

'Thou glorious kingdome, thou chiefe of empires': Persia in seventeenth-century travel literature

Article

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'Thou glorious kingdome, thou chiefe of Empires': Persia in Early Seventeenth-Century Travel Literature

The late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries saw a rise in European travel to Persia, and consequently in writings about such travel.¹ Many of these emanated from the group surrounding the brothers Anthony and Robert Sherley, who first travelled to the East in 1598 and whose experiences in Persia were documented in a range of texts published in the early seventeenth century. The Sherleys' journey to Persia was begun from Italy; originally bound for Ferrara in the service of the Earl of Essex, they eventually arrived in Persia via Venice in December 1598, with the aim of promoting English interests there and assessing the potential for trade.² It is uncertain whether the Persian expedition was undertaken with or without Essex's knowledge or approval; neither brother went back to England before the earl's death in 1601.

After several months in Persia, Anthony returned to Europe in 1599 in company with _____, on an ambassadorial visit to a series of European courts.³ Robert, the younger brother, remained in Persia in the service of the Safavid ruler, Shah 'Abbas I; he returned to Europe himself as 'Abbas's ambassador in 1609 and subsequently spent two extended periods in London, from 1611 to 1613, and from 1623 to 1627.⁴ Both Sherley brothers, though born Protestant, are believed to have converted to Catholicism whilst in Persia, a fact which was probably known in England by the early years of James VI and I's reign.⁵ Anthony

Sherley, initially forbidden to return to England by Elizabeth I because of his unauthorized departure, lived out his years mostly in Spain; Robert, unsuccessful in gaining James's support for trade alliances with Persia, died there in disfavour with 'Abbas in 1628.⁶

The Sherleys' time in Persia, and the publication of the literature that surrounded their exploits there, occurred during a period when English relations with the East, and those of Persia with its neighbours, were changing. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Ottoman Empire and Persia had been in conflict for many years. 'Abbas I had been obliged to sign away large amounts of his territory to the Ottomans on his accession to the throne in 1587, in order to give himself time to settle land disputes elsewhere. In 1603, the hostilities which had flared on and off between the Safavids and Ottomans for over a century were reignited when 'Abbas sought to recover the most significant of the provinces which had fallen to Ottoman control.⁷

At the same time, changes in Anglo-Ottoman relations affected English attitudes to Persia. As Matthew Dimmock has recently shown, James took a different approach to the Ottoman Turks from that of Elizabeth. Long known for his hostility towards the Ottomans, James portrayed them as a nation of 'faithles' and 'circumcised Turband Turkes' battling 'the baptiz'd race', in the revised version of his poem on the Battle of Lepanto that was published for his coronation in 1603.⁸ In 1601, the king had written to 'Abbas to praise his military successes against the Ottomans and hint at future help from England in these endeavours.⁹ As Dimmock

has noted, the peace made with Spain in 1604 and the commitment to joint resistance to the Turk as the common enemy of Christendom showed 'both to his own realm and to courts across Europe that English policy had decisively turned away from the associations cultivated by his predecessor'.¹⁰ The early years of the seventeenth century thus witnessed an increase in aggression between the Safavids and the Ottomans and overtures of a closer relationship between England and Persia from James, which had immediate consequences for Anglo-Persian relations. Increased trade with Persia, a long-held English interest, and closer diplomatic involvement, now seemed possible.¹¹ English travel writings about Persia from this period, such as those about the Sherleys' mission, were often written in support of such possibilities.

This article is interested in the presentation of Persia in England during this period within this context; in particular it focuses on the ways in which Persia was contrasted to the Ottoman Empire in early seventeenth-century travel narratives, and the use to which these contrasts were put by fictional writings based on such narratives. In order to explore these questions, the article falls into two parts. The first examines the travel narratives of English visitors to Persia, and in particular those based around the voyages of the Sherley brothers. It examines how these narratives use their awareness of Islamic sectarian division to portray Persia as a good potential trading partner in preference to the Ottoman Empire. The second part of the article examines how a play by John Day, William Rowley and George Wilkins, *The Travailes of the Three English Brothers* (1607), builds on the material

provided by the travel narratives, and specifically their recognition of Islamic sectarian division, to develop a fantasy model of how relations between Persia and England might function. The evidence of these writings is that travellers to Persia in the early seventeenth century sought to emphasise the possible unity and closeness between England and Persia through the presentation of Persian religious identity as potentially close to Christianity.

