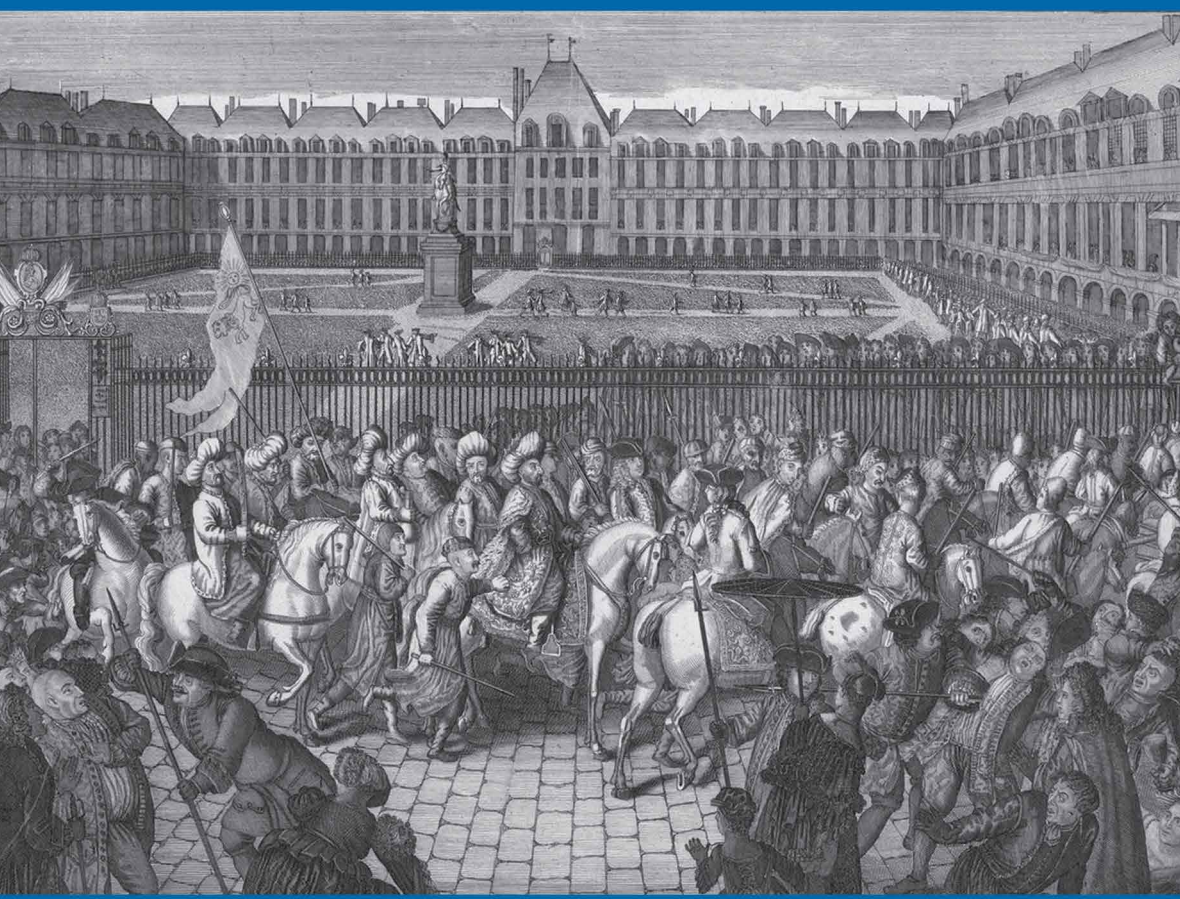
Persia and the Enlightenment

Edited by

Cyrus Masroori, Whitney Mannies, *and* John Christian Laursen



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CYRUS MASROORI,

WHITNEY MANNIES

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JOHN CHRISTIAN LAURSEN

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Persia and the Enlightenment

Since the fifth century BCE Persia has played a significant part in representing the "Other" against which European identity has been constructed. What makes the case of Persia unique in this process of identity formation is the ambivalent attitude that Europe has shown in its imaginary about Persia.

Persia is arguably the nation of "the Orient" most referred to in early modern European writings, frequently mentioned in various discourses of the Enlightenment including theology, literature, and political theory. What was the appeal of Persia to such a diverse intellectual population in Enlightenment Europe? How did intellectuals engage with the "facts" about Persia? In what ways did utilizing Persia contribute to the development of modern European identities? In this volume, an international group of scholars with diverse academic backgrounds has tackled these and other questions related to the Enlightenment's engagement with Persia. *Persia and the Enlightenment* questions reductionist assessments of modern Europe's encounter with the Middle East, where a complex engagement is simplified to a confrontation between liberalism and Islam, or an exaggerated Orientalism. By carefully studying Persia in the Enlightenment narratives, this volume throws new light on the complexity of intercultural encounters and their impact on the shaping of collective identities.

Contents

Introduction

Cyrus Masroori *and* Whitney Mannies

The intellectual interaction between Europe and Persia has a long and rich history. As the contributions in this volume demonstrate, that interaction reached new heights during the Enlightenment. What was the impact of the Enlightenment's engagement with Persia on modernity? The goal of this volume is to provide diverse insights into this question without imposing an overarching framework or paradigm. Indeed, *Persia and the Enlightenment* came about precisely because the Enlightenment did not have a single vision of Persia.

There are several theoretical frameworks available for studying the diverse and complex modes of relationship between modern Europe and the East.[1] It may be tempting to try to frame the answer in terms of Saidean Orientalism, but Saidean Orientalism is highly time sensitive. Its analytical lens is trained on colonialism, but this volume concentrates on the era before intellectuals were drawn into the ideological project of justifying imperial domination. Other theoretical frameworks have moved cross-cultural Enlightenment studies toward more varied and productive approaches. For example, Fred Dallmayr describes seven "modes of cross-cultural encounter": conquest, conversion, assimilation and acculturation, cultural borrowing, minimal engagement, conflict and class struggle, and dialogical engagement.[2] Deborah Root describes

1. For instance, see Kim M. Phillips, *Before Orientalism: Asian peoples and cultures in European travel writing, 1245–1510* (Philadelphia, PA, 2014), p.15–16. Also, see Joan-Pau Rubiés, *Travel and ethnology in the Renaissance: South India through European eyes, 1250–1650* (Cambridge, 2005).
2. Fred Dallmayr, *Beyond Orientalism: essays on cross-cultural encounter* (New York, 1996), p.1–37. Also, Alexander Bevilaqua points to a mode of engagement which could be labeled as empathy. See Alexander Bevilaqua, *The Republic of Arabic letters: Islam and the European Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 2018), p.12–13.

an eighth mode, cultural cannibalism.[3] Finally, studying radical Orientalism, Gerard Cohen-Vrignaud suggests that "instrumentalization" is another way of assessing some examples of Europe's engagement with the East.[4] Such modes prompt us to move from patterns of theoretical engagement that reenact domination toward engagements grounded in critical reflection and mutual recognition that, writes Dallmayr, "[allow] the other to gain freedom and identity while making room for cultural difference and diversity."[5] Indeed, the normative impulse at the heart of these perspectives is essential for cross-cultural scholarship, but also, perhaps, insufficient when it is a question not of conducting cross-cultural engagement oneself, but of studying how *past* figures embarked on cross-cultural engagement. Moreover, thinking through such "modes," we might inadvertently flatten our understanding of the multiplicity and metamorphosing of intentions present in any one engagement, or the diverse ends to which such engagements could lead. Additionally, as Brinda Charry and Gitanjali Shahani argue with respect to their communicative mode of transcultural engagement, cultural knowledge is not "always simply presented and transferred to 'other' peoples," but its form and meaning are "a result of complex processes of mediation and negotiation."[6] This volume is an attempt to understand those complex processes of negotiation, though we would note that the nature of the encounter between Persia and Enlightenment Europe was not entirely or primarily "communicative."

The reader of this volume will notice frequent references to the Safavids, the dynasty that ruled Persia between 1501 and 1722, and the ancient religion of Iranians/Persians, Zoroastrianism. We have provided very short reviews for readers who may be unfamiliar with the Safavids and Zoroastrianism. Obviously, these brief narratives cannot do justice to introducing a religion at least 2600 years old and a dynasty which shaped the destiny of modern Iran. Thankfully, there are extensive studies on Zoroastrianism and Safavid Persia, whose

3. Deborah Root, *Cannibal culture: art, appropriation and the commodification of difference* (Boulder, CO, 1996).
4. Gerard Cohen-Vrignaud, *Radical Orientalism: rights, reform, and romanticism* (Cambridge, 2015), p.8.
5. Dallmayr, *Beyond Orientalism*, p.3.
6. *Emissaries in early modern literature and culture: mediation, transmission, traffic, 1550–1700*, ed. Brinda Charry and Gitanjali Shahani (Farnham, 2009), p.4–5.

impact on Enlightenment Europe has been partially portrayed in the following contributions.

The Safavids

In 1501 Ismail I (1487–1524) founded the Safavid dynasty. The event was of substantial consequence for Persia (later Iran), the Middle East, and Europe. In addition to carrying the title of the shah (king), Ismail was considered the Perfect Guide (Murshid-i Kamil) of a Sufi (Muslim mystic) order established by his ancestor Shaikh Safi al-Din Ardabili (1252–1334), from whose name the title of the dynasty is derived. This also explains frequent references to the Safavid kings as "the Sufi/Sophy/Sophi" in early modern European literature. Upon his ascendance to the throne, Ismail relied on the Turkmen tribal warriors (the Qizilbash) who greatly revered him in order to advance an ambitious agenda.[7]

Until 1501, most Iranians were Sunnis. Ismail forcefully converted this population to Twelver Shi'ism.[8] The Safavid reliance on Shi'ism

7. One traveling European observed "the name of God is forgotten throughout Persia and only that of Ismail remembered." *A Narrative of Italian travels in Persia in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries*, ed. Charles Grey (London, 1873), p.206. Various studies on the Safavids, some of which mentioned here, provide information on the Qizilbash. For a brief account on this topic, see Hans R. Roemer, "The Qizilbash Turcomans: founders and victims of the Safavid theocracy," in *Intellectual studies on Islam: essays written in honor of Martin B. Dickson*, ed. Michel M. Mazzaoui and Vera B. Moreen (Salt Lake City, UT, 1990), p.27–39.
8. The Twelver Shia believe that the only legitimate successors to Prophet Muhammad (532–632) are his son-in-law Ali (601–661) and eleven of his offspring, whom they call the Twelve Imams. Given that Muhammad practiced both spiritual and temporal authority over the Muslim community, the Twelver Shia argue that God has extended the same authority to the Twelve Imams (and only them). However, upon Muhammad's death the majority of the Muslim notables elected Abu Bakr (573–634) as the prophet's successor (caliph). Although eventually Ali, and later his son Hasan (624–670), became caliphs, other Twelver Imams only practiced spiritual leadership over their followers. In 680 another son of Ali named Hussain (626–680) rebelled against the Umayyad caliph, Yazid (645–683). Hussain's small army was defeated, and he was beheaded. The event made a long-lasting impact on the Shia community, and has been a substantial source of animosity in the Shia–Sunni relationship over centuries. The Twelvers believe that the next eight imams were also subject to persecution by the Sunni caliphs and murdered by them. However, Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Mahdi (b.869), the twelfth and last imam, has been in occultation, and shall return one day to bring peace and justice to

as the state ideology and a source of legitimacy has left its mark on Iranian society and politics for the last 500 years. The Safavid monarchs enjoyed substantial support among their subjects by asserting spiritual authority as Sufi Guides (at least initially), propagating descent from Prophet Muhammad, and claiming to be the defenders of the true religion.

Relying on and exaggerating the Shia–Sunni rivalries and animosities, Ismail I and his successors engaged in extensive military campaigns against two powerful Sunni neighbors, the Uzbeks in the east and the Ottomans in the west. Out of these campaigns, the Safavid domain, which to a large extent corresponded to the contemporary Iranian borders, was carved. Thus, Shi'ism was utilized by the Safavids to form a cohesive territory, a relatively effective and legitimate central authority, and a distinct national identity.

The Safavids' power reached its zenith during Shah Abbas I's reign (r.1588–1629). Abbas's successful military campaigns against the Ottomans, his desire to explore commercial relations with Europe, and his generally warm treatment of European diplomats, merchants, adventurers, and Christian missionaries made him and Persia subject to both greater curiosity and positive reception in Europe. It was also during his reign that Isfahan (Isphahan, Ispahan) achieved its most glorious days, as Abbas patronized art and architecture in his capital. As the number of travelers to Persia increased, fact and fiction about the Safavid empire circulated around Europe on an unprecedented scale. However, Safavid power began to decline gradually after Abbas's death in 1629. In 1722, an army of rebellious Afghans conquered Isfahan. The Safavid monarch, Shah Sultan Hussein (1668–1726), was consequently imprisoned and eventually beheaded. By this time much of the Safavid dominion was occupied by Afghans, Ottomans, and Russians.

While the fall of Isfahan in 1722 is often considered as the end of the Safavid dynasty, after Sultan Hussein's execution, his son Tahmasp II (Tahmasb II, d.1740) claimed succession to the throne. Tahmasp's chief military commander, Nadir (who was given the title of Tahmasp Qoli/the Servant of Tahmasp), defeated the Afghan invaders and took Isfahan back in 1729. However, the relationship between Tahmasp

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the earth. For more on Twelver Shi'ism, see Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: the history and doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism* (New Haven, CT, 1985); and Andrew J. Newman, *Twelver Shiism: unity and diversity in the life of Islam, 632 to 1722* (Edinburgh, 2013).

and Nadir (d.1747) deteriorated quickly. Under pressure, Tahmasp abdicated the throne in favor of his infant son Abbas III (1732–1740), with Nadir as his regent. Finally, in 1736 Nadir removed Abbas III from the throne, and declared himself the shah. A brilliant military leader, Nadir's successful campaigns against the Ottomans, and later his conquest of India, brought him to the Europeans' attention. However, his cruel demeanor and the questionable legitimacy of his policies were also noticed in the West. With Nadir Shah's murder in 1747, Persia succumbed to civil wars and political instability until the establishment of the Qajar dynasty in 1789.[9]

Zoroastrianism

The historical origin of Zoroastrianism is subject to debate, but the religion is at least some 2600 years old. At the height of its influence, Zoroastrians lived from the eastern borders of today's China to Georgia and Mesopotamia. References to the supreme deity of Zoroastrianism, Ahura Mazda, are frequent in Achaemenid and Sassanid inscriptions. Zoroastrianism reached the zenith of its influence during the Sassanid era when it became the de facto state religion.[10] Zoroastrianism is still practiced by a small number of Iranians (particularly in the Yazd and Kerman provinces). It is also the religion of the Parsis (Parsees) of India, the Persian diaspora whose ancestors left Iran after the Muslim invasion.[11]

There is relatively little information about the founder of Zoroastrianism, Zoroaster (Zarathustra/Zartusht). Evidently, he was born somewhere in the Greater Khorasan, an area covering today's

9. There is an abundance of research about the Safavids. For example, see Roger Savory, *Iran under the Safavids* (Cambridge, 1980); *Iran and the world in the Safavid age*, ed. Willem Floor and Edmund Herzig (London, 2015); Stephen F. Dale, *The Muslim empires of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals* (Cambridge, 2010); Abbas Amanat, *Iran: a modern history* (New Haven, CT, 2017). For Persian accounts of the Safavids, see Hasan Beg Rumlu, *Ahsan al-tavarikh* (Tehran, 1970); Mirza Muhammad Tahir Vahid Qazvini, *Tarikh-i jahanara-yi Abbasi* (Tehran, 2003); Abdulhussein Navaii and Abbasqoli Ghaffari Fard, *Tarikh tahavolat siyasi, ijtima'i, iqtisadi va farhangui Iran dar dowran Safaviyeh* (Tehran, 2002).
10. The Sassanid or Sassanian (Sasanian) empire (224 CE–651 CE), was the third and last Persian empire (after the Achaemenid and Parthian empires), which eventually fell to the Muslim invasion of Iran.
11. Zoroastrians are called Zartushtis in contemporary Iran. They have also been referred to as Gabr in Persian literature, which found its way to the early modern European texts (sometimes as Ghebres).

northeastern Iran, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. There is even less evidence about when Zoroaster lived, with suggestions ranging from 1700 BCE to 600 BCE.[12] What is purported to capture the prophet's teachings is a number of verses called the Gathas.[13] It appears that Zoroaster started his mission with little success until a local ruler named Vishtaspa converted to his religion, and became a patron of Zoroastrianism.

Whether Zoroastrianism is a monotheistic or a polytheistic religion is debatable. However, it is clear that Ahura Mazda, whose name means Lord Wisdom, is the principal deity and the one "uncreated God, existing eternally."[14] Ahura Mazda is the creator who stands for *asha* (what is true, right, and just). There are also six lower deities or archangels called Amesha Spentas (beneficent immortals), who emanated from Ahura Mazda and assist him in upholding *asha*. Zoroastrians also believe in a number of lower deities or angels (Yazatas) including Mithra (Mitra), the god of covenant, whose name is often associated with the sun on the account of ancient mythology.[15] Outside ancient Iran, Mithra acquired prominence in the Roman empire (as Mithras), where his cult became particularly popular among the Roman legions.[16]

The dualism in Zoroastrianism is rooted in the dichotomy of Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu, the evil spirit who stands for darkness,

12. There is no evidence supporting the claim that Zoroaster died 6000 years before Plato. For a brief account of that claim, see *The Wiley Blackwell companion to Zoroastrianism*, ed. Michael Stausberg and Yuhan Sohrab-Dinshaw Vevaina (Oxford, 2015), p.442–43.
13. For more on Zoroastrian beliefs, see *An Introduction to ancient Iranian religion: readings from the Avesta and Achaemenid inscriptions*, ed. William W. Malandra (Minneapolis, MN, 1983); Meena Iyer, *Faith & philosophy of Zoroastrianism* (Delhi, 2009); S. K. Mendoza Forrest, *Witches, whores, and sorcerers: the concept of evil in early Iran* (Austin, TX, 2011). For an English translation of the Gathas, see Helmut Humbach, *The Gāthās of Zarathushtra and the other old Avestan texts* (Heidelberg, 1991).
14. Mary Boyce, *Zoroastrians: their religious beliefs and practices* (London, 2001), p.19–20.
15. It is important to remember that Mithra was a deity among the Indo-Iranians prior to the arrival of Zoroastrianism.
16. For some examples of the variations in references to Mithra in Zoroastrian texts, see E. O. James, *Creation and cosmology: a historical and comparative inquiry* (Leiden, 1969), p.58. For the cult of Mithras in the Roman empire, see Roger Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras cult in the Roman empire: mysteries of the unconquered sun* (Oxford, 2001).

destruction, and falsehood.[17] The cosmic battle between good and evil links Zoroastrianism to Manichaeism and the Abrahamic religions. Important to Zoroastrianism is the concept of free will. Human beings are not predestined but must choose a side in the battle between creation and destruction, truth and falsehood, and righteousness and corruption. In fact, the final victory of Ahura Mazda over Angra Mainyu hinges on trusting that human beings by and large choose righteousness over wickedness. To side with Ahura Mazda, human beings must choose "good thoughts, good words, and good deeds," a principle at the heart of Zoroaster's teachings.

