authored book on the history of Jesuit translations of Confucian texts and their circulation in Europe until the suppression of the Society of Jesus (1773) with which the project will culminate, the research team will progress the project by focussing on a number of case studies.

Among these, a critical edition with English translation of François Noël's *Chinese Philosophy* (*Philosophia sinica*) is being edited by Canaris and Meynard. Meynard and Canaris have just completed work on the *First Treatise on God* in Noël's *Chinese Philosophy*, which is due to be published in 2023 by Brepols in the series 'Global Perspectives on Medieval and Early Modern Historiography.'

Meynard and Canaris have also prepared the first edition and scholarly annotated translation of a pioneering report on the predicament of cross-cultural understanding at the dawn of globalization, titled *A Brief Response on the Controversies over* Shangdi, Tianshen *and* Linghun (*Resposta breve sobre as Controversias do* Xámtý, Tien Xîn, Lîm hoên), which was written in China by the Sicilian Jesuit missionary Niccolò Longobardo (1565–1654) in the 1620s, profoundly influenced Enlightenment

understandings of East Asian thought, and was printed in 2021 by Palgrave MacMillan in the series 'Palgrave Studies in Comparative Global History.'[23]

Canaris has published a critical edition of the Chinese and Latin texts, which are both translated into English for the first time, of the *The True Record of the Lord of Heaven* (*Tianzhu shilu*, 1584) by Michele Ruggieri, the first Chinese-language work ever published by a European. The volume, which contains an introduction, a biography of Ruggieri, and rich annotations, was published in 2022 by Brill in the series 'Studies in the History of Christianity in East Asia.'[24]

Furthermore, Borghesi has set up to work on an edition of Michele Ruggieri's 1601 *Relatione del successo della missione della Cina*, which presents an account of Ruggieri's travel and mission to China in the period spanning from 1577 to 1591 and is currently preserved in the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu in Rome (*Jap. Sin.*, 101, I). Ruggieri's account has been neglected by scholarship, which has relied primarily on Ricci's memoirs that were published in Latin in 1615 and many Europeans vernacular languages in the first half of the seventeenth century, and provides an alternative account on the beginnings of the Jesuit China mission.

In addition to the focus on text-based work, while Lü will further her research on intercultural paradigms in translation to support the methodological framework for the project, Borghesi and Lü will edit a collection of essays on translating and interpreting Chinese and Tibetan cultures in seventeenth- to nineteenth-century Europe intended to fine-tune the overarching theoretical approach of the project and to be submitted to the journal 'Intellectual History Review' by the end of 2022. Such collection will include seven papers from scholars based in universities in Australia, China, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States of America on topics ranging from Sino-Western translation theories and practices to the introduction of Renaissance pedagogy in Late-Ming China and from approaches to translation in Malebranche and Leibniz to the development of Tibetan Studies between the second half of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century.

[23] THIERRY MEYNARD and DANIEL CANARIS, eds, *A Brief Response on the Controversies over* Shangdi, Tianshen *and* Linghun (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).
[24] DANIEL CANARIS, ed., *Michele Ruggieri's* Tianzhu shilu (The True Record of the Lord of Heaven*, 1584*) (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2022).

Bibliographical Essays

Studying Trade and Local Economies in Early Islamicate Societies: Responses to the 'Long-Divergence' Debate from Islamic History[*]

CECILIA PALOMBO
Leiden University

With this article I take the opportunity to discuss recent scholarship on trade and the economy in early Islamic history (seventh–eleventh centuries CE), at a moment in which research on these subjects has become lively once again.[1] My discussion is limited to a selection of studies that deal with the history of trade in Islamicate societies and are concerned with problems of geography and comparability. The projects and publications I have selected belong in a much broader pool of studies; however, they may be considered representative of recent trends in scholarship on Islamic history and they have the quality of raising historiographical reflections that researchers interested in economic and social histories, even if focusing on other regions or periods, may also find important.[2]

Behind a renewed interest in economic matters in early Islamic history is a thorny matter of debate: that is, the idea that we might identify historical institutional patterns

[*] The author wrote this literature review after organising an international workshop on the subject of 'trade in and across the early Islamicate Middle East' (Leiden University, 3-4 June 2021) in the context of the project *Embedding Conquest: Naturalising Muslim Rule in the Early Islamic Empire (600–1000)* (funded by the European Research Council under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme, grant agreement n. 683194). I wish to thank the 'Embedding Conquest' team and all the workshop's participants – Cátia Antunes, Hannah Barker, Jessica Goldberg, Parvaneh Pourshariati, Stefanie Schmidt, Peter Fibiger Bang, Koray Durak, Reza Huseini, Hugh Kennedy, Khodadad Rezakhani, Chris Wickham, and Yasuhiro Yokkaichi – for inspiring the writing of this article with their research and insights on the topics at hand. Many thanks to Caterina Bori, Petra Sijpesteijn, and Murat Bozluolcay for offering precious comments and reading suggestions.

[1] See MAYA SHATZMILLER, 'The Economic History of the Medieval Middle East: Strengths, Witnesses, and the Challenges Ahead,' *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 44, no. 3 (2012): 529−31.

[2] This article focuses on the period 600–1000 CE and it aims at discussing trends in recent scholarship. For this reason, the terminology used here also relates to academic fields and historiography. Broadly following Marshall Hodgson, in what follows I use the adjective 'Islamicate' when referring to the societies, cultures, and literatures developed inside and characterising Islamic polities and regions in the period under discussion; and 'Islamic' for objects or concepts that refer more directly to Islamic rule as well as to Islam as a religious, a political, and a philosophical system. The rationale of this distinction in this article is not to separate religion from other spheres, but rather to more easily embrace in one term both Muslims and non-Muslims and the sources they produced, e.g., concerning trade or economy. In this article, I refer to Islamic history as a field of studies and as its historical period of focus, subsuming things both Islamicate and Islamic. Similarly, I refer to the Middle East (even if more precise geographic terms may be chosen) both as a region and as its related field of studies. See MARSHALL HODGSON, *The Venture of Islam*, Volume I: *The Classical Age of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 3–100; ZACHARY LOCKMAN, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism* (Cambridge-New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); CHASE ROBINSON, 'Introduction,' in *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, ed. Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1−16.

Cromohs (Cyber Review of Modern Historiography), ISSN 1123-7023, 24/2021

DOI: 10.36253/cromohs-13571

to explain the modern configuration of Muslim-majority countries in relation to the West. This general idea serves to situate the Islamic world, broadly defined, or the Middle East, more specifically, within a broader theorisation about the relative development of different regions or cultures through the study of institutions. The debate about Islam's historical place in this framework is an old one; it goes back to Weberian concepts about sovereignty, rationalism, and institutions, and it is connected to institutionalism as a tradition of studies. The history of institutions, in this respect, has been understood as a key to explain why the economies and political systems of some regions developed in one way, while others did not, or to compare the 'path' exceptionally taken by Western polities to those not taken by non-Western ones.[3] Despite its many reiterations, the debate continues to be important in works of economic history, political science, and political economy. In recent years it has been raised at times with policy concerns in mind. The successful book by Tamim Ansary, *Destiny Disrupted,* is a good example of its having trickled down also to popular literature about Islam and the West.[4] However, I raise it here as a matter of historiographical relevance, in particular, regarding early Islamic history and the medieval Middle East, and because of its capacity to sway historical questions.

The search for the historical roots of the Middle East's 'difference' from the West, which has developed mostly in economic history and political science, has encouraged the study of long-term trajectories between Islamic and European institutions in comparative fashion. In addition, the debate has pushed some historians of early Islamicate societies to explore also different kinds of connections, in particular, by evading Europe-centred geographies, and by downsizing global patterns to local and regional contexts. In moving away from broad comparative studies and bringing the examination of longitudinal 'paths' down to smaller scales of analysis, some were able to bypass altogether the question of capitalism's origins, which largely lies at the centre of Europe's 'exceptional path' thesis.[5] In this, of course, scholars studying Islamic history have been aided and inspired by the work of those studying the early modern and the modern period, global history, and Mediterranean studies. Yet, I would like to suggest that the debate's reverberation in Islamic history has provoked responses that historians in other fields might also find helpful, as they similarly tackle

[3] For an introduction to the debate, see HURİ İSLAMOĞLU, 'A Proposal for Global Economic History: Beyond the Histories of Stagnation and Deficiencies to "Living" Histories of Possibilities,' in *Histories from Below: A Tribute in Memory of Donald Quataert*, eds Selim Karahasanoğlu and Deniz Cenk Demir (Istanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2016), 189–96; JOEL BEININ, 'Introduction.' In A Critical Political Economy of the Middle East and North Africa, eds Beinin, Bassam Haddad, and Sherene Seikaly (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021), 1–24. The phrase 'path not taken' was used, for example, by Jared Rubin: JARED RUBIN, *Rulers, Religion, and Riches: Why the West Got Rich and the Middle East Did Not* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 76.

[4] TAMIM ANSARY, *Destiny Disrupted: A History of the World Through Islamic Eyes* (New York: PublicAffairs Books, 2009).

[5] For an introduction on Eurocentrism and the question of capitalism, see JANET L. ABU LUGHOD, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 3–20; PRASANNAN PARTHASARATHI, *Why Europe Grew Rich and Asia Did Not: Global Economic Divergence, 1600–1850* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1–18.

with the problem, after having identified Eurocentric models in contemporary historiography, of how to substantially uproot them from historical practice.

The 'long divergence' theory, early Islamic history, and comparative history

In recent scholarship, the idea that the separation between the Middle East and the West would have deep roots has been linked especially to the ground-breaking book of political scientist Timur Kuran, *The Long Divergence*, from 2011. Its emblematic title evoked Kenneth Pomeranz's important study from two years earlier, titled *The Great Divergence,* which compared economic developments in Europe and in Asia.[6] While Pomeranz advanced historical hypotheses to explain the exceptional economic growth of north-western Europe with the industrial revolution in the nineteenth century, Kuran and other scholars studying the Middle East have looked at the question of European 'exceptionalism' from a reversed angle. Namely, they have asked what prevented the Middle East, unlike Europe, from developing institutions that were conducive to growth or development. By 'long divergence' theory here I do not refer to a single hypothesis or study, but rather to a wide framework of analysis built on historical cases and by several authors. Put simply, the 'long divergence' theory is a framework that suggests that the modern Middle East has been stalled by inefficient Islamic institutions. Islamic law, Muslim religious authorities, or specific legal instruments are pinpointed in various studies as responsible for impeding growth or modernisation processes in the long run, even though they are often thought to have favoured premodern forms of commercialisation.[7]

The 'long divergence' theory about the Middle East is consequential to historical scholarship not least because it involves expertise on a variety of regions and sources. Insofar as its proponents refer to Islamic institutions that developed in the first centuries of Islam, the theory invites engagement from experts in early and medieval

[6] TİMUR KURAN, *The Long Divergence: How Islamic Law Held Back the Middle East* (Princeton University Press, 2011); KENNETH POMERANZ, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009). Pomeranz's book compared the development of north-western Europe to the 'paths' taken by China and Japan, yet without assuming European normativity.

[7] Some representative studies are KURAN, *Long Divergence*; TİMUR KURAN, 'Why the Middle East is Economically Underdeveloped: Historical Mechanisms of Institutional Stagnation,' *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 18, no. 3 (2003): 71−90; RUBIN, *Rulers*; LISA BLAYDES, 'Mamluks, Property Rights, and Economic Development: Lessons from Medieval Egypt,' *Politics and Society* 47, no. 3 (2019): 395–424. As Fahad Bishara wrote, 'historians have placed a good deal of explanatory weight on Islamic law as one of the primary engines' behind the 'world of trade' created after the Muslim conquests: Bishara, 'Histories of Law,' 2. Surveying the history and various versions of the 'long divergence' theory is beyond the scope of this article; for more detailed discussions, see MAYA SHATZMILLER, 'Recent Trends in Middle East Economic History: Cultural Factors and Structural Change in the Medieval Period, 650−1500. Part One,' *History Compass* 16, no. 12 (2018): 1−6; FAHAD A. BISHARA, 'Histories of Law and Economic Life in the Islamic World,' *History Compass* 18 (2020): 1–10; SASCHA BECKER, JARED RUBIN, and LUDGER WOESSMANN, 'Religion in Economic History: A Survey,' *IZA Institute of Labor Economics: Discussion Papers* (2020), https://www.iza.org/publications/dp/13371/religion-in-economic-history-a-survey, accessed 10 February 2022; ROGER OWEN, 'Review of The Long Divergence: How Islamic Law Held Back the Middle East by Timur Kuran,' *Middle East Report* 260 (2011): 47–48.

Islamic history. The search for ancient points of fracture between the West and the Middle East has brought together in new comparative syntheses specialised work about different contexts, including early and medieval Islamic states. Perhaps even more fundamentally, any formulation of the theory requires seeing different regions and the institutions characterising them as historically comparable. In other words, the theory emerges from a convergence of interests across disciplines and is built on comparative studies. Chronicles and court records in Latin, Arabic, or Ottoman Turkish, for instance, have been recently used for comparing the presence and the absence of concepts such as representative democracy or constitutionalism in different countries. One example is the comparison of political institutions in the Mamluk sultanate and in England under the Plantagenets in a study by Lisa Blaydes and Eric Chaney in which they tried to explain why the 'checks-and-balances' principle of government arose in northern Europe but could *not* have arisen in Egypt, also citing the work of historians that might lend support to the theory, such as early publications by renowned Islamic history scholar Patricia Crone.[8]

There is, in sum, a strong relationship between comparative history and institutionalist approaches, in which patterns of growth are foregrounded by institutional patterns. That relationship influences the historian's choice of what to compare. The history of trade is key in this regard because it has been at the centre of many studies comparing different economic trajectories, with an eye to explaining the 'rise of the West,' and tying together historical and political analyses of development.[9] One important example in Islamic history is Avner Greif's work on medieval trade and institutions on the 'path' towards modernity.[10] Not only what *things*, but also what *regions* one compares is a choice partly driven by the questions at the core of the 'long divergence' theory. In the 2000s and 2010s a renewed interest in the Mediterranean has encouraged scholars to test the comparability of Christian and Islamic institutions in late antiquity, early Islam, and medieval European history within a Mediterranean framework.[11] Significantly, the reception of Kuran's book has been accompanied by

[8] LISA BLAYDES and ERIC CHANEY, 'The Feudal Revolution and Europe's Rise: Political Divergence of the Christian West and the Muslim World Before 1500 CE,' *The American Political Science Review* 107, no. 1 (2013): 16–34. On issues of method regarding the use of historical sources in political science, see, for example, IAN LUSTICK, 'History, Historiography, and Political Science: Multiple Historical Records and the Problem of Selection Bias,' *American Political Science Review* 90, no. 3 (1996): 605−18.

[9] See HURİ İSLAMOĞLU, 'Economic History in Middle Eurasia,' in *Routledge Handbook of Global Economic History*, eds Francesco Boldizzoni and Pat Hudson (London: Routledge, 2015); and İSLAMOĞLU, 'A Proposal.'

[10] AVNER GREIF, *Institutions and the Path to the Modern Economy: Lessons from Medieval Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[11] See, for example, JOHN TOLAN, GILLES VEINSTEIN, and HENRY LAURENS, eds, *Europe and the Islamic World: A History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), and JOHN HUDSON and ANA RODRÍGUEZ, eds, *Diverging Paths? The Shapes and Power of Institutions in Medieval Christendom and Islam* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2014); NÉRI DE BARROS ALMEIDA and ROBSON DELLA TORRE, eds, *O Mediterrâneo medieval reconsiderado* (Campinas: Editora da Unicamp, 2019). See also the recent study of Mediterranean trade by AHMET USTA, *Hilal ile Haç Arasında Hayatlar: Ortaçağ Akdenizi'nde Ticaret ve Tüccarlar* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınevi, 2022). Another example might be CHRIS WICKHAM, *Framing the Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400–800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), which to

discussions concerning earlier theories of 'divergence' centred on the Mediterranean trade. Thus, historians of medieval Europe and the Byzantine empire have been again debating Henri Pirenne's 1937 thesis about 'Muhammad and Charlemagne,' according to which the Muslim conquests had severed trade in the Mediterranean, thereby ultimately allowing for the rise of capitalist entrepreneurship in medieval Europe. As Bonnie Effros has remarked, Pirenne's theses have become newly influential in medieval and Mediterranean studies in the twenty-first century. Pirenne's work has been recently rediscussed also by political scientists and economists, betraying the enduring relevance of his theses on medieval trade for studies of comparative development.[12]

In sum, the work of political scientists, economists, and policy experts interested in the 'long divergence' debate in the last two decades has developed through longitudinal comparisons between institutions in Europe and in the Middle East. The 'long divergence' as an interpretive framework has favoured historical comparisons within a Mediterranean setting. In turn, a renewed focus on the Mediterranean in recent years has contributed to tie with a double knot the study of premodern institutions, such as those related to trade, to the question of capitalism's origins.

Conversely, the theory's influence on and tenability for historical research is challenged when historians offer alternative takes on comparability. It matters if historical research is broadly more oriented towards comparisons or rather towards connections. Beyond individual case-studies, the 'long divergence' theory has been based on the possibility of comparative history and has been built by tracing comparisons between regions and institutions, which are seen as developing in parallel or next to each other. On the other hand, writing connected histories, in many a historian's craft, has created the possibility of weaving together the history of premodern institutions through their diverse expressions in a variety of local contexts.[13] Regarding trade in the early Islamic period, Effros noticed that Pirenne's critics in the twentieth century focused almost exclusively on the economic arguments of his 'divergence' thesis, whereas they did not question the 'larger civilisational claims' that Pirenne had made about the relative place of Europe in world history. As she wrote, 'medievalists should be mindful of the impact of Europe's colonial relations with North Africa and the Middle East in the late nineteenth and early twentieth

some extent incorporates in a Mediterranean framework also early Islamic rule. On Mediterranean studies, see RAMZI ROUIGHI, 'A Mediterranean of Relations for the Medieval Maghrib: Historiography in Question,' *Al-Masaq* 29, 3 (2017): 201−20.

12 BONNIE EFFROS, 'The Enduring Attraction of the Pirenne Thesis,' *Speculum* 92, no. 1 (2017): 184–208; ERIK THOEN and ERIC VANHOUTE, 'Pirenne and Economic and Social Theory: Influences, Methods and Reception,' *Belgisch tijdschrift voor nieuwste geschiedenis* 41, no. 3 (2011): 323−53.

13 See SANJAY SUBRAHMANYAM, *Connected History: Essays and Arguments* (New York: Verso, 2022). I wish to thank Caterina Bori for making me aware of Giuseppe Marcocci's introduction to the 2014 Italian translation and edition of various articles by Sanjay Subrahmanyam (published as *Mondi connessi*), which also discusses comparisons vs. connections: GIUSEPPE MARCOCCI, 'Gli intrecci della storia. La modernità globale di Sanjay Subrahmanyam,' in Subrahmanyam, *Mondi connessi: La storia oltre l'eurocentrismo (secoli XVI–XVIII)*, tr. and ed. by Giuseppe Marcocci (Rome: Carocci Editore, 2014), 9–22.

century on [Pirenne's book] *Mahomet et Charlemagne*."[14] In recent scholarship on Islamicate trade and economy, however, we see a wide variety of approaches that may help us overcome those deeper 'civilisational claims,' particularly by trying different scales of analysis. Some researchers have engaged directly with the 'long divergence' theory by undertaking comparative studies that undermine its empirical bases and by putting forward alternative explanations; while others have weakened the theory's premises by offering alternative views on institutions and geography. It is with those responses that the rest of this article is concerned.[15]

Early Islamic history and the question of economic decline

Much work depicting the Islamic Middle East as historically bound to become stagnant due to inefficient Islamic institutions comes from economic historians. It seems therefore significant that one of the major challenges to the theory's empirical bases in the last decade has been raised from within economic history. According to some, the proposition that Islamic institutions as such would have stalled economic growth does not rest on sound empirical grounds.[16] Moreover, while most previous discussions on the 'long divergence' had focused on the Mamluk, Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal empires and on the early modern period, recent economic historical studies have tested the theory by looking at the economies of the earliest Islamic states.

