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Safavids in Venetian and European Sources

Ahmad Guliyev



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Ahmad Guliyev

Abstract

The emergence of the Safavid Empire in the early sixteenth century marked a significant change in the geopolitics of the Middle East. This momentous change coincided with the widening of Ottoman expansion eastward and the exploration by European powers, especially by Venice, of the possibilities of forming alliances against the Ottomans with the involvement of the Safavids. Thus, Ottoman threat and commercial interests contributed to the emergence and development of diplomatic, cultural, and trade relations between the Republic of Venice and the Safavid Empire, which lasted until the end of the seventeenth century. Drawing on the documents from the Venetian State Archives and other contemporary sources, this book focuses mainly on some aspects of Safavid diplomacy, including the language of the Safavid polity, the role of European subjects as interpreters for the shahs, material and visual characteristics of Safavid diplomatic letters to Venice, the attitude of the Safavids towards resident diplomacy, the reception of the European envoys in the Safavid court and Europeans' perception of Safavid diplomatic practices, as well as the characteristics of the Safavid embassies to Venice. We have tried to explain the role of Turkish as a language of diplomacy and communication in Safavid-Venetian encounters. We have also attempted to explore briefly how the Venetians distinguished Safavid subjects according to their ethno-linguistic affiliations. Finally, we examine the Ottoman factor in Safavid-Venetian relations in order to establish to what extent, if any, the Ottomans had an impact on the overall character of Safavid-Venetian relations.

Keywords Safavid Empire. Venice. Safavid diplomacy. Safavid-Venetian relations. Ottoman-Venetian relations. Safavid envoys. Early modern diplomacy. Diplomatic gift-giving.

Safavids in Venetian and European Sources

Ahmad Guliyev

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The present monograph was written within a research project titled *SAFVEN-West Meets East in Venice: Cross-Cultural Interactions and Reciprocal Influences Between the Safavids and Venetians*, financed thanks to the generous support of the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Individual Fellowship (grant agreement no. 789632). I would like to thank the Department of Asian and North African Studies (DSAAM) of Ca' Foscari University of Venice for hosting me during my research in Venice. I owe my deepest gratitude to my supervisor Professor Simone Cristoforetti for his support and scholarly advice. At DSAAM, I am also grateful to the "Hilâl" series editor-in-chief, Elisabetta Ragagnin for her encouragement and valuable Turcological advice, as well as to Andrea Rudatis for his precious help in administrative matters and logistics. Many thanks to the staff of Edizioni Ca' Foscari for their support of this book project and Tommaso Galvani for excellent copy-editing. I thank young scholar Andrew Vidali for his assistance in transcribing Venetian archival documents. I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers whose comments and suggestions improved the previous version of the manuscript. Finally, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the staff at the Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Biblioteca Marciana (Venice), Archivio storico del Patriarcato di Venezia, Archivio di Stato di Firenze (Florence), Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze (Florence), Vatican Apostolic Archive, and Ca' Foscari's Languages and Cultures Library (BALI).

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Safavids in Venetian and European Sources

In memory of Maria Pia Pedani

Introduction

The emergence of the Safavid Empire¹ in the early sixteenth century marked a significant change in the geopolitics of the Middle East. This momentous change coincided with the widening of Ottoman expansion eastward and the exploration by European powers, especially by Venice, of the possibilities of forming alliances against the Ottomans with the involvement of the Safavids. Thus, Ottoman threat and commercial interests contributed to the emergence and development of diplomatic, cultural, and trade relations between the Republic of Venice and the Safavid Empire, which lasted until the end of the seventeenth century.

In the past two decades, in the wake of a renewed interest in early modern diplomacy and a shift toward interdisciplinary approaches, the interactions between Europe and the Islamic Middle East have received considerable attention. Scholars are increasingly emphasizing the interconnected and shared history of Europe and the Middle East.² The nature of these connections can be traced through a comprehensive examination of early modern diplomatic and cross-cultural encounters between the Islamic Middle East (Ottomans, Safavids)

¹ For a general overview of the history of the Safavid Empire, see Savory 1980; for the sixteenth-century Safavid history, see Efendiyev 1981. For a revisionist study on the general history of the Safavids, see Newman 2006. For Safavid-Venetian relations, see Rota 2002; 2009a; 2009b; 2012.

² Dursteler 2006; Rothman 2012; Ortega 2009.

and Europe (Venetians) which cannot be grasped appropriately from a shallow historical or a monocultural perspective. The complex and comparative research analysis of Safavid-Venetian diplomatic and trade exchanges could contribute towards a better understanding of the diplomatic relations between these two powers, in general, and of the significance of non-verbal communication, in particular. In this book, I focus mainly on some aspects of Safavid diplomacy, including the language of the Safavid polity, the role of European subjects as interpreters for the shahs, material and visual characteristics of Safavid diplomatic letters to Venice, the attitude of the Safavids towards resident diplomacy, the reception of the European envoys in the Safavid court and Europeans' perception of Safavid diplomatic practices, as well as the characteristics of the Safavid embassies to Venice. Particularly, I have tried to shed light on the role of Turkish as a language of diplomacy and communication in Safavid-Venetian encounters. I have also attempted to explain briefly how the Venetians distinguished shah's subjects according to their ethno-linguistic affiliations. By examining the material and visual features of the Safavid missives to Venice, I sought to discover differences or similarities in decoration, honorifics, and dimensions of letters sent to the Doges. While exploring the nature of the Safavid missions to Venice, I discuss the place of the *gäräkyaraqs* (purveyors) of the Royal within the Safavid merchant-envoy class. Finally, I examine the Ottoman factor in Safavid-Venetian relations in order to establish to what extent, if any, the Ottomans had an impact on the overall character of Safavid-Venetian relations. I also sought to identify the Venetian stance with regard to Safavid-Ottoman military engagements.

While my research draws extensively on Venetian archival documents, I have used numerous contemporary European historical sources to examine and clarify some issues regarding Safavid diplomacy.

I dedicate this monograph to the memory of the late Professor Maria Pia Pedani (1952-2019) whose invaluable advice and constant encouragement helped me greatly to write a successful project proposal. In the same way, I honor the memory of my PhD supervisor, the late Professor Ogtay Äfändiyev (1926-2013) who made an important contribution to the development of Safavid studies in Azerbaijan.

1 Language and Translation at the Safavid Court

Summary 1.1 Languages of the Safavid Diplomacy: “Speaking in Turkish while Writing in Persian”. – 1.2 “Interpreting and Translating for the Shah”.

1.1 Languages of the Safavid Diplomacy: “Speaking in Turkish while Writing in Persian”

Knowledge of the local language or languages of the host country was important for early modern diplomats, in addition to the knowledge of the region and its customs. Knowledge of Turkish was particularly useful for European diplomats visiting the Safavid court where the Safavid shahs and courtiers conversed in that language. This fact was attested by numerous European travellers, diplomats, missionaries who had visited the Safavid state in different periods, such as García de Silva y Figueroa,¹ Pietro Della Valle,² Pacifique de

1 García de Silva y Figueroa, a Spanish diplomat, Philip III's ambassador to the Safavid court wrote in 1619; Figueroa 1905, 2: 404: “El Enbaxador de Laor [Mughal] [...] no entendiese lo que se auia tratado sobre el tabaco, auriendose hablado en turquesco, lengua común en la corte”.

2 Della Valle 1843, 1: 506: “In Persia si parla comunemente la lingua Turca: e quasi più della Persiana; particolarmente alla Corte, e fra i grandi”; Della Valle 1843, 1: 656: “Fat-tomi sedere il Re in questa guisa, cominciò a domandarmi, parlando in lingua turca [...]”.

Provins,³ Adam Olearius,⁴ Raphael du Mans,⁵ Jean Chardin,⁶ Niccolò Manucci,⁷ Jean de Thevenot,⁸ Angelo Legrenzi,⁹ John Fryer,¹⁰ Gemelli Careri,¹¹ Engelbert Kaempfer,¹² as well as Carmelite friars, including Filippo of Santissima Trinità¹³ and John Thaddeus.¹⁴ Turkish was not only a language of the court, but also of provincial administration and of the military, retaining its importance until the very end of the Safavid period.¹⁵ Above all, it was the mother tongue of the Qizilbash¹⁶ tribes, which constituted the backbone of the state. Instead,

3 The Capuchin Father Pacifique De Provins who was received by Shah Abbās I in late 1628 conversed with the Shah in Turkish (De Provins 1631, 266): “Et moy ie les ofris au Roy devant toute la Cour avec ces mesmes paroles que j’auois bien premeditées en ‘langue Turquesque’”.

4 German Adam Olearius, secretary to the legation of 1635 sent out by the Duke of Holstein to the court of Shah Safi I, wrote (Olearius 1669, 332-3): “Turkish language and by this means it is so common at court that a man seldom hears anyone speak the Persian”.

5 Du Mans 1694, 137: “La langue ordinaire de la Perse est la langue persienne pour le commun, la turquesque pour la cour”.

6 Chardin 1711, 5: 30: “Le Turquesque est la langue des armées & de la Cour”.

7 In 1654, Venetian Niccolò Manucci, who accompanied English envoy Henry Bard (Viscount Bellomont) to the Safavid court of Shah Abbās II, referring to the Bellomont’s audience with the Safavid Grand Vizier, notes (Manucci 1907, 33): “The above conversation was in Turkish, which I could already speak and understand sufficiently”.

8 De Thevenot 1687, 90: “at the court of Persia, they speak nothing but Turkish”.

9 Angelo Legrenzi, a doctor and a traveller who visited Safavid lands in 1678, notes (Legrenzi 1707, 2: 139): “quelli della corte parlino alla Turca”.

10 Fryer 1698, 402: “The Courtiers think the Turkish language more commanding, and therefore addict themselves to that speech”.

11 Gemelli Careri 1699, 202: “Nella Corte però il Re medesimo parla sempre Turchesco”.

12 Kämpfer 1712, 144: “Lingua Aulae Turcica est, nimirum stirpi Regiae vernacula, atque alia quam nationis”.

13 Filippo of Santissima Trinità who was in the Safavid state in 1630-1631 wrote (Philippe de la Très Sainte Trinité 1666, 357): “in quella [corte] del Rè di Persia la Turchesca ha prevaluto, questa lingua vā tuttavia perseverando nella corte loro”.

14 In his report, dated 15 August 1609, intended for the Praepositus General in Rome, Fr. John Thaddeus notes (Chick 1939, 165): “The Turkish language is usually spoken and understood, and the Shah and chief men and soldiers generally speak in it. The common people speak in Persian, and all documents and communications are in that language”.

15 See Gandjei 1991; Perry 2001; Floor, Javadi 2013.

16 Its members were drawn from Turkish tribes who were instrumental in bringing the young Ismāil Safavi [figs 1-2] to power and constituted the military aristocracy of the empire. They filled the most important offices of state, and held a dominant position in both political and military affairs (See Efendiev 1975; 1981, 37-8). The name Qizilbash (‘Redheads’) was given to them by their rivals in reference to their red turban with twelve gores, which is also called ‘taj-i Heydari’, the ‘Heydar cap’. In some instances, Safavid chroniclers use ‘the Qizilbash realm’, ‘the Qizilbash territory’ and ‘the Qizilbash state’ as synonyms for the Safavid state (Munshi 1978, 1: 307; Musalı 2011, 293). Furthermore, Ottoman sources mainly describe the Safavids as ‘Kızılbaşlar’, in-

Persian was the preferred language for formal correspondence, chancery composition, and literary production in the Safavid Empire.

It appears that the Venetian Senate was aware of the role of Turkish in the Safavid Empire and Michele Membré¹⁷ and Vincenzo degli Alessandri's knowledge of that language was instrumental in their appointment as envoys to the Safavid court. Their familiarity with the local language and customs helped Venetian emissaries to build a good rapport with members of the Safavid court. Membré, in particular, benefitted from his command of the Turkish language, gaining the favour of Shah Tahmāsp I (r. 1524-1576) [fig. 3]. Cypriot Michele became 'Mikayıl Bey' in Tabriz, which is how he is referred to in Shah's reply letter to the doge Andrea Gritti (r. 1523-1538), which could be interpreted as a reflection of his success in building friendship ties with the Safavid ruling elite. Enjoying close contact with some Safavid courtiers, he became well informed about local culture and of the state's principal offices and affairs. Membré apparently spoke with them in Turkish, which is clearly evident from the number of Turkish words,¹⁸ and phrases he mentions in his *Relazione*; these include *ordu* ('army'), *otaq* (*ottach*, 'room'), *ishîq* (*icechie*, 'light'), *boghra* (*bogra*, 'camel'), *çay* (*chiqj*, 'river'), *qovurma* (*cavurma*, 'roasted meat'), *okh-yay* (*ochiag*, 'bow and arrow'), and *bayram* (*bairan*, 'holiday'). Throughout his work, Membré transliterates Turkish phrases and words into Latin characters. Furthermore, he attempts to provide an Italian translation of various phrases used by the local people. For example, he writes: "When the Sophians wish to swear they say 'Şah başı ki',¹⁹ that is, 'By the head of the Shah', and when one wishes to return thanks to another, they say 'Şah muradın versin' that is, 'May the Shah give him his desire'".²⁰

terchangeably using the names 'Memâlik-i Acem' (the country of Ajam), 'vilâyet-i Acem' (the province of Ajam), or 'saltanat-ı Kızılbaş' (the realm of Kızılbaş) to refer to the Safavid state (Selânikî 1989, 1: 132, 145, 146, 160-1, 201, 217; 1989, 2: 638, 840; Peçevî 1982, 2: 22, 32, 62). The Safavid shah was indicated as 'a Qizilbash' in the map of the world, the text of which was written in Turkish in 1559 by a certain Haji Ahmed of Tunis. See Ménage 1958, 295; Bellingeri 2015, 128. The particular headgear of the Safavid supporters – the Qizilbash frequently caught the attention of the Venetians, as well as of other European authors (BNM, ms. it. VI, 365 (=5957), f. 6r; Albèri 1855, 216-17).

¹⁷ For Membré's life and his mission to the Safavid court, see Guliyev 2011; Arbel 2013; Pedani 2020.

¹⁸ ASVe, Collegio, *Relazione*, b. 25, 1542 *Relatione presentata adi. V lulio per mano de Michael Membré*, ff. 13-16, 18, 24, 28-9, 31; Membré 1969, 20, 22, 25-6, 31, 38.

¹⁹ Membré mentions the shorter version of this phrase, whose full-length version runs: 'Şahın başına and olsun ki'.

²⁰ ASVe, Collegio, *Relazioni*, b. 25, 1542, *Relatione presentata adi. V lulio per mano de Michael Membré*, f. 35: "Quando li Sophiani voleno giurar, dicono Chiach pachi chi [*Şah başı ki*], cioè, per la testa del Chiach, et quando voleno ringratiarsj, l'uno con l'al-

**Figure 1**

Cristofano Dell'Altissimo,
Ritratto di Ismail I Sophi.
1552-68. Galleria degli Uffizi,
Galleria delle Statue e delle
Pitture degli Uffizi, Inv. 1890
no. 5. Reproduced by kind
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Uffizi, Florence

**Figure 2**

A statue of Shah Ismail I
in Baku (Azerbaijan Republic).
Photo © AzVision.az

Membré refers to the Safavid subjects as 'Sufis' ('Sofiani') (Membré 1969, 29, 37-8, 47) and in one place as 'the Qizilbash' ('Chisilpech') while discussing Safavid nobles and courtiers (Membré 1969, 35).

His appointment as Public Dragoman in 1550, upon the death of his predecessor Girolamo Civran, was thus in recognition not only of his proven linguistic skills but also of his long diplomatic services to the Republic, and strong connections with Ottoman and Safa-

tro dicono Chiach morati versj, cioè Chiach li dia il suo desiderio [*Şah muradın versin*]].
See Membré 1969, 47-8; 1993, 42.



Figure 3
Cristofano Dell'Altissimo,
Ritratto di Tamas Sophi.
1552-68. Galleria degli
Uffizi, Galleria delle Statue e
delle Pitture degli Uffizi, Inv.
1890 no. 6. Reproduced by
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vid elites (Rothman 2012, 173). Vincenzo degli Alessandri was one of the youths ('giovani della lingua') sent by the Venetian Senate²¹ to learn Turkish in Istanbul. He was recorded as being in Constantinople in 1565-66 – together with Lodovico Fontana – learning the Turkish language.²²

Thanks to their knowledge of the Turkish language,²³ some travellers and envoys could easily interact with the Shah at his audiences without the need for an interpreter. For instance, Shah Abbās I (r. 1587-1629) was impressed by the Turkish skills of Sefer Muratowicz, an envoy of King Sigismund III of Poland to the Safavid court in 1601, and was content that he could speak with him without having an interpreter present (Muratowicz 1777, 27).²⁴ Della Valle, in his letter of 18 December 1617, writes:

²¹ In 1551, the Venetian Senate made a decision to establish a “state school for dragomans” at its *bailaggio* in Istanbul. See Lucchetta 1989.

²² ASVe, Capi del Consiglio di Dieci, Lettere ambasciatori, Costantinopoli, b. 3, 8 gennaio 1565, 20 luglio 1566, unpaginated.

²³ In this work, the term ‘Turkish’ is not restricted to the official language of the present-day Republic of Turkey.

²⁴ See also Szuppe 1986.

The Shah asked the courtiers if I knew the language, and they replied yes, because all day I had spoken with them in Turkish, without an interpreter; turning to me with a cheerful face, he spoke to me, in Turkish, using the customary phrase *chosc ghielid, sofà ghielid*,²⁵ that is, in a broad sense, welcome, welcome.²⁶

The Turkish spoken at the Safavid court was somewhat different from the language spoken in Istanbul. This dialectical difference was also perceived by Della Valle. In the course of conversation with Shah Abbās, he realised that the Shah had difficulty in understanding his Ottoman Turkish and they continued their dialogue through an interpreter.²⁷ We can assume that the shahs spoke in a dialect of Turkish, which is spoken nowadays by Azerbaijani Turks in the Tabriz region.

In 1620, Della Valle wrote a Grammar of the Turkish language (*Grammatica della lingua turca di Pietro Della Valle il Pellegrino, divisa in sette libri*) during his stay in Isfahan, where he emphasised the importance of knowledge of Turkish in Safavid lands.²⁸

The Carmelite friar Felix emphasised the importance of learning the Turkish language, which according to him,

is the most common almost in the East, and is current not only in Turkey, but also in this kingdom [Safavid Empire]. It is the commonest language, and the most esteemed at the Court of 'the [Safavid] king'. (Chick 1939, 1: 374)

In his memorandum of 2 March, 1573, addressed to Don John of Austria, Matthias Bigudo Furtado, a Portuguese priest, notes, in reference to the skills that should be possessed by an envoy to the Safavid court:

I am of opinion that Your Highness should send by another route some person well known and, if possible, someone with an ac-

²⁵ This phrase ("Xoş gəldin, səfa gəldin") is still in common use among Azerbaijani Turks, mainly to welcome guests.

²⁶ Della Valle 1843, 1: 618: "Domandò il re a quei signori se io sapeva la lingua, e ripostogli che sì, perchè tutto il giorno aveva parlato con loro in turchegeo, senza interprete; rivoltosi a me con faccia allegra, mi disse solo come usano, e pur in lingua turca, *chosc ghielid, sofà ghielid*, cioè in senso, ben venuto, ben venuto".

²⁷ Della Valle 1843, 1: 656-7: "Una volta di non so che non m'intese bene, perchè la lingua turca che io parlo è turca Othmanli, come dicono in Persia, ovvero di Costantinopoli, differente in molti vocaboli dalla turca che si parla qui".

²⁸ BAV, Mss. Vaticani turchi, no. 40, *Grammatica della lingua turca di Pietro Della Valle il Pellegrino, divisa in sette libri*, f. 4v: "Non solo alla natione de' Turchi, et a quella de' Chizilbaschi [...] che da molti anni fin'hora han governato le armi della Persia, è questa lingua propria e comune ovunque vivono".

quaintance of those parts [Safavid Empire] [...] He should be able to understand and speak very well one of two languages at least, Turkish or Arabic. He should take with him a letter from the Pope, and one also from Your Highness for the Sufi. (Chick 1939, 21)

Although most of the official Safavid letters to Venice were composed in Persian, some were also issued in Turkish. There is evidence in the Venetian archival records that the Safavid envoys sent to Venice carried official letters written in the Turkish language along with missives in Persian. For example, in 1580, one of the two letters brought by the Safavid envoy Haji Mohammad Tabrizi was in Turkish.²⁹ It was sent to the Doge by Amir Khan Mosullu³⁰ who was a governor of Tabriz at that time. In 1634, Ali Bali, envoy to Venice of the Safavid Shah Safi (r. 1629-1642) carried two letters with him: one written in Persian³¹ and one in Turkish.³² Only the copy of the Turkish letter has survived; it does not bear the date or the shah's seal and was intended to inform the Doge of the enthronement of Shah Safi I. This was not the only letter of this kind in Turkish. Shah Safi sent two letters in Turkish to announce his accession; one³³ to the Polish King Sigismund III (r. 1587-1632) and another (Fekete 1936, 271-3, 275-6) to the Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand II (r. 1619-1637). The Central Archives of Historical Records in Warsaw preserve a letter from Shah Abbās I to the Polish King Sigismund III written in Turkish.³⁴

However, it should be noted that the language of the extant letters was heavily influenced by Persian and Arabic, as in the case of the Ottoman Turkish, and differs from the spoken language of the shahs and their Qizilbash subjects. In contrast, as evidenced by the

²⁹ ASVe, Collegio, Esposizioni Principi, fz. 3, 1 maggio 1580, c. 320r: "Espose la sua ambasciata, e diede due lettere una scritta in Persiano e l'altra in Turco, la prima fu letta da esso Persiano, la seconda dal predetto Alessandri" (Presented his embassy and gave two letters one written in Persian and the other in Turkish, the first was read by the same Persian, the second by the aforementioned Alessandri).

³⁰ Amir Khan Mosullu Turkman was one of the powerful Safavid amirs and in 1578 he was given the governorship of Tabriz by the Safavid Shah Mohammad Khodabanda (Munshi 2003, 1: 227).

³¹ ASVe, Collegio, Documenti Persia, no. 28.

³² ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Constantinopoli, fz. 26, unpaginated. This letter was first discovered by Giorgio Rota. See Rota 2002, 586. Moreover, Ali Bali wrote a receipt in Turkish, along with one in Persian, regarding the acceptance of the proceeds from the sale of royal silk and goods [fig. 4].

³³ AGAD, AKW, Perskie, no. 5. The transcribed version of this letter, together with its translations into English and Polish, was published in Jaśkowski, Kołodziejczyk, Mnatsakanyan 2017, 172-9.

³⁴ AGAD, AKW, Perskie, no. 4. See also Jaśkowski, Kołodziejczyk, Mnatsakanyan 2017, 160-7.

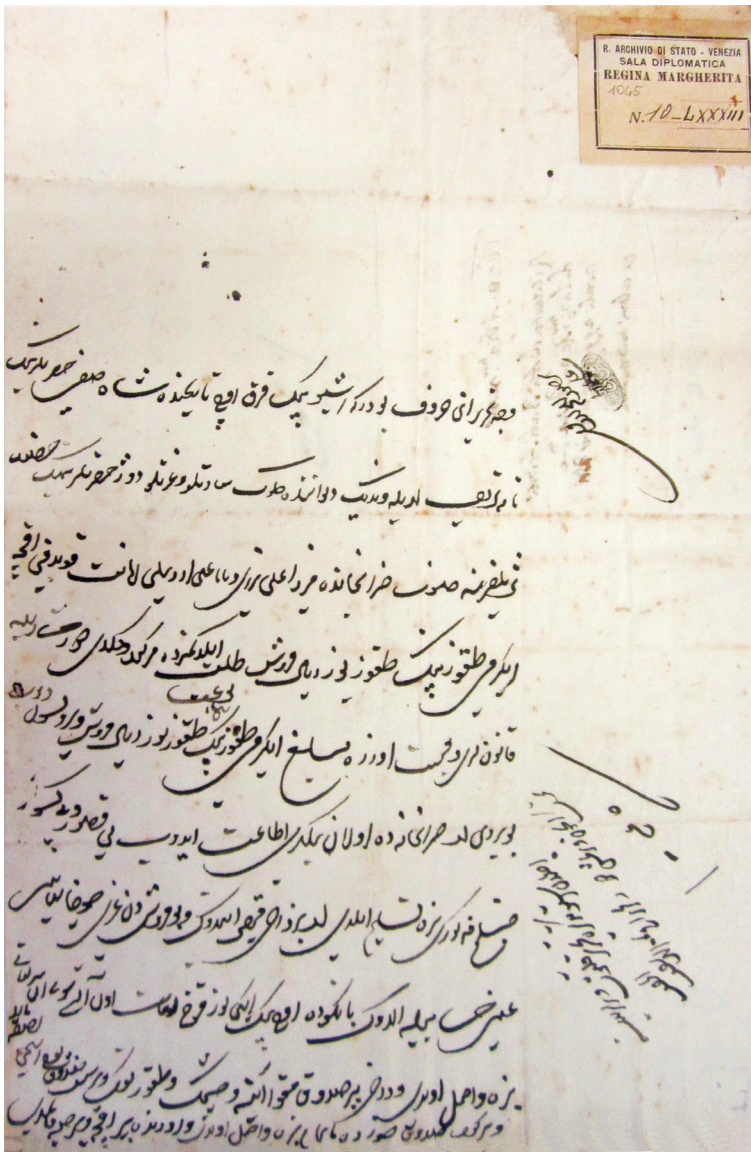


Figure 4 Facsimile of receipt (dated 6 Rajab 1045/16 December 1635) written in Turkish by Safavid envoy Ali Bali (the receipt was also issued in Persian, dated Shaban 1045/10 January-7 February 1636).
© Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Documenti Persia, nr.30

Diwan of Khatai, the language of many of the literary works in Turkish of that period appears closer to the vernacular of the Qizilbash. In linguistic and philological Turcological works, the Turkic variety spoken during the Safavid period is referred to as 'Ajami Turkic'.³⁵

We have found a recommendation letter issued by Shah Abbās for Khoja 'Yeias' (Ilyas) and Mehmed Emin in the "Lettere e scritture turchesche" series in the Venetian State Archives³⁶ (see "Appendix 2"). The letter, issued in Qazvin, dated Hijri 1005 (≈ 1597) is preserved only in its Italian translation. Addressing the Venetian Doge Marino Grimaldi (r. 1595-1605), Shah Abbās asks him to facilitate the purchases of his envoys. Neither the name of the translator nor the original language of the letter are mentioned. In the absence of the original letter, it is difficult to verify whether it was written in Persian or Turkish. There is evidence of usage of both languages in the composition of this kind of letter.

Since the Safavid envoys had no knowledge of Italian, they relied on the Public Dragomans in the Turkish language during their conversations at the Venetian Collegio. The audiences of some Safavid envoys in Venice suggest that they spoke in Turkish. For example, in his audience with the Doge on 19 July 1634, Ali Bali made a speech in Turkish that was interpreted by the Venetian public interpreter (dragoman) Francesco Scaramelli.³⁷ During his last audience at the Collegio on 18 January 1636, he again expressed his thoughts and needs in Turkish.³⁸

This was also the case during the receptions of the shah's delegates at the Muscovite court. Safavid envoys in Moscow conversed with Russian officials through the medium of interpreters (*tolmachi*)³⁹ of 'Tatar' (Turkish) language (Veselovskiy 1890-98, 3: 570). It is worth noting that, since Turkish was the primary spoken language of both the Ottoman and Safavid courts and among the ruling elites, oral communication between host states and guest missions took place in Turkish without the agency of interpreters (Selânikî 1989, 1: 70-1; Fındıklılı 2012, 1433; Çelebi 2016, 449).

The Venetian Senate sent letters to the shahs written in Italian with a translation into Ottoman Turkish. Draft versions of the Turk-

³⁵ I would like to thank Prof. Elisabetta Ragagnin for bringing this to my attention. For Ajami Turkic, see Johanson 1997 and Stein 2005.

³⁶ ASVe, Lettere e scritture turchesche fz. V, c. 195rv, See also Pedani 2010, 138.

³⁷ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Costantinopoli, fz. 26, 19 luglio 1634, unpaginated; ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Costantinopoli, registro 22, 15 luglio 1634, c. 51v: "Quello che disse hieri Ali Bali Agente del Re di Persia in lingua Turca nell'Ecc[ellentissi]mo Coll[eg]io interpretando io Francesco Scaramella". See "Appendix 5".

