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Courtly Connections: Anthony Sherley's *Relation of his trauels* (1613) in a Global Context

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This article revisits Anthony Sherley's Relation of his trauels into Persia (1613), reading the text within the larger context of early modern Eurasia. It highlights the ways in which at least one European traveler sought and found not alterity, but commensurable structures, social roles, political ideologies, and personal motivations in the Islamic polities to the east and emphasized these connections to his European readers. Furthermore, in making the case that Sherley's narrative is informed by local actors in Safavid Persia, it maintains that a certain level of Eastern knowledge is present within Western texts from this period and awaits scholarly excavation.

INTRODUCTION

DESPITE VARIOUS ATTEMPTS by literary theorists and historians to find more integrative ways of studying early modern societies and cultures, fairly essentialist notions of the difference between Europe and the rest of the world continue to persist in scholarship. The assumption of fundamental differences then leads to a search for sundry misperceptions, misunderstandings, mischaracterizations, and other skewed representations in early modern texts, particularly in those produced by European travelers. Similarly, studies on cultural, ideological, religious, and intellectual exchanges have not always been able to transcend approaches that solely focus on *encounters*, a word that sometimes implies haphazard meetings and difficult situations, and *representations*, a word that often implies distortions. It is true that crucial markers of difference such as language and religion shaped one's views of alterity, and that various intermediary individuals and communities played critical roles in establishing communication and creating meaning. Moreover, the weight of genre and literary tradition resulted in the perpetuation of various factual

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errors as well as anti-Islamic and particularly anti-Ottoman tropes in early modern European writings. Nevertheless, it is equally critical now to attend to the considerable similarities across Eurasian cultures and the many recognitions of resemblance or relationship that occur in European texts treating Islamic polities.

A desire to utilize Edward Said's critique of Orientalism for the premodern periods produced an excellent body of scholarly work, but it also led to a growing recognition of the need to modify a concept based largely on later centuries.¹ As Sanjay Subrahmanyam shows, the notion of "cultural incommensurability" almost singlehandedly defined ideas of difference and exchange, from the Eurocentric and protonationalist notions of Enlightenment philosophers to the more recent (and more liberal) definitions of cultural relativity.² One of the present article's arguments is that focusing on commensurability will help early modern literary critics and historians better account for the full complexity of East-West relations in the early modern period. The idea of commensurability, as it is understood here, may emerge as the result of the early modern traveler's exposure, during his or her travels, to political and cultural values and structures that are identified as familiar and subsequently presented as such within a text; further, commensurability may be defined as the wish for and ability to communicate across cultural boundaries, under the impact of several motivations that range from political idealism to sheer individual pragmatism.

This article examines one European traveler's narrative that displays such commensurability, arguing that there were enough parallel and integrated processes in early modern Eurasia (such as imperial expansion and rivalry, dynastic consolidation, the rise of new elites, and the emergence of new political and economic networks on regional and global levels) to enable a fairly educated member of the English lower nobility to feel familiar with the political and religious challenges of an Islamic polity when motivated to do so by personal self-interest. In analyzing *Sir Antony Sherley his relation of his trauels into Persia* (1613), this essay highlights the ways in which at least one European traveler sought and found commensurable structures, social roles, political ideologies, and personal motivations in the Islamic polities to the east and emphasized these connections to his readers. While this article does not argue that this work and others like it are exempt from Orientalist bias or that they do not contribute to

¹The term was popularized by Edward Said and redefined as a discursive practice stemming from the exercise of cultural and political hegemony. Originally published in 1978, the 2003 edition utilized here includes a 1994 afterword and a new introduction. Said's work mostly studies the manifestations of Orientalism in the modern period. For discussions of its problematic applicability in earlier periods see, for instance, Hadfield; Vitkus, 1999; Tinguely; Vitkus, 2003, 1–24; Boettcher, 2004b; Aune, particularly 120–22; MacLean, 1–27; Andrea and McJannet.

²For a concise discussion of the idea of cultural incommensurability, and of its impact in evaluating early modern cultural exchanges, see Subrahmanyam, 2012, 2–7.

later Orientalist knowledge regimes, it does insist that the possibility of such texts' contribution to antiracist discourses in early modern Eurasia should be equally entertained and studied.³ Furthermore, in making the case that Sherley's narrative is directly informed by local actors in Safavid Iran, it maintains that the presence of Eastern knowledge within Western texts from this period is present and awaits scholarly excavation. By attending to the epistemological hybridity of a work ostensibly composed on one side of a religious and cultural boundary, this article calls attention to the danger of assuming incommensurability: namely, an ironic reinscription of Orientalist biases in which it is assumed that Eastern knowledge and voices cannot legitimately be found within Western texts.

Anthony Sherley is one example of a hybrid subject navigating across the cultural complexities of early modern Eurasia. As a minor English aristocrat who engaged in myriad international adventures and intrigues across Eurasia, who claimed to be the diplomatic representative of Shah Abbas I (r. 1588–1629), who offered his services to several patrons, and who spent the final years of his life in abject poverty, Sherley's personal history displays a multiplicity of subject positions. His *Relation*, published at a moment when Sherley seemed to have exhausted his entire credibility vis-à-vis potential patrons, was clearly meant to serve the goal of personal advancement by presenting the author as both an ideal courtier and a statesman knowledgeable about international politics. In the course of meeting this objective, however, the text's evaluation of Abbas and the Safavid elite moves well beyond simplistic, inherited racist images of Muslims and others in Eurasia, and advances a fairly detailed and sophisticated reading of the Safavid polity and the international political situation at the turn of the century.

The dynamics that made it possible for an Englishman like Sherley to recognize common political and religious issues in Safavid Iran are diverse and multiple. The Eurasian landmass was intricately connected economically and politically in this period, with considerable artistic, scientific, philosophical, and cultural overlap between the various societies within this broad geography. The first section of this article offers an overview of these connections by focusing on those most relevant to Sherley's text, such as early modern political discourses and court structures. Sherley's life story and personal background also obviously played an important role in the development of his ideas on Eurasian courts, notably his rank and social status, military adventures, constant search for self-promotion, and unbridled machismo (further worsened by initially having to serve under a female ruler, Elizabeth I [r. 1558–1603]). The somewhat unusual trajectory of his life, the image he left behind through his writings, and, most importantly, his own activities and reputation have caused him to be viewed

³Recent works on race in the early modern period include Iyengar; Loomba and Burton; Bovilsky; Thompson; Smith; Feerick; Selwood; Johnson; Malcolmson; Spiller.

as decidedly eccentric.⁴ Whether this judgment is valid or not, it has unfortunately obscured the impact of the connected history that is found at the basis of his view of the Safavid polity in his *Relation*.⁵ The second section of this article explores the political and cultural commensurabilities Sherley relied upon in the rhetorical crafting of his travel text, and considers what lessons might be drawn from such a work.

Rooted in global history and nuanced by an understanding of European genres and literary traditions, this analysis would be difficult for a single scholar to undertake for disciplinary reasons. Placing this text within a Eurasian connected history without losing sight of its European/English particularities has been made possible through close collaboration between a historian of early modern Islam and a Europeanist specializing in literary criticism. The article therefore closes with a call for further such collaborations, so that scholars may more effectively trace not only differences, but also similarities across early modern Eurasia, and more fully acknowledge the entanglements of antiracist and Orientalist threads in the tapestry of this period's history and literatures.⁶

CONNECTED WORLDS: ANTHONY SHERLEY IN EARLY MODERN EURASIA

While this article does not venture into the categories of alterity produced and applied by early modern Islamic societies, it has to be noted here that this important discussion long suffered from Orientalist simplifications inspired by works such as Bernard Lewis's *The Muslim Discovery of Europe*, which succinctly summarized and further perpetuated an old paradigm about the incurious Muslims whose views of the outside world were constrained by their religion and law (the Sharia). Here it suffices to say that, beyond evaluating foreigners through the strict lenses of the Sharia, Muslims of different classes and backgrounds developed various pragmatic ways of thinking. More recently, scholars working on early modern Islamic societies have brought attention to both the plurality of those views and their flexibility.⁷ Different linguistic and

⁴For a concise discussion of the image created by previous studies on Anthony Sherley, see Subrahmanyam, 2011, 116–17. Even the rare positive evaluation of Sherley's life and career felt the need to refer to his wild schemes. See also Burton, 2009, 26. Following Burton and Subrahmanyam, this article's objective is to look beyond the image.

⁵This notion of a connected history relies on Subrahmanyam, 1997. A connected history does not only take into account the more structural economic and ecological trends, but also seeks cultural and intellectual linkages across time and space.

⁶While historians sought to provide more nuanced readings of early modern European travelogues, this article differs from their focus on the validity and usefulness of these texts in terms of facts and data. See, for instance, Murphey, 1990; Matthee, 2009.