In the West, Zoroastrians have at times been portrayed as the worshipers of fire or the sun.[18] This is not quite accurate. According to Zoroastrianism fire and the sun are creations of Ahura Mazda, which occupy a privileged doctrinal position. To begin with, the privilege extended to fire and the sun is a consequence of Ahura Mazda's representation as pure light. Additionally, fire is a conduit in the connection between human beings and Ahura Mazda, and the sun has been called Ahura Mazda's eye.[19]

One explanation for modern European interest in Zoroastrianism is the misperceived association of Zoroastrianism with worshiping the sun, a practice common not only in the ancient Middle East and the Roman empire (through Mithras and his reputation as the sun god), but also among the Incas. This gave Zoroastrianism an appealing quasi-universal reputation. As early as the fifteenth century, Neo-Platonists such as Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) and Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494) considered Zoroaster the first great theologian, and associated Zoroastrianism with true wisdom.[20] Zoroastrianism began to appear increasingly in European travel accounts and in

17. However, it must be kept in mind that what Angra Mainyu stands for is only possible because of Ahura Mazda's creations. As such, Angra Mainyu occupies an ontologically inferior position compared to Ahura Mazda.
18. There have also been frequent references to Zoroastrians as fire-worshipers (*atash parast*) in Persian texts. The earliest Western text associating Zoroastrians with the worship of fire and the sun is Herodotus's *Histories* (I.131 and III.16). On Greek and Roman reports on Zoroastrianism, see Albert de Jong, *Traditions of the Magi: Zoroastrianism in Greek and Latin literature* (Leiden, 1997), ch.3.
19. For more on this topic, see S. A. Negosian, *The Zoroastrian faith: tradition and modern research* (Montreal, 1993), p.73.
20. See Wilhelm Schmitt-Biggemann, *Philosophia perennis: historical outlines of Western spirituality in ancient, medieval, and early modern thought* (Dordrecht, 2004), p.33, 172; and Michael Stausberg, *Faszination Zarathushtra: Zoroaster und die Europäische Religionsgeschichte der frühen Neuzeit*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1998), vol.1, p.93–261.

philosophical and theological texts in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As various contributions in this volume demonstrate, it was also present in some of the most important intellectual debates during the Enlightenment.

Studying the Enlightenment

The Enlightenment has been called "the founding moment of modernity,"[21] essential in "understanding the origins and the nature of the modern world,"[22] and "the hinge upon which modernity turns."[23] Michel Foucault suggests that the Enlightenment "has determined, at least in part, what we are, what we think, and what we do today."[24] Indeed, we agree with Jeffrey Nealon's assessment that Foucault "finally comes around to embracing what he had so long resisted: a positive endorsement of the Enlightenment project."[25] We find Foucault particularly relevant to our project in three interconnected ways: First, Foucault invites us to maintain a critical attitude toward the Enlightenment, engaging with it as a case of "a historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying."[26] Second, as Foucault did, we have engaged the Enlightenment as an "attitude […] a mode of relating to contemporary" issues instead of a "doctrinal heritage."[27] Finally, we have also seen the Enlightenment as a moment when Europe was "compelled to face the task of producing" itself.[28] David Harvey has gone as far as suggesting that the projects of the Enlightenment and modernity are identical.[29] If these sentiments are accurate, a closer look at

21. Dan Edelstein, *The Enlightenment: a genealogy* (Chicago, IL, 2010), p.1.
22. Charles W. J. Withers, *Placing the Enlightenment* (Chicago, IL, 2007), p.5.
23. Harvey Chisick, "Looking for Enlightenment," *History of European ideas* 34:4 (2008), p.570–82 (570).
24. Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?," in *The Essential Foucault: selections from essential works of Foucault, 1954–1984*, ed. Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose (New York, 2003), p.43–57 (43).
25. Jeffrey Nealon, *Foucault beyond Foucault: power and its intensifications since 1984* (Stanford, CA, 2008), p.14.
26. Foucault, "Enlightenment," p.53.
27. Foucault, "Enlightenment," p.48; Michael Mahon, *Foucault's Nietzschean genealogy: truth, power, and the subject* (Albany, NY, 1992), p.181.
28. Foucault, "Enlightenment," p.50.
29. David Harvey, *The Condition of postmodernity: an enquiry into the origins of cultural change* (Malden, MA, 2000), p.12.

the significance of Persia to the Enlightenment may help us better understand the Enlightenment and modernity, and even shed new light on some contemporary Western ideas and practices. In addition, such an examination could be helpful in conducting more informative assessments of how different cultures appropriate each other.

While we have placed the Enlightenment roughly between 1680 and 1780, we are cognizant of objections to these dates. Those who consider the Enlightenment an exclusively eighteenth-century phenomenon may question the legitimacy of extending it back to the seventeenth century. Others may see the dawn of the Enlightenment as early as the sixteenth century. However, as Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786) anticipated, a concept can exist prior to being represented by a particular word (or phrase).[30] This of course was not unique to the German language, as "the expression 'the Enlightenment' […] appeared in English only around the mid-nineteenth century."[31] In other words, retrospective use of the term "Enlightenment" "does not mean that we are imposing coherence on the past that was not experienced then."[32] Finally, to insist that the Enlightenment was an exclusively eighteenth-century phenomenon because, for example, the abbé Dubos's first use of "lumière" appeared in 1733 leads to the exclusion of the likes of Spinoza and Bayle, whose defining contributions to the Enlightenment are hard to ignore.

What can help us recover the boundaries of the Enlightenment is not insistence on some arbitrary dates, but an understanding of what the Enlightenment was about. Foucault saw the Enlightenment as an "attitude of modernity."[33] Consequently he assessed Kant's essay on "What is Enlightenment?" as a response to the question, "What

30. Moses Mendelssohn, "On the question: What is Enlightenment?," in *What is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-century answers and twentieth-century questions*, ed. James Schmid (Berkeley, CA, 1996), p.53–57 (53). Also, see Quentin Skinner, "Language and political change," in *Political innovation and conceptual change*, ed. Terence Ball, James Farr, and Russell L. Hanson (Cambridge, 1995), p.6–23 (8–9).
31. Edelstein, *Enlightenment*, p.7. Note, however, that Michael Allen Gillespie has pointed to the use of the concept in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. See Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological origins of modernity* (Chicago, IL, 2008), p.257.
32. Clifford Siskin and William Warner, "This is Enlightenment: an invitation in the form of an argument," in *This is Enlightenment*, ed. Clifford Siskin and William Warner (Chicago, IL, 2010), p.1–33 (18).
33. Foucault, "Enlightenment," p.48.

difference does today introduce with respect to yesterday?"[34] Similarly, we approach the Enlightenment here as an extensive and sustained effort to generate a new narrative of identity for Europe. It is in the context of this effort that G. L. van Roosbroeck made the following observation about Montesquieu: "'Comment peut-on être Persan?' was reflected in the convex mirror of his mind as: 'How can one be a European?'"[35]

Unprecedented production of pseudo-ethnographies, the popularity of travel journals, the allure of utopian accounts, and the rise to prominence of the Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns in intellectual circles were various instances of this effort to delineate boundaries between an old identity and a new one. This pursuit of an identity both invented and appropriated new mediations which appeared in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe, including new literary styles.[36] It is in the context of such an inherently complex effort that one can grasp the Enlightenment's preoccupation with reason and rationality on the one hand, and its appetite for fantasy and magical realism on the other. It is with this dualism in mind that we should look at the Enlightenment's interest in Persia.

The narrative of the Enlightenment provided Europe (or at least a significant part of it) with an occasion to reflect and negotiate a "new" identity. However, as mentioned above, we do not attempt to endorse either "euphoric accounts of intellectual courage and progress in the face of superstition and inequality," or "dystopian unmaskings of reason's darker motives."[37] We see the methodological diversity in the volume as well-suited to the end of demonstrating a range of eighteenth-century thought regarding Persia, and can better highlight the continuities and discontinuities of eighteenth-century theoretical approaches to "Orient."

Rather than attempting to identify intellectual convergence or homogeneity for the purpose of proposing a paradigm or narrative, the contributions in this volume instead stress the diversity and plurality in contemporaneous uses of sources about Persia—indeed, even the same sources about Persia. Cyrus Masroori's and John Christian Laursen's piece, "The background: European knowledge

34. Foucault, "Enlightenment," p.45.
35. G. L. van Roosbroeck, *Persian letters before Montesquieu* (New York, 1972), p.10.
36. For more, see Siskin and Warner, "This is Enlightenment."
37. Julie Candler Hayes, *Reading the French Enlightenment: system and subversion* (Cambridge, 2004), p.3.

of Persia before the Enlightenment," describes how, in addition to their firsthand experiences, eighteenth-century Europeans drew on a wide range of earlier sources about Persia. This contribution surveys how those ancient, medieval, and early modern sources served as a background to Enlightenment developments, helping us recognize continuities and changes in perceptions of Persia.

A central aim of this volume is to consider how the generation of new texts about Persia was taken up by Europeans with complicated motivations, and in ways that altered Enlightenment concepts like tyranny, tolerance, and reason. In this vein, Erica J. Mannucci's contribution, "'Peuplade estimable': late-eighteenth-century radical critics of religion and the Ghebres," asks how European processes of secularization and critiques of religion were shaped by empirical sources such as travel literature. Mannucci examines how revolutionary intellectuals Charles Dupuis, Sylvain Maréchal, and Constantin François de Chassebœuf, comte de Volney, used the example of the Ghebres, a religious minority in Persia and followers of natural philosophy, to launch a radical critique of religion. While these critics were sympathetic toward the religious minorities living in Persia, especially compared with what they saw as a despotic, violent Islamic empire, they nevertheless saw Persian religious minorities as cautionary tales, warning against the inherent irrationality and superstition of religion that cause it to descend into tyranny. Mannucci focuses intently on unearthing the ways in which Europeans engaged with empirical observations of Persia and (ostensibly) factual information to influence European debates. In this way, Mannucci goes beyond the analysis of texts, genealogies, or sources of ideas, so as to consider the political and social stakes for radical authors.

Myrtille Méricam-Bourdet's contribution, "Voltaire and Persia, or how to use Orient against Occident," examines how Voltaire strategically selected facts from travel stories such as Jean Chardin's *Voyage en Perse*, scholarly sources such as Thomas Hyde's *Veterum Persarum religionis historia*, and more recent histories of Persian revolutions in order to elaborate an image of a "modern" Persia that he implicitly contrasted with Christian interpretations of history and with the political image of horrific despotism elaborated by Montesquieu and others. Instead, Voltaire defended an ideal of tolerance that he saw at work in Persian and Muslim societies, while also using Persia as a case study for defining what constituted a benevolent despotism. By identifying the ideological, political, and religious issues in the historical discourse, Méricam-Bourdet is able to trace the dialogue

that Voltaire has with the connoisseurs of Persia, and also with contemporary thinkers such as Montesquieu.

Instead of subscribing to a grand theory, this volume has tried to appreciate the Enlightenment as "a complicated picture of the intellectual life of the period as a site of political and cultural contestation."[38] The narrative of the Enlightenment that emerges from this contestation is about a broadly shared consciousness developed largely based on a vocabulary whose meanings have been subject to constant negotiation such as reason, rights, freedom, and toleration, and which are the subject of the following contributions. In that spirit, Rolando Minuti's piece, "Oriental patriotism? Eighteenth-century French representations of Nadir Shah," demonstrates how the achievements and sudden decay of the administration of Nadir Shah, sovereign of Persia from 1736 to 1747, became fodder for European reflections on contemporary European political events and, crucially, European understandings of tyranny and patriotism. More specifically, Minuti concentrates on how the image of patriotism in a despotic nation challenged and altered European stereotypes of "Oriental" governments. Minuti's contribution is an inquiry into the concepts of *patrie* and *patriotisme* in the French cultural context of the eighteenth century, and it identifies the varieties of meanings of *patriotisme* vis-à-vis contemporary events in Persia. In doing so, Minuti offers an intriguing field of inquiry concerning the relationship between the eighteenth-century approach to Oriental history and the possibility of using critical concepts forged in European intellectual and political contexts. Through his analysis of a variety of literary sources and by connecting conceptual history and intellectual history, Minuti highlights issues related to the extension of European concepts in a global context.

If we take a critical attitude toward grand theories, the narrative of the Enlightenment appears as a web of languages in a wide range of disciplines and practices such as philosophy, theology, politics, art, and historiography, which communicate with each other because they subscribe to several broadly defined but never fully stable concepts such as reason, autonomy, liberty, tolerance, and rights. Thus, we use "the word 'Enlightenment' in a family of ways and talking about a family of phenomena, resembling and related to one another in a variety of ways

38. Karen O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment: cosmopolitan history from Voltaire to Gibbon* (Cambridge, 1997), p.10.

that permit of various generalizations."[39] Consequently, in this volume the narrative of the Enlightenment represents a number of discourses and several languages. Cyrus Masroori's single-authored piece investigates "George Lyttelton's *Letters from a Persian*: Persia and politics in eighteenth-century English fiction." Unlike most other authors of pseudo-Oriental literature, Lyttelton was a high-ranking politician who served in both houses of the British Parliament and as Chancellor of the Exchequer. *Letters from a Persian in England* is a unique example of Persia figuring in the political discourse of the Enlightenment. Lyttelton's work had a substantial impact on English political fiction of the eighteenth century: A chain of pseudo-Oriental letters appeared in England after its publication, some written in direct response to the book. Contrasting a fictional Persia and a "factual" England, *Letters from a Persian in England* criticizes the political and economic conditions of England, advances attacks against Robert Walpole's administration, advocates freedom of the press, and rejects religious persecution. Cyrus Masroori's contribution illustrates the historical approach in which texts are understood as responses to the concrete questions and challenges faced by authors—responses largely limited by a "linguistic context," or the concepts that the available discourses present to the author. Lyttelton's authorial intention, too, is grasped from within these contexts. It is this methodological background that informs Masroori's examination of the use of Persia by George Lyttelton.

Whitney Mannies's piece, "Persia in the *Encyclopédie*," considers the portrayal of Persia in the quintessential Enlightenment text. The term *Perse* appears in approximately 752 discrete articles, and approximately 471 articles deal specifically and substantively with Persia. Overall, the *Encyclopédie*'s treatment of Persia coalesces into five themes: Persia as a once-great kingdom; Persia as a source of European ideas; Persia as tolerant and diverse; the triumph of religious fanaticism over natural religion; and, finally, Persia's dissolution into despotism. This contribution is indicative of the volume's overall perspective that, in their utilization of Persia, Enlightenment discourses emerged in response to political and religious disputes and contingencies.

Marta García-Alonso's approach in "Persian theology and the checkmate of Christian theology: Bayle and the problem of evil" discloses the ways in which Persian thought was brought to bear on

39. J. G. A. Pocock, "Historiography and Enlightenment: a view of their history," *Modern intellectual history* 5:1 (2008), p.83–96 (83). Also, see Reinhart Koselleck, *Critique and crisis: Enlightenment and the pathogenesis of modern society* (London, 1988).

European debates about theology and philosophy via Pierre Bayle's texts on the problem of evil. García-Alonso shows how Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism were appropriated by this eminent voice of the early Enlightenment. The author illuminates the centrality of Persian theological doctrines to European Christian debates about evil and the nature of God. Pierre Bayle revived a debate between Persian and Augustinian theology, namely, the debate about whether or not the divine being itself contained equal, contrasting powers of good and evil. According to Bayle, scripture cannot reconcile the existence of sin in a world that is the work of God. Using Manichaean and Zoroastrian theologies, Bayle makes a case for rejecting natural theology and defining God in a philosophical way. Persian thought thus played a crucial role in Bayle's critique of the illegitimate use made of philosophy in religious affairs. Even more significantly, García-Alonso demonstrates the broad scope of Bayle's critique: Instead of limiting his criticism to the Calvinist theology of his time, Bayle instead directs his critique toward the very essence of Christian theology, represented by Augustine of Hippo. As he does so, the Persian roots of Bayle's critique take on a far-reaching significance.