³⁸ Senato, Deliberazioni Costantinopoli, registro 23, 18 gennaio 1635 (*more veneto*), c. 124v. See "Appendix 6".

³⁹ This word derives from Turkic word 'tylmaç/tilmaç/dilmaç' (Fasmer 1987, 72).

ish translations are still extant in the State Archives of Venice. They include drafts of the letters sent in Turkish by the Venetian government as a response to the letters of Shah Abbās delivered by Sujaddin Asad Bey in March of 1600, and by Aladdin and Khoja Shahsuvar in March of 1613, as well as in February of 1622.⁴⁰

We have come across the term ‘turco persiano’ (Persian Turk) in the Venetian official documents, used to refer to the Safavid merchants. According to some Italian scholars, the Venetians commonly used ‘Turk’ as a synonym for all Muslims or for Ottoman subjects (Vercellin 1980, 70; Pedani 2005, 29). Rota argues that ‘turco persiano’ means ‘Persian of Muslim faith’ (Rota 2009a, 21). It appears that in Venetian usage, the term ‘Persiano’ bore no ethnic connotation and designated Safavid subjects in general (Muslims and in some cases also non-Muslims). We argue that in Venetian documents the expression ‘turco persiano’ was employed to describe an ethno-linguistic affiliation rather than a religious one. Thus, a distinction was made between Turkish and non-Turkish Safavid subjects. The ethno-linguistic distinctions among Safavid subjects were raised by the merchants themselves on numerous occasions.

In some instances, Safavid traders preferred to distinguish themselves from other shah’s subjects in Venice by identifying themselves in notarial deeds and petitions to Venetian authorities as ‘Persian Turks’ rather than ‘Persians’.⁴¹ Venetian authorities were well aware of the linguistic divides among Safavid subjects. The merchants Hazimammad ibn Gazi of Tabriz, Baba Ali ibn Galandar of Isfahan, Mirza Ali ibn Arvish Mohammad and Mohammad ibn Hazi Salah of Tabriz were allowed to make their testimonies before the commission in their native language of Turkish interpreted by Francesco Scaramelli.⁴² The register of transactions of the Venetian broker Zuane Zacra clearly shows that some Safavid merchants referred to as ‘turcho persiano’ signed in Turkish in order to validate their transactions. For example, Mohammad Çelebi (*Meemet Celebi*) and Haji Yusif (*Agi Giusuf*) accepted the deal by signing ‘bu bazar maqbulum’ [figs 5-6].⁴³

The Russian court, which had frequent contacts with the Safavids, particularly during the reign of Shah Abbās I, sent its official letters in the Turkish language. For example, on 29 July 1592, Clerks (*d’iaki*)

⁴⁰ ASVe, Collegio, Documenti Persia, nos. 6, 25 and 27.

⁴¹ ASVe, Collegio, Risposte di Dentro, b. 58, giugno 19, 1662, unpaginated.

⁴² ASVe, Savi all’eresia (Santo Ufficio), b. 72, 27 luglio 1624, 13 agosto 1624, unpaginated: “Testes ad defensam Theodoli Tartari examinandos qui turcica lingua loquentur”.

⁴³ ASVe, Miscellanea di carte non appartenenti a nessun Archivio, b. 29, *Il libretto dei contratti turcheschi di Zuane Zacra sensale*, c. 74r-74v. For a study on this document, see Vercellin 1979.

Figure 5
Facsimile of registration
of transaction dated 9 February 1660
involving Safavid merchant “turco persiano”
Mehmet Chelebi (Meemet Celebi).
© Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Miscellanea
di carte non appartenenti a nessun Archivio,
b. 29, *Il libretto dei contratti turcheschi*
di Zuane Zacra sensale, c. 74r

Figure 6
Facsimile of registration
of transaction dated 10 February 1660
involving Safavid merchant “turco persiano”
Haji Yusuf (Agi Giusuf). © Archivio
di Stato di Venezia, Miscellanea di carte
non appartenenti a nessun Archivio, b. 29,
*Il libretto dei contratti turcheschi di Zuane
Zacra sensale*, c. 74v

of the Ambassadors' Office of Tsar Feodor I (r. 1584-1598) handed a letter (*gramota*) of the Tsar to the Safavid envoy Qaya addressed to Shah Abbās I that was written in the 'Tatar' (Turkish) language (Veselovskiy 1890-98, 1: 171). The above examples were confirmed by a Safavid chronicler, Iskandar Bey Munshī, who, while describing the events of H. 1027 (1617-18) writes:

Through the medium of an interpreter, he [Russian envoy] expressed the desire of his master, the Tsar, for a friendly alliance between the two countries, and delivered to the Shah a huge letter written in Turkish. (Munshī 1978, 2: 1160)

This was an embassy led by Mikhail Baryatinsky and received on 4 November 1618 by Shah Abbās I in Qazvin (Veselovskiy 1890-98, 3: 414-35). The Safavid court dispatched its official letters composed in Persian or in Turkish in reply to the Russian tsar. The Safavid envoy Hazi Khosrov, who was received by Boris Godunov on 13 September 1593, gave him a letter from Shah Abbās written in the Turkish language (Veselovskiy 1890-98, 1: 197-8).⁴⁴ Shah Abbās I wrote his letter dated Zulqadah 1031 (September-October 1622) to the governor (*voevod*) of Astrakhan in the Turkish language (Shorokhov, Slesarev 2019, 29-30). Seventeenth-century author⁴⁵ Heydar Evoğlu (Abu al-Qasim Haydar Ivaghli) informs us that Shah Safi I addressed a letter to Russian tsar Mikhail Romanov in Turkish (Onullahi, Häsänov 1974, 89).

1.2 “Interpreting and Translating for the Shah”

Although they maintained diplomatic relations with European powers, Safavid authorities showed little to no interest in organising training for their Muslim subjects in European languages. Therefore, the Safavid court relied on Europeans or its Christian subjects as interpreters. There is just one piece of evidence referring to a Safavid court official learning European languages. According to Philip of Santissima Trinita, Zaman bey, who was appointed as an interpreter of foreign languages by Shah Safi I, received Italian and Latin language training from the friars.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Unfortunately, the original letter has not survived at the Russian State Archives of Ancient Acts (RGADA) (Bushev 1976, 1: 182).

⁴⁵ He held the post of Ishik Aghasi Bashi during the reign of Shah Safi I.

⁴⁶ Philippe de la Très Sainte Trinité 1666, 454: “Zemam Beq, essendo eletto dal Rè per interprete delle lingue forastiere, fu dato alli nostri Padri per imparare la lingua Italiana e la Latina”.

There are numerous pieces of evidence suggesting that in the first half of the sixteenth century, the Venetian consulate in Damascus played an active role in bridging the language gap between the Safavid and European courts. For example, in 1505, the first letter of Shah Ismā'il I (r. 1501-1524) to Doge Leonardo Loredan (r. 1501-1521) was translated into Latin at the Venetian consulate in Damascus before being forwarded to Venice (Sanudo 1879-1903, 6: col. 269). Shah Ismā'il's letter to the Doge, which was brought to Venice by the second Safavid envoy in 1509, was also translated in Damascus (Sanudo 1879-1903, 8: col. 232). In 1546, a letter to Shah Tahmāsp from the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, was translated from Latin into Arabic by a Venetian consulate interpreter (*turcimanno*) in Damascus (*Due lettere di Carlo V* 1870, 3).

The first documented case of employment of Europeans as interpreters dates from 1530. In that year, Simon de Lillis, a Habsburg envoy to the Safavid court, presented his credentials to Shah Tahmāsp, which were translated from Latin to Persian by a "Portuguese gentleman" who was present at the Safavid court (Neck 1952, 86).

In 1580, the Safavid envoy Haji Mohammad Tabrizi brought two letters for the Doge, one in Persian and one in Turkic. Curiously, Vincenzo Alessandri read and translated into Italian only the letter in Turkic, while the envoy himself read the other and translated it from Persian into Turkic (Rota 2009a, 50).

Safavid embassies frequently engaged the services of Italians, especially Venetians, during their visits to the Western courts. For example, the Venetian ambassador at the French court reported that a Safavid envoy (Huseyn bey), who had arrived in Marseille in August 1604, was accompanied by a Venetian interpreter.⁴⁷ In a report dated 12 May 1601, Giovanni Mocenigo, the Venetian ambassador at Rome, mentions that the shah's representative was provided with an interpreter, who would accompany him to Spain and other places.⁴⁸

With regard to an episode in which Anthony Sherley queried the authenticity of the translation of the credentials of the Safavid embassy, establishing the identity of the ambassador, Mocenigo notes

⁴⁷ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci ambasciatori, Francia, Rubricari, C4, 28 agosto 1604, c. 20r: "Che era arrivato à Marsiglia un amb[asciador]e del Re di Persia con lettere, et ragionam[en]to havuto con un venetiano venuto in sua compagnia"; ASVe, Senato, Dispacci ambasciatori, Francia, Rubricari C4, 14 settembre 1604, c. 22v: "Che il Re Cristianissimo [title of the French sovereign] non havea voluto admetter L'Amb[asciador]e persiano, non si sa p[er]che". Eventually, the Safavid envoy was denied an audience with Henry IV, who probably did not want to damage his relationship with the Ottomans.

⁴⁸ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci ambasciatori, Roma, fz. 47, 12 maggio 1601.

that “the Papal court seems to have sent these documents to someone who knows this language or to Venice”.⁴⁹

During the reign of Shah Abbās I, individual Catholic missionaries were actively employed as translators. This fact was even attested by the Safavid historian Iskandar Bey Munshī, who, like other contemporary court chroniclers, very rarely mentions issues concerning Europeans: “This letter was written in some Frankish tongue and arrived, sealed. Some members of the foreign [European] community in Isfahan translated it into Persian” (Munshī 1978, 2: 1307).

The Carmelite friar Juan Tadeo (John Thaddeus) de San Eliseo, one of the founders of the convent of Discalced Carmelites, worked for the shah as a translator and interpreter of European languages. In a postscript of 28 June 1619, he wrote that Shah Abbās had given him a letter to translate, which had been sent from Madrid by Friar Redempt and Robert Sherley (Chick 1939, 226). His report was confirmed by Pietro della Valle, who was at that time at the Safavid court.⁵⁰ The Safavids’ reliance on Catholic missionaries as interpreters continued after the reign of Shah Abbās. During his audience with the newly enthroned Shah Safī, Fr. Juan Tadeo wrote: “He [Shah Safī] gave me back the letter of the Pope for it to be translated into Persian” (Chick 1939, 307-8). The employment of individual Augustinian friars as interpreters was also attested by Adam Olearius in 1637:

Our Interpreter was a Portugez, an Augustine Frier [...]. His name was Father Joseph, of the Rosary, [...] having lived four and twenty years in Persia, he was excellently well skilled in the Language, and thoroughly acquainted with the humour and customs of that Nation. (Olearius 1669, 203)

During the course of his second sojourn in Isfahan, French traveller Jean Chardin noted that he was summoned frequently to the palace to translate petitions and letters of recommendation from various European embassies. At the beginning of the 1670s, Carmelite Fr. Jerome wrote to Rome that he sometimes was “summoned to translate letters from Christian [European] princes sent to the [Safavid] Court” (Chick 1939, 440). Capuchins also provided translation services to the shah. It is known that the Capuchin Father Raphael du Mans was the principal interpreter at the Safavid court from about 1650 until his death in 1696 (Richard 1996).

⁴⁹ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci ambasciatori, Roma, fz. 47, 21 aprile 1601, c. 99v.

⁵⁰ Della Valle 1843, 2: 43: “Cinque giorni prima che il rè partisse, mandò al nostro padre vicario degli Scalzi un gran fascio di lettere, e scritture di Christianità, acciocchè gliele interpretasse”.

2 Safavid Letters to Venice

Summary 2.1 Material and Visual Features of the Diplomatic Epistles. – 2.2 Dimensions of the Letters. – 2.3 Locations of the Seals in the Safavid Missives. – 2.4 Containers of the Letters. – 2.5 Letters of Recommendation. – 2.6 ‘Hidden Letters’.

2.1 Material and Visual Features of the Diplomatic Epistles

A letter’s material and visual characteristics did more than connote magnificence: they were essential to the meaning of the texts (Sowerby 2019, 219). The type and quality of the paper, the colour of the ink, the materials with which the letters were bound, the way in which the letter was folded all reflected the social distance between the sender and recipient (Sowerby 2019, 204).

Safavid letters addressed to European sovereigns were usually decorated in coloured inks (red,¹ blue, and gold), especially in the parts emphasised by means of elevation.² It was customary for all

1 Red ink was not employed in the texts of the surviving Safavid letters; however, sources and samples of missives sent to the rulers of Poland and Russia attest to its usage in the shahs’ correspondence.

2 *Tadhkirat al-Mulūk* 1943, 40a: “The duty of the *Munshī al-mamālik* [‘State scribe’] was to draw in red ink and liquid gold the tughra on all the King’s missives”. From the seventeenth century on, documents with the introductory formula (tughra) were exe-

Safavid letters to begin with an invocation to God (*invocatio*), the shortest form of which was *Huwa* and the commonly used formula was *Huwa Allāh subhānahu (wa-ta'ālā)*, 'the Most Glorified and Exalted is He'. In Shah Tahmāsp's letter, this formula appeared as *Huwa Mālik al-Mulk al-Muta'āl* ('He is the Owner of the Dominion and Most Exalted'). A large space was usually left blank beneath this formula as a sign of reverence. In some letters, the *invocatio* to God was followed by an invocation to Prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali. In *intitulatio*, the titles and names of the Venetian rulers were placed above the text by means of honorific elevation. The shahs addressed the Venetian Doges by means of the customary honorific epithets, such as mighty, glorious, great, renowned, just, and august.

While Shah Tahmāsp used the Turco-Mongol title of *Khan*, alongside other honorifics, in addressing Andrea Gritti, Shah Abbās I called his Venetian counterpart the *Padshah*. Venetian Doges were addressed as *Farmānfarmā* ('ruler') by Shah Safi I and by Shah Abbās II (r. 1642-1666) in his two letters. The latter also called the Doge the *Padshah*.³ Instead, Shah Suleyman I (r. 1666-1694) and his successor Shah Sultan Huseyn (r. 1694-1722) employed the title of *Wāli-ye Kabir* (Great Governor-general) in addressing the Venetian ruler.

A number of letters referred to the addressee's territories, in addition to their name and titles. For example, a letter dated 27 October 1570 sent by the Council of Ten to Shah Tahmāsp lists the principal territories of the Safavid Empire, such as Iran, Azerbaijan, Shirvan, Iraq, Khorasan, and Ghilan.⁴ In 1696, Shah Huseyn devoted three lines of his ten-line letter to Doge Silvestro Valier (r. 1694-1700) to citing the territories of the Republic, including Crete (Candia), even though it was under Ottoman rule at that time.⁵ Similarly, it appears that the Venetian government recognised the mainly Ottoman-controlled Iraq as a Qizilbash dominion. The vast majority of the letters sent to Venice were issued by the shahs, only one by Grand Vizier Qazi Jahan Qazvini and another one, which was not survived, by the governor of Tabriz Amir Khan Mosullu.

Standing out, in particular, in terms of material embellishment are two letters of Rabi' al-Awwal 946 (August 1540): one from Shah Tahmāsp and another from Qazi Jahan Qazvini to Venetian Doge An-

cuted in the chancellery of the *wāqī'a-niwis*, who was also responsible for letters addressed to foreign princes (Busse 1991, 312).

³ ASVe, Collegio, Esposizioni Principi, fz. 62, 28 marzo 1650, unpaginated.

⁴ ASVe, Consiglio di Dieci, Deliberazioni, Segrete, fz. 14, 27 ottobre 1570, unpaginated.

⁵ ASVe, Collegio, Documenti Persia, no. 36.

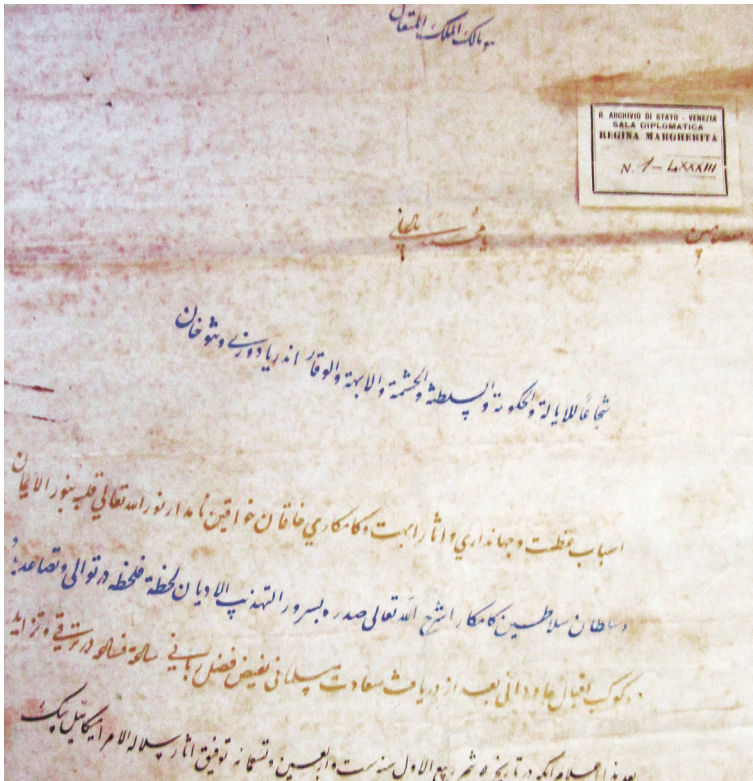


Figure 7 Fragment of Shah Tahmāsp's letter (1539) to Venetian doge Andrea Gritti.
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drea Gritti are among other Safavid missives preserved in the State Archives of Venice. Both letters make abundant use of gold ink compared with other Safavid missives. Moreover, Shah Tahmāsp's letter is the only missive where blue ink was used in addition to gold [fig. 7]. This could be explained by the fact that blue, like red, was a colour often associated with royalty. While the name and titles of the Venetian Doge were written in blue in the *intitulatio* part of the Shah's letter, the same part was written in gold in his Vizier's missive.

The correspondence of the succeeding Safavid rulers appears to have been relatively simple both in decoration and in style of writing; the use of coloured ink decreased and black ink replaced blue and gold in the *intitulatio*.

In seventeenth-century letters, gold ink was mainly used for the invocation of God, Muhammad, and Ali, as well as for Qur'anic citations. It is worthy of note that, similarly, references to Christianity (*Masihi* or *Isaviyye*) were also highlighted with gilded letters.⁶ Various features of the Safavid missive brought by Fathi Bey in 1603 caught the attention of seventeenth-century Venetian historian Alessandro Maria Vianoli (1684, 382) who mentioned that the names of God ("Dio") had been written in gilded letters ("caratteri d'oro"). The letter brought by Khoja Safar was written completely in black with no parts of the texts emphasised with gold, except the customary invocation to God, which was in gilded letters.

The material embellishment of the royal missives was not limited to Safavid-Venetian relations. For example, Oruj Bey Bayat, who accompanied shah's envoy Huseyn Ali Bey to various European capitals in 1599-1601, gave material details of the Shah's letter in his description of the audience with Spanish king Philip III:

The ambassador came forward bearing the Letter, and this, after the Persian fashion, was written in letters of gold and coloured ink on a sheet of paper more than a yard⁷ in length and curiously folded, for the length in Persian style was doubled up. (*Don Juan of Persia* 1926, 291)

Russian Tsars tried to imitate the Safavids by sending their missives with embellishments. On the eve of Grigoriy Vasilichkov's embassy to the Safavid shah in 1588, the Tsar's chancery in Moscow experienced difficulties in decorating the letter artistically, including embellishing it with gold ink and producing an appropriate ornament, etc. Eventually, they found specialists in Astrakhan capable of doing this (Bushev 1976, 1: 82). Similarly, on 25 September 1595, Boris Godunov, who at that time was the *de facto* ruler of Russia, dispatched a letter to Shah Abbās written in 'Tatar' (Turkish), with gilded titles and names (Veselovskiy 1890-98, 1: 307-8). In a letter dated 23 July 1614 from the Russian Tsar Mikhail Feodorovich to Shah Abbās I, the titles and name of Shah Abbās and of the Tsar were written in golden ink (Veselovskiy 1890-98, 2: 365-6).

The Safavid chancery used the same strategy with other royal documents, such as patents and trade privileges. Jean Chardin in 1673 described a patent that was granted to him by the Shah as follows:

⁶ ASVe, Collegio, Esposizioni Principi, fz. 62, 28 marzo 1650, unpaginated.

⁷ 1 yard ≈ 91 cm.

All the great men admired the words wrote in gold, and the flow-
ered work in the margin, which was very large. It was one sheet
of paper, two feet⁸ and a half long and thirteen or fourteen inches⁹
broad. Besides the writing in gold, there were words in blue, and
others in red, thus the principal words and sentences were dis-
tinguished, while the rest were written in black. (Sir John Char-
din's travels 1777, 165)

During his fourth expedition in 1568, the English merchant Arthur
Edwards obtained other privileges for the trade of merchandise in-
to Safavid lands, which were "all written in Azure and gold letters,
and delivered unto the Lord Keeper of the Sophie his great seale"
(Hakluyt 1926, 416-17).

It is interesting to note that in all the Safavid official letters pre-
served at the Venetian State Archives, the lower right corner has
been cut off. This is also the case with missives sent to European and
Muscovite rulers. According to Chardin, this was done as a sign that
"all earthly things are incomplete" (Chardin 1811, 293). Bhalloo and
Rezai point out that "other hypotheses attested in the sources include
the 'inauspiciousness of square shapes'" (Bhalloo, Rezai 2019, 842).

2.2 Dimensions of the Letters

The format of the Safavid letters to Venice varied in width from 23.5
to 51.5 cm and in length from 64.5 to 119.5 cm. Most of the documents
were less than one meter long. The largest Safavid epistle, which
was sent from Shah Abbās I to Doge Marcantonio Memmo (r. 1612-
1615), measures 119.5 × 51.5 cm [fig. 8].¹⁰ These missives can be dis-
tinguished by their smaller dimensions in comparison to the size of
the letters of Ottoman sultans, sent in the same period to the Vene-
tian doges. For example, an Ottoman fethname of 1597 sent to the
Doge measures 165 × 41 cm (Pedani Fabris 1998, 187).

⁸ 1 foot ≈ 30.5 cm.

⁹ 1 inch ≈ 2.5 cm.

¹⁰ ASVe, Collegio, Documenti Persia, no. 18.

Table 1 The dimensions¹¹ of the letters sent by the Safavid shahs to the Venetian Doges

| Sender | Addressee (Doge) | Brought to Venice by | Date | Length (cm) | Width (cm) |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|---|---------|-------------|-----------------|
| Shah Tahmāsp I | Andrea Gritti | Michele Membré | 1540 | 80 | 23.5 |
| Qazi Jahan ¹ | Andrea Gritti | Michele Membré | 1540 | 77.5 | 25 |
| Shah Abbās I | Marino Grimani | Fathi Bey | 1602 | 114.5 | 30.5 |
| Shah Abbās I | Leonardo Donà | Khoja Kirkuz (Kirakos) | 1608(?) | 79.5 | 29.5 |
| Shah Abbās I | Leonardo Donà | Khoja Safar | 1609 | 83.5 | 26.5 |
| Shah Abbās I | Marcantonio Memmo | Khoja Shahsuvar | 1612 | 119.5 | 51.5 |
| Shah Safi I | Francesco Erizzo | Ali Bali | 1634 | 96.5 | 49 |
| Shah Abbās II | Francesco Molin | Antonio di Fiandra | 1647 | 53.5 | 30 |
| Shah Abbās II | Francesco Molin | Domenico de Santis | 1647(?) | 77 | 36.5 |
| Shah Abbās II | Francesco Molin | Catholic priest Ferdinando Gioverida | 1649(?) | 75 | 45 ² |
| Shah Suleyman | Domenico II Contarini | Two anonymous Dominican priests | 1670 | 98 | 38 |
| Shah Sultan Huseyn | Silvestro Valier | ? | 1694 | 64.5 | 38.5 |

¹ Grand vizier of Shah Tahmāsp.

² ASVe, Collegio, Esposizioni principi, fz. 62, 28 marzo 1650, unpaginated.

Table 2 The dimensions¹² of the letters sent by Safavid shahs to the Grand Dukes of Tuscany

| Sender | Addressee (Duke) | Length (cm) | Width (cm) |
|--------------|-------------------------|-------------|------------|
| Shah Abbās I | Ferdinando I de' Medici | 76.5 | 33 |
| Shah Abbās I | Ferdinando I de' Medici | 112.5 | 37.5 |
| Shah Abbās I | Ferdinando I de' Medici | 98 | 38 |
| Shah Abbās I | Cosimo II de' Medici | 68.3 | 27 |
| Shah Abbās I | Cosimo II de' Medici | 59.5 | 29.5 |

¹¹ These data were generously provided by the staff of the State Archives of Venice to whom I am very grateful.

¹² ASF, Mediceo del Principato 4274a. The measurement belongs to us. For the letters of Shah Abbās I to Grand Dukes of Tuscany in the first decades of the seventeenth century, see Pontecorvo 1949.

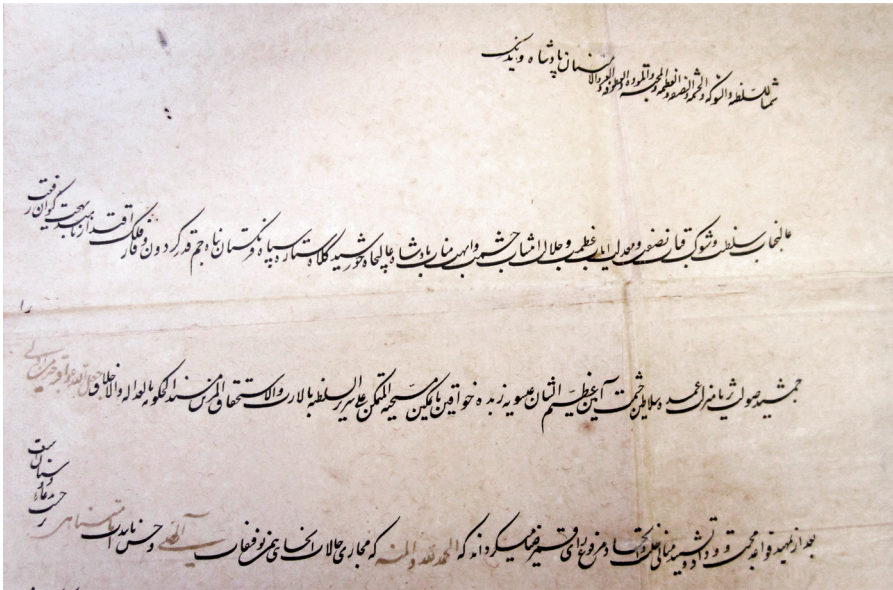


Figure 8 Fragment of Shah Abbās I's letter (1612) to the Venetian doge.
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While studying Qaraqoyunlu and Aghqoyunlu documents, Busse argues that the higher the rank of the recipient of a document, the wider it was. He adds that this may have also been the case under the Safavids.¹³ Jaśkowski, Kołodziejczyk and Mnatsakanyan also came to similar conclusions based on the comparative analysis of the letters sent by the shahs to Polish rulers and dignitaries in the first half of the seventeenth century. According to them, the letters addressed to the Polish kings were larger than those addressed to their dignitaries and “it was the width, not the length, that mattered” (Jaśkowski, Kołodziejczyk, Mnatsakanyan 2017, 108).

When comparing the dimensions of the letters sent to the Venetian doges, the grand dukes of Tuscany, and the rulers of Poland, it appears that on average, the missives to Venice are greater both in length and in width than those dispatched to the other two sovereigns. However, letters addressed to the Popes were usually the largest. For example, the letter from Shah Huseyn to Pope Innocent XII measures 97 × 59 cm.¹⁴

¹³ Busse quoted in Martin 1965, 172.

¹⁴ BAV, Ms. Vat. pers. 31. See also Piemontese 2007 for Shah Sultan Mohammad Khodabande's letter to Pope Sixtus V.