* * *

Information on Persia and the Ottoman Empire reached early seventeenth-century readers of English in a variety of ways. These included historical texts, such as Giovanni Tommaso Minadoi's *The History of the Warres Betweene the Turkes and the Persians* (1595) and Giovanni Botero's influential *Historicall Description of the Most Famous Kingdomes and Common-weales in the Worlde* (translated by Abraham Hartwell in 1603) and general or geographical works, like George Abbot's *A Briefe Description of the Whole Worlde* (1599) and Peter Heylyn's *Microcosmus* (1621). Accounts of individual travellers to the region were also available, such as William Biddulph's *The Travels of certain Englishmen into Africa, Asia, Troy, Bythinia, Thracia, and to the Blacke Sea* (1609) and John Cartwright's *The Preachers Travels* (1611). Two of Anthony Sherley's English companions, William Parry and George Manwaring, as well as his French steward Abel Pinçon, wrote reports of their time in Persia and the Ottoman Empire in the early 1600s, in addition to Anthony's own *A True Report of Sir A Sherlies Journey* (printed in 1600 and immediately suppressed), and *Sir Anthony*

Sherley his Relation of his Travels into Persia, printed in 1613.¹² In addition, the publication of Anthony Nixon's relation of all three brothers' travels, *The Three English Brothers*, which appeared in 1607, the play by Day, Rowley and Wilkins which was based on Nixon's pamphlet and first performed in the same year, and a pamphlet by Thomas Middleton, entitled *Sir Robert Sherley* and printed in 1609, all attempted to build interest in and support for the Sherleys at home. Later diplomatic missions to Persia would also result in publications about the country. Thomas Herbert, for example, who was attached to the first English ambassador in Persia, Sir Dodmore Cotton, wrote of his travels in Persia from 1627 in *A Relation of Some Years Travaile* (1634).

Early seventeenth-century travel literature often records positive impressions of Persia, frequently making explicit comparison to the Ottoman Empire. In Herbert's account, Persia is portrayed as being home to people who are courteous to strangers, and also suitably strong and warlike: 'No Nation in the Uniuerse has better nor more daring spirits in fight or exercise, then *Persia* has'.¹³ The Italian diplomat Giovanni Botero also suggested that 'the forme of government amongst this nation is not like the gouernment of anie other Mahumetan people: neither is there to be seene the like policie in anie place through the whole east, as amongst the Persians.'¹⁴ Anthony Sherley even indicated that Persia could provide a political model to be imitated elsewhere: 'the fashion of his [the Persian shah's] government differing so much from that which we call barbarousnesse, that it may justly serve

for as great an *Idea* for a Principality, as *Platoes* Common-wealth did for a Government, of that sort.¹⁵ The Persians, governed by a monarch who claimed to be a descendent of 'Ali himself (that is, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law), were renowned in the seventeenth century as a submissive people who followed their monarch's commands without question.¹⁶

For Anthony Sherley, Persian territories are '*better inhabited, better governed, and in better obedience, and affection*' than those of the Ottomans.¹⁷ Writing of his travels through Asia twenty-five years later, Herbert also noted that 'the *Turkes* be not comparable to the *Persian* for magnanimity and noblenesse of mind' (p. 145). The superior treatment of Europeans in Persia was naturally a focus for many travellers; thus we find Manwaring insisting that 'the country of Persia is far more pleasant for a stranger to live in than the *Turks*' country'.¹⁸ Parry also mentioned the different treatment that might be expected in each place in terms that accord Persia an Edenic status: 'we then happily entred the King of *Persiaes* country, where vpon our first entrance we thought we had bin imparadized, finding our entertainment to be so good, and the maner of the people to be so kinde and curteous (farre differing from the *Turkes*)'.¹⁹ Pinçon, too, emphasised the difference between Turk and Persian, and characterised it as intentional on behalf of the Persians: 'les Persans ont en grande abomination les Turcs, les reputant impurs en leur loy'.²⁰

This reference to the divergence in 'law' between Persians and Ottomans attests to an important way in which their dissimilarity was understood in religious

terms. Since the start of Safavid rule in Persia, which began with the reign of Shah Isma'il I in 1501, Persia had been predominantly a Shi'ite state, whilst the Ottoman Empire remained largely Sunni.²¹ Shi'ism, the second largest denomination in Islam after Sunnism, is characterised by its attention to the spiritual authority of Muhammad's family, and especially his daughter Fatima and her husband 'Ali and their descendants. From the Shi'ite perspective, 'Ali was the rightful successor of the Prophet Muhammad; the word shi'ism or *al-shi'a* derives from *shi'at 'Ali* or 'the party of Ali', and many early references to the differences between Shi'ism and Sunnism identify attention to 'Ali as a Shi'ite characteristic. The sectarian divide between Shi'ite and Sunni had played a part in the hostilities between the Safavids and the Ottomans during this time.²²

Descriptions of Persian religious practice demonstrate that early seventeenth-century travellers comprehended that the sectarian division between Ottoman and Persian was significant and potentially useful. Several contemporary accounts speak of the Persians in terms which stress the superiority of their faith over that of the Ottomans, whilst recognising that both states are Islamic. For Parry, writing of his time in Antioch, the behaviour of the Ottomans, 'besides that they are damned Infidells, and Zodomitically Mahomets', justifies 'the hate we christians doe justly holde them in' (10). Whilst recognising that the faith of the Persians is similar in 'devotion', i.e., in its practical manifestations, he notes that they are 'somewhat

different in religion': 'As the Persian praieth only to *Mahomet*, and *Mortus Ally*, the Turke to those two, and three other that were *Mahomets* servants' (23).