This volume aims to demonstrate how visions of Persia informed religious debates, political struggles, social criticism, and philosophical meditations. In the midst of that diversity, the reader can also see how these different discourses could claim membership in the same family, by using and emphasizing shared concepts. We have striven to present what is common among the languages of the Enlightenment engaged with Persia, without committing the kind of gross generalization that ignores their differences. John Marshall's contribution, "Religious tolerance, intolerance, and absolutism in Safavid Persia and their representations in early Enlightenment European travel literature," describes how early Enlightenment engagements with Persia related to tolerance and tyranny. Influential travelers like Chardin, Thévenot, and d'Herbelot noted Persian theology's emphasis on love and the unity of peoples, and reported on Persian leaders' tolerance of religious minorities like Jews, Zoroastrians, and Hindus. It was a picture punctuated, however, by intolerance of and violence toward religious minorities. Marshall's piece is thus representative of the volume's overall assessment of the Enlightenment as a multifaceted dynamic narrative, far more complex than a naïve fable about human emancipation or an age of reason.[40]

40. The complexity of the Enlightenment has received greater appreciation by some recent scholars. For instance, the complexity of the relationship of religion and

Arguably the most famous of Enlightenment representations of Persia, Montesquieu's *Persian letters*, has been read and interpreted by numerous students of the Enlightenment during the three centuries since its publication. Montesquieu narrated a vision of Persia and Persians and appropriated that vision to criticize characteristics of eighteenth-century France such as absolutism, provincialism, and persecution. There is a broad (although by no means unanimous) consensus on some of Montesquieu's intentions in arrogating Persia and the Persian characters he portrays in the *Persian letters*. However, how he advances those intentions remains an intriguing question. Concentrating on Montesquieu's call for toleration, Antônio Carlos dos Santos provides an in-depth analysis in "The tolerant Persia in Montesquieu's *Persian letters*," focusing on the interplay of the "Self" and the "Other" in developing a cosmopolitan advocacy for toleration. Dos Santos conducts structural analysis of the text so as to gain a more reliable and comprehensive grasp of the internal logic of the arguments within the texts themselves. Putting less emphasis on historical context and more emphasis on the elucidation of ideas within the texts, dos Santos better conveys the ways in which Europeans themselves made sense of the concepts from, and representations of, Persia. Using the lens of tolerance, dos Santos interprets the movement of travel between Persia and Paris to be a movement also of moral philosophy and personal transformation. The author argues that the debate about Islam that transpires in the characters' correspondence is structured in such a way as to invite the reader's reflection and, ultimately, develop the values of tolerance and religious pluralism in the reader.

Each of these contributions illustrates the diversity of contingent interests on the part of Europeans who engaged with Persia, leading to various assessments and presentations of Persia. Some Europeans who engaged with Persia surely had a genuine interest in understanding Persia and Persians through dialogical exchanges, while others "instrumentalized" for the sake of diverse ends. Many did both. The pieces in this volume shed light on the variety and intricacy of interactions between the Enlightenment and Persia, providing its readers with the opportunity to appreciate the diversity and breadth of Persia's presence in the myriad discourses of the Enlightenment.

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the rationalist thought associated with the Enlightenment has been studied in *Let there be Enlightenment: the religious and mystical sources of rationality*, ed. Anton M. Matytsin and Dan Edelstein (Baltimore, MD, 2018).

The background: European knowledge of Persia before the Enlightenment

Cyrus Masroori *and*
John Christian Laursen

Even casual readers notice the frequent references made to "Persia" and "Persians" in the writings of the authors of the European Enlightenment. Indeed, it is hard to find any major thinker of the era who entirely ignored Persia. But what did they know about it? This contribution will review the available sources of information on Persia as a context for what the authors of the Enlightenment did with it. We will draw attention to a few themes in these materials, such as the errors made, deliberately or inadvertently, in reporting on Persia, and the special interest in the Zoroastrians, which in turn may have influenced the writers of the Enlightenment. Needless to say, we cannot cover every single source of knowledge about Persia that was available to Europe: That might number hundreds or even thousands of works, especially if we included texts which were based not on direct knowledge but rather on indirect knowledge taken from other sources. Although we begin with a discussion of early sources, we have emphasized later travel reports and travelogues that appeared in the century leading up to the Enlightenment.

Ancient sources

Persia was known to Europe from very early times through the Bible and ancient Greek and Roman sources. The Bible's account of Cyrus II, founder of the first Persian empire, played an important part in keeping Persia present in the European imagination. The biblical Cyrus is God's "shepherd," is given "a title of honor" by Him, liberates the Jews from Babylonian slavery, and rebuilds Jerusalem and its Temple (Isaiah 44–45; 2 Chronicles 36.22–23). Further, the

New Testament speaks of the three gift-bearing Magi, or Zoroastrian priests, so Christian Europeans knew of the connection between the gift-bearing visitors and Persia.

Among the ancients, Xenophon (430–354 BCE) contributed most significantly to the Enlightenment's portrayal of Persia.[1] He played a substantial part in introducing Persia in general and Cyrus in particular to pre-Christian Europe. His *Cyropaedia* (*c.*370 BCE) enjoyed renewed attention at the dawn of modernity by influencing a number of prominent European intellectuals, particularly Machiavelli.[2] His account of the Persians was deemed so remarkable that Roger Ascham, tutor to Queen Elizabeth I, wished that in England there was "such good order, as the old noble Persians so commonly used."[3]

One very early Enlightenment text, Denis Veiras's *History of the Sevarambians* (1675–1679), drew heavily on Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* and *Anabasis* (*c.*370 BCE).[4] It was an elaborate and innovative description of ideal monarchy combined with bold criticism of European institutions and ideas. It tells the story of one Captain Siden, whose story reminds one of Xenophon's adventures as a leader of the Ten Thousand in *Anabasis.* After a storm wrecks his ship, he and the other passengers find themselves in an unknown land. Siden is elected their leader. The founder and lawgiver of the country they discover was a Persian named Sevarias.[5] He was the oldest son of a noble and powerful Persian Zoroastrian. Like Xenophon's Cyrus, Veiras's Sevarias shows signs of extraordinary intelligence, courage, beauty, and health from an early age. He is soon forced to leave Persia, going into exile. This misfortune is described as a consequence of religious persecution that

1. Doohwan Ahn discusses attempts to fuse Xenophon's picture of Cyrus with that of the Old Testament. See Doohwan Ahn, "From Greece to Babylon: the political thought of Andrew Michael Ramsay (1686–1743)," *History of European ideas* 37:4 (2011), p.421–37.
2. For instance, see Paul J. Rasmussen, *Excellence unleashed: Machiavelli's critique of Xenophon and the moral foundation of politics* (Lanham, MD, 2009); Christopher Nadon, *Xenophon's prince: republic and empire in the Cyropaedia* (Berkeley, CA, 2001); and W. R. Newell, "Machiavelli and Xenophon on princely rule: a double-edged encounter," *The Journal of politics* 50:1 (1988), p.108–30.
3. J. K. Anderson, *Xenophon* (New York, 1974), p.5.
4. Xenophon and Veiras shared more than a taste for ideal monarchies. They preferred a life of action to one of contemplation, engaged in political intrigues, and lived part of their lives in exile. They shared an interest in military affairs and history, and they enjoyed mixing fact and fiction in their utopian texts.
5. For the story of Sevarias, see Denis Veiras, *The History of the Sevarambians*, ed. John Christian Laursen and Cyrus Masroori (New York, 2006), ch.3.

the Zoroastrians faced in Persia under Muslims and their monarch, "the Sophy." Veiras has his hero duplicate Cyrus's great military and diplomatic achievements as described in the *Cyropaedia*.[6]

Aeschylus (*c.*524–455 BCE), who witnessed the Persian invasion of Greece and wrote *The Persians* after the Battle of Thermopylae (480 BCE), offers a surprisingly benevolent portrayal of the Persians.[7] His contemporary, Herodotus (*c.*484–*c.*425 BCE), shows a similar attitude in his *Histories* (440 BCE), and on occasion admires Persian customs (*The Histories*, I.136–37). Herodotus considered the Persians capable of enjoying a Logos similar to the Greeks, one which allowed them to discuss and consider the merits of various political regimes, including democracy.[8] Meanwhile, Herodotus's *Histories* was one of the most important influences on the shaping of early modern European thought.[9]

Later, in Aristotle's writings (384–322 BCE), we see the greatest polarization of Greek and barbarian, and a departure from Aeschylus, Herodotus, and Xenophon.[10] Rather than being simply an expression of the Greeks' claim to ethnic superiority, this was probably a response to Athenian anxiety about tyranny, a regime prevalent in many Greek city-states, and always presented as an alternative to Athenian democracy. Aristotle, having experienced the decline and fall of the Persian empire, argued for the inferiority of the Persians not on the basis of their weakness on the battlefield, but in their readiness to obey

6. However, one difference is worthy of notice in comparing the two. Cyrus's kingdom, as Xenophon predicts toward the end of *Cyropaedia*, becomes subject to decline and ruin. Sevarambia, in contrast, remains a prosperous and secure kingdom after Sevarias's death. Thus, in a final assessment, Sevarias proves to be superior to Cyrus.
7. There were apparently two other plays about Persians written by Phrynichus, before Aeschylus's *The Persians*, but both are lost. For more, see Mary R. Bachvarova and Dorota Dutsch, "Mourning a city 'empty of men': stereotypes of Anatolian communal lament in Aeschylus' Persians," in *The Fall of cities in the Mediterranean: commemoration in literature, folk-song, and liturgy*, ed. Mary R. Bachbarova, Dorota Dutsch, and Ann Suter (Cambridge, 2016), p.79–105 (87–88).
8. Herodotus, *The Histories*, VI.43; VII.10a.
9. For example, see Arnaldo Momigliano, *The Classical foundations of modern historiography* (Berkeley, CA, 1990), p.51–52.
10. The development of the concept of barbarian among the ancient Greeks has a long, multifaceted, and complex history which stands beyond the scope of this article. For some insights, see Edith Hall, *Inventing the barbarian: Greek self-definition through tragedy* (Oxford, 1989).

a tyrant. During the rise of Alexander's imperium and the decline of Athenian democracy, as Aristotle's hopes for establishing a virtuous polity in Greece faded, he appealed to his compatriots to avoid the fate of the Persians.

Medieval and Renaissance sources

A number of Italians traveled to Persia during the late medieval era, before such journeys became fashionable among other Europeans. One of the earliest accounts of such travels is Odoric of Pordenone (d.1331). Odoric wrote that he "visited the countries of the unbelievers in order to win some harvest of soul."[11] Odoric's account of Persia was brief but intriguing to the medieval European. To those interested in the riches of the Orient, he told about Tauris (Tabriz), where "the whole world, almost, hath dealings […] for merchandise."[12] To others more interested in the biblical image of Persia he tells about Cassan (Kashan), which he identifies as the city of the New Testament's Magi.[13]

Because of the Bible, Renaissance Europe was inclined to give Persians a rather privileged position in comparison to other nations of the East. Attention to Zoroastrianism, the religion of the Magi, which had its roots in the Greco-Roman writings, was revived during the Renaissance.[14] Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) believed that Zoroaster, Hermes Trismegistus, and Orpheus had access to the divine truth, which was then transmitted to Plato via Pythagoras and Aglaophemus.[15] In Ficino's account, Zoroaster is the first theologian to whom both Plato and Christian thinkers owed intellectual gratitude.[16] As he put it, "after [announcing Jesus's birth] the Angel immediately directed the light that had appeared toward Persia, and so the Magi were led

11. Odoric of Pordenone, *The Travels of Friar Odoric*, translated by Henry Yule (Grand Rapids, MI, 2002), p.63–64.
12. Odoric, *Travels*, p.69.
13. Odoric, *Travels*, p.70.
14. For a comprehensive study of the Greco-Roman engagement with Zoroastrianism, see Phiroze Vasunia's *Zarathushtra and the religion of ancient Iran: the Greek and Latin sources in translation* (Mumbai, 2007).
15. Wilhelm Schmitt-Biggemann, *Philosophia perennis: historical outlines of Western spirituality in ancient, medieval, and early modern thought* (Dordrecht, 2004), p.33.
16. Michael J. B. Allen, "At variance: Marsilio Ficino, Platonism and heresy," in *Platonism at the origins of modernity: studies on Platonism and early modern philosophy*, ed. Douglas Hedley and Sarah Hutton (Dordrecht, 2008), p.31–44 (38).

to Christ."[17] Ficino's contemporary, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494), connected Zoroaster to the Christian cabalist tradition, suggesting that Zoroastrianism was "divinely inspired."[18] Francesco Patrizi of Cherso (1529–1597) considered Zoroaster, Orpheus, and Hermes to be divine figures. By doing so, Patrizi "swept [Aristotle] from the daily menu of the philosophy students and replaced [him]" with the three figures above.[19] Similarly, William Gilbert (1544–1603) "referred to Hermes, Zoroaster, and Orpheus as ancient teachers of great […] wisdom," and Robert Burton (1577–1640) "considered Pythagoras, Zoroaster, and Trismegistus to be ancient theologians."[20]

Early modern sources

In early modern times, accounts of journeys to "the Orient" enjoyed a wide reception. Because of pragmatic interests, the largest increase in European knowledge about Persia came from travelers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[21] Among the most important Italian sources on sixteenth-century Persia was Giovanni Battista Ramusio's *Delle navigationi et viaggi*.[22] This three-volume book "served as a model for Hakluyt's *Voyages* and provided a number of documents, which Hakluyt had translated and inserted into his own compilations."[23] *Delle navigationi* includes the accounts of a number of Italian travelers, including Giovanni Maria Angiolello (1451–1525), Josafa (Giosafat)

17. Marsilio Ficino, "The Star of the Magi," in *Marsilio Ficino*, ed. Angela Voss (Berkeley, CA, 2006), p.95–102 (98).
18. Schmitt-Biggemann, *Philosophia*, p.95, 172.
19. Cees Leijenhorst, "Francesco Patrizi's Hermetic philosophy," in *Gnosis and hermeticism from antiquity to modern times*, ed. Roelof van den Broek and Wouter J. Hanegraaff (New York, 1998), p.125–46 (130).
20. Dewey D. Wallace, *Shapers of English Calvinism, 1660–1714: variety, persistence, and transformation* (Oxford, 2011), p.102.
21. For a survey of such travels, see Sonja Brentjes, *Travellers from Europe in the Ottoman and Safavid empires, 16th–17th centuries: seeking, transforming, discarding knowledge* (Abingdon, 2010); Ambrogio Contarini *et al.*, *Travels to Tana and Persia, by Josafa Barbaro and Ambrogio Contarini* (London, 1873).
22. The first volume of *Delle navigationi et viaggi* was printed in Venice in 1550 by Givnti. The third volume was printed in 1556 by Stamperia de Giunti, and the second volume was printed two years later, also in Venice by Stamperia de Giunti.
23. Sven Trakulhun, "Three tales of the New World: nation, religion, and colonialism," in *Richard Hakluyt and travel writing in early modern Europe*, ed. Daniel Carey and Claire Jowitt (London, 2012), p.57–66 (60).

Barbaro (1413–1494), and Caterino Zeno. Also, in his long *Diarri*, Marino Sanuto (Marin Sanudo) the Younger (1466–1536) provided information about Shah Ismael I.[24]

Early Italian travelers such as Ludovico di Varthema (1470–1517) acquired much fame. His *Itinerario de Ludouico de Varthema Bolognese* (1510) reported on the rise of the Safavids, and contributed to an image of the sophi/sophy (the title given to the Safavid kings by European travelers) as a bloodthirsty tyrant. The Italian edition went through multiple reprints and was also translated and published in Latin (1511), German (1515), Spanish (1520), French (1556), Dutch (1563), and English (1577 and 1863).[25] Varthema witnessed Shah Ismael's persecution of the Sunnis, reporting that "the Sofi was going through [Transoxania] putting everything to fire and flame; and especially he put to the sword all those who believed in Bubachar and Othman and Aumar, who are all companions of Mahomet; but he leaves unmolested those who believe in Mahomet and Ali, and protects them."[26] Echoing Varthema's view of Ismael, his contemporary anonymous Italian traveler to Persia writes, "From the time of Nero to the present, I doubt whether so bloodthirsty a tyrant has ever existed."[27] He then adds, "The name of God is forgotten throughout Persia and only that of Ismael remembered,"[28] thus reinforcing Aristotle's conclusion that Persians were susceptible to tyranny.

A number of Italians traveling to India visited the island of Hormuz during the period that it was under Portuguese control in the sixteenth century.[29] Among them were Cesare Federici (1521–1601) and Gasparo Balbi.[30] More extensive information on Safavid Persia was provided

24. Marin Sanudo, *I diarii di Marino Sanuto* (Venice, 1879–1903); Marin Sanudo, *Šāh Ismā'īl I nei diarii di Marin Sanudo*, ed. Biancamaria Scarcia Amoretti (Rome, 1979).
25. Ludovico di Varthema, *The Travels of Ludovico di Varthema*, translated by John Winter Jones (London, 1863), preface.
26. Varthema, *Travels*, p.103.
27. "The travels of a merchant in Persia," in *A Narrative of Italian travels in Persia in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries*, ed. Charles Grey (London, 1873), p.139–207 (191).
28. *Italian travels*, p.206.
29. Europeans traveling to India could have become acquainted with Persia and Persians even if they did not visit Persia. Persian was widely used, both in the Mughal court and in the literary circles of the subcontinent. Persian culture was also present in India via some Sufi orders. For more on the presence of Persia in India, see Phiroze Vasunia, *The Classics and colonial India* (Oxford, 2013).
30. Cesare Federici, *Viaggio di M. Cesare Federici nell'Indie Orientali et Oltra l'Indie* (Venice, Andrea Muschio, 1587). The English translation by T. Hitchcock, R. Jones, and E. White first appeared in 1588 (Cesare Federici, *The Voyage and*

by Giovanni Minadoi (1551–1615), who served as a member of the Venetian diplomatic mission in the Levant. Balbi's *La historia della guerra fra Turchi et Persiani* (1587) was reprinted several times.[31] Giovanni Tommaso Minadoi traveled to Persia, and wrote *Historia della guerra fra turchi et persiani: descritta in quattro libri* (1587).[32] An English translation followed in 1595.[33] Among other Italian narratives on early Safavid Persia was Michele Membré's *Relazione di Persia* (1542),[34] "a tract on how relations with Persia could be developed [whose] insights served as important contributions to Venetian policy."[35] Another account from the same era was Theodoro Spandugino's *La Vita di Sach Ismael el Tamas Re di Persia Chiamati Soffi*, which appeared in 1560.[36] Vincenzo degli Alessandri's (1530–1595) *Relazione di Persa* (1574) was written against the background of his highly unsuccessful mission to Shah Tahmasp's court.[37] It is not surprising that his account of

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travaile of M. Cæsar Frederick, merchant of Venice, into the East India, the Indies, and beyond the Indies, London, n.n., 1588). Another English edition appeared soon after in the second volume of Richard Hakluyt's *Principal navigations, voyages, traffiques and discoveries of the English nation made by sea or overland, in the south and south-east parts of the world* (London, n.n., 1599), p.213–44. More recent reprints have been made by Theatrum Orbis Terrarum in Amsterdam (1971), and Decapo Press in New York (1971). See Robin Healey, *Italian literature before 1900 in English translation* (Toronto, 2011), p.391. Gasparo Balbi, *Viaggio dell'Indie Orientali, di G. B. Gioielliero Venetiano, nel quale si contiene quanto egli in detto viaggio ha veduto per lo spatio di 9 anni consumati in esso dal 1579 fino al 1588* (Venice, Camillo Borgominieri, 1590).