⁷See Matar.

religious communities in the Eastern Mediterranean and Asia regulated their relations according to what Baki Tezcan calls *conveniencia* (convenience), instead of *convivencia* (coexistence).⁸ This practice of forming ideas of alterity and difference according to convenience and context rather than dogma was also reflected in Muslim views of the *Frenk* (Ottoman Turkish) / *Farang* (Persian), i.e., the Franks, European Christians who were different from both the local Muslims and the followers of Eastern Christian churches. Like so many diplomats, merchants, pilgrims, scholars, and travelers of all stripes who went East in the sixteenth century, Anthony Sherley was most probably perceived as a *Frenk/Farang*, primarily because he did not speak any of the local languages, dressed differently, and came from a land afar.⁹ Sherley's English contemporaries would categorize Safavid Iran's difference from their own society in similar terms, as seen in the publisher's prelude to the *Relation*, where readers are told that Sherley left "to liue amongst a people . . . farre different in Religion, Language, and Manners."¹⁰ However, these differences did not make the travelers complete strangers to the issues and concerns of their Muslim contemporaries, since they dwelled within a relatively unified geographical and economic-ecological space, namely Eurasia,¹¹ and an interconnected temporality, namely early modernity.¹²

⁸See Tezcan, 2012. Tezcan's use of *convivencia* instead of *conveniencia* is significant, since the former is often used, in an idealizing fashion, to describe the interreligious peace that is supposed to have existed in the Iberian Peninsula before 1492. Tezcan, like the authors of the present article, chooses to restore the importance of daily conventions and pragmatic approaches without ignoring the impact of preconceived notions and dogmas.

⁹See Matthee, 2002; Tezcan, 2011. For a partial treatment that agrees with the incuriosity argument yet offers interesting information, see Sefatgol. For the dialectical relationship between rhetorical violence and political pragmatism in the treatment of European Christians in the writings of a sixteenth-century Ottoman bureaucrat, see Şahin, 203–05.

¹⁰Sherley, A2^r.

¹¹Here, Eurasia is understood as a landmass that ties together various areas that have been separated from one another on the basis of culturalist and essentialist arguments. In this scheme, Europe is not a separate continent, but a subcontinent of Eurasia, like India. See Lewis and Wigen, 35–37.

¹²Criticisms directed against a too liberal use of the appellation *early modern*, most forcefully voiced by Goldstone, have to be taken into account; on the other hand, the term is still useful in a number of ways. First of all, it allows scholars to study nascent yet intense global economic and ecological linkages in a meaningful way, as Bentley, 2007, argues. More importantly, it opens up new vistas into the study of cultural and ideological trends and dynamics (such as the emergence of new universalist political theologies) that linked different societies and polities across the Eurasian landmass, as demonstrated by Subrahmanyam, 1997. Finally, rather than claiming the existence of a single early modern condition, it has to be admitted that there were interlinked yet different early modernities that were the result of the negotiation between local and global dynamics. For an illustration of this approach, see Eisenstadt and Schluchter.

Various scholars have discussed the structural factors and dynamics that led to a more integrated Eurasia at the beginning of the early modern period. It has been argued that the geographical expanse from Western Europe to East Asia was never unintegrated, that it had already been connected through various commercial networks and ecological cycles since the Bronze Age Revolution.¹³ These *longue durée* structures were further enhanced, thanks to the rise and expansion of the Mongol Empire after the first decades of the thirteenth century, by a variety of shorter term, more tangible and immediate flows and networks. The Mongol invasions of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries connected the eastern and western portions of Eurasia initially through violent military conquest, and eventually through the exchange of commercial goods, plants and seeds, germs, and military and nonmilitary technologies.¹⁴ Until the hegemony of Western European societies was dictated to the rest of the Eurasian zone (indeed the entire world) through the twin forces of industrial capitalism and new forms of imperialism after the late eighteenth century, Eurasia witnessed a period of relatively integrated political and economic developments and relatively dialogical cultural exchanges from the mid-fifteenth century onward.¹⁵ Buoyed by a favorable climate, improved agricultural production, and an expanding international trade, “[an] early capitalist global economy . . . shaped patterns of production, distribution, consumption, and social organization around the world.” The new era witnessed “demographic fluctuations, large-scale migrations, intensified exploitation of natural environments, technological diffusions, consolidation of centralized states, imperial expansion, and global cultural exchanges.”¹⁶ Joseph Fletcher, one of the pioneers of global perspectives in history writing, adds to these trends the growth of regional cities, the rise of urban commercial classes, religious revival and reformations, and rural unrest.¹⁷ World historians, from William McNeill’s groundbreaking works to the recent debates about the global turn, have investigated these trends jointly, rather than as manifestations of local/national/regional qualities

¹³The argument on behalf of a Eurasian *longue durée* is found most notably in Goody.

¹⁴For a detailed panorama of a relatively integrated Eurasia through linkages among relatively coherent zones and regions, see Abu-Lughod. A further discussion of the various exchanges that occurred as a result of the Mongol invasions is found in Allsen, 41–50, 83–211, where the author focuses mostly on the relations between Mongol successor states in China and Iran; and May, 109–256, where the author adopts a more global approach.

¹⁵Darwin, 50–99; Parker. The break that occurred from the late eighteenth century onward is discussed in Bayly.

¹⁶Bentley, 2007, 22–23.

¹⁷Fletcher.

and merits.¹⁸ Anthony Sherley, as his works and correspondence show, was acutely aware of the existence of such a connected space, and of the opportunities it created in terms of imperial expansion and commerce.¹⁹

While works on large-scale economic and ecological dynamics in the early modern period now constitute an impressive literature, studies on cultural, ideological, religious, and intellectual linkages and exchanges have traditionally lagged behind. Scholars who work on exchange and communication have focused mostly on artistic influences from East to West, material culture, the circulation of objects, and scientific exchanges;²⁰ they also have given primacy to the experiences of liminal figures, go-betweens, spies, converts, interpreters, corsairs, and slaves.²¹ With a few notable exceptions on Southeast Asia, and a remarkable collection on the impact of a truly global Renaissance on early modern English culture,²² these studies usually focus on the Mediterranean, and particularly the Italian Peninsula and the Ottoman possessions in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Balkans, as the spaces par excellence for these exchanges. By emphasizing Anthony Sherley, this essay seeks to expand this space of exchange to include Tudor England and Safavid Iran. Next, this article aims to discuss the circulation of political ideas, and to test the flexibility and adaptability (or, to follow Sanjay Subrahmanyam, the commensurability) of political ideologies in early modern Eurasia.

What Sherley encountered in Iran, such as the political, religious, and military tensions between the Sunni Ottomans and the Shiite Safavids, or Shah Abbas's attempts at fortifying his rule against court factions and powerful local interests, were not issues unique to the Muslims or the East. Local and international politics

¹⁸See Bentley, 2011, 12–13: “The global turn facilitates historians’ efforts to deal analytically with a range of large-scale processes such as mass migrations, campaigns of imperial expansion, cross-cultural trade, environmental changes, biological exchanges, transfers of technology, and cultural exchanges, including the spread of ideas, ideals, ideologies, religious faiths, and cultural traditions.” For an impressive attempt at providing a panorama of this interconnected global environment through the lens of movement and mobility, see Hoerder, 108–273.

¹⁹Sherley’s understanding of this global setting is best explored by Subrahmanyam, 2011, 118–32, on the basis of a political treatise, *Peso politico de todo el mundo*, that he wrote in 1622 and submitted to the Count-Duke of Olivares. Grogan, 178, associates the composition of the *Relation* itself with the rise of the joint-stock companies. While this article agrees with Grogan about the importance of Sherley’s economic concerns, one of the main arguments throughout the article is that Sherley’s text cannot be reduced to the outcome of a specifically English concern, or the extension of specifically English genres.

²⁰Jardine and Brotton; Brotton; Belting; Deborah Howard, 2000 and 2007; Ben-Zaken.

²¹Gürkan; Rothman; Krstić, 2012. While the author mentions other constituents of the Venetian community in early modern Istanbul, Dursteler, 61–129, similarly grants considerable space to corsairs and renegades.

²²Subrahmanyam, 2005; Alam and Subrahmanyam; Singh.

in early modern Eurasia were characterized by a constant struggle between newly consolidating dynastic polities (the Ottomans, the Habsburgs, the kingdom of France, the Safavids, the Mughals, Muscovy, etc.), and their external and internal rivals. As Victor Lieberman remarked, this was an environment determined by “territorial consolidation; firearms-aided intensification of warfare; [and] more expansive, routinized administrative systems.”²³ Sherley and other European observers and travelers came from societies where they witnessed a political, religious, and cultural crisis similar to the Ottoman-Safavid conflict, and this gave their observations a particular poignancy. These observers were only too familiar with the political and cultural turmoil fostered by (or legitimized on the basis of) sectarian differences, the violence created by new forms of warfare, the attempts of royal/imperial centers to create political and economic consolidation, the resistance and tensions created by these imperial ambitions and, in general, the opening up of a new space where individuals and communities from a plethora of linguistic, religious, and cultural backgrounds exchanged goods, germs, and ideas.²⁴

Some of these dynamics are more relevant than others in Sherley’s particular case. The emergence of new service classes under the dynastic enterprises, the creation of local and international diplomatic networks, the political and cultural promotion of monarchs, and the spread of new ideas and forms of writing about politics exerted a crucial impact on both his life and career, as well as his ideas and insights in his *Relation*. The sixteenth century saw a steady increase in the numbers of soldiers and administrators working for the different dynastic enterprises, which eventually culminated in the emergence of ruling elites and court societies across Eurasia.²⁵ Sherley not only saw himself as part of such an elite, but, as such, he believed he was able to recognize his peers inside

²³Lieberman, 14.