2.3 Locations of the Seals in the Safavid Missives

Seals were used to authorise and authenticate a variety of official Safavid documents, including the shah's missives sent to foreign countries. While Shah Ismā'il's seal was described by a Venetian merchant in the first decade of the sixteenth century (Grey 1873, 205-6), the seals of the following century were described by Olearius (1669, 254-5), Tavernier (1678, 179), and Chardin (1711, 1: 135). Safavid royal seals which appear on letters sent to the Venetian Doges had undergone some changes both in design and content. While Shah Tahmāsp's seal was almond-shaped, starting with Shah Abbās I, its headpiece took the shape of a roof. Whereas in 1540, Tahmāsp's seal was designed with nine concentric circles, the number of small circles later reached twelve, as is evident from Shah Sultan Husayn's seal.

In 1580, Haji¹⁵ Mohammad Tabrizi, a Safavid envoy to Venice, mentioned that while the shah endorsed letters with three seals, other sultans would use only one seal.¹⁶ According to *Tadhkirat-al muluk*, there were four seals in use in the late seventeenth century. Three of them were considered royal seals, namely: *muhr-i humāyun* ('August seal'), *muhr-i sharaf-i nafāz*, *muhr-i angushtar-i āftāb-āthār* ('seal of the signet ring'), and one seal of the divan called *muhr-i musavvadayi dīvān-i a'lā* (*Tadhkirat al-Mulūk* 1943, 62-3, 202). *Muhr-i sharaf-i nafāz*, which, along with *muhr-i humāyun*, was considered a 'large seal', had a roof shaped headpiece and was identical to the seal appended on the Safavid letters addressed to European sovereigns, including the Venetian Doge.

The location of the seal in the shahs' letters reflected the status of the addressee as perceived by the Safavid rulers. As is evident from the extant Safavid missives preserved in the Venetian State Archives, all the letters sent to Venice by the shahs and by Tahmāsp's vizier bear the seal at the bottom on the reverse side. A letter from the Shah Tahmāsp differs slightly from others by having the seal located at the top of the reverse side rather than at the bottom of the front side. This practice was also confirmed by Adam Olearius (1669, 255):

In the letters, he sends to Christian Princes, he [Shah Safi] observes this respect, that he does not set the seal on the same line with the writing, but on the other side, at the very bottom.

¹⁵ Berchet reads his title as 'Chogia' (Berchet 1865, 38, 183, 184, 190) and Rota as 'Xwāje' (Rota 2009b, 219-21). However, this name should be written as 'Haji', a title given to a Muslim person who has successfully completed his Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca.

¹⁶ ASVe, Collegio, Esposizioni Principi, fz. 3, 1 maggio 1580, c. 321r.

According to the Calendar of State Papers, the letter sent by Shah Abbās to the King of England James I (r. 1603-1625) had the seal placed on the reverse side 'to show respect' to the English sovereign:

The King's name is Shaw Abbās, and is in the character or seal which is stamped on the back side, somewhat low, under part of the writing which they say is for more respect. (Sainsbury 1884, 6: 170)

As pointed out by Jaśkowski, Kołodziejczyk and Mnatsakanyan, this privilege was reserved for monarchs, thus in the letter sent by Abbās I to Polish notables, and in the two letters sent by Abbās II to Chancellor Jerzy Ossoliński and Hetman Mikołaj Potocki, the seals of the shahs figure at the top of the documents on the obverse side (Jaśkowski, Kołodziejczyk, Mnatsakanyan 2017, 110).

The seal location in the missives sent by the shahs to foreign rulers and governors of lesser status was identical to that of the Safavid *fīr-mans* (royal decrees) where the seals of the rulers are usually found above the texts (Martin 1965, 246-54). For example, an imprint of the round seal of Abbās I is located above the text of his letter addressed to the governor (*voevod*) of Astrakhan (Shorokhov, Slesarev 2019, 29). This is also the case of the letter (measuring 90 × 37.5 cm) from Shah Sultan Huseyn to the ruler of Malta (Rossi 1933, 357). Referring to the patent given by the shah to Anthony Sherley, Huseyn Ali Bey commented that "it only bore the seal at the top of the front page, which showed that it was the epistle of lesser importance, since all important official documents bore the seal at the bottom and on the back" (Steensgaard 1974, 220).

2.4 Containers of the Letters

The covers and containers of the royal letters were also important elements in determining a missive's authenticity. Letters to foreign sovereigns were usually sent in pouches of gold-embroidered silk cloth, brocades in particular. This practice was described by Jean Chardin as follows:

it is another piece of Eastern Civility, to put the letters into rich boxes, or into purses made of stuffs, more or less rich, in proportion to the quality of the persons to whom they are directed. (Chardin 1927, 41)

According to Marin Sanudo, the first Safavid envoy to appear before the Venetian Collegio in March of 1509 brought a letter enclosed in a silk cloth (*revolta in cendado*) (Sanudo 1879-1903, 8: col. 14). In 1610, Khoja Safar brought Shah Abbās's letter enclosed in two bags, one of crimson satin (*raso sguardo*), the other of green velvet, which were, in turn, contained in a box covered with 'Bursa cloth' (*panno di Bursa*).¹⁷ Giovanni Mocenigo, the Venetian ambassador in Rome, attests that Husayn Ali Bey brought the Shah's letters contained in golden purses (*borsa d'oro*).¹⁸

There is some evidence to suggest that sometimes the letters were dispatched in gold boxes. For instance, on 23 July 1609, Shah Abbās gave the Carmelite Father Vincent a letter addressed to the Pope, which was contained in a little box of gold with a cover made of the "most beautiful" brocade" (Chick 1939, 188). In addition to boxes, Safavid missives were also carried in other containers, such as canes. In 1582, Simon Contarini, the Venetian *bailo* (resident ambassador)¹⁹ in Istanbul, reported that a Safavid envoy handed him a letter from the Shah, enclosed in a gold cane (*canna d'oro*).²⁰ In 1571, Venetian envoy Vincenzo Alessandri mentioned that the Safavid prince Heydar Mirza took a ducal letter from him and wrapped it in a handkerchief to present it to the Shah (Berchet 1865, 32). Handkerchiefs were sometimes interpreted as symbols of imperial power.²¹

The missive bag (*kise*) was protected against unauthorised views by a wax seal. Unfortunately, the bags in which such letters were brought to Venice are no longer extant. However, previous research on Shah Sultan Huseyn's letters to other European rulers, suggest that such bags were tied up with two gilded cords from which hung a red wax seal (Rossi 1933, 360). The wax seal appended to the bag containing the letter, sent to the King of Poland Frederick Augustus I bore the following phrase: "Slave of God, Sultan Huseyn" (Fekete 1936, 271). The address of the letter was also stitched onto the bag (Rossi 1933, 360).

¹⁷ ASVe, Collegio, Esposizioni Principi, fz. 18, 30 gennaio 1609 (*more veneto*), unpaginated.

¹⁸ ASV, Senato, Dispacci ambasciatori, Roma, fz. 47, 14 aprile 1601, c. 90v-91r.

¹⁹ Since there was no Venetian diplomatic representative in any of the three Safavid capitals, the Venetian baili in Istanbul were regularly tasked with collecting a wide range of information on the Ottomans' arch-rival in the East and communicating this to the Senate, as a part of the periodic reports (*dispacci*), which devoted particular attention to Safavid-related issues (Guliyev 2022a, 81).

²⁰ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci Costantinopoli, fz. 16, 20 marzo 1582, c. 33r.

²¹ The Portrait of Mehmed II with his handkerchief is one of the famous examples representing this tradition. See Mangir 2014, 828.

In January 1610, the Venetian public interpreter Giacomo Nores reported the arrival of the Safavid envoy Khoja Safar bringing a letter from Shah Abbās “without a sealed bag”. It seems that Giovanni Francesco Sagredo, the Venetian consul in Aleppo, had managed to access the contents of the communications between Shah Abbās and European rulers. The circumstances of Sagredo’s access to the Shah’s missives are obscure. It is difficult to determine whether he did so without the knowledge of Khoja Safar to whom he had also a letter of recommendation, in addition to 200 ducats. Another possibility is that Safar himself granted Sagredo this opportunity in return for money. Following his meeting with Safar, Sagredo transmitted the copies of Shah Abbās’s letters addressed to the Pope, Spanish king, the Grand Duke of Tuscany, and others back to Venice.²²

The breaking of the seal by someone other than the intended recipient and the failure to keep contents hidden from the eyes of others was treated seriously and considered a crime by the Safavids. Evidence of this emerges from Iskandar Bey Munshī’s narrative describing the reasons leading to the execution of Daniz (Dangiz) Bey, a former Safavid envoy to the Spanish court in 1611-12:

One of Dengiz Beg’s crimes was that when he reached Cadiz, at the insistence of Buzra, who was the governor of the city [...], he broke the seal on the Shah’s letter to the King of Spain, read the letter and revealed its contents to the governor. The sacrilegious act of breaking the royal seal is considered by kings to be a serious crime, and to divulge to another the secret communications of kings is a heinous crime. (Munshī 1978, 2: 1075)

Crimson satin was the preferred material for the pouches used by the Ottomans.²³ The material of the wax seal also served as an indicator of the status of the sender, and – to a lesser extent – of the receiver. The Ottoman imperial letters to Venice were usually dispatched in pouches sealed with golden wax. On 29 May 1602, Ottoman envoy Khalil çavuş brought a letter of the Ottoman Grand Hasan Pasha in a pouch of crimson satin closed with silver wax seal (*sigilata in cera col coperchio d’argento*).²⁴

²² ASVe, Inquisitori di Stato, b. 516, unpaginated. For Sagredo’s espionage activities, see Wilding 2014, 79-88.

²³ ASVe, Collegio, Esposizioni Principi, fz. 1, 31 ottobre 1567, c. 161r; ASVe, Collegio, Esposizioni Principi, registro 14, 18 maggio, c. 111r.

²⁴ ASVe, Collegio, Esposizioni Principi, fz. 12, 20 maggio 1602, unpaginated.

2.5 Letters of Recommendation

During the reign of Shah Abbās I, in particular, the commercial agenda of Safavid diplomacy was reflected in the content and type of the missives sent to the Doges. Accounting for most of the Shahs' correspondence, these missives could be characterised as royal letters of recommendation in support of specific persons. Recommendations were a way of establishing the person's credentials and the purpose of his visit (Ortega 2016, 128). It not only helped guarantee a modicum of protection but also distinguished the bearer from the masses of people who passed from East to West and West to East (Ortega 2016, 134).

The letters, which usually start with flowery compliments addressed to the Doge, contain a general assurance of friendship, confirmation of the rights granted to Christians in Safavid lands and a culminating clause of introduction and recommendation of the shah's envoy-royal merchant requesting the Doge to help facilitate the acquisition by a Safavid envoy-purveyor of various articles necessary for use in the royal household.

As mentioned before, the first known letter of this type dates from 1597 and was issued by Shah Abbās for Mehmed (Mohammad) Emin Bey and Khoja Ilyas. The letter exists only in Italian translation in the Venetian State Archives; the original document appears not to have survived. These documents correspond in style and construction to the letters sent with Safavid envoy-merchants to the Muscovite rulers at the end of the sixteenth and throughout the eighteenth centuries (Veselovskiy 1890-98, 1: 190, 326-8).

In addition to bearing the shah's missives, envoys (purveyors), whose trade missions combined with diplomatic duties, were charged with selling various commodities on the shah's account, including royal silk, and with procuring the goods 'necessary' for the court. When in Venice, their list of purchases usually included Venetian luxury textiles (satin, velvet, 'ormesino' and 'damask' fabrics) and glass products (including mirrors, lenses, drinking glasses),²⁵ while they were usually commissioned to buy wool fabrics, sable fur, leather, walrus tusks ('fish teeth'), wax, and metal wares in Russian markets (Veselovskiy 1890-98, 1: 311; 2: 58). Arms were the most common items travelling in both directions (Veselovskiy 1890-98, 1: 190, 201, 311; ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Costantinopoli, fz. 10, 18 gennaio 1604, unpaginated).

Evidence from the Venetian archival records suggests that some Safavid envoys also travelled to Venice with recommendation letters

²⁵ ASVe, Documenti Persia, no. 21.

from Ottoman and Venetian officials. For example, in August-September 1609, prior to setting off for Venice, Khoja Safar was granted a letter of recommendation to the Venetian authorities by the Venetian consul in Aleppo, Giovanni Francesco Sagredo²⁶ Furthermore, in 1612, Safavid envoys Khoja Shahsuvar and Aladdin Mohammad, who had travelled via Istanbul, brought with them a letter of recommendation from the Ottoman Grand Vizier Nasuh Pasha following the signing of a peace accord between the Ottomans and the Qizilbash.

2.6 'Hidden Letters'

Contacts between the Safavid shahs and Venetian doges were possible only by means of intermediaries-envoys. Envoys or messengers, often travelling in disguise through the Ottoman territories, had to take great care that sensitive materials involving correspondence were properly stored, concealed, and safely delivered to their destination. Letters were often hidden or kept in rolls of silk, linings of garments, inside book covers, metal containers, walking-sticks, and in other places deemed to be secure.

In the summer of 1510, a Cypriot messenger, Nicolò Surier, and two Venetian merchants were intercepted by Mamluk authorities near the fortress of Bira (Birecik) and it was said that they were carrying letters from the Shah Ismāil to the Venetian consuls of Alexandria and Damascus, hiding them in their walking-sticks (Rabie 1978, 77). In 1539, Michele Membré carried a letter from the Doge to Shah Tahmāsp bound inside a Greek book (*salterio* or psalter), "so that it would go safely and in good condition" (Membré 1969, 5). In 1571, another Venetian, Vincenzo Alessandri, carried a letter to the Safavid court, hidden inside a tin jar (Berchet 1965, 32). In the same year, Khoja Ali Tabrizi brought a letter from the Venetian Council of Ten to Qazvin, hidden inside the cover of a book (Berchet 1965, 34). In 1580, while travelling through Anatolia merchant - envoy, Safavid Haji Mohammad tied the letters in one of the silk rolls; he sold all the silk rolls except the one with the letter inside.²⁷ In 1599, Michelangelo Corrai brought letters from Antony Sherley to the Venetian Doge and several European rulers, hiding them in the stocks and barrels of harquebuses.²⁸

²⁶ ASVe, Collegio, Esposizioni Principi, fz. 18, 2 settembre 1609, unpaginated.

²⁷ ASVe, Collegio, Esposizioni Principi, fz. 3, 1 maggio 1580, c. 329v.

²⁸ ASVe, Collegio, Esposizioni Principi, registro 14, 18 novembre 1599, c. 69r.

3 The Nature of Safavid Diplomacy

Summary 3.1 The *Ad Hoc* Nature of Safavid Diplomacy. – 3.2 Hospitality in Safavid Diplomatic Practice. – 3.3 Europeans' Perceptions of the Diplomatic Gift-Giving Etiquette at the Safavid Court. – 3.4 Re-Gifting. – 3.5 The Characteristics of the Safavid Embassies to Venice. – 3.5.1 *Gäräkyaraq*. – 3.6 The Selection of Diplomatic Envoys. – 3.7 Safavid Rituals of Letter Delivery. – 3.8 The Use of Oral Messages in Diplomacy.

3.1 The *Ad Hoc* Nature of Safavid Diplomacy

The presence of resident embassies in Italian states responded to a pressing need for accurate, up-to-date information about the actions and intentions of neighbours. Unlike the major European powers, neither the Ottoman (Yurdusev 2004, 15) nor the Safavid empires maintained permanent embassies abroad, including Venice. M. Talbot argues that “the Ottoman concept of diplomacy did not strictly conform to any idealised homogeneous ‘Islamic’ or ‘European’ diplomacy, but operated on pragmatic terms” (Talbot 2017, 52-3). This practice of the Safavid court was observed by Pietro della Valle: “He [Shah] does not maintain his ordinary ambassador at any court, but sends extraordinary envoys when he needs to have talks with any of the rulers”.¹

¹ Della Valle 1628, 31: “In niuna Corte tiene Ambasciatore ordinario; ma, solo ne manda degli straordinari, quando con alcun Principe gli occorre haver qualche negotio”.

As for Venice, she was officially represented by the bailo in Istanbul but lacked a resident ambassador at the Safavid capital.

Traditional scholarship interpreted Muslim rulers' unwillingness to establish permanent embassies in Europe as an expression of "Muslim isolationism" (Krstic 2015, 685). However, according to M. Pedani's count, around 110 Ottoman missions were received in Venice between 1500 and 1656 (Pedani 1994, 198-202). In a period from 1598 to 1622, Shah Abbās I sent at least seven embassies only to Venice.

In the case of the Ottomans, some historians believe that this was partly due to the Ottoman worldview, which put Istanbul at the center of the world, with the sultan as king of kings in the highest position in the hierarchy of the world's rulers (McCluskey 2016, 338). Bulent Arı characterises this practice as a synthesis of "abstract Islamic principles with Ottoman *Realpolitik*" (Arı 2004, 37). He adds that the economic and commercial structure of the Ottoman Empire did not necessitate the establishment of residential diplomatic missions at the major capitals of Europe (Arı 2004, 48). M. Talbot states that the Ottomans did not adopt the model of permanent resident ambassadors until the very end of the eighteenth century simply because they did not see a need (Talbot 2017, 52).

A very minor exception to this rule was the appointment by Shah Abbās I of the Venetian consul in Aleppo, Giovanni Francesco Sagredo, first as "Persian consul" in the Syrian city (1608) and then (after his return to Venice) as "general procurator" for the entire territory of the Republic (1611). Rota states that "it is not clear what this appointment meant in terms of actual duties for Sagredo, unless it was just an honorific title bestowed on him as a reward for his friendship towards Persia: most probably, he was supposed to help Persian traders operating *in loco*" (Rota 2009b, 234).

The Safavids' refusal to establish permanent embassies abroad should not be interpreted as

reflecting a lack of concern about European affairs. Several European envoys and travellers have attested to the eagerness of various Shahs to learn about the state of affairs in Europe. Membré's *Relazione* could serve as the best example:

In company with the above-named Sultans, he (Shah Tahmāsp I) began by asking me to be so good as to tell him the result of the league (Holy League) which the Most Illustrious Signory had formed, and of its strength, and of all things that were happening in the lands of the Franks, because he was eager to hear of them. (Membré 1993, 27)

Furthermore, Shah Tahmāsp's letter to the Venetian Doge shows that the shah was aware of the recent political developments in Europe concerning the Ottomans.

Shah Abbās's insatiable appetite for accounts of the politics of other states is evident from his conversations with Pietro Della Valle. Shah Abbās questioned Della Valle on diverse issues ranging from politics (the structure of the Papal States), religion (differences between the Christian denominations), the personality of an individual ambassador (García de Silva y Figueroa), to geography (city of Rome) (Della Valle 1843, 1: 652-3, 656, 658). Safavid officials, from the shah down to provincial governors, routinely questioned visiting Europeans about political and military developments in the West (Matthee 1998, 236). In 1621, Shah Abbās, in an audience given to the Carmelite priest Vincenzo di S. Francesco, asked him about the war between the Ottoman and Poland and religious differences between the Catholics and Englishmen.² According to Alessandri, when Safavid prince Heydar Mirza inquired about affairs in Europe, he "wondered if the league (Holy League) had ended and which rulers were more powerful at sea" (Berchet 1965, 33). On his way to the Safavid capital of Qazvin, Alessandri sojourned in Tabriz for several days in order to gain information about the Safavid "way of negotiation" so as not to go "completely inexperienced" to Shah Tahmāsp's court (Berchet 1965, 31).

R. Matthee notes that "as the Safavids were above all interested in European states inasmuch as these offered the prospect of a joint diplomatic and military alliance against the Ottomans, their interest in things European centered on weaponry and military expertise and, in general, the art of war" (Matthee 1998, 235). Safavid shahs promoted their wishes for constant diplomatic relations and more frequent communication as their letters often contained statements such as "we have always kept the doors open for negotiations, ambassadors, and merchants" (Berchet 1865, 196, 210, 214, 254).

In 1608, Carmelite friar Paul Simon presented a "nota verbale" to Shah Abbās I, on behalf of Pope Paul V (r. 1605-1621). One of the points of the note dealt with the proposal to establish mutual resident embassies:

The Pope proposes to accredit to Your royal person a distinguished personage as his ambassador and asks that Your Majesty would send to his court a representative of permanent character, to reside in Rome, as it is to be desired that the communication of se-

² ASV, Fondo Confalonieri 65, ff. 10r-12r.

crets and plans between Your Majesty and the Pope should be more frequent and frank. These ambassadors should reside for several years at both courts, and receive letters from their own sovereigns, and in this way deal with current affairs. Thereafter it would be no longer necessary to dispatch fresh ambassadors every few months, which experience has shown to be useless, both on account of the many difficulties of the journey and from the long delay in receiving the replies, as, finally, also because of other events which sometimes befall. (Chick 1939, 127-8)

3.2 Hospitality in Safavid Diplomatic Practice

Economics of diplomacy, among other items, also covers lodging and upkeep for foreign visitors. In Venice,³ the expence of receiving embassies was funded by public money while in the Safavid Empire it was met by the Shah's treasury. First-hand accounts of a number of embassies, as well as local sources, suggest that the Safavids placed great emphasis on hospitality when receiving foreign envoys. From the time the foreign embassy reached the Safavid lands until its departure, all of its expenses and provisions were covered by the Safavid authorities.

On his departure from the Safavid court in April of 1700, the nephew of Pope Innocent XII wrote:

The liberality of the king and magnificence of this Court is perhaps singular, because they do the same to every ambassador, even to everyone bringing letters from European princes to the king, making no distinction between mere bearers of letters or couriers and an ambassador, except in the manner in which they are treated: and they take the measure of the allowance to be assigned from the person concerned himself. (Chick 1939, 490)

According to Joseph Tournefort:

Persia is the only country I know of, where Ambassadors are maintained at the Prince's charge. As soon as an Ambassador or simple Envoy, has shown the Governors of the Provinces, that he is charged with letters for the King of Persia, they immediately give him the [...] allowance for his daily subsistences. (Tournefort 1741, 3: 181)

³ For reception and treatment of the Safavid envoys in Venice, see Guliyev 2020.

Adam Olearius, the secretary of the 1637 Holstein embassy, wrote: “During our abroad in Ispahan, we were supplied with all things upon the King’s account” (Olearius 1669, 200). Furthermore, Shah Safi I gave the Holstein mission 200 *tūmāns* (\approx 3370 *piastres* or 1000 French *pistols*) as a contribution towards the expenses of their return journey (Olearius 1669, 214).

The Venetian Domenico de Santis was granted travel allowances from the Safavid court paid in three installments: 30 *tūmāns*⁴ disbursed after his arrival at the court;⁵ 50 *tūmāns* before his audience with the Shah,⁶ and 50 *tūmāns* for his return travel expenses after he got permission to leave the court.⁷ According to the Safavid custom, money could also be given instead of a food allowance upon the wishes of a foreign envoy. This is evident from Jean Tavernier’s description of a public dinner given in honour of the visiting envoys at the Safavid court in 1647:

The Master of the Ceremonies came to the Ambassador and told him that if he did not like the cookery of the Persians, he had order from the Atemadoulet [Etimād-ad dawla], who is as the Grand Vizier in Turkic, to offer him Money instead of Diet, to the end he might dress his own Meat as he pleas’d himself. (Tavernier 1678, 76-7)

In 1539, following his first audience with Shah Tahmāsp, Michele Membré was given eighty ducats and a horse in addition to clothes (Membré 1969, 25). The degree of Safavid hospitality was subject to change and varied in accordance with the importance of the incoming mission and the overall nature of its relations with a sending state. In 1721, Ottoman envoy Ahmet Dürri Efendi was given 500 *tūmāns* for the legation’s daily expenses by the marshal of the Royal Court on behalf of the Shah along with a retinue of thirty sol-

⁴ In 1608, 1 *tūmān* equaled to 15 *scudi* (crowns) (ASV, Fondo Borghese II, 20, f. 136r; Chick 1939, 126). It appears from the European sources that the *tūmān* gradually lost its value against the Venetian ducat over the course of the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. While in the 1530s, one *tūmān* equaled to 40 ducats (Membré 1969, 40), its value was 20 ducats in 1571. (ASVe, Collegio, Relazioni, b. 25, *Relazione (originale) di Vincenzo Alessandri, ritornato di Persia, 1572-24 Settembre*, unpaginated). The *tūmān* dropped further in value equalling to 10 ducats in the first quarter of the seventeenth century (Della Valle 1843, I: 621, 794).

⁵ ASVe, Collegio, Relazione, b. 25, *Relatione del viaggio fatto da Domenico di Santi in Persia*, f. 5v.

⁶ ASVe, Collegio, Relazione, b. 25, *Relatione del viaggio fatto da Domenico di Santi in Persia*, f. 6v.

⁷ ASVe, Collegio, Relazione, b. 25, *Relatione del viaggio fatto da Domenico di Santi in Persia*, f. 7r.

diers (Dourrî-Effendi 1810, 15). In 1618, the Russian embassy, which numbered 116 persons, received 90 *tūmāns* for their food allowance for the duration of two months (Veselovskiy 1890-98, 3: 437; Bush-ev 1976, 2: 207).

Granting a *Khilat* or robe of honour was an integral element of Safavid diplomatic practice. The *Khilat* was one of the insignia of royalty and usually regarded as a token of honour. *Khilats* were usually given to ministers, provincial governors, and others, especially on their appointment to office and on the accession of the shah (Lambton 1991, 526). Visiting royalty, ambassadors, and other dignitaries, including Europeans, also received robes of honour (Floor 2013). It was the custom in the Safavid court for foreign envoys to wear *khilat* during their farewell audience with the Shah. The Holstein embassy secretary Adam Olearius writes:

The Mahemandar [Mehmandar] told them [ambassadors], it was the custom, that they should have, upon their own clothes, the best of those Garments [khilat], which the King had sent them. The Ambassadors, at first, made some difficulty to have that compliance but when they were told it was a custom observed by all Ambassadors. (Olearius 1669, 214)

Pietro Bedik adds that “The King [Shah] wants to see them in the last audience dressed in these robes granted by the Royal Munificence” (Filamondo 1695, 335). According to Chardin:

No Ambassador nor Envoy receives his audience of leave, but clothed with this habit; and when it is sent to him, it is a certain mark that he is going to be dismissed. (Chardin 1927, 112)

The quantity and quality of the robes were used to gauge favour and honour. Regarding this, Chardin writes:

These Calates are of different sorts: Some of them are worth a thousand tomans, which are fifteen thousand Crowns; those are enriched with pearls and precious stones. In a word, the Calates have no set price, and they are given more or less rich, according to the quality of the persons. (Chardin 1927, 112)

As attested by Michele Membré, the shah would also distribute *khilat* from his own wardrobe (Membré 1969, 25). In March 1675, Pietro Bedik, who was in the retinue of the Dominican Father Francesco Piscopo, an envoy of Clement X to the Safavid court, wrote:

one day the Mehmandar-Basci came to him with a special order to present him with the usual gift, that is, one of those precious garments, which was given only once by the King, to honour royals and ambassadors. (Filamondo 1695, 334)

It is evident from the contemporary sources that in many cases these robes of honour were given together with money gifts or allowances to enable foreign envoys to cover their return travel expenses. For example, Domenico de Santis, a joint envoy of the Pope, the emperor, the king of Poland, the Grand Duke of Tuscany and the Serenissima to Shah Abbās II, was granted a *khilat* in addition to a gift of money.⁸

Ottoman and Safavid sources of that period mention dozens of instances of *khilat*-giving. Ottoman sultans frequently gave Safavid envoys a robe of honour (*hil'at-ı fâhire*) together with an allowance (*harçlık*) (Selânikî 1989, 2: 253, 675, 818). This practice was also in use at other Muslim courts. For example, according to Marin Sanudo, in 1512, at the farewell audience with the Mamluk sultan Qansuh al-Ghuri, Venetian ambassador Domenico Trevisan, the consuls Tommaso Contarini and recently pardoned Pietro Zen were dressed in robes given to them by the sultan. As similarly to the Safavid court, it was also customary at the Mamluk court to expect an ambassador to wear this robe at his last public audience with the sultan (Sanudo 1879-1903, 15: col. 206-7).