31. Gasparo Balbi, *La historia della guerra fra Turchi et Persiani* (Rome, Stamperia di Iacomo Torniero, 1587). For more on this see http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/italy-iv-travel-accounts-2 (last accessed January 20, 2021).
32. Giovanni Tommaso Minadoi, *Historia della guerra fra turchi et persiani: descritta in quattro libri* (Rome, Tornerio & Donangeli, 1587).
33. *The History of the wares between the Tyrkes and the Persians*, translated by A. Hartwell (London, n.n., 1595).
34. Michele Membré, *Relazione di Persia* (1542). The text, which was a part of the Venetian State Archive, was printed in 1969 as *Relazione di Persia (1542): Ms. inedito dell'Archivio di Stato di Venezia* (Naples, 1969). An English version is also available: *Mission to the lord sophy of Persia (1539–1542)* (Cambridge, 1999).
35. Stephen Ortega, *Negotiating transcultural relations in the early modern Mediterranean Ottoman–Venetian encounters* (London, 2014), p.41.
36. Francesco Sansovino, *Dell'historia vniuersale dell'origine et imperio de Turchi: parte prima. Nella quale si contengono tutte le guerre fatte da quella natione. Con le vite particolari de i principi Ottomani fino al tempo presente* (Venice, Francesco Sansovino et compagni, 1560), p.125–34.
37. One can speculate that Shah Tahmasp's concern with preserving the Peace of Amasya (1555) with the Ottomans, a concern also displayed in the cold

Shah Tahmasp was the harshest report on any Safavid monarch by any European traveler. Meanwhile, Alessandri's writings had a significant influence on the Italians' perception of Persia.[38] Detailed reports by Giovan Battista Vecchietti (1552–1619), printed in 1587, also contributed to the Europeans' opinion about Persia in the late sixteenth century.[39]

Another group of Italians who contributed to the shaping of the Europeans' image of Persia in the seventeenth century were the Carmelite missionaries, who were first sent to the Safavid empire by Pope Clement VIII in 1604. In the following years missionaries from other Catholic orders such as the Capuchins arrived in Persia.[40] Other Carmelites, like Vincenzo Maria di S. Caterina and the lesser known Giuseppe di S. Maria, also wrote about their experiences in Persia.[41] Vincenzo Maria di S. Caterina allocated a short chapter to the Persians and their government. He begins the chapter by stating that "Persia, based on its size, population, and wealth, is one of the more prosperous kingdoms in the Orient."[42] Giving a brief description of Persia's borders and terrain, Vincenzo names the Turks, the Great Mogul (gran Mogor), and the Uzbeks as Persia's enemies, pointing out that the Persians keep the upper hand against them. Writing about the Safavid shahs, Vincenzo pointed out that some of their titles are suitable for God and not mortal men.[43]

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reception of Anthony Jenkinson (discussed below), played an important part in the failure of this mission.

38. For a copy see Vincenzo degli Alessandri, "Relazione di Persia," in *Relazioni degli Ambasciatori Veneti al Senato*, ed. Eugenio Albèri, 15 vols. (Florence, 1839–1863), vol.3, p.103–27. Another copy is available as *La Republica di Venezia e la Persia*, ed. Guglielmo Berchet (Turin, 1865), p.167–82.
39. "Una relazione di Giovan Battista Vecchietti sulla Persia e sul Regno di Hormuz (1587)," *Oriente moderno* 35:4 (1955), p.149–60. For more on Giovan Battista Vecchietti see Gerolamo Vecchietti, "Lettera di Girolamo Vecchietti sopra la vita di Giovambattista Vecchietti suo fratello," in *I Codici manoscritti volgari della libreria Naniana* (Venice, Antonio Zatta, 1776), p.159–91.
40. For more on the Carmelites, see *A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia: the Safavids and the papal mission of the 17th and 18th centuries*, ed. H. Chick (London, 2012).
41. *Il viaggio all'Indie Orientali del padre F. Vincenzo Maria di S. Caterina da Siena, con le osseruationi, e successi nel medesimo, i costumi, e riti di varie nationi, et reconditissimi arcani de' gentili, cauati con somma diligenza da' loro scritti* (Rome, Fillipomaria Mancini, 1672; repr. Venice, Giacomo, 1678); *Prima speditione All'Indie Orientali del P.F. Giuseppe di Santa Maria, Carmeltano Scalzo* (Rome, Filippo Maria Mancini, 1666).
42. Vincenzo, *Il viaggio all'Indie Orientali*, p.104.
43. Vincenzo, *Il viaggio all'Indie Orientali*, p.105.

The Italians who traveled to Persia in the earlier years of Safavid rule had a generally negative perception of that country. Later Italian travelers, however, drew a different picture of the country and its monarchs. A century after Varthema and Contarini, Pietro Della Valle (1586–1652) traveled to Persia and lived there for about four years (1617–1621), hoping to join Shah Abbas's military campaigns against the Ottomans. Della Valle reported his observations in five long letters, first published between 1650 and 1658, which are particularly valuable for a number of reasons.[44] To begin with, his interest in the lives of ordinary Persians was rare among early modern European travelers. He engaged with local people in various parts of Persia, and reported on their clothing, housing, food, and social events.[45] His interest in Persian culture motivated him to learn about Persian poetry and folklore.[46] His accounts of matters of religion and religious ceremonies are detailed and often accurate, indicating a keen curiosity and attention to matters often ignored or summarized superficially by other European travelers.

Della Valle's attention to the etymology of Persian words is unique among the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europeans who traveled to Persia. He used some of the most accurate transliterations when reporting on various geographical locations in Iran. Finally, Della Valle's firsthand observations regarding Shah Abbas's court, the shah's demeanor, and the royal family are unique, even considering accounts by Persian authors of the time. He was given a number of occasions to speak with the shah and otherwise be in his presence in gatherings with elite participants. He also enjoyed access to a number of influential courtiers, some of whom shared intriguing information with him. Of particular value is Della Valle's account of the shah's engagement with the invading Ottomans in Azerbaijan, and his

44. Pietro Della Valle, *Viaggi di Pietro Della Valle, il pellegrino: con minuto ragguaglio di tutte le cose notabili osseruate in essi, descritti da lui medesimo in 54 lettere familiari, da diuersi luoghi della intrapresa peregrinatione, mandate in Napoli all'erudito, e fra' più cori, di molti anni suo Amico Mario Schipano: diuisi in tre porti, cioè la Turchia, la Persia, e l'India, le quali hauran per Aggiunta, se Dio gli dorà vita, la quarta parte, che conterrà le figure di molte cose memorabili, sparse per tutta l'Opera, e la loro esplicatione* (Rome, n.n., 1650); Pietro Della Valle, *Viaggi di Pietro Della Valle il pellegrino descritti da lui medesimo in lettere familiari all'erudito su amico Mario Schipano, La Persia. Parte prima-parte seconda* (Rome, Biagio Deversin, 1658). The references here are to Pietro Della Valle, *Viaggi di Pietro Della Valle il pellegrino*, vol.1 (Brighton, 1843).
45. See for example Della Valle, *Viaggi*, p.435–37, 443–44, 446–47.
46. See for example Della Valle, *Viaggi*, p.431.

accounts of some of the battles between the two sides are of significant historical importance. He also had extensive contact with Christian missionaries and European diplomats in Persia. His account of his travels in Persia influenced the Western imagination well into the twentieth century.[47]

Della Valle draws an overall positive picture of Persia and Persians.[48] He found Persia superior to the Ottoman empire, and even comparable to European countries.[49] This is in part because Shah Abbas's reign (1588–1629) was during the zenith of the Safavids' power and splendor. The shah defeated the Ottoman armies in multiple major engagements, and even captured parts of Iraq, including Baghdad. He also developed commerce in his empire, and renovated important cities, particularly his capital, Isfahan.[50] As Della Valle points out, Shah Abbas was one of the most tolerant Safavid monarchs, and particularly sympathetic and generous toward the Europeans who traveled to his empire.[51] Della Valle saw the Persians as natural allies against the Turks, and hoped to promote an alliance between the Safavids and the European enemies of the Ottomans.

Della Valle's account of his travels in Persia was published posthumously in Italian (1658). A Dutch translation appeared in the same year, and again in 1681.[52] French translations began to appear from 1661, followed by another Dutch translation (1681).[53] A German translation came out in 1674.[54] While there was an early English translation of Della Valle's travels to India (1665), a translation of

47. See for example Wilfrid Blunt, *Pietro's pilgrimage: a journey to India and back at the beginning of the seventeenth century* (London, 1953).
48. See for example Della Valle, *Viaggi*, p.450.
49. See for example Della Valle, *Viaggi*, p.440.
50. Della Valle was quite impressed with Isfahan. See Della Valle, *Viaggi*, p.453–57.
51. See for example Della Valle, *Viaggi*, p.451.
52. Siegfried Huigen, "Antiquarian Ambonese: François Valentyn's comparative ethnography (1724)," in *The Dutch trading companies as knowledge networks* (Leiden, 2010), p.171–99 (177).
53. *Les Fameux voyages de Pietro Della Valle* (Paris, n.n., 1661); *Les Fameux voyages de Pietro Della Valle, surnommé l'illustre voyageur* (Paris, Gervais Clouzier, 1670); *Voyages de Pietro Della Valle gentilhomme romain* (Rouen, Robert Machuel, 1745). *De volkomen beschryvinge der voortreffelijcke reyzen van de deurluchtig Reysiger Pietro Della Valle* (Amsterdam, Jan Rieuwertsz, 1666); *Alle de voortreffelijke reizen van de deurluchtige Pietro Della Valle* (Amsterdam, Hendrik, 1681).
54. *Eines vornehmen Römischen Patritii Reiss-Beschreibung in unterschiedliche Theile der Welt nemlich in Turkey, Egypten, Palestina, Persien, Ost Indien* (Geneva, Verlegung Johann-Herman Widerholds, 1674).

his letters from Persia did not appear until John Pinkerton's *Voyages and travels* (1811).[55] Della Valle also wrote *Della conditioni di Abbas re di Persia* (Venice, 1628), which was shortly after translated into French as *Histoire apologétique d'Abbas, roi de Perse*.[56]

While Della Valle was in Iran, Philip III's ambassador, Don García de Silva y Figueroa, arrived at the Safavid court in Isfahan.[57] Like Della Valle, Silva y Figueroa wrote a journal of his travels, where he paid close attention to various aspects of life in Iran, and gave relatively detailed accounts of cities which he passed through.[58] Silva y Figueroa is particularly known for his observations on the ruins of Persepolis, and is recognized as the first European who copied the cuneiform inscriptions of the site. Silva y Figueroa also gives a valuable and at times detailed account of his observations at Shah Abbas's court.

Silva y Figueroa also gives a relatively detailed description of the main differences between the Shia and the Sunni Muslims, and a brief account of the martyrdom of the highly revered Shia Imam Husayn.[59] The journal points out that the Shia are not as zealous as the Sunnis. The Shia, Silva y Figueroa observes, do not mind allowing Christians access to the mosques during the ceremonies mourning Husayn,

55. *The Travels of Sig. Pietro Della Valle, a noble Roman, into East-India and Arabia deserta* (London, n.n., 1665); John Pinkerton, *A General collection of the best and most interesting voyages and travels in all parts of the world* (London, 1811).
56. Pietro Della Valle, *Della conditioni di Abbas re di Persia* (Venice, F. Baba, 1628), translated by Jean Baudoin as *Histoire apologétique d'Abbas, roi de Perse* (Paris, Toussainct Du Bray, 1631).
57. For more on García de Silva y Figueroa and his mission to the Safavid Court, see Luis Gil, "The embassy of Don García de Silva y Figueroa to Shah Abbas I," in *Iran and the world in the Safavid age*, ed. Willem Floor and Edmund Herzig (London, 2015), p.161–80; and *Estudos sobre Don García de Silva y Figueroa e os "Comentarios" da embaixada à Persia (1614–1624)*, ed. Rui Manuel Loureiro, Ana Cristina Costa Gomes, and Vasco Resende (Lisbon, 2011).
58. An edited French translation of the journal was first printed as *L'Ambassade de D. Garcias de Silva Figueroa en Perse*, translated by Abraham de Wicqfort (Paris, Louis Billaine, 1667). The French translation does not include the first two chapters of the original Spanish text. The Spanish text was published in two volumes between 1903 and 1905 in Madrid: *Comentarios de D. García de Silva y Figueroa de la embajada que de parte del rey de España don Felipe III hizo al Rey Xa Abás de Persia* (Madrid, 1903–1905). The introduction to the first volume of the Spanish edition suggests that the books were read, among others, by Chardin (*Comentarios de D. García de Silva y Figueroa*, vol.1, p.v).
59. Silva y Figueroa, *L'Ambassade*, p.276–79.

apparently hoping that the ceremonies impact them so much that they will convert to Islam.[60]

Like many other travelers to Safavid Persia, Silva y Figueroa pays particular attention to the Zoroastrian inhabitants of Isfahan (Isphahan), whom he describes with general sympathy. Silva y Figueroa suggests that the invasion by "les plus grossières et les plus barbares Nations de la Terre," such as Arabs, Turks, and Tartars, was responsible for the decline of the "restes des anciens & premiers Habitans de Perse."[61] The ambassador concludes: "La grande simplicité & l'humeur franche de ces gens là faisoit croire, que l'on n'auroit pas beaucoup de peine à les amener à la connoissance de la Religion Chrestienne, si les Religieux, qui sont à Ispahan, s'y appliquoient auec le zele & la diligence qu'ils doiuent à leur profession."[62]

Some fifty years after Della Valle and Silva y Figueroa, another Italian aristocrat, Ambrosio Bembo (1652–1705), traveled to Persia in June 1674 and wrote extensively about his journey. Bembo's account of Persia was neither as detailed nor as meticulous as that of Della Valle.[63] However, Bembo points out that this period witnessed a substantial rise in the presence of Europeans in the Persian Gulf (particularly the city of Basra) and Persia.

Portuguese traveler

Pedro Teixeira (*c.*1570–1641) was a Portuguese of Jewish descent who reached Hormuz (Ormuz) in 1593 and resided there for a number of years. At the time Hormuz was under Portuguese rule. He read and partially translated Mohammad Mir Khwand's *Rauzat al-safa fi sirat al-anbiya va al-muluk va al-khulafa* (1434–1498), arguably one of the most authoritative Persian medieval books of general history, which included chronicles of the Persian monarchies. This, together with his account of the kings of Hormuz, was published in Antwerp in 1610.[64] While it has been suggested that Teixeira's book "has little merit as a historical work, [and] his record of his travels in Persia is distinctly

60. Silva y Figueroa, *L'Ambassade*, p.278.
61. Silva y Figueroa, *L'Ambassade*, p.176–77.
62. Silva y Figueroa, *L'Ambassade*, p.179.
63. Ambrosio Bembo, *The Travels and journal of Ambrosio Bembo* (Berkeley, CA, 2007).
64. Pedro Teixeira, *Relaciones de P. Teixeira del origen, descendencia y succesión de Ios reyes de Persia y de Hormuz y de un viaje hecho por el mismo autor desde la India oriental hasta Italia por tierra* (Antwerp, Hieronymo Verdussen, 1610).

jejune," the book is one of few accounts of Portuguese travelers in Safavid Persia.[65]

English travelers

One of the first Englishmen to travel to Persia and write about his journey was the merchant, adventurer, and ambassador Anthony Jenkinson (1529–1611). Jenkinson was an agent of the Muscovy Company, and one author has called him the first English explorer in Persia.[66] He participated in an effort by Queen Elizabeth to get around the Ottoman and Portuguese control of trade routes to China. In that capacity, he traveled to the Safavid empire in 1561–1562 and delivered a letter from Queen Elizabeth to Shah Tahmasp (1514–1576). Jenkinson's mission was not very successful. He was treated rather coldly by the king, and the resulting disappointment is clear in Jenkinson's journal.[67] When Jenkinson presented the queen's letter, the shah pretended that there was no one in his country who could translate it, although the three copies of the letter were written in Latin, Italian, and Hebrew. If Jenkinson's report was accurate, he reminded the shah that given the extent of his realm it was hard to imagine that none of his subjects knew any of these languages.[68] Such a blunt reminder would have embarrassed the shah, perhaps explaining what happened next. Tahmasp asked Jenkinson whether he was a Muslim or not. This was a deliberately odd question, as the shah surely knew the answer beforehand. Upon hearing that Jenkinson was

65. Laurence Lockhart, "European contacts with Persia, 1350–1736," in *The Cambridge history of Iran*, vol.6, ed. Peter Jackson and Laurence Lockhart (Cambridge, 1986), p.373–410 (386). For more, see John M. Flannery, *The Mission of the Portuguese Augustinians to Persia and beyond (1602–1747)* (Leiden, 2013).
66. Kit Mayers, *The First English explorer* (Leicester, 2016).
67. Anthony Jenkinson, "A compendious and briefe declaration of the journey of M. Anth. Jenkinson, from the famous citie of London into the Land of Persia." The text was first published in Jenkinson's account in Hakluyt, *The Principal navigations*. For more information see Jennifer Speake, *Literature of travel and exploration: an encyclopedia*, vol.1 (London, 2003), p.650. Jenkinson's report of visiting Persia was reprinted multiple times with different titles assigned by editors. The references in this article are to "The voyage of M. Anthony Jenkinson through Russia, and over the Caspian Sea into Persia, anno 1561," in *The Principal navigations voyages trafiques & discoveries of the English nation made by sea or over-land to the remote and farthest distant quarters of the earth at any time within the compasse of these 1600 yeeres*, vol.3 (Glasgow, 1903), p.15–38.
68. Jenkinson, "The voyage," p.30.

a Christian, the shah said: "Oh thou unbeliever, we have no need to have friendship with the unbelievers."[69] Jenkinson was then dismissed from the court, and apparently saved from further mistreatment only because one of Tahmasp's lords interceded on his behalf.