Parry was not the only European traveller to make a feature of this division between Sunni and Shi'a, and sectarian differences within Islam had long been noted.²³ Herbert's relation of his Eastern travels during the 1620s includes an explanation of the dissimilarity in belief and practice between Ottoman and Persian. Herbert describes how sectarian disagreement served political ends, with Persian establishment of Shi'ism envisaged as 'a plot to make a perpetuall hatred between the *Turkes* and them, and to re-establish the Scepter in the line of *Mortis Haly*' (159). The narrative reports that this purpose was achieved by Shah Isma'il I (the founder of the Safavid dynasty), who 'perswades the *Persians* that *Abubecher*, *Omar* and *Ozman*, the three immediate *Caliphs* or Successours to *Mahomet*', were 'Villanes and Impostures, that most unjustly they opposed *Mortis Haly*, Mahomets sonne in Law, and heire by Legacie'. Although the Ottomans pray to these caliphs, the Persians 'thinke otherwise of them, as enemies to *Mahomet*, and all good men, and that all their Disciples were Toades, the of-scum of the earth & vile Apostates'. In return, the Ottoman Sunni Muslims 'hate them like Dogges, and call them *Rafadi* and *Caffarrs*, or Schismaticks, and themselues *Sonnj*, and *Mussulmen*, which is *truly faithfull*' (159). Herbert goes onto explain that the difference between Shi'ite Persian and Sunni Ottoman causes disruption between the two nations and faiths: 'this diverstitie of

opinion causing that great opposition and hatred twixt the *Turke* and *Persian*,
apparent to this day' (163-4).²⁴

In attributing the aggression between the Ottoman and Safavid Empires to religious differences, early seventeenth-century travel writers were in accord with contemporary descriptions of the two nations. Heylyn's *Mircocosmus*, in contrast to Pinçon, places the Ottomans as aggressors, saying of the Persians that

Their religion is *Mahumetanisme*, in which they differ from the *Turkes* about the successours of *Mahomet* (as shall be shewed anon) and some other circumstances; hence the *Turkes* reputed them schismaticall, continually persecute them with the fire and the sword.²⁵

In *A Briefe Description of the Whole Worlde*, George Abbot described the sectarian divide between the two empires as the source of their fighting, which is mutual in origin: 'the one pursuing the other as heretickes with most deadly hatred. In somuch, that there be in this respect, almost continuall wars between the *Turkes*, and the *Persians*.'²⁶ Abbot, in company with other commentators from the period, naturally related this disunity within Islam to that of his own faith, stating that 'as Papistes and Protestants doe differ in opinion, concerning the same Christ, so doe the *Turkes*, and *Persians* about their *Mahomet*'.²⁷ As Kenneth Parker has noted, the contestation between Sunni and Shi'a, which was mapped on to the discord between Ottoman and Persian, was perceived during this period as the counterpart of that between Protestant and Catholic.²⁸ In Europe, this ongoing conflict came to be seen as something from which European nations could benefit. Minadoi's *The History of*

the Warres Betweene the Turkes and the Persians described the potential benefits for Europe in the engagement of 'two enimies of Christ' in

a warre not onely long & bloudie, but also very commodious and of great oportunitie to the Christian Common-wealth: for that it hath granted leisure to the Champions of Christ to refresh and encrease their forces, being now much weakened by warres both Forreine and Ciuill.²⁹

Minadoi recognised that the conflict between the Ottomans and the Persians could be exploited to Christian advantage, since it turned Ottoman attention from the ambitions that might otherwise be targeted at Europe.³⁰

By the early seventeenth century, there was a tradition within English Protestant literature of linking the Ottomans and the Catholics; in Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* of 1570, for example, both the Ottoman sultan and the Pope are identified as types of the Antichrist.³¹ Writings about the East sometimes perpetuated this association between Ottoman and Catholic; Ralph Carr's *The Mahumetane or Turkish Historie*, for example, which was printed in London in 1600, mentions that the 'Caliphe doth execute his office as though he were both their Pope and their Emperor'.³² We might expect the travel narratives related to the Sherley mission, which attempted to support the Sherleys' endeavours and promote Anglo-Persian relations, to emphasise the correlation between Protestant and Persian which the potential identification of Ottoman with Catholic would seem to support. In his *Relation of his Travels into Persia* of 1613, Anthony Sherley mentions that the Persian shah is keen to maintain the Shi'ite identity of his state, to eliminate 'that Religion of