²⁴While it is impossible to do justice to the large literature on the transformation from the late Middle Ages to the first stage of European early modernity, the following works have been particularly useful in contributing to the present article’s vision: Brady, Oberman, and Tracy; Kamen. For general surveys of the three Islamic empires in the early modern period, see Hodgson; Dale. For an attempt at placing the trajectory of the Ottoman polity within the larger early modern context, see Şahin.

²⁵The rise of the courts, and of the courtier as a social type, in early modern Europe inspired notorious works that extend from Castiglione to Elias. A critical examination of the scholarship about the European court societies is found in Duindam. For the expansion and development of the Ottoman ruling elite, the classic work is Kunt. Also see Tezcan, 2010, 79–114. The creation of a Safavid elite receives a detailed treatment in Babaie, Babayan, Baghdiantz McCabe, and Ferhad. For a unique collection that brings together case studies across Eurasia from late antiquity to the early modern period, see Duindam, Artan, and Kunt. The articles focusing on the early modern period are found in *ibid.*, 239–431.

Safavid Iran.²⁶ More importantly, the stiff competition for social mobility within these new elites motivated individuals like Sherley to strive for recognition and constantly seek opportunities for self-promotion, and Sherley's voyage to Iran and the composition of the *Relation* partly stem from these anxieties.²⁷ The intense imperial rivalries of the period were also instrumental in the establishment of local and international diplomatic networks. These networks served as important channels of travel and information production, and diplomatic activity led to the emergence of distinct forms of writing that reflected a nuanced and pragmatic approach. In the words of Lucette Valensi, the new diplomats (in her case, the Venetian ambassadors) "stood at an intersection of three spaces, those of empirical observation, political action, and humanism."²⁸ While the distinct nature of Renaissance diplomacy has long been recognized, it has to be admitted that the Ottomans and the Safavids also played important roles within this international environment.²⁹ Next to their active participation in diplomacy, as Sherley's account shows, the Ottomans and the Safavids loomed large in the imagination of various Europeans as targets of, or participants in, international and political alliances. Sherley was thus able to place his *Relation* within a long and popular tradition of promoting pan-European alliances against the Ottomans with the help of a friendly Eastern power.³⁰

Perhaps more importantly, it is possible to read Sherley's *Relation* as a commentary on and a contribution to early modern Eurasian political debates. These debates revolved around universal monarchy and various forms of universalist-imperial ideologies; they focused on the prerogatives of the monarchs as well as the role and function of intermediate bodies, service classes, and aristocracies. From the

²⁶For instance, while discussing the state of the Ottoman government at the beginning of his *Relation*, he boastfully states that he is not a common pilgrim or merchant, but a "gentleman" who can provide a pertinent analysis of political and economic issues: Sherley, 10. In another passage, he evaluates the Safavid notables as the local versions of the English dukes, lords, counts, and earls, and strives to find equivalents to other English bureaucratic offices within the Safavid government: *ibid.*, 46–47.

²⁷The life story of the Ottoman litterateur Mustafa Ali, told by Fleischer, displays similar themes that characterize the early modern ruling elites: constant competition for positions, a pervasive sense of being undervalued by one's peers and superiors, a ceaseless yearning for higher positions, etc.

²⁸Valensi, 9. For the intensification of diplomatic activities, the humanists' participation in the international scene, and the textual practices related to early modern diplomacy, see Levin; Hampton. Against the risks of overemphasizing the humanist diplomats' role as peacemakers, see Martin.

²⁹For studies that restore the importance of the Ottoman participation in the new international diplomacy, see Goffman; Ágoston, 2007. For a study that reflects the intensity of the new diplomacy that connected the Ottomans and the Safavids to various European polities, see Setton.

³⁰See, for instance, Meserve, 231–37; Aubin; Matthee, 2011; Fernández, 1:57–78.

perspective of institutionalized religion, dogma, liturgy, and religio-cultural identity, the period was characterized, for Christians and Muslims from all backgrounds and persuasions, by discussions on reform and renewal, and on the sources and attributes of political and religious authority. The dynastic enterprises of the period were able to develop sophisticated mechanisms through which the images of monarchs were created. These images were propagated through public appearances, royal portraiture, new forms of patronage, and charity, as well as political texts.³¹ The *primus inter pares* of the medieval period thus left its place to an imperial figure that was often hailed as a king of kings and a messianic warrior; at the very least, the new monarch was described as a skilled manager of hearts and minds who achieved success through divine intervention as well as personal talent. Sherley's portrayal of the Safavid Shah Abbas belongs to this new literature on the qualities of a central monarchical figure, and does not rely on a mere repetition of tropes found in previous English works on Persia. This new political literature, which, as discussed by Linda Darling, witnessed an explosion in both Europe and the Islamic world, went beyond the attributes of a monarch to discuss good government, justice, and the relationship between the dynasts and those who were expected to serve them, since the members of the newly prominent service classes and court societies sought to define their own roles and positions within the dynastic polities.³² It is no wonder that Sherley did not see Abbas's attempts at shoring up his own authority, and the strivings of his courtiers to assert themselves, as reflections of Oriental duplicity or tyranny, but instead as problems with a universal resonance and as issues about which he believed he had pertinent opinions and valuable advice.

In this new international environment, Elizabethan England, Sherley's native society, occupied an interesting position. On the one hand, it may be said to be

³¹For these parallel processes of image creation and monarchic ideology, see, among others, Yates; Lecoq; Tanner; Cole; Woodhead; Necipoğlu; Moin.

³²Darling, 2008, relates the rise of this new political literature to larger political, economic, and military developments that affected early modern Eurasia as a whole in 521–31. (It should be noted here that the same author, in Darling, 2013, addresses what she calls the “historiographical incommensurability” between the European and Islamic traditions of political writing in the early modern period. The author bases her idea of “incommensurability” mostly on the absence of direct textual transmission, while the current article argues for the existence of similar political issues and challenges that were recognizable across early modern Eurasia by the members of certain classes and communities.) Very much like the subfield of early modern diplomatic history, the area of early modern political history remains mostly Eurocentric and usually focuses on Renaissance political thought and its myriad virtues. See, for instance, Skinner. As Darling, 2008, argues, various Muslim authors voiced very similar concerns, defended universal political values in their treatises, and produced highly personal accounts that reflected their quest for personal and professional recognition. For examples, see Fleischer, 273–92; Yılmaz; Douglas Howard; Şahin, 214–42.

one of the most dynamic societies of the period, given the sharp increase in vernacular literacy, the emergence of new political issues and opportunities, and the competition among the aristocracy to benefit from the Tudor administrative consolidation. At the same time, it was one of the societies where the recently redefined relationship between religion and politics remained particularly tense and contentious.³³ The long rule of a female monarch and the absence of large-scale warfare had become, for some members of the aristocracy, a source of frustration and gender-related anxieties. Elizabethan England was a minor actor in an environment dominated by the Spanish and the Ottomans, and imperial envy, rather than imperialist confidence, characterized the elite's state of mind.³⁴ England at the time of Anthony's voyage (1598–1601) had opened formal ambassadorial relations with the Ottoman Empire, and had established a solid mercantile presence in the Levant. Elizabeth I had in the prior decade sought closer relations with the Ottomans in an effort to counterbalance Spanish aggression, but when the Spanish armada finally sailed, the Ottomans had not acted to assist the tiny northern country. While Elizabeth's ardor for the alliance may have cooled by 1598, relations remained cordial, especially as English merchants had a substantial investment in the Levantine trade.³⁵

English relations with the Safavids, on the other hand, were virtually nonexistent at the time of Sherley's departure. The Muscovy Company had made a number of voyages down the Volga, across the Caspian Sea, and into Safavid domains in the 1550s and 1560s, and had acquired trading privileges from a somewhat reluctant Shah Tahmasb I (r. 1524–76). However, subsequent turmoil in the region following continued clashes between the Ottomans and the Safavids effectively closed this route to English travelers in the following decades.³⁶ While the English East India Company would soon begin its annual voyages into the Indian Ocean, eventually establishing trading outposts in Iran and assisting Shah Abbas in his efforts to oust the Portuguese from the

³³Ogborn's concise survey of Elizabethan England is particularly useful for the present study, since it discusses the period in order to shed light on what he calls "global lives": see Ogborn, 16–47. One of the best accounts of state formation in this period is Braddick, since the author discusses various aspects of the relationship among the political center, the elite, and the lower classes, including the embodiment of political power in everyday life, the establishment of cultural and religious identity, the use of the legal process, etc.

³⁴For the concept of imperial envy, see Maclean, 20.

³⁵Andrea, 2007, 12–29, analyzes the series of epistolary and gift exchanges between Elizabeth I and Safiye, mother of Mehmed III (r. 1595–1603), in the context of the diplomatic and trading relations in the period. For a detailed account of English efforts to secure independent trading privileges, their intrigues against the French in Istanbul, and the establishment of the permanent English embassy there, see Horniker, 1942 and 1946.