One important research project in this respect is the *Measuring the Medieval Islamic Economy Project* led by Maya Shatzmiller at Western University.[17] The project has been collecting data about topics such as monetisation, urbanisation, and labour in various regions of the medieval Middle East, especially Syria and Egypt, with the goal of assessing economic performance and structural changes from the rise of Islam to the early modern period. Its preliminary results challenge the idea that Muslim state authorities or religious elites as such had a generally negative impact on economic performance and therefore also that there is a necessary correlation between Islamic state institutions and economic stagnation or decline.[18]

Economic historians like Shatzmiller have challenged the 'long divergence' theory by working from within the same approach that provided arguments to support it. As Shatzmiller writes in a recent article about the early Islamic period, 'economic

[14] EFFROS, 'Enduring Attraction,' 189.
[15] A further line of research, which is not discussed in this article, consists of studies of early Islamic institutions in a historical perspective but targeting contemporary policy issues, finance, and banking practices. See, for example, SEYED K. SADR, *The Economy of the Earliest Islamic Period* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). For a critical discussion, see İSLAMOĞLU, 'Economic History.'
[16] See ŞEVKET PAMUK and MAYA SHATMZILLER, 'Plagues, Wages, and Economic Change in the Islamic Middle East, 700–1500,' *Journal of Economic History* 74, no. 1 (2014): 196−229; MAYA SHATZMILLER, 'Recent Trends in Middle East Economic History: Cultural Factors and Structural Change in the Medieval Period, 650−1500. Part Two,' *History Compass* 16, no. 12 (2018): 1−11; and SHATZMILLER, 'Structural Change and Economic Development in the Islamic Middle East 700−1500: Population Levels and Property Rights,' *Scottish Journal of Political Economy* 69, no. 1 (2022): 4−22.
[17] See the project's website *Measuring the Medieval Islamic Economy*, https://www.medievalislamiceconomy.uwo.ca/, accessed 15 March 2022.
[18] See SHATZMILLER, 'Recent Trends: Part One' and 'Part Two.'

theory and empirical evidence' may be used 'to show that the Middle East economy was powered by a series of changes to structural factors and that these and other changes to the economy implemented by the Islamic state [i.e., the Umayyad and the Abbasid state administrations] led to measurable improvement in standards of living and demonstrable growth in economic indicators.'[19] At the same time, economic historians on both ends of the debate – either arguing or questioning that early Islamic institutions were likely to stall economic growth – have approached the subject with similar methods. In general, they have accepted the Neo-institutionalist principle that economic performance is linked to the performance of institutions. In fact, in the 2010s the New Institutional Economics inspired to Douglass North's and Robert P. Thomas's ideas, more than any other approach, appear to have sustained both studies rejecting and studies supporting arguments about the long-term economic decline of the Middle East, one that would be rooted in early Islamic history and institutions.[20] Following North's foundational work, scholars on both sides have aimed at analysing the efficiency of institutions and institutions as tools for efficiency, focusing in particular on the role of the state in enforcing property rights – even as they came to differ on how to evaluate the impact of religion and religious values on the economy.

The history of trade is central in this regard because it has been used both for formulating and for disproving arguments about the long-term economic performance of Islamic states based on the study of early Islamic institutions. For example, in a widely-cited book from 2006 Avner Greif ambitiously proposed to integrate Neo-Institutionalism and economic game theory through a series of studies on medieval trade.[21] One of the book's main case-studies concerns a group of merchants whose letters were found in the Cairo Genizah, dating from the Fatimid period.[22] The Genizah letters were used to illustrate the point that the merchants of the Fatimid caliphate operated in the absence of external institutional structures, autonomously, and through informal agreements. These conditions are considered incompatible with economic growth according to the Neo Institutional Economics, since it is postulated

[19] SHATZMILLER, 'Recent Trends: Part One,' 2.

[20] On neo-institutional economics, see DOUGLASS NORTH, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). The influence of the Neo Institutional Economics certainly extends beyond Islamic history. Studies of ancient, late-antique, and medieval economies based on the New Institutional Economics boomed in the 2000s, and the trend does not seem to subside: see PETER FIBIGER BANG, 'The Ancient Economy and New Institutional Economics,' *The Journal of Roman Studies* 99 (2009): 194–206; JÉRÔME MAUCOURANT, 'New Institutional Economics and History,' *Journal of Economic Issues* 46, no. 1 (2012): 193–208; TACO TERPSTRA, *Trade in the Ancient Mediterranean* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 13–32.

[21] GREIF, *Institutions*. For responses, see JESSICA GOLDBERG, *Trade and Institutions in the Medieval Mediterranean: The Geniza Merchants and their Business World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 144–150; GREGORY CLARK, 'A Review of Avner Greif's Institutions and the Path to the Modern Economy: Lessons from Medieval Trade,' *Journal of Economic Literature* 45 (2007): 727–43.

[22] The Genizah materials consist in about 400,000 fragments of documents and manuscripts in Arabic, Judeo-Arabic, Hebrew, and other languages, found inside or associated with the Ben Ezra synagogue in Cairo, where they had been dismissed and preserved over time. For an introduction, see the *Princeton Geniza Lab*'s website, https://genizalab.princeton.edu/, accessed 15 March 2022. On the Genizah and economic history, see JESSICA GOLDBERG, 'On Reading Goitein's *A Mediterranean Society*: A View From Economic History,' *Mediterranean Historical Review* 26, no. 2 (2011): 171–86.

that markets emerge only where and when institutions protecting property rights and enforcing contracts are in place. According to Greif's study, this was not the case in the Fatimid caliphate.[23]

Thus, Greif's study of the Genizah letters used historical sources on trade to stress one central tenet of the New Institutional Economics, namely, that the efficiency of state institutions depends on the state's ability to enforce property rights. He concluded that Muslim authorities obstructed the formation of agency relations and did not protect property rights; consequently, Islamic polities like the Fatimid caliphate were unable to foster economic growth. Other studies, however, have leveraged the same economic theory to argue that, on the contrary, Islamic state institutions did not obstruct economic growth in the medieval period. Based on sources including chronicles, coins, and documents, Shatzmiller argued that in the Umayyad and the early Abbasid period the state authorities did enforce property rights and contributed to driving market expansion. Moreover, she suggested that the early Muslim rulers favoured commercialisation, for example, by enforcing contractual relations. She noticed that the 'liquidity and unified coinage system' introduced under the Umayyads, and then maintained by later dynasties, 'mutually reinforced urban and rural markets and encouraged inter-provincial trade.'[24]

This double-edged function of Neo-institutionalist approaches seems interesting because, at its inception, North's studies aimed at finding economic and historical explanations for the 'rise of the Western world' and for Europe's economic 'divergence' from other regions.[25] In fact, what seems new in recent scholarship on Islamicate economies is not so much the influence of the New Institutional Economics but rather the fact that discording voices have emerged from within that same scholarly tradition to provide competing narratives of economic growth in the medieval Middle East. It is only recently that the Neo Institutional Economics has become an approach used for contradicting the same Eurocentric notions which provided its initial stimulus. In Islamic history, in particular, the emphasis has shifted from the negative impact of religious elites to the positive impact of administrative elites. For instance, Shatzmiller points out that the state administrations of the Umayyad caliphate undertook policies (e.g., monetisation) and enforced cultural processes (e.g., Arabicisation) that positively affected the economy.[26]

Another group of economic historians have tackled the 'long divergence' paradigm from a different angle. Among Marxist historians and those broadly falling

[23] GREIF, *Institutions*, 58–90.
[24] SHATZMILLER, 'Recent Trends: Part Two,' 2–3.
[25] See DOUGLASS NORTH and ROBERT PAUL THOMAS, *The Rise of the Western World: A New Economic History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).
[26] SHATZMILLER, 'Recent Trends: Part Two.' At the same time, the involvement of Muslim rulers in the economy has not been considered inherently positive regardless of the context and was identified as a limit to the rise of capitalist enterprises in the nineteenth century; see ŞEVKET PAMUK, 'Institutional Change and the Longevity of the Ottoman Empire, 1500–1800,' *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 35, no. 2 (2004): 225–47.

into the tradition of Marxist historiography, the debate on the efficiency of Islamic institutions has reverberated mostly because of its implications for the history of capitalism.[27] Here, early Islamicate sources about trade and commerce have become instrumental to argue for a global history of capitalism that would integrate into its narrative a variety of forms of premodern capital, including Islamic ones, also stressing the impact of non-European commerce on European economies. One example is Anievas and Nişancıoğlu's interpretation of thirteenth-century Mongol trade.[28] Jairus Banaji explains that 'concepts of profit, capital, and the accumulation of capital are all found in the Arabic sources of the ninth to fourteenth centuries.'[29] In part, this reading of medieval Islamicate sources attempts to bridge the gap between European and non-European enterprises, again defending the vitality of Islamic institutions. According to Banaji, already in the seventh century CE the Arab Muslim conquerors were 'seeking to dominate existing networks of trade as the Portuguese would do centuries later' and they gave rise to an 'empire of trade' which contributed in various ways to 'the growth of capitalism in the Mediterranean.'[30] In this way, a number of economic historians have challenged the Marxian premise that the seed of Europe's 'divergence' would lie in the rise of capitalism in Europe, rather than elsewhere, in multiple places, or at least through the essential contribution of economic actors outside Europe. On the other hand, the question remains as to why such premodern forms of merchant capitalism did not turn into modern capitalism. In a recent book, Banaji refers to two main historical explanations, citing Malise Ruthven and Eric Mielants, to solve the conundrum of what was different in the Islamicate world compared to Europe. One explanation points to the absence of aggressive mercantilism; the other one to the lack of class solidarity among merchants in the Islamic states.[31] These, as Jessica Goldberg's explained based on Genizah documents, lacked corporate forms of association insofar as they 'did not belong to a single corporate group that was a source of privileges, rules, and bounds of trust.'[32] In either case, Banaji points out that the key factor in the rise of modern capitalism was the different way in which state and capital related to each other.[33]

As these examples suggest, economic historical studies directly challenging the premises of the 'long divergence' theory – by claiming that early and medieval Islamic institutions were, in fact, not *bound* to cause economic stagnation or decline – have created more room for comparisons between state traditions. An important contribution to the comparative study of premodern economies, largely based on trade

[27] See BISHARA, 'Histories of Law.'
[28] ALEXANDER ANIEVAS and KEREM NİŞANCIOĞLU, *How the West Came to Rule: The Geopolitical Origins of Capitalism* (London: Plutopress, 2015), 64–90.
[29] JAIRUS BANAJI, 'Islam, the Mediterranean, and the Rise of Capitalism,' *Historical Materialism* 15 (2007): 47−74, qt. 57.
[30] BANAJI, 'Islam,' 57–62.
[31] MALISE RUTHVEN, *Islam in the World*, third ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 122–74; ERIC H. MIELANTS, *The Origins of Capitalism and the 'Rise of the West'* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007), 125–64.
[32] GOLDBERG, *Trade and Institutions*, 350.
[33] JAIRUS BANAJI, *A Brief History of Commercial Capitalism* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2020), 'Appendix.'

history, is Fibiger Bang's 2011 book comparing Roman 'bazaars' to the markets of other empires, including the early Ottoman empire.[34] Moreover, such studies have put forward new readings of medieval Islamicate sources, based on the collection of more data on topics like monetisation or labour contracts, and by re-interpreting the sources' own discourse on economic topics such as trade. At the same time, comparative history, institutionalism, and a focus on the origins of capitalism are all elements of continuity in scholarship on Islamicate economic history. In this sense, many of the questions at the core of the 'long divergence' theory have remained the same, even as the debate has given rise to competing answers, now often rejecting the negative judgement of Islam as a religion, and pointing to the vitality of Islamicate economies from New Institutionalist and Marxist perspectives alike.

The question of institutions

Scholars influenced by the Neo Institutionalist Economics, as mentioned, tend to approach institutions as 'efficiency-exchanging devices' that people use or with which they interact while competing with each other and trying to minimise their losses.[35] Economic historians following other traditions of studies have similarly been influenced by institutionalist approaches, whether deriving more directly from Marx, Braudel, or other foundational authors.[36] This helps us explain why so much of the debate has cantered on the role of Islamic *institutions* in affecting economic performance and in determining future political choices. In this respect, the strongest rejection of the 'long divergence' theory has come from scholars putting into question the meaning and function of institutions. A number of recent studies on the social and legal histories of the early Islamic period build on Foucault's and especially on Bourdieu's ideas to claim that institutions are politically construed through people's interactions, so that, as Eduardo Manzano Moreno has remarked, we may compare institutions in the light of social, economic, and political relations rather than vice-versa.[37] One key feature of the latter approach is that it stresses the distinct relationships and struggles that give shapes to institutions in each historical context.[38]

Scholars including Gadi Algazi and Manzano Moreno have criticised the influence of the Neo Institutional Economics on history writing by warning that, in measuring the efficiency of very different types of institutions without analysing the

[34] PETER FIBIGER BANG, *The Roman Bazaar: A Comparative Study of Trade and Markets in a Tributary Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). For the historiographical context, see FAHAD BISHARA, 'The Bazaar in the History of Global Capitalism,' *Islamic Law Blog* (2020): https://islamiclaw.blog/2020/04/30/the-bazaar-in-the-history-of-global-capitalism/, accessed 10 November 2021.

[35] THIERRY PÉNARD, 'Game Theory and Institutions,' in *New Institutional Economics*, eds Éric Brousseau and Jean-Michel Glachant, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 158−80, see 159.

[36] For an introduction, see İSLAMOĞLU, 'Economic History.'

[37] EDUARDO MANZANO MORENO, 'Why Did Islamic Medieval Institutions Become So Different from Western Medieval Institutions?', *Medieval Worlds* 1 (2015): 118–37, see 120–23.

[38] The importance of context has been recently underlined also in economic theory, leading to the conclusion that 'divergent paths of development need not imply – nor require – deep differences in economic institutions, for context matters:' PARTHASARATHI, *Why Europe*, 7–16, qt. 2.

power relations underlying them, scholars following this approach risk treating institutions as if they were apolitical; moreover, they risk conflating concepts that are meant to convey different things, confusing institutions for what sociologically may be better defined as organisations, practices, habits, or actions, from which institutions emerge or crystallise. This conflation, some argued, serves Eurocentric and teleological narratives in which the strength and complexity of premodern Islamic institutions is conveniently overlooked. Instead, for the comparison to be historically meaningful, they suggest to contextualise institutions within fields of conflict and negotiation.[39] In Huri İslamoğlu's words, 'institutions are viewed here not as neutral instruments in the service of given social-political interests, state or market imperatives, but as part of political processes rooted in the struggles of different actors.'[40] As an example of this trend, in a study from 2014, Eduardo Manzano Moreno and Susana Narotzki looked at the institution of the *hisba* and the official called *muhtasib*, which historically have been variously related to the regulation of urban markets and marketplaces in Islamic polities. The two authors aimed at tracing the effect of moral economic principles in early Islamicate societies, one in which economic, political, and religious goals were carried out simultaneously by officials like the *muhtasib*.[41]

Such a heightened level of confrontation in the 2010s – this struggle over the nature and function of institutions – has had the welcome effect of generating more methodological reflection about how to study Islamic and Islamicate institutions. Moreover, it has produced a body of new specialised studies on particular institutions and on their connection to social relations.[42] One significant example comes from the collaborative project *Documents and Institutions in the Medieval Middle East* (2014–2017), connected to Princeton University's *Geniza Lab*, and cantered on the study of legal and administrative documents.[43] As another example, a newly-started research project on water management in early Islamic cities, led by Maaike van Berkel at Radboud University, combines questions about environmental and urban histories with an

[39] See GADI ALGAZI, 'Comparing Medieval Institutions,' in *Diverging Paths?*, eds Hudson and Rodríguez, 3–15; EDUARDO MANZANO MORENO and SUSANA NAROTZKY, 'The Ḥisba, the Muḥtasib, and the Struggle Over Political Power and a Moral Economy: An Enquiry into Institutions,' in *Diverging Paths?* eds Hudson and Rodríguez, 30–56; MANZANO MORENO, 'Islamic Medieval Institutions.'

[40] İSLAMOĞLU, 'A Proposal,' 194.

[41] MANZANO MORENO and NAROTZKI, 'Ḥisba.' On the *hisba*, see KRISTEN STILT, *Islamic Law in Action: Authority, Discretion and Everyday Experiences in Mamluk Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); CHRISTIAN LANGE, 'Ḥisba and the Problem of Overlapping Jurisdictions: An Introduction to, and Translation of, Ḥisba Diplomas in Qalqashandī Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā,' *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review* 7 (2006): 85–107.

[42] See, for example, the approach to the study of institutions described in EVE KRAKOWSKI, *Coming of Age in Medieval Egypt: Female Adolescence, Jewish Law, and Ordinary Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 1–32; NATHAN HOFER, *The Popularisation of Sufism in Ayyubid and Mamluk Egypt, 1173–1325* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 1–32.

[43] The project brought together Eve Krakowski, Marina Rustow, Tamer El Leithy, Craig Perry, Naïm Vanthieghem, Brendan Goldman, and Jennifer Grayson. See the description on the website: *Documents and Institutions in the Medieval Middle East*, https://genizalab.princeton.edu/projects/documents-and-institutions-medieval-middle-east, accessed 11 March 2022.

organic approach to Islamic institutions of government.[44] In a study on water provisioning and distribution in the Mamluk sultanate, van Berkel exceeded the aim of showing that Islamic institutions were not any 'weaker' of less 'formal' (in a Weberian sense) than European ones; rather, she suggested to break altogether with the divide between 'formal' and 'informal.' That divide itself is a heuristic limit preventing us from studying how urban structures and institutions functioned on the ground, through multiple actors, methods, and strategies.[45]

A very important study in this respect is Jessica Goldberg's book from 2012, *Trade and Institutions*.[46] The book centred on the relationship between political, economic, and legal institutions and geographies of trade 'in the Islamic Mediterranean' in the Fatimid period, based on documents from the Cairo Genizah. Goldberg argued that that relationship, and not the absence of strong institutions, conditioned how the Genizah merchants operated in the Mediterranean. It determined what routes they chose, how they interacted with state authorities, how they related to the law, and how they entered into partnerships. Reacting to the success of the New Institutional Economics in Genizah studies, Goldberg proposed to put institutions back 'in their place,' that is, in relation 'to other structural conditions and economic geographies.'[47] She showed that there is no ground for assuming the existence of a specially 'Islamic informality' behind the Genizah merchants' activity in the Mediterranean, as Greif and others had argued; instead, the merchants were sustained and constrained in their actions by Islamic institutions of law and government and by legal tools including formal partnerships, contracts, petitions, and access to courts.[48] Similarly, as Hannah Barker has argued, the slave trade in the Mediterranean in the Mamluk period was both a product and an effect of 'a set of assumptions and practices' shared among Christian and Muslim inhabitants, including the diffusion of specific contractual languages and legal instruments; the dissemination of such practices was favoured and regulated, though not imposed, through imperial structures of government and law.[49]

In researching institutions, scholars in the field of Islamic history have not always forsaken the question of how Islamic and European institutions compare to each other. For example, Manzano Moreno and Narotzki's article on the *hisba*, mentioned above, was published in a volume dedicated to the very question of comparability

[44] See the project's website: *Water Management in the Premodern Middle East*, https://www.ru.nl/rich/our-research/research-groups/representations-city/current-projects/projects/project-source-life-water-management-premodern/, accessed 11 March 2022.
[45] MAAIKE VAN BERKEL, 'Waqf Documents on the Provision of Water in Mamluk Egypt,' in *Legal Documents as Sources for the History of Muslim Societies: Studies in Honour of Rudolph Peters*, eds Maaike van Berkel, Léon Buskens, and Petra Sijpesteijn (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2017), 229–44.
[46] GOLDBERG, *Trade and Institutions*.
[47] GOLDBERG, *Trade and Institutions*, 17.
[48] GOLDBERG, *Trade and Institutions*, 120–80.
[49] HANNAH BARKER, *That Most Precious Merchandise* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), qt. 3; BARKER, 'Like Sand Grouse Flocking to Water: Merchants, Mamluks, and the Geopolitics of the Slave Trade' (paper delivered at the workshop *Networks and Ties of Exchange*, Leiden University, 3–4 June 2021).

between medieval institutions in Islamic states, Latin Europe, and the Byzantine empire.[50] Goldberg's book also considered the different institutional settings in which the Mediterranean-trade merchants worked. She suggested that, ultimately, the Genizah merchants' presence in the Mediterranean in the eleventh and twelfth centuries might have contributed to the rise of given institutional patterns in Europe, particularly in the Italian city-states. Seen from the Genizah, as she explained, it seems that the Italian merchants were interested in gaining 'the sort of legal geographic reach' that their colleagues, Muslim and Jewish merchants in the Fatimid empire, already enjoyed thanks to various forms of legal redress and formal contracts. In turn, the Fatimid merchants benefitted from and possibly boosted the success of Italian shipping in those centuries. However, such exchanges occurred through the establishment of markets in the Mediterranean which were regulated and sustained, among other things, also by Islamic legal institutions and Muslim political authorities.[51]

In other words, as a number of scholars have argued, any study considering seriously the historical differences between European and Islamicate economies cannot be based on the assumption that early and medieval Islamic states were characterised by weak of inefficient institutions, as it has often been supposed, because this is contradicted by the sources. In fact, neither adjective is suitable to describe how institutions took shape out of people's actions, movements, and relationships.