Mahomet, which followeth the interpretation of *Ussen* and *Omar*, and to make his people cleave to that of *Ally*', and organises ritual burnings of images of '*Ussen* and *Omar*' to this purpose (*Relation*, 74). Hussein and Omar were the caliphs 'venerated by Sunni Muslims but rejected as false prophets by the Shi'ites'.³³ The burning of images is clearly understood by Sherley as having a political purpose, in that it encourages the religious unity necessary for tyrannical rule, but could also be interpreted as appealing to his potentially Protestant audience's presumed distaste for graven images and similar decoration.³⁴ As Anthony Parr points out, Shi'a Islam had a variety of features, including the burning of images, which might be expected to appeal to English Protestants.³⁵ The potential correlation between Protestant and Shi'a might be strengthened by Isma'il's commitment of his people to the Shi'a faith; with this action, Isma'il had undertaken a break from the Sunni majority which might appear to parallel England's break from Rome.

Other travellers also used their observances of Persian religion to emphasise the potential similarities between Persia and England. George Manwaring, for example, recorded Abbas's conversation with a Franciscan friar in which Abbas mocked the Pope, criticising the notion that he is Christ's representative on earth, and asserting that only 'God the Father' could pardon or forgive human sin.³⁶ At this the friar was 'stricken mute', and Abbas reported to Anthony that 'he [*Abbas*] was almost a Christian in his heart since his [*Anthony's*] coming unto him' (225). The suggestion that '*Abbas* was inclined towards Christianity featured in a variety of

reports from the period. Anthony Nixon, author of the pamphlet *The Three English Brothers*, hinted at the prospect of the shah's conversion to Christianity, to which 'Abbas 'lends such attentive eare' that 'he may in time bee brought to become a Christian'.³⁷ As early as 1598, Geoffrey Ducket had noted in his *Further observations concerning the state of Persia* that: 'they say furthermore, that if he [Mortus Ali] come not shortly, they shalbe of our believe'.³⁸ Given that Shi'a Muslims believe 'Ali should have inherited leadership after the Prophet's death, Ducket's observation demonstrates a willingness to link 'Abbas's interest in Christianity to his status as a Shi'ite Muslim. It should be noted, however, that Catholic travellers were just as interested in the prospect of the shah's conversion to Christianity. In 1606, a pamphlet was published in Paris entitled *La Nouvelle Conversion du Roy de Perse*, which suggested that the shah had in fact already been converted by Jesuits at Pentecost in 1605.³⁹ Similarly, Pope Clement VIII appears to have written to a supposedly Christian member of the shah's harem in order to persuade her to help effect 'Abbas's conversion to the Christian faith.⁴⁰

It is perhaps because of their knowledge of and emphasis on Persian religious tolerance that the English reports printed in London stop short of stating explicitly that 'Abbas favoured Protestantism over Catholicism. As well as English travellers, 'Abbas tolerated Catholic religious orders in his country and Catholics were also travelling to Persia for reasons of trade and diplomacy in the early seventeenth century.⁴¹ The shah himself seems to have been interested in links with any Christian

nation; he sought joint military action against the Ottoman Empire and promised toleration of Christians, both Protestant and Catholic. Still more significant for the English travel narratives must have been the Sherley brothers' own religious status, following their conversion to Catholicism during their time in Persia; 'Sir' Anthony's knighthood had been conveyed by a Catholic king, a fact which had caused some displeasure to his own monarch, Elizabeth.⁴² On leaving Persia, Anthony, as Robert would be after him, was sent to the 'Christian princes' of Europe, travelling first to the papal court, rather than to his native land.

Thus on their various missions to Europe as Abbas's representatives, the Sherley brothers sought to appeal to Catholic as well as Protestant heads of state, and their aim was to achieve closer European ties with Persia, as well as closer Anglo-Persian relations.⁴³ The narratives which describe their travels are generally unable to claim that their mission is Protestant in nature; it is likely that English audiences would have known enough about the Sherley brothers to have been aware that any claims made to Protestantism on their behalf would be unstable. The question of the religious status of the shah, the Sherleys, and their mission was to become a dominant feature of imaginative literature based on their adventures, as the second part of this article will demonstrate.

* * *

The Travailes of the Three English Brothers was first performed in 1607 at the Curtain Theatre by the Queen Anne's Men.⁴⁴ The play, based on Nixon's *The Three*

English Brothers, is largely set in Persia, describing voyages and adventures in each brother's life in the East and linking them through dumb-show and the narrative of a chorus. Thomas Sherley, Robert and Anthony's older brother, journeys to Anatolia, where he is taken prisoner by 'the Great Turk', tortured, and eventually ransomed by Robert.⁴⁵ Robert and Anthony spend most of the action of the play at the court of the Persian shah, whom they impress with their bravery and military skills, and outwit Persian officials who are jealous of their meteoric rise to power. By the end of the play, Anthony has returned to Europe with the shah's embassy to the Christian princes and the papal court, and Robert is domiciled in Persia, married to the shah's niece and made captain of the shah's army.