³⁶For an overview of the relations between England and Persia in the decades prior to Sherley's visit, see Andrea, 2011.

strategically important port of Hormuz in 1622, in 1598 their first ship had yet to leave port. Despite various setbacks and a limited diplomatic and economic involvement, however, writing on the Orient had become a fairly popular activity in early modern England, and Sherley must have been motivated by the popularity of this particular theme and the existence of a sizeable audience before composing his *Relation*.³⁷

Anthony Sherley reached Iran at a crucial turning point in the reign of Abbas as well as the history of the Safavid polity itself. Following the death of Shah Tahmasb in 1576, Safavid Iran was plunged into what has been called the second civil war, which would rage between 1576 and 1587. (The first civil war had ensued at the passing away of the first Safavid ruler, Ismail I [r. 1501–24], in 1524.) Tahmasb's successor, Ismail II, died in 1577. Muhammad Khudabanda ruled over a fractured polity between 1577 and 1587, until he was overthrown in a palace coup, which placed his son Abbas on the throne. During this period, the Safavid territory suffered attacks on the part of the Uzbeks and the Ottomans. While the Uzbeks made several gains in the east, the Ottoman-Safavid war, which lasted between 1578 and 1590, was particularly devastating. The Ottomans took Tbilisi in 1578, and Kars and Tabriz in 1585. They extended their control over Azerbaijan, captured the rich silk-producing areas on the Caspian shore, and received the allegiance of several frontier figures from the Caucasus to the Persian Gulf. On the ideological front, the Ottomans once more asserted their Sunni position; as part of the ceasefire concluded in Istanbul in March 1590, the Safavid side promised to end its propaganda activities inside Ottoman territories and the persecution of the Sunnis inside its domain.³⁸

The outbreak of the Thirteen Years' War in 1593 between the Ottomans and the Habsburgs, however, soon shifted the Ottoman energies to Central Europe, and prevented further Ottoman military action in the East. The

³⁷Among the plethora of recent studies on the representation of Islam and the Muslims in various early modern English writings, in addition to works mentioned earlier in this article, see Schleck, 2011; Grogan. *Ibid.*, 177, provides a wider panorama of Sherley's multiple audiences: "It is conceivable that Anthony imagined [the text] offering different things to different constituencies: to the court, perhaps, an urgent quasi-exemplary dialogue of the sort that Spenser presented in *A View of the Present State of Ireland* and an intelligence update on Persian politics, trade and governance of the sort encouraged by English apodemic texts; to the London reader, an appealingly familiar description of Persia that remembered the long tradition of English interest in classical Persia and proffered another royal Persian exemplar; and to his creditors and enemies in England, a justification of his actions up to the point where they might still conceivably be tolerated."

³⁸For an account of the so-called second civil war, see Newman, 41–49; a more detailed account of the Ottoman-Safavid war of 1578–90 is in Fleischer, 70–133.

Ottomans had been feeling the financial burden of long wars in Central Europe since the early decades of the sixteenth century; the impact of the new war was further compounded by revolts in the Anatolian countryside, and resulted in a certain loss of control on the part of the Ottomans.³⁹ Sherley thus reached Iran at a time when the century-old Ottoman military advantage in the East was on the wane. Perhaps more importantly, by the time Sherley made the acquaintance of Shah Abbas, the latter had been able to begin creating his own ruling coalition that included some Turkoman tribal leaders, Twelver Shiite scholars, secretaries, and a considerable number of *ghulam* (Christian-born slaves) who served him as high-ranking political and military officers.⁴⁰ Abbas still felt the impact of various political and theological challenges, especially those coming from groups and communities that remained true to more latitudinarian forms of Safavid Shiism;⁴¹ however, by 1598, he had been able to formulate a relatively clear imperial agenda, one that Sherley would come to admire. Moreover, he was keener than his predecessors to establish relations with European Christian polities, and this attitude, rather than any particular virtue displayed by Sherley, created a receptive environment to European visitors.⁴²

CONNECTED COURTS: ANTHONY SHERLEY IN SAFAVID IRAN

Anthony Sherley's autobiographical traveler's tale was printed in London in 1613, fifteen years after he left England on a journey that would eventually reach the Safavid court. Sherley had traveled to Italy on the orders of the Earl of Essex to interfere in a succession dispute in Ferrara, but the matter was resolved

³⁹For the increasing financial and political costs of the Ottoman-Habsburg rivalry, see Ágoston, 2010; Murphey, 2010. The Anatolian rebellions are discussed in Griswold; Barkey, 1997. Cf. Sherley, 13–15.

⁴⁰For a praiseful account of Abbas's reign, see Savory, 76–103. Savory's account reflects the image of Abbas in the Safavid historiographical tradition, the creation of which was among Abbas's cultural projects. A more nuanced account may be found in Newman, 50–72. The bureaucratic practice and discourse under Abbas is given a more detailed analysis in Mitchell, 2009, 176–97.

⁴¹For the theological challenges and transitions, next to Newman, see Babayan, 349–66; Abisaab, 53–70.

⁴²For Abbas's diplomatic activities, see Lockhart, 389–95. In an article that focuses on a later period, Mitchell shows how Abbas, rather than being a passive subject of European diplomatic and commercial attentions, lured the English to his own side: see Mitchell, 2000. *Ibid.*, 109–10, also discusses the activities of Anthony's brother Robert who, by 1611, had come to occupy an important place within the Safavid military circles.

before he arrived.⁴³ He subsequently took the money and men gathered for this purpose and travelled to Iran. Why exactly Sherley chose to journey there is a matter of some debate, but it seems that he was attracted by accounts of the shah's generosity and the possibility of advancement, or honor, for completing such a voyage. George Manwaring, one of Sherley's men, records that Sherley met one or more travelers coming from Persia, who touted the shah's largesse. Other contemporary letters indicate that Sherley was encouraged by the Venetians to undertake the voyage and push for a military alliance against the Ottomans.⁴⁴ Sherley left Levant Company merchants whom he met in Aleppo with the impression that he planned to revive the overland trade in order to offset the Portuguese influence in the Indian Ocean.⁴⁵

These different explanations and motivations are in tune with the vagaries of Sherley's life. As the second of three brothers,⁴⁶ and a minor nobleman at Elizabeth's court, Anthony had participated in both the wars against the Habsburgs in the Netherlands and had led a fleet in various assaults on Spanish territories in the Caribbean in the 1590s. After spending five months at the Safavid court, he returned from Asia through Russia in the company of a group of Safavid notables sent by Abbas to the West.⁴⁷ After numerous mishaps and quarrels, Sherley, who claimed throughout that he was the shah's ambassador, deserted the mission in 1602 and eventually entered the service of the Spanish court in 1606. He was initially able to promote himself as a useful servant to the Spanish Habsburgs, and as an information broker who was extremely knowledgeable about things Eastern and, indeed, the politics and economy of the entire Eurasian continent. Although initially trusted with large and important tasks in Spain's continuing conflict with North African ghazi fleets, Sherley soon fell from favor, and it was during this period of considerable poverty that his autobiographical account, *Sir Antony Sherley his relation of his trauels into Persia* (1613), was published in England.⁴⁸ It is uncertain whether

⁴³Shortly thereafter, the Earl of Essex launched a rebellion against Queen Elizabeth I. He was executed for treason in 25 February 1601.

⁴⁴For a discussion of the available information, see Davies, 77–85. For further details about the voyage, see Ross. For the most recent scholarly biography of Sherley, see Raiswell.

⁴⁵For a summary of this plan, see Subrahmanyam, 2011, 93–96.

⁴⁶Anthony's elder brother was Sir Thomas Sherley (1564–1633/4), and his younger, Sir Robert Sherley (ca. 1581–1628; subsequently Count Robert in the papal nobility).

⁴⁷While Sherley himself claims that he was made an *ilchi*, i.e., an envoy, by Abbas, it is unclear whether he carried a formal title. For the Persian term *ilchi*, see Mehdizadeh, 89–92. Burton, 2009, 23–24, 35–36, questions the issue of a formal title and shows how the manner of representing Abbas in Europe was the subject of debate within the travelling party itself.

⁴⁸For a detailed and nuanced account of Sherley's life and career within a Eurasian panorama, see Subrahmanyam, 2011, 90–116. For a detailed treatment of the Safavid embassy and Sherley's service to the Spanish Habsburgs, see Fernández, 1:79–253.