3.3 Europeans' Perceptions of the Diplomatic Gift-Giving Etiquette at the Safavid Court

Diplomatic etiquette required that, before coming to discuss the object of his mission, an envoy must have given his presents. Venetian doctor Niccolò Manucci, who accompanied English envoy Henry Bard to the Safavid court of Shah Abbās II in 1654, noted the following in reference to his audience with the Safavid Grand Vizier:

the chief object of which [conversation] was directed to finding out presents we had brought for the King of Persia; secondly, to know the ambassador's rank so that the proper honours might be paid to his person. (Manucci 1907, 21)

⁸ ASVe, Collegio, Relazione b. 25, Relatione del viaggio fatto da Domenico de Santi in Persia, f. 6v: "Dopo li quindecì giorni lo stesso Rè mi mandò il presente che furono Tomani cinquanta, et Pezze di seta con oro et senza et altre pezze [...] et con questi mi mandò anco la Calata [*khilat*], cioè le vesti d'Honore et mi fù detto che fra pochi giorni sarebbero venuti à levarmi all'audienza [...] del Rè".

It was a general rule, particularly in Turco-Muslim courts, that an envoy without gifts or lacking appropriate gifts had little chance of succeeding in his mission. Foreign representatives were well aware of this practice, which was obvious from the letter sent by the Carmelite bishop Elias to the Cardinals of the Congregation de Propaganda Fide, dated 27 April 1697:

We had no gifts with which to accompany the presentation of it, as is the custom of this country, I deemed it well to await the coming of the ambassador from Portugal, who was on his way with great state and with rich presents. (Chick 1939, 478)

Although the arrival of an embassy without gifts was considered unusual at the Safavid court, they were received with the same honour. This is evident from Carmelite Bishop Francois Picquet's description of his reception by Shah Suleyman on 5 May 1682:

I was received by him with all benignity and respect; and with some preference over all the other ambassadors. It has been no small marvel to them that I, without gifts, have had so outstanding an audience. But they (the Persian officials) are expecting the presents, the delay in the arrival of which gives me very great trouble, causes me very heavy expense and keeps my hands tied without my being able to discuss any business at all, neither with the Shah nor with his officials. (Chick 1939, 432)

Michele Membré did not present any gifts to the Shah in 1539 while Vincenzo Alessandri brought only meager gifts in 1571, blaming this on the fact that he had travelled through the hostile Ottoman territories.⁹ In 1646, Domenico de Santis made gifts to the Shah Abbās II only on his own behalf "in order to follow the ordinary custom", as he had not been dispatched with presents apart from letters.¹⁰

⁹ ASVe, Collegio, Relazioni, b. 25, *Relatione di Vincenzo Alessandri*, 24 settembre 1572, f. 8r: "mi domandò se v'era altro al presente, li risposi che con gran fatica mi avevo potuto solo presentare a Sua Altezza rispetto l'esser venuto per mezzo il paese de nemici, ma che con occasione la Serenità Vostra non avria mancato di onorare la maestà del re e sua signoria con quei degni presenti che se le conveniva". Cf. Berchet 1865, 32.

¹⁰ ASVe, Collegio, Relazione b. 25, *Relatione del viaggio fatto da Domenico de Santis in Persia*, f. 5v: "Capo de Memandari [...] chiedendomi s'era vero, ch'io havessi lettere diritte alla Reggia Maestà, et se portavo il solito presente, à quello risposi, che ben si havevo le lettere, ma non già presente mandato da Principi ma che nondimeno havend'io di proprio diverse cose da me comprate, per curiosità ero dispostissimo a sequestrar l'ordinario costume".

3.4 Re-Gifting

As an extension of gift-giving behaviour, re-gifting was a common practice among the Early Modern states. What were the motivations for re-gifting behaviour and what items were most frequently re-gifted? As they changed hands, these objects did not always carry their original meanings, and could acquire and initiate new meanings.

Some diplomatic gifts that the Safavid court received from foreign powers – such as jewelled items, precious stones, luxury cloths, and clothes – were recycled as diplomatic gifts for foreign rulers and envoys. Some sources provide evidence related to the circulation of Venetian textiles through Safavid diplomatic gift-giving. For instance, in 1593, the gifts brought by the shah's envoy Haji Khosrov to the Muscovite court included a Venetian silk taffeta fabric sent to the Russian queen by the aunt of Shah Abbās I Zeynab Beyim (Veselovskiy 1890-98, 1: 196-7).

In 1618, Shah Abbās gave the Mughal envoy Khan-e Alam one of the hunting falcons brought by the Muscovite embassy.¹¹ Russian fur coats, *Firangi* (European, probably Venetian) and Chinese satins and velvets were also included in the gift package sent by Shah Abbās to the Mughal Emperor in 1608 (Munshī 1978, 2: 979-80). In H. 1018-19 (1609-11), Shah Abbās sent a perfume pomander of gray ambergris, previously received as gifts from Mogul Emperor Jahangir, together with a reply letter, to Ottoman Murad Pasha.¹² According to the English diplomat Thomas Roe, among the gifts brought to the court of Mughal Emperor Jahangir in 1616 by another Safavid diplomatic mission headed by Muḥammad Riza Bey were two Venetian gold-embroidered velvet hangings and seven looking glasses (Roe 1899, 2: 296-7).

The recycling of gifts was not exclusive to the Safavids and was common in other cultures as well. Safavid luxury objects, especially carpets and textiles, were also re-gifted by Ottomans and Muscovites. For example, in 1719, Ottoman ambassador Ibrahim Pasha presented a Safavid silk carpet woven with gold and silver threads (*lavorato d'oro d'argento, e di seta*) and two pieces of cloth woven with gold flower motifs (*lavorato d'oro, & à fiori*) to Prince Eugene, who was, at that time, the President of the Imperial War Council of the Holy Roman Empire (Rousset 1739, 4: 508). It is possible that the

¹¹ According to Iskandar bey Munshī, this type of hunting falcons “is not found anywhere in the world except in Russia” (Munshī 1978, 2: 1160).

¹² In his letter to Murad Pasha, Shah Abbās wrote: “I am sending you forthwith a weighting one thousand eight hundred *mesqals*, in a filigree bowl cunningly fashioned by Indian goldsmiths from eight *man* of red gold, a gift to me from the Mogul Emperor Salim” (Munshī 1978, 2: 1026-7).

carpets and textile items, which were recycled as a gift for the Habsburgs, had originally come to Istanbul with one of the Safavid embassies during the first decades of the seventeenth century.

A Safavid figural coat also found its way from the Russian Tsar to Queen Christina of Sweden in 1644. Munroe (2017, 89) notes that “this particular gift may also be an important example of re-gifting in diplomatic exchange, as it most likely travelled from the Safavid court to Russia before it reached Sweden”. “Gold-embroidered Qizilbash velvet” (*Kizilbashskiy barkhat*) was included in the list of gifts sent from the Muscovite court to Queen Christina of Sweden with the embassy headed by B. Pushkin in 1649 (Kologrivov 1911, 123).

Shah Abbās I also participated in the circulation of Christian objects. According to Augustinian missionaries, in 1602, Shah Abbās had intended to regift a number of Christian-themed paintings, which he had received from Catholic Archbishop of Goa Aleixo de Meneses, to Alexander II (1574-1605), the ruler of the Georgian kingdom of Kakhetia (Pinto 2018, 162). In March 1625, the shah’s ambassador Rusan Bey brought the Robe of Jesus Christ, which had been taken from Georgia as a war booty, to Moscow as a gift from Shah Abbās to Tsar Mikhail Romanov and Patriarch Filaret (Belokurov 1891, 26-7).

3.5 The Characteristics of the Safavid Embassies to Venice

In contrast to other European rulers in this period, the Safavids relied on temporary embassies dispatched for a particular mission who would return home upon its completion. The Safavid shahs distinguished envoys according to the importance of the mission and the state of relations with the receiving country. Diplomats were selected for their personal suitability and skills. Thus, the socio-occupational background of Safavid envoys varied mainly according to their destination.

This appears particularly true for the reign of Shah Abbās I, who attached considerable importance to trade relations with Venice. The accession of Shah Abbās to the Safavid throne marked the start of a new era of relations with the Serenissima Republic distinguished by the preponderance of trade issues in bilateral relations. As the commercial agenda increasingly characterised Safavid diplomacy towards Venice, diplomacy and commerce became inextricably intertwined. This is evident from the nature of the Safavid missions and the social backgrounds of the envoys dispatched to Venice. Between 1597 and 1629, Shah Abbās dispatched no fewer than seven diplomat-

ic-cum-trade missions there. Venice, by contrast, is known to have not reciprocated with any missions in the same period. The prospect of a military alliance against the Ottomans, which had shaped the agenda of occasional Safavid-Venetian negotiations in the sixteenth century, was now put aside.

Embassies of ambassadorial rank were rare and it appears that only the first three of these missions had ambassadorial rank since their task of promoting the alliance against the Ottomans made it necessary to give these embassies a fully-fledged character. The occupational background of ambassadors was significant for their selection in one other way. In the seventeenth century, the majority of shah's representatives to Venice were merchants with a relatively low status who were not in charge of military negotiations, but carried letters from the Shah and dealt exclusively with commercial matters. According to Niayesh (2016, 208), this category of diplomatic agents can be primarily defined as one of "economic diplomats". Since they frequently travelled to and fro between the Shah's lands and Venice, merchants were ideal candidates for recruitment. Even during times of war, they enjoyed the freedom of movement as the frontiers that were otherwise closed were open to them.

Safavid envoys, combining the roles of royal agent and merchant, were tasked with selling royal silk and with purchasing the things needed for the royal household. In terms of diplomatic practice, they were not envoys (*elçi* ایلچی) but messengers tasked merely with delivering the Shahs' letters. Venetians called them 'latori delle lettere' or 'letter-bearers' (Berchet 1865, 38). These letters, which conveyed the Shah's assurances of friendly relations, were little more than a recommendation for one agent or another and often included a request for the Venetian Doge to facilitate the activities of such merchants-cum-envoys in the lagoon city.

Usually, they had little knowledge either of the political conditions in Venice or of the rules and protocols of Venetian diplomacy. Rota (2009b, 235) argues that Venetian authorities had no illusions about the status of these merchants-envoys, however personally important or close to the Shah any one of them may have been. Their views can probably be exemplified by the words of Giovanni Francesco Sagredo who, in 1609, advised the Senate to receive Khoja Sa-far favourably, even if he were 'not able' to understand such honours fully and properly.¹³

¹³ ASVe, Collegio, Esposizioni Principi, fz. 18, 2 settembre 1609, unpaginated: "Ho voluto far saper questo, non perchè creda che si convenga a lei far soverchio honore a questo Cogia Seffer, il quale manco è atto a discernere e conoscere certi termini, ma solo perchè se gli mostri molto affettuosa, et amorevole verso i suoi negozi".



Figure 9 A fragment of the gold-embroidered velvet fabric with the figures of Jesus and his mother Mary (136 cm × 136 cm). Venice, Museo di Palazzo Mocenigo. Photo © Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia

Figure 10 Safavid cane shield. Venice, Palazzo Ducale. Photo © Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia

On many occasions, Shah Abbās I appointed two envoys to head the embassy jointly – probably one as a chief envoy with another as his deputy. The missions of Mehmed Emin Bey and Khoja Ilyas (1597), Fathi Bey and Mehmed Emin Bey (1603), Khoja Shahsuvar and Aladdin Mohammad (1613), Khoja Shahsuvar and Haji Eyvaz Tabrizi (1622) could serve as examples. As is evident, chief envoys had mainly ceremonial responsibilities. The deputy or second envoy would take up the duties of the chief envoy in the event of his death or arrest.¹⁴ Fathi Bey's testimony could explain the reason for the assignment of two envoys at the same time. According to him, "in the absence of one of them, the available one had to execute the orders of the Shah".¹⁵

Shah Abbās I used the same strategy, but with a slight difference, in several missions to other European powers. While two-envoy missions were exclusively composed of the shah's subjects, some missions to Europe were entrusted to Europeans in tandem with the Safavid envoys. It suffices to mention the missions of Huseyn Ali Bey and Anthony Sherley (1599-1602), Ali Qulu Bey and Francisco da Costa (1609), Daniz Bey and Antonio de Gouvea (1609-13). This practice was not limited to the embassies to Western Europe, as we can see from the embassies sent to Russia. The missions of Budaq Bey and Hadi (Andi) Bey (1589-90), Hadi Bey and Ali (Azi) Khosrov (1594-96), Qaya Sultan and Polad Bey (1617-18) serve as good examples (Bushev 1976, 1: 121, 209; 2: 154).

Some Safavid envoys bore the title *khōja* (*khwāja*), which put them on a certain social level in society. In fact, *khōja* was a title of respect used for wealthy merchants among both Muslim and non-Muslim Safavid subjects. Among the envoys, Mohammad Tabrizi bore the title of *haji*, indicating that he had undertaken the pilgrimage to Mecca and that he had sufficient independent economic means to do so.

As far as Venice was concerned, those arriving in the Safavid court bearing the letters of Venetian Doges were not noblemen or even actual diplomats. The highest-ranking Venetian emissary, from the point of view of both his social status and his rank within the Venetian administration, was Degli Alessandri (Rota 2009b, 234). In the seventeenth century, in particular, such letters were given to missionaries, merchants, and also, in certain cases, to travellers. The

¹⁴ For example, Bastam Qulu Bey, Shah Abbās's envoy to Spain in 1603, died on the way to Europe and the leadership of the embassy had to be taken by his secretary (Steensgaard 1974, 238).

¹⁵ ASV, Senato, Deliberazione, Mar, fz. 157, 13 marzo 1603, unpaginated: "Che il sudetto Signore Memet, mio compagno venisse a morte in nave, sapendo che il volere di Sua Maestà era che manchando uno di noi l'altro dovesse eseguir li suoi ordini".

discrepancy between their status and the nature of their missions emerges from the words of French traveller and merchant Jean-Baptist Tavernier in reference to Domenico de Santis:

This Venetian [Domenico de Santis] was a person ill-fitted for the quality of an Ambassador, being a person of no Parts; which made me wonder that such great Princes and so wise a Commonwealth should send such a person upon a Concern of that importance. (Tavernier 1678, 74)

3.5.1 *Gäräkyaraq*

During the reign of Shah Abbās I, envoys to Venice were often chosen from among the officials of the royal household. The administration of the Safavid royal household was managed by a separate department, headed by the *Nazir-i Buyutat*, or superintendent of the royal workshops (*buyutat-i khassa-yi sharifa*) (*Tadhkirat al-Mulūk* 1943, 48, 49, 118; Savory 1986, 354). *Nazir* had under him thirty-three different buyutats; alongside such purely domestic departments as the King's kitchen, scullery, etc., there were also departments, which represented small factories (tailoring department, weaving mill, jewelry workshop) (*Tadhkirat al-Mulūk* 1943, 119). *Nazir-i Buyutat* had many subordinate officials who assisted him in the discharge of his multifarious duties, including: agreeing on the price of, and signing contracts for, foodstuffs and other goods supplied to the royal household (Savory 1986, 355). Among these subordinates were *gäräkyaraq*s, whose duties included purveying the materials required for a Royal Buyutat and sending goods from the provinces (*Tadhkirat al-Mulūk* 1943, 177-8).

As noted by Minorsky, the term is Turkish: *gäräk*, 'necessary,' *yaraq* in a general sense 'an implement', an object possessing some utility (from *yaramaq*, 'to be useful'). In a special sense *yaraq* means 'arms'. The compound stands, then, for 'purveyor of necessary things, or of arms' (*Tadhkirat al-Mulūk* 1943, 178),¹⁶ 'provider of what is necessary' (Das 1978, 120), the person in charge of supplies, or simply provisions officer. We can assume that merchants were also appointed as purveyors to the Royal Household due to their knowledge and expertise in assessing the quality of goods. The existence of the office of the *Gäräkyaraq*s in other Turco-Mongol powers is confirmed

¹⁶ Among the famous holders of this rank, we can mention Agha Mirak, who was a prominent painter before his appointment as the *gäräk-yaraq* at Shah Tahmāsp's court (*Calligraphers and painters* 1959, 185). See also Doerfer 1967, 593-4.

by the sources.¹⁷ As in the earlier period, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the *gäräkyaraq* supplied the court with its needs from crown lands (*khassa-yi sharifa*) (Floor 2012).

Olearius describes this figure as, “The *Kerek jerak*, or ordinary Steward of his Majesty’s Household” (Olearius 1669, 211). Furthermore, while describing the office of the *Nazir*, he writes: “The *Nasir*, or Controller of the King’s house, whom they also give the quality of *Kerek jerak*, because he executes the function of a Purveyor” (Olearius 1669, 273). Mohammad Rafi Ansari in his *Dastur al-Muluk*, a manual of the Safavid administration, made reference to the *gäräkyaraq*’s duties both in Safavid provinces and foreign states (Ansari 1991, 102). In the shahs’ Persian language letters, this phrase appeared as *garakyarāqān-e khāsse-ye* گرکیراقان خاصه شریفه, while its Turkish equivalent was written as *Khassā-yi shārifāmin Gäräkyaraqları* (Shorokhov, Slesarev 2019, 29). Venetian Dragomans interpreted this term as ‘agents of our most revered court’ (*agente della riverita nostra corte*).

The Safavid merchant-envoy class, particularly during the reign of Shah Abbās, appears to have been dominated by *gäräkyaraqs*. This is evident from extant letters where three out of five envoys were described as being *gäräkyaraqs*. With the exception of Khoja Safar and Khoja Kirkuz, other envoys, namely, Asad bay (1600), Fathi Bey (1603), and Khoja Shasuvar (1613 and 1622) all belonged to this group. Their expert knowledge of goods and previous long-distance trade experience as merchants made *gäräkyaraqs* particularly well qualified for the post of envoy to Venice.

According to Keyvani (1980, 269), “one instance of Abbās I’s mercantile aspirations was his dispatch of royal agents to Venice, London, and Russia to procure manufactured goods and luxuries for the royal stores – a practice which was continued under his successors”. Safavid missions to Venice were similar in nature to those sent to Russia. Merchants commissioned by the shah also routinely accompanied diplomatic missions to Russia and these missions often had important commercial mandates or were little more than trade missions in disguise. Aside from the status and legitimacy the accompaniment of a diplomatic mission conferred upon merchants, they also benefited from protection and the opportunity of evading customs duties (Matthee 1999, 69).

¹⁷ In Ilkhanids the term ‘Gäräk-yaraq’ was also used in the sense of taxes collected on behalf of the rulers, princes, and amirs to provide them with arms and supplies (Geydarov 1987, 129; see also Petrushevskiy 1960, 393). In the fourteenth-century Golden Horde, the phrase ‘Gäräk-yaraq’ signified the procurement of everything necessary for the needs of the Court (Tizengauzen 1941, 96). The official who engaged in purchasing goods required by the court was also called ‘Gäräk-yaraq’ in the eighteenth century Uzbek Khanate of Bukhara (Vil’danova 1970, 48).

Conversely, Safavids dispatched eminent dignitaries as envoys to the Ottoman Porte. Della Valle observed that the shah always sent high-ranking courtiers – “his best and worthy subjects” to the Ottomans and Mughals.¹⁸ The Safavids attached particular importance to their relations with the Ottomans, which was reflected in the social status of the envoys sent to Istanbul. Governors, particularly of the border regions, such as *Chukhur-Sa’d* and Azerbaijan were increasingly employed as heads of missions to the Ottoman court. Furthermore, they were usually of noble background and prominent members of Turkic Qizilbash clans. Often, high-ranking court officials were designated by both sides to conduct peace negotiations. One of the so-called peace envoys was Farrukhzad Bey Qajar, who held an important post of Eshikaghasibashi at the court of the Shah Tahmāsp, was in charge of the negotiations leading to the Amasya Peace treaty in 1555. The Ottoman court usually gave special honours to the Safavid envoys, which also can be seen from the Venetian *relazioni* (Pedani Fabris 1996, 635-83, 671).

3.6 The Selection of Diplomatic Envoys

Theoretically, the Safavid shahs, as absolute rulers of their domains, could choose their diplomatic agents personally. Before naming the envoy, the shah probably considered the advice of the members of the *divan* and *amirs*. The viziers or other leading court officials could influence the shah’s choice by presenting one candidate rather than another. For example, in 1599, Shah Abbās’s grand vizier Hatam Bey Ordubadi was against the appointment of Anthony Sherley as an envoy to the European powers in particular and to this venture in general (Sherley 1613, 82). However, it is difficult to determine the extent of the influence that the Safavid court dignitaries had upon the selection process since the sources offer very little information on this procedure.

The personal relationship that potential candidates enjoyed with the Safavid court officials was also of importance in being appointed to embassies. Haji Mohammad was introduced to the court by his trade companion Khoja Habibullah, whose son Mirza Shukrullah held the position of *vizier* at the court. Khoja Safar was probably presented to the Shah by his father Khoja Yadigar, who was a merchant of

¹⁸ Della Valle 1628, 33: “Come fece al mio tempo al Turco più volte, al Moghol, & ad altri tali, hò veduto mandar sempre persone, e di qualità, e di valore, e del migliori soggetti in somma, che havesse nella Corte”.

the royal household (*Sovdakar khāsse-ye sharifa*).¹⁹ One reason why merchants were selected as envoys was the nature of the duties that they were called upon to perform. Obviously, previous trade experience in Venice or geographical knowledge and knowledge of the host country played a role in the appointment of the envoys. For example, according to their own testimonies, Haji Mohammad and Ali Bāli had been in Venice before their selection as the Shah's representatives. Envoys also hoped to receive a reward for their services in the form of fiefs, or other forms of remuneration. For example, in 1580, Haji Mohammad was given twenty houses with land in the countryside by the Shah in advance of his mission.²⁰

3.7 Safavid Rituals of Letter Delivery

The importance of royal correspondence for the Safavids is best exemplified with the words of Fathi Bey, Shah Abbās's envoy to the Serenissima: "The great rulers visit each other through the medium of the letters and in this way, they confirm and enhance the friendship and good correspondence that they have together".²¹ A similar phrase was used by Doge Leonardo Loredan in 1504 during the audience given for the Ottoman envoy Yakup Bey: "through the medium of the [sultan's] letter he would see (visit) also [his] land" (Sanudo 1879-1903, 5: col. 991).²²

The letter presentation ritual was an important part of early modern diplomatic practice. In the Safavid tradition, any written communication of the shah was regarded as an object of respect. The Safavid envoys were instructed not to show the contents of the shah's letter to anyone before presenting it personally to the ruler of the host power. As representatives of the shah, envoys were obliged to deliver the letter directly into the hands of the foreign rulers.

As required by Safavid custom, the shah's envoys to the Serenissima usually presented their master's missives in accordance with their own protocol. As a mark of reverence, Safavid envoys kissed the Shah's letter before handing it over to foreign rulers. Fathi Bey's audience with the Venetian Doge in 1603 [fig. 11] gave evidence of this ritual:

¹⁹ According to Berchet (1865, 202), he was a *senser* at the Venetian consulate at Aleppo.

²⁰ ASVe, Collegio, Esposizioni Principi, fz. 3, 1 maggio 1580, c. 322r.

²¹ "I principi grandi visitarsi l'un l'altro col mezzo delle lettere, per confirmar ed accrescer di questa maniera l'amicitia et buona corrispondenza che hanno insieme". ASVe, Annali, fz. 13, marzo 1603, c. 1r.; ASVe, Collegio, Esposizioni Principi, fz. 13, 5 marzo 1603, unpaginated. See also Berchet 1865, 44.

²² "E si vederia la lettera, e in questo mezo el vederia la terra".

Figure 11
Gabriele Caliari
(attributed to, 1568-1630),
*Il doge Marino Grimani
che riceve gli Ambasciatori
persiani (1603)*.
1603-1605. Oil on canvas.
Venice, Palazzo Ducale,
Sala delle Quattro Porte.
Photo © Fondazione
Musei Civici di Venezia



Since he had been ordered to place it [the letter] in the hands of the Doge, he drew it from his chest, where he kept it in a red silk bag embroidered in silver, kissed it, and presented it to the Doge.²³

Oruj Bey Bayat related the episode of presentation of the shah's letter to the Spanish king Philip III as follows:

The ambassador [Hüseyn Ali Bey] had brought the Letter enclosed in a bag of cloth of gold, and he carried this in his turban close upon his head, from whence he had now taken it, and first kissing it, then presented it to the King. (*Don Juan of Persia* 1926, 291)

In another place, from Oruj Bey's description of the audience at the Muscovite court, it appears that the Russian ruler imitated the Safavid practice and received the letter in the same manner:

Then before the presentation, he [Pirgulu Bey] kissed the Letter which he bore, and next put it into the hands of his Highness [Russian Tsar]. On this, the Grand Duke [Tsar] rose from his seat, and receiving the Letter kissed it likewise. (*Don Juan of Persia* 1926, 255)

Iskandar Bey Munshī, while describing the misdoings of the Safavid envoy Daniz Bey noted that he "showed disrespect for the shah's letter" by not delivering it to the Pope of Rome in person:

²³ ASVe, Collegio, Esposizioni Principi, fz. 13, 5 marzo 1603, unpaginated: "Havendogli comandato di presentargliela in propria mano, et così presa la lettera, che haveva in seno, et era posta in una borsa lunga di panno di seta sguardo tessuto d'argento, la basciò, et presentò in mano di Sua Serenità".

This was completely unacceptable behaviour on the part of the ambassador. If there really was some reason why he could not deliver the letter in person, he should have brought the letter back and explained the circumstances to the Shah. (Munshī 1978, 2: 1075)

The same ritual was also observed by the Safavid officials. For example, Robert Stodart, who was in Safavid lands in 1628-29 as a member of Dodmore Cotton's mission, reported that "whenever they receive any letter from their king, they kiss and raise it to their eyes and heads" (Ross 1935, 29). This custom was also observed by the Ottoman envoys visiting the European capitals, including Venice, when consigning the Sultan's letters into the hands of host rulers.²⁴ In Venice, the Ottoman envoy would sometimes bring the imperial missive with him to his audience with the Doge; at times, his servant would precede him with the letter placed on a pillow. However, the envoy usually kissed the letter before handing it over to the ducal councilor who would, as a sign of respect, imitate him in receiving it (Pedani 1994, 75).

According to the French missionary priest, Martin Gaudereau, secretary to the papal legate led by the archbishop of Ancyra, the privilege of handing a letter to the Shah was reserved only for the Ottoman envoys:

Of all the Princes of the world there is only the Great Lord [Ottoman ruler] whose Ambassador has the privilege of giving the Letter immediately in the hand of the King of Persia, and it is said that the Ambassador of Persia has the same privilege in Constantinople. (Gaudereau 1702, 22)

For example, Ottoman envoy Ahmet Dürri Efendi, who was received by Sultan Huseyn in the winter of 1721, began by introducing and conveying the Padishah's greetings then kissed the imperial letter (*nâme-i hümâyûn*) twice, placed it upon his head, and presented it to the shah (Dürri Efendi 2006, 4b). Unlike the Safavid envoys, it seems that the European ambassadors did not present their rulers' epistles to the shah in person but consigned them into the hands of the grand vizier, as was the Safavid custom. This rule was illustrated by Martin Gaudereau:

²⁴ "[Mustafa çavuş] dalla convinientia delle sue Imperiali lettere, le quali presenti in mano as sua Serenita dentro una borsa di panno d'oro" (ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Costantinopoli, fz. 14, 4 march 1618, unpaginated; ASVe, Collegio, Esposizioni Principi, registro 14, 18 maggio 1600, c. 111r). In 1669, at an audience with the king, Süleyman Ağa, an Ottoman envoy to the French king Louis XIV, reported that "his Master [Sultan Mehmed IV] ordered him to deliver his Letter into the hands of His Majesty" (Dumont 1739, 4: 101).

The custom in Persia is, that an Ambassador having arrived in the presence of the Roy gives the Letter of his Prince to the Echicagassi Bachi [Eshikağasibaşı], who immediately returns it to Etmadolet [Etimād-ad dawla], this Prime Minister presents it to the King. (Gaudereau 1702, 21-2)²⁵

Foreign envoys also received the response letters with equal ceremony. Manucci described the departure of English ambassador with a Shah Abbās II's letter addressed to the exiled King of England (Charles II) in 1655.