Jenkinson tried to explain the failure of his mission in terms of Shah Tahmasp's foreign policy considerations. His arrival at the Safavid court in 1562 indeed came at a delicate time. Shah Tahmasp had signed the Peace of Amasya with Suleiman the Magnificent in 1555, and was eager to avoid another long and costly war with the Ottomans. Tahmasp allowed Suleiman's agents to murder his rebellious brother Bayezid, who had taken refuge at the Safavid court. Jenkinson notes that, not long before his arrival at Tahmasp's court, an Ottoman embassy bearing gifts worth 40,000 pounds had reached Qazvin to perpetuate the peaceful relationship in return for Bayezid's head.[70] The Turks were also wary of the threat that Jenkinson's trade ambitions could present to the blooming Ottoman-Venetian trade with Persia. Finally, the shah apparently was suspicious that Jenkinson was spying for the Portuguese, who controlled the Persian Gulf from the island of Hormuz. It is possible that Jenkinson's disappointing audience with Shah Tahmasp was also a consequence of his failure to appreciate the Savfavid court's etiquette, and perhaps only exacerbated by the complexities of the Ottoman–Safavid relationship at the time.

A few years later the shah treated Englishmen Richard Willes and Arthur Edwards, who visited his court in 1568, with much greater sympathy. According to Willes's report,

> before the Sophie (whom they say to be a marvelous wise and gracious prince) seemed to favour our nation and to graunt them such priviledges, the people abused them very much, and so hated them that they would not touch them, but reviled them, calling them Cafars and Gawars, which is infidels or misbeleevers. But after they saw how greatly the prince favoured them, they had them afterward in great reverence, and would kiss their hands and use them very friendly.[71]

69. Jenkinson, "The voyage," p.30.
70. Jenkinson, "The voyage," p.27–28.
71. Richard Willes, "Notes concerning this fourth voyage into Persia, begunne in the monthe of Julie 1568, gathered by Master Richard Willes from the mouth of Master Arthur Edwards, which was agent in the same," in *Early voyages and travels to Russia and Persia by Anthony Jenkinson and other Englishmen*, ed. E. Delmar Morgan and C. H. Coote, 2 vols. (London, 1886), vol.2, p.415–22 (417).

The second half of the sixteenth century witnessed a number of other travelers from Britain visiting Persia, whose accounts provided the raw material for associating Persia with the erotic elements of some eighteenth-century European tales. Jeffrey Ducket, for example, reported on Shah Tahmasp's harem of four wives and 300 concubines.[72] He left the details for the readers' imagination by saying, "What I heard of the maner of their marriages, for offending of honest consciences and chaste eares I may not commit to writing." While not void of some accurate information, these accounts were plagued by blunders. For example, Ducket gives the shah's age as "about foure-score yeeres," although Tahmasp died at sixty-two. A more substantial error is Ducket's description of the religious differences between the Shia Persians and the Sunni Turks:

> Their religion is all one with the Turkes, saying that they differ who was the right successour of Mahumet. The Turkes say that it was one Homer [Omar] and his soune Vsman [Osman]; but the Persians say that it was one Mortus Ali, which they would proove in this maner. They say there was a counsell called to decide the matter who should bee the successor; and after they had called upon Mahumet to reveale unto them his will and pleasure there in, there came among them a little Lizard, who declared that it was Mahumets pleasure that Mortus Ali should bee his successour. This Mortus Ali was a valiant man, and slew Homer, the Turkes prophet.[73]

In this passage Ducket correctly identifies the main difference between the Shia and the Sunni over the question of Muhammad's succession. He is also accurate that a council elected Muhammad's successor. But the rest of his account suffers from significant errors. Omar (or Homer, as Ducket Europeanizes him) was not the first but the second successor (caliph) to Muhammad. Usman (Uthman, 576–656), the third successor to Muhammad, was not Omar's son. Omar was not killed by Mortus Ali (Morteza Ali), who succeeded Uthman, although Ali was implicated in Uthman's murder at the hands of a mob. Finally, there is no evidence that the Shia believed "a lizard" informed the council about Muhammad's choice. The rest of Ducket's account of the Persians' religion also represents a mixture of accurate and erroneous information.

72. Jeffrey Ducket, "Further observations concerning the state of Persia," in *Early voyages*, ed. E. D. Morgan and C. H. Coote, vol.2, p.423–40 (433).
73. Ducket, "Further observations," p.433–34.

Toward the end of the sixteenth century, British interest in Persia witnessed a substantial shift as Queen Elizabeth pursued a rapprochement with the Ottomans. The next important mission to Persia, that of the Sherley brothers, was not sanctioned by the queen, who banished Anthony Sherley for jeopardizing British foreign policy. Anthony Sherley, together with his brother Robert, went to Persia in the years 1599–1601. *A True report of Sir Anthony Sherley's journey*, printed in 1600, included a "true copy of Sir Anthony Sherley's Oration to the Sophi," a copy of the sophi's letter of credence for negotiating an alliance with the Christian princes, and a copy of the privilege obtained by Sherley for all Christians to trade in Persia.[74] The next year, William Parry brought out *A New and large discourse of the travels of Sir Anthony Sherley*, which provided more details about Sherley's negotiations with "the Sophi."[75] A longer report, *Sir Anthony Sherley his relation of his travels into Persia* appeared in 1613.[76] After a brief summary of his travels, he provides over a hundred pages of an account of "the present King called Abas,"[77] who had to fight for his throne and eventually appointed Sherley ambassador to the Christian powers to negotiate an alliance against the Turks. This was political realism, explaining the balance of power, domestic reasons for Persia's stance in international affairs, and describing money as the sinews of both war and the state.[78]

Anthony Sherley eventually made his way to Madrid, where he advised the Spanish court about Persia and wrote manuscripts entitled *Peso de todo el mundo* (1622) and *Discurso sobre el aumento de esta*

74. Reprinted in *Sir Anthony Sherley and his Persian adventure*, ed. E. Denison Ross (London, 1933), p.91–97.
75. Reprinted in Ross, *Sir Anthony Sherley*, p.98–136.
76. *Sir Anthony Sherley his relation of his travels into Persia* (London, Butter and Bagset, 1613; repr. Farnborough, 1972).
77. *Sir Anthony Sherley*, p.30.
78. *Sir Anthony Sherley*, p.83, 93. Ross, *Sir Anthony Sherley*, p.xii–xxvi, lists and sorts out a number of other publications about Sherley's travels. Further sources, including materials about Anthony's brother Robert, may be found in *The Three brothers, or the Travels and adventures of Sir Anthony, Sir Robert, & Sir Thomas Sherley, in Persia, Russia, Turkey, Spain, etc.* (London, 1825); Franz Babinger, *Sherleiana: I. Sir Anthony Sherleys persische Botschaftsreise (1599–1601)* (Berlin, 1932); Boies Penrose, *The Sherleian odyssey: being of the travels and adventures of three famous brothers during the reigns of Elizabeth, James, and Charles I* (Taunton, 1938); David William Davies, *Elizabethans errant: the strange fortunes of Sir Thomas Sherley and his three sons* (Ithaca, NY, 1967).

monarquia (1625).[79] The first of these included five pages in the modern edition detailing the parts of the Persian empire and its ports, with comments on hostilities with the Turks (162–166). He points out that Persia is more hostile to Christianity than the Turks, since it has never allowed Christian convents and the latter have allowed them (165). He observes that the Persians want to retake Ormuz from the Portuguese (165). He concludes that the Persian empire is much less powerful than the Turkish empire, and that it is divided within itself into the religious factions of Ali and Husayn (166). The discussion of Persia in the *Discurso* is much shorter: It reports that Persia has taken the outposts of Bahrain, Comaron, and Ormuz from the Portuguese and Spanish, aspires to take Muscat, and may be expected to attack the European enclaves in Diu and Chaul (223). It further reports on the balancing of power between Persia and supporters of the Turks in the Indian subcontinent (224).

It is useful to note the inaccuracies in Sherley's account. The Safavids in general and Shah Abbas in particular had a tolerant attitude toward Christians. This was at least in part because, like their European counterparts, they recognized the political value of potential alliances with the Ottoman empire's enemies, who happened to be Christians. In the case of the British, Shah Abbas also exploited the hostilities between them and the Portuguese to push the latter out of the Persian Gulf.[80] So Sherley's comments on Persia's greater hostility toward the Christians in comparison to the Turks have little historical credence. A greater error in Sherley's account is his statement that Persia is divided between the religious factions of Ali and Husayn. Such factions never existed in Persia. Ali and his son Husayn were the first and the third imam of the Shia, and both highly revered by the Shia Iranians. Even the Sunnis esteemed Ali and respected his son Husayn. The conflict between the Shia and the Sunni, if that is what Sherley is referring to, was based on the legitimacy of Ali's rule versus three of his predecessors: Abu Bakr, Omar, and Othman.

In fact, Sherley's accounts here are in conflict with those of William Parry, one of his companions in his journey to Persia. In *A*

79. Sir Anthony Sherley, *Peso de todo el mundo (1622) Discurso sobre el aumento de esta monarquia (1625)*, ed. Ángel Alloza, Miguel Ángel de Bunes, and José Antonio Martínez Torres (Madrid, 2010). For more about the Sherleys, see Anthony Sherley, *A True report of Sir Anthony Shierlies journey* (London, n.n., 1600).

80. For instance, see Rudi Matthee, *Persia in crisis: Safavid decline and the fall of Isfahan* (London, 2012), p.67, 93.

New and large discourse of the travels of Sir Anthony Sherley, Parry writes, "upon our first entrance [to the Safavid territories] we thought we had bin imparadized, finding our entertainment to be so good, and the manner of the people to be so kinde and curteous (farre differing from the Turkes)."[81] A similar experience is also reported by George Manwaring, another author who accompanied the Sherley brothers in their journey to Persia.[82] Parry also made a much more accurate observation on the Persians' religion, stating that they "Praieth only to Mahomet, and Mortus Ally [Ali, the first Shia imam], [while] the Turke to those two, and to three other that were Mahmomets servants."[83] Sherley's statement about the Persians' religion could be a printing error or a blunder due to his lack of inquiry about the topic. However, his report on the treatment of Christians by the Safavids in general and Shah Abbas in particular signals a possible intentional misrepresentation. Cases of lack of knowledge, carelessness, and intentional falsification abounded in the European accounts about Persia during this period.

Error or ignorance, the inaccuracies in Anthony Sherley's accounts did not temper "the Sherley Fever." In 1607 Anthony Nixon published *The Three English brothers*, an account which provided the material for a play, *The Travels of the three English brothers* (1609). Written by John Day, William Rowley, and George Wilkins, the play included an elaborated version of Nixon's claim that Robert Sherley had married Shah Abbas's niece. The play was so grossly inaccurate that John Cartwright, who had traveled to Persia, "complained of the liberties taken by the play."[84] In 1609 Thomas Middleton published *Sir Robert Sherley, sent ambassador*, which was followed by "A brief memorial of the travels of […] Robert Shereley" in Samuel Purchas's *Pilgrimage, or Relations of the world and the religions observed in all ages and places discovered, from the creation unto this present* (1613). The

81. William Parry, *A New and large discourse of the travels of Sir Anthony Sherley Knight, by sea and over land, to the Persian empire* (London, Valentine Simmes, 1601), p.26.
82. George Manwaring, "A true discourse of Sir Anthony Sherley's travel into Persia," in Ross, *Sir Anthony Sherley*, p.175–228 (197, 200).
83. Parry, *A New and large discourse*, p.34. By "three other" Parry means Abu Bakr, Omar, and Othman, the first three successors to Muhammad whose sovereignty is considered legitimate by the Sunnis but not the Shia.
84. 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, 1996), p.14–31 (29).

latter was important, because it was reprinted multiple times in the seventeenth century.[85]

Thomas Herbert's *A Relation of some yeares travaile begunne anno 1626 into Afrique and the greater Asia* (London, Will Stansby and Jacob Bloome, 1634) went through four English editions between 1634 and 1677. A German translation appeared in 1658, followed by a French translation in 1663.[86] Herbert, who was a member of Dodmore Cotton's mission to Shah Abbas's court, provides the most detailed account of Persia by a seventeenth-century English traveler. He was critical of the Safavid monarchy for its tyranny, and refers to its subjects as "wretched Mahometans."[87] At the same time he had a positive view of the execution of justice, which he believed to be "the reason that the country is so secure, and travelers can scarce find a more quiet place than Persia."[88] He also reported that "the Persian King can march […] three hundred thousand horse and seventy thousand foot, or musketeers."[89] Of the Persians he writes, "this I can say in praise of the Persians: they are very humane and noble in their nature, differing in their ingenuity and civility to one another, but much more to strangers, very much from the Turks, who are rugged and barbarous."[90]

Nearly half a century after Herbert, a British physician named John Fryer (1650–1733) traveled to Persia and wrote about his observations.[91] The opening lines to the book's preface give important insight into British curiosity about Persia toward the end of the seventeenth century:

> What prompted me, after so many Years Silence, to expose this Piece to the World, was not so much the Old Topick, Importunity of some, as the Impertinencies of others; there being more than Four hundred Queries now by me, to which I was pressed to answer and wherein I found a necessity, if I declined this Work, to appear from other Hands in Print.

85. For more on *Pilgrimage*, see Matthew Dimmock, "Faith, form and faction: Samuel Purchas's *Purchas his pilgrimage* (1613)," *Renaissance studies* 28:2 (2014), p.262–78; L. E. Pennington, *The Purchas handbook: studies of the life, times and writings of Samuel Purchas 1577–1626* (London, 1996).
86. Thomas Herbert, *Travels in Persia: 1627–1629* (New York, 1929), p.ix–xi.
87. Herbert, *Travels*, p.228–29.
88. Herbert, *Travels*, p.229.
89. Herbert, *Travels*, p.242.
90. Herbert, *Travels*, p.239.
91. John Fryer, *New account of East India and Persia* (London, Rose and Crown, 1698).

Like most other travel accounts of the period, Fryer gives an account of the regions he travels through, including their cities, foods, products, and wildlife. Fryer was particularly impressed with the city of Siras (Shiraz), its friendly residents, wine, "Wealthy Market," and above all its beautiful gardens and nightingales.[92] Being a physician, he also examined the reasons for occurrence of blindness among the population in Gerom (Jahrom).[93]

The French

During the seventeenth century the French also began to travel to Persia. In that century alone the accounts of twenty-six French travelers to Persia were published.[94] Most of these travelers were priests and merchants, who at times also acted as ambassadors. Sometime around 1608 Henri de Feynes (1573–1647) passed through Persia on his way to China. We do not know much about him, but a translation of his travel journal was published in English in 1615,[95] with a French edition appearing fifteen years later.[96] Cardinal Richelieu's interest in promoting the silk trade led to Louis Deshayes de Courmenin's mission to Persia. However, the two attempts by Courmenin to reach Persia via the Ottoman empire and Russia were unsuccessful.[97] Consequently, Richelieu turned to Capuchin priests Pacifique de Provins (1588–1648) and père Gabriel de Chinon (1610–1668), who arrived in Isfahan sometime in 1628, and enjoyed Shah Abbas's benevolence.

Both monks wrote about their experience in Persia. Provins's *Relation du voyage de Perse* (1631) gave an account of the Persians, including their administration of justice, manner of fighting, and Shah Abbas's generosity toward foreign visitors.[98] Chinon also wrote

92. Fryer, *New account*, p.246–48.
93. Fryer, *New account*, p.242.
94. Anne-Marie Touzard, "French travelers in Persia," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (2016), http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/france-vii-french-travelers-in-persia-1600–1730 (last accessed January 20, 2021).
95. *An Exact and curious suruey of all the East Indies, even to Canton, the chieffe cittie of China* (London, Thomas Dawson, 1615).
96. *Voyage faict par terre depuis Paris jusques à la Chine par le sieur de Feynes avec son retour par mer* (Paris, n.n., 1630).
97. For more on this see R. J. Knecht, *Richelieu* (Abingdon, 2013), p.160.
98. *Pacifique de Provins, relation du voyage de Perse* (Paris, Nicolas et Jean de La Coste, 1631), p.389–403.

an account about Persia, which was printed posthumously.[99] The information in this book, while subject to inaccuracies like similar contemporary European accounts, reflected the author's studious attempt to learn about various aspects of life and people in Persia.