Sherley himself arranged for the publication of his account at this time, or whether his brother Thomas, who had previously sponsored works trumpeting all three brothers' travels, did so using a copy already in his possession. However, Thomas is not mentioned anywhere in the book, in contrast to the group of 1607 publications that Thomas almost certainly oversaw. It is even possible that Robert assisted in the publication of the work, although he and Anthony were at odds for much of this time. Given Anthony's circumstances at the time and his constant scheming for positions, it seems likely that Anthony was involved in some way and that he hoped the publication would facilitate his search for a patron.⁴⁹

The story ends with Anthony Sherley's departure from Isfahan, concluding with advice given by Anthony to his younger brother Robert, who was to stay behind at the court of Shah Abbas. However, the full title of the work notes that it was "Penned by Sr. Antony Sherley, and recommended to his brother, Sr. Robert Sherley, being now in prosecution of the like honourable employment," a reference to Robert Sherley's first voyage through Europe as the shah's envoy, which took place from 1608 to 1613. The publication of Anthony's account at this moment was surely meant to capitalize on the renewed interest in the brothers generated by Robert's voyage and the unusual nature of their service to Shah Abbas. Anthony had attempted to use Robert's presence in Spain to revive his own flagging fortunes, and Robert's stay in England from 1611 to 1613 likely spurred the publication of the English text. It is reasonable, therefore, to read Anthony's account as a bid for patronage made at a propitious time. The portrait Anthony paints of himself in the *Relation* strengthens this idea. Rather than a discoverer, navigator, or conqueror, Anthony is depicted as a consummate courtier and diplomat, skillfully negotiating a foreign court and accomplishing his goals through canny alliances and smooth persuasion. In order for this strategy to work, the court of Shah Abbas could not be cast as radically different from the European courts in which Anthony sought employment. Although mastering the subtle disparities between the practices of various nations is presented as a unique skill of Anthony's, the courts are portrayed, overall, as functionally similar in order for Anthony's success at Isfahan to be viewed a qualification for employment at the English or other European courts. Indeed, Anthony works hard to flatten potential differences, speaking frequently in generalities about the characters and behaviors of princes, factions, advisors, and other courtly figures and configurations.

This universalizing drive in the *Relation* is most notable in its obsessive use of italicized maxims. There are over eighty such passages, varying in length from phrases to paragraphs, scattered over 139 pages of text. These italicized passages invariably include some generalizing statement regarding either the nature of

⁴⁹For a brief analysis of the *Relation* in this capacity, see Schleck, 2012. For a discussion of the entire Sherley corpus along these lines, see Schleck, 2011, 61–92.

men, as in “*No man receiueth harme but from himselfe*”; of courtiers and courts, as in “*Nothing hauing euer beene proued more certaine, then that the Ministers of any Prince do euer symbolize with their Masters vertues or vices*”; of princes, as in “*Princes difficilly speak of peace while they feele themselues able to make warres*”; or of statecraft, as in “*Leagues are vsually of more appearance then effect.*” There is even a maxim on the occasional failure of maxims: “*many times general rules faile in particular subiects.*”⁵⁰ That these generalizing proverbs are deployed in contexts radically foreign to the European author and readers is what lends them their ideological charge. For example, Anthony closes his account with some final advice to his brother Robert, who is destined to remain behind in Isfahan as a pledge of Anthony’s service and loyalty to Abbas: “I desired him to remember, that his fortune & safety in that place subsisted only vpon the *kings fauour, which in virtuous princes was euer to bee maintained by virtue. That Princes eares and eyes were in euery place, Courts being full of spies, and nothing hidden from emulation.*”⁵¹ Robert may be in a very foreign court for an Englishman, but his fortune and safety depend on his recognition of certain characteristics shared by courts everywhere, such as the ubiquity of surveillance and competition among the members of the elite. Anthony’s advice also highlights the way in which princes across Eurasia in this period had increasingly centralized their power, requiring powerful noblemen to raise and maintain their fortunes through the prince’s favor rather than through an independent power base outside the court.

Indeed, Anthony makes explicit in his advice to Robert that he sees all courts, whether Muslim or Christian, Protestant or Catholic, as functioning in more or less the same fashion. He writes that he provided Robert with a discourse on the “chiefe properties of all estates” in order “to giue him the better light how clearly to see into that wherein he was; and to helpe the way of his businesse . . . desiring him with all to remember, *that Court carriages were riddles, which though seene, could not bee resolued without exceeding patience, and well iuding experience.*”⁵² In case Robert missed the point, Anthony insists once more that he would best spend his time “vnderstanding the principal elements, by which the body of all estates are compacted, and then by dilating with himselfe the good or defectiue mixture in euery particular state, which hee knew by his owne experience and others relation.”⁵³ If courts everywhere are composed of certain “principal elements” that remain constant across cultural and religious differences, this renders the skills of a knowledgeable courtier eminently transferrable. A good courtier is a good courtier everywhere, and an Englishman may be as successful a courtier in Isfahan as in London.

⁵⁰Sherley, 118, 92, 99, 100, 99.

⁵¹Ibid., 132.

⁵²Ibid., 138.

⁵³Ibid., 139.

This does not mean that Anthony is unaware of the difficulties posed by his foreign origins at the Iranian court. In the process of making his pitch to Abbas on the alliance with Christian princes against the Ottomans, he notes that “*the best propositions haue euer oppositions, mens humours neuer concurring all to one end, and the nature of men being always opposite to a strangers aduancement.*”⁵⁴ However, it is worth noting that this opposition was already guaranteed by the nature of “mens humours” that result in contrary stances on propositions of state. Sherley presents the opposition to his proposal as grounded in the very flesh of the men involved, but not in a manner that evokes a protoracial, or geohumoral, difference between himself and the Iranians. Diverse opinions are attributable not to regional differences in humoral complexion, but to the natural humoral variations between individuals everywhere. This pattern governs all of Sherley’s depictions of his opponents at the court of Abbas, who are presented as contesting Sherley’s planned alliance not through some essential defect in themselves, their culture, or religion, but because this is the expected functioning of a court. One of his primary challengers is the vizier, “Haldenbeague,” whose arguments against the plan are “worthy of so wise a man,” but because “*particular factions doe sometimes blinde men, both in counselling, and deliberating,*” they are in this instance faulty.⁵⁵ His primary ally at court and champion of his cause, “Oliver Di-Can,” suffers when general opinion and, more importantly, that of the shah shifts against the idea, and he soon ceases to support Sherley’s goals. What might be presented as a terrible personal betrayal is philosophically filtered first through the lens of courtly ways and those within it, and then through human nature, as Sherley considers the potential reasons for Oliver Di-Can’s desertion of his cause. He is first presented as having “changed the inclination of his minde according to *the corrupt condition of all Courts, in which the love of obsequiousnesse to the Prince, and fitting themselues to their appetites (by that meanes to strengthen their owne emulations) is more power-able then the feare to do ill, and the working of their owne consciences.*” Sherley then broadens his lens even further, with the even less condemnatory explanation that “*as there are mouings of times, so there are also variations in our minds and fashions.*”⁵⁶

Political Pragmatism and Religious Difference

This universalizing strategy reaches an obvious limit when it comes to religion. The Safavid polity strongly identified itself as a Twelver Shiite domain, a point of difference that no amount of gnomic musings on human nature could entirely

⁵⁴Ibid., 79.

⁵⁵Ibid., 87–88. Sherley presents numerous Safavid officials and notables as central figures in his *Relation*, and uses Anglicized versions of their names. Among the names quoted in the article, “Haldenbeague” corresponds to the vizier Hatim Beg Urudubadi, “Oliver Di-Can” to Allahverdi Khan, and “Bastan-Aga” to Bestam Aqa Qajar.

⁵⁶Ibid., 107.

erase.⁵⁷ Sherley does not shy away from discussing religion and recognizes its importance to the shah's rule. Yet on this topic too his approach is designed to flatten difference rather than place it in high relief, as is the case in so many contemporary travelers' accounts. While recognizing the force of sincere religious belief, Sherley nevertheless engages religion in a largely politicized way in his *Relation*, and invariably through the lens of statecraft. He states explicitly that religion "is that which euer moveth the blindest hearts of men to the most resolute enterprises: and an awfull loue hath euer been the strongest band to binde men to their Princes, to their Countrey, and to common society."⁵⁸ The strength of religious conviction, when married with the state, can serve as a powerful mode of securing the domestic integrity and the borders of a prince's domains. Similarly, he argues that "*Heresie in all Religion causeth Division & the corrupted part becommeth a pernicious enemy to the Prince who supporteth the contrarie; From it arise as from a maine turbulent Spring, Treasons, Conspiracies, secret Conventicles, and Seditions.*"⁵⁹ Thus the careful management of the religious beliefs of one's subjects emerges in the text as an important consideration for all princes and aspiring courtiers, regardless of the religion practiced by the ruler.

Sherley accordingly pays close attention to the religious dimensions of the Safavid polity, particularly in relation to its long-standing conflict with the Ottomans. He observes that a Sunni politico-religious affiliation brings together the Ottomans with the Uzbeks of Central Asia and the majority of the Kurds on the Ottoman-Safavid frontier, and that Abbas has to take into account these political sympathies when acting to consolidate his state. He agrees with the Safavid policy of converting the Sunni subjects, since this is a matter of state security, and notes approvingly the shah's efforts to repress Sunni religious identity and practices: "For the king knowing how potent a vniter of mens minds the selfe-same Religion is for the tranquility of an Estate, hee is exceeding curious and vigilant to suppress, through all his Dominions, that religion of *Mahomet*, which followeth the interpretation of *Vssen* and *Omar*, and to make his people cleave to that of *Aby*."⁶⁰ These actions on the part of the shah, in Sherley's assessment, are not motivated by Shiite piety only, but for clear and justifiable reasons of state: "The Shah acts [n]ot (as I iudge) through any Conscience . . . but first to extirpate intrinsicke factions, then to secure himselfe the more firmly against the *Turke*, who being the head of that part which followeth *Omar* and *Vssen*, should haue too powerfull a way into his Countrey, if his peoples hearts

⁵⁷ A thorough analysis of the development of this identification and its propagation through the Safavid chancery is found in Mitchell, 2009. For the Safavid dynasty's search to build a Twelver Shiite confession in tune with its political agendas, see Abisaab, 7–87.