The ambassador was on the left side of 'Azamat-ud-daulah.²⁶ The latter put his hand into his pocket and drew forth a bag of gold brocade, inside of which there was a letter. Lifting this bag with both hands, he placed it on his head, making a profound reverence to the king [Shah Abbās II]. Then he handed the said bag to the ambassador, saying that his king sent that letter to the King of England. (Manucci 1907, 34)

His description confirms that European and Muscovite envoys received their response letters not from the Shah but from the hands of the Grand Vizier. In 1699, Russian envoy Vasily Kuchukov refused to follow this customary Safavid procedure and insisted on handing over the Tsar's epistle to Sultan Huseyn rather than to the grand vizier, claiming that he had to present them personally. This incident was described by the Carmelite bishop Elias in his letter dated 12 June 1699:

This resident [envoy], at his first audience now more than a year ago, was unwilling to give his letters [of credence] into the hands of any minister, claiming that the king [Shah] himself ought to take them with his own hands. When the Persians answered to this that it was contrary to their customs, which could not be altered, after some disputing, somewhat noisy and threatening on the part of the resident, he was sent outside rather contemptuously and kept confined to his dwelling by a considerable number of guards. (Chick 1939, 489)

The intention to imitate the Safavids' practice reflects the Tsar's desire to attain a recognised equal standing to the shah.

²⁵ "La coutume en Perse est, qu'un Ambassadeur étant arrivé en presence du Roy donne la Lettre de son Prince à l'Echicagassi Bachi, qui la rend aussitôt à l'Etmadolet, ce premier Ministre la presente au Roy". See also Lockhart 1958, 61-2, Matthee 1998, 234.

²⁶ Should be Etimād-ad dawla.

3.8 The Use of Oral Messages in Diplomacy

It was not uncommon for shah's envoys to be entrusted with oral messages accompanied by written letters. The Safavids relied on the memory of their envoys or messengers to transmit important secret information because letters of this kind had very little chance of getting through the Ottoman territory. Even though they carried a letter, these bearers had to keep a significant part of the message in their minds so as not to risk it falling into the hands of the Ottomans.

In Safavid-Venetian diplomatic correspondence, the use of oral communication combined with written messages is attested by two letters bought by Safavid envoy Haji Mohammad to Venice in 1580. These two letters, one written in Turkish and another in Persian, originals of which have not survived, have a similar content. It is evident from the text of one letter and the testimony of Haji Mohammad in Venice that he was commissioned by two Safavid amirs: Mohammad Khan²⁷ and Amir Khan.²⁸ Both of the letters are brief and apparently, the main message was to be delivered orally by an envoy. The wording of both letters also confirms that the envoy's primary task was to convey an important oral message. One of these missives states (Berchet 1865, 190): "we have sent Haji Mohammad to tell you" (*abbiamo mandato [...] chogia Mehemet per significarvi*); while the other one has a similar phrase: "we entrusted Mohammad with giving you an account of [...]" (*al quale Mehemet abbiamo commesso [...] darvi conto*). The letters, therefore, played a secondary role and amounted to little more than the introduction of the messenger to the Venetian government. Furthermore, during his discourse in Venice, the Safavid envoy also emphasised the importance of oral delivery by mentioning "I have been told by them [Safavid amirs] to say to the lords of Venice" (*mi dissero che dovessi dire alli signori di Venetia*).

It is clear from the missives that Mohammad Khan and Amir Khan dispatched Haji Mohammad to give an account of their military engagement against the Ottomans on their behalf and to learn the Venetians' stance.

²⁷ This was probably Pira Mohammad Khan Ustajlu who was one of the most influential amirs during the reign of the Shah Tahmāsp I, Shah Ismāil II, and Sultan Mohammad Khodabanda. During the first years of the latter's reign, he held the post of the governor of Ardabil province. Moreover, he was the father-in-law of Shah Ismāil II and also had family ties to the above-mentioned Amir Khan, as one of his daughters had married the latter's son.

²⁸ Amir Khan at that time held the post of governor of Tabriz (*Don Juan of Persia* 1926, 175).

Haji Mohammad's reception in Venice was conducted secretly and senators did not give him a written reply "in order not to put him in danger", contenting themselves with giving an oral answer.²⁹ Although Haji Mohammad insisted on a response letter that could also serve a proof of his meetings in Venice,³⁰ the Doge politely turned down his request by reminding him that "the previous Persian King [Shah Tahmāsp I] had also not given a response letter to our Vincenzo Alessandri, but we trusted him and in the same way, your Shah and amirs would also believe in you".³¹ It appears that in 1509, the second Safavid envoy was also dismissed without a response letter, as the Venetian government trusted him to report their decision to Shah Ismāil verbally (Berchet 1865, 26).

In his letter dated 24 July 1621, Khoja Shahsuvar writes, "to confuse your enemies, I wish to say nothing else in writing but only by word of mouth".³² In a letter, dated 10 August 1670, Archbishop of Nakhchivan Matteo Avanisens writes: "He [Safavid Shah Suleyman] gave me no response by word of mouth about the deal of war, telling me that his opinion was contained in his letters".³³ Documents on Safavid-Russian diplomatic relations suggest that in some missions to Muscovite rulers, Safavid envoys were charged with delivering oral messages from the shah in addition to the letters (Veselovskiy 1890-98, 2: 20-2, 44, 363, 412-16).

One of the main challenges of studying the history of Safavid-Venetian diplomatic encounters is the absence of Safavid envoy reports. Whereas it was customary for Venetian envoys to write a report (*relazione*) and present it to the Senate upon their return, shah's envoys seem not to have recorded their impressions and observations during their European journeys. Shah's envoys made their reports

²⁹ ASVe, Collegio, Esposizioni Principi, fz. 3, 13 giugno 1580, cc. 312r-312v: "Noi non vi diamo lettere nostre per non mettere in pericolo la vostra persona c[h]e ne è carissima, p[er] la prudentia c[h]e conoscemo essere in voi; ma riferirete a bocca a quei sig[no]ri c[h]e vi hanno mandato".

³⁰ ASVe, Collegio, Esposizioni Principi, fz. 3, 17 giugno, c. 302r: "Che hà ben inteso la risposta, et che riferirà il tuto, ma che haveria desiderato di reportar indriedo qualche segno dal suo esser stato qui".

³¹ ASVe, Collegio, Esposizioni Principi, fz. 3, 17 giugno, cc. 302v-303r: "Che essendo de mezzo come lui diceva un inimico tanto potente non bisognava mettersi in pericolo con le[tter]e et che considerando il medes[im]o Il Rè di Persia vecchio quando fù à sua ma[est]a questo nostro Vin[cenz]o di Alessandri se ben li portò nostre let[t]e, non però li diedi let[t]e in risposta essendo sicuro, che noi li credessamo, come sua Ma[est]a et quei signori credera anco à lui".

³² ASVe, Savi all'eresia (Santo Ufficio), b. 72, 24 luglio 1621, unpaginated: "a confusione de Vostri nemici che in pena non voglio dire altro ma a boca".

³³ Berchet 1865, 233: "Intorno al negozio della guerra non mi ha dato risposta alcuna a bocca, dicendomi che nelle lettere responsive si contenevano li suoi sentimenti".

by word of mouth (delivered orally) meaning that unfortunately we have no written records for Safavid missions to Europe. The shah's envoys were only debriefed verbally after their return from diplomatic missions, which is also evident from Della Valle's description:

He (Shah Abbās) is a very diligent investigator of every particular detail of his country, and of others; a curious observer of the things of foreign rulers. In general, he frequently sends and places his ordinary men in different parts under the pretext of trade [...]; often [sends them] with letters to [foreign] sovereigns, and after their return, he inquires of them very carefully, paying much more attention to their oral reports than to what is written in the letters of the [foreign] rulers, which they brought. (Della Valle 1628, 31)

In his other work, Della Valle mentions that the shah did not open the letters sent by European rulers, and "they remained as sealed as they were", and "according to the custom, he wants his envoys to convey the report by word of mouth" (Della Valle 1843, 1: 828).

This was also true for the Ottomans before the late seventeenth century when the sultans' envoys were debriefed orally after their return and written reports were not customary (Faroghi 2014, 7). The first *sefâretnâme* was written in 1666 by Kara Mehmed Pasha following his embassy to Vienna (Unat 1968, 47-8). While later Ottoman delegations composed *sefâretnâme*, unfortunately, no such document exists for the Safavid envoys who travelled to European courts.

Besides letters for foreign rulers, the shah or court officials also delivered verbal instructions to Safavid envoys concerning their conduct in foreign domains before their departure and it appears that it was not customary for an envoy's instructions to be written down. Although we do not possess any knowledge of the contents of those instructions, the "affair of Daniz Bey Rumlu", which was described in detail by Iskandar Bey Munshî, suggests that to reduce the possibility of misconduct, the behaviour of these envoys abroad was regulated by numerous restrictions and prohibitions. According to Munshî, the Safavid envoys were instructed not to show the contents of the shah's letter to anyone other than the host ruler and the letters had to be delivered personally to the foreign sovereign (Munshî 1978, 2: 1075). Furthermore, the envoys had to observe the dress code of their country as was attested by their appearances in audiences at the foreign courts and to treat their fellow mission members well (Munshî 1978, 2: 1075-76).

4 Safavid Subjects in Venice

Venice was a key entrepôt for the Safavid silk trade throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and served as the ideal location in which to commission and purchase the items needed for the shah's court. The main arena of contact between the Safavids and Venetians, in both in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was trade and it was their mutual trade interests that kept these contacts alive even when the anti-Ottoman alliance was no longer pursued.

Venetian archival records give scanty information about the presence of Safavid merchants in the city. Comprising both Muslims and non-Muslims, most of the Safavid merchants found in the Venetian sources were small traders. Little is known about their business activities, though available evidence from Venetian sources suggests that Muslim Safavid merchants, who formed a part of the wider Levant trade, played a considerable role in trade with Venice. Some merchants travelled in the company of the envoys to take advantage of the favourable tax conditions guaranteed by trade with Venice. In addition to silk, Safavid merchants brought to Venice large quantities of herbs such as rhubarb¹ and

1 Rhubarb is a plant also used for medicinal purposes.

spices like cloves (*garoffoli*).² In his preface to Marco Polo's travel account, Giovanni Battista Ramusio notes that a certain Haji Mohammad (*Chaggi Memet*), a merchant active in Venice, had brought to Venice large quantities of rhubarb from China (Ramusio 1559, 14b).

Throughout the sixteenth century and in the first quarter of the seventeenth century, Safavid merchants stayed in brokers' houses or in private residences throughout the city. The merchant Khalil from Nakhchivan who brought rhubarb stayed at Corte Nuova in Campo Santa Maria Nuova (sestiere³ di Cannaregio) in Venice.⁴ Garakhan bin Haji Bayram from Nakhchivan brought to Venice 20 bales of silk.⁵ Sahib son of Murat from Tabriz who brought rhubarb stayed at Corte Nuova in Campo Santa Maria Formosa (sestiere di Castello) in Venice. Hüseyin son of Ali from Nakhchivan also stayed at Corte Nuova in Campo Santa Maria Formosa (sestiere di Castello). In 1624, the merchants Mirza Ali and Baba Ali also lived in Campo Santa Maria Formosa.⁶ This could be explained by its proximity to the commercial areas near the Rialto Bridge and St Mark's square. Safavid trader, Molla Najaf (*Moria Nariaf*), indicated as 'turco persiano', died on 15 July 1690, aged 86 in the parish of Santa Maria Formosa. Santa Maria Formosa was also the preferred neighbourhood for Ottoman merchants to stay in Venice, at the end of the sixteenth century (Pedani 1994, 61). Following the opening of *Fondaco dei Turchi* in 1621, most of the Safavid merchants relocated into lodgings here.

The only Safavid merchant-envoys to mention his quarantine experiences was Khoja Shasuvar, who quarantined (*far la contumacia*) in Spalato before proceeding to Venice in 1622 (Berchet 1865, 213). As a measure of disease prevention related to the plague, both ships and people had to spend forty days in isolation in one of the ports in Dalmatia or in one of the Lazarettos in Venice before entering the city.⁷ Although he was frustrated by the duration of the quarantine

² ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni, Mar, Filza 157, 15, 16 marzo 1603, unpaginated.

³ 'Sestiere' is a subdivision of certain Italian towns and cities. Venice is divided into six sestieri (districts): San Marco, San Polo, Dorsoduro, Cannaregio, Santa Croce, and Castello.

⁴ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni, Mar, Filza 157, 13 marzo 1603, unpaginated.

⁵ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni, Mar, Filza 157, 13 marzo 1603, unpaginated.

⁶ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Costantinopoli, fz. 26, unpaginated.

⁷ For more on Venetian anti-plague measures, see *Venezia e la peste* 1979. Venetians took the lead in measures to prevent the spread of the plague. Quarantine was first introduced in 1377 in Dubrovnik on Croatia's Dalmatian Coast and the first permanent plague hospital (lazaretto) was opened by the Republic of Venice in 1423 on the small island of Santa Maria di Nazareth. This system spread to other Italian cities and was

(*così lunga dimora con molto patimento*), in particular, by the length of waiting time for a galley, he expressed his gratitude to the Venetian government for the good treatment he received, both in Spalato and Zara. Some Ottoman envoys, particularly Halil in 1602 and Suleyman in 1615, also complained about the length of the quarantine (Pedani 1994, 55).

Some of the Safavid envoys arrived in Venice on their way to other European courts, the Habsburg and French courts, in particular. The Venetian government granted letters of safe conduct or passports to Safavid envoys or other subjects travelling through Venetian territories on their way to other European domains. As in the case of Zeynal Bey, a Safavid ambassador to the Habsburg court in Prague, who arrived in Venice in the late spring of 1604.⁸ Zeynal Bey sailed to Venice from Syria on a Venetian galley named *Nave Liona*, travelling under the guise of a merchant, probably in order not to attract the attention of Ottoman spies. He was dispatched by Shah Abbās to Rudolf II (r. 1576-1612) to hand over the shah's letter and to update the Emperor on the progress of the Safavid-Ottoman war. He came to Venice with a retinue of four or five, including an interpreter called Angelo who joined them in Syria. After spending about a month in Venice, Zeynal Bey and his companions travelled north to Prague. It is likely that his retinue included another Safavid envoy called Huseyn Bey who made his way to Marseille.

A report by the Venetian ambassador at the French court indicates that the Safavid envoy sought an audience with French King Henry IV (r. 1589-1610) and was accompanied by a Venetian interpreter.⁹ Zeynal Bey Shamlu reached Prague in July 1604, where he was joined by other envoys: Hasan Bey and Mehdi Gulu Bey in December of the same year. In 1636, Safavid envoy Ali Bali sailed off to England on a recommendation letter granted by the Serenissima.¹⁰ In 1656, Seyfi agha (*Sep agha*), a Safavid subject travelled to Paris with a passport issued by the Venetians (Pedani Fabris 1995, 228).

later adopted by other European countries. According to the Carmelite letter addressed to the Roman Curia in 1772, even letters coming by sea from countries suspected of contagion (i.e. from the plague) were processed in the *lazzareto* and quarantine posts, where they were unsealed and fumigated as a precaution (Chick 1939, 697).

⁸ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Costantinopoli, fz. 10, 29 giugno 1604, unpaginated: "Con la nave Liona venuta il mese passato di Soria arrivò in questa città un Persiano nominato Ogià Seinà della città di Corasan espeditto come mercante dal Re di Persia dopo la presa di Tavis sono già otto mesi".

⁹ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci ambasciatori, Francia, Rubricari C4, cc. 20r (28 agosto 1604), 22v (14 settembre).

¹⁰ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Costantinopoli, registro 23, 26 gennaio 1635 (*more veneto*), c. 147r. See "Appendix 7".

Evidence from Venetian sources suggests that the Safavid court also granted safe conduct (passage) letters or passports to foreign envoys, including the Venetians. For example, Shah Abbās II gave a passport to allow the Venetian emissary Domenico de Santis to travel to Moscow, but he was denied entry at the border by the Russians.¹¹

¹¹ ASVe, Collegio, Relazione, b. 25, *Relatione del viaggio fatto da Domenico de Santis in Persia*, f. 7r.

5 **The Safavid-Ottoman Gift Exchanges Through the Eyes of the Venetians**

Safavid Empire had much more extensive diplomatic relations with Turco-Muslim polities, particularly with the Ottomans, compared to the European states. Safavids and Ottomans interacted with each other actively, managing their relationships through relatively regular exchanges of envoy missions. The importance that Safavids placed on their relationship with the Ottoman was reflected in the values of the gifts made to the Sultan. Subsequently, the value, quantity, and variety of gifts sent to their neighbouring powers was greater than those sent to European countries.

Both Safavids and Ottomans paid attention to variety and quantity in mutual gift-giving. Sources from both sides record numerous diplomatic gift exchanges.¹ The most telling examples of diplomatic exchanges of gifts occurred when peace negotiations were at stake or when a new ruler ascended the throne. In addition to the local sources, the Venetian baili in Istanbul also provided information on the nature of the gifts presented by the Safavid envoys to the Ottoman sultan. The baili not only mentioned instances of gift-giving, but also gave detailed lists of the Safavid gifts.²

¹ For the material dimension of the Safavid-Ottoman relations, see Arcak 2012.

² ASVe, Senato, Dispacci Costantinopoli, fz. 9, 8 maggio 1576, c. 100r; ASVe, Senato, Dispacci Costantinopoli, fz. 16, 14 aprile 1582, c. 35r.

According to Ottoman chronicler Mustafa Efendi Selânikî, in 1568, the Safavid embassy led by Shahqulu Sultan Ustajlu reached the Ottoman court in Edirne bearing a letter, immense gifts and presents (*pîşkeş ü hedâyâ*) from Shah Tahmâsp and accompanied by 1,000 Qizilbash (Selânikî 1989, 1: 67). The gifts for the Ottoman sultan were so numerous that they had to be transported by thirty-four camels.

Gifts sent from the Safavid court to the Porte can help us to highlight the distinctive features of the Shah's gifts for the Sultan. Gifts selected had to be appropriate for the mission. The presentation of costly gifts to the Sultan was also motivated by the Shah's desire to display his wealth and power. At the same time, with this gift, he wished to showcase the sophisticated craftsmanship of Safavid artisans and weavers. As a rule, in addition to the gifts, which were presented on behalf of the Safavid shahs, Qizilbash envoys were also expected to offer their own personal gifts to the Sultans.

Safavid lists of gifts were ranked in descending value with the highest position granted to Holy Qur'an gifts to the Ottoman rulers. Despite being adversaries in times of war, the gifts of the Qur'an made by Shahs were intended to remind the Sultan of their shared Muslim identity and highlight their Muslim solidarity. The number of the Qur'an gifts ranged from one to eighteen. The largest numbers of the Qur'an gifts for the Ottoman ruler were presented in May 1576 by an embassy headed by Mohammad Khan Tokhmaq Ustajlu. While Shah Tahmâsp sent eighteen copies of the Qur'an (nine large and nine small), his envoy offered only one copy. The Safavid court paid special attention to the decoration of these holy books. For example, according to Marc'Antonio Pigafetta, the covers of the Qur'an brought by the 1568 Safavid embassy headed by Shahqulu Sultan Ustajlu were encrusted with gold and jewels (Pigafetta 2008, 235). Similarly, five copies of the Qur'an that were bought by the Qizilbash embassy in 1582 were bound in gold and jewelled inside.³

In addition to Muslim holy books, *The Shahnama of Shah Tahmâsp*, one of the most famous illustrated manuscripts of the *Shahnameh*, was among the special gifts presented to Sultan Selim II by the Safavid embassy of 1568. The manuscript was originally commissioned by Shah Ismâil I from the calligraphers and painters of the royal palace in 1522 (Savory 1980, 129). According to Safavid chronicler Budaq Munshî Qazvini, many renowned artists worked on the *Shahnameh*, which took thirty years to complete (Qazvini 1999, 226). Venetian bailo Soranzo

3 ASVe, Senato, Dispacci Costantinopoli, fz. 16, 14 aprile 1582, c. 35r.

described *The Shahnama of Shah Tahmāsp* as “a book [...] which one prince sends another in gold illuminated leaves with 259 figures”.⁴

Safavid rulers followed mobile court life by moving between winter and summer quarters. This was reflected also in their gifts of ornate pavilions⁵ to the Ottoman sultans. The gift of pavilions can be found on almost every list of gifts provided by the Venetian baili. The most telling description of the Safavid pavilion gifts was made by Soranzo in 1568. He remarks:

A Pavilion is 16 *ferse* [12 metres]⁶ lined with damask and covered with crimson satin with the columns painted in blue and silver and covered with green on top. Three umbrellas are placed at the door of the Pavilion, one is worked with azemine gold, and another is of satin and the other of hermesine.⁷ Their columns were painted with azure with the joints of silver illuminated with gold and jewelled, and two sets of ropes of silk and gold, one [intended] for the Pavilion, and the other for the umbrellas.⁸

The largest number of pavilions were brought by an embassy of 1576. According to bailo Giovanni Correr:

The first one was 33 *ferse* (\approx 25 metres) in size and embroidered with flowers in the Persian style, and lined with crimson satin. The second pavilion was built in the manner of a dome with gilded timbers. The columns of the said pavilion were all jewelled and illuminated.⁹

⁴ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci Costantinopoli, fz. 2, 27 febbraio 1567 (*more veneto*) c. 515r.

⁵ Venetian envoy Membré described Shah Tahmāsp's pavilions (1993, 19): “This palace has three pavilions, one behind the other, and the second pavilion is very large. There, within, stands an *utaq*, which is made of sticks of gilded wood in the form of a dome and covered over with scarlet. Upon the cloth is foliage, cut out and sewn with silk”. Habsburg ambassador Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq gave details of the pavilions which were among the diplomatic gifts brought by the Safavid embassy led by Farrukhzad Bey Qaradaghli in 1555, on the occasion of Amasya peace negotiations: “Babylonian tents, the inner sides of which were covered with coloured tapestries, trappings and housings of exquisite workmanship” (Busbecq 1881, 156-7). The description of the same pavilion also appeared in a report concerning the Ottoman-Safavid conflict in 1553-55 and Amasya peace talks: “this Ambassador [Farrukhzad Bey Qaradaghli] [...] brought to the Turk [Ottoman sultan] a very beautiful camp pavilion, superbly worked in gold and silk [thread], the supporting pillars [of the pavilion] worked in gold and jewels” (ASV, Misc., Arm. II, 94, f. 194v).

⁶ Probably, a pace, as a unit of measurement. 1 pace = 0.75 metres.

⁷ Precious light silk fabric, which took its name from Hormuz city.

⁸ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci Costantinopoli, fz. 2, 27 febbraio 1567 (*more veneto*), c. 515r.

⁹ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci ambasciatori, Costantinopoli, fz. 9, 24 maggio 1576, c. 100r.

The Venetian baili did not describe the interior of the pavilions. In 1590, Venetian bailo Giovanni Moro mentioned “a war pavilion of crimson satin” among other Safavid gifts presented to the Ottoman sultan Murad III.¹⁰

Precious stones were also included in the gift packages sent to the Ottoman court. In particular, Venetian baili mention turquoise brought by the Safavid embassies. Turquoise was worn as an ornament and as jewel adorning rings, cameos, and amulets. Khazeni (2014, 2-3) notes that it became an imperial stone in the early modern Muslim empires negotiating their power with rival states. While the 1568 embassy brought nine bags of Turquoise (*rocca di Turchine*), in 1576, the Safavid envoy offered the Sultan twenty-nine bags of these precious stones.

Baili mention both deer tears (*Lacrime di cervo*) and bezoar stones (*Bezuar pietre*) in the Safavid gift lists. Deer tears were brought in boxes in 1568 while the gift package sent in 1582 included a big bejewelled deer tear. In 1597, baili Marco Venier and Girolamo Capello confirm the use of bezoar stones against poisons (*contra veneni*). According to them, these stones were presented in settings of gold and musk (*legate in oro et muschio*).¹¹

Bezoar stones were valuable because they were believed to have the power to act as a universal antidote for poison. According to Barroso (2013, 198), the origin of bezoars was linked with snake-stone legends, an ancient belief present in many cultures. Bezoars were associated with deer tears, also thought to be effective against all kinds of poisons. Shah Tahmāsp himself had acquired a lasting fear of being poisoned in the wake of a plot to poison him in 940 (1533-34) (see *A Chronicle of the Early Safawīs* 1934, 116). The Shah's practice of protecting himself against poison emerges from Michele Membré's description:

As for the water he drinks, one of his *farrashs* holds it in a jar of porcelain or silver, for I have seen two sorts of a jar; and the King seals it with his seal, and when he wants to drink, unseals it, and, when the meal is removed, seals it up. (Membré 1993, 34-5)

Carpets were among the diplomatic gifts most frequently given by the Safavids and were much admired and appreciated by the Ottoman court. It should be noted that the art of carpet-weaving reached

¹⁰ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci ambasciatori, Costantinopoli, fz. 30, 3 febbraio 1589 (*more veneto*), c. 390v.

¹¹ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci ambasciatori, Deciferazioni, Costantinopoli, registro 11, 14 gennaio 1596 (*more veneto*), 258.

its height in Azerbaijan and Iran during the reign of the Safavid dynasty. As luxury goods, carpets symbolised wealth, power, and purity, and were among the objects used by the Safavids as vehicles of cultural identity. No gift could be more effective than carpets projecting Safavid sophistication in the art of weaving [fig. 12]. The carpets made from the finest wool brought by the Safavid envoy Shahgulu Bey Ustajlu in 1568 “were so big that they could barely be carried by seven men” (Pigafetta 2008, 235; see also Hammer-Purgstall 1828, 3: 521). Pigafetta referred to these wool carpets as *teftich* (tiftik), which were made from the finest wool. According to him, the Safavid envoy brought “20 big silk carpets and many other small gold-threaded silk ones embroidered with bird and animal figures” (Pigafetta 2008, 235).

Giacomo Soranzo, the Venetian bailo in Istanbul, mentions both small silk carpets with gold thread (*3 tappeti di seta piccoli*) and large woollen carpets among the gifts presented to the Sultan. Four of the 21 large carpets were intended to be laid in the pavilions. In addition to carpets, Soranzo itemises 6 felts from Khorasan.¹² As is evident from Michele Membré’s *Relazione*, the province of Khorasan was renowned for the production of luxury felt carpets during the Safavid period: “The King [Shah Tahmāsp] was thus seated upon a *takya-namad*, that is a felt of Khurasan, which was of great price” (Membré 1993, 21).

Compared to the carpet gifts made to the Ottoman sultans, rugs presented to the Venetians doges [fig. 13] were relatively limited in size and type, probably due to transportation issues and Venice’s geographical remoteness from the Safavid Empire, as well as to the different nature of relationships that the Safavids had with these two polities. The carpet gifts presented in 1576 were noteworthy both in quantity and in variety. Without counting the personal carpet gifts made by the Safavid envoy, Shah Tahmāsp’s gifts to the Ottoman ruler comprised seventy-four carpets and rugs of different sizes, materials, and assortment, including carpets of silk and fine wool, mosque carpets (*tapedi moschetti*) and prayer rugs (*sezzade*).

In addition to carpets and textiles, the Safavid shahs also gave various types of weapons and pieces of armour and weaponry as diplomatic gifts to the Ottoman rulers. Gifts of weaponry symbolised power and military competence and highlighted the martial glories of the sender. According to baili reports, weapons brought as diplomatic gifts by the Safavid envoys were mainly arms like ‘Ajami’ scimitars (*Lame di scimitarra azimine*), Damascus steel scimitars,¹³ and bows and arrows.

¹² ASVe, Senato, Dispacci ambasciatori, Costantinopoli, fz. 2, 24 febbraio 1567, c. 515r.

¹³ Jewelled Damascus scimitars were also included in gifts brought by Safavid envoy Farrukhzad Bey in 1555 (Busbecq 1881, 157).



Figure 12

The Ardabil Carpet, unknown. 1539-40, Iran.
Museum no. 272-1893.
© Victoria and Albert Museum, London

The most popular gifts, given regularly by both sides, were textiles, especially luxury silk fabrics. For the Safavids, the most desirable and lucrative commodities were probably silks, which reached their technical and artistic pinnacle in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the early modern world, textiles were the most important gift item and vehicle for all other kinds of social recognition. Silk fabric, often associated with luxury and wealth, served as a form of artistic expression, an important tool for the communication of artistic ideas. The Safavids also managed to display their refined handicrafts by presenting different kinds of textiles, which were the most successful in-kind currency, both in diplomatic and commercial spheres. Gold-threaded silk robes were among the gifts brought by the Safavid envoy to Sultan Murad III in 1580.¹⁴

In 1597, a Safavid envoy brought to the Ottoman court 9 gold-embroidered velvet *veste*, 18 gold brocade robes, a gold thread garment woven with the loop over loop technique (*riccio sopra riccio*),¹⁵ 18 robes of damask fabric, 27 half-satin robes and 18 robes of a rich

¹⁴ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci ambasciatori, Costantinopoli, fz. 14, 3 settembre 1580, c. 223r.