Shortly after Provins and Chinon, Philippe de la très-sainte Trinité (1603–1671) traveled to Persia. His account was published in French in 1669,[100] but an Italian translation had already appeared in 1666.[101] The Jesuit priest Alexandre de Rhodes (1591–1660) became primarily renowned for his travels in Southeast Asia, but he ended up in Isfahan, where he died and was buried. An account of his mission to Persia appeared in 1659.[102] Another French priest who traveled through parts of Persia and wrote about his experience was the abbé Barthélemy Carré de Chambon, whose *Voyage des Indes orientales, melé de plusieurs histoires curieuses* was published by Veuve Claude Barbin in Paris in 1699.[103] A French Jesuit, père Philippe Avril (1654–1698), who was involved in attempts to find a route to China via Russia, also reported on his travel to Persia.[104] François Picquet appears to be the last French missionary-diplomat who traveled to Persia and corresponded about that country in the seventeenth century.[105]

Priests were not the only French visitors to Safavid Persia. François Bernier (1620–1688), a French physician and philosopher who visited Persia around 1668, wrote primarily about his observations in India, so his reports on Persia were scattered and rather brief.[106] But he was well connected in France, and his audience was primarily from the so-called Republic of Letters, who played an important part in

99. *Relations nouvelles du Levant, ou Traités de la religion, du gouvernement et des coutûmes des Perses, des Arméniens et des Gaures* (Lyon, Jean Thioly, 1671).
100. *Voyage d'Orient du R.P. Philippe de la très-saincte Trinité carme deschaussé* (Lyon, n.n., 1669).
101. *Viaggi orientali del reverendiss P. Filippo Della SS. Trinità* (Rome, n.n., 1666).
102. *Relation de la mission des pères de la Compagnie de Jésus, establie dans le royaume de Perse par le R. P. Alexandre de Rhodes* (Paris, n.n., 1659).
103. A three-volume English translation was printed in 1947: *The Travels of the abbé Carré in India and the Near East* (London, 1947). There has also been a recent French edition by Dirk van der Cruysse, *Le Courrier du roi en Orient: relations de deux voyages en Perse et en Inde, 1668–1674* (Paris, 2005).
104. Philippe Avril, *Voyage en divers Etats d'Europe et d'Asie entrepris pour découvrir un nouveau chemin à la Chine* (Paris, C. Barbin, J. Boudot, G. et L. Josse, 1692).
105. A book about Picquet's life appeared in 1732: Charles Anthelmy, *La Vie de messire François Picquet, consul de France et de Hollande à Alep* (Paris, Mergé, 1732).
106. François Bernier, *Voyages de François Bernier* (Amsterdam, Paul Marret, 1699).

creating the background to the Enlightenment.[107] Thus, Bernier's comments on the state of women and eunuchs in Persia may have influenced the views of writers like Montesquieu.[108]

One of the best-known seventeenth-century French travelers to Persia was Jean de Thévenot (1633–1667), who arrived in Persia in 1664 and died there three years later. His account of Persia appeared posthumously as a part of his collected works, and went through multiple reprints.[109] It was translated into English as early as 1687.[110] In about 300 pages, Thévenot gives an account of various parts of Persia and different aspects of Persian life, describing the geography of Iran, its various archeological sites, religious ceremonies, and the Safavid capital, Isfahan.

Two French Protestant gem merchants were among the most influential travelers who introduced Persia to the early modern Europeans. Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (1605–1689) visited Persia nine times between 1632 and 1668, during six trips that he made to the Middle East and India. His long accounts of these journeys were published in parts and as a collected work multiple times, and translated into English, German, and Dutch.[111] He wrote, among other things, about Safavid Iran's borders, flowers and fruits, wildlife and domesticated animals, buildings, the religion of the Iranian Shia, marriage among the Persians, the genealogy of the Safavid kings, Safavid administrative offices, his reception at Shah Abbas II's court, and the life of Zoroastrians and Armenians in Iran. Like Jean de Thévenot, Tavernier gave an extensive but unfavorable account of Isfahan, and wrote about the Julfa neighborhood (where the Armenians lived).

107. See for example Joan-Pau Rubiés, "Race, climate and despotism in the works of François Bernier," in *L'Inde des Lumières: discours, histoire, savoirs (XVII^{e}–XIX^{e} siècle)*, ed. Marie Fourcade and Ines Zupanov (Paris, 2013), p.13–38.
108. For example, see *Voyages de François Bernier* (Amsterdam, David Paul Marret, 1723), p.242.
109. *Voyages de Mr. de Thevenot en Europe, Asie et Afrique* (Paris, Angot, 1689; repr. Paris, B. Alix, 1727). A five-volume edition was also printed in Amsterdam in the same year (Amsterdam, Le Cène, 1727).
110. *The Travels of Monsieur de Thevenot*, translated by A. Lovell (London, H. Clark, 1687).
111. *Les Six voyages de Jean Baptiste Tavernier, écuyer, baron d'Aubonne, en Turquie, en Perse, et aux Indes* (Paris, Olivier de Varennes, 1675). For various seventeenth- and eighteenth-century reprints of the book in French, and its translation to various languages, see V. Ball, "Bibliography," in *Travels in India by Jean Baptiste Tavernier baron of Aubonne*, 2 vols. (London, 1889), vol.1, p.xl–xlvi.

A second French Protestant, also a gem merchant who spent a lot of time in Safavid Persia, was Jean (Jean-Baptiste/John) Chardin (1643–1713). Chardin witnessed the reign of two Safavid monarchs, Shah Abbas II (r.1642–1666) and his son Soleiman (r.1666–1668). The reign of Soleiman witnessed an acceleration in the decline of Safavid Persia, which is alluded to in Chardin's writings from time to time. His extensive writings on Persia were reprinted multiple times.[112] He also published an abridged English version of his travels in English. Chardin influenced a number of the most important Enlightenment thinkers, among them Montesquieu, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Voltaire.[113]

Material from seventeenth-century travel accounts was reworked in numerous eighteenth-century volumes. Bernard Picart's great *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde* (1723–1737) was, for example, a monumental seven-volume edition of engravings, with special attention to Persia in volume 7. Picart relied on Orientalist scholars like Gagnier, d'Herbelot and Rycaut; travelers to Persia such as Thévenot and Chardin; and Sale's translation of the Koran (1734).[114]

Among other political uses of these materials, the seventeenth century witnessed attempts to Europeanize and Christianize the Persians. Some European accounts presented the first Safavid king, Ismail, as "a saint and a prophet" and "a Christ-like figure."[115] Abel Pinçon, who traveled to Persia with Anthony Sherley and whose account of the journey was published in French in 1651,[116] mentions meeting Shah Abbas when he returned from defeating "the Tartars of

112. For a list of some of the French and English editions see N. M. Penzer, "Preface," in John Chardin, *Travels in Persia, 1673–1677* (New York, 1988).

113. For example, see Ina Baghdiantz McCabe, *Orientalism in early modern France: Eurasian trade, exoticism, and the Ancien Régime* (Oxford, 2008), p.276; Percy G. Adams, *Travel literature and the evolution of the novel* (Lexington, KY, 1983), p.115, 260; Lucian Boia, *The Weather in the imagination* (London, 2005), p.43; Melvin Richter, *The Political theory of Montesquieu* (London, 1977), p.141.

114. See Kishwar Rizvi, "Persian pictures: art, documentation, and self-reflection in Jean Frederic Bernard and Bernard Picart's representations of Islam," in *Bernard Picart and the first global vision of religion*, ed. Lynn Hunt, Margaret Jacob, and Wijnand Mijnhardt (Los Angeles, 2010), p.169–96 (172–73).

115. Palmira Brummett, *Ottoman seapower and Levantine diplomacy in the age of discovery* (New York, 1994), p.31.

116. Jonathan Burton, "The shah's two ambassadors: the travels of the three English brothers and the global early modern," in *Emissaries in early modern literature and culture: mediation, transmission, traffic, 1550–1700*, ed. Brinda Charry and Gitanjali Shahani (London, 2016), p.23–40 (23, n.1).

Usbec."[117] Pinçon tried to "Christianize" Shah Abbas I, stating that "He is a Mahometan. Nevertheless under his shirt and round his neck he always wears a cross, in token of the reverence and honour which he bears towards Jesus Christ."[118] Pinçon's fellow traveler George Manwaring reports that the shah allegedly told Anthony Sherley that "he was almost a Christian in heart."[119] Likewise, Thomas Middleton confidently reported in *Sir Robert Sherley his entertainment in Cracovia* that Shah Abbas I was "confessing and worshiping Christ."[120] Remarkably, Robert Sherley declared in Rome that the shah intended to formally convert to Christianity, "and render entire obedience to the Apostolic See," once the Ottomans were defeated and Constantinople taken.[121] One must read these statements against the overwhelming evidence pointing to the fanatical commitment by Ismael and Abbas I to Shia Islam.

The Zoroastrians

We have already seen that various European authors paid special attention to the Zoroastrians in Persia. There were several reasons for that. First, if the Zorostarians could be portrayed as intelligent, assiduous, and civil, both Islam and Christianity could be made to look bad. Thomas Herbert, whose account of travels to Persia became quite popular in England and was translated into German and French, states that the Muslim Persians have the Zoroastrians "in small account […] partly for that by their industry they shame the [Muslim] Persians in their idleness."[122] Similarly, Chardin stated, "if Persia was in the Hands […] of those People call'd Ignicoles [Zoroastrians], one should quickly find it appear again in all its Ancient Glory and Primitive Splendor."[123]

117. Abel Pinçon, "The relation of a journey taken to Persia in the years 1598–1599 by a gentleman in the suit of Sir Anthony Sherley, ambassador from the queen of England," in Ross, *Sir Anthony Sherley*, p.137–75 (153).
118. Pinçon, "The relation," p.162.
119. Manwaring, "A true discourse," p.225.
120. Thomas Middleton, *Thomas Middleton: the collected works and companion* (Oxford, 2007), p.674
121. Middleton, *Collected works*, p.671–72.
122. Herbert, *Travels*, p.138.
123. Jean Baptiste Chardin, *Travels in Persia, 1673–1677* (London, J. Smith, 1720), p.139.

The Cambridge Neo-Platonists, meanwhile, found Zoroastrianism useful to support their assertion that reason is the key to religion; John Smith (1618–1652) went so far as to suggest that Zoroaster had called his followers to the "Holy life" centuries before Jesus.[124] Thomas Hyde (1636–1703) gave the Persian Zoroastrians a privileged position by suggesting that they had prior knowledge of Christ's birth.[125] Zoroaster was deemed useful in undermining the doctrine that true religion (and salvation) was only available through Christian revelation. If Zoroaster had access to the true religion without the intervention of revelation and miracle, reason was sufficient for knowing the true religion. That would remove the raison d'être for revelation and miracles, a blow to the heart of Judeo-Christian dogma. Second, if reason was the key to the discovery of religious truth, spiritual authority would shift from the priest to the philosopher. Thus, the writings of the seventeenth-century Neo-Platonists, Christian cabalists, and Hermetic authors appealing to Zoroaster contributed to the anticlerical posture of the intellectual climate in the eighteenth century. There was, as one could expect, a reaction to this elevation of Zoroastrianism. Pierre Daniel Huet (1630–1721) "argued against the historical existence of Zoroaster," and claimed that Zoroaster was only a "reflection of Moses,"[126] while others fabricated stories about the education of Zoroaster by Jewish prophets.[127]

Conclusion

The intellectual history of Europe's engagement with Persia before the Enlightenment is extensive and multifaceted. Particularly during the early modern era, Europeans engaged with Persia in response to diverse incentives and different motives. This applied to European travelers to Persia as well. It is important to recall that these travelers' narratives of Persia and Persians were impacted by different historical circumstances, and by their preconceived expectations. For instance, those who traveled during Shah Ismail's reign witnessed a very different Persia from those who visited the country during Shah Abbas's reign.

124. David Pailin, "Reconciling theory and fact," in *Platonism at the origins of modernity*, ed. Douglas Hedley and Sarah Hutton (Dordrecht, 2008), p.93–111 (101).
125. Thomas Hyde, *Historia religionis veterum persarum eorumque magorum* (Oxford, Theatro Sheldoniano, 1700), ch.31.
126. Guy G. Stroumsa, *A New science: the discovery of religion in the age of reason* (Cambridge, MA, 2010), p.102.
127. David Pailin, *Attitudes to other religions: comparative religion in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Britain* (Manchester, 1984), p.54–55.

Merchant adventurers who were under the illusion that Persia was one of the wealthiest nations ended up with disappointment, while others whose enterprises proved profitable portrayed a more positive picture. Diplomats whose missions were unsuccessful presented a grim picture of Persian monarchs. Their counterparts whose reception by the court was favorable portrayed the Safavid monarchs (particularly Shah Abbas) in an auspicious light. Europeans with diverse motives, whether it was to criticize Islam or to advance their hypotheses on natural religion, saw Zoroastrianism useful in promoting their arguments.Their understanding of Zoroastrianism, often partial and at times inaccurate, contributed to lively theological and political debates during the Enlightenment.

Enlightenment intellectuals relied on these diverse, partial, often inaccurate, and at times conflicting narratives of Persia to advance their own various projects. Their visions of Persia did not form against the background of investigations and reports by reflective and unbiased scholars who were concerned with the "objectivity" and meticulousness of their accounts of Persia. Nor did Enlightenment intellectuals regularly insist on evaluating the accuracy of the resources on Persia available to them. They were concerned and engaged with their own projects, and, just like their predecessors, had their own biases and interests. Yet, had it not been for the centuries of reports on Persia and Persians available to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europeans, Enlightenment intellectual history would have certainly been different.

Religious tolerance, intolerance, and absolutism in Safavid Persia and their representations in early Enlightenment European travel literature

John Marshall

I

In his thirteenth-century *Gulistan* the Persian Sufi Sa'di composed a declaration based on a hadith (exemplary saying) of Muhammad which now adorns the United Nations in New York:

> All men are fellow-members of one body
> For they were created from one essence
> When fate afflicts one limb with pain
> The other limbs may not stay unmoved
> You who are without sorrow for the suffering of others
> You do not deserve to be called human.

In the fourteenth-century *Gulshan-i-raz*, the Persian Sufi Shabistari expressed much of Sufi Islam's account of divine love and mystical union of the individual with the godhead, as Persian Sufism emphasized especially erotic, ecstatic, esoteric Islam and not ritualized, legalistic, exoteric religious practice. For Sufism, the essence of religion was virtuous behavior based on a loving focus on God, not the world, with love of others a path to love of God. At moments, Sufi emphasis on virtue and devotional intent was combined with tolerance and sympathetic treatment of those of other religions. Shabistari declared that "it is more virtuous for you to frequent a pagan temple than to attend a mosque imagining yourself superior to others." The thirteenth-century Persian Sufi Rumi held that

> The differences among creatures come
> from the outward form
> When one penetrates into the inner meaning

> There is peace
> On the marrow of existence!
> It is because of the point of view in question
> That there have come into being differences
> Among the Muslim, Zoraster, and Jew.

Rumi declared that he was himself "neither Muslim, nor Christian, nor Jew nor Zoroastrian." According to the fourteenth-century Persian Sufi Hafiz,

> Love is where the glory falls
> Of thy face—on convent walls
> or on tavern floors, the same
> Unextinguishable flame
> Where the turban'd anchorite
> Chanteth Allah day and night
> Church bells ring the call to prayer
> And the Cross of Christ is there.

Hafiz celebrated: "Bring wine! For last night the angel of the Unseen World / Gave me glad tidings that His Mercy emanates to everyone!"[1]

In Safavid Persia, these ecumenical, mystical Islamic words and works by Sa'di, Shabistari, Rumi, and Hafiz commanded considerable circulation and influenced many compositions and attitudes amongst the population. Shabistari's *Gulshan-i-raz* was the subject of many commentaries, read by "any educated Muslim" seeking "foundational literary cultivation," and frequently quoted by seventeenth-century scholars of the School of Isfahan, who were intimates of shahs Abbas I (r.1588–1629) and Abbas II (r.1642–1666). Sa'di's works were the most "widely read works of normative Islamic ethics of all time"; a sixteenth-century Safavid prince, Ibrahim Mirza, commissioned a beautiful miniature depicting Sa'di's illumination by angels in composition of his couplets. In his early seventeenth-century *Travels in Persia* Herbert

1. Michael Axworthy, *A History of Iran* (New York, 2008), p.110–11; Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam?* (Princeton, NJ, 2016), p.236; Rumi, *Masnavi*, translated by J. Mojaddedi (Oxford, 2004); *Hafiz and the religion of love in classical Persian poetry*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (London, 2010); Leonard Lewisohn, "The transcendental unity of polytheism and monotheism in the Sufism of Shabistari," in *The Legacy of medieval Persian Sufism*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (London, 1992), p.379–406 (379, 405); Leonard Lewisohn, *Beyond faith and infidelity: the Sufi teachings of Mahmud Shabistari* (London, 1995); Leonard Lewisohn, "Iranian Islam and Persianate Sufism," in *The Heritage of Sufism*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1999), vol.2, p.11–43 (23, 38, and 41).

noted pilgrimages to the celebrated graves of Sa'di and Hafiz, and that Hafiz's poetry was held "in great esteem" in a country which accorded poetry unsurpassed importance. Hafiz was celebrated as the "Tongue of the Unseen," the preeminent inspired interpreter of Islam. With his poetry issued in royally commissioned sixteenth-century collections, Persians learned it by heart after learning the Koran by heart—as, indeed, they still do today in Iran. Indicating that "There is no nation in the world more addicted to poetry than the Persians," Olearius's 1659 *Voyages*, translated into English in 1662, described the presence of mosques on every street in Isfahan in which mullahs provided basic education to all, with students learning first their characters, then the Koran, and "Then they put them into the Gulistan of Sadi […] and at last into Hafis," which the children together "read very loud." Olearius declared that "there is not any one almost but hath" Sadi's *Gulistan* and "some have perused and studied it so much that they have it by heart and apply the passages, sentences, and comparisons thereof, in their ordinary discourse."[2]

According to Chardin's late-seventeenth-century *Travels into Persia*, which became in the Enlightenment the most influential by far of many travel accounts on Persia and was read by Bayle, Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Anquetil-Duperron, *inter alia*, Shabistari's work was the "summa theologica" of Persian philosophy and theology and the Sufis' "sacred text." It had been "explained, elucidated and illuminated" by several "works in prose and verse," with the "most highly regarded" of these being Rumi's "huge work of mystical theology," the *Mathnavi*, which stressed "divine love and intimate union with God" and vividly depicted the "vanity of the world, the dignity of virtue and the enormity of vice." The *Mathnavi* was often called "the Quran in the Persian tongue." Chardin described Rumi's work, which celebrated dervish rejection of the riches of the world, as containing "beautiful precepts," including requiring keeping minds "fixed on God […] The soul enlightened by the rays of heaven is the mirror in which can be discovered the most hidden secrets."[3]

2. Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, p.32–38, 236, 493–503; Roger Savory, *Iran under the Safavids* (Cambridge, 1980), p.206–15; Adam Olearius, *The Voyages and travels of the ambassadors* (London, n.n., 1662), p.332–38.
3. Jean Baptiste Chardin, *Voyages de M. le chevalier Chardin, en Perse et autres lieux de l'Orient*, ed. L. Langles, 10 vols. (Paris, 1811), vol.4, p.459–64. Farhang Jahanpour, "Western encounters with Persian Sufi literature," in *The Heritage of Sufism*, ed. L. Lewisohn, vol.3, p.28–60 (41–44).