⁵⁸ Sherley, 16.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 117.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 74.

were inclined vnto him by the force of Religion.”⁶¹ A western border populated by Shiite subjects would render an Ottoman incursion more difficult, while a frontier zone populated by Sunnis would ease the Sultan’s road into Safavid territories. In attempting to convert the Sunni inhabitants of his lands to Shiism, Sherley confidently asserts, the shah acts in his own best territorial interests, and promotes both stability and prosperity.

Sherley’s interest in statecraft keeps his focus squarely on the conflict between the Ottoman Sunnis and the Safavid Shia. In addition to his approving summary of the shah’s repression of Sunnism in his own realm, Sherley also analyzes the conflict from the point of view of religious similarity. He quotes Abbas as saying that “the flame of our warre once breaking forth . . . will not be so facily extinguished . . . the diuersity of our religion will striue with a more mortall rancour then contraries.”⁶² In other words, the sectarian “diuersity” in Islam will produce a more vicious war than a war with those of an entirely different, “contrary” religion. This is a point that would not be lost on a Reformation-era European, and its expression here is surely invested with memories of Sherley’s own experiences fighting the Spanish in the Netherlands on the Protestant side, and potentially with his subsequent service to Spain and the pope against the Protestants. On the other hand, however, Sherley believes it would be easier for Abbas to establish control over the Ottoman territories than any European Christian polity, both because it would be easier to invade the territories of another Islamic entity by using the sympathies of one’s religious affiliates on the other side (the reason for the shah’s conversion efforts within his own domains), and also because the Ottomans and the Safavids share “Lawes, Orders, and [a] forme of gouernement.” Sherley argues that Abbas should press his advantage against the Ottomans, insisting that “the symbolizing of religion . . . would more facilitate an entry into his state, then the sword, when there should grow no more mutation in the maine points of gouernement, laws, nor orders, but the person of the Prince onely. The obstinate warres, and resistances of the progresse of the one and the other, betweene the *Turkes* and the *Christians*, grew from the maine alterations of all Lawes, Orders, and forme of gouernement, with the vtter ruine of the conquered, being so diuerse in all those; and more in the principall point of religion.”⁶³ Since the Ottomans and the Safavids both possessed a devotion to Islam, a similar legal tradition, and a monarchical form of government, the shifting of territory from one prince to the other could happen with relative ease, as the disruption caused to subjects’ lives would be fairly minimal. This is contrasted to the trenchant fighting on the Ottoman–Eastern European border, where subjects were motivated by fear of losing more than simply one prince for another.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Ibid., 99–100.

⁶³Ibid., 76–77.

This analysis minimizes the differences between Sunnism and Shiism, and simplifies an extremely complex set of negotiations and alliances in the borderlands between the two empires. It also contradicts Sherley's earlier point, voiced by the shah in his text, regarding the ferocity of sectarian wars. But both discussions reflect Sherley's awareness of the role of sectarian identity in the essentially political conflict between the Ottomans and Safavids. This understanding of the role of religion in statecraft is one that was widespread in Europe at the time, and would render the shah a quite familiar style of ruler to Sherley's European audience. It thus realizes an important rhetorical task for Sherley in his efforts to introduce Abbas to a European audience. It is not simply a rhetorical device, however. This understanding of confessional identity in statecraft was widespread not simply across Europe, but the entire Eurasian continent. Similarly, the Englishman's emphasis on the shah's control of religion through political means and for political reasons likely reflects, to some extent, Abbas's preoccupation with alternative forms of piety found in his domain around the time of Sherley's visit, even though Sherley does not provide his readers with much information about these problems.⁶⁴ This issue linked not only Sherley's informants and his readers, but Eurasian societies as a whole during the sixteenth century.⁶⁵

Not content with displaying this connection, however, Sherley attempts to push his observations of Safavid religious policy beyond the domain of the observable and into the realm of wish fulfillment, while still retaining his instrumentalist approach to religion and statecraft. Sherley sees the religious rift between the Ottomans and the Safavids as something that can be leveraged to build an alliance between the princes of Latin Christendom and the shah, and he also seeks to capitalize on his knowledge of the conflict to improve the lot of Western European traders and travelers. In the context of making his case to Abbas for a Safavid-European alliance, he claims that the Ottoman sultan "is an absolute and Tyrannous enemie to the Christians" while asserting that the shah's brand of Islam "hath a charitable opinion of them."⁶⁶ He then slyly argues that since Abbas already does much to defile Sunni Islam publicly, he could do so even more by being charitable to the Christians: "a greater meanes your Maiestie

⁶⁴For an eloquent summary of the tensions created by a millenarian religion and its adherents and a Safavid center intent on imposing its own version of spiritual and temporal order on its constituents, see Babayan, 349–402. For Abbas's attempts at controlling Twelver Shiite piety to his advantage, see Abisaab, 53–88; Melville; Calmard.

⁶⁵Debates on confessionalization have a long and rich pedigree among historians of early modern Europe, as seen, among others, in Schilling; Brady, 2004; Hsia; Boettcher, 2004a; Brüning. For attempts at testing the concept in the Ottoman and Safavid cases, see Krstić, 2011, particularly 165–74; Antov, 171–74; Şahin, 205–13; Terzioğlu.

⁶⁶Sherley, 117.

may worke by: in giuing libertie of Christian religion, so much abhorred of their part, and securitie of trade, goods and persons to Christians, by which you shall bind their Princes, expresse the charitie of your Law, serue your selfe in diuers thinges of them which haue been hidden vnto you, both for your utilitie, strength and pleasure: and more inure your people to despise the other Religion, by so contrarie, so apparent and so great effect."⁶⁷ In this passage, Sherley alludes to the common European opinion, first formulated by Italian observers, that the Safavid religious confession was much closer to Christianity than the Ottoman one.⁶⁸

Sherley is a thoughtful observer and political analyst of the sectarian differences between two great Islamic empires, and he accurately reflects the views and actions of certain factions of Abbas's court in late sixteenth-century Iran, as will be discussed below. But this does not make him immune from repeating less informed European commonplaces, especially when they serve a useful rhetorical function in his *Relation*. His visit to Iran coincides with a period when the shah often resorted to conversion, this time from Christianity to Islam, to create a group of loyal officials and soldiers that he could use against other factional interests. For instance, "Oliuer Di-Can," whom Sherley admires, was a Georgian convert to Islam, Allahverdi Khan, whose background was not a secret in Iran. However, Sherley displays his ignorance (willful or otherwise) of the shah's actions toward the Georgian and Armenian Christians in his domains, and similarly fails to take into account the Christian communities living under Ottoman rule, or the complex relationship between Islam and Christianity.⁶⁹ This is the point where his instrumental understanding of religion reaches its limits, and fails to provide any relevant analysis beyond immediate political concerns.

A Global Mirror for Princes

Sherley may be overly optimistic regarding Shah Abbas's sympathy toward Christianity; however, this optimism is in harmony with his overall depiction of the Safavid ruler. Abbas is presented to Sherley's readers as a model prince, worthy of emulation and praise. Sherley is fully aware of the objections he will encounter for selecting a Muslim prince as his ideal, and promotes Abbas explicitly in the face of such opposition. His statement on the matter is worth

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Meserve, 223–37; Rota, 34–38.

⁶⁹For a general survey of non-Muslims in seventeenth-century Iran, see Moreen. For Abbas's creation of elites through the mechanism of conversion or the promotion of specific communities defined on the basis of religious difference, see Babaie, Babayan, Baghdiantz McCabe, and Ferhad. Rather than universally oppressing their Christian subjects, the Ottomans had also developed an extensive set of legal and practical applications for the management of religious difference at a time of universal religious tensions: see Barkey, 2008.

quoting at length, both for the hyperbole of its praise, and the parallel made with Christian princes:

I speake onely of . . . the iustice, wisdom, temperance, liberalitie, valour, mercifulnesse, and generality of all excellent vertues in a Prince esteemed by vs barbarous, and yet indeed fit to be a patterne and mirror to some of ours, who haue *Christ* in our mouthes, and not the least of his Saints in our hearts . . . the subiect being euer the person of the king, and his excellling vertues: which I had rather speake of, to point out by them the happinesse of his state, then to see a farre off the miseries of some of ours swimming in bloud, full of cruell commandement, continuall accusations, false frendships, the ruine of innocents, implacable factions, and pernicious ends of things: contrairie to that which ought to be with vs of a better profession; and is with those which we despise.⁷⁰

In a move that inverts the hierarchy normally inscribed in Western Christian texts, Sherley notes the difference in “profession” between Abbas and “our” princes, but claims that Abbas better exemplifies the virtues espoused by Christianity despite his reputedly “barbarous” status. This might seem a curious move for an author seeking advancement from the very Christian princes he here condemns. However, in his idealized depiction of Abbas and critique of Western Christian princes, Sherley is drawing on a long-established genre, one that spans the breadth of Eurasia, namely the *speculum principis* (mirror for princes) genre, as it was known in Latin Christendom, or the advice literature variously known in Arabic as *naṣīḥat al-mulūk* (counsel for kings), in Persian as *pandnāmeḥ* and *andarznameḥ* (book of advice), and in Turkish as *nasihatname* (book of counsel).⁷¹ Sherley places his depiction of Abbas firmly within this tradition when he states that Abbas is fit “to be a patterne and mirror” to other princes. Indeed, in choosing Abbas for his ideal, Sherley echoes a tradition inherited from Greek authors of late antiquity, in which Persian kings in particular are presented as exemplary rulers.⁷²

In a comparative study of the mirror/advice literature in both the Christian and Islamic traditions, Lisa Blaydes, Justin Grimmer, and Alison McQueen note that “Christian authors relied heavily on description of an idealized ruler, leaving readers to contemplate the difference between this ideal and their existing

⁷⁰Sherley, 109.