Other geographies

As Jessica Goldberg suggested, the real keystone for moving beyond Eurocentric views in the field of Islamic history has been the adoption of different perspectives on human geography. Several recent studies have contributed to upsetting the 'long divergence' theory by offering alternative research scales. They have done so mainly in two ways: first, by writing more localised histories of trade and commerce, and second, by following patterns of exchange that either exclude Europe or relativise its position. This has resulted in more specialised knowledge on regional trade, paving the way for future studies in a more connected perspective.

The most striking development since the 2010s is that historians have started paying more attention to regional trade *inside* Islamic polities, focusing on Islamic cities and their countryside. Overall, twentieth-century scholarship had given priority to long-distance routes linking India and China to Europe, while neglecting other connections, and it had conceived of Islamic lands mostly as transits or mediators for the passage of luxury items on their way to European cities. As a result, the vitality of sea trade in and between Islamic polities was often overlooked.[52] Recent studies on inter-regional and cross-cultural networks have upset that perspective. A general shift from long- to short-distance trade routes has been favoured by the intervention of social historians working with archaeological and documentary sources. These have

[50] HUDSON and RODRÍGUEZ, *Diverging Paths.*
[51] GOLDBERG, *Trade and Institutions*, 359–60.
[52] For a discussion, see GOLDBERG, *Trade and Institutions*, 18–25.

both leveraged micro-historical studies and turned to a broader range of Islamicate sources than those conventionally available for writing economic histories, such as legal texts.[53] In fact, recent studies combine chronicles and local histories with archaeological findings and documentary texts in a variety of languages, at times tapping into *belle-lettres* and religious literature. For example, a forthcoming volume on 'land and trade in early Islam,' edited by Fanny Bessard and Hugh Kennedy, includes several contributions on trade in regional contexts, such as a chapter by Alison Vacca on Abbasid Armenia.[54]

Besides the better-known merchant letters from the Cairo Genizah – which since the early twentieth century have provided much information on trade and economic matters, also fuelling discussions about Islamic institutions – scholars have started paying more attention also to the corpus of business documents excavated in central and southern Egypt, such as Arabic letters on papyrus, paper, and potsherd, many of which are earlier than the Genizah materials.[55] Thus, Stefanie Schmidt has recently studied regional trade in early Islamic Egypt based on papyri and archaeological sources, focusing on the border region between southern Egypt, Nubia, and historical Sudan.[56] In addition, Schmidt's research on the city of Aswan suggests that, besides a better-known story of long-distance trade, in which Egypt functioned as the link between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean, there are also more 'threadlike' stories to be written about networks of merchants who operated only in and around their towns.[57] With a similarly regional focus, Khodadad Rezakhani has

[53] Recent Islamic history scholarship has been reinvigorated by a 'material turn,' with the expansion of papyrology and archival studies, and more historians engaging with art history and archaeology and attempting at integrating literary and documentary sources. See, for example, the studies surveyed in URSULA BSEES, 'Annotated Bibliography: Arabic Papyrology, Archives, and Times of Change in the Mediterranean and Islamicate World,' *Der Islam* 98, no. 2 (2021): 546–645; see also SARAH MIRZA, 'Shoes, Writing: Unspeaking Writing in the Material Culture of Pre-Islamic Arabia and Early Islam,' *West 86th: Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture* 24, no. 2 (2017): 159–76; PETRA SIJPESTEIJN, 'The Continuum Approach: Multiple Legal Solutions to Run a Diverse Empire,' *Islamic Law Blog* (February 2021), https://islamiclaw.blog/2021/02/18/the-continuum-approach-multiple-legal-solutions-to-run-a-diverse-empire/, accessed 15 March 2022; SIJPESTEIJN, 'The Rise and Fall of Empires in the Islamic Mediterranean (600–1600 CE): Political Change, the Economy and Material Culture,' in *The Routledge Handbook of Archaeology and Globalisation*, ed. Tamar Hodos (London: Routledge, 2017), 652–68.

[54] FANNY BESSARD and HUGH KENNEDY, eds, *Land and Trade in Early Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming). I wish to thank Hugh Kennedy for sharing with me a draft of the introduction before the volume's publication.

[55] On the Genizah and trade, see ABRAHAM L. UDOVITCH, *Partnership and Profit in Medieval Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970); GOLDBERG, *Trade and Institutions*, 8–30; and GOLDBERG, 'Reading Goitein.'

[56] STEFANIE SCHMIDT, 'Economic Conditions for Merchants and Traders at the Border Between Egypt and Nubia in Early Islamic Times,' in *Millennium Studien: Living the End of Antiquity*, eds Sabine Huebner, Eugenio Garosi, Isabelle Marthot-Santaniello, Matthias Müller, Stefanie Schmidt, and Matthias Stern (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 207–22.

[57] STEFANIE SCHMIDT, 'Craft, Trade and Mercantile Networks in Aswan between the Late Byzantine and Early Islamic Period' (paper delivered at the workshop *Networks and Ties of Exchange*, Leiden University, 3–4 June 2021). See Schmidt's research project at the Free University of Berlin: *Greek, Coptic and Arabic sources from Aswan, Elephantine, Anba Hadra and Qasr Ibrim, Text and ConText*, https://firstcataract.hcommons.org/contacts/, accessed 22 March 2022.

recently undertaken research on the trade networks based in the strait of Hormuz, connecting sea and land posts, following the Muslim conquest of Sasanian lands.[58]

Historians of Islamicate societies have altered Eurocentric views of trade history also in a second way, and that is, by studying how merchant networks located inside Islamic polities interacted with networks centred in other regions. In this respect, the field has benefited from a more general interest in cross-cultural sea trade and from studies on the early modern period emphasising the role of merchants as cultural brokers. Since the early 2000s, the study of cross-cultural trade by scholars including Ghislaine Lydon and Francesca Trivellato has been fundamental, among other things, in contrasting more conventionally Eurocentric geographical narratives.[59] In its turn, however, the study of cross-cultural trade in early and medieval Islamic history has been largely centred on the Mediterranean, as a space in which Jewish, Christian, and Muslim merchants crossed paths, collaborated, and competed. Once again, the Mediterranean lens has favoured the study of links and comparisons between Europe and North Africa and the Middle East, to the detriment of other geographies. It is therefore noticeable that a growing number of historians of early Islamicate societies have turned to stretching such connections onto other geographical axes. The Indian Ocean, in particular, has been attracting renewed attention.[60]

Overall, thus, one notices a general shift towards reconsidering the importance of internal and regional trade routes inside and between Islamic polities, and not necessarily in relation to European economies. For example, recent archaeological research has brought up new information about trade posts and exchanges between Islamic polities in the Horn of Africa and India and Tang China, as well as about local routes connecting networks of close-by towns and sea-posts in East Africa.[61] Moving the focus away from the Mediterranean towards other seas, and especially the Indian Ocean, has been an important (re-)development in Islamic economic and legal histories.[62] But recent publications on trade, like Mohamed Ouerfelli's study of the

---

[58] KHODADAD REZAKHANI, 'Post-Sasanian Commercial Kingdoms and Trade Communities in the Western Indian Ocean' (paper delivered at the workshop *Networks and Ties of Exchange*, Leiden University, 3–4 June 2021).

[59] See LYDON GHISLAINE, *On Trans-Saharan Trails: Islamic Law, Trade Networks, And Cross-Cultural Exchange in Nineteenth-Century West Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); FRANCESCA TRIVELLATO, *The Familiarity of Strangers: the Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); TRIVELLATO, LEOR HALEVI, and CÁTIA ANTUNES, eds, *Religion and Trade: Cross-Cultural Exchanges in World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[60] The classical study is KIRTI N. CHAUDHURI, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indean Ocean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), on the early Islamic period see 34–62. On recent scholarship on the Indian Ocean, see FAHAD A. BISHARA, 'Ships Passing in the Night? Reflection on the Middle East in the Indian Ocean,' *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 48, no. 4 (2016): 758–62.

[61] SADA MIRE, 'Mapping the Archaeology of Somaliland: Religion, Art, Script, Time, Urbanism, Trade and Empire,' *African Archaeological Review* 32 (2015): 111–36. As another example, see the work of Awet Teklehimanot Araya and other archaeologists working on Eastern Africa in the early Islamic period, including sources on trade: *Becoming Muslim: Conversion to Islam and Islamisation in Eastern Ethiopia*, http://www.becomingmuslim.co.uk/2020/10/07/gias-global-islamic-archaeology-showcase/, accessed 20 March 2022.

[62] See BISHARA, 'Histories of Law;' and BISHARA, 'Ships Passing.'

Mediterranean sugar trade, or Ingrid Houssaye Michienzi's study of merchants networks between Tuscany and the Maghrib, show us that a Mediterranean setting needs not be oriented towards the rise of European markets either geographically or narratively.[63] As Jessica Goldberg has found, based on Genizah letters from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries, the impact of medieval transit routes linking India and Europe through the mediation of merchants based in Islamic lands should be resized in the favour of regional routes and, even more significantly, in the light of trade in primary agricultural goods.[64]

The European markets, particularly those looking onto the Mediterranean, have become less central even in studies that have kept focusing on transit routes. Two examples are Melanie Michaelidis' study of the fur trade between the Samanids in Central Asia and the Vikings in north-eastern Europe, and Hugh Kennedy's recent work on Abbasid Baghdad and its connection to northern Iraq.[65] Kennedy has suggested that Baghdad's expanding demand in the eighth and ninth centuries CE reached out at the same time towards India and South-East Asia and towards the nearby Jazira, the region where most agricultural produce the city consumed came from. Such studies underline the ability of large Islamic cities to *generate* transit connections for their own population's consumption. Others have also focused on the creation of new trade routes to fit the needs of Muslim elites and of the populations they governed. For example, Parvaneh Pourshariati and Reza Huseini have independently argued for the rise of new merchant networks based in Khurasan, Bactria, Sogdiana, and northern Iran in the seventh and eighth centuries. They suggested that the Muslim conquests of those regions had the double effect of exploiting pre-existing, consolidated trade routes in Central Asia, and of creating new routes south of the Alborz chain. These movements, as Huseini suggested, might have favoured the foundation and growth of Bagdhad in Iraq.[66] In a study on the island of Kish, Yasuhiro Yokkaichi has suggested that networks of Kish merchants were instrumental in linking two distinct sea routes that served the southern Indian trade in the Mongol period: one root centred in the Red Sea, the other one centred in the Persian Gulf.[67] As a final example, Koray Durak has been studying the exchange of medical knowledge and products between Byzantine and Islamic lands. His research had pointed to multiple trade hubs in Anatolia, such as the regional routes that

63 MOHAMED OUERFELLI, *Le Sucre: Production, commercialisation et usages dans la Méditerranée médiévale* (Leiden: Brill, 2008); INGRID HOUSSAYE MICHIENZI, *Datini, Majorque et le Maghreb (14e-15e siècles)* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

64 GOLDBERG, *Trade and Institutions*, 211–46.

65 MELANIE MICHAELIDIS, 'Samanid Silver and Trade Along the Fur Route,' *Medieval Encounters* 18 (2012): 315–38; HUGH KENNEDY, 'The Globalisation of Baghdad' (lecture delivered at Leiden University, 21 October 2021).

66 PARVANEH POURSHARIATI, 'The Abbasid Revolution, Overland Trade and the Opening of the Khurasan Highway;' REZA S. HUSEINI, 'Conquests and Trade in the early Islamic East' (papers delivered at workshop *Networks and Ties of Exchange*, Leiden University, 3–4 June 2021).

67 YASUHIRO YOKKAICHI, 'The Maritime and Continental Networks of Kīsh Merchants under Mongol Rule: The Role of the Indian Ocean, Fārs and Iraq,' *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 62 (2019): 428–63.

developed around the 'Cilician frontier' in the Taurus, and the 'international emporium' of Trabzon in the Pontos.[68]

Local contexts and empire studies

Thus, thanks to a more focused expertise in local contexts and in the study of documentary sources, accompanied by a sociological interpretation of institutions as 'sites of contention' rather than as 'efficiency-exchanging devices,' as mentioned above, over the last decade historians of Islamicate societies have ventured to trace meaningful connections between regions, such as those connections that were established through trade, by anchoring these into local and regional networks. One important consequence of these approaches has been that specialised knowledge about regional routes and patterns in Islamic history could now be better situated within imperial frameworks, in conversation with empire studies, yet without scholars losing sight of particular or even exceptional local circumstances.[69] Many have approached Islamic economic institutions as growing out of concrete practices of exchange, grounded in local realities, as far as these may be reconstructed from an array of historical and archaeological sources. This seems a significant development compared to studies taking Islamic empires as the starting point for drawing comparisons and parallels between institutions. To this end, experts in Islamic history have built on concepts of cultural brokering and political partnership that were first elaborated for studying early modern empires.[70] In turn, however, I believe that they have contributed to developing bottom-up and polycentric definitions of imperial structures and economic geographies before the modern period which scholars in other fields may also learn from. As a result, the economy of the early Islamic empires – caliphates and imamates – is now being presented at one time as locally diverse and internally interconnected; it is the sum of overlapping local practices, regional networks, and interregional routes. I would like to suggest that this multi-layered picture will allow for increasingly sophisticated comparative studies between premodern economies and for building more interconnected histories, in which early and medieval Islamicate economies interweave with those of other regions and polities, while also valuing internal connections and localised historical narratives.

---

[68] KORAY DURAK, 'The Commercial History of Trebizond and the Region of Pontos from the Seventh to the Eleventh Centuries: An International Emporium,' *Mediterranean Historical Review* 36 (2021): 3−41; DURAK, 'The Cilician Frontier: A Case Study of Byzantine-Islamic Trade in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries,' in *Center, Province and Peripherythe Age of Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos: From De Ceremoniis to De Administrando Imperio*, eds Niels Gaul, Volker Menze, and Csanád Bálint (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2018), 163–83.

[69] On empire studies and Islamic history, see the classical HODGSON, *Venture of Islam*, 101–230. See BISHARA, 'Bazaar;' SIJPESTEIJN, 'Rise and Fall;' MICHAEL COOK, 'The Long-Term Geopolitics of the Pre-Modern Middle East,' *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 26 (2016): 33–41. As an example of recent trends, see the research project *The Early Islamic Empire at Work* (2014–2019), including several forthcoming articles on the history of trade: https://www.islamic-empire.uni-hamburg.de/publications-tools/publications.html, accessed 17 March 2022.

[70] See, for example, CÁTIA ANTUNES and AMELIA POLÓNIA, 'Introduction,' in *Beyond Empires: Global, Self-Organizing, Cross-Imperial Networks*, eds Antunes and Polónia (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016), 1–11.

As an example of such trends, connecting imperial frameworks and local practices, Fanny Bessard's book *Caliphs and Merchants* masterfully traces the development of urban craft and retailing in Islamic cities of the Umayyad and the early Abbasid caliphate (seventh–tenth centuries CE). By studying workshops, marketplaces, food processing industries, and even private homes as sites of commercial activity, Bessard was able to inscribe a very concrete and every-day dimension of economic changes taking place inside Syrian towns such as Aleppo or Bosra and in their immediate hinterlands within broader patterns of transformation in the organisation of labour and in the regulation of markets, in which the rulers were also directly involved.[71] Similarly, in her book on trade and institutions Goldberg highlighted the 'intimate bonds' established between merchants, state officials, and agriculturalists in the Fatimid empire. Goldberg linked both the production and the exchange of primary food products, at the regional level, with long-distance trade in the Mediterranean, at the interregional level, through the activity of specific groups of merchants who operated and moved within an imperial institutional framework.[72] The lens of empire studies has sustained also the recent research project *Embedding Conquest*, led by Petra Sijpesteijn at Leiden University (2017–2022).[73] The project has investigated the social, economic, and political connections that allow us to study the early Islamic caliphates (seventh–tenth centuries CE) through the lens of empire studies. Material and invisible threads kept different regions of the caliphate well tied together, to such a degree of juridical and administrative cohesiveness between centres and peripheries that at times we may find the caliphate's overarching imperial organisation reflected in the administration of even small and remote villages, while at other times it was the craft of local scribes and village functionaries that became representative of imperial policies on the ground. Connective threads between the provinces were concretely knotted up by the movement of people (armies, government appointees, delegates, messengers, and tax collectors, among others), and perhaps even more crucially, by moving documents. Without always covering great distances, merchants in the Umayyad and the Abbasid caliphates transported objects, letters, and money, while also making use of imperial infrastructure, thus consolidating its connective force across regions. They travelled on imperial roads, followed pilgrimage routes, crossed bridges, used the postal system, and paid tax duties. They carried all that served for integrating the various regions of the caliphate into one coherent political space: from rough resources to refined goods, animals, and cash; from legal documents to books,

[71] FANNY BESSARD, *Caliphs and Merchants: Cities and Economies of Power in the Near East (700–900)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).
[72] GOLDBERG, *Trade and Institutions*, qt. 338.
[73] See the project's website: *Embedding Conquest*, https://emco.hcommons.org/https://emco.hcommons.org/, accessed 17 March 2022.

private letters, and recommendation letters. All this contributed to establishing links between local and regional economies.[74]

Moreover, while economic historians have often been criticised for decoupling economic institutions from political relations, recent scholarship on the early Islamic period has pointed to sodalities and conflicts in a very political realm. Several studies emphasise the involvement of even early state authorities, such as caliphs, imams, and *qadi*s, in determining economic matters both through personal enterprises and political negotiation. Bessard has argued that the Abbasid caliphs intervened directly to promote economic investment in given sectors; they built covered markets, opened stores, and invested in agricultural work. But in this they were not alone: shopkeepers, retailers, artisans, and local officials like the *muhtasib*, mentioned above, also played an active role in shaping urban institutions. They were able to negotiate with the authorities and their representatives as well as to resist their interventions.[75]

Finally, scholarship on the early Islamic empires has explored the convergence of different social circles built around regional business interests. Going beyond traditional dichotomies between merchants and scholars, or between rulers and religious elites, recent studies have attempted to identify networks that are different from commercial ones but that still had a prominent role in shaping economic life in the caliphate.[76] Thus, Koray Durak's research has pointed to overlaps between non-commercial networks of exchange involving soldiers, pilgrims, spies, captives, and other groups besides merchants.[77]

Overall, such approach to commercial and non-commercial networks, looking for ties and obligations also beyond circles of merchants, has allowed scholars to connect groups that are more conventionally treated separately or whose activities are placed outside the traditional study of economy, such as religious leaders. For instance, Edmund Hayes has shown that the early Imami authorities and their agents were

[74] Several recent studies strive to connect empire-wide and provincial administrations. See, for example, HANNAH-LENA HAGEMANN, KATHARINA MEWES, and PETER VERKINDEREN, 'Studying Elites in Early Islamic History: Concepts and Terminology,' in *The Early Islamic Empire at Work Volume 1: Transregional and Regional Elites: Connecting the Early Islamic Empire*, eds Hagemann and Stefan Heidemann (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 17–46; PETRA SIJPESTEIJN, 'Loyal and Knowledgeable Supporters: Integrating Egyptian Élites in Early Islamic Egypt,' in *Empires and Communities in the Post-Roman and Islamic World (c. 400-1000 CE)*, eds Walter Pohl and Rutger Kramer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 329–59; SIJPESTEIJN, 'Rise and Fall;' and ANTONIA BOSANQUET and STEFAN HEIDEMANN, eds, *The Early Islamic Empire at Work Volume 2: The Reach of Empire* (Berlin: De Gruyter, forthcoming).