¹⁵ Wright 1997, 1176: “*Riccio sopra riccio* was the most extravagant and costly use of precious gold threads. The technique was, therefore, reserved for the making of wall hangings and ecclesiastical and royal garments”.



Figure 13

A Safavid carpet, probably brought as a diplomatic gift to Venice. Venice, Museo di San Marco.

Photo © Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia

watered silk (*tabino*).¹⁶ According to Venetian bailo Almorò Nani, in 1619, another Safavid envoy offered the Ottoman sultan 32 *veste* of cloth of gold, 24 *veste* of velvet with the pile cut at different heights (*d'alto e basso*), and 9 robes made from damask cloth (*damascio Persiano*).¹⁷ Gifts of robes were highly individual and personalised gifts, symbolising the closeness between the giver and the recipient.

Hunting was a favourite pastime of rulers in the pre- and early-modern world. Safavid and Ottoman courts had several officials dealing with hunting. Ottoman officials included the *Doğancıbaşı* (chief hawk), *Atmacacıbaşı* (chief of the staff responsible for the hunting hawks), *Çakırcıbaşı* (chief falconer), and *Şahincıbaşı* (chief falconer).¹⁸ As for the Safavids, according to the *Tadhkirat al-mulūk*, the *Amir-shikar-bashi* (master of the hunt) was “one of the amirs of high rank” and all of the falconers (*qushchiyan*) were subordinated to him (*Tadhkirat al-Mulūk* 1943, 51). According to Bailo Soranzo, in 1568, Shah Tahmāsp sent 81 falcons¹⁹ as diplomatic gifts to the Sultan, however “due to their big size” they were left to Pasha of Erzurum.

¹⁶ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci ambasciatori, Deciferazioni, Costantinopoli, registro 11, 14 gennaio 1596 (*more veneto*), 258. For Venetian clothing of that period, see Rosenthal 2013.

¹⁷ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci ambasciatori, Costantinopoli, fz. 87, 1 luglio 1619, c. 303r.

¹⁸ For more on Ottoman hunting organisation, see Uzunçarşılı 2014, 403.

¹⁹ According to Pigafetta (2008, 230, 235), Shah Tahmāsp sent to Sultan 40 falcons and they died during the journey.

In September 1580, bailo Paolo Contarini reported that money gifts were included among the presents offered to the Ottoman ruler by the Safavid envoy.²⁰

In some cases, the Safavids included objects taken as trophies during their military raids in the gift packages sent to the Ottoman court. In order to preserve peace with the Ottomans, Shah Abbās dispatched Zakir Agha Qushchi (*falconer*) to the Porte. Among the gifts that he sent to Sultan Ahmet I (r. 1603-1617) was a crown, encrusted with pearls and rubies, which had been taken as booty during the Qizilbash expedition to Kakhetia in 1614 (Munshi 1978, 2: 1093). This crown was valued at 500 royal Iraqi *tūmāns* (Munshi 1978, 2: 1088). In his letter to the Sultan, Shah Abbās wrote:

Since I resolved to raid and conduct holy war against some infidels of Georgia [...]. I marched against them solely for the purpose of exalting the banners of Islam and punishing the rebels. (Munshi 1978, 2: 1093-4)

According to the Venetian bailo Cristoforo Valier, a Safavid envoy presented “a helmet with some book covers that were taken as trophies in Georgia; all were richly jewelled”.²¹

It appears from the reports of Venetian baili that sometimes the gifts brought by the Safavid embassies to the Ottoman court were in sets of nine, in particular when the gifts concerned were clothes, textiles, or weapons. Turkic peoples have always considered the number nine as having a special mystic significance.²² Abu’l Gāzī, the author of *Shajarah-i-turk*, divided his work into nine chapters because “wise men have said: nothing must exceed the number nine” (Abu’l Gāzī 1906, 5). Ottoman, Mughal, and Safavid chroniclers often mention ‘nine skies’ and ‘nine vaults of heaven’. The tradition of exchanging gifts held a prominent place in Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal court etiquette and diplomatic protocol.²³ The number ‘nine’ also played an

²⁰ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci ambasciatori, Costantinopoli, fz. 14, 3 settembre 1580, c. 223r: “L’Ambasciadore di Persia ... presentato di alcune borse nelle quale vi erano 100 mille aspri”.

²¹ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci Costantinopoli, fz. 77, 20 agosto 1614, c. 366r.

²² For the significance of the number ‘nine’ for the states and societies in the early modern Turkic Empires see Guliyev 2022b (forthcoming).

²³ Shah Abbās I sent Husain Beg to the ruler of Golconda to lead an embassy who brought some *tuqiz* (nine-pieces) of cloth from the Deccan and Gujarat (Beveridge 1909, 372). According to Abul Fazl, among the gifts from the Safavid ruler Shah Tahmāsp I (r. 1524-1576) to Humayun (r. 1530-1540; 1555-1556), were “twelve times nine pieces of silk, including velvet, satin, European and Yezdi *kamkhāb* and *bafta-shami* (Syrian cloth) and other choice materials” (*Akbarnama* 1907-39, 1: 427-8). A letter dated from the mid-

important role in gift exchanges: it was customary to give presents in groups of nine. The presentation of nine gifts meant that the donor had particularly friendly intentions. Sending and receiving some gifts in groups of nine clearly reveals that the Safavids had preserved this ancient Turkic tradition.

The vast majority of the textile and porcelain gifts sent to the Ottoman sultan Ahmet II (r. 1691-1695) on the occasion of his enthronement in 1692 by the Safavid shah Sultan Huseyn (r. 1694-1722), through his ambassador Kalb'Ali Khan, were in nines and multiples of nine:

Thirty-six cups and bowls of blue, twenty-seven bows, nine pieces of silk fabric, twenty-seven pieces of velvet, nine pieces of cashmere fabric, nine pieces of satin fabric, nine pieces of cotton fabric of various colours, eighteen carpets of small and big sizes. (Hammer-Purgstall 1827-1835, 6: 569)

The usage of the number nine by the Safavids was also recorded by the Italian envoys and travellers visiting the Safavid and Ottoman empires. Michele Membré, a Venetian envoy to the Safavid court in 1539-40, writes:

So, after an hour had passed, he [Shah Tahmāsp I] ordered him [Gāzī Khan Takali] to be summoned; and he came alone with a present to give to the said Shah: there were camels, 45 in number, fine horses 25,²⁴ mules 36, lances of Babylonia about 200, slaves 9 in number and gold coins in a little bag, the quantity of which I do not remember. (Membré 1993, 45)

The gift-giving in nines and multiples of nine on the occasions of the *Novruz* holiday was also described by Membré:

After this the Easter festival which they call *Bairam* was celebrated and many festivities were held, in the way I have already said: the pavilions placed in the *maidan* and polo played, as I have said above. And the next day, the King's Minister, Qadi-yi Jahan, gave a very great present to the Shah, which was, if I remember correctly,

dle of Dhu'l-Hijja 817 (February 1415) from the Ottoman sultan Mehmed I (r. 1413-21) to the Mamluk sultan al-Muayyad Shaykh (r. 1412-21) stated that, "We have sent to you... intended as a gift, five *taqūzāt* of various *Rūmī* fabrics, three *taqūzāt* of the European fabric, and two bundles of Persian fabric" (Muhanna 2010, 191).

24 A. Morton was right in noting that there should be 27 horses in accordance with the old Turkish practice of gift-giving (Membré 1993, 45).

9 fine horses with brocade horse-cloths and saddles of massy gold and with threads of gold in the middle of their hair; and 18 fine mules, and 36 very fine camels; and velvets, satins, many turban-cloths and cups of silver, bottles, gilded belts and I know not how much money in cash. (Membré 1993, 36)

Pietro Della Valle, who visited the Ottoman empire in 1614-16, writes that:

When this prince of Bitlis went to the divan to an audience with *Grand Signor* (Ottoman Sultan) he did not go without gifts, he brought [...] nine pieces of velvet, nine pieces of satin, nine damask fabric, and nine pieces of wool and silk fabric. (Della Valle 1843, 1: 125-6)

Rhoads Murphey points out that:

The processing and parading of the governors and their presentation of the *piskesh*, often deliberately denominated in nines and multiples of nine to accord with ancient Turkic customary practice, provided not only a spectacle for onlookers but also a demonstration that faithfulness to tradition and sensitivity to the proper performance of these rituals of respect and subservience carried a profound significance for the Ottomans. (Murphey 2008, 189)

The practice of sending gifts in by the Safavids in nines and multiples of nine was not limited to the Turco-Muslim powers. The embassy headed by Khoja Fathi Bey sent by Shah Abbās I to the Doge of Venice, Marino Grimani, in 1603 brought nine gifts.²⁵ Another Safavid envoy, Ali Bali, who was sent by Shah Safi, followed a similar pattern by bringing 18 items of silk fabrics for the Doge in 1634.²⁶

²⁵ ASVe, Collegio, Esposizioni principi, fz. 13, 5 marzo 1603, unpaginated.

²⁶ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Costantinopoli, fz. 26, 13 maggio 1634, unpaginated.

6 The Ottoman Factor in Safavid-Venetian Relations

Summary 6.1 The Safavids and Ottomans in Venetian Realpolitik. – 6.2 The Safavids' Policy of Caution. – 6.3 The Ottoman-Safavid Conflict and Europe.

6.1 The Safavids and Ottomans in Venetian Realpolitik

The nature and intensity of Safavid diplomatic engagement with Venice should be considered in the light of Ottoman-Venetian and Safavid-Venetian relations, as they were closely interrelated during this period. In the sixteenth century, this relationship was mainly centred on the issue of the Ottoman threat.

Giorgio Rota argues that both the Venetian attitude towards the Ottomans as well as Venetian interest in the Safavid state were shaped by the necessity of trading and of defending trade (Rota 2009a, 7). Venetians were interested in trade relations and it was their commercial concerns that resulted in a warming of their relations with the Ottomans. In many respects, Venice pursued Realpolitik by safeguarding its commercial relations with the Ottomans for the purpose of its own survival (Preto 1975, 28). Palmira Brummett (1999, 227-8) points out that the Ottoman-Venetian relationship was not characterised by an attitude of extreme hostility. Across borders, Ottomans and Venetians were more often engaged in trade than at war. The fortunes of each state were connected to the fortunes of the other.

In the sixteenth century, in particular, Venetians and Safavids viewed each other as potential allies against the threat of the expanding Ottoman Empire. Therefore, contacts were only made when one side or the other was contemplating military action. On the other hand, the maintenance of peaceful relations with the Ottomans was a critical element in both Safavid and Venetian grand strategies. Peaceful relations with the Ottomans also contributed to a more propitious commercial climate in the Eastern Mediterranean. Mutual trade interests often took precedence over the prospect of a military alliance in Safavid-Venetian relations, particularly for the first half of the seventeenth century. Gabriele Caliari's painting of the reception of the Safavid envoy Fathi Bey by Doge Marino Grimani on 5 March 1603 could serve as a telling example of this (Rota 2009b, 229-33). The artist chose to focus on the gift of precious silk rather than on any religious or military emblem (Niayesh 2016, 209).

Generally, Venice looked upon the Safavids through the prism of its relations with the Ottomans. This was also true for the Safavids, the nature of whose contacts with the Venetians was influenced by their attitude to the Porte. In its relations with the Safavids, the Venetian government pursued a cautious policy and tried not to antagonise the Ottomans. Venetian officials were so careful that they tried to ensure that the Ottomans did not get wind of even their most insignificant dealings with the Safavids ("Non pervenisse alle orecchie de Turchi").¹ As long as Venice did not lose any of her vital possessions to the Ottomans, no ambassadors were sent to the Safavid court. Whenever the Ottoman threat seemed graver, the Serenissima sought support from the Safavids against the Porte. For the most part, Venice maintained neutrality or amicable relations with the Ottomans, except when her possession of certain territories and bases was at stake (Brummett 1999, 230).

Venetians exercised the same caution in their contacts with the Safavids in order not to damage their relations with Mamluks, one of Venice's principal trading partners before their fall in 1517. However, Mamluk-Venetian relations were temporarily strained in the wake of an incident that took place in the summer of 1510, involving the interception of Shah Ismâil's letters by the Mamluk authorities.² These letters, carried by Cypriot Nicolò Surier and his companion, were addressed to the Doge, to the Venetian consuls in Syria as well as to the rectors of Cyprus (Sanudo 1879-1903, 12: col. 236-7).

¹ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Costantinopoli, fz. 26, unpaginated; ASVe, Risposta dei Cinque Savij, 7 Marzo, 1626, unpaginated.

² See Lucchetta 1968; Setton 1984, 25-33; Rota 2021, 589.

Outraged by the links between the Safavid Shah and the Venetian government (Sanudo 1879-1903, 11: col. 825), the Mamluk Sultan ordered the arrest of Pietro Zen, the consul of the Republic in Damascus. In 1512, to 'sweeten' the soured relations and conciliate the Sultan, the Venetian government sent its envoy Domenico Trevisan with rich gifts and assurances that correspondence between the Signoria and the Safavid shah was in no way directed against the Mamluk sultan (Setton 1984, 29-30).

In 1580, when the Safavids sent the embassy led by Haji Mohamad in an attempt to get at least 'moral' support against the Ottomans, it resulted in failure due to Venetians' unwillingness to break peace with the Ottomans (Rota 2012, 150).

The delayed audience of Safavid envoy Asad Bey at the Venetian Collegio could serve as a further example of Venice's policy of caution and desire not to provoke the Ottomans. Despite being informed of Asad Bey's arrival in Venice on 29 May 1600,³ the Venetian Collegio did not grant him an audience until 8 June.⁴ The reason being that the Ottoman envoy Davud çavuş was in Venice at the same time.⁵ In fact, Asad Bey's audience with Doge Marino Grimani was deliberately delayed until the çavuş had left the city. Furthermore, Venetians advised Asad Bey "not to talk to anybody, especially to the Ottoman envoy".⁶ Similarly, in 1601, a Safavid envoy called Huseyn Ali Bey Bayat, who was accompanying Anthony Sherley, who was charged with discussing a military alliance against the Ottomans, was not given permission to enter Venice. This could be interpreted as the Venetian government's wish to avoid involvement in any action that could endanger its peaceful relations with the Sublime Porte. Venice had evidently decided that the mission could negatively affect its relations with the Ottomans. It is interesting to note that in 1609, the Venetian government refused to negotiate with Robert Sherley, another Safavid envoy, this time on a mission to the Pope (Paz 1914, 644). Venice's reluctance to deal with Robert Sherley might well explain the importance of the precautionary principle in the Serenissima's foreign policy.

Contacts between various European states and the Safavids aroused the Porte's suspicions regardless of the intentions of the

³ ASVe, Collegio, Esposizioni Principi, registro 14, 18 maggio 1600, c. 111v.

⁴ ASVe, Collegio, Esposizioni Principi, fz. 11, 8 giugno 1600, unpaginated.

⁵ ASVe, Collegio, Esposizioni Principi, registro 14, 18 maggio 1600, cc. 111rv. For Davud's visit to Venice see also Pedani 1994, 36, 55.

⁶ "Ella gli [Asad Bey] commise, che non dovesse parlarne con alcuno, et meno di tutti con il [Davud] chiaus, et che dovesse trattaner l'audientia al Persiano sino che esso Chiaus fosse espedito" (ASVe, Collegio, Esposizioni Principi, registro 14, 29 maggio 1600, c. 112v).

parties involved, especially when the Ottoman Empire was in a state of war with one of them (Güngörürler 2016, 94). For example, in his dispatch dated 28 November 1609, the Venetian bailo in Istanbul Simon Contarini informed the Senate about his conversation with the Ottoman *Kapudan-ı Derya* Halil Pasha, who had questioned him regarding the Safavid envoy's visit to Rome. His reply to Halil Pasha illustrates Venice's cautious policy towards the Porte:

I told him [Halil Pasha] about the Persian Ambassadors [Robert Sherley's embassy] and he asked me where they were. I said that they were in Rome, and they had also wanted to go to Venice, but the Ambassador of the [Venetian] Republic [in Rome], aware of the wish to never to cast any shadow of hostility in the direction of the Grand Sultan [Ottoman sultan], with great prudence dissuaded them from that journey [...] Pasha [Halil Pasha] was very happy to hear this and took my hand laughingly.⁷

When the Serenissima was on peaceful terms with the Ottomans, Venetian officials tried to give an unofficial character to the visits of the Safavid envoys and in most cases, associated the presence of Safavid subjects in Venice and their contacts with the Safavids with trade issues.⁸

The impact that the Ottomans had upon Venetian-Safavid relations clearly emerges in the case of Safavid diplomat Zeynal Bey's visit to Venice. In the late spring of 1604, Safavid envoy Zeynal Bey Shamlu's sojourn in Venice on his way to the Habsburg court in Prague aroused suspicions among the Ottomans. The Ottoman *Hazinadar* (Treasurer) demanded an explanation from the bailo in Istanbul regarding the visit of Zeynal Bey. The Venetian government ensured the Porte that the Safavid ambassador was in Venice "not only privately, but also secretly" and they had not engaged in any negotiations with him.⁹

⁷ ASVe, Senato, Dispaggi Costantinopoli, fz. 68, 28 novembre 1609, cc. 376r-377v: "et gli havevo detto degli Ambasciatori del Persiano, mi addimandò ove fossino, dissi che erano a Roma, et che havrebbo anco voluto andar a Venetia, ma che là Ambasciadore della Republica con sapevole del desiderio che ella tiene di non apportar mai nissun ombra di disgusto al Gran Signore gli haveva con molta prudenza dissuasi da quel viaggio.... Si fè il Bassà molto allegro.. et presomi per mano ridendo".

⁸ ASVe, Collegio, Esposizioni Principi, registro 14, 31 maggio 1600, c. 113r; ASVe, Senato, Dispaggi Costantinopoli, fz. 98, 18 gennaio 1624 (*more veneto*), c. 439rv.

⁹ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Costantinopoli, fz. 10, 17 luglio 1604, unpaginated: "Con questo che è stato qui, non solo privatamente ma, si può dir, occultamente, noi non habbiamo havuto niuna sorte di tratattione, né lo [Zeynal Bey] habbiamo veduto et parti verso la fine di giugno medesimamente passato verso Praga. Ma, perche ci perviene hora à notitià che' il Casnadar intese l'esser qui di esso Persiano, et disse di haver anco inteso che da noi gli sià stato dato un passaporto".

6.2 The Safavids' Policy of Caution

By refusing to grant an audience to Vincenzo degli Alessandri, who had been dispatched to the Safavid court in 1571 in order to urge the Safavids to join the anti-Ottoman alliance, Shah Tahmāsp showed his unwillingness to put peace with the Porte at stake. As a part of its policy aimed at involving the Safavids in the anti-Ottoman league, the Venetian government also used Safavid subjects as envoys to the shah. For example, after the outbreak of the Ottoman-Venetian war over Cyprus in 1570, one of the two envoys sent to the Safavid Court by the Venetian Senate was Khoja Ali Tabrizi, a Safavid subject who traded in Venice. The letter of bailo in Istanbul makes it clear that the Venetians made attempts to employ the Shah's subjects, particularly the merchants. He urged the consul in Syria to seek to curry favour with the Safavid merchants there, "so that they might convince the Shah to join the war against the Ottomans", as he had already done through Venetian merchants and other Safavid merchants in Istanbul.¹⁰ Despite the Venetian efforts, Shah Tahmāsp saw no alternative to continuing peaceful relations with the Ottomans.

From the signing of the peace of Zohab (1639) until the end of Safavid rule in the early eighteenth century, Safavid rulers sought to avoid involvement in an alliance against the Ottomans, maintaining an extremely cautious policy designed not to antagonise their western neighbour (Matthee 1994, 750). Peaceful terms with the Ottomans allowed the Safavids to recapture the strategic city of Qandahar from the Mughals in 1649.

In the early years of the Cretan (Candian) war (1645-69), the Venetian government sent several missions to the Safavid court in order to urge the Shah to join the anti-Ottoman alliance. According to Tavernier (1678, 74), the main aim of this attempt was "to excite the King of Persia to engage him in a war against the Turk, thereby to keep off the storm that threatened Christendom". None of these missions produced any results due to Shah Abbās II's reluctance to jeopardise his peace accord with the Ottomans. Shah Abbās II's response invariably included an affirmation of friendship but no commitment to military support (Rota 2012, 151).

From time to time, both the Safavids and Ottomans would appeal for peace on the grounds of Muslim solidarity, arguing that a continuation of hostilities served the benefit of the Europeans. According

¹⁰ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci, Costantinopoli, Rubriche D1, 18 luglio 1570, c. 260v: "Ha esortato il console in Soria far qualche officio con mercanti Persiani, che potessero mover il Soffi alla guerra contra Turchi, come ha egli fatto far in Costantinopoli da nostri mercanti con altri mercanti Persiani".

to Iskandar bay Munshī, in a letter brought by Kheyraddin çavuş in H. 1017 (1608/1609), the Ottoman grand vizier Murad Pasha noted:

Such situation would only weaken the Muslim forces engaged in the struggle with the Frankish [European] princes, who were in a constant state of war against the Muslim world, and would produce malicious joy among Christians. (Munshī 1978, 2: 986)

In his reply to the Ottoman sultan, Shah Abbās wrote:

If the Ottoman sultan will relinquish his claim to this territory [Safavid provinces occupied by the Ottomans], I am ready at any time to discuss peace for the benefit of all Muslims. What could be better than that Muslim rulers should live together in peace and harmony, and thus frustrate the designs of the enemies of the faith? (Munshī 1978, 2: 987)

In his other letter to the Shah, reported by the Venetian bailo in March 1611, Murad Pasha wonders why so much Muslim blood was spilled if they (Ottomans and Safavids) all belong to the same religion.¹¹

In his dispatch dated 12 May 1608, the Venetian bailo Ottaviano Bon related that a Safavid envoy in Istanbul had informed a Polish diplomat about the progress of the Shah's army against the Ottomans.¹² According to the Venetian document dated 19 July 1634, during his audience at the Venetian Collegio, the Safavid envoy Ali Bali informed the Doge that the shah had sent his ambassador to the king of Poland to urge him not to make peace with the Ottomans and for his part "promised to continue a war".¹³ However, it is interesting to note that in 1622, when the Safavids and Ottomans were on peaceful terms, in a letter to the Ottoman Sultan, Shah Abbās emphasised that he prayed with the clerics in the mosque for the success of the Sultan's campaign against Poland (Küpelī 2009, 73).

¹¹ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci Costantinopoli, fz. 71, 19 marzo 1611, cc. 55r-55v: "che fra di loro tutti d'una seta si spanda tanto sangue di Mussulmani".

¹² ASVe, Senato, Dispacci Costantinopoli, fz. 66, 12 maggio 1608, c. 127r: "Et, esso Ambasciadore ha riferito al Nontio di Polonia che lo ha visitato senza sospetto come per lettere con ha' havuto, fin hora Van deve esser preso, et che il Re con potentissimo esercito deve esser verso Babilonia".

¹³ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Costantinopoli, fz. 26, 19 luglio, 1634, unpaginated: "Che il Re di Persia a quello di Polonia haveva inviato Amb[asciadio]re per ecitarlo a non far la Pace con Turchi promettendo dal suo canto di tener fermo con gran forze la continuattione della guerra".

6.3 The Ottoman-Safavid Conflict and Europe

In spite of the role of Shia-Sunni rhetoric in Safavid-Ottoman confrontation, it is inappropriate to place relations between these two powers in the context of sectarian rivalry. As borne out by the facts, the political dimension was preeminent over the religious dimension in relations between these empires (Allouche 1983, 149). The Safavid-Ottoman struggle was mainly distinguished by extreme competition over territories, control of trade routes, prestige, and political hegemony in the Middle East rather than by differences regarding religious authority in the Islamic world.

European powers maintained a keener interest in Safavids on account of their traditional desire to involve the Safavids in an anti-Ottoman alliance. The Safavid Empire was strong enough to challenge the Ottomans military sphere. The frequent wars between these two powers and their mutual weakening were in the interest of the Western European countries, including Venice (Makhmudov 1991, 113). The Venetian Council of Ten's decision regarding Haji Mohammad's audience on 13 June of 1580 is a good example.¹⁴ The resolution of the Council of Ten suggests that the Venetian government was interested in the continuation of the war between the Ottomans and Safavids.

It appears from the letters of the Venetian bailo in Istanbul, dated 7 May 1579 and 1 October 1579 (see "Appendix 3"), that Haji Mohammad was not the first or only Safavid subject given an audience in Venice following the outbreak of the Ottoman-Safavid war¹⁵ in 1578. According to the letters of the bailo, a certain Huseyn (*Ussein*), a merchant by profession, claimed to have visited Venice on several occasions and to have been introduced to the Venetian Collegio through the offices of public dragoman Michele Membré.¹⁶ Huseyn's case suggests that the activities of some Safavid merchants in Venice were not limited to trade, so when the need arose, especially during the Safavid-Ottoman wars, they were debriefed by the Venetian authorities regarding the situation in the Qizilbash domain. On the other hand, Huseyn's initiative could be explained as an attempt by this Safavid subject to act as an intermediary between the Shah and the Doge.

The advantages for Europeans resulting from conflict between the Safavids and the Ottomans had an important place in European

¹⁴ ASVe, Consiglio di Dieci, Deliberazioni, Segrete, registro 12, c. 40r: "sperando nel Signor Dio, che continuando la guerra darà occasione non solamente a noi, ma anco à tutta la christianità, di mostrar con effetti qual sia il suo desiderio".

¹⁵ For the Safavid-Ottoman war of 1578-1590, see Guseyn 2005 and Matthee 2014.

¹⁶ ASVe, Capi del Consiglio di Dieci, Lettere ambasciatori, b. 5, c. 81rv (7 maggio 1579), c. 95r (1 ottobre 1579).

strategic thinking, which cherished the idea of two Islamic powers destroying each other (Matthee 2019, 515). Europeans believed that the Safavid-Ottoman confrontation would bring “an opportune time to expel the Turks with little effort from Europe”, since the Sultan’s entire army would be busy against the Safavids in Asia.¹⁷

A favourite theme for Venetian speculation in the mid-sixteenth century was the possible role of the Safavid shah as “an agent for the destruction of the Ottoman sultan” (Libby 1978, 117). The Ottoman-Safavid wars eased pressure on Europe and meant a temporary respite for European powers, providing them with opportunities to capitalise on the military and economic weaknesses of the Ottomans. This could be best exemplified with the words of Venetian bailo in Istanbul Alvise Contarini: “The Turks might do harm to Your Excellencies [Venetian government] if they will be free”.¹⁸ However, from an economic perspective, the Safavid-Ottoman wars did not serve Venetian commercial interests, given their negative impact on Levantine trade, one of the *Serenissima*’s main sources of revenue.

The Safavids themselves were aware of the strategy employed by Europeans in order to bring the Qizilbash into the war with the Ottomans. This was best described by the words of Zeynal Bey Shamlu, one of the Safavid envoys to the court of the Habsburg emperor Rudolf II:

All their [the Emperor’s and the Christian Princes’] professions of friendship were false, and that all they wanted was for the Turks and Persians to destroy each other and the Muslim religion included. (Chick 1939, 169)

The Venetians’ stance on Safavid-Ottoman military engagements could also be traced through their reactions to the Ottoman *fethnames*¹⁹ (victory missives) sent to the Doges to celebrate their victories and conquests against the Qizilbash. For example, in a reply to the Ottoman *fethname* brought by Hüseyin çavuş in March of 1550, the Senate sent a congratulatory letter to Sultan Süleyman I (r. 1520-1566) on his victories against the Safavids.²⁰

In 1555, the Senate dispatched Alvise Renier as its ambassador to Istanbul to congratulate Sultan Süleyman on his victories against the

¹⁷ ASV, Arm. I-XVIII, 5505, f. 223v.

¹⁸ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci Costantinopoli, fz. 120, 9 aprile 1639, c. 102v: “se turchi saranno liberi; et che possano far male all’Eccellentissima Vostra, lo faranno certo”.

¹⁹ For Ottoman *fethnames* to Venice, see Pedani Fabris 1998.

²⁰ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni, Segrete, registro 67, cc. 29v-30r.