The Travailes was clearly part of efforts made by the Sherleys and their supporters to promote their activities in Persia and garner support for an Anglo-Persian alliance. As Daniel Vitkus has recently argued, it might be expected to appeal to its audience's patriotic feeling in order to gain support for the Sherley mission, or at least to counter negative reports.⁴⁶ The play, which was entered on the Stationers' Register only three weeks after Nixon's pamphlet was printed, follows Nixon closely in terms of its relation of events.⁴⁷ It is likely that both the pamphlet and the play were commissioned by Thomas Sherley or his supporters.⁴⁸ By the time of *The Travailes'* performance, however, Thomas Sherley was imprisoned in the Tower for his activities in a plot against the Levant Company; whilst audiences

watched the character Thomas languish on stage in an Ottoman jail, they may have known that the real Thomas was locked up more closely to hand.⁴⁹

The Travailes of the Three English Brothers has been characterised as an adventure play, a form of drama in which English heroes engage in patriotic feats in distant lands, reflecting the early modern stage's sensitivity to cultural change.⁵⁰ This kind of drama, as Claire Jowitt has shown in relation to the plays which dealt with the exploits of Thomas Stukeley, an adventuring predecessor of the Sherleys, is often informative about contemporary concerns and the interests of its audience regarding their own society, as well as about their perceptions of the foreign climes in which such plays were set. Jowitt has demonstrated, for example, how the Stukeley plays build on their prose narrative sources in order to 'express broader anxieties about legitimate forms of masculine behaviour in Elizabethan England'.⁵¹ This activity is replicated by *The Travailes*, which expands on elements from its prose sources to articulate particular ideas of Englishness and English masculinity, as well as to demonstrate the worthiness of the Sherleys' Persian activities. As Anthony Parr has argued in his edition of *The Travailes*, Renaissance theatre audiences partly went to the theatre in order to learn about the world beyond their shores;⁵² but as recent work by Jowitt and Vitkus, amongst others, has shown, these topical plays have as much to tell us about portrayals of English identities as they do of foreign ones.

An imaginative work of drama rather than a purportedly factual report, *The Travailes of the Three English Brothers* stages the potential reception that English

travellers and traders might hope to receive in Persia, and presents the Persian court as open to infiltration by English influences. The character of Shah 'Abbas, referred to in the play as the 'Sophy', is deeply impressed by his English visitors, and especially Anthony, feeling for him an admiration which extends to a desire for emulation. After his first conversation with Anthony Sherley, 'Abbas exclaims:

What powers do wrap me in amazement thus?
Methinks this Christian's more than mortal.
Sure he conceals himself! Within my thoughts
Never was man so deeply registered.
But God or Christian, or whate'er he be,
I wish to be none other but as he.⁵³

To the Sophy, Anthony is both 'worthy Englishman, and worthy Christian' (ii. 238).

In the opening scene, the Persian soldiers enact a battle between Ottomans and Persians, in which they return with the heads of the Ottoman prisoners on their swords. This is followed by a mock skirmish between Anthony and Robert, in which clemency is granted to the Christians' captives, leading the shah to respond, 'We never heard of honour until now' (i.111), and to ask Anthony to teach him 'unknown rudiments of war': 'Tell us thy precepts and we'll adore thee' (i.126, 127).

Whilst relations between the shah and his English visitors are cordial for most of the action, the play demonstrates the pitfalls of inter-faith relations in other contexts. It portrays the Ottoman characters as vicious barbarians who seek to 'make picking meat of their [Christians'] carcasses even to the very bones, and then leave them to the hangman' (xii.5-7), whilst Anthony Sherley embodies an equally violent

religious fervour in his exclamation that 'In death of pagans all Christ's sons delight / And I am one of them' (ii.55-6). Relations between Shi'ite Persian and Christian are quite different, however. The Persians' Shi'ite identity is made clear; they are devotees of 'Mortus Ali' as opposed to the Ottomans who are devoted to 'Mahomet' alone (i.87). In response to the shah's inquiry as to the differences between Persian and Christian, Anthony explains that 'our inward offices / Are most at jar' (i.174-5), but that in all other ways they are the same, in a speech that ends in a plea for religious unity:

All that makes up this earthly edifice
By which we are called men is all alike.
Each may be the other's anatomy; [...]
One workman made us all, and all offend
That maker, all taste of interdicted sin. [...]
We live and die, suffer calamities,
Are underlings to sickness, fire, famine, sword.
We are all punished by the same hand and rod,
Our sins are all alike; why not our God? (i.164-6, 170-1, 177-80)