The Sufi works of Sa'di, Shabistari, Hafiz, and Rumi were saturated with quotations from the Koran and hadith, and many Muslims in Safavid Persia read them as expositions of the true spiritual meaning of Islam. They influenced the thought of Mulla Sadra, the leading intellectual of the School of Isfahan and "widely regarded by modern Muslim and Western scholars alike as the most important Muslim philosopher in the last four hundred years." As Lewisohn and Cooper have shown, Sadra's works include citation of Hafiz, the "continual citation of Rumi's Mathnavi and Shabistari's Garden of Mystery," and passages "specifically written by way of exegesis on the Mathnavi." Sadra identified the higher states of being of the soul with erotic, esoteric, ecstatic understandings of the Koran. As Seyyed Nasr puts it, Sadra amalgamated Koranic, philosophical, Sufi, and Shia beliefs "like so many colours of the rainbow which became unified and harmonized" in a "transcendent theosophy." Sadra's son-in-law and disciple Kashani composed poetry extensively quoting Shabistari and devoting an entire ghazal (love poem) in praise of Hafiz, wrote an extensive commentary on Rumi's *Mathnavi*, and composed a treatise of commentary on Shabistari, in addition to works on theology, law, and hadith.

Kashani was among Muslim divines who refused to force Jews to convert when ordered to do so by a persecuting Grand Vizier in the 1650s, and leading scholars of the School of Isfahan undertook sympathetic inquiries into the beliefs of Christians, Jews, and even Hindus. Many shahs of Persia discussed religion with Christian missionaries. Indeed, the capacity to debate religion publicly in Persia was often commented upon in European travel accounts. Manucci declared that, in contrast to the rest of the Muslim world, in Persia "you may use arguments, make inquiry, and give answer in matters of religion without the least danger"; Thévenot's 1674 *Travels*, published in English in 1687, noted that in Persia public disputes were held about religion (in contrast to Ottoman executions of those arguing against Islam), and Sanson's 1665 *Present state of Persia*, translated into English in 1695, declared that in Persia "they love to dispute over their religion" where the "Laws allow Disputes in matters of Religion."[4]

4. Stephen F. Dale, *The Muslim empires of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals* (Cambridge, 2010), p.193; Leonard Lewisohn, "Sufism and the school of Isfahan," in *The Heritage of Sufism*, ed. L. Lewisohn, vol.3, p.63–114; John Cooper, "Rumi and Hikmat," in *The Heritage of Sufism*, ed. L. Lewisohn, vol.1, p.409–28 (421–24); Sayyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic philosophy from its origin*

Attacking Sufism at the end of the seventeenth century, its Persian Islamic critic, Majlisi Jr., identified Sufism as having been "extremely powerful and active" in mid-seventeenth-century Persia, and attempted to explain away his own father's associations with Sufism. Chardin, who visited the father's tomb, recorded that after the death of Majlisi Sr. people had venerated him like "a prophet," while Mir Lawhi recorded that "they ascribed miracles to his mule and broke pieces off his grave and wore them as amulets." Stressing the considerable influence of Sufism in mid-seventeenth-century Persia, Babayan declares that Majlisi Sr. "belonged to the circle of clerics who had assimilated into the hegemonic culture of the dervish cult."[5]

Spending some fifteen pages of his *Travels* in explication of Persian Sufism, Chardin noted Sufism's ecstatic raptures and ascetic fasts and suggested that these troubled magistrates (part of his general criticism of Persian idleness, which we will meet again later). And he identified Islamic "clergy" as having "hated" the Sufis for making internal spiritual worship of God alone significant and not ritual performances. But, together with quotation of several of their "beautiful precepts" of virtuous service of God, Chardin summarized the views of contemporary Sufis in Persia for his wide European audience with sympathetic recognition of their extensive tolerance and sympathy for others' devotional intent:

> They interpret the Koran in its entirety in spiritual terms, and they spiritualize all the precepts concerning ritual as well as religion in its external sense […] saying that all that concerns devotion to God is internal; and though they engage in physical purification much as do other Mahometans, they do not give it any credence, saying that all

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to the present (Albany, NY, 2006), p.209–34; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Religion in Safavid Persia," *Iranian studies* 7:1–2 (1974), p.271–86; Savory, *Iran*, p.218; Kathryn Babayan, *Mystics, monarchs and messiahs: cultural landscapes of early modern Iran* (Cambridge, MA, 2002), p.416; Rula Jurdi Abisaab, *Converting Persia* (London, 2004), p.89; Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam* (Chicago, IL, 1984); Vera Basch Moreen, "The Jews in Iran," in *A History of Jewish-Muslim relations*, ed. Abdelwahab Meddeb and Benjamin Stora (Princeton, NJ, 2013), p.239–45 (239); Manucci in Rudi Matthee, "The Safavids under Western eyes: seventeenth-century European travelers to Iran," *Journal of early modern history* 13 (2009), p.137–71 (168); Monsieur [Nicolas] Sanson, *The Present state of Persia* (London, M. Gilliflower, 1695), p.180.

5. Babayan, *Mystics*, p.426; Kathryn Babayan, "Sufis, dervishes and mullas: the controversy over spiritual and temporal dominion in seventeenth-century Safavi Iran," in *Safavid Persia*, ed. Charles Melville (London, 1996), p.117–38 (127).

> that concerns devotion to God is internal […] they claim to love the entire world and to despise no one, seeing all men as the products of a common father; and the diverse sects of men as so many slaves and servants of the same Lord.

In d'Herbelot's influential 1697 *Oriental library*, an encyclopedic introduction to Islamic thought for Western Europe, Persian Sufism was similarly defined as centred on "the intimate union with the Divine in the heart of man detached from love for things of this world, and transported beyond himself." D'Herbelot quoted Hafiz: "Give me not the cup until I have torn from my breast the blue robe," explaining that the wine in the cup was to be understood as divine love and the blue robe as earthly hypocrisy. And the Sufi path to "felicity" was described by d'Herbelot as "raising man" in "passing degree by degree to the highest perfection" of which human nature was capable.[6]

II

These Persian Sufi strains of Islam stressing that what mattered religiously was virtue and the individual's relationship with God could be aligned with the support for practices of religious toleration for religions other than Islam which had been expressed in Islam's foundational texts and enacted in many Islamic polities. In the single most important passage for Islamic defences and practices of toleration, it is held in the Koran that "there is no coercion in religion" (2.256). The Koran declares that "truth is from your Lord, so let whomever wills, believe, and let whomever wills, disbelieve" (18.29). The Koran states "And if thy Lord had willed, whoever is in the earth would have believed, all of them, all together. Wouldst thou then constrain the people, until they are believers? It is not for any soul to believe save by the leave of God" (10.99–100). According to the Koran, "Had God willed He would have made you into one community; but [it was His

6. Chardin, *Voyages*, vol.8, p.459–64; Jahanpour, "Western encounters with Persian Sufi literature," p.41–44; Barthélemy d'Herbelot, *Bibliothèque orientale* (Paris, Compagnie de libraires, 1697), p.424, 628, 873, quoted (with slight adaptation in the translation) from Mark Sedgwick, *Western Sufism from the Abbasids to the new age* (Oxford, 2017), p.84. D'Herbelot's text did, however, refer to Muhammad as a "famous impostor" and the Koran as a "tissue of vulgar of impostures" that "could make no impression on the spirit of a man who wishes to use the lights of his reason": *Bibliothèque*, p.86–88, in David Harvey, *The French Enlightenment and its others* (New York, 2012), p.18.

will] to test you in what he gave you. So compete with each other in doing good works. To God you are all returning, and He will inform you about how you differed" (5.48). The Koran specifies that

> Of the People of the Book there is an upright Party who recite God's messages in the night-time and they adore Him. They believe in God and the Last Day, and they enjoin good and forbid evil and vie with one another in good deeds. Those are among the righteous; whatever good they do, they will not be denied it. And God knows those who keep their duty. (3.112–16)

The Koran indicates that "Those who have believed—and the Jews, the Christians, the Sabeans, those who believe in God, the Last Day, and do good works—stand to be rewarded by God. No fear or grief shall befall them" (2.62). And the Koran stresses persuasion in discussion with Jews and Christians: "So argue not with the people of the book except in the best way […] and say: we believe in that which was revealed to us as well as that which was revealed to you. Our God and your God is one and the same. We all submit to him" (29.46).[7]

Hadith collected by al-Bukhari record Muhammad declaring that "He who wrongs a Jew or a Christian will have myself as his accuser on the day of judgment." Muhammad recognized Jews as fellow citizens in his "Constitution of Medina"—though he thereafter expelled and used force against Jews in Medina whom he held treasonous. After Muhammad's own lifetime came centuries in which Islamic polities declared that Muhammad had also covenanted on a number of occasions with Christians and Jews to provide them with religious toleration. Six such covenants by Muhammad have been published recently by John Andrew Morrow as *The Covenants of the Prophet Muhammad with the Christians of the world.*

Some of these covenants were discussed in the early Enlightenment, including by Bayle in the 1696 *Historical and critical dictionary* in an extensive entry on Muhammad, in which Bayle pointed to Islamic toleration as having been greater in practice than Christian toleration and noted contemporary practices of toleration in Persia and in the Ottoman Empire. Bayle, however, questioned the veracity of Muhammad's alleged covenants as part of his argument that

7. Many contemporary Muslim scholars and leaders of interfaith organizations point to these and other important Koranic texts now in their extensive and committed defenses of religious toleration as a duty of Islam; I explore this in other work.

Muhammad had moved from supporting liberty of conscience in Mecca when weak to opposing toleration in Medina when strong, as Bayle identified Muhammad in the *Dictionary* as an "impostor" who ended his life supporting the use of force to impose his false religion.[8]

Extensive toleration was provided to Christians and Jews over many centuries from the seventh to seventeenth under many Islamic rulers, with covenants such as the Covenant with the Monks of Mount Sinai having been declared genuine by Fatimids, Ayyubids, Mamluks, and Ottomans, and an influential "Pact of Umar" providing the basis of terms for toleration and protection of non-Muslims in many Islamic polities. The status of protected dhimmis—those required to pay poll taxes but given freedom for private religious belief and worship—was extended in many Islamic polities from the seventh to the seventeenth century not only to Christians and Jews, clearly designated by Muhammad as "People of the Book," but also to Zoroastrians and Hindus. Such toleration did not involve full civic equality, as non-Muslims were required to pay special taxes and to symbolize their humble submission toward Muslims in forms of dress and in many other forms of behavior. They were usually forbidden to proselytize to Muslims. Public expressions of their worship were often restricted, including a ban on ringing church bells, and they were often forbidden to build new churches or synagogues. Intermarriage between Muslim women and non-Muslim men was generally forbidden—though marriage was permitted between Muslim men and non-Muslim women allowed to maintain their religion after marriage, and was practiced by some Muslim rulers. From the seventh to seventeenth century, Islamic polities thereby provided much more extensive religious toleration than Christian polities.[9]

8. John Andrew Morrow, *The Covenants of the Prophet Muhammad with the Christians of the world* (n.p., 2013), p.65–98; Pierre Bayle, "Mahomet," in *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (Amsterdam, Reinier Leers, 1697), p.256–72; John Marshall, "The *Treatise of the three impostors*, Islam, the Enlightenment, and toleration," in *Clandestine Enlightenment: new studies on subversive manuscripts in early modern Europe, 1620–1823*, ed. Gianni Paganini, Margaret C. Jacob, and J. C. Laursen (Toronto, 2020), p.307–27.
9. This is obviously a huge topic, and some scholars question its discussion in terms of toleration, but see as a beginning: Mark Cohen, *Under crescent and cross* (Princeton, NJ, 1995); Milka Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims in the early Islamic empire* (Cambridge, 2013); *Conversion and continuity*, ed. Michael Gervers and Ramzi Jibran Bikhazi (Toronto, 1990); Daniel Dennett, *Conversion and the poll tax in early Islam* (Cambridge, 1950); Anver Emon, *Pluralism and Islamic law* (Oxford, 2015); Yohanan Friedmann, *Tolerance and coercion in Islam* (Cambridge, 2003); John

Religious toleration for non-Muslims, however, came not only generously, when populations sought refuge in Islamic territories from persecution elsewhere, as for hundreds of thousands of Jews fleeing repeated waves of Christian massacres and persecutions, but also as toleration in combination with subjection and humiliation as the alternative to death or conversion after Islamic armies had conquered territories formerly controlled by Christian rulers. Such practices had Koranic support in the classical period of Islam by invocation of passages such as 9.29, "Fight those who believe not in God and the Last Day and do not forbid what God and His Messenger have forbidden—such men as practice not the religion of truth, being of those who have been given the Book—until they pay the tribute out of hand and have been humbled." While many Muslims through the centuries described war as legitimate only when defensive—which the vast majority of Muslims hold true today—significant authors in the classical period of Islam declared legitimate offensive wars to conquer territory in order to establish the sovereignty of Islam, and cited also the Koranic injunctions in 2.193 and 8.39 to "Fight them until there is no fitna [persecution/seduction] and the religion is entirely God's," and in 9.5 to "Kill the polytheists wherever you find them." In such accounts, the declaration in 2.256 that "there is no coercion in religion" was often held to have been abrogated by later Revelations, to have applied only to dhimmis or to Muslims, or to have rendered illegitimate the use of force in conversion but not warfare to extend the sovereignty of Islam which caused those subjected to become dhimmis.

It was often held that living in Islamic polities would facilitate subjected populations seeing the superiority of Islam and converting freely. Some Muslim authors further suggested that force was only illegitimate in a spiritual sense, and that force could be used to create external conformity without violating spiritual liberty. According to many Muslim authors who held that expansionist warfare was legitimate, this could occur only under the authority of a rightly authorized ruler, but such a ruler had a duty to undertake such campaigns for the faith when possible. The Shi'ite doctrine of the Hidden Imam could suggest that such an authorized ruler did not exist before the awaited return of the Mahdi, and that legitimate wars could therefore only be defensive. Ottoman expansion, however, was often talked about by Sunnis as legitimate

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Marshall, *Locke, toleration and early Enlightenment culture* (Cambridge, 2006) and the works cited in "The *Treatise of the three impostors*" and other forthcoming pieces.

under Ottoman sultans. The founder of the Safavid regime, Shah Ismael, depicted himself as the intended conqueror of the world, and the military campaigns against Georgian Christians of two of his successors, shahs Tahmasp and Abbas I, were explicitly legitimated in Koranic terms as campaigns for the faith against infidels in important Safavid works, as we will see later. Here, in the first century and more of Safavid Persia, was an aggressively as well as defensively oriented Shia Sufism that was messianic, millenarian, militant, and military.[10]

III

Islam has a simple creed—the shahada—which requires only statement of belief in one God and Muhammad as his prophet, and only five central ritual requirements. Islam has no clerical equivalent to the Christian clergy or pope to pronounce authoritatively for the entire community. The Koran emphasizes unity, not uniformity, in the Muslim community. Hadith record Muhammad condemning pedantry—including by warning that "Perdition shall befall extreme Pedants." And hadith record that Muhammad declared emphatically that "Whoever testifies that there is no God but God, and prays in the same direction as us, and prays like us, and eats what we slaughter, is a Muslim. He has the same rights as a Muslim and the same obligations as a Muslim." For many Muslims, moreover, as Islam centers on individual submission, virtue, and the equality of believers, and is based on a mystical and poetically expressed text, Sufism best represents the beating heart of Islam, and a wide variety of ritual

10. Patricia Crone, *God's rule—government in Islam: six centuries of medieval Islamic political thought* (New York, 2004), p.358–92; Patricia Crone, "No compulsion in religion: Q 2:256 in medieval and modern interpretation," in *Le Shi'isme imamite quarante ans après*, ed. Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, Meir Bar-Asher, and Simon Hopkins (Turnhout, 2009), p.131–78; Abdulaziz Sachedina, "The development of Jihad in Islamic revelation and history," in *Cross, crescent and sword*, ed. James Turner Johnson and John Kelsay (Westport, CT, 1990), p.35–50; Abdulaziz Sachedina, "Liberty of conscience and religion in the Qur'an," in *Human rights and the conflict of cultures: Western and Islamic perspectives on religious liberty*, ed. A. Sachedina, D. Little, and J. Kelsay (Columbia, SC, 1988), p.53–100; Rudolph Peters, *Jihad in mediaeval and modern Islam* (Leiden, 1977); Rudolph Peters, *Jihad in classical and modern Islam* (Princeton, NJ, 1996); Richard Bonney, *Jihad from Qur'an to bin Laden* (New York, 2004); John Kelsay, *Arguing the just war in Islam* (Cambridge, MA, 2007), p.122–24.

practices and further beliefs are legitimate. With its rich history of Persian Sufi poetry, this is especially true of Persian Islam.[11]

But significant divisions within Islam arose early, with the most significant over the legitimate succession to Muhammad. The vast majority of Muslims—Sunnis—supported the rule of the first four caliphs, while a small but nonetheless significant minority of Muslims declared themselves followers of Ali, or Shias, and forcefully condemned the authority of the three caliphs before Ali, including by cursing them as "apostates"—nonbelievers. The majority of Shias, known as Twelver Shias, stressed the interpretative infallibility and legislative authority of a succession of twelve inspired imams followed by the ninth-century occultation (concealment rather than death) of Muhammad al-Mahdi in about 868–878, the twelfth legitimate successor to Muhammad, whom they said would return to lead the community. Sunnis and Shias divided over many further issues, including the hadith; pilgrimages and shrines; schools of interpretation of the sharia; and some "moral" requirements of Islam. Less than 10 percent of Muslims became Shia, and most Shia rulers from the seventh to the seventeenth century did not try to impose Shi'ism on their subject populations. The Shia Fatimids in late medieval Egypt, for instance, did not try to impose Shia beliefs on their majority Sunni subject population.