[75] FANNY BESSARD, 'The Politics of Suqs in Early Islam,' *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 61, no. 4 (2018): 491–518. The point that the Muslim highest authorities, like caliphs and governors, were directly involved in regulating economic matters – for example, by applying taxes on trade – has been recently discussed also by HUGH KENNEDY: 'Taxation of Trade in the Early Islamic Period (700-950)' (paper delivered at the workshop *Networks and Ties of Exchange*, Leiden University, 3–4 June 2021). On negotiation, see the recent research project *Social Contexts of Rebellion*, led by Hannah-Lena Hagemann: https://www.gwiss.uni-hamburg.de/forschung/aktuelles-forschung/eng-islamwissenschaft/social-contexts-of-rebellion-hagemann.pdf, accessed 17 March 2022.

[76] On the study of 'economic life,' see BISHARA, 'Histories of Law,' 5–6.

[77] KORAY DURAK, 'Non-Commercial Networks for the Study of Commerce in Medieval Eastern Mediterranean: The Case of Byzantine-Islamic Relations' (paper delivered at the workshop *Networks and Ties of Exchange*, Leiden University, 3–4 June 2021).

important economic actors in the early Islamic caliphate.[78] The Arabic papyri from Abbasid Egypt suggest that, in some regional contexts, merchants and businesspeople formed sodalities that crossed social strata and familial divides. At times, their connections and ties evaded religious and even linguistic borders. In fact, when studying documents from the early Islamic period, like the Arabic papyri, markers of religious identity are often difficult to spot. It is difficult to identify distinct groups of merchants separated from each other on religious grounds, even if still interacting or collaborating, because in the papyri expressions of religious affiliation and of communal organisation are generally absent or passed in silence. On the other hand, it is easier to see merchants of different religious groups coming together in the same documents and dossiers because of personal relations, conflicts, or partnerships, and because of their shared use of legal and political infrastructures.[79] Another aspect that is somewhat more visible in the sources is political sodality. Thus, in Reza Huseini's research on early Islamic Khurasan, the interests of local non-Muslim political elites met those of groups of Arab Muslim merchants, determining trade patterns in the region.[80] Such personal and political sodalities contributed to building and consolidating the early caliphates' social fabrics.

In conclusion

A well-established tradition of studies in economic history and political science has looked for the roots of the Middle East's 'failure' to adapt to a European model of economic growth and/or political development *in* the history of early Islamicate societies and institutions. Recent responses raised from within scholarship on Islamic history contribute to upsetting the theory's premises. First, in going back to the early history of Islamic institutions, Islamic history experts have put into question the historical plausibility of the arguments sustaining the 'long divergence' theory – in the broad sense used in this article – on empirical grounds. As mentioned, both economic and social historians have produced new studies on Islamicate documents and social practices. They have written on the relationship between institutions and trade, retailing, urban government, and other economic activities. This has created the premises for more complex and detailed comparisons between the institutions of medieval polities on a global yet interconnected scale. These studies, in turn, may help

[78] See EDMUND HAYES, 'Imams as Economic Actors,' in *Land and Trade in Early Islam*, eds Fanny Bessard and Hugh Kennedy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming), and HAYES, *Agents of the Hidden Imam: Forging Twelver Shi'ism, 850-950 CE* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 28–41. I am thankful to Ed Hayes for sharing and discussing these works with me before their publication.
[79] See, for example, PETRA SIJPESTEIJN, 'Visible Identities: In Search of Egypt's Jews in Early Islamic Egypt,' in *Israel in Egypt: The Land of Egypt as Concept and Reality for Jews in Antiquity and the Early Medieval Period*, eds Alison Salvesen, Sarah Pearce, and Miriam Frenkel (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2020), 424–40; CECILIA PALOMBO, 'The Local Clergy and "Ties of Indebtedness" in Abbasid Egypt: Some Reflections on Studying Debt and Credit in the Early Islamic Middle East,' in *Ties that Bind: Mechanisms and Structures of Social Dependency in the Early Islamic Empire*, eds Edmund Hayes and Petra Sijpesteijn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: forthcoming); and PALOMBO, 'The Christian Clergy's Islamic Local Government in late Marwanid and Abbasid Egypt' (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2020).
[80] REZA S. HUSEINI, 'Framing the Conquest: Early Muslim Domination of Bactria, 652–750' (in-progress Ph.D. dissertation, Leiden University).

historians in other fields to better situate the history of specific Islamic institutions into discrete political and geographic contexts and to put institutions back 'in their place' when assessing questions of continuity and rupture, for example, between late-antique and early Islamic conceptions of rule, or between premodern and modern economies.

One of the most significant outcomes of scholarship from the last decade has been the emergence of research on regional economies and commercial networks within Islamic polities. Social historians working with a combination of documentary, archaeological, and literary sources, and playing with alternative geographic scales, have been building layered connections between towns, provinces, and states without forsaking the discreteness of local contexts – even when adopting the perspective of empire studies – and without necessarily reading the formation of institutions in function of what they might entail for the rise of capitalism. Several historians of Islamicate societies, such as the ones mentioned in this article, have thus been able to study institutions through concrete political, economic, and social interactions. As mentioned, many have not only reduced the scope of their research to towns, villages, or islands, but also shifted the focus towards regional commercial networks and agricultural work. Finally, they have highlighted that a variety of actors besides merchants were part of commercial networks – including retailers, soldiers, administrators, religious leaders, and others. These had a part in sustaining economic and cultural exchanges across regions and in creating forms of political and social cohesiveness within Islamic polities, such as the Abbasid or the Fatimid caliphate. One question that remains open is whether putting 'the local' at the centre might also favour the writing of interconnected histories on a global scale entirely outside of imperial frameworks.

Book Reviews

What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic

Shahab Ahmed

(Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015)

[ISBN 9780691164182]

NABEELAH JAFFER
Oxford University

The collection of the Gulbenkian Museum in Lisbon houses a white jade wine jug which once belonged to the Mughal Emperor Jahāngīr. The emperor had an inscription carved on its lip, which was translated by the late Shahab Ahmed in the first chapter of *What is Islam?*:

> God is Most Great [*Allāhu Akbar!*] The King of the Seven Lands! The Emperor of Emperors who spreads Justice! The Knower of the Signs, Real and Metaphorical! Abū-l-Muẓaffar Nūr-ud-Dīn Jahāngīr, the King, son of Akbar, the King! Righteous-Warrior! (68)

The point, Ahmed argues in the book, is that this is an *Islamic* wine-jug. The inscription begins with a fundamental Islamic statement that is universally recognisable – *Allāhu Akbar* – and goes on to celebrate Jahāngīr's rule in this religious context. Other wine-cups once owned by the Mughal Emperor similarly fashion themselves in the language of Islam, drawing on the concepts of *khilāfat* (Caliphal succession), and characterising Jahāngīr as a *ghāzī* – a Muslim warrior. Though alcohol has been almost universally forbidden by Muslim jurists, Jahāngīr's wine-jug is clearly coherent within his own conceptualisation of Islam. The question, Ahmed suggested, is whether 'our own conceptualization of Islam allow[s] us to understand this coherence?' (71)

In *What is Islam?* Ahmed sets out to demonstrate that modern understandings of Islam have grown too narrow to make sense of objects such as Jahāngīr's wine-jug, which exemplify an older Islamic tradition of epistemic diversity that was characterised by its openness to contradiction. He takes particular aim at the 'legal-supremacist' framing of Islam as *law*, which is adopted 'by Western analysts and modern Muslims alike' (129), and reproaches both groups for passing over centuries of literature, art and ethics in their willingness to take up the Salafi principle that 'the original is authentic.' Ahmed wants to rehabilitate poetry, figural representation in painting – and indeed, wine jugs – within our understanding of Islam as a human and historical phenomenon. This ambitious aim proves a tall order and, as I will show, Ahmed doesn't quite succeed in establishing a definitive new definitional framework for Islam. But his argument for a broader understanding of Islam – which shifts the focus away from prescriptive discourse – is very compelling. In the five years since its posthumous

Cromohs (Cyber Review of Modern Historiography), ISSN 1123-7023, 24/2021

DOI: 10.36253/cromohs-12801

publication this erudite and insightful volume has established itself as a landmark contribution to the work of conceptualising Islam usefully and accurately.

What is Islam? is a love letter to a flavour of Islam that dominated the region stretching from the Balkans to the Bay of Bengal from about 1350-1850 – a temporal-geographical entity which Ahmed refers to as the 'Balkans-to-Bengal complex.' It shifts our focus away from the Arab experience – a move reflected by the impressive linguistic variety of the evidence Ahmed marshals, which includes Malay, Pashtō and several other languages alongside Arabic and Fārsi. The book is divided into three parts. In the first (which contains only chapter 1), Ahmed sets out six provocative case-studies drawn from the Balkans-to-Bengal complex – each of which contradicts legally-derived Islamic norms in some way – and uses them to test the boundaries of our definition of Islam. In brief: is rationalist Islamic philosophy (as taught in the *madrasahs* of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex) Islamic? When Sufis claim they are no longer bound by Islamic law, is that Islamic? Are Suhrawardī's Philosophy of Illumination (*ḥikmat al-ishrāq*) and Ibn al-'Arabī's concept of the Unity of Existence (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) Islamic? Is the Dīvān of Ḥāfiẓ (and its often-disparaging attitude towards ritual piety) Islamic? What is Islamic about Islamic art, including figural representation? And finally, can the drinking of wine be Islamic? Collectively these case-studies embody 'the Sufi-Philosophical amalgam' – a trajectory of ideas which Ahmed positions as the primary epistemological framework of Islamic thought and practice within the Balkans-to-Bengal complex.

We might conclude that the individuals who engaged in these phenomena were simply bad Muslims. That would enable us to remove these six case-studies from an imaginary box labelled 'Islamic' and set them aside. And yet, as Ahmed is at pains to demonstrate, the Sufi-Philosophical amalgam was integral to the widespread experience of lived Islam for centuries and was valorised in that context. Like Jahāngīr's wine-jugs, these six phenomena were meaningfully Islamic for those who engaged with them. This sets the bar for Ahmed's definition of Islam: it must be broad enough to encompass these six phenomena, and the outright contradiction which was rife in the lived 'religious' experience of Muslims within the Balkans-to-Bengal complex. At the same time, it must retain enough unifying coherence that we can speak meaningfully of a single 'Islam.'

It is against this measure that previous definitions of Islam fall short for Ahmed. Ahmed devotes part two of the book (which contains chapters 2 to 4), to a lengthy and painstaking deconstruction of existing models of Islam. He argues that the tendency to view Islamic law as 'Islam-proper' and marginalise the Sufi-Philosophical amalgam leaves us with a version of Islam which cannot make sense of the contradictions outlined in part one. Nor will it do to view Islam as a figment conjured up from multiple distinct 'Islams' while Muslims themselves insist a single tradition exists. Ahmed is on strong ground when he draws on the burgeoning Critical Religion approach to pick apart frameworks which separate out 'religion' and 'culture,' or 'religion' and 'secular.' He finds Marshall Hodgson's 'Islamic/Islamicate' division

wanting on this basis (157-75). Phenomena placed in the 'Islamicate' category are arbitrarily excluded from the 'religious' category of Islam-proper, although the Muslims who engaged with them often made no such distinction. Ahmed's project might be summarised by this aim alone: to extend the boundaries of 'Islam' to encompass the 'Islamicate.' Less convincing is his critique of what he views as the undue weight given to the production of 'orthodoxy' in Talal Asad's concept of Islam as a 'discursive tradition' (270-95). Given the affinity between the two scholars' approaches, it seems likely that Ahmed makes heavy weather of his critique in order to set his own ideas apart.

In part three (containing chapters 5 to 6), Ahmed puts forward his solution to the contradictions posed in part one. He describes Islam as a language used to make meaning from the Islamic revelation. Ahmed complicates the matter by identifying three aspects of the revelation: the Pre-Text, the Text and the Con-Text. The Text refers straightforwardly to the Qur'ān and the Hadith. The Pre-Text is the higher divine truth (347) only partly revealed by the Text. The existence of unseen divine truth is traditionally accepted by Muslims (although the history of Islam is infused with disagreement over whether or not it can be made known by non-Textual means such as the philosopher's independent reasoning or the Sufi's mystical experience). The Con-Text is the history of hermeneutic engagement with the Pre-Text and the Text. Ahmed likens it to a city (358), with today's citizens adding their own modern buildings to the vast sprawl of existing edifices.

Islam, then, encompasses any act of meaning-making engagement with *any one* of these three aspects of the revelation. Philosophy and Sufism are Islamic even when they sidestep the Text because they seek to engage directly with the Pre-Text. Jahāngīr's wine-cups are Islamic because they are embedded in a Pre-Textual, Textual and Con-Textual matrix of meaning. Wine-drinking becomes Islamic whenever it is made meaningful in these terms, whether it is being forbidden or positively valorised as a heavenly indulgence for knowers of the higher truth (409). Ahmed goes even further: Sikh wrestlers in the villages of the Punjab traditionally shout '*Yā 'Alī*' – invoking the fourth caliph of Islam, who serves as a model warrior – before entering a fight. By engaging with the Con-Text of the revelation of Islam the Sikh wrestler's act becomes Islamic in a sense – although the wrestler himself remains a Sikh and might have no idea where his ritual phrase comes from (445).

There is something to be said for the way Ahmed's approach flattens out the category 'Islamic.' Consider Graeme Wood's provocative 2015 Atlantic article, in which he argued that ISIS was '*very* Islamic.'[1] Ahmed's approach suggests that while ISIS may be Islamic – as Islamic as Jahāngīr's wine-drinking – *nothing* can be reasonably deemed '*very* Islamic' from an outsider's standpoint, as this unfairly privileges one

[1] GRAEME WOOD, 'What ISIS Really Wants,' *The Atlantic*, March 2015, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980/, accessed March 20, 2021.

experience of Islamic meaning-making over another. Islam, Ahmed suggests, is not centripetal but diffuse. But the strength of Ahmed's conceptualisation is also its limitation: he makes the adjective 'Islamic' so broadly applicable that it becomes difficult to discriminate between different strands of the unwieldy diversity it encompasses.

In the final pages of the book Ahmed pre-empts many of the critiques that have surfaced since his death. To call something 'Islamic,' he notes, is not to deny that it can be described meaningfully (perhaps more meaningfully) in other ways. The wrestler's shout might also be described as a 'Sikh' act, or in terms of class or race or geography. Nor is he suggesting that prescriptive and Textual traditions are not of vital importance to a coherent understanding of Islam (538).

But perhaps the most vehement responses to *What is Islam?* have come from those who feel Ahmed is being disingenuous when he says, in the first sentence of chapter 1, that he is speaking only about 'Islam as a human and historical phenomenon', and is 'precisely *not* seeking to tell the reader what Islam is as a matter of Divine Command' (5). Ahmed's arguments hit their mark precisely because, for the most part, he takes a descriptive rather than a normative approach towards Islam. When Ahmed's prose does take on a personal quality – in an eloquent passage about what Islam means to the individual Muslim (257-59) for example – it offers insight and humour. Yet there is a sense that part of his audience lies beyond the academy. (At one point he wonders why Islamic feminists and other reformers have not made more use of Pre-Textual principles to overturn challenging Textual precepts, 513).

Ahmed's insistence that contradiction *necessarily* arises from the revelation is a chink in his armour. His conceptualisation of Islam doesn't just account for contradiction, it enshrines it. He argues that disagreement and difference is structurally inherent in any engagement with the Islamic Revelation's hierarchy of truth, as those who know the 'higher' truth of the Pre-Text live by different precepts than those who know the 'lower' truth of the Text (363-77). This is certainly how many gentlemen of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex viewed Islam, but it is a view that many Muslims would not condone. Ahmed's point verges on theology, requiring us to accept that the Pre-Text and the Text, as distinct sources of divine truth, necessarily give rise to different registers of this truth. Yet many Muslims believe these two sources of truth are *necessarily* in agreement and contradiction between them is impossible. We might wonder – given Ahmed's insistence elsewhere on the equality of all experiences of Islam – whether he is quite justified in making the hierarchy of divine knowledge that infuses the Sufi-Philosophical amalgam the sole lens through which the rest of Islam is to be viewed. This undermines his protest that he is not attempting to re-centre Islam around the pluralism and ambiguities of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex (539). It also calls attention to another problem: in establishing a dichotomy between Pre-Textual traditions (Sufism, Philosophy) and Textual traditions (law, Salafism) Ahmed claims too little of the Text for the former and concedes too much of it to the latter.

The Pre-Text, after all, can only be conceived of in relation to the Text, and Muslims can only interpret the Text in light of their understandings of the Pre-Text.

Despite these limitations *What is Islam?* will rightly remain an important milestone in the contemporary study of Islam. Ahmed demands that we make room for an Islam which is broader and messier than is commonly assumed. If nothing else the reader is forced to be more self-reflective about their imagining of 'authentic' Islam, more cautious about separating 'secular' and 'cultural' elements from 'Islam-proper,' and warier of centring one aspect of Islam – such as the law – while consigning other aspects (particularly non-Arab engagements with Islam) to the periphery.

A Culture of Ambiguity
An Alternative History of Islam

Thomas Bauer
(New York: Columbia University Press, 2021)
[ISBN 9780231170659]

GOTTFRIED HAGEN
Department of Middle East Studies, University of Michigan

Thomas Bauer's *Die Kultur der Ambiguität. Eine andere Geschichte des Islams* was published in German in 2011 (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen), and was quickly recognized as the most thought-provoking book coming out of Germany's *Islamwissenschaften* in many years. Frustrated by the ever negative attitudes of the German public towards Islam and the concomitant air of Western superiority, Bauer sought to set the record straight by providing a new perspective on premodern Islamic culture, and to explain how we previously got it so wrong. He did so by interweaving brilliant insights into Arabic literature, linguistics, Islamic law, and other aspects of culture with polemics against Western and Islamic modernity and against engrained biases in Islamic and oriental studies.[1] Ten years later, through the valiant efforts of Hinrich Biesterfeldt, himself an expert in Islamic studies, and Tricia Tunstall, a highly readable English translation has finally come out, which will hopefully usher in a new round of debate about his central argument, the tolerance of ambiguity in premodern Islam.

Bauer takes the concept of ambiguity from textual studies, and then expands its application in psychology to cultural history, to denote the ability or willingness of a significant segment of a society or social group to hold contradictory or at least 'different meanings […] associated with an act, term, or object […] *at the same time*' as equally valid (10). The inclination toward tolerance or intolerance of ambiguity is not only a matter of personality, but a defining characteristic of larger social groups or entire societies. Throughout the book Bauer posits a contrast between 'traditional' – both 'classical' and 'postformative' (5 and 7) – Islam as ambiguity-tolerant on one hand, and modernist and *salafī* Islam as ambiguity-averse or intolerant, on the other. And just as tolerance to ambiguity is associated with more sympathetic personality traits in individuals, Bauer evidently finds it more interesting or attractive in cultural formations than its opposite.

[1] It was extensively reviewed by CATHERINE MAYEUR-JAOUEN in *Arabica* 64 (2017), 115-127. See also ISABEL TORAL-NIEHOFF in *Al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā* 24 (2016): 187–193.

Cromohs (Cyber Review of Modern Historiography), ISSN 1123-7023, 24/2021

DOI: 10.36253/cromohs-13639

The heart of the book (chapters 2–4 and 6–8) consists of a series of case studies, starting with the variant readings of the text of the Qurʾān. In the early community under conditions of oral transmission, and in the absence of a definite bounded text authorized by the Prophet, those variants inevitably proliferated, creating what Bauer terms a 'crisis of ambiguity,' which was then reined in – or 'domesticated' – by the canonization of the 'Uthmānic text. This 'domesticated' ambiguity is enshrined in the equally canonical set of the 'Seven Readings' or 'Ten Readings' that are a well-established part of the philological approach of Islamic scholars to the Qurʾān. Western scholars have primarily studied these variants in order to establish an (unambiguous) Urtext, but Islamic scholars consider them all valid, and Ibn al-Jazarī (d. 1429) even celebrated them as an enrichment in meaning, to the point that he praised removing diacritical dots from the written text. By contrast, modernists like Ṭāhā Ḥusayn (d. 1973) find themselves aligned with salafists like the Saudi Ibn ʿUthaymīn (d. 2003) in the search for a single unambiguous reading and meaning of the text.