Anthony's conversation with the shah is interrupted, so the audience is only able to guess at how 'Abbas might have responded to this question, but his previous behaviour suggests his willingness to tolerate and even promote a Christian presence in Persia. 'Abbas's positive response to the English brothers concludes in his agreement to allow Robert to build a church, baptise his Persian-born son, and educate Christian children living in Persia in his own faith. With regard to the baptism, the shah exceeds the basic demand that he permit the ceremony and offers to stand as godfather to the child:

Baptize thy child, ourself will aid in it;
Ourself will answer for't, a godfather.
In our own arms we'll bear it to the place
Where it shall receive the complete ceremony. (xiii.172-5)

The shah's reference to his intention to 'make thy child the first Christian in the land' (xiii.202) hints at the prospect of a larger Christian community in Persia, and perhaps gestures towards his own conversion, in keeping with Nixon's statement that the shah not only stood as godfather to Robert's children but is responding to the efforts of Robert, who 'labours the king very much to Christianisme'.⁵⁴ The audience of *The Travailes* would have been aware that only a Christian can perform the role of godfather in the Christian rite of baptism.

The Travailes follows its sources in referring to 'the Christian', 'Christian's faith', 'Christian love' and so on, rather than differentiating between Protestant and Catholic, or openly acknowledging the Sherleys' Catholicism. It could be argued that, in doing so, the play is seeking to reflect a unified image of Christianity in contrast to the fissure evident in the Islamic faith. This would seem particularly pertinent given the aim of promoting English attempts to build closer relations with Persia, as such relations would be dependent not only on the divide between Ottoman and Persian but also on the potential sense of unity between England and Spain or other Catholic partners against the Ottomans (which Matthew Dimmock describes as a feature of early Jacobean attitudes). Despite its English Protestant audience, the play avoids an opportunity to vilify Catholicism openly in its portrayal of the Pope on stage. The Pope joins with Anthony in his desire 'to make Christian

Turkish land' (v.88) and is a much more appealing figure than the Ottoman sultan, who describes himself as 'the sole god of earth' (viii.17) and orders Thomas to be racked in his presence with apparent enjoyment. The play dramatises the potential for an easy and mutually beneficial relationship with Persia against the Ottomans, representing a fantasy of how the Persian shah might respond to English visitors and of the qualities that such visitors might be expected to demonstrate. In this fantasy, it is not Robert and Anthony's status as Protestant or Catholic which is most significant, but their status as Englishmen.

* * *

The contrasts between the Safavid and Ottoman Empires, and specifically Persia's Shi'ite status, were used by English travel writers during this period in order to create an image of Persia as a nation open to English trade and travel. The narratives discussed here, and the play based on them, negotiate a series of oppositions, such as those between Ottoman and Persian, Sunni and Shi'a, and Protestant and Catholic. In doing so they seek to highlight particular differences, such as the gulf between the Ottomans and Safavids, whilst minimising others, such as that between Persian and Christian. The majority of the texts considered here were written in support of closer Anglo-Persian relations, and especially the Sherley brothers' efforts towards this goal, which serves as a reminder of the political and economic motives that can influence the portrayal of a particular nation, people, or faith during this period. The evidence of these travel writings shows that the

relationship between Europe and the East in the early modern period was complex, varied and multi-dimensional. Historically, there has been a tendency in studies of early modern East-West relations to focus on the aggression and hostility between Christian and Muslim nations. William Dalrymple has noted, for example, that Bernard Lewis's portrayal of Muslim-Christian relations has been one of 'hostile blocs clashing incessantly for 1,500 years', with early modern interactions between East and West seen as largely confrontational.⁵⁵ As recent writings have established, however, the relationship between East and West during this period was not always antagonistic, and the tacit assumption of a 'binary opposition between a civilized Christian "West" and the encroaching barbarity of an infidel "East"' is currently being submitted to radical reassessment.⁵⁶ The writings considered in this article demonstrate travellers' willingness to look for similarity and correlation between Christian and Muslim, as well as difference.

¹ For the rise in European travel to and contact with Persia in the early seventeenth century and its causes, see Hellmut Braun, 'Iran under the Safavids and in the Eighteenth Century', in *The Muslim World: A Historical Survey. Part III: The Last Great Muslim Empires*, ed. Bertold Spuler, trans. F. R. C. Bagley (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 181-218 (194-5); Roger Stevens, 'European Visitors to the Safavid Court', *Iranian Studies* 7:3 (1974), 421-57 (421); David Morgan, *Medieval Persia, 1040-1797* (London: Longman, 1988), 139. I would like to thank Dan Carey, Claire Jowitt, and the anonymous reviewer for their helpful comments on this and earlier versions of this article.

² D. W. Davies, *Elizabethans Errant: The Strange Fortunes of Sir Thomas Sherley and His Three Sons* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), 77-84. See Chapters 5, 6 and 9 for the Sherleys' time in Persia. See also Franz Babinger, *Sherleiana* (Berlin, Gedruckt In Der Reichsdruckerei, 1932); and Boies Penrose, *The Sherleian Odyssey* (Taunton: Wessex, 1938).