⁷¹Marlow, 526. For a discussion of the issues of definition and naming in relation to the mirror-for-princes genre in multiple traditions, see *ibid.*, 523–28. Very much like Renaissance diplomacy, as discussed above, the emergence of a new political thinking around the Renaissance and the Reformation is usually discussed solely with reference to European texts and contexts.

⁷²See Al-Azmeh, 10; cf. Grogan, 175–76.

ruler.⁷³ Sherley is not as subtle, as the quote above demonstrates. But since he specifies no particular Christian prince, and was at the time in the service of the Spanish Crown, his English audience could easily interpret his comparisons in ways not unfavorable to themselves. In depicting Abbas as the embodiment of “iustice, wisdome, temperance, liberalitie, valour, mercifulnesse,” Sherley evokes the personal characteristics long believed in Latin Christendom to be the qualities of a perfect prince (while also repeating themes that are found in Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal political texts).⁷⁴ James I could therefore choose to see himself as closer to the shah than to those princes “who haue *Christ* in our mouthes, and not the least of his Saints in our hearts,” “swimming in bloud, full of cruell commandement,” etc. As James saw himself as a pious peacemaker and a virtual Solomon of his age, it is unlikely that he would see Sherley’s condemnations as directed toward him. Moreover, if through this comparison James considered himself naturally allied with Shah Abbas through their shared princely excellence, Sherley’s efforts to unite Christendom with Safavid Iran would be all the more respected and his chances of finding a new patron or service at the English court would be increased.

In addition to the virtues of the prince, the mirror genre across Eurasia featured certain recurring topics and themes, many of which appear in Sherley’s text.⁷⁵ Justice and injustice were central concerns in these texts, and they are engaged repeatedly in both indirect and direct ways in Sherley’s *Relation*. For example, Sherley gives an account of how Abbas handled the discovery of a corrupt governor within his domains, noting that such crimes would be “small matters” in a state where the prince ignored the welfare of his people in favor of his own comfort and the interests of a privileged elite. Such princes, he claims, “concurring in the spoyle of the people, concurre also in so cruell a suppression of their iust cries, [seeing] their lifting vp their voyces, for Iustice . . . as [a] great a sinne, as almost a perfect Rebellion.” Their response to such a “rebellion” is violence, such that “the same Iustice, which should protect them against inique oppression, inflicteth seuer chastisement . . . *A Miserable calamitie for the poore flocke, where the Sheeheard sheareth the wooll, and the Bramble rent the flesh.*”⁷⁶

⁷³See Lisa Blaydes, Justin Grimmer, and Alison McQueen, “Mirrors for Princes and Sultans: Advice on the Art of Governance in the Medieval Christian and Islamic Worlds,” a precirculated paper presented at *AALIMS: Economic and Political Institutions of Islam: Past and Present* held at Princeton University. The paper is posted at www.aalims.org/uploads/Mirrors%20Princeton.pdf, dated October 4, 2013.

⁷⁴See Born. See also Blaydes, Grimmer, and McQueen, 5. Cf. Darling, 2008. For near-contemporary examples from Timurid, Ottoman, and Mughal contexts, see Subtelny; Tietze; Alvi.

⁷⁵For succinct lists, see Blaydes, Grimmer, and McQueen, 7; Marlow, 527.

⁷⁶Sherley, 69–70.

This imagined antihero of a prince is used as a foil for Abbas's response, who chooses to discipline the corrupt governor, "knowing *that the true care of a Prince, must bee euer the publique good; and [that] the capableness of his ruling, would bee iudged by this true Iustice, and election of his Ministers, and distribution of his fauour vpon the worthiest.*" Thus Sherley displays how Abbas not only judges the minister justly, but even takes some of the blame himself for having made the poor appointment in the first place. Sherley describes these actions explicitly as just, and uses them to contradict the expectations of his Christian readers, noting that "wee call [the Safavid ruler] barbarous, though from his example wee may learne many great and good things."⁷⁷

A further central theme in the pan-Eurasian mirror/advice literature is the necessity for the prince to consult with honest advisors and, after careful deliberation, to be willing to take their advice. Given that most of the texts in this genre are composed by bureaucrats and courtiers profoundly engaged in the political process, it is perhaps unsurprising that the need to take advice occupies such a major role in mirrors, and Sherley and his *Relation* are no exception.⁷⁸ Indeed, the entire text is designed to display Sherley's prowess as a princely advisor, and to praise the prince that takes his advice. In the *Relation*, Abbas himself is made to voice the rationale by which advisors are a valued and critical tool for any good prince: "For Princes (said hee) are, indeed more then men, when they find faithfull friends which will freely aduise them; and lesse then men when they are without such: the brightnesse of their greatnesse so dimming their sight, that they haue much more needed of helpe, then priuate men; who being conuersant in all things, gather experience of euery thing, which a Prince cannot haue; Nature, onely, bringing forth a man, his perfection following by his owne vertue, learning and experience; the two first a Prince might haue, but last hardly, and euer unperfect."⁷⁹ Without experienced men at their side, princes will inevitably make mistakes, Sherley's Abbas asserts. The graceful visual metaphor provides a rhetorically effective way to explain why even great princes need the advice of others, as their own shining magnificence makes seeing the dimmer world around them difficult.

At issue in Sherley's account of this topic is not only the necessity of princes to take advice from their ministers and courtiers, but the legitimacy of taking advice from "strangers" such as himself. Sherley spends over twenty pages of his autobiographical travel account describing in detail the debate that occurred at

⁷⁷Ibid., 70.

⁷⁸Indeed, a significant number of the authors of political treatises dwelled in highly competitive court environments, sought advancement and favor, and hence developed intricate discourses about their usefulness to the monarchs. For a discussion of these dynamics in an Ottoman context, see Darling, 2008; Fleischer; Yılmaz; Douglas Howard; Şahin.

⁷⁹Sherley, 77.

the shah's court over whether the shah should embrace Sherley's proposal to ally with the princes of Latin Christendom and form a league against the Ottomans. Sherley begins the series of speeches with his proposal, after which he and his scheme are criticized by Haldenbeague the vizier, then defended by the general Oliver di-Can, and finally rejected by the "Great Chamberlaine . . . Bastan-Aga"; Abbas then concludes the session with a noncommittal promise to consider all sides of the question before rendering his decision.⁸⁰ The vizier's objections to the proposal include his very frankly articulated skepticism about Sherley's trustworthiness as an advisor. Instead, he asserts, Sherley must be working for one or another prince who hopes the shah will end his peace accord with the Ottomans; by doing so, he will pull their attention east, and draw the Ottoman forces away from the European front and into Asia.⁸¹

When Oliver di-Can steps in to defend the proposal, he also defends Sherley by articulating a broad, ecumenical view of advisors: "if conuenient and necessary things be propounded, by a Christian, by a Iew, or by the worst man liuing; not onely in religion, but the very disposition of his life, I see no cause why you, nor I, nor any should reiect that which is good for the illes sake; since *Princes must, and ought, make their benefite of all men: not regarding what they are, but how they may serue them.*"⁸² The view that religious affiliation does not disqualify one from offering advice to a prince, or the prince from taking it, is implicitly ratified by Shah Abbas, since the point is not argued further and since it was Abbas who initially encouraged Sherley to speak. He also ultimately adopts what is presented in the *Relation* as Sherley's scheme to ally the Safavids with the Western Christian princes, putting this ecumenical view into practice. Although Sherley does not in this case point out explicitly that his readers could and should take advice from Abbas and his worthy Iranian advisors as well, the reciprocity contained within this broad principle is obvious. Good ideas come from all kinds of individuals, including those of differing religious persuasions.

In sum, in his *Relation of his trauels into Persia*, Anthony Sherley actively seeks to flatten differences and to draw connections between the Safavid prince and court and those in Latin Christendom. He does so primarily through his

⁸⁰See *ibid.*, 80–103.

⁸¹Although Sherley was not, in all likelihood, working for any European prince when making this journey or proposal, the aims described here are ones that Sherley is given credit for by contemporaries when the Ottomans concluded a peace with the Habsburgs in 1606 and turned their attention to their eastern border. For example, see Cartwright, A2^v, who notes that "two of the most mightie and most warlike Princes among the *Barbarians*, the great *Turke* and the *Persian*, are now in armes one against the other; stirred vp thereunto by two of our Country-men, Sir *Anthonie Sherley*, and Master *Robert Sherley* his brother. A warre not onely like to be long and bloudie, but also very commodious and of great oportuni|tie to the Christian Commonweale."