Safavids.²¹ Following the capture of the former Safavid capital Tabriz in 1585, the Senate sent a fulsome congratulatory letter to Sultan Murad III (r. 1574-1595) stating that they had received this news of “victorious success” with “great joy”.²²

²¹ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni, Segrete, registro 69, cc. 138v, 139r, 149v, 152r, 161r: “le grandi vittorie di sua Maestà et lo acquisto di molte città et provintie”.

²² ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Costantinopoli, fz. 6, 11 gennaio 1585 (*more veneto*), unpaginated: “Con sommo nostro consenso havemo inteso per lettere del Bailo nostro residente à quella Eccelsa Porta; la nova dell’Aquistò fatto da Vostra Imperial Maestà della principalissima et Real città di Tauris: Del qual vittorioso successo, havendone noi sentito quella grande, et intima allegrezza che ricerca la sincera amicitia, et be-nevolentia che tenemo con Lei”.

Appendices

Appendix 1

List of Safavid Envoys/Merchants/Travellers to Venice

Venetian archival sources shed light on the identities of some Safavid subjects who visited Venice in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the table, we included the names of the Muslim subjects of the Safavid shahs whose identities are known to us. Future research into archival records could reveal the identities of anonymous Safavid subjects and discover previously unknown ones.

| | Name | Provenance | Date of visit(s) to Venice | Profession |
|---|---|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Haji Mohammad (<i>Chaggi Memet</i>) | Tabas-? (Gilan province) | 1550s | Merchant |
| Haji Mohammad dealt with the rhubarb trade. Michele Membré, who was a Venetian public dragoman, acted as an interpreter during Haji Mohammad's transactions with the Venetians (Ramusio 1559, 14b). | | | | |
| 2 | Khoja Khabibullah (<i>Chogia Cabibulà</i>) | Isfahan | Unknown | Merchant |
| Khoja Khabibullah was the trade partner of Haji Mohammad Tabrizi with whom he visited Venice for trade purposes. ¹ | | | | |
| 3 | Mirza Shukrullah (<i>Chogia Succurlà</i>) | Isfahan | Unknown | Mustawfī al-Mamālik, Safavid Grand vizier (1576-77) |
| Mirza Shukrullah was the son of Khoja Khabibullah Isfahani with whom he visited Venice several times. ² | | | | |

| | Name | Provenance | Date of visit(s) to Venice | Profession |
|--|--|---------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 4 | Haji Mohammad (<i>Chogia Mehemet</i>) | Tabriz | 1570s, 1580 | Envoy, Merchant |
| During the war of Cyprus (1570-73), he was captured as a 'Turk' by a Venetian ship and was released thanks to the efforts of Vincenzo degli Alessandri (Rota 2009a, 20). In 1580, he was sent by Shah Mohammad Khodabanda as an envoy to Venice. | | | | |
| 5 | Khoja Ali (<i>Cogia Ali</i>) | Tabriz | ?-1570s | Merchant, Envoy |
| Following the outbreak of war over Cyprus between the Ottomans and Venice in 1570, Khoja Ali, a Safavid merchant, was sent to the Safavid court by the Venetian Senate with a letter offering an anti-Ottoman alliance. ³ In the same year, the Senate ordered the <i>Governatori delle Entrate</i> to pay 1329 ducats and 21 <i>grossi</i> to Khoja Ali, described as a "turco da Tabriz", as compensation for a sum owed to him by the Dolfin bank (Arbel 1995, 67; ASVe, Senato, Mar, registro 39, c. 273r). | | | | |
| 6 | Shah Muralla (<i>Schiac Muralla</i>) | Unknown | 1571 | Merchant, Envoy-? |
| In October 1571, he was officially received by the Venetian Collegio and claimed to be an emissary of the Safavid shah. ⁴ Since he had not brought credentials, it appears that the Venetian Council of Ten suspected him of being an impostor. | | | | |
| 7 | Huseyn (<i>Ussein</i>) | Ganja-? (<i>Gongie</i>) | 1578-79 | Merchant, Informant, Envoy-? |
| He visited Venice mainly for trade purposes. However, it appears from the bailo letters that Huseyn was introduced to the Venetian Collegio several times with the help of Michele Membré and debriefed the senators on issues relating to the Safavid-Ottoman war, which started in 1578. | | | | |
| 8 | Ali | Unknown | 1583 | Merchant |
| His name was mentioned in connection with a trade partnership with Ottoman merchant Hacı Ahmed with whom he arrived in Venice in 1583 (Pedani 2018, 37; ASVe, <i>Documenti Turchi</i> , b. 7, nos. 927, 929). | | | | |
| 9 | Khoja Burjali (<i>Chogia Purchiali</i>) | Unknown | 1596 | Merchant |
| According to the register (<i>libretto</i>) of Zuane Zacra, a Venetian broker (<i>sanser</i>) of Cypriot origin, Khoja Burjali sold a woolen fabric known as <i>zambelotti</i> . ⁵ | | | | |
| 10 | Hasan (<i>Asan turco da Percia</i>) | Unknown | 1596 | Merchant |
| His name was mentioned in Zuane Zacra's <i>libretto</i> . ⁶ | | | | |
| 11 | Khoja Ilyas (<i>Yeias</i>) | Unknown | 1597 | Envoy, Royal purveyor |
| Together with Mehmed Emin Bey, he headed the first Safavid trade mission to Venice and brought a letter from Shah Abbās I to Venetian doge Marino Grimani. ⁷ | | | | |

| Name | Provenance | Date of visit(s) | Profession to Venice |
|---|------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| 12 Mehmed Emin Bey Mehmed Emin Bey died on board of the ship <i>Nave Liona</i> in February 1603 while en-route to Venice. ⁸ | Unknown | 1597, 1603 | Envoy, Royal purveyor |
| 13 Haji Hasan (<i>Agi Assan</i>) Haji Hasan's name was recorded in Zuane Zacra's <i>libretto</i> in connection with selling <i>zambelotti</i> with the mediation of Zacra. ⁹ | Unknown | 1599 | Merchant |
| 14 Sujaddin Asad Bey In 1600, he led a Safavid embassy of eight people to Venice. He brought to Venice, among other things, musk (<i>muschio</i>) and carpets (<i>tappeti</i>); all his merchandise was estimated at 80,000 <i>scudi</i> . ¹⁰ He was reported as saying that he had been in the service of the Safavid rulers for about forty years and had two sons in the service of the current shah. ¹¹ Diego de Miranda stated that Asad Bey's real task was "to give money to Don Antonio (Anthony Shirley) for the embassy if he finds him". ¹² Asad Bey died in Baghdad on his way home. ¹³ | Unknown | 1600 | Envoy, Royal purveyor |
| 15 Shahverdi Bey (<i>Shaver di bech</i>) According to Portuguese Francisco da Costa and Diego de Miranda, in 1600, during the Asad Bey's visit to Venice, there was another Safavid merchant called Shahverdi Bey "who knew the truth" about the embassy lead by Huseynali Bey Bayat and Anthony Shirley particularly, Shah Abbās's attitude towards the latter. ¹⁴ | Unknown | 1600 | Merchant |
| 16 Mohammad Çelebi (<i>Meemet Celebi</i>) According to the <i>libretto</i> of Zuane Zacra, Mohammad Çelebi sold six bags of rhubarb through the brokerage of Zacra. ¹⁵ | Unknown | 1600 | Merchant |
| 17 Haji Yusuf (<i>Agi Giusuf</i>) Haji Yusuf's name was recorded in Zuane Zacra's <i>libretto</i> in connection with selling seven bags of rhubarb with the mediation of Zacra. ¹⁶ | Unknown | 1600 | Merchant |
| 18 Khoja Fathi Bey Fathi Bey was the head of the largest and most memorable mission recorded to Venice. In addition to bearing Shah Abbās I's letter to the Venetian Doge, he was charged to sell the 139 bales of royal silk (of this number 65 bales of silk had previously been on Mehmed Emin's name and after the latter's death, they were transferred to Fathi Bey) ¹⁷ and procure the necessary goods for the Safavid court. | Unknown | 1603 | Envoy, Royal purveyor |
| 19 Khalil ibn Miri (<i>Calil figlio di Miri</i>) He was in the company of merchants attending Safavid envoy Fathi Bey. ¹⁸ | Nakhchivan | 1603 | Merchant |

| | Name | Provenance | Date of visit(s) to Venice | Profession |
|-----------|---|-------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|
| 20 | Garakhan ibn Haji Bayram (<i>Caracan del Agi Beiran</i>) See note in line no. 19. | Nakhchivan | 1603 | Merchant |
| 21 | Sahib ibn Murat (<i>Saap del Murat</i>) See note in line no. 19. | Tabriz | 1603 | Merchant |
| 22 | Hasan ibn Haji Abulgasim (<i>Assan del Agi Ebulcasin</i>) See note in line no. 19. | Nakhchivan | 1603 | Merchant |
| 23 | Hüseyn ibn Ali (<i>Ussein del Ali</i>) See note in line no. 19. | Nakhchivan | 1603 | Merchant |
| 24 | Zeynal Bey (<i>Ogià Seinà</i>) As a Safavid envoy to the Habsburg court of Rudolf II, Zeynal Bey arrived in Venice in the late spring of 1604 on his way to Prague. | Khorasan province | 1604 | Envoy |
| 25 | Khoja Shahsuvar Khoja Shahsuvar was at the head of the Safavid missions to Venice in 1613 and 1622. He died in London in August 1626 at the age of 44 (Pennant 1791, 267-8). ¹⁹ | Nava | 1613, 1622 | Envoy, purveyor |
| 26 | Khoja Aladdin Mohammad (<i>Oggià Àladin Mehemet</i>) Together with Khoja Shahsuvar, he headed the Safavid embassy to Venice in 1613. | Unknown | 1613 | Merchant |
| 27 | Khoja Hidayatullah (<i>Oggià Idaètullà</i>) He was in the company of merchants attending Safavid envoy Khoja Shahsuvar to Venice in 1613. | Unknown | 1613 | Merchant |
| 28 | Khoja Musa (<i>Oggià Musà</i>) See note in line no. 27. | Unknown | 1613 | Merchant |

| Name | Provenance | Date of visit(s) to Venice | Profession |
|---|------------|-------------------------------|------------|
| 29 Khoja Dervish (<i>Oggià Dèrvis</i>) See note in line no. 27 | Unknown | 1613 | Merchant |
| 30 Khoja Qubad (<i>Oggià Cubat</i>) See note in line no. 27 | Unknown | 1613 | Merchant |
| 31 Khoja Sultan (<i>Cogia Sultan</i>) He was mentioned in a letter dated 20 December 1613 by the Venetian consul in Aleppo Girolamo Morosini to the Venetian Senate. ²⁰ | Unknown | 1613 | Merchant |
| 32 Haji Eyvaz (<i>Aivas</i>) Together with Khoja Shahsuvar, he headed the Safavid embassy to Venice in 1622. | Tabriz | 1622 | Merchant |
| 33 Imad He was in the company of merchants attending Safavid envoy Khoja Shahsuvar to Venice in 1622. | Unknown | 1622 | Merchant |
| 34 Haji Murvarid (<i>Agi Murvarid</i>) As a royal merchant, he came to Venice with a recommendation letter from the Shah Abbās I. ²¹ | Unknown | Unknown, after 1618 | Merchant |
| 35 Haji Ali (<i>Agi Ali</i>) He was a companion of Haji Murvarid. See note in line no. 34. ²² | Unknown | Unknown, after 1618 | Merchant |
| 36 Mohammad Ali (<i>Meemet Ali</i>) He had been in Venice for more than 15 months before his testimony in May 1624. ²³ | Unknown | After 1621 | Merchant |
| 37 Hazimammad ibn Gazi (<i>Azimemat bin Cazi</i>) He had been in Venice for more than two years before his testimony in July 1624 and came there with Khoja Shahsuvar. In 1624, he was 46 years old. He was in the mirror and glass trade. ²⁴ | Tabriz | 1621-24 | Merchant |
| 38 Mohammad Bey (<i>Mamet Beeg</i>) He filed a petition to the Venetian government about a theft of 1 bale of silk belonging to him. ²⁵ | Unknown | 1622 | Merchant |

| | Name | Provenance | Date of visit(s) to Venice | Profession |
|--|--|------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|
| 39 | Baba Ali son of Galandar (<i>Babali figlio di Calander</i>) ²⁶ | Ardabil | 1623-27 | Merchant |
| He was among the Safavid merchants sent to Venice by the Safavid envoy to the Ottoman court Agha Riza Isfahani to sell royal silk in 1622. ²⁷ In 1624, he was 25 years old. He was also in the mirror and glass trade. | | | | |
| 40 | Mirza Ali (or Mir Zali) ²⁸ ibn Arvish Mohammad (<i>Mirza Allî bin Arvis Meemet</i>) | Tabriz | 1621-26 | Merchant |
| He was among the Safavid merchants sent to Venice by the Safavid envoy to the Ottoman court Agha Riza Isfahani to sell royal silk in 1622. He had visited Venice with Khoja Shahsuvar several times during the three-year period before he made his testimony in July 1624. At that time, he was 33 years old. | | | | |
| 41 | Mohammad ibn Hazi Salah (<i>Maomet dei Asi Salà</i>) ²⁹ | Tabriz | 1622-24 | Merchant |
| In 1624, he was 45 years old. | | | | |
| 42 | Ilyas (or Ulash) Bey (<i>Ulas Bech</i>) | Unknown | 1621 | Merchant |
| He was in the rhubarb trade. ³⁰ | | | | |
| 43 | Gazi Avaz (<i>Casi Aves</i>) ³¹ | Unknown | 1623 | Merchant |
| 44 | Mohammad Huseyn (<i>Mecmet Cossei</i>) ³² | Unknown | 1623 | Merchant |
| 45 | Mohammad Emin (<i>Mamed Emin</i>) ³³ | Unknown | 1623-24 | Merchant |
| Companion of Baba Ali. See note in line no. 39. | | | | |
| 46 | Mulla Gargeçay (<i>Mulla Carcechai</i>) ³⁴ | Unknown | 1623-24 | Merchant |
| Companion of Baba Ali. See note in line no. 39. | | | | |
| 47 | Haji Mohammad Ali (<i>Agi Mamed Ali</i>) ³⁵ | Unknown | 1623-24 | Chief Merchant |
| Head of the merchants who were sent to Venice to sell 69 bales of royal silk by the Safavid envoy to the Ottoman court Agha Riza Isfahani in 1622. | | | | |
| 48 | Ali Bali | Unknown | 1634-36 | Envoy, merchant |
| Ali Bali, who was dispatched by Shah Safi I, came to Venice to recover the proceeds from the sale of royal silk. | | | | |

| Name | Provenance | Date of visit(s) to Venice | Profession |
|--|------------|-------------------------------|------------|
| 49 Mohammad Bey (<i>Mehemet Bei</i>) | Unknown | 1636 (?) | Unknown |
| According to the Venetian bailo report to the Senate, dated 7 April 1636, a certain Mehmet Bey expressed his intention to visit Venice in order “to recover a particular credit in the amount of 12,000 <i>reali</i> of his master Emir Gune Khan ³⁶ from the hands of his fellow townsman Teymur Khan”. To that end, he asked the bailo to provide him with a recommendation letter addressed to the Venetian government. However, in the absence of additional evidence, it is not clear whether his visit to Venice took place or not. | | | |
| 50 “Deuvan” | Unknown | 1649 | Unknown |
| In 1649, he helped the runaway slave “Assolomamuto” of Rhodes in his attempt to escape from Italy via Venice (Rota 2009a, 21). | | | |
| 51 Seyfi agha (<i>Sep aga</i>) | Unknown | 1656 | Unknown |
| As a Safavid subject, he travelled to Paris with a passport issued by the Venetians (Pedani Fabris 1995, 228). | | | |
| 52 Yusuf agha | Unknown | 1656 | Unknown |
| Yusuf agha was a Safavid subject. After escaping from the Ottoman military camp on the island of Crete, he sought Venetian protection. On the way home to the Safavid state, the Venetian government entrusted him with a letter addressed to Shah Abbās II. ³⁷ | | | |
| 53 Molla Najaf (<i>Morla Nariaf</i>) | Unknown | Unknown | Merchant |
| He died from fever on 15 July 1690, at the age of 86. ³⁸ | | | |

Notes

- 1** ASVe, Collegio, Esposizioni Principi, fz. 3, 1 maggio 1580, c. 321r.
- 2** ASVe, Collegio, Esposizioni Principi, fz. 3, 1 maggio 1580, c. 321r.
- 3** ASVe, Consiglio di Dieci, Deliberazioni, Segrete, fz. 14, 27 ottobre 1570, unpaginated.
- 4** ASVe, Consiglio di Dieci, Deliberazioni, Segrete, fz. 15, 10 ottobre 1571, unpaginated. See also Rota 2015, 174-5.
- 5** ASVe, Miscellanea di carte non appartenenti a nessun Archivio, b. 29, *Il libretto dei contratti turcheschi di Zuane Zakra sensale*, 36r. For a study on this document, see Vercellin 1979.
- 6** ASVe, Miscellanea di carte non appartenenti a nessun Archivio, b. 29, *Il libretto dei contratti turcheschi di Zuane Zakra sensale*, c. 43v.
- 7** ASVe, *Lettere e scritture turchesche*, fz. 5, cc. 195rv.
- 8** ASVe, Senato, Deliberazione, Mar, fz. 157, 14 marzo 1603, unpaginated.
- 9** ASVe, Miscellanea di carte non appartenenti a nessun Archivio, b. 29, *Il libretto dei contratti turcheschi di Zuane Zakra sensale*, cc. 63v, 64v.
- 10** ASV, Fondo Borghese, serie II, 20, f. 192r.
- 11** ASV, Fondo Borghese, serie II, 20, f. 193v.
- 12** ASV, Fondo Confalonieri 22, f. 317v.
- 13** ASV, Fondo Confalonieri 22, f. 317v; ASVe, Quarentia criminal, fz. 114, 3 marzo 1603, unpaginated.
- 14** “Et piu di questo sta anchora in Vinegia un’altro mercadante del Rè di Persia

chiamato Shaver di bech il quale sa la verità di quest'embasciata et tanto la stima del Signor Don Antonio con il Rè di Persia". ASV, Fondo Confalonieri 22, f. 317v.

15 ASVe, Miscellanea di carte non appartenenti a nessun Archivio, b. 29, *Il libretto dei contratti turcheschi di Zuane Zacra sensale*, c. 74r.

16 ASVe, Miscellanea di carte non appartenenti a nessun Archivio, b. 29, c. 74v.

17 ASVe, SDM, fz. 157, 14 marzo 1603, unpaginated

18 ASVe, Senato, Deliberazione, Mar, fz. 157, 13 marzo 1603, unpaginated.

19 See also Ferrier 1973, 83-92.

20 "Qui si ritrova un'Agiamo chiamato Cogia Sultan che altre volte è stata a Venetia, et vorrebbe anco ritrovarvi con una quantità du sede, et onde chi, è stato dame, et làho essertato, et consigliato à venire assicurandolo che riceverà ogni buon trattamento". ASVe, Senato, Dispacci consoli, Aleppo, fz. 1, 20 dicembre 1613, unpaginated.

21 ASVe, Documenti Persia, no. 29. See "Appendix 13".

22 ASVe, Documenti Persia, no. 29. See "Appendix 13".

23 ASVe, Savi all'eresia, b. 72, 17 maggio 1624, unpaginated.

24 ASVe, Savi all'eresia, b. 72, 27 luglio 1624, unpaginated.

25 ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Costantinopoli, fz. 16, 1622, unpaginated.

26 ASVe, Savi all'eresia, b. 72, 27 luglio 1624, unpaginated; ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Costantinopoli, fz. 26, 24 aprile 1624, 21 agosto 1624, unpaginated.

27 "[...] alcuni Persiani con considerabile numero di balle di seda, et per haver più facile esito di esse, furono espediti per questa Città da Agenti [...] del Serrenissimo Re di Persia, due Persiani, uno chiamato Mirzali, et l'altro Babbali, qauli [...] et portorno balle 69 di sede [...] L'anno poi 1624 seguirno fra li di Mirzali, et Babali, discordie, et dissensioni per occasione del maneggio di detto denaro, che passatane notizia all'Eccellentissimo Collegio vedendosi, che il capitale che si diceva essere di raggione del sodetto Serenissimo [Re] di Persia, poteva essere delapidato". ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Costantinopoli, fz. 26, unpaginated.

28 ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Costantinopoli, fz. 26, 24 aprile 1624, unpaginated.

29 ASVe, Savi all'eresia, b. 72, 13 agosto 1624, unpaginated.

30 ASVe, Savi all'eresia, b. 72, 24 luglio 1621, unpaginated.

31 ASVe, Savi all'eresia, b. 72, undated, unpaginated.

32 ASVe, Savi all'eresia, b. 72, undated, unpaginated.

33 ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Costantinopoli, fz. 26, 24 aprile 1624, 21 agosto 1624, unpaginated.

34 ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Costantinopoli, fz. 26, 24 aprile 1624, 21 agosto 1624, unpaginated.

35 ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Costantinopoli, fz. 26, 24 aprile 1624, unpaginated. "Alcuni mercanti Persiani venuti li passati mesi in questa Città con alquanta seta consignata loro dall'ultimo Ambasciadore del Serenissimo Re di Persia in Costantinopoli di ragione di quella Maestà". ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Costantinopoli, fz. 26, 17 settembre 1624, unpaginated.

36 This should be Tahmaspqulu Khan Qajar, a former beylerbeyi (1625-1635) of Chukhur - Sa'd (Iravan) province of the Safavid Empire. Following the Ottoman conquest of Iravan, he defected to the Ottoman side. For more about Tahmaspqulu Khan Qajar, see Rota 2008.

37 ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Corti, fz. 54, 22 aprile 1656, unpaginated. See also Pedani Fabris 1995, 229-31; ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Corti, fz. 54, 22 aprile 1656, unpaginated.

38 ASVe, Provveditori alla Sanità, Necrologi Ebrei-Turchi, reg.997, c. 159v; See also Lucchetta 1997, 142.

Appendix 2

Letter of the Shah Abbās to Venetian doge Marino Grimani¹

In nome de idio Re di ciel et de la terra
et del suo prophetta Maumet Ali

Sah Abbās Re dessesso dalla benigna et signorile linea del gran Re humayiun Potentissimo et valoroso sultano et dominator del famoso regno di Persia con giustitia prudentia et honore – Ala eletta et sopranominata nazione del Messia profitizzato dal gran Re David – Altissimo et potente Signore posto et sentato nel eccelso et famoso trono di valore Serenissimo Principe di Venetia et dominator di tutto il suo Custodito paese et l'altissimo et grande idio faci per il suo fine sia meglio di quello estato per il passato con infiniti et gentil saluti quali convengono a simil regni et potentati la avisemo come per la anticha et intrinsicha amicitia che da gia anni estata tra le miej ecelssi antenati et la Serenita Vostra ne occorssso di mandar in quelle parte per comprare algune gentileze di quel luoco li molto honorati Cogia Geias [Iyas] et Emin Maumet [Mehmed] quali per esser ignari della lingua et costumi di quelli paesi con la presente amorevol nostra richiedemo da Vostra Serenita che per sua gran clementia non li priva dalla custodia del ssuo benigno ochio acio con facil modo posino comprare quello che a loro estato ordinato et parimente nel loro partire far li ussire da tutto il suo Custodito paese con sanita et senza inperdimento et gratiosamente mandarli in queste parte per la qual cossa ancor nui de qui restaremo in obbligo di tutto quello facesse bisogno a vostra serenita in ogni occasione che comandando ne la restara ottimamanete contenta et sadisfata.

datta in la Città di Casbin adi 8 della luna di febrer del 1005 [1597] milesimo
del propetta Maumeto.

Appendix 3

The Letter of Venetian Bailo in Istanbul Niccolò Barbarigo to the Council of Ten Dated 7 May 1579²

Illustrissimi etc.

Il Persiano dal quale ho inteso le cose contenute nella prima mia lettera scritta all'Eccellentissimo Senato è un Ussein mercante qualche fedra che suol fare viaggio in quella città, et mi afferma esser stato introdotto alcune volte nell'Eccellentissimo Collegio col mezo di messer Michel Membre Dragomanno, et di esser stato dimandato con molta confidentia delle cose di persiani et non sono molti mesi che parti ultimamente di quella città, questo per quello che egli dice è anco conossuto dal Re di Persia, et di qui gli espedisce qualche volta delle nove di questo paese et hà sempre notitia delle spie che vengono da quelle parti esso mi hà pregato à scriver a Vostro Signoria eccellentissima il nome suo, et dar loro aviso di haver havuto quelle nove da lui et havendoli detto io confidentemente che erano troppo grandi, et che

¹ ASVe, Lettere e scritture turchesche, fz. V, c. 195rv.

² ASVe, Capi del Consiglio di Dieci, Lettere ambasciatori, b. 5, 7 maggio 1579, cc. 81rv.

avvertisco bene di non perder la fede mi replicò costantemente ch'io li scrivessi pure, et che io le scrivesse in suo nome a Vostre Eccellentie et che esso sperava avanti che morisse far qualche viaggio in Venetia, et di haver anco qualche recognitione di queste communicationi perche se non haverà detto il vero non vuol esser stimato degno di premio ne della gratia di quel Serenissimo Dominio, et io nelli ragionamenti che ho havuti seco piu di una volta, l'ho sempre conosciuto huomo molto sensato, et mi pare molto informato delle cose di quei paesi ma anche per il vero molto affettionato alle cose del suo Re. Tra quatro o sei giorni vuol andar in Angeri [Ankara-?], et ritornerà qui a tempo del ritorno d'un huomo, che ha mandato gia vinti giorni al Re di Persia, che potria esser fra doi mesi et mezo in circa. Questo è verissimo Eccellentissimi Signori che questi sono qui in gran travaglio et stanno con estremo spavento del successo di questa guerra, et con gran dubbio di qualche notabile revolutione di questo Imperio in caso, che fussero molestati da Principi Xⁿⁱ [cristiani], et tutto il giorno vengono qui in casa d'i rinegati mei amici, i quali o che conservino anchora una buona intentione, o che si accomodino a i tempi presenti et forse alcuno anche per far qualche prova che dicono liberamente, che nessuna occasione si presentò mai piu bella ne più opportuna alla X^a [cristianità] con quali tutti però io procedo con ogni circospectione et riserva et cosi continuerò a fare, ma che ho giudicato mio debito di non di restar di rappresentar loro questo tanto, Gratie etc.

The Letter of Venetian Bailo in Istanbul Niccolò Barbarigo to the Council of Ten Dated 1 October 1579³

Illustrissimi etc.

Ussein [Huseyn] de Gongie [?] mercante persiano, che sarà portator di queste volendo al presente conferrirsi in Venetia dove è solito di far viaggio con sue mercantie mi hà ricercato con grandissima che in stantia ch'io voglia accompagnarlo con mie lettere a Vostro Signor Eccellentissimo, anchora che gli dica di esser ben conossuto di là come quello che è stato introdotto qualche volta nello Eccellentissimo Collegio, et confidentamente dimandato delle cose di Persiani, onde per che mi è parso che egli sia di bona mente verso qual Serenissimo Dominio si come è certo molto parziale et affettionato alle cose del suo Re per le communicationi che hà fatte meco tal hora di quanto egli veniva ad intender di successi di questa guerra ho giudicato esser bene di compiacerlo, et per intelligentia de Vostra Signoria eccellentissima questo è quello de scritto da me nella mie lettere di 7 maggio prossimopassato a loro dricciate et che mi diede quell'informatione che avisai per lettere del di medesimo nell'Eccellentissimo Senato, Gratie.

³ ASVe, Capi del Consiglio di Dieci, Lettere ambasciatori, b. 5, 1 ottobre 1579, c. 95r.

Appendix 4

Information on passage of Safavid envoy Zeynal Bey Shamlu through Venice to Prague and instruction of the Venetian Senate to its ambassador in Habsburg court to follow Zeynal Bey's Negotiations in Prague⁴

À XXIX Giugno

All'Ambasciador in Corte Cesarea

Con la Nave Liona venuta il mese passato di Soria arrivò in questa città un Persiano nominato Ogià Seinà della città di Corazan espedito come mercante dal Re di Persia dopo la presa di Tauris sono già otto mesi con lettere credentiali alla Maestà dell'Imperatore. Il suo ufficio, per quello, che si è riferito, sarà una efficace istanza, che sua Maestà Cesarea continui la guerra in Ungaria senza inclinar punto alla pace, con promessa, ch'esso Re amicitia perpetua verso di lei, et d'altri Principi Christiani continuerà la guerra contra Turchi da lui principiata per le promesse portategli à nome di sua Maestà Cesarea, et di altri Potentati dall'Ambasciador suo ritornato di Christianità. Detto Persiano è partito per Praga à. 26. del corrente con quattro, ò cinque de suoi, et ha seco un Christiano, che ha condotto di Aleppo nominato Angelo, perche li serva di Dragomano; Di tutto questo habbiamo voluto darvi avviso co'l Senato, acciò che servendovi di lume, et di informatione, possiate poi al suo arrivo à quella Corte penetrar tanto meglio nel suo negotio, per tenercene avisati, secondo quello, ch'è solito della vostra diligenza.