³ Niels Steensgaard, *The Asian Trade Revolution of the Seventeenth Century: The East India Companies and the Decline of the Caravan Trade* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 213-4.

⁴ Davies, 236, 240, 259, 272.

⁵ Anthony Parr, ed., *Three Renaissance Travel Plays: The Travels of the Three English Brothers, The Sea Voyage, The Antipodes* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 10.

⁶ Parr, *Three Renaissance Travel Plays*, 16-7.

⁷ Roger Savory, *Iran Under the Safavids* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 57, 85. For the hostilities between the Safavid and Ottoman Empires during this period, see also Dorothy M. Vaughan, *Europe and the Turk: A Pattern of Alliances, 1350-1700* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1954), 164; Braun, 186-92; Ahmad Gunny, *Images of Islam in Eighteenth-Century Writings* (London: Grey Seal, 1996), 9-10; Matthew Dimmock, *New Turkes: Dramatizing Islam and the Ottomans in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 137-9.

⁸ James I and VI, *His Maiesties Poetical Excercises at vacant hours*. (London, 1603), H3v, H2r, quoted in Dimmock, 199.

⁹ Franklin L. Baumer, 'England, the Turk, and the Common Corps of Christendom', *American Historical Review* 50 (1944), 26-48 (37 n.59).

¹⁰ Dimmock, 200.

¹¹ On the long-held English interest in trade with Persia and the Orient, see Davies, 82.

¹² William Parry, *A New and Large Discourse on the Travels of Sir Anthony Sherley Knight, by Sea, and ouer Land, to the Persian Empire* (London, 1601); George Manwaring, *A True Discourse of Sir Anthony Sherley's Travel Into Persia*, ed. E. Denison Ross in *Sir Anthony Sherley and His Persian Adventure* [1933] (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005). Manwaring's original account remained in manuscript until Denison Ross's 1933 collection of contemporary writings about Sherley. It may be consulted in the British Library, MS Sloane 105.

¹³ Thomas Herbert, *A Relation of Some Years Travaile, begonne Anno 1626. Into Afrique, Asia, Indies* (London, 1634; repr. New York: Da Capo Press, 1971), 149. Further references will be given in parentheses in the text.

¹⁴ Giovanni Botero, *An Historicall description of the Most Famous Kingdomes and Common-weales in the Worlde*, trans. Abraham Hartwell (London, 1603), 210-1.

¹⁵ Anthony Sherley, *A True Report of Sir A Sherlies Journey* (London, 1600), 29. Further references will be given in parentheses in the text.

¹⁶ Ronald W. Ferrier, trans. and ed., *A Journey to Persia: Jean Chardin's Portrait of a Seventeenth-Century Empire* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1996), 77. For the government of Persia under the Safavid dynasty, see Ferrier, 76-96.

¹⁷ Anthony Sherley, *Sir Antony Sherley His Relation of His Travels into Persia* (London, 1613), 36. All further references will be given in parentheses in the text.

¹⁸ Manwaring, pp. 216-7.

¹⁹ Parry, 18. Further references will be given in parentheses in the text.

²⁰ Abel Pinçon, *Relation d'un voyage de Perse Faict es Années 1598. & 1599.*, in *Relations Veritables et Cvrieuses* (Paris, 1651), 141. In English, 'the Persians hold the Turks in great

abomination, saying that they are impure in their law', trans. Denison Ross, *Sir Anthony Sherley and His Persian Adventure*, 163.

²¹ On Persia under the Safavid dynasty, see Savory, *Iran Under the Safavids*; Peter Jackson and Laurence Lockhart, eds., *The Cambridge History Of Iran: Volume 6: The Timurid and Safavid Periods* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), especially ch. 7; Gene R.

Garthwaite, *The Persians* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), ch. 6. For the origins of Shi'ism, its emergence as state religion under the Safavids, and its significance in Persia/Iran, see Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order, and Societal Change in Shi'ite Iran from the Beginning to 1890* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), Part II, and I. P. Petrushevsky, *Islam in Iran*, trans. Hubert Evans (London: Athlone, 1985), 30-3. For Shi'i Islam in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, see Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism* (Oxford: Ronald, 1985), 105-14.

²² Petrushevsky, 326.

²³ See for example Pietro Martire d'Anghiera, *The History of Trauayle in the West and East Indies, and other countreys lying eyther way, towards the fruitfull and ryche Moluccaes. As Muscovia, Persia, Arabia, Syria, Ægypte, Ethiopia, Guinea, China in Cathayo, and Giapan: With a discourse of the Northwest passage*, trans. Richard Eden and Richard Willes (London, 1577), 380; Manwaring, 217; Geoffrey Ducket, 'Further observations concerning the state of Persia, taken in the foresayd fift voyage into those partes', in Richard Hakluyt, *The Prinicpal Navigations Voyages Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*, ed. John Masefield, 8 vols (London: Dent, 1927), 2: 127. Persia in the seventeenth century contained people of a variety

of religions, including orthodox Christians, Gregorian Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians; see Davies, 96.