In chapter 3 Bauer continues his discussion of the Qur'an, expanding the analysis from the textual to the semantic to demonstrate the idea that the 'semantic abundance of the Qurʾān is inexhaustible' (76) – until the 'theologization of the Qurʾān,' because the theologian does in fact insist on a single truth whereas the jurist has to work with probabilities. This is demonstrated in chapter 4: The canonization of ḥadīth is another effort at domestication, in reaction to their exponential proliferation, but still leaves plenty of contradictory material in place. From among it, the jurists' goal is not to separate the wheat from the chaff, but to establish probabilities corresponding to degrees of authority. The prohibition of carrion in Q 5:3 provides a fascinating example of how scholars were reluctant to just throw out or disregard a specific interpretation, and rather preferred to interpret a problem in a way that accommodated apparently contradictory statements, resulting in nuance and complexity (112).

Chapter 5 functions as the axial chapter of the book. Here Bauer argues that the complexity mentioned before is no longer appreciated in modern times because modern Islamic orthodoxy with an ambiguity-intolerant academia colluded in an unholy alliance to 'Islamicize' Islam, with the result that Islam has come to be defined, first and foremost, in terms of theology and orthodoxy, such that all other aspects of social, intellectual and cultural life are supposed to be shaped by it. Instead, Bauer claims that ambiguity and the tolerance for it are deeply engrained in the Arabic language, and the swiftness with which Arabic replaced Greek and Persian in the rapid expansion of the early Islamic empire is a first-rate cultural achievement (chapter 6). Long before Wittgenstein, Arabic speakers and scholars maintained a healthy skepticism vis-à-vis absolute truth claims, based on the realization that human understanding is always proximate and relative, because it is mediated through language (261). The resulting linguistic consciousness valued words with double

meanings, along with all kinds of word play, from the competitive practice of the writing contrafactional poems (*muʿāraḍa*) to the irreverent use of Qurʾānic quotes (*iqtibās*) in poetry on wine and love.

The realm of love and desire provides more fertile ground for ambiguity (chapter 7). Traditional Islam embraces sex as an integral part of human nature, celebrates it in *mujūn* poetry, and accepts homoerotic desire as part of life. Bauer criticizes the Western category of sexuality which by lumping together so different phenomena as love and sex inevitably skews perceptions and values. Moreover, even in its current backlash to heteronormativity, Western discourses that match or seek to match morality and sexual identity have been producing misconceptions about Islam, with the result that in the past the West has faulted 'Islam' 'for its sensuality and promiscuity, and today, as the former Western prudishness has taken hold in the region, is faulting it for this very hostility to sex and desire.

Chapter 8 juxtaposes Islamic political discourses and geographical literature. Pushing back against the 'Islamization' of Islam, Bauer argues that political thought goes far beyond legal and theological discourse, and in its panegyric, historiographical, and philosophical, and ethical-political manifestations remain distinctly secular. The stranger, ambiguous and hence a paradigmatic threat to modern society, can be embraced with equanimity. Likewise, not driven by a search for a singular universalized truth, Islamic scholars were able to observe the physical world in a detached mode of curiosity, and had no desire for colonial and missionary expansion.

It will be evident from this summary that ambiguity as a heuristic opens up fascinating perspectives on Islamic premodern cultural history that have either been neglected or misunderstood. Bauer is a lively writer who enjoys a spirited polemic;[2] his textual knowledge and range of perspectives are astounding, and his reminder of the multiplicity of discourses that allow an individual like his crown witnesses Ibn Nubāṭa (d. 1366) and Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 1449) to engage in deeply pious as well as playfully irreverent ones is highly welcome. The concept of ambiguity invites comparison with Shahab Ahmed's magisterial *What is Islam*, which identifies contradiction as the characteristic feature of the Islamic hermeneutical engagement with its sources.[3] Both works speak to a similar ambition to fundamentally reshape the understanding of Islam, although they differ in their approach (Ahmed writes as a practicing Muslim; Bauer as a European academic) and regional and linguistic focus (Bauer's primary expertise is in Mamluk Studies; Ahmed focuses on what he calls the Balkans-to-Bengal complex). Tragically, Ahmed did not have time to engage with Bauer's work thoroughly because it came out too late, and Bauer decided against a more serious discussion of Ahmed's ideas as part of his (modest) revisions for the

[2] An impressive earlier example is THOMAS BAUER, 'Mamluk Literature: Misunderstandings and New Approaches,' *Mamluk Studies Review* 9, no. 2 (2005).
[3] SHAHAB AHMED, *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).

English edition, but Frank Griffel has critically compared both in a recent article.[4] Just as with Ahmed's fundamental concept, it is worth asking to what degree Bauer's ambiguity can actually be historicized, and thus applied to periods and regions outside the purview of the original work.

The singular focus on one explanatory paradigm in the study of vast cultural spaces is always a fraught enterprise, and ambiguity as wielded by Bauer is no exception. First, the overall argumentative and occasionally polemic thrust leaves many intriguing and important observations (about the continuity of cities from late antiquity into the Islamic period, the emotional purchase of Arabic poetry, or the place of al-Rāzī (d. 1210) in Islamic legal thought, to name just a few examples) underdeveloped, which is a pity, but understandable. More serious is the problem that ambiguity does not apply to all aspects of Islamic culture equally well. Zygmunt Bauman identifies the stranger as an ambiguous and hence threatening figure under conditions of modern nationalism, but how ambiguous is the stranger in the premodern Middle East? Given the power inherent in poetic speech, which got more than one poet killed, one wonders whether all poetic polemic was just play. The title of Book XXIII of al-Ghazālī's (d. 1111) *Revival of the Religious Sciences* is *Breaking the Two Desires* (meaning hunger and sexual desire): is this really a positive attitude towards sex?[5] Many more such individual quibbles could be enumerated here.

What is included in, or excluded from this picture of Islam is often arbitrary: Bauer is an Arabist, and as a result, the wholesome Islam he presents is almost entirely based on Arabic sources from the Middle East, with a particular emphasis on the Mamluk period. The Persian-speaking world, with its vast literary and intellectual output, has vanished behind the language barrier, although its mystical tradition would have had much to contribute to the study of ambiguity; let us note that Saʿdī's *Gulistān* and Firdawsī's *Shāhnāme* were read in Mamluk Cairo (nota bene in Turkish translation, another linguistic absence). Mysticism in general hardly figures in this picture of Islam, although the Sufi penchant for paradoxes and contradictions (pace Ahmed) would have presented ample material. The flippant disregard for the Ottoman period as *terra incognita* (7), omitting even a well-researched figure like ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulsī (d. 1731), will be taken up below. But even within the cultural production in Arabic before 1500 CE Bauer is self-servingly selective, when he gives short shrift to discourses that he concedes show little tolerance of ambiguity, like speculative theology (*kalām*) and philosophy (*falsafa*), and dismisses the 9th-century *Muʿtazila* as a fanatic aberration that is only appreciated by moderns who discover their own ideals in it. Are some fields of Islamic culture more Islamic than others?

The very concept of Islam and its boundaries remain a puzzle throughout the book. Shahab Ahmed had arrived at a maximally capacious definition of Islam,

[4] FRANK GRIFFEL, 'Contradictions and Lots of Ambiguity: Two New Perspectives on Premodern (and Postclassical) Islamic Societies,' *Bustan: The Middle East Book Review* 8, no. 1 (2017): 1–21.

[5] This is noted in IRENE SCHNEIDER's review of the German version: 'Review of *Die Kultur der Ambiguität. Eine andere Geschichte des Islams* by Thomas Bauer,' in *Der Islam* (2012) 88: 439–48.

claiming even the emperor Jahāngīr's wine goblet and the ideas of Maimonides as Islamic. Bauer in turn rejects the idea of a coherent Islamic culture or the idea of Islamic art, mocking the idea of an Islamic wine cup (no reference to Ahmed), but also the reduction of Islam to a religion, by pointing out that much 'Islamic' political thought is entirely secular. This, then, calls for a definition of religion that is never given, although one gets the impression that religion for Bauer is narrowly concerned with worship and scriptural exegesis. While one can easily agree that the panegyric discourse of praise of rulers emerges from a secular tradition, that of the pre-Islamic *qaṣīda*, to say that the philosophical tradition is secular, or the tradition of statecraft, or to claim that the work of the *qāḍī* has nothing to do with religion only makes sense in a polemic against a view that holds that everything Islamic must be dictated by scripture. That Muslims might have thought of kings as imbued with sacrality (as first prominently proposed by Aziz al-Azmeh) or studied creation as a manifestation of divine signs (see e.g. Suyūṭī's Islamic cosmology) remains outside of consideration.[6] It is true that discourses of justice and statecraft assert that the world order is endangered by injustice, rather than unbelief, but this does not mean that Islamic political thinkers would not consider that world order as a divine creation in the first place. Statements how God gave a prince the qualities to rule abound (e.g. 227); if this is secular, then it is secularism at the mercy of the divine. Having criticized the 'Islamization' of Islam, not without good reason, Bauer leaves us with a de-Islamicized Islam that has no coherent historical referent, and no viable delineation.

Whichever way it is conceived of, neither Islam, nor Europe easily conform to the rigid dichotomy of tolerance vs. intolerance for ambiguity. Bauer's characterization of modern Europe as Islam's counterpart borders on caricature, and wilfully glosses over the question how continuing ambiguities in art and music might be compatible with the intolerance for ambiguity in science and philosophy.[7] Moreover, this neat dichotomy ends up being utterly ahistorical. According to Bauer it ended when Western colonialism imposed its Cartesian concept of a singular, unified, unambiguous truth upon the Middle East, resulting in Islamic modernism and Salafism. How this imposition unfolded, however, and how the Middle East swiftly adopted fundamental tenets of European modernity is not part of the book, in which the history of Islam promised in the title ends more or less in the early sixteenth century, and snapshots from the twentieth only serve as foils, without a coherent presentation. Not only the actual history of colonization, but the entire Ottoman period are simply absent, with several implications. First, one wants to ask how even such an erudite iconoclast, who throughout the book chides Islamic and 'Oriental' studies for their modernist and

[6] AZIZ AL-AZMEH, *Muslim Kingship. Power and the Sacred Muslim, Christian and Pagan Polities* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1997); ANton M. Heinen, *Islamic cosmology; a study of as-Suyūṭī's al-Hayʾa as-sanīya fī l-hayʾa as-sunnīya, with critical edition, translation, and commentary* (Beirut: Orient-Institut der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft; Wiesbaden: In Kommission bei F. Steiner Verlag, 1982).

[7] This should have included the work of Adolf Loos, whose polemic against ornament Bauer quotes, while ignoring that Loos and Karl Kraus (one of the few European examples of ambiguity tolerance) were good friends, and that Loos' own work is actually playful and in its own way ambiguous (I owe these observations to my colleague Rudi Lindner).

disciplinary blinders, could himself be so incapable or unwilling to look beyond his own discipline to Ottoman history even if it so obviously pertains to his subject? Is this not another example of the narrow disciplinary boundaries of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies in Germany? Secondly, in the few forays into Ottoman territory we find factual errors that could have easily been avoided. For instance, making the point that the canonic punishment of death by stoning was hardly ever implemented, Bauer references one unique and well-documented case, the execution of an adulterous couple in the hippodrome in Istanbul in 1680, but inexplicably misses the essential point that the accused adulterer was Jewish, and that the episode took place in context of sectarian conflict and forced conversion.[8] His summary of the Ottoman claim to the caliphate is muddled at best (234). The linkage of *dīn wa dawla*, which Bauer dismisses as non-essential in Islam (whatever that means) is by no means modern, but standard fare in Ottoman political discourse. And a better understanding of the realities of seafaring and mapmaking might have prevented him from uncritically subscribing to Fuad Sezgin's speculations that Muslim seafarers had reached the Americas before Columbus (253).[9] But the most serious implication is a third one, namely, that any attempt to fill in the gap between the end of the Mamluk period and colonialism would quickly have shown that the very premise of Bauer's dichotomy is fatally flawed, because it rests on the assumption that the Islamic world existed by itself and unperturbed until its encounter with colonialism, despite its ancient Greek and Hellenistic heritage and major demographic and political change with the arrival of the Turks and the Mongols, to name just a few. The Ottoman Empire, including its Arab provinces, was integrated with the rest of the Mediterranean through constant interaction in warfare, migration, and trade. Does Bauer simply consider these interactions as less consequential, or was the encounter with Europe categorically different, and if so, how? The lack of an answer, or even the acknowledgement of the problem, once more underscores the dangers inherent in the attempt to shoehorn a vast and complex history into a mono-dimensional paradigm.

Ambiguity, it turns out, is an important feature of premodern Islam, but in an of itself has little explanatory purchase. Bauer has valuably shown how it is manifested in a vast kaleidoscope of cultural practices, and this merit should not be diminished, but he does not sufficiently historicize it. In conclusion of this review, and as a historian of Ottoman culture, I will offer a few thoughts how Bauer's study could be used to generate new questions, or shed new light on well-known phenomena, in order to start elucidating his 'dark ages' between the Mamluks and modernity, aka Ottoman history. We might start by acknowledging what generations of historians have shown before, that there is no neat distinction of what constitutes endogenous or exogenous change, and when the Ottomans bring change over the Mamluk period – given the

[8] See for instance MARC BAER, 'Death in the Hippodrome: Sexual Politics and Legal Culture in the Reign of Mehmet IV,' *Past & Present* 210, no. 1 (2011): 61–91. Bauer seems to think that the biographer Muḥibbī is the only source for this incident, which is far from the truth.

[9] A more plausible study of the evidence in question is GREGORY W. MCINTOSH and NORMAN J. W. THROWER, *The Piri Reis Map of 1513* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2000).

above-mentioned entanglements – it does not make sense to attribute them to external influence (which in Bauer's logic might thus make them somehow less Islamic). Ottoman imperial culture, that is, centred on the court in Istanbul, and mostly expressed in Turkish, shared the appreciation of ambiguity and playfulness in poetry. Similarly, much of what Bauer has to say about love and desire resonates with the ambivalent gendering and emotionality of this poetry.[10] On the other hand, the sacralization of the sultan as messiah, as Lord of the Conjunction (*ṣāḥib-qirān*), or as caliph – a title imbued with a strong dose of mysticism – clearly sets the Ottomans apart from Bauer's political secularism, making them heirs to Mongolian traditions of charismatic kingship, but the collusion of these concepts leaves room for an argument in favour of ambiguity.[11]

On the other hand, in a development now regularly described as Sunnitization, religious belonging and orthodoxy were reinforced and politicized starting in the sixteenth century, leading to more rigid sectarian or confessional boundaries. Religious activism emerging from this background brooked no ambiguity, but was clearly not independent from pre-Ottoman traditions.[12] European and Ottoman students of geography freely traded their knowledge in the seventeenth century, and natural philosophy and medicine underwent a paradigm shift towards experimental and Paracelsian ideas.[13] The compatibility between European and Ottoman quests for knowledge and truth shows that the Islamic Middle East did not have to wait to be colonized in order to change its validation of ambiguity. Whether we frame this change as indigenous Enlightenment, as Reinhard Schulze once proposed, as the seeds of Ottoman proto-modernity, as part of a process of disenchantment, it is clear that it fundamentally rests on Ottoman agency and indigenous intellectual developments.[14] That these do not happen with all of society in lockstep, but asynchronously and with much nuance is evident if we juxtapose the two towering figures of the Ottoman seventeenth century, Kātib Çelebi (d. 1657) and Evliyā Çelebi (d. after 1685) who in many ways represent two different tendencies in Ottoman culture. Nor are such

[10] WALTER G. ANDREWS, *Poetry's Voice, Society's Song: Ottoman Lyric Poetry* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985); WALTER ANDREWS and MEHMET KALPAKLI, *The Age of Beloveds: Love and the Beloved in Early-Modern Ottoman and European Culture and Society* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005) also show how closely this poetry and the attendant patronage system track Renaissance poetry in French, Italian, or English.

[11] CORNELL FLEISCHER, 'The Lawgiver as Messiah: The Making of the Imperial Image in the Reign of Süleymân,' in *Soliman le magnifique et son temps*, ed. Gilles Veinstein (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1992); HÜSEYIN YILMAZ, *Caliphate Redefined: The Mystical Turn in Ottoman Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

[12] TIJANA KRSTIĆ and DERIN TERZIOĞLU, eds, *Historicizing Sunni Islam in the Ottoman Empire, c. 1450–c. 1750* (Leiden: Brill, 2020); MICHAEL A. COOK, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 323–33.

[13] GOTTFRIED HAGEN, *Ein osmanischer Geograph bei der Arbeit. Entstehung und Gedankenwelt von Kātib Čelebis Ǧihānnümā* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2003); HARUN KÜÇÜK, *Science without Leisure* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019).

[14] REINHARD SCHULZE, 'Das islamische achtzehnte Jahrhundert: Versuch einer historiographischen Kritik,' *Die Welt des Islams* 30, no. 1/4 (1990); MARINOS SARIYANNIS, *Perceptions ottomanes du surnaturel. Aspects de l'histoire intellectuelle d'une culture islamique à l'époque moderne* (Paris: Les Éditions du CERF, 2019).

changes articulated in programmatic statements or enacted in highly visible announcements. As Ethan Menchinger has demonstrated, it took only slight shifts in emphasis for a historical thinker like Aḥmed Vāṣıf Efendi (d. 1806) to reappropriate religious rhetoric for a call for active political reform, and a rejection of 'fatalism,' making him 'the first modern Ottoman'.[15] What is clear, however, is that the Ottoman period at no point constitutes a distinct break from 'classical' Islam, and yet over the course of the centuries even before the interaction with colonialism (and nationalism!) has changed it substantially.

In sum, the phenomenon of ambiguity and the social and cultural tolerance or intolerance for it not only gives us a new and refreshing perspective on the Arab premodern Middle East, but it can also provoke new questions in adjacent areas. If tracking ambiguity's manifestations and transformations entails a more intensive dialogue between Arabists and Ottomanists, and probably Persianists and Mughal scholars, so much the better.

[15] ETHAN L. MENCHINGER, *The First of the Modern Ottomans* (Cambridge University Press, 2017).

Writing History in the Medieval Islamic World
The Value of Chronicles as Archives

Fozia Bora
(London: I.B. Tauris, 2019)
[ISBN 9781784537302]

MUSTAFA BANISTER
Utah State University

Modern historians assess the Syro-Egyptian territories of the late medieval Cairo Sultanate as having undergone an 'explosion' of historiographical writing during the fifteenth century. Kicking things off as a 'matrix moment' for the rest of the century in many ways, was the chronicle of the hadith-scholar, historian and notary witness, Aḥmad ibn al-Furāt (1335–1405) whose *Tārīkh al-duwal wa-l-mulūk* has been recognised by many scholars as a watershed for subsequent historiographical output between Tamerlane's invasion of Syria and the ultimate conquering of the sultanate by the armies of the Ottoman sultan Selim the Grim.

Fozia Bora's recent monograph, based on her 2010 Oxford doctoral thesis, presents specialists with a long-awaited case study of the medieval Cairene historian Ibn al-Furāt: a master preserver of long-lost historical sources (as well as original documents) who discerningly collated and consciously transmitted narratives from earlier source materials.

Students of medieval Islamic history have long bemoaned the lack of original sources surviving from the Fatimid period (909–1171) and how most of our historical narratives from the era are filtered only through the lens of later historians from the Ayyubid and 'Mamluk' periods of the Cairo-based sultanate. Historians such as Ibn al-Furāt and later Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī (who drew heavily on his work) thus stand as repositories of source material on the Fatimid period. Bora's work accordingly provides an assessment of Ibn al-Furāt's utility as a late fourteenth-century source for the later Fatimid period (roughly 1107–1166). The book inserts itself into two important lacunae: 1) the pressing call (by Ulrich Haarmann and others) for modern historians to investigate individual medieval Arabic authors and their historiographical productions; 2) a lack of scholarship on Ibn al-Furāt's work in particular, which is astonishing in light of his recognised importance among later fifteenth-century historians.