⁸²Sherley, 86.

obsessive use of generalizing maxims, which are understood to apply to all men regardless of location or religion, or to the nature of courts in both Europe and Iran. This universalizing tendency allows the *Relation* to display Sherley's achievements as a courtier in Iran, with the understanding that the knowledge and skills utilized in his travels would guarantee his success in any court across Eurasia. As the published *Relation* was likely meant to serve as a means to patronage in the English court, this transferability of skills is critical to the author's goals. Rather than emphasizing difference through a relentless othering, Sherley emphasizes sameness and connection across Eastern and Western courts, and he has a reason for doing so.

Moreover, although Sherley was unlikely to be aware of its presence and examples in the Islamic world, his use of the conventions and topoi of the mirror for princes genre stands as a reminder of a further connection between the so-called East and West. The presence of the genre across Eurasia and across multiple linguistic and literary traditions points to a further shared history that has yet to receive a full-length treatment by early modern scholars. Such an analysis could, as Sherley does, point to the ways in which structural similarities in courts across the continent rendered their practices and personas mutually intelligible across linguistic, religious, and national boundaries.

EARLY MODERN ORIENTALISM AND THE PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE

In its determination to draw connections rather than emphasize difference, Sherley's text is a good example of the breadth of political and ideological stances taken by early modern authors in Latin Christendom — particularly travelers — toward Islamic empires such as the Ottomans, Safavids, or Mughals. Although many European authors sought to other their neighbors to the East, this is not uniformly the case. And while, as noted above, positive depictions of non-Europeans can feed into developing Orientalist discourses, the possibility that such texts can also have antiracist effects has to be maintained. Sometimes the same text has the potential to do both. It is argued here that Sherley's account does the latter in its determination to flatten cultural and religious differences through its presentation of a recognizable set of courtly figures and structures.

Said's *Orientalism* does not only call attention to the process of othering, however. It also emphasizes the ways in which Europeans spoke for Eastern peoples when they spoke or wrote of them.⁸³ Knowledge about the East was produced entirely in the West, as Orientals were assumed to be incapable of

⁸³This is not to imply that the practice no longer exists, or that a post-Orientalist era has begun.

penning accurate, scholarly accounts of their own lands and histories.⁸⁴ It is in this sense that Sherley's account, despite its eschewing of radical othering, might be fairly accused of contributing to developing Orientalist discourses, as it is yet another Western account of the lands and histories of the East. Sherley's frequent habit of direct discourse allows for Shah Abbas and others in his court to speak, but given the likely absence of a bilingual scribe during these reported conversations, and Sherley's lack of Persian and Turkish, it can be assumed that they are based entirely on Sherley's memory of a translator's mediated version (at best), or his imagination (at worst).⁸⁵

Yet there is another way in which Sherley's text pushes against the Orientalist European monopoly on legitimate knowledge production, and restores (limited) agency to the Iranians with whom he came in contact during his travels. The information embedded in Sherley's account of recent Safavid history and his analysis of the geopolitical position of its leader vis-à-vis the variety of ethnic groups within and outside the borders of the Safavid empire reflect the particular perspective of groups within Abbas's court. Sherley's narrative reflects a pro-Abbas, pro-Safavid party line, and at times it represents, even more specifically, the views of the prowar faction at court, which supported an alliance with Latin Christendom, and thus was a natural ally of Sherley's. For instance, the Shaybanid Uzbeks claimed to be the inheritors of a refined Central Asian–Timurid political tradition, but, with an obvious Safavid bias, Sherley paints them as uncouth frontiersmen who do the bidding of the Ottomans “whose religion they professe.”⁸⁶ He also quotes Abbas as presenting the Uzbeks, true to Safavid propaganda, as his vassals.⁸⁷ Similarly, two groups whose support was essential for both the Ottomans and the Safavids to manage their frontier, the Kurds and the Georgians, are presented as having friendly relations with Abbas, rather than as communities whose survival depended on a careful balancing act between the two sides. Finally, the Ottomans are painted as illegitimate aggressors and usurpers who invaded Abbas's ancestral lands (which were captured from the White Sheep Turkomans by Abbas's ancestor Ismail only a century earlier).

It is undeniable that Sherley's account of the central policy debate at the Safavid court is clearly marked by his own needs to portray himself as a skilled

⁸⁴Said, headnote, 21.

⁸⁵Issues of translation also come into play in such reported scenes. As is common with many European travelers' accounts, Sherley largely elides the presence of the translator(s) needed for this conversation to take place. He notes only that he took “the opportunity of the Kings being alone with me and my brother in a Garden, with my Interpreter onely and *Xa-Tamas-Coolibeague*” to begin his extended debate over the potential alliance with Latin Christendom against the Ottomans: Sherley, 80.

⁸⁶Ibid., 32.

⁸⁷Ibid., 101.

and persuasive courtier on behalf of European interests, and thus is an account of Safavid history and policy molded to serve Sherley's rhetorical interests. However, the nature of the information included in the account points to the ways in which Safavid knowledge and political positioning crafted Sherley's presentation of Persia to his English readers.⁸⁸ Sherley possesses a fairly detailed knowledge of the different factions at the Safavid court, and the key considerations in their debates over Safavid policy toward the Ottomans. His narrative quite obviously favors the side whose interests ally most closely with his own. Since there are no well-known extant European sources containing such a thorough analysis of the conflict between the two Eurasian empires from the Safavid perspective, it is extremely likely that Sherley acquired this knowledge (in mediated form) through direct contact with the court in Isfahan.⁸⁹ Indeed, his accounts of Abbas's recent struggles with leaders of powerful factions or his activities against the Uzbeks, which preceded Sherley's arrival and constituted the immediate context of his visit, usually agree with what might be called the canonical account of Abbas's reign, the work of history by the chancellor Eskandar Beg Monshi, *Tarih-e alam-ara-ye Abbasi* (The world-adorning history of Abbas), finished around 1628–29.⁹⁰ And finally, although he appropriates the Perso-European alliance as his own in order to inflate his skills as an international diplomat, the scene of persuasion is not caricatured and fully represents the serious debate at the turn-of-the-century Safavid court regarding how, when, and whether to further pursue their conflict with the Ottomans. The various positions in this debate are voiced through characters who are realistically portrayed and based on actual historical figures. Although other Sherley publications would demonize and flatten individuals such as Haldenbeague and Bastan-Aga, Anthony Sherley himself accords them both ample space and considerable respect in his depiction of the men and their opinions.⁹¹

⁸⁸McJannet makes a related argument; however, she focuses on textual transmission of Ottoman words and knowledge rather than the oral transmission described here.

⁸⁹At the time of Sherley's visit, the Carmelites and other missionary groups had not yet established a permanent presence in Iran. Similarly, although various trading expeditions from Western Europe had come to Persia seeking privileges, none of the major trading companies that would later dominate the overseas trade between Europe and the Indian Ocean had succeeded in setting up extensive operations inside Iran. So while traders and travelers routinely passed between Iran and Western Europe, there was not a significant expatriate community in Isfahan or Qazvin to provide detailed information on regional, local, or court politics. Following his return to Europe, Sherley received continued updates on events in Iran from his brother Robert, who had married, learned to speak Persian, and generally established himself in the court of Abbas.

⁹⁰Cf. Sherley, 58–62, with Monshi, 2:693–777.

⁹¹See, for example, the depiction of "Hallibeck" (Hatem Beg) in the stageplay dramatizing the Sherley brothers' travels by Day, Rowley, and Wilkins.

Thus Sherley's *Relation* embeds significant local knowledge into both its account of recent Safavid history and its description of the policy debate in which Sherley reportedly participated. While such material does not prevent the text from being read as a further example of Orientalist knowledge production, ignoring the ways in which the opinions and experiences of sixteenth-century Iranians mark this narrative risks an ironic reinscription of Orientalist biases in which it is assumed that Eastern knowledge and voices cannot legitimately be found within Western texts.

POSTSCRIPT

This article offers, through collaboration between a Europeanist specializing in literary criticism and a historian of early modern Islam, a discussion about the translatability or circulation of political ideas and ideals in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. An approach that takes into account stereotyping as well as appreciation is harder to do from within the confines of a single discipline; a multidisciplinary reading of early modern European narratives, on the other hand, may help scholars establish a more nuanced approach to the texts and the authors, and reveal the commensurability of numerous intellectual trends in early modern Eurasia. This is where the collaboration between literary scholars and historians reveals itself to be particularly fruitful for this field, since what is needed is a joint evaluation of text and context that will go beyond both simple historicism and mere hermeneutics. Such collaborative work thus has the potential to bring to light the presence of considerable amounts of Eastern knowledge in Western texts. It would also enable the discovery of the reverse, since these commensurabilities run in both directions. Regardless, to reveal more of these connected histories, more connections between scholars should be made.⁹²

⁹²Although no special technology is needed to facilitate such collaborations, new digital platforms can speed and assist scholarly connections. The open source Serai: Premodern Encounters (<http://serai.uts.utoronto.ca/>) is a revealing example of how digital humanities projects can greatly facilitate such collaborative work in the field.

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