²⁴ For the positive impressions of Islam as practised by the Persians in Herbert's report, and his portrayal of Islam in general, see Gunny, 11-2.

²⁵ Peter Heylyn, *Microcosmus, or a Little Description of the Great World* (Oxford, 1621), 331.

²⁶ George Abbot, *A Briefe Description of the Whole Worlde* (London, 1599), sig. Biv^r.

²⁷ Abbot, sig. Biv^r.

²⁸ Kenneth Parker, ed., *Early Modern Tales of Orient: a Critical Anthology* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 4.

²⁹ Giovanni Tommaso Minadoi, *The History of the Warres Betweene the Turkes and the Persians*, trans. by Abraham Hartwell (London, 1603), 2, 1, quoted in Dimmock, 139.

³⁰ Dimmock, 139.

³¹ Dimmock, 78.

³² Ralph Carr, *The Mahumetane or Turkish Historie* (London, 1600), Cr.

³³ Anthony Parr, 'Foreign Relations in Jacobean England: The Sherley Brothers and the "Voyage of Persia"', in *Travel and Drama in Shakespeare's Time*, ed. Jean-Pierre Maquerlot and Michèle Willems (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 14-31 (21).

³⁴ See Parr, 'Foreign Relations', 21.

³⁵ Parr, 'Foreign Relations', 21.

³⁶ Manwaring, 224-5.

³⁷ Anthony Nixon, *The Three English Brothers* (London, 1607), K4v.

³⁸ Duckett, 2: 127; see also Davies, 130. Nixon also reports on the imminent conversion of the shah (K4v).

³⁹ *La nouvelle conversion du Roy de Perse. Avec la deffette de deux cents mil Turcs après sa conversion* (Paris, 1606).

⁴⁰ *A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia and the Papal Mission of the XVIIth and XVIIIth Centuries*, 2 vols (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1939), 1: 88.

⁴¹ For example, on French travel to Persia during the seventeenth century and harmonious relations between the two nations, see M. H. Karimi, 'Persia in the Writings of Montesquieu', *The Durham University Journal*, n.s. 38 (1976-77), 231-7 (231).

⁴² For the Sherleys' conversion to Catholicism, see Davies, 135, 167.

⁴³ Steensgaard, 224.

⁴⁴ Parr, *Three Renaissance Travel Plays*, 7.

⁴⁵ The 'Great Turk' referred to in the *Dramatis Personae* was Mehmet III; the term was frequently used in English as the designation of the Ottoman Sultan. See Parr, *Three Renaissance Travel Plays*, 58 n. 13.

⁴⁶ Daniel Vitkus, 'Adventuring Heroes in the Mediterranean: Mapping the Boundaries of Anglo-Islamic Exchange on the Early Modern Stage', *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 37:1 (2007), 75-95 (88).

⁴⁷ H. Neville Davies, 'Pericles and the Sherley Brothers', in *Shakespeare and His Contemporaries: Essays in Comparison*, ed. E. A. J. Honigmann (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 94-113 (96).

⁴⁸ Parr, *Three Renaissance Travel Plays*, 7.

⁴⁹ Vitkus, 'Adventuring Heroes in the Mediterranean', 90. For Thomas Sherley's imprisonment, see also Davies, *Elizabethans Errant*, 183.

⁵⁰ Jean E. Howard, 'Gender on the Periphery', in *Shakespeare and the Mediterranean: The Selected Proceedings of the International Shakespeare Association World Congress Valencia, 2001*, ed. Tom Clayton, Susan Brock, and Vicente Forés (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), 344-62 (346-7).

⁵¹ Claire Jowitt, *Voyage Drama and Gender Politics 1589-1642: Real and Imagined Worlds* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 68.

⁵² Parr, *Three Renaissance Travel Plays*, 3.

⁵³ *The Travels of the Three English Brothers* in *The Travels of the Three English Brothers*, ed. Anthony Parr, scene i, ll. 74-9. All further references will be to this edition and will be given in parentheses in the text.

⁵⁴ Nixon, K4v.

⁵⁵ William Dalrymple, Foreword, in Gerald MacLean, ed., *Re-Orienting the Renaissance: Cultural Exchanges with the East* (London: Palgrave, 2005), ix-xxiii (xv). See also Bernard Lewis, *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1982; repr. Phoenix, 2000).

⁵⁶ See Nabil Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York: Columbia Press, 1999); Gerald MacLean, *The Rise of Oriental Travel: English Visitors to the Ottoman Empire, 1580-1720* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004); Matthew Birchwood and Matthew Dimmock, eds, *Cultural Encounters Between East and West, 1453-1699* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2005), 1.