Bora sets out to rethink medieval Arabic chronicles as a form of historiographical documentation and advocates for the reading and interpretation of

Cromohs (Cyber Review of Modern Historiography), ISSN 1123-7023, 24/2021

DOI: 10.36253/cromohs-13685

chronicles as epistemic archives (2). After explaining the benefits of the archive perspective and the archival nature of the material, Bora examines Ibn al-Furāt as an ideal case study (4), Building on Donald Little's comparative approach to sources, Bora sets out to 'identify the specific archival practices' of her chosen historian, such as Ibn al-Furāt's gathering and reorganising of sources of late Fatimid history to reveal intellectual attitudes and epistemic concerns (5–6). Bora departs from Little's well-known methodology of identifying similarities and differences between sources to identify "original" material, by using the archival model to establish the choices of the historian and the subsequent shape of the tradition (20).

The first chapter ('The Archival Function of History') begins with Bora's theoretical explanation and defense of the archival approach as a fruitful means of engagement with medieval chronicles more broadly, and with Ibn al-Furāt's *Tārīkh* specifically. She looks briefly at the epistemic environment Ibn al-Furāt worked in and wrote history for as a way to frame his historiography as documentation; an 'archive' interested in preserving narratives rather than documents (although there are documents to be found preserved in its pages). While asserting her disinterest in a positivist recreation of later Fatimid history, in regard to the portions that deal with later Fatimid history, Bora sees Ibn al-Furāt's text as something of an 'anthology of extant and lost historiographical resources' (11). To her credit, Bora's approach to Ibn al-Furāt's chronicle seeks to transcend issues of historical veracity or authenticity (the main questions typically asked of such sources) and instead to observe how a medieval historian consciously shaped, preserved, and transmitted his material.

In chapter 2, after presenting Ibn al-Furāt's chronicle as an archive by ascribing signs of archivality to it, Bora examines the author's life, social network, place in the intellectual cosmos of the Cairo Sultanate, and how his chronicle influenced and was assessed by later writers particularly Ibn Khaldūn and al-Maqrīzī (29–30). She also engages with the material aspects of the text and its immediate fifteenth-century reception. Interesting insights about Ibn al-Furāt and his working methods as a historian come to the fore such as his focus on causal factors for events and his tendency to privilege court historians for the earlier periods he wrote about in his *Tārīkh*. She deals with questions of text structuration, audience, and reception for the work, as well as, more broadly, with the transmission of Fatimid sources down through the Ayyubid and early 'Mamluk' periods.

The third chapter details what might be identified as an elite Fatimid corpus, courtly in nature. In light of the many Fatimid sources lost to time, Bora presents what remains to us by explaining Ibn al-Furāt's utility as a source for the Fatimid period (61). While pointing out that we do not have a so-called official 'Fatimid view' of history (67–68), she ties many of the sources preserved by Ibn al-Furāt to issues of a given Fatimid caliph or wazir's legitimacy, and about assumptions that the texts were penned by quasi-courtly historians interested in aggrandising the men who granted them agency (70). Among the interesting revelations here, is that like his Sunni contemporaries Ibn Khaldūn and al-Maqrīzī, Ibn al-Furāt's approach to the Ismāʿīlī

Fatimids tends to be free of religious precommitment and his historiographical voice tends toward the non-confessional.

Moving on from the broader discussions of historiography presented above, the fourth chapter zooms in for a closer look at Ibn al-Furāt's text. In his account of late Fatimid rule, Bora claims Ibn al-Furāt uses a number of strategies (itemisation, analysis, sequencing, space management, synthesis and conservation, etc.) that can be described as 'archival' in which he is both creator and beneficiary of the historiographical archive. Ibn al-Furāt collates written materials and also curates extracts to narrate a new account to preserve knowledge of late Fatimid history (84).

As case studies on particular Fatimid caliphs and wazirs, Chapters 5 and 6 then take a closer look at Ibn al-Furāt's account of the late Fatimid caliphate and wazirate in relation to earlier, contemporary and later sources. Faithful to his historiographical project, Ibn al-Furāt demonstrates what Bora identifies as the omnivorous nature of medieval Islamic historical knowledge: historians were actively invested in exploring their craft, disagreeing over it, committing it to paper, and sharing it in a bibliophilic context in which archivality was a key modus operandi (126).

The final chapter restates the mission, summarises the findings, and adeptly presents the wider implications for the study of medieval Islamic archivalities.

It should also be mentioned that the book also includes three extensive appendices which help support the arguments made by the author, and which provide the reader with a range of historical sources for Fatimid history preserved by Ibn al-Furāt. The second appendix offers Bora's Arabic edition of all of Ibn al-Furāt's unique material on Fatimid historical events, followed by an original English translation of these narratives in the final appendix. In all, Ibn al-Furāt preserved around forty reports on the Fatimids, more than half of which are comprised of unique material, which alone, makes the book indispensable to current scholarship and research on the Fatimids.

Bora is above all interested in the complicated and multifaceted structural production of Ibn al-Furāt's text and further still to questions of historiographical authorship and agency in the Cairo Sultanate. As the author admits, it is unfortunate that so little is known to us about the life of Ibn al-Furāt. One can only wonder what a deeper dive into the social contexts and relational ties of Ibn al-Furāt might have revealed about the milieu the work was created for and created by. Like all fifteenth-century historians indigenous to the Cairo Sultanate, Ibn al-Furāt's life followed a complicated career path which the *Tārīkh al-duwal* was carefully situated within. The performative element of who Ibn al-Furāt was (or who he may have aspired to be) – would also have shed light on the shaping and inclusion of narratives and documents in his text in light of his own scholastic endeavours and relationships. It is thus important to acknowledge, as Bora does, the interweaving of author and text, and that an author may have written a chronicle to serve multiple complex purposes (which are not always mutually exclusive).

Earlier scholars including Haarmann and Li Guo argued for the existence of regional idiosyncrasies in historical writing that helped define unique 'Egyptian' and 'Syrian' schools or traditions among works of late medieval Arabic historiography. Historical works produced in fourteenth-century Syria tended to be written by religious scholars and were often styled more like hadith literature, whereas the style developing in thirteenth- (and later fifteenth-) century Cairo was oriented more towards the court of the sultan in the Citadel. Ibn al-Furāt, himself a muhadith and one who read Fatimid and other court histories, seems to have produced work that inhabited the intersection of these two styles in late fourteenth-century Cairo. In some ways, he was quite an innovator, whose material was (perhaps rightly) borrowed liberally by his later contemporaries (whether attributed or not).

Throughout the book, Bora applies interpretive understandings from archival studies and questions the purpose of the medieval Arabic chronicle. The writing is often dense, succinct, and committed to upholding the book's central premise. Although Bora argues consistently and persuasively, many points are deserving of further expansion, such as the precise meanings of terms like 'archival' or 'archivality' to better guide the reader. While the presentation is convincing and offers valuable food for thought on the utility of the archival approach to chronicles, some concession has to be made that the approach is somewhat limiting and can potentially force chronicles to be understood as something their medieval authors may not have intended or conceived of their works as being. There is a danger here of applying the notion of archive too broadly in which *any* source or item of inquiry – even a singular collection of poetry (*dīwān*), can be interpreted as an 'archive' of sorts. This may raise eyebrows among scholars of more modern history who work with (and wander through) massive state archives in the more typical sense. Ultimately, however, Bora concludes somewhat even-handedly that through their narrative, documentary, and archival dimensions, chronicles serve a key function of memorialisation (130).

In summary, Bora has done a great service to the field and *Writing History in the Medieval Islamic World* offers a great deal of value for medieval Arabic historiographical studies as well as Fatimid studies. Bora's work is a theoretically sophisticated case study on the utility of the *Tārīkh al-duwal* that will hopefully guide future scholarship in pressing forward on issues such as Ibn al-Furāt's value as a historian of his own fourteenth century. The author is also to be commended for her encouragement of the field to move beyond issues of source authenticity or chronology and onto new horizons of analysis such as the agency of authors and their texts, by presenting a compelling and thought-provoking example for how best to execute such a study.

L'autore assente
L'anonimato nell'editoria italiana del Settecento

Lodovica Braida
(Rome: Laterza, 2019)
[ISBN 9788858136188]

ANN THOMSON
European University Institute

This book by the distinguished Italian book historian Lodovica Braida brings together a collection of studies which, as she indicates on p. VIII, analyse some significant cases of the adoption of anonymity by Italian eighteenth-century authors. However, the studies go beyond the sole question of anonymity as they look at the question of authorship from diverse angles; the central question is the construction of authorship in Italy in the eighteenth century, a period which saw important developments in the Italian book trade, particularly during the second half of the century. An interesting aspect of this investigation concerns the general lack of reflection on intellectual property in Italy at the time. These studies draw on the book history practiced both in Italy and elsewhere, together with comparisons with other countries, notably England and France, to bring out the complexity of the question. Often considered to be imposed by censorship, anonymity is here shown to be the result of a much more complicated range of elements including the type of work. The analysis is based on a sometimes detailed study of the publication process and the book market, including the function of false addresses, and is also intended to illustrate the long process which eventually led to the recognition of copyright. Thus the 'absent author' in the book's title is not only intended to refer to the absence of a name on the title page, but also the author's absence in the commercial decisions taken by the printers or booksellers.

After an Introduction which sets out the aims of the volume and indicates the variety of possible reasons for the choice of anonymity and its complex function, the first chapter investigates the ambiguity of the 'author function', to use Foucault's expression. It gives a fascinating overview of the situation in eighteenth-century Italy and the position of the author, including advice about publication, before moving on to discuss the complexity involved in the question of anonymity, which is often purely formal, as the name of the author was an open secret in certain circles. As Lodovica Braida points out, anonymity can take different forms, including false names, as well as dedications or accompanying letters which can be understood by those in the know. Here she often draws on the correspondence of well-known writers and provides a

Cromohs (Cyber Review of Modern Historiography), ISSN 1123-7023, 24/2021

DOI: 10.36253/cromohs-13656

variety of different examples of publication, in Italy and elsewhere, to bring out the complexity of the position of the author in the process of book production and commercialisation. The example of Alfieri underscores the low status of authors and the difficulty they experienced in affirming their rights in the face of printers and booksellers.

The following chapters constitute case studies, the first one concerning travel accounts, a popular eighteenth-century genre. As Braida shows, travel accounts could differ considerably and represent a variety of formats, and their authors did not always pay attention to the same aspects of the countries visited; these differences could influence the choice of anonymity. The study of four different travellers who chose anonymity but whose identity is known (Algarotti, Bianconi, Caimo and Angiolini), together with the publication history of their accounts, enables her to bring out the diversity of cases. This chapter is followed by two studies of very different cases: Giuseppe Parini and Carlo Goldoni. Giuseppe Parini's poems *Il Mezzogiorno* and *Il Mattino*, published anonymously, were republished with a continuation, *La Sera*, by another poet and without his permission. The reconstruction of the complicated story of the different anonymous editions and the restitution of the true author is very different from the history, studied through the publication of three editions of his plays, of how Goldoni attempted to construct his status as author and to keep control of the transition from stage to page, with no question of anonymity. Here the use of his correspondence reveals the true story of his dispute with the original printer and the ensuing court case. It clearly shows how this episode as a stage, for the moment isolated, in the struggle for copyright. Despite the differences relating to anonymity, both cases illustrate, through a detailed study of different editions of their works, the complicated relationship between author and printers and the difficulty experienced by the authors when attempting to establish control over the circulation of their works.

The last chapter, devoted to the novel, generally seen as an inferior genre by 'men of letters' and as more suitable for women, looks at a different aspect of authorship. Novels were often published anonymously or presented as translated from the English or the French, often with false addresses. The study of the paratext often reveals a lot. This chapter is somewhat less original than the preceding ones as it discusses aspects which are better known, but it is usefully complements the others by dealing with this genre which became so important in the second half of the eighteenth century.

This book constitutes an important contribution to the history of authorship by showing how book history, and the detailed study of the preparation and circulation of different editions, throws light also on the construction of authorship and the struggle to establish the recognition of intellectual property. It is a pity, however, in view of the large amount of information provided in the footnotes, that it does not include a separate bibliography; this would have been useful both for the bibliographical information on the editions studied and the abundant secondary literature which is cited throughout the book.

Paper in Medieval England: From Pulp to Fictions

Orietta da Rold
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020)
[ISBN 9781108886536]

JOSÉ MARÍA PÉREZ FERNÁNDEZ
University of Granada

With a few exceptions that include Lothar Müller's *White Magic* (2014), and now Orietta da Rold's monograph, scholarship on paper has consisted in mostly historicist approaches to its production and trade, and the elaboration of watermark repertories. This new wave of research now begins to focus on a critical examination of its cultural history, a trend which had an important precedent in 1990 when Renzo Sabbatini published his account of early modern paper in Tuscany.[1] Orietta da Rold situates her approach to paper in Medieval England within the general history of paper by engaging in a critical survey of some of the most relevant secondary literature on the material aspects of Medieval and Early Modern paper production which also suggests new paths for further research with the incorporation of views from disciplines such as literary and economic history, knowledge management, and media studies.

Her insights on paper in Medieval England also result from the careful scrutiny of a wealth of primary documentary sources and the use of statistics distilled from some of the most relevant existing databases – one of which, the *Mapping Paper Project*,[2] is actually coordinated by Orietta da Rold herself. The attention to detail deployed in her examination of these sources is both an antidote against overgeneralization and an unavoidable starting point for a fresh approach to the subject, whose proper development, she also acknowledges, will require the compilation of further quantitative data and analysis. Her book, in short, makes a good case for a more nuanced approach to paper that can go beyond some of the received ideas about its cultural history. This is particularly called for in those cases which involve what we might call micro-histories of paper.

One of these received ideas involves the role of production costs in the adoption of paper as a medium. To demonstrate that cost need not be the main factor for the

[1] LOTHAR MÜLLER, *White Magic: The Age of Paper* [*Weisse Magie*, München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2012] (Cambridge, UK & Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2014); Renzo Sabbatini, *Di bianco lin candida prole. La manifattura della carta in età moderna e il caso Toscano* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1990).
[2] ORIETTA DA ROLD and HOLLIE MORGAN, 'Mapping Medieval Paper in England,' *The Manuscripts Lab For the Research and Pedagogy of Handwritten Culture*, November 28, 2015, https://www.english.cam.ac.uk/manuscriptslab/mapping-medieval-paper-in-england/.

Cromohs (Cyber Review of Modern Historiography), ISSN 1123-7023, 24/2021

DOI: 10.36253/cromohs-12802

success of paper, at least in the English case, da Rold turns to 'the accounts of the household of King John II of France during his captivity in England in the middle of the fourteenth century' (60-61). This document does not just suggest that cost was not the only consideration for the use of paper-based products, but it also provides evidence on the different sorts of paper-products available at the time in England in terms of 'size, quality, colouring and finishing.' (61). From this record, whose data she carefully collates and registers in a list in page 62, da Rold concludes that 'paper was used frequently, and that it could be found easily' and stresses the fact that this information documents the use of paper in 'England in the 1360s, almost a century before the arrival of printing in Westminster.' This is indeed an important first step, and a practical demonstration of the insights that microhistories of paper can provide. The data are certainly valuable and relevant, and although out of a narrow chronological frame of just two years (i.e. 1359-60) and a corpus of items bought by the household of a monarch with a purchasing power well above the average consumer one can only reach partial conclusions about this particular case, microhistories like this do counterbalance the traditional contention that paper was always cheaper than parchment and that this led to the triumph of the former above the latter. As da Rold suggests, insights on the general cultural and social drift provoked by the gradual adoption of paper and its long cultural history as a medium require a much larger corpus of primary documents, and a critical mass of microhistories like this that can put together a more fine-grained and nuanced account. Da Rold's first approach to paper in England is in fact followed by a string of case studies during the rest of her book which document the increasing amount and variety of paper in England over the course of the fourteenth century.

Although this is a history of paper in Medieval England, one of the conclusions that the reader draws from the book is that a proper attention to local or national histories of paper requires an international approach. This dialectic between the local and the international alongside close attention to particular case studies and the *longue durée* pervades da Rold's monograph. In her chapter 4 she proves that the relative prices of paper and parchment were established by a series of factors, one of which was the region under scrutiny. Even within the Italian Peninsula the quality and price of paper in relation to parchment varied according to the diversity of its regions and their respective circumstances – which stresses that a national Italian approach is as reductive as an exclusively English approach can be. These domestic Italian regional differences exacerbated once paper was exported to places like England, when additional costs in transportation and taxes increased its original price, and eventually affected its competitive edge vis à vis parchment.

The result is a general picture that registers significant differences in the perception, cultural and political function of paper in different domestic and international regions over the course of the late Middle Ages. This is the complex picture we get when we approach the cultural history of paper as a mosaic of microhistories. A bird eye's view in combination with a comparative analysis of

particular cases in England and Italy result in a series of telling general differences, one of which confirms that a relatively abundant supply in combination with proximity to important centres of production did generate lower costs in Italy. In other words, and all necessary nuances considered, paper was more competitive in Italy vis à vis other media, whereas in England the lack of local expertise and production centres delayed its adoption in comparison with other European regions where it was more readily available. As we all know now, in the long run, paper ended up displacing parchment and became the omnipresent medium for global communication.

Besides the need for an interdisciplinary and international approach, da Rold's book also confirms that important aspects of the use of paper are closely linked to practices like administration, diplomacy, trade, and finance. In other words: the use of paper as a medium was just a piece in the vast and complex mechanisms that made up Late Medieval and Early Modern communication systems and their networks. It is very revealing that the history of paper in England must start not just with documents that reached the country from abroad during the thirteenth century, but also that these papers include above all diplomatic correspondence and financial documents sent by the Riccardi Italian banking family.

Da Rold also addresses the administrative dimension of paper vis à vis other media in her chapter 3, which starts with a reference to Frederick II's edict on the compulsory use of parchment and the ban of paper for public documents. This naturally underlines the persistence of parchment, but it also reveals the fact that whereas parchment-based documents constituted the permanent nodes or hubs in imperial networks, the fragments of information that circulated among them and which fed Frederick's administrative machinery circulated first in paper format. These paper documents were then discarded once these clusters of scattered information had been properly processed and registered in the more permanent medium of parchment. This ban on the use of paper for public documents by Frederick II does in fact reveal that paper had been in frequent use among *curiali* notaries, i.e. it had been a well-established practice for some time, and suggests that this was a practice that Southern European notaries might have imitated from their Arabic counterparts. In short, da Rold's chapter 3 confirms the coexistence of paper and parchment, their different uses and the close relation between paper and the adoption of new types of script that could optimize and speed up the production of documents.

The most substantial and indeed innovative part of the book provides a critical account of the role of paper in Medieval England, with important insights on its cultural and literary history. This includes a discussion of the use of paper in a variety of disciplines and practices – such as medicine, wrapping, the manufacture of playing cards, the preservation of food and the presentation of confectionery. Da Rold also stresses how paper circulated alongside other goods that came from abroad – such as spices. Not surprisingly, these merchants who traded in spices and paper were Italian, and they operated in the London district where Chaucer grew up. This does not merely stress that paper and spices reached England thanks to Italian merchants. It also proves

that Chaucer's familiarity with all things Continental, from paper to literary models, were to a very large extent mediated by merchants and aided by diplomatic activity. These constitute further proof that all national literary canons are established upon essentially transnational exchanges and processes of material and immaterial appropriation which involve mediators like merchants and diplomats, as well as practices like trade and translation. Paper was just one among the different materials and practices that were entangled in these complex processes: this is yet another reason to contemplate the cultural history of paper always in relation to other processes and phenomena.

An account of the presence of paper in the English literary imagination also calls for a return to Europe in general, and to Italy in particular. A passage of Dante's *Inferno* in which paper is used as a trope gives da Rold an opportunity to apply the concept of *affordance*, which was first used in cognitive psychology.[3] Affordance works very well for a mostly empirical approach that can bridge the gap between the material dimensions of paper and their perception, both subjective and collective. Critical and heuristic categories like affordance, but also agency and value, all complement each other by converging in the materiality of a specific medium (paper in this case) in order to explain how specific aspects of such materiality can be semiotically activated. In her final chapter da Rold sets about exploring how paper and its affordances stirred the literary imagination of Medieval England. She musters a long list of primary sources to explore the rich diversity in the use of paper as a trope, from Chaucer and the anonymous *Cleaness* to the *Gawain* poet, among several others. These sections are without any doubt the most valuable and ground-breaking in her book.