Appendix 5

First Audience of Safavid Envoy Ali Bali at the Venetian Collegio in 13 May 1634⁵

1634. à 13 maggio

Venuto nell'Ecc[ellentissi]mo Collegio Ali Balli, Persiano presentò a piedi del Ser[enissi]mo Principe tre Tapeti tessuti con oro e seta di tre braccia e mezzo l'uno nove pezze di sèssa bianca, et altre nove di Geurino pur bianco, et presentò insieme scrittura nella sua propria lingua di quello, che disse co'l mezo del Dragomano Scaramelli, che gli occorreva di esponder a nome del Re di Persia, la quale tradotta fu letta, presente esso Ali, et è la seguente... dopo la lettura della quale rese anco la lettera di Sua Maestà nominata in quella, che tradotta parimente, dice come segue... et dapoi aggiungendo altre parole in conformità interpretando esso Dragomano dell'affettione che portava il suo Re a questa Serenissima Republica et della stima grande che faceva di Lei, et della continuatione della sua amicitia havuta seco dai re suoi Precessori, rispose il Serenissimo Principe, che si rendevano molte gratie a Sua Maestà di questi segni del suo affetto, et della sua gentilezza che pienamente le era corrisposta dalla Republica la quale con sommo contento haveva intese in ogni tempo tutte le prosperità quel

⁴ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Costantinopoli, fz. 10, 29 giugno 1604, unpaginated.

⁵ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Costantinopoli, fz. 26, 13 maggio 1634, unpaginated.

Nobilissimo Regno, et haverebbe sentite sempre in avvenire tutte quelle di Sua Maestà Prencipe dottato di gran valore, et di tutte altre dignissime condizioni come ne contava la fama, et medesimamente, che ad esso Balli si offeriva ogni piacere, et per rispetto della Maestà, et della persona di lui; di che tutto havendo humilmente ringratiato, dicendo che altre volte era stato in questa Città con altro suoi fratello, et ricevutivi ottimi trattamento si licentiò, et parti.

Et poco dopo partito, conssignai io Secretario sottocritto di ordine dell'Eccellentissimo pien Collegio nelle stanze del Serenissimo Prencipe detti Tapeti et pezze di tele a miser Bortholo Cavalli Cassiero et Guardarobba di Sua Serenità presenti il Cavaliero di lei et Alessandro commandador alle porte dell'Eccellentissimo Collegio medesimo.

Moderante Scaramello

Secretario

Document 2⁶

Serenissimo Prencipe

Quello che disse hieri Ali Bali Agente del Re di Persia in lingua Turca nell'Ecc[ellentissim]o Coll[egi]o interpretando io Francesco Scaramella humilissimo servo di Vostra Serenità è in sostanza che si rallegrava dell'ottima salute del Serenissimo Prencipe. Che ringratiava con ogni maggior riverenza del dono, che sè gl'era fatto delli rinfrescamenti mandatigli à nome publico li giorni pasati.

Che dava una buona nova a sua Serenità, che il medesimo Re di Persia suo Signore era giunto per avisi, che tenèva con 200 mila combattenti sotto Vam [Van], et sperava di ben presto impatronirsene. In discorso à parte havendomi detto di più, che se prendeva quella Piazza in pochi mesi sarebbe stato in Aleppo, et Patron di tutta la Soria; essendo quella città la chiave di tutto il paese, che conoscendone il pericolo il Primo Visir haveva espedito d'Aleppo al Gran Signore a dimandar aiuti.

Che il Re di Persia a quello di Polonia haveva inviato Amb[asci]ado[re] per ecitarlo a non far la pace con Turchi, promettendo dal suo canto di tener fermo con gran forze la continuatione della guerra, et che ogni dì arivano novi messi Persiani a Costantinopoli per osservar li andamenti et apparecchi dei Turchi.

Disse anco con poche parole pur nell'Eccellentissimo Collegio, che aspettava rissoluzione circa il negotio per il quale era venuto con le lettere presentate di sua Maestà, acciò che potesse con la notitia della publica deliberatione essequire gl'ordini, che teneva.

⁶ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Costantinopoli, registro 22, 8 luglio 1634, c. 225v-226r.

Appendix 6

Last Audience of Safavid Envoy Ali Bali at the Venetian Collegio in 18 January 1636⁷

1635. 18 Genaro

Venuto nell'Ecellentissimo Collegio Ali Balli, mercante del Serenissimo Re di Persia, disse in lingua Turca, interpretando in Italiano il fedelissimo Dragoman Francesco Scaramelli, come segue.

Serenissimo Principe.

Dopo haver co atteso lungamente incontro di passaggio in questa Città à proposito di ritornarmene per la via di Terra in Persia, vedendo di non poterlo havere per le occorrenze della Guerra, che hà il Re mio signore col signor Turco, e che la Pace si v`à sempre più allontanando, ho risoluto di passar sopra Vasello che qui è pronto, et alla Vella in Inghilterra, per proseguire di la pare per Mare il mio viaggio et però prima di partire son venuto à riverire Vostra Serenità come è di mio debito, et à ringraziarla insieme delli molti favori fattime in tutto il tempo che mi sono fermato in questa Città, alli gli dovera corrisponder il Re mio Signore in tutte le occasioniò essendo stati conferiti in sua maestà principalmente.

Vengo anco à pregar Vostra Serenità à raccomandarmi a questo signore Ambasciador di Inghilterra, et al suo a quella Corte, et che havendo io impiegato tutto il denaro esborsatomi di ragione della Maestà Sua in mercantie, nell'estrattione di esse mi sia in qualche parte diminuito, et rilasciato il Datio, non gran per l'interesse di questo poco utile, ma in segno di honore anco in questo verso il Re, il quale nelle lettere che io portai alla Serenità Vostra havendole accennato, che per beneficio del reciproco commercio del suo regno, et queste parti, sarebbe stato se non bene, che qualche Mercante Venetiano di là vi fosse per introdurne il traffico, com'è seguito con Inghilterra et Fiadra, attendo di sapere, che rissoluzione se ne prendi lasciando qui per certi negocij da terminarei questo altro Persiano mio compagno, che mostro à cenno pure presente.

Rispose il Serenissimo Principe.

L'habbiamo sempre veduta volentieri, et tutto ciò, che si è potuto per grattificarla, et honorarla si è fatto con pienezza d'affetto in riguardo delle sodisfattioni della Maestà del Re di Persia, et del merito particolare anco della persona di lei sopra le cui istanze questi signori continueranno ad havere la solita con consideratione del nostro buon animo verso sua Maestà alla quale si è risposto nelle nostre lettere, che hora se le consegnamo per il suo recapito ad essa circa al commercio de nostri col suo nobilissimo Regno, i cui mercanti, et merci ci sarebbe carissimo amplexassero ogni miglior negotio in questo nostro stato come dal canto nostro in tutte le occasione si abbracciarà il facilitarne ogni più utile incaminamento, et caro ci riesce resti qui il suo Compagno negociandovi egli da molte tempo in qua, che hà la nostra lingua, et vi è conosciuto assai per un Galant'huomo. A lei desiderandosi il buon viaggio, et felice arrivo nè suoi Paesi.

⁷ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Costantinopoli, registro 23, 18 gennaio 1635 (*more veneto*), cc. 145r-146r.

Repplicò egli che le gratie recevute si sarebbero da lui, et da suoi portate, et publicate in ogni luogo per veri effetti della somma benignità, e grandezza della Serenissima Republica, et presentato memoriale in conformità di quanto di sopra è espresso, che dice di più come seque, presa licenza partì.

Et dopo uscito di audienza l'Illustrissimo signor Giacomo Marcello Cassiero dell' Eccellentissimo Collegio refferi, che si trattava la compreda di un Armatura tutta rimessa ad'oro che era dell'altimo signor Duca di Mantova, e che due Terzette da Cavallo ordinate dovevano arrivadi di giorno da Bressa per mandare il tutto in dono, conforme alla deliberazione dell'Eccellentissimo Senato alla Maestà del Re di Persia, et i cento reali di donativo à detto Ali Balli Agente di Sua Maestà si sarebbero impiegati in rinfrescamenti di mesa per il suo viaggio che se gli sarebbero fatti presentare al Vasello in Vasello giudicandosi che tale impiego gli sarebbe stato più grato et più comodo di ogni altro di qual si voglia altra sorte.

Moderante: Scaramello
Secretario.

Appendix 7

Recommendation of Ali Bali by the Venetian Senate to the Resident Ambassador of England in Venice⁸

à 26 Genaro in Pregadi

Che à nuova cortese publica dimastratione, oltre le alter deliberatisi verso la persona di Ali Bali, come Mercante del Serenissimo Re di Persia, sia anco sopra l'istanze ultimamento da lui portateci, et contenute nella sua esposizione, et memorial gia letti per l'occasione del suo imbarco verso Inghilterra di ritorno in Persia, mandato per un Nadaro della Cancelleria à raccomandarlo à nome nostro al signor Ambasciador Inglese qui residente, per lettere sue di favore al medesimo suo passaggio in conformità scrivendosene da Noi à quella conte all'Ambasciador Corrarò; et gli sia relasciato in dono il Datio per ducati duecento delle robbe comprate da esso per detta Maestà col denaro ragion di lei nell'estrazione di quello da questa Città, commettendosi, che così da quelli à chi spetta debba esser interamente essequito.

1635, 26 genaro
Moderante: Scaramello
Secretario.

à 26 Genaro
All'Ambasciador in Inghilterra

Venendosene à qualle volta, imbarcato in questa Città sopra Vasello Inglese Ali Bali mercante del Serenissimo re di Persia, che qui si è trattenuto alcuni mesi et che prende cotesto camino per il rotorno à sua Maestà, vi commettemo col Senato di assisterlo del vostro favore, in tutto ciò che troverete esser giusto, et conveniente

⁸ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Costantinopoli, registro 23, 26 gennaio 1635 (*more veneto*), cc. 146v-147r.

per detto suo passaggio, et per continuata publica benigna di mostratione anco in questa vostra assistenza verso la persona di lui oltre le altre, che se gli sono usate de qui al suo partire, con là haverlo tutto altresì raccomandare puo per nome nostro in tal conformità anco à questo signor Ambasciador Inglese presso di noi residente.

Moderante: Scaramello
 Secretario.

Appendix 8

List of Gifts Presented to the Ottoman Sultan Selim II from Shah Tahmāsp I in February 1568 by His Ambassador Shahqulu Sultan Ustajlu⁹

In lettere di Costantinopoli di 24 febbraio 1567

Presente mandato dal Re di Persia presentato al Signor Turco dal suo Ambasciadore

- 1 Alcorano scritto a tre righe per faccia.
- 1 Libro della forma, che devono essere le lettere, che un Principe manda all'altro co'le carte tutte miniate d'oro con 259 figure.
- 3 Bussoli d'argento pieni di mùmia fatta in elettuario.
- 9 Buste coperte di veluto piene di pennacchj negri d'un uccello che in Persia detto cighè.
- 9 Borse piene di rocca di Turchine.
- 9 Piatti grandi di Porcellana.
- 9 Taglieri di Porcellana.
- 1 Candelier di Porcellana con la bocca d'argento gioiellata.
- 1 Carcasso¹⁰ dorato con alquante frezze.
- 81 Archi Persiani.
- 9 Selle alla Persiana con una cassetta per una all'arcione co'le abay dorate, con le Teghelty di panno, et briglie di sagry alla Persiana.
- 1 Paviglione de 16 ferse fordrato di damasco, et coperto di raso cremesino co'la colonna depinta di azzurro con argento alla incastratura, et una sopra coperta verde, et 3 ombrelle da mettere alla porta del Paviglione, una d'oro lavorata alla azemina, una di raso, et una d'ermesino, et la loro colonna depinta d'azzurro co'le giunture di argento miniata d'oro e gioiellata, e due mute di corde di seta, e d'oro, una per il Paviglione, et l'altra per le ombrelle.
- 6 Feltri grandi dal Corassan per metter in terra.
- 3 Tappeti di seta piccoli.
- 21 Tappeti grandi 3 per mettere sotto le ombrelle, et 4 sotto il paviglione, 2 d'oro, e 2 di seta li altri 14 sono bellissimi da Chermany [Kirman], e dal Corassàn [Khorasan].
- 81 Falconi quali per esser freddi grandi si sono lassati al Bassà d Esdrum [Erzurum].

⁹ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci ambasciatori, Costantinopoli, fz. 2, 24 febbraio 1567, c. 515r.

¹⁰ Quiver.

Presente fatto da dall'Ambasciadore al Serenissimo Signore

- 1 Alcoran.
- 1 Paviglion di 20 ferse.
- 1 Tapetto piccolo d'oro, e di seta.
- 2 Tappeti grandi Persiani.
- 1 Feltre dal Corassàn.
- 9 Lame¹¹ di scimitarra azimine.
- 9 Archi dal Corassàn.
- 9 Carcassi.
- 9 Mazzi di frezze [frecce].

Appendix 9

List of Gifts Presented to the Ottoman Sultan Murad III from Shah Tahmāsp I in May 1576 by His Ambassador Mohammad Khan Tokhmaq Ustajlu¹²

In lettere di Costantinopoli 24 Maggio 1576

Presente del Re di Persia, presentato dall'Ambasciadore suo al baciare della mano.

- Alcorani grandi no. 9.
- Alcorani piccioli no. 9.
- Libretti di canzoni, et altre poesie no. 63.
- Sfogli con esempi da scrivere di varie sorte di lettere no. 254
- Ligazzi nove di penne d'Aairon¹³ al no. di 6900.
- Rocca di Turchine borse numero. 29.
- Lacrime di cervo, scatole numero. 3.
- Mumie naturali cavate dalle minere, et non sono di corpi humani, scatole numero 3.
- Un padiglion grande di trenta tre ferse, ricamato di fiori alla Persiana, et fodrato di raso cremesino.
- Un'ombrella, che va'avanti al padiglione di raso cremesino, lavorata d'oro, et d'argento.
- Un'altro padiglion fatto à modo di cupula di lignami rimessi, et tutti doradi; Il quale ha poi un'altro padiglione, che lo ricuopre; et serve la cupula, come per camera Reggia entro detto padiglione.
- Le colonne delli detti padiglioni sono in quattro pezzi, tutte gioielate, et miniate.
- Tapeti di veluto de diversi colori numero 9.
- Tapedi grandi di seta numero 34.
- Tapedi grandissimi di seta numero 2.
- Tapedi moschetti numero. 14.
- Felzade¹⁴ d'orassan [Khorasan] numero 10.
- Tapeti di lana finissima numero 5.

¹¹ Blades.

¹² ASVe, Senato, Dispacci ambasciatori, Costantinopoli, fz. 9, 24 maggio 1576, c. 100r.

¹³ Heron.

¹⁴ Woolen blankets.

Presente dell'Ambasciadore

Un'Alcorano

Lacrime di Cervo una scatola

Tapeti di seta numero 2.

Felzade d'orassan no. 3.

Codde da metter al collo alli cavalli di vitriso marino no. 9

Scimitare no. 9.

Archi no. 9.

Toche no. 9.

Gottonine d'Azemina no. 9.

Appendix 10

List of Gifts Presented to the Ottoman Sultan Murad III by Safavid Ambassador Ibrahim Khan in 1582¹⁵

Il presente fatto dall'Ambasciadore di Persia

Cinque Alchorani legati con oro, et gioie interno.

Cinque Tapeti Persiani di seda, di oro, et di argento.

Cinque lame alla Zemina [Ajam].

Una lacrima di Cervo, grande come uno otto di gallina, fornita di oro intorno, et gioie.

Un sacchetto di Turchine.

Appendix 11

List of Gifts Presented to Ottoman Sultan Mehmed III from Shah Abbās I by Safavid Ambassador Zulficar Khan Qaramanlu in January 1597¹⁶

Nota del presente fatto al Gran Signor dall'Ambasciator del Re di Persia.

Un libro d'Alcoran scritto di mano di Artimon di Brun.¹⁷

Un altro scritto di man di Isnat.

Un altro che si chiama Murechagi.¹⁸

Un libro che si chiama Nusetusafā [Nuzhat al-safa] che vuol dire paradiso di allegrezza.

Un altro simile.

Un libro nominato Gralistan [Gulistan], che vuol dire Rosario, il autore di quello libro è stato Secsade [Sadi] predicatore

¹⁵ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci Costantinopoli, fz. 16, 14 aprile 1582, c. 35r.

¹⁶ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci ambasciatori, Deciferazioni, Costantinopoli, registro 11, 257-9.

¹⁷ Abraham de Bruyn (1539-1587?), Flemish engraver. Dutch artist and traveller Cornelis de Bruyn (1652-1726/7).

¹⁸ Might be Agha Mirak, a Safavid illustrator and painter.

Un altro libro che si chiama Divanafis [Divan-i Hafiz] che vuol dire libro di rime.
 Un libro che si chiama Seilvemegranon che vuol dire innamoramento.
 Un altro libro che si chiama Divanesai [Divan-i Shahi or Shahname] che vuol dire croniche de Imperatori.
 Veluti tessuti a oro con opera vesti N 9.
 Broccadi tessuti con oro veste N 18.
 Rizzo [riccio]¹⁹ sopra rizzo d'oro veste N. 9.
 Bezuar pietre contra veneni legate in oro et muschio N. 5.
 Mumia Miticali [misqal] 27 che vuol dire un peso veludi di diversj colori schietti veste N. 18.
 Damasco veste N. 18.
 Damasco a opera veste N. 9.
 Mezzo raso veste N. 27.
 Tabino veste N. 18.
 Un padiglione da campo velluto ricamato d'oro, et raso con le corde di seta et con le vere d'oro con gioie.
 Un baldacchin di veluto ricamato d'oro a opera con carde di seta et mazze d'argento
 Tappedi grandi fatti in Chierman [Kirman] N. 2. di brazza 14 di lunghezza
 Tapedi fatti in Corassan [Khorasan] N. 2. di brazza 10 l'uno
 Tapedi fatti in Nesaheti [Mashhad] tessuti con oro grandi N. 2.
 Tapedi di velluti tessuti con oro N. 2.
 Tapedo tessuto con oro N. 1.
 Chiezzes fatti a opera in Chierman N. 3.
 Pelizze del color del cielo N. 9.
 Archi fatti in Corassan N. 27.
 Frezze²⁰ mazzi 9 a 30 per mazzo
 Spade schiette N. 27.
 Cavalli corsieri con le staffe et coperte di damasco N. 9.
 Ahacchi in Gen N. 9.
 Carcassi da frezze N. 9.

Appendix 12

List of Gifts Presented to Ottoman Sultan Osman II from Shah Abbās I by Safavid Ambassador Yadigar Ali Sultan in 1619²¹

Nota del presente portato in Divano dall'Ambasciadore di Persia

Seda, soma – n.ro: 50.
 Scimitarra gioielata - n.ro: 1.
 Archi da frezze n.ro: 27.
 Tapedi, colli – n.ro: 67.
 Pavion da campo – n.ro: 1.
 Pelle de leon pardo, colli – n.ro: 2.
 Lupi cervieri – n.ro: 37.

¹⁹ Uncut loop.

²⁰ Arrows.

²¹ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci ambasciatori, Costantinopoli, fz. 87, 1 luglio 1619, c. 303r.

Volpe nere in un mazzo – n.ro: 6.
 Veste di panno d'oro in pezza – n.ro: 32.
 Veste di veluto à pelo, d'alto e basso con oro e schiette - n.ro: 24.
 Veste in pezza di damasco Persian – n.ro: 9.
 Faccioli ricamadi con oro da profumarsi – n.ro: 16.
 Detti schietti, postoni da cingersi, tovaglie, et altri faccioli vergati, in tutto pezzi in circa – n.ro: 100.
 Pezze di setta – n.ro: 27.

Appendix 13

Italian Translation of the Letter of Protection Issued by Shah Abbās I to the Royal Merchants Haji Murvarid and Haji Ali²²

Traduzione fatta dal Nores d'un Comandato del Re di Persia
 Presentato da Agi [Haji] Murvarid mercante Persiano del teneret infra
 Sach Abbās Servo di Dio.

Con questa Real carta si commetto à tutti li Giudici, et Governatori del mio amplissimo Regno et à tutti li Datiari, Gabellieri, et altri Ministri che sono nel mio stato, che capitando per occasione di traffico in ogni Città, luoco, et passo con le sue mercantie, il lator di questa real carta nominato Agi Murvarid, uno delli Mercanti, che negotiano per la mia inclita, et eccelsa Corte, non sia egli impedito, et molestato da alcuno, ma favorito, agiutato, et protetto da ogn'uno, accio che possa attender sicuramento; et con animo quieto alli suoi negotii et che niuno ardisea di contrattenire à questo mio eccelso Comandante sotto pena della mia disgratia. Di più venendo con esso Agi Murvarid un altro mercanto, nominato Agi Ali, con una quantità di seda di nostra ragione, sia ancor'egli protetto, et favorite in ogni luoco, senza che niuno ardisea di dargli alcuna molestia, et disturbo.

Dato nella Città di Casbin nella luna di silcadi [Zulqada] l'anno 1027 di Macometo,
 cio è nel mese di Novembre 1618.

²² ASVe, Documenti Persia, no. 29.

Appendix 14

Inventory of the Remaining Goods and Merchandise Belonging to Safavid Envoy Fathi Bey, Brought Back to Venice Following His Arrest in Alexandretta (İskenderun) in 1603 on His Way to the Safavid Court²³

1604. à 18 Gennaro.

Inventario fatto alla presentia del Clarissimo Signor Ruzier Ruzini savio alla mercantia delle infrascritte robbe, che si dicono esser dell'Agente del Re di Persia venute in questa Città con la Nave Moresina, et Agustina, et ciò in esecuzione della parte dell' Eccellentissimo Senato di 23. Dicembre prossimo passato.

In una cassa quadra:

Un bacil[e] d'ariento tondo lavorato con marche di animali.

Un ramin[o] d'argento con un fazzoletto intorno.

Una seradura todesca in un sachetto.

Una crovata vecchia de pele.

Una veste di Damasco cremesini usada da Donna.

Un cavezzo de panno roan tagliado per una crovata.

Un sachetto di retagi de panni diversi.

Un paro di zoccoli alti quarte 212 me. da donna.

Scattole 9 de spechetti piene.

Una scattola con un vaso de vero dorado.

Cortelli numero cinque di fontego con le sue vazine.

Un fazzoletto migropado con cose vechie, et doi toleri²⁴ pareno falsj.

Un ligazzetto di un pezzo, o, cavezzo di sessa.

Una casella quadra de specchi in libretto.

Un brazzolar de ferro.

Una scattola di rasaorj.

Un ligazzetto de carta da scriver.

Un ligazzetto de pele agneline.

Un ruodolo di retratti, o figure in tella.

Un sachetto de sabion da hore.

Una scattola con occhiali.

Un sachetto di zenzaro.

Un ligazzetto di doi para di scarpe.

Una cassetta di oro pele.

Un sachetto piccolo di cera.

In un'altra cassella quadra:

Una scattola di corone.

Una scattola di ariento vivo.

Un fagotto di cavezzi di mussolo.

²³ Senato, Deliberazioni Costantinopoli, fz. 10, 18 gennaio 1604 (*more veneto*), unpaginated.

²⁴ A thaler was one of the large silver coins minted in the states and territories of the Holy Roman Empire and the Habsburg monarchy during the Early Modern period.

Una scattola con bossoli di osso
 Un corto coerto di bordo
 Un scurlier di legno.
 Una scattola con campanelle.
 Un fazzuol, o cavezzo da coltre.
 Tagien de peltre numero 9.
 Alcune scattole rosse una dentro l'altra.
 Un cavezzo di Damasco con opera d'oro.
 Un pomolo di legno da strissar carta.
 Sabion da hore sachetto uno.
 Cortelli longhi numero 5 con le vazine de fontego.
 Un mazzo di braghesse, et drappi usadj.
 Tre pezze di telle da coltre.
 Una crovata turchina fodra di varj.
 Un commesso turchin.
 Un sacchetto de pele con pettenj.
 Doi pam di zuccaro.
 Una crovata de bordo.
 Un cavezzo de Bordo de seda.
 Scattole rivolte in carta con confettion tutte marze.
 Un ligazzetto di specchietj.
 Una scattola di forfette da barbier, et altri ferrj.
 Una certa piera ritondo ligada in legno.
 Un ligazzo con pezzi de sessa dentro.
 Una tazza de meza nosa d'India.
 Un vaso di terra bianca longo co'l coverchio d'arzenzo; non fù altramente aperto,
 pieno di cuscini quattro di piuma.
 Un mazzo de diverse robbe usade da vestir di poco momento.
 Un altro fagotto simile.
 Un feraletto co'l suo scuro d'osso.
 Doi pere tonde.
 Un facciol con chiave dentro.
 Un fazzuol alla Moresca.
 Una scattola di solimato.
 Doi cortelli con piera da guzzar.
 Doi Campanelle.
 Un sachetto con scarpe turchine.
 Un fazzuol rosso.
 Un cavezzo de bombazina.²⁵
 Un secchieletto de latton.
 Un bacil de latton.

Nella terza cassa:

Zacchie de maggia de ferro numero: 16.
 Maggie dette pezzi numero: 26.
 Verigole, numero: 2.
 Tre Braghierj.
 Un sacchetto de corone de Ambri falsi.

²⁵ A fabric originally made of silk or silk and wool, and now also made of cotton and wool or of wool alone.

Nella quarta cassa:

Una cassella d'Arzento legata con crestalli de Montagna lavorati à fазze, con collonne di cristallo molto ricca, vaga, et bella, et per quanto si, è, veduto da una fazzada anco ben conditionata.

Li, è, poi appresso il Clarissiamo messier Francesco Moresini.

Una Armatura, et tre Archibusj.

Archives and Sources

Abbreviations and Glossary of Terms

| | |
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| AGAD | Central Archives of Historical Records in Warsaw |
| ASF | Archivio di Stato di Firenze |
| ASV | Archivio Apostolico Vaticano |
| ASVe | Archivio di Stato di Venezia |
| BAV | Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana |
| BNM | Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana |

More veneto (m.v.) The calendar used in the Republic of Venice, until its fall in 1797, corresponded to the oldest Roman calendar where March was the first month of the year. As a result, the months of January and February were always reckoned as belonging in *more veneto* to the previous year from the Gregorian years. *More veneto* means ‘according to the Venetian custom’. For example, January 1635 m.v. corresponded to January 1636 of the Gregorian calendar.

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Mediceo del Principato 4274a.

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- Senato, Deliberazioni Costantinopoli, fzz. 6, 10, 14, 16, 26.
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The emergence of the Safavid Empire in the early sixteenth century coincided with the widening of Ottoman expansion eastward and the exploration by European powers, especially by Venice, of the possibilities of forming alliances against the Ottomans with the involvement of the Safavids.

Drawing on the documents from the Venetian State Archives and other contemporary sources, this book focuses mainly on some aspects of Safavid diplomacy, including the language of the Safavid polity, the role of European subjects as interpreters for the shahs, material and visual characteristics of Safavid diplomatic letters to Venice, the attitude of the Safavids towards resident diplomacy, Europeans' perception of Safavid diplomatic practices, the characteristics of the Safavid embassies to Venice, and the Ottoman factor in Safavid-Venetian relations.

Ahmad Guliyev is a Leading Researcher and Associate Professor at the Institute of History of Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences. Former Marie Curie Fellow at Ca' Foscari University Venice, he conducted research within the project titled *SAFVEN. West Meets East in Venice: Cross-Cultural Interactions and Reciprocal Influences Between the Safavids and Venetians*. He is an author of articles, one edited volume, and a monograph devoted to various aspects of the Safavid history, especially on the Safavid-Ottoman relations, diplomatic relations between the Safavid state and European powers, and Anglophone historiography of the Safavid history.



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