The many strengths of this book lie in the way it demonstrates through a rigorously empirical method that paper is a far more complex material and medium than we have come to believe so far. With the example provided by her detailed approach to paper in Medieval England within an international context, da Rold's book confirms that a cultural history of paper will need to take into consideration the nuances that punctuate each of its different episodes, as well as the diversity of its uses and perception within its very long history, which is still in the making.

[3] JAMES G. GIBSON, *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966). The use of affordance as a heuristic tool allows da Rold to go beyond the concept of agency, on which she quotes Bruno Latour's *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford, University Press, 2005).

Inexcusabiles*: Salvation and the Virtues of the Pagans in the Early Modern Period*

Ed. Alberto Frigo
(Cham: Springer, 2020)
[ISBN 9783030400163]

GIACOMO MARIANI
Università degli Studi di Modena e Reggio Emilia

Admiration for the virtues of Greek and Roman antiquity, polemical taunting from contemporary pagans, and pity for the destiny of those unaware of the Christian message are just the main reasons that provoked the ever-returning question of the possibility for the unfaithful to obtain afterlife salvation. The issue is known, especially for the centuries that span from Augustine to the late Middle Ages. In 1934, Louis Capéran offered his *essai historique* on the matter, pinpointing fundamental testimonies and the evolution of the question through the centuries.[1] More recently, John Marenbon (2015) has provided a new synopsis, also rightly pointing attention to the issue of the appreciation and effectiveness of pagan virtues, an issue closely related to that of their salvation.[2] Yet, several aspects of the matter remain unexplored, especially in the age that followed the great geographical discoveries, which faced the Christian West with a whole new multitude of men that had never heard about Jesus Christ. Inexcusabiles: *Salvation and the Virtues of the Pagans in the Early Modern Period* attempts to fill this void, although without aspiring to provide an exhaustive and complete account of the centuries that separate Montaigne from Leibniz.

The volume is mostly grounded on the papers presented at a conference, under a very similar title, held at the Warburg Institute in London in 2016. The distance in time between the conference and the publication of its proceedings has affected the book, since at least one of the papers presented there has in the meantime appeared elsewhere and others could not be included in the final edition.[3] To make up for the

[1] LOUIS CAPÉRAN, *Le probléme du salut des infidèles*, 1: *Essai historique*. Toulouse: Grand Seminaire, 1934 (nouvelle édition revue et mise a jour).
[2] JOHN MARENBON, *Pagans and Philosophers. The Problem of Paganism from Augustine to Leibniz*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015.
[3] The papers not included in the volume are listed on page 7, note 8. One appeared as: GUIDO GIGLIONI, 'Between Galen and St Paul: How Juan Huarte de San Juan Responded to Inquisitorial Censorship', in *Medicine and the Inquisition in the Early Modern World*, ed. MARIA PIA DONATO, in *Early Science and Medicine* 23, 1-2 (2018), 114–134 (*Medicine and the Inquisition in the Early Modern World* was reprinted separately under the same title: Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2019). The others that were not included do not seem to have appeared elsewhere.

Cromohs (Cyber Review of Modern Historiography), ISSN 1123-7023, 24/2021

DOI: 10.36253/cromohs-13653

losses, other authors were invited to contribute to the printed volume.[4] In part due to these changes, the book appears to have lost its focus, which originally looked at a very specific long-standing topic of Christian theology and Western philosophy. Not all the newly included contributions – and even, in part, some of the original ones – are entirely respondent to the topic that the editor claims to be at the heart of the book: the issue of how to evaluate virtues attributed to pagans (unbelievers, ancient and modern) and whether pagans can attain afterlife salvation. This, of course, does not burden the quality and novelty of the single contributions. The book remains coherent under other aspects, such as the chronological, geographical and historical viewpoint: sixteenth-eighteenth century Christian Europe or its viewpoint.

The book is divided into four parts, which correspond to the sessions of the conference organised in London. The first part addresses the issue of pagans in the early modern world from the perspective of humanism. Alberto Frigo, editor of the whole volume, opens this section with an essay on Montaigne. He discusses the philosopher's view of pagan religion and its relation to Christian salvation, with special attention to the texts of the *Essays*, the *Apology for Raymond Sebond* and the handwritten annotations to the edition Montaigne possessed of Lilio Gregorio Giraldi's *De deis gentium varia et multiplex historia*. Distant from the attitude of previous humanists – such as Erasmus and his famous exclamation 'Sancte Socrates' –, Montaigne acknowledged the distance of any pagan religion from true Revelation, although he smoothed his judgment towards those religions that recognised deity in something incomprehensible and unknowable, as some early critics would not hold back from reproaching. Moreover, pagan culture stood for him as an example of virtue for contemporary Christianity. The other two chapters that complete part I seem to come short of responding to the general topic that inspires the volume, notwithstanding the authors' efforts to do so. The first, by Hanna Gentili, treats Giovanni Francesco Pico's attitude towards pagan philosophy and pagan sources. Discussing his considerations on ancient philosophy, prophecy and *imitatio*, Gentili marks Giovanni Francesco Pico's separation from the previous humanist generation, to which his uncle Giovanni Pico belonged, denying the possibility of a conciliation between ancient wisdom and Christianity and asserting the predominance of the latter over the former. The following chapter, by Finn Schulze-Feldmann, deals with Sebastien Castellion's work as biblical translator and exegete and his use, edition and translation of the Sibylline oracles, which he read – not at all isolated – as inspired prophecies of Christian revelation. The author also touches upon the context of the reception of the Sibylline texts in the Reformation world and the early responses to Castellion's work.

Part II of the book focuses on *The Theological Debate* concerning pagan virtues and salvation. Michael Moriarty draws a clear picture of the debate over the salvation of pagans in seventeenth-century France, rightly connecting it to the intertwined issues of the proportion between the number of saved and damned souls and the divine

[4] The contributions by Hanna Gentili, Finn Schulze-Feldman, Frédéric Gabriel, Jean-Michel Gros and Lucy Sheaf do not originate from papers presented in London.

attributes of mercy, goodness and justice. The following chapter, by Frédéric Gabriel, sheds light on a previously disregarded voice inside the debate concerning the salvation of the pagans, the seventeenth-century recollect friar Pascal Rapine de Sainte-Marie, author of a work entitled *Le christianisme naissant dans la gentilité*, first part of a trilogy on early Christianity. The work openly engaged in the debated issue, arguing in favor of the possibility for pagans to be saved thanks to natural law, implicit faith, and grace. More deeply, the recollect friar proposed a reading of ancient history from a new historical perspective. The third article of the theological section of the book appears to move away from the central question regarding pagan virtues and pagans' chance to be saved. Han van Ruler discusses the issue of moral beatitude in early modern – primarily Dutch – philosophy (Erasmus, Geulincx, Spinoza). The issue of the salvation of pagans only comes up at the end of the essay, with just tangent connection with the rest of the discussion contained inside it.

The Philosophers and the Unbelievers is the title of part III of the book. In the first chapter of the section, Jean-Michel Gros investigates the issue of the virtues of pagans in Pierre Bayle's writings. Using the question as a strongly anti-religious argument, the philosopher wrote in favor of a society deprived of Christian religion and based on the virtues shared by the pagans of the past and the atheist philosophers of the present. In the following essay, François Trémolières explores the conception of pagan virtues in Fénelon's written production. He gives special attention to his works concerning the Quietist controversy, highlighting how his treatment of the issue – and of the connected issue of the salvation of pagans – is linked to the existence of a 'natural love' that can lead to 'pure love', that is love for God, even without knowledge of God. The third chapter of the section, by Lucy Sheaf closely analyses the claim made by Leibniz that pagans can effectively be saved – or, at least, not damned – in connection to his soteriology based, again, on love.

The fourth and final part of the book is dedicated to *The New Pagans*. Giuliano Mori's essay takes the discussion to a different level. The issue of pagan salvation and pagan virtues is used to correct Jan Assman's opposition of inclusivism and exclusivism with the use of the distinction between falsehood ('inaccurate or imperfect representation') and untruth ('the polar opposite of truth, its negation'). The distinction between these two notions opposed to that of truth is tested by Mori on historical writers of antiquity and in early modern Christian production (Nicholas of Cusa and Athanasius Kircher). This last part, especially concerning Jesuit views, brings the author to discuss the early modern views of pagan virtues in connection to Christian faith. The second and last contribution to this part and to the entire volume is an essay by Michela Catto regarding the Jesuit considerations (namely of Matteo Ricci) of Chinese 'atheism', a positive attribute related to the Confucian mandarins' highly moral life conduct. Catto then follows the transformation of the term in early modern Europe to its negative connotation.

As a whole, the book sheds new light on the treatment of an important topic for the history of theology, philosophy and culture, although in an uneven way. Of course,

a more focused and harmonious discussion of the early modern theological developments – 'in Capéran's footsteps', we might say – would be desirable, but, as clearly stated, this was not in the volume's intentions. Surely, this book – and the conference that preceded it – contributes to bringing the issue back to the attention of scholars. A final, unfortunately negative, note: perhaps the book would have deserved more attentive proofreading, given the important academic publisher, since more often than one would expect it is tainted by typographical mistakes and non-idiomatic English phrases.

The Visualization of Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Europe

eds Marcia Kupfer, Adam Cohen, and J. H. Chajes
(Turnhout: Brepols publisher, 2020)
[ISBN 9782503583037]

ANGELO CATTANEO
CNR - Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche

This broad collection of nineteen extensive and lavishly illustrated essays authored by leading scholars, organised and put together by the joint efforts of Marcia Kupfer, Adam S. Cohen and Yossi H. Chajes, focuses on how graphic devices contributed to the production, aggregation, archiving and dissemination of knowledge from the early Middle Ages to early modernity. Mostly looking at the multifaceted Latin, Byzantine and Hebrew written and visual manuscript traditions, with an emphasis on religious texts, the volume covers the seventh to the sixteenth century.

Considering the paramount importance of cognitive visuality in the current forms of experiencing knowledge, light needs to be cast on the intellectual origins of the scientific and editorial project, with the definition and analysis of the intellectual and material archaeology concerning the affirmation of visuality as a way of thinking, producing and disseminating knowledge in the medieval and early modern past. To this end, the book investigates the forms of mental definition, 'coding,' production, use and dissemination of non-pictorial images – in the sense of not explicitly artistic representations – such as diagrams, charts, tables, calendars, lists, anatomical and architectural images, geometric drawings and maps, mostly but not exclusively included in written religious, philosophical and scientific texts, from the seventh to the sixteenth centuries. These nearly 1,000 years, generally overlooked by scholars interested in the cognitive functions of visuality in the past, deeming the period not particularly significant for this field of investigation, 'stand as a formative era,' the editors write, 'during which visual structures, both mental and material, increasingly shaped and systematized knowledge.' Decisions about space and time coverage and organisation are as important in a multi-authored volume as the concepts and analytical categories that inform the essays. In the case of *The Visualization of Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, the broad horizon of research on which the volume is grounded is Christian (Greek as well as Latin) and Jewish (Hebrew) visual traditions and the transfer, also through images, of Arabic learning. However, the principal investigators and editors of the book complain that the original plans to include the

Cromohs (Cyber Review of Modern Historiography), ISSN 1123-7023, 24/2021

DOI: 10.36253/cromohs-13520

rich Islamic visual traditions suffered substantial limitations because several specialists from Islamic countries declined the invitation on the grounds of the project's association with Israeli academic institutions.

The research hypothesis

The main, transversal research hypothesis that supports the 20 essays (including a remarkable introduction by Marcia Kupfer that gives an extensive presentation and discussion of the overall structure of the volume, its four sections and each essay individually) is a critical questioning of the generative power of medieval and early modern visuals in the formalisation of abstract concepts, as Kupfer, Cohen and Jossi write, by providing grids through which 'to process data, set in motion analytic operations that give rise to new ideas, and create interpretive frameworks for understanding the world.' To this end, the authors of the essays and the members of the research group scrutinised hundreds of manuscripts and to a lesser extent also printed works, which include religious texts (in particular the Bible and the Talmud), medieval calendars, *computus* works and the Kabbalistic tradition, astronomical works, cartographic devices (maps, charts and *mappae mundi*), and also works that visualise music and medicinal devices, while deconstructing and analysing the layouts of pages that combine text and images and transform written contents into graphic contents though schemata, diagrams, charts, geometric drawings, calendars and cartographic representations, mostly in (religious) manuscript works. The main concern of the book is the search for and analysis of the epistemic transformations in different fields of knowledge induced by or connected to the appearance of page layouts that integrate graphic devices, transforming the ways in which readers interacted and conceived the world through visual mediality. Starting from the practice of *ars memoriae* in classical antiquity and the invention of locational imagery through which real and imaginary places were transformed into repositories (*loci*) where concepts, topics and knowledge could be stored and retrieved, the essays explore the production of visual models and the way they worked as cognitive mechanisms in the past. This strong interpretive through line can be seen in most of the essays.

The structure

The large-format volume comprises nineteen extended, monographic-style essays, with an average of no fewer than 10,000-15,000 words each, which investigate a broad set of topics relating to specific, mostly Latin, Byzantine and Jewish cultural contexts, spanning the seventh to the sixteenth centuries. Given this editorial and scientific architecture, in a review it is not possible to discuss all the chapters individually, let alone do them justice. Yet quite apart from the significant contributions of each essay, *The Visualization of Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* dazzles with the sheer magnitude of its ambition. The book comprises four wide-ranging sections. Part I, 'Visualization between Mind and Hand,' includes three chapters ('Geometries for Thinking Creatively' by Mary Carruthers; 'Visualization of a Universal Knowledge: Images and Rhetorical Machines in Giulio Camillo's *Theatre of Memory*' by Lina Bolzoni

and 'Mind Mapping: The Diagram Paradigm in Medieval Art – and Beyond' by Jeffrey F. Hamburger) that explore and map the cognitive, rhetorical and material processes that link the imaginal to the conceptual, and then to the graphical and pictorial, from a cognitive, psychological and literary perspective.

Part II, 'The Iconicity of Text,' comprises six essays following chronologically from manuscript to print culture: 'Framing the Gospels, c. 1000: Iconicity, Textuality, and Knowledge' by Beatrice Kitzinger; 'Biblical Gloss and Commentary: The Scaffolding of Scripture' by Lesley Smith; 'The Topography of the Talmudic Page' by David Stern; 'Seeing the Forest beyond the Trees: A Preliminary Overview of a Scholastic Habit of Visualization' by Ayelet Even-Ezra; 'Functional Paratexts and the Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Jewish Manuscripts of Magic' by Yuval Harari; and finally 'More than Meets the Eye: What Made the Printing Revolution Revolutionary' by A. Mark Smith. By simply reading the titles of the six essays that make up Part 2 we can grasp the heuristic vastness of the reflection, which cannot be traced back or reduced *ad unum*. However, one aspect unites these six essays, originally conceived as individual and heterogeneous research trajectories: altogether, they explore the page, its materiality and the plurality of *mise en page* developed in the Middle Ages, as a 'locus of thought, indeed the plane where the visual arrangement of discourse reproduces and transmutes knowledge,' as Marcia Kupfer convincingly argues. The page is therefore not a mere locus on which pre-existing knowledge is made visible: on the contrary, it is precisely in the *mise en page* process that ideas are possibly transformed into organised, structured, transmissible and retrievable knowledge. The creation of page layouts across different cultures that combined writing and graphemes – also in the sense of 'writing *as* graphemes' and 'graphemes *as* writing' – is therefore at the very centre of the cognitive processes of knowledge creation, in particular in religious books such as the Talmud and the Bible. In this regard, while reading Part II, one is gladly taken back to *In the Vineyard of the Text. A Commentary to Hugh's Didascalicon* by Ivan Illich, a book that announced and captured some of the material and epistemological passages that led to the creation of the page as a gradually more structured space of knowledge in the passage from scrolls to codices, starting from the very early Middle Ages.[1]

Part III, 'Graphic Vehicles of *Scientia*,' focuses on the way graphic devices placed inside books – three-dimensional models, diagrams, maps, patterned frameworks, musical notation and pictorial vignettes – were assembled and used in different branches of both theoretical and applied branches of knowledge. It comprises four essays: 'The Idea of a Spherical Universe and Its Visualization in the Earlier Middle Ages (Seventh to Twelfth Century)' by Barbara Obrist; 'The Rhetoric of World Maps in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages' by Marcia Kupfer; 'Visualizing Knowledge in Medieval Calendar Science: A Twelfth-Century Family of "Graphic Glosses" on

[1] IVAN ILLICH, *In the Vineyard of the Text: A Commentary to Hugh's Didascalicon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), in particular Part 6, 'From Recorded Speech to the Record of Thought' and Part 7, 'From Book to Text,' 93–124.

Bede's *De temporum ratione*' by Faith Wallis; 'The Visualization of Music in the Middle Ages: Three Case Studies' by John Haines and finally 'Visualization in Medicine between Script and Print, c. 1375–1550' by Peter Murray Jones. Cosmology, cosmography, cartography, religious calendars, music and medicine were the principal branches of scientific knowledge in which graphic devices were deployed to translate written knowledge into visual forms that were integrated into the spatial, mostly textual structures of the pages. While on the one hand, these translations gave birth to new forms of page layouts, on the other, they transformed the ways readers conceived and related to both visible and invisible realities through the intermediation of graphic devices, whether these realities coincided with the supernatural or physical structure of the cosmos, its celestial and sublunary parts, or the *orbis terrarum*, the macrocosm and the microcosm, the flow and the cyclical structure of religious and secular time, the human body, or the musical universe.

It is somehow easy to underestimate the importance and centrality of the appearance of cognitive graphic devices – such as perpetual calendars for the determination of Easter and all mobile religious holidays, which combined and coordinated the lunar and solar calendars, rather than the circular *mappae mundi* – which have often been overshadowed by more recent and developed devices, more familiar to current readers' eyes. In this regard, one of the greatest achievements emerging from this part of the book deals with the medieval reception of the graphic and visual heritage of antiquity. Through a philological approach, both Obrist's and Kupfer's essays highlight the recovery and transformations in medieval times of the diagrammatic and graphic heritage of antiquity, an overlooked, if not forgotten chapter of cultural history. Their research broadly expands Marcel Destombes' and Patrick Gautier Dalché's pioneering works[2] and, to provide a significant example drawn from Obrist and Kupfer, readers can follow the first appearances in late antiquity of the tripartite *imago mundi* in numerous diagrammatic world maps called *mappae orbis terrae* or 'T-O maps,' often found in the cosmographic chapters of classical works during late antiquity and into the Middle Ages. Examples of these are Sallust's *De bellum Iugurthinum* (first century BCE, traditionally chapter XVII, in correspondence with the beginning of the description of Africa), Macrobius's *Commentarius in somnium Scipionis* (fourth century), Martianus Capella's *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* (fourth–fifth centuries, usually in the geographic section of book VI, *De Geometria*) and Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* (sixth-seventh centuries, especially books XIII and XIV.2.3, respectively *De mundo* and *De terra*). Placed on the beginning pages or at the bottom of the page in the chapters, the *mappae terrarum orbis* schematically indicate the inhabitable and inhabited parts of the Earth, called the *ecumene*. These diagrammatic maps were by no means unsophisticated, nor did they reflect the idea of the Earth as flat; rather, they were

[2] PATRICK GAUTIER DALCHE, 'De la glose à la contemplation. Place et fonction de la carte dans le manuscrits du Haut Moyen Age,' in *Testo e immagine nell'Alto medioevo, atti della XLI Settimana di studio* (Centro italiano di studi sull'Alto Medioevo: Spoleto, 1994), 693–771. For a rich although not exhaustive catalogue of *mappae orbis terrae* or 'T-O,' see MARCEL DESTOMBES, *Mappemondes A.D. 1200–1500* (Amsterdam: Nico Israel, 1964).

mnemonic and pedagogical devices to be used in educational contexts, putting the otherwise invisible Earth into material form through the juxtaposition of text and images.

Finally, the five chapters of Part IV, 'Diagrammatic Traditions,' focus on the way text, geometric schematisation and pictorial elements interacted in the Middle Ages: 'A Prolegomenon to Byzantine Diagrams' by Linda Safran; 'Diagramming the Diagrammatic: Twelfth-Century Europe' by Adam S. Cohen; 'Templates for Knowledge: Geometric Ordering of the Built Environment, Monumental Decoration, Illuminated Page' by Madeline H. Caviness; 'Religious Instruction and Devotional Study: The Pictorial and the Textual in Gothic Diagrams' by Lucy Freeman Sandler and 'The Kabbalistic Tree' by J. H. Chajes. To the reviewer's knowledge, this is one of the most systematic cross-cultural analyses of corpora of schemata from the medieval Greek, Latin and Hebrew cultures. If recent scholarship has highlighted the importance of diagrammatics in the development of human cognition,[3] the essays in Part IV provide a historical and documentary basis for this branch of cognitive psychology and phenomenology. The five essays scrutinise treatises on astronomy, *computus*, astrological divination, philosophy, theology, military sciences, music, glossed religious texts, cosmography and geography which include tabulated data and coordinate information as well as architectural patterns. At the same time, they analyse the forms, typologies and functions of *schemata* and *figurae* – the synonymous Greek and Latin words that were used to refer to diagrams – such as geometric figures, the mnemonic figure of the hand and the Tree of Life and its transformations, as well as the complex geometric armatures in stained-glass windows as possible models for the development of schematic forms of thinking.

The graphic apparatus

The impressive graphic apparatus of the volume, made up of 248 colour illustrations, deserves a specific analysis and appreciation. The graphics go beyond the specific connections with the respective essays which, in the opinion of the reviewer, seem set out and conceived more as (well-researched and erudite) standalone monographic essays rather than essays that integrate with each other. The iconographic apparatus of the volume is instead a genuinely transversal repository of exemplary quality graphics that give readers unique access to a multiplicity of late antique, medieval and early modern graphic documents and layouts that are not commonly found in contemporary publications. This generous editorial choice is and will remain one of the most significant and enduring legacies of the volume, providing a solid base on which the numerous communities of specialists interested in the history of the visualisation of knowledge will be able to expand and develop their own research.

[3] SYBILLE KRÄMER and CHRISTINA LJUNGBERG, *Semiotics, Communication and Cognition. Thinking with Diagrams: The Semiotic Basis of Human Cognition* (Boston and Berlin: Mouton De Gruyter, 2016).

Below is a very partial selection of the most significant types of images displayed and analysed in the volume, in what is the largest collection of cognitive graphic material currently available in press. They include the diagrams of cognition and memory (derived from Avicenna, 37), the Tower of Wisdom (*Thebit De Scientia imaginum*, 48), the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit (Hrabanus Maurus, *In honorem sanctae crucis*, 69), the Tree of Porphyry (Boethius, *Logica vetus*, 75), the Tree of Knowledge (*Etz Hha-Da'at*, 199), the Tree of Vices and Virtues (398), the Tree of Life (431), the Kabbalistic Tree (452, 456) and the *Ilan* parchments (a new fifteenth-century genre of Kabbalistic tree expression, 462, 463); the Canon Tables of the Gospels (the graphic system of dividing the four Gospels between late antiquity and the Middle Ages, before the introduction of chapters and verses in the thirteenth and the sixteenth centuries respectively, 92–93); the complex schematic layouts of the pages of Peter Lombard's *Magna glossatura* of the Psalms (116), a selection of impressive medieval layouts of glossed pages of the Gospels with readers' additions (121, 123, 126), the complex page layouts and outlines of the Babylonian Talmud with Rashi and Tosafot (138, 149, 150) and of the Pentateuch with Targum and Rashi (144, 148); the textual schemata in biblical texts (166, 167, 169); the layouts of commentaries on Aristotle's works (173), Peter Lombard's *Sentences* (177); *Pterygoma* (triangular-shaped) formulas, candelabrum schemas in Jewish texts of magic and recipes (186, 188, 195); new forms of highlighting concepts through the iconicity of the printed text (219) and printed geometric drawings (225); the earliest images of the spherical geocentric universe (231, 241, 248) and the earliest world maps (in Macrobius's *Commentarii in somnium Scipionis*, 264; Isidore's *De natura rerum*, 265; and Lambert of Saint-Omer's *Liber floridus*, 273, 274) including the first map that placed Jerusalem at its centre (in Isidore's *Etymologiae*, 278); lunar calendars in the form of *rota* (300); diagrams of the harmony of seasons, qualities and humours in Isidore's *De natura rerum* (307); images of the 'musical hand' (333) and interval diagrams (308) for music notation; medical images in the first *incunabula* (348, 357); Byzantine zodiac and wind diagrams and tables (363, 364), astronomical diagrams (369), 'Trinity diagrams' (374); consanguinity trees (389), diagrams displaying the elements of the Creation (391); the architectural-diagrammatic structure of medieval stained glass windows (413, 417); the rectangular diagrams of the instruments of the Passion (440) and the tables of the Twelve Articles of Faith (442).

When looking at these heterogeneous yet connected graphic corpora, readers will recognise the archaeology – in certain cases also including the most ancient and foundational examples – of the mental imaging and strategies of textual and graphic mediation and their reification through numerous graphic devices – mostly originally from religious works – many of which, despite the different contents, we still use today when we take notes, prepare class outlines, structure indexes and tables of contents, and organise and consult PowerPoint presentations and websites. The volume is a magnificent showcase that enables readers to observe the archaeology of the interactions between texts and graphemes, diagrams, geometric images, music notations, maps, charts and tables involving and mobilising the iconicity of the text and its multiple transformations into charts, tables, diagrams, vectors and schemata in

the Hebrew, Greek and Latin cultural traditions. It is remarkable to observe the functional complexity of the layouts of medieval commentaries and their ability to structure and connect different and yet connected levels of text through the extensive deployment of graphic devices and complex layouts in ways that we would now define as 'multilayer' and even 'hypertextual.' At the same time, the iconographic apparatus can show readers other graphic devices and layouts that were not continued or developed further, in particular in religious texts, or did not withstand the transition from manuscript to printed forms of reproduction. But most of all, the same visual apparatus gives stimulating and easy access and a good reason for non-specialist readers to approach the nineteen essays that make up the volume, either together or individually. Through the images, readers will recognise the archaeological traces of many intellectual and cognitive practices still involved in their scholarly routines today.

Staccato

These considerations on the transversality of the iconographic corpus as a true connective tissue supporting and keeping together the entire editorial project provide a launch pad to reconsider the structure of the volume as a whole. If we are to turn our attention back to the essays that structure the book, their heterogeneity and their methodological, heuristic, linguistic and cultural versatility is one of the strengths of the volume and at the same time one of its limits. The strength of the essays' variety mainly lies in the breadth of the points of view adopted, which shows how between the seventh and sixteenth centuries visual and graphic phenomena branched out and transformed in the variegated multilingual worlds of manuscript production in Greek, Hebrew, Latin and to a more limited extent also Arabic. As its broad and at the same time specialised structure suggests, the book attempts to be all things to all people: an introduction to the subject, reference work and showcase for cutting-edge research.

However, this approach is restricted by its not emphasising or highlighting the explicit and implicit interactions among the cultural and linguistic translations from the main three cultural traditions considered by the authors of the volume. In this regard, it is well known that the circulation of manuscript works originally in Greek, then translated into Syriac (a specific variant of the Aramaic language), Arabic and Persian, and then into Latin, built up a complex geography of cultural translations involving fundamental works such as the Aristotelian corpus.[4] In this respect, the absence in this book of emblematic case studies that could have shown the circulation of visual models across cultures and languages within the vast areas under analysis comes as something of a surprise. As an example, works such as *Almagest* and *Geography* by Alexandrian scientist Claudius Ptolemy (second century CE), undoubtedly of paramount importance in the way knowledge was visualised from antiquity to early modern Europe across ancient Greek, Syriac, Arabic, Persian, Byzantine Greek, Latin and several European vernacular cultures, would have offered an extraordinary and

[4] MARIA MAVROUDI, 'Translations from Greek into Latin and Arabic during the Middle Ages: Searching for the Classical Tradition,' *Speculum* 90, no. 1 (2015): 28–59.

easily accessible ground though which to grasp the transformations in the visualisation of graphic knowledge at the crossroads of very broad linguistic and cultural traditions. The search for cross-cultural examples of the reception of works, implying the mobilisation of several visual cultures rooted in the Mediterranean basin, would have further enriched the cultural breadth of the volume.

There is also a second aspect that would have helped place the volume better in the long history of the use of visualisation strategies as essential pathways in the creation, aggregation, archiving, conservation and transmission of knowledge. Since the book also takes the sixteenth century into consideration, it could have been opportune to consider a fundamental transformation in the visualisation of knowledge which took place starting from about 1530s, and its cultural roots.

The matter in hand is the complex epistemological transformation, specific to early modern book production, concerning the aggregation, organisation, storage and dissemination of heterogeneous knowledge through the creation and printing of wide-ranging collections of cognitive images that were not intended as illustrations of written or practical knowledge, towards which they were traditionally regarded as dependent or even subordinate, but as centres of knowledge: genuinely independent *lieux des savoirs*. These practices of defining and structuring images gave birth to a new range of bookish objects generally identified by titles such as *theatrum*, *speculum*, *descriptio*, *compendium*, *atlas* or *cosmographia*. These all shared the characteristic that they mainly consisted of numerous normalised cognitive images forming thematic collections of city views, maps, the human body in all its parts, animals, plants, machines, buildings, costumes, just to mention the main topics. The list could nevertheless go on and on.

De humani corporis fabrica libri septem (Basel, 1542; Venice, 1543) by Flemish scholar Andreas Vesalius (Latinized from Andries van Wezel, 1514–1564), with hundreds of images by Jan Stephan van Calcar (plagiarised by Juan Valverde, along with the engravings by Antonio Lafreri, in Rome, in 1559); *Herbarum vivae eicones ad naturae imitationem* by Otto Brunfels (1488–1534), published in Strasbourg in 1532 with 238 illustrations by Hans Weiditz (1495–1537) or *Di Pedacio Dioscorides Anazarbeo libri cinque della historia, et materia medica*… by Andrea Mattioli (1501–1577) published in Venice in 1544; treatises such as the *Aquaticium animalium historiae* by Hippolito Salviani, with Antonio Lafreri's engravings, printed in Rome in 1554; treatises on architecture and city views such as the *Quattro libri dell'Architettura* by Andrea Palladio (1508–1580) printed in Venice in 1570; the *Theatrum orbis terrarum* by Abraham Ortelius (1528–1598), printed in Antwerp in 1570; the 'theatres of machines,' such as the *Theatrum instrumentorum et machinarum* by Jacques Besson, published in Lyons in 1578, are just a few, albeit striking examples of organised and serial collections of normalised images put together since the mid-sixteenth century.

In these collections, images became laboratories, operational spaces in which knowledge was aggregated and produced and, once published, they set in motion other operations and practices of the intellectual mediation of reality. These cognitive images

not only were not subordinate to the written text – with respect to which they were, if anything, in synergy – but inverted the hierarchy: the written text – often relegated to commentaries, captions or simple titles – became subordinate to the images, and the latter became the fulcrum on which the intellectual, social and productive practices converged and developed.[5] These processes involved and were implemented in different fields of knowledge such as anatomy, natural history (for the description of some types of animals, in particular fish, and plants), architecture, theatres of machines, as well as geography and cartography. This great variety of sectors of knowledge were united by having been transformed through codified and normalised images, used as cognitive aggregators and 'producers' of knowledge. This was a major epistemological turning point, amplified by the invention, implementation and dissemination of printing, but which originated and descended from the manuscript culture which is unjustifiably overlooked in the volume, especially in the essays that deal with printed works.[6]

These critical reflections are by no means intended to diminish the value of this editorial and scientific enterprise. The volume's goal to show how medieval patterned text, lists, tables, diagrams, schemata, charts and maps, in mainly religious, philosophical and scientific texts, had a generative power which enabled them to formalise abstract concepts and provide grids that set in motion analytic operations and created interpretive frameworks for understanding the world, is without any doubt fully achieved.

As a conclusion, it is important to focus on and highlight the genesis of this ambitious scientific and editorial project, which could inspire other colleagues and institutions who wish to undertake similar collaborative research projects. The volume *The Visualization of Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* is the result of the homonymous research project organised between 2014 and 2015 by Marcia Kupfer (independent scholar, Washington DC) and Katrin Kogman Appel (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev), supported jointly by the Israel Science Foundation and the Israel Institute for Advanced Studies (IIAS), a national institution devoted to academic research located at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, whose primary function is to support and encourage collaborative research. Collaborative international research groups composed of eight fellows plus additional visiting scholars are given the funds to meet in Jerusalem to engage in research questions of common interest. Both foundations could be instrumental for informal groups of scholars who are looking for research funds to support collaborative research projects, without necessarily having to resort to more complex and laborious financing schemes.

[5] See the essays collected in Wolfgang Lefèvre, Jürgen Renn, and Urs Schoepflin, eds, *The Power of Images in Early Modern Science* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2003).

[6] See JEAN-MARC BESSE, ed., *Forme du savoir, forme du pouvoir. Les atlas géographiques à l'époque moderne et contemporaine* (Rome: Publications de l'École française de Rome, 2022). In this volume also see ANGELO CATTANEO's essay, 'Conoscere attraverso le immagini: genesi e forma degli atlanti. Una svolta epistemologica della prima età moderna.'

Hernando Colón's New World of Books
Toward a Cartography of Knowledge

José María Pérez Fernández, Edward Wilson-Lee
(New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2021)
[ISBN 9780300230413]

RENATO PASTA
University of Florence

Hernan Colon (1488–1539), illegitimate son of Columbus, accompanied him on the fourth voyage of exploration to the New World (1502–04) and wrote an important and controversial biography of his father, published in Italian in Venice in 1571. A member of the court since childhood, in 1511 he put forward to Ferdinand the Catholic a plan for the circumnavigation of the globe, which was rejected at the time, but later carried out by Magellan (1519–22). Starting in 1518 Hernan worked with the Casa de Contratacion in Seville, the powerful body that managed trade with the Americas and the in-flow of resources vital to the monarchy of Spain; eight years later he was appointed head of the team in charge of drafting new and more accurate navigation maps and responsible for training the pilots of the fleet. Hernan's name, however, is mainly linked to the immense library (the Colombina or Ferdinandina) that he started to build in Seville in 1526, an institution which came to count about 15,000 titles and which was largely dispersed after his death. Hernan's life-long fascination with books had been bolstered up by the volumes inherited from his father and the titles he collected during his stay in Rome in 1512–16, where he came into contact with the Capitoline humanists, the Studium Urbis and the dense network of local booksellers. The Biblioteca Colombina reflected an all-encompassing, utopian desire to provide its readers with a well-ordered, accessible collection of 'all the books in all languages and disciplines that can be found within Christendom and beyond' (2). Mindful of the great collections of antiquity and their myth (Alexandria) and well-aware of the libraries which the humanists had developed in the fifteenth century (including the Vatican Library), the Colombina nevertheless set itself apart from them, as it never aimed to propose an authoritative, closed canon of classical texts, but a universal trove of knowledge constantly growing through the new acquisitions offered by an expanding print market. The new library was planned to serve the advancement of learning, preserve collective memory and encourage the ends of imperial Spanish power in Europe and the world as well as the aims of Christian evangelisation overseas. Hernan Colon thereby rekindled the strain of late medieval millenarianism which marked his father's travel experience and emerged in his *Libro de las profecias*. The

Cromohs (Cyber Review of Modern Historiography), ISSN 1123-7023, 24/2021

DOI: 10.36253/cromohs-13536

Colombina operated as a living body, open to the flow of information from the changing reality of a context of early-modern religious and political strife. A private institution, primarily supported by its master, the library was built up on a bend of the River Guadalquivir at Hernan's Casa de Goles, and boasted a botanical garden with plants from all over the world. Patterned after the humanist ideal of a comfortable, secluded villa for scholarly retreat and worldly conversation, the mansion hosted learned visitors, cartographers and natural philosophers and emerged as a leading venue for scholarly pursuit in Seville. The library was open to external readers, even though strict rules only made access to the books possible through staff, who were themselves involved in sorting out and filing its content through massive indexing and cataloguing projects. This effort to order knowledge made the Colombina an 'epicenter of early modernity' (13).

Colon nourished his life-long passion for books through acquisitions from the leading printing centres in Europe; but the core of his purchases came together during his two journeys in the retinue of Charles V: in 1520–22 he followed the ruler to his imperial coronation in Aachen and then descended from the Netherlands along the 'fertile crescent' of the Rhine, Switzerland, northern Italy and Venice, where he spent eight months. On his way back, the tour ended with a short spell in London. Later, in 1529–31, Hernan followed a similar path in the opposite direction, moving from Spain and northern Italy to the Low Countries. A section of the wealth of books acquired during the first trip (1,367 out of 4,300 volumes) was lost at sea during a shipment from Venice under the care of a Genoese merchant. Colon tried to replace them and to this end compiled an index of the lost works, the *Memorial de los libros naufragados*: the huge inventory prompted an innovative classification system for the collection, which would in the end number 39 manuscript volumes, divided into 16 large registers. A general key to accessing the library, these *repertorios* were presented by Juan Perez, a loyal collaborator of Hernan Colon, after his master's death (Appendix One, 200–26). From early on, Colon also carefully recorded the date and place of his purchases as well as the price paid and the corresponding value in Spanish *maravedìs* to the local currency. What set the Colombina apart from other libraries, however, was the bulk of ephemera that its master acquired, and which made up 'the core of his universal library' (223). These pamphlets, or *obrezillas*, formed a heterogeneous set of cheap texts composed of newssheets, broadsides, lives of saints, devotional literature, calendars and fables as well as ballads and erotic poetry, which mirrored the events of the time – the Italian Wars, the Turkish threat and the idea of the Crusade, the role of the Holy See and its enemies. Many of the pamphlets reflected a millenarian perspective: as was the case of the 260 astrological prognostications that single out the library as the 'greatest known repository of public astronomy of the early modern age' (123). This exceptional patrimony remains a gold mine for scholars, who can find there some unique examples of a now lost printed production. As Pérez Fernández and Wilson-Lee make clear, these popular texts crossed the boundaries between different social groups and sowed the seeds for a possible public opinion which Colon and his collection intended to acknowledge, but also to control. A similar comprehensive logic

guided the acquisitions of typographical images that made the Colombina 'the largest collection of printed images in Europe' (59), none of which survives today. References to this material were nonetheless included in the three in-quarto volumes of the *Memoria de los Dibujos o Pintura*. The catalogue was meant to prevent the acquisition of duplicates, following the same commitment pursued by Colon and his librarians for books too.

Time and human neglect have deeply affected the Colombian legacy. The Inquisition heavily expurgated many titles, beginning with the copy of Erasmus' *Antibarbari* that the founder had personally received from the author. The Arabic and Hebrew books that the patron's encyclopaedic curiosity had put together have also disappeared. And not much remains of the religious controversies triggered by the Reformation, sedulously sought after in the early stages of the library. Pérez Fernández and Wilson-Lee's analysis, however, goes farther than the textual content of the collection and concentrates on its genesis in accordance with their research project to highlight the unity of the library before and above the disciplinary boundaries of current science and bibliography. As such, the Colombina stands out as a path-breaking attempt to represent the variety of life through a system of linguistic and numerical symbols, flexible enough to accommodate the empirical evidence from an evolving global reality. The manifold activities of its founder interacted with the ordering of books as suggested by his personal experience of navigation, the role played by cosmographers and cartographers at the Casa de Contratacion and his commitment between 1518 and 1523 to create a general cartography of Spain. Colon's intellectual prowess is equally attested by an incomplete Latin vocabulary in-folio as well as the extensive records and comments he made on his texts in the splendid *Libro de los Epitomes*, the fair copy of which was discovered in Copenhagen in 2019 and remains a prized source for specialists. The order of the books and world in the library paralleled the drive for new charts for navigation, trade and conquest. In the same way, it contributed to fixing the authority of editions and texts following strategies which bibliographers would later improve. A trailblazing collector in many fields, Colon maintained close ties with merchant networks (especially Genoese), and their accounting strategies helped to mould the symbolic order of the Colombina. Hence, merchants and bankers allowed their client to mirror the mobility of his experience in a single location/situation: the Colombina library