The Safavid dynasty came to power in Persia as Twelver Shias and heads of a messianic and mystical Sufi order claiming simultaneously to be the representatives on earth of the Mahdi and lineal descendants from Ali; the perfect spiritual director of their Sufi Safavid order; and the "Shadow of God on earth" according to the divine right of kings, a doctrine long supported in Persia. Starting with Ismael I, Safavid shahs sponsored Shia shrines and pilgrimages, and personally made pilgrimages to these shrines, restored them, and endowed them richly. In his own collection of poetry, Ismael described himself as a descendant and reincarnation of Ali, and declared that "Those who do not recognise Ali as Truth are absolute non-believers. They have no creed, no faith, and are not Muslims." The Italian traveler Constantino Lascari noted in 1502 that Ismael's "religion […] always bore great hatred towards the Ottoman house, and counts them as heretics." Ismael depicted himself in his poetry as forecast to be conqueror of the world. In the early sixteenth century the Safavid regime supported imposition

11. This is a huge topic, but for a beginning see Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad, *A Thinking person's guide to Islam* (London, 2017), p.144, 149, and passim; Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, passim; and the works of Lewisohn cited above.

of Shia beliefs on the Muslim subject population by force, and there were executions of "some" Sunnis—the numbers are unclear—who refused their vocal support when Shias walked through the streets and bazaars ritually cursing the first three caliphs and Sunnis in general. Such ritual cursing of Sunnis was backed by arguments of al-Karaki, named by Ismael as his "deputy imam," that the cursing of disbelievers was invoked by Muhammad in Koran 2.89 and 2.161: "on them is the curse of Allah and of angels and of men combined." This cursing was among Ottoman legitimations for warfare; when treaties of peace were made between Ottomans and Safavids they banned such ritual cursing, including in 1555 and 1589–1590. In the sixteenth century, the Ottoman Mufti Effendi declared of the Shias that "if you had no other heresy than the rejection of those elevated familiars of Muhammad, viz Umar, Uthman and Abu Bakr, your crime would notwithstanding be so great as were not expiable by a thousand years of prayer or pilgrimage in the sight of God; but you would be condemned to the bottomless abyss of Hell." For Effendi, "it is lawful in a Godly zeal to kill and destroy you for the Service of God."

In the early Enlightenment such Sunni enmity to Shias was quoted at length in Rycaut's widely circulated account of the Ottoman empire. Ritual cursing was declared "an act tantamount to unbelief" and thus a ground for war against Shias not just by Sunni Ottomans, but also by Sunni Uzbeks; it was part of their claim that Shias turning believers away "to the abominable Shi'ite rite" had placed all Muslims "under an obligation to kill and destroy them, as God has commanded, as the supreme act for the true religion," and that any ruler who failed to prosecute a mandatory "holy war against such people when he has the power to do so" would need to answer for failure on the Day of Judgment. Munshi quoted this Uzbek justification of war at length in his *Chronicle*. Ritually cursing caliphs in declarations of war, Shah Abbas I declared in a letter to the Uzbek ruler that he, Abbas, was a slave of Ali, whereas his opponent was a slave of Umar, Mu'awiya, and Abi Sufiyan, "may all of them be cursed and burned in hell." According to Chardin, the train of an Uzbek envoy was killed in Persia by a cursing mob when they had responded. Shah Ismael II had opposed such ritual cursing during his brief sixteenth-century reign; Munshi's official chronicle of Abbas I's reign spent almost all of its pages devoted to Ismael describing this opposition and his religious views as therefore deeply suspect, before recounting his murder.[12]

12. Savory, *Iran*, p.28–29; Markus Dressler, "Inventing orthodoxy: competing claims for orthodoxy and legitimacy in the Ottoman-Safavid conflict," in

Ritual cursing of the Sunni line of caliphs remained extremely common in seventeenth-century Persia, where religious feasts which celebrated the Persian murderer of Caliph Umar were named for the murderer and held on the anniversary of Umar's death with the burning of Umar's effigy. These were very widely reported as being very popular parts of the religious calendar by many European travelers in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth century, including by Olearius, Du Mans, Thévenot, and Kaempfer. Du Mans, who lived for almost fifty years in Persia, recorded that Umar was vilified also in anecdotes that proclaimed that he had been born incestuously, and had dispossessed and attempted to kill Muhammad's wife Fatima and members of Muhammad's family. According to Chardin, Umar was the most hated of the caliphs by Persians, and ritual cursing of Umar was constant. Chardin indicated that Persians commonly called Umar a "son of a whore" and a "tyrant," and that he could write a whole book about everything that Persians did to execrate Umar. The religious festival and ritual calendar of Persia repeatedly reinforced that violence occurred in relation to the succession to Muhammad, and the legitimacy of Ali and his successors and illegitimacy of the succession supported by Sunnis, as it often depicted the murderers of Ali and of Husayn and his bloodied children, with sermons followed by burning of effigies of their Sunni murderers. Herbert recorded thousands of people present at such religious festivals in the early seventeenth century, and Olearius, Chardin, and de Bruyn's late-seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century texts recorded their importance. The central festival of the entire calendar year in Persia, often described at great length by European travelers, was the ten-day festival devoted to Husayn—the Muharram—which involved collective mourning over Husayn's martyrdom, with preachers reinforcing messages both of remorse and of revenge. The body of Imam Husayn was displayed either dead in a cenotaph, or naked with pieces of arrows and lances attached to his bloody skin "as if they had pierced his body," in Chardin's description. The Ottoman traveler Evliya Chelebi, who

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Legitimizing the order, ed. Hakan T. Karateke and Maurus Reinkwoski (Leiden, 2005), p.151–73 (156–59); Andrew J. Newman, *Safavid Iran* (London, 2006); Jean Calmard, "Shi'i rituals and power," in *Safavid Persia*, ed. C. Melville, p.139–90 (161–66); Iskander Munshi, *The History of Shah Abbas the Great*, translated by R. Savory, 3 vols. (Boulder, CO, 1978–1986), vol.1, p.2–5, 7, 13, 16, 67, 75, 90, 93–94, 105–107, 112, 137, 210, 443, 509, 517; vol.2, p.561; Paul Rycaut, *The Present state of the Ottoman empire* (London, John Starkey and Henry Brome, 1668), p.119–21.

visited Tabriz in 1647 and in 1655, recorded that the representation of the bloodied head and body of Husayn and of his dead children displayed at one such Muharram had caused such screams and wailings that the audience was in a state of ecstasy.[13]

Safavid rulers often challenged the power and Muslim status of the Sunni Ottomans on the battlefield; in the same period Ottoman Sunnis declared similarly in repeated fatwas and texts legitimating wars that Shia Safavids were "infidels" against whom "holy war" could be waged, and killed many Shias in their own territories. In 1514, 1532–1535, 1548–1549, 1553–1555, 1576–1590, 1603–1612, 1615–1618, and 1623–1639, Ottomans and Safavids were at war. While they did not fight again until shortly after the Safavids fell, this peace was unpredictable, during which Safavids fought against Sunni Mughals. And Safavid Persia repeatedly fought against Sunni Uzbeks in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Wars against the Ottomans and Uzbeks often involved fighting over shrines with great importance to Shias, such as the tomb of Ali in Najaf, recaptured from the Ottomans in 1631, and thereafter lovingly restored. The relocation of the capital of Persia to Isfahan by Shah Abbas in the 1590s was followed by a commission of mosques dedicated to Shia Islam, including the Luftallah Mosque, inscribed with a dedication to Shah Abbas as "propagator of the faith of the infallible Imams," and the stunningly beautiful Royal Mosque, commenced in 1611 to celebrate victory over the Ottomans and bearing the prophetic inscription "I am the city of knowledge and Ali is its gate."

For Munshi, the official chronicler of Abbas I in the early seventeenth century, "Sovereignty and kingship are the right of Shah Ishmail and Tahmasp's family, who having sent their dust-and-wind borne opponents to hell with the fire of their well-tempered swords, revealed and manifested Imamism and spread it throughout the world." Munshi's work began with a genealogy tracing Safavid rulers' descent from Ali and Muhammad. He repeatedly excoriated Sunni Ottomans and Uzbeks for persecutions and killings of Shias. He described the "deep faith in Ali" of Shah Tahmasp, "to whom the immaculate Imams in a vision had given the assurance of victory" over Uzbeks. And he repeatedly claimed that a "celestial host" of angels and "divine assistance" had helped the Shia rulers in many of their battles against Sunnis—just as they had assisted Muhammad in

13. Calmard, "Shi'i rituals."

his battles. Munshi repeatedly invoked the Koran at these moments in his text describing Shias defeating the "enemies of the faith."[14]

IV

European travelers in the early Enlightenment unequivocally asserted the deep hostility of Shia to Sunni, and repeatedly criticized Shia belief in the divinity of their ruler as associated both with this hostility to Sunnis and with absolutist or despotic rule. At times they explicitly attributed the central focus on military might, and therefore the existence of absolutism itself, to the overriding hostility between Sunni and Shia. According to Sanson, Persians live as "irreconcilable Enemies" to Ottomans, Mughals, and Uzbeks, with "irreconcileable Hatred" between Turks and Persians. As Shias had a "great many enemies from those Mahometans of a different Sect, who have always for em an unappeasable Aversion. Whence it comes that the King is always obliged to keep a strong Guard upon his Frontiers," a force which Sanson totaled as no fewer than 150,000 men. For Sanson, such militaristic sources of despotism combined with superstitious reverence, as Persians were "so pre-possessed and bigotted with the Infallibility of their Prince, that they receive his Commands and Ordinances as Oracles descended from Heaven." For Sanson, Shias' beliefs about the divinity of their ruler thus undergirded Safavid despotism, and the "Alcoran" was the fountainhead of Muslim superstition as a "ridiculous Collection of many impieties and fables" mixed with truths "perverted by Mahomet."[15]

Thévenot declared that no "Nations in the World hate one another so much upon the account of Religion" as Persians and "Turks" as "they look upon one another as Heretics" because "the Turks pretend that Aboubeker was the Lawful Successor of Mahomet […] whereas the Persians" held them "usurpers" of Ali, who was the "Lawful Successor of Mahomet." Indicating that there was a "superstition" amongst Persians that no Christian could touch anything without polluting it, which meant that Shias kept Christians from shared meals, baths, and coffeehouses—a point to which we will return later—Thévenot declared that "Persians hate Turks no less and hold them to be as

14. Sussan Babaie *et al.*, *Slaves of the shah: new elites of Safavid Iran* (London, 2004), p.46, 47; Munshi, *Shah Abbas*, vol.1, p.2–5, 7, 13, 16, 67, 75, 90, 93–94, 105–107, 112, 137, 210, 443, 509, 517.
15. Sanson, *Present state*, p.2–3, 11, 74–79, 97–99, 146.

impure as the Christians." Thévenot stressed that the current rulers of Persia claimed descent from Ali, and that that was required to rule, with Persia "a monarchy governed by a King, who has so absolute a power over his Subjects, that no limits can be set to it." Subjects of the shah "never look upon him but with fear and trembling, and they have such a respect for him, and pay so blind an obedience to all his Orders, that how unjust soever his Commands might be, they perform them." Depicting shahs as capricious "tyrants" who were "angry," "jealous," and "cruel," Thévenot held that the "chief Persons of the Court" were particularly subject to the "storms" of rulers who ordered their own sons killed and brothers blinded in order to prevent the threat of being "deprived of that Power which they abuse." Their resources were based on "usurpation" from their people, whom Thévenot suggested they disdained. He described horrified Portuguese ambassadors who had witnessed executions involving bellies being ripped open, given justification by the shah (Abbas I) that such would be "too cruel and horrid, if they were practiced amongst Christians who are rational people, but that they were absolutely necessary among the Persians who are Beasts."[16]

Chardin identified Safavid rule as despotic in a society he depicted as full of lust and luxury, idleness and corruption. He combined theories of climate inherited from ancient Greeks in which Persians had been alleged for centuries to be naturally slavish with allegations about the Muslim religion and about Shi'ism specifically suggesting superstitious Shias' slavish subjection. For Chardin,

> The Persian Government is monarchical, despotic and absolute, being entirely in the hands of a single man, who is the sovereign head as much for spiritual as well as those of temporal affairs, the all-embracing master of the lives and possessions of his subjects. There is certainly no sovereign in the world so absolute as the Shah of Persia for every one does exactly what he orders without paying any regard to the basis or the circumstances of those commands, although it can be seen as bright as daylight that for most of the time there is no justice at all in his orders and quite often no common sense.

Explaining to his European audience that in the seventeenth century royal children were restricted to the harem, with potential challengers to rule killed or blinded, Chardin declared that "The Mahommedan sovereigns, having been brought up in the seraglios with Women and

16. Jean de Thévenot, *Travels into the Levant* (London, Faithorne, 1687), p.97–107.

Eunuchs, are so incapable of governing" that they needed someone to rule in their stead. Chardin identified this as the basis for the "extreme power of the Grand Viziers" in Persia, and alleged a largely unchanging history of Islam in declaring that "if we go further back in Mahommedanism, as far as its earliest times, we will find that the Kings of the Orient all had their Grand Viziers just as the Kings of Egypt had their Joseph and those of Assyria their Daniel." Focusing on conversion to Islam to avoid execution, Chardin declared that, in the beginning of Mohammedanism,

> religion was even crueller and more bloodthirsty than it has been since, no quarter was given in war to any but those who embraced it with a habitual profession of faith. […] And whenever someone made this profession of faith in order to avoid death, the cry was raised: Musulmoon est! "He has reached salvation." This shows that the term does not mean a true believer.

For all of his and his fellow travel writers' celebrations at moments in their texts of elements of Persian society such as hospitality and tolerance, in the picture of Shia absolutism, Chardin's works handed on to the Enlightenment—most notoriously to Montesquieu—much of the image of "Oriental despotism" initiated in ancient Greek thought, combined with an image of Islam as a false, fissiparous, and superstitious religion based largely on cruelty and force and supportive of despotism.[17]

17. Chardin, *Voyages de M. le chevalier Chardin en Perse et autres lieux de l'Orient*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam, de Lorme, 1711), vol.2, p.211, 235, 312, and ch.1–2, passim; Chardin, *A Journey to Persia: Jean Chardin's portrait of a seventeenth-century empire*, ed. Ronald Ferrier (London, 1996), p.79; Alain Grosrichard, *The Sultan's court: European fantasies of the East*, translated by Liz Heron (London, 1998), p.75 and 112. The topic of "Oriental despotism," and the importance of Chardin's account therein, is an important one which has provoked much excellent scholarship and can only be glanced at here; see as a beginning: Joan-Pau Rubiés, "Oriental despotism and European Orientalism: Botero to Montesquieu," *Journal of early modern history* 9:1 (2005), p.109–80, esp. 154–58; Michael Curtis, *Orientalism and Islam: European thinkers on Oriental despotism in the Middle East and India* (Cambridge, 2009); Ahmad Gunny, *Images of Islam in eighteenth-century writings* (London, 1996); Grosrichard, *The Sultan's court; Harvey, The French Enlightenment*, ch.1. On Anquetil-Duperron's important Enlightenment corrective to Montesquieu as alleging that Montesquieu misread Chardin, see Frederick Whelan, "Oriental despotism: Anquetil-Duperron's response to Montesquieu," *History of political thought* 22:4 (2001), p.619–47 (634, 638, 643).

V

Shias fought against Sunnis in repeated wars and executed some Sunnis within Persia's borders as Shi'ism was imposed. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries other Muslims were executed by the Safavid regime, most notably for religiously inspired rebellions, including in 1593 many Nuqtavis who believed in their own messianic mission to replace the Safavid shahs; in 1629 perhaps 2000 followers of Gharib Shah, the leader of a further messianic revolt; and in 1631 Darvish Risa, who proclaimed himself the Hidden Imam. But in an important sense it was the enormous degree of acceptance of a wide variety of mystical practices and beliefs within Shi'ism, and the frequent celebration of extreme mysticism as the truly authentic religious path, which allowed such messianic movements to come to exist as frequently as this. Safavid shahs often respected rather than restrained mysticism and messianism until it became actively rebellious until at least the second half of the seventeenth century, when Shah Abbas II was still referred to by his court chronicler as a "dervish-loving monarch," and when court chronicles from his reign were "filled with instances when the monarch interacts with and patronises dervishes." Considerable eclecticism and pluralism within Shia Islam within Persia, frequently involving the respect and court patronage for elite Shia Sufism described at the beginning of this article, seem to have been at least as significant across the majority of the seventeenth century as were moments of drives for restrictive Shia orthodoxy based on ritual observances, on the sharia, and on the orders of the ulama. As the leading historian of Safavid mysticism, Babayan, notes, "at least until the age of Suleyman (1666–94), the choice to follow or abandon a particular jurisconsult (mutjahid), preacher (va'iz), or dervish seems to have been as free as the flows of the currents" of diverse religious views "through the Safavid imperium."

European observers often remarked on the "multitude of sects of Mahometans" in Persia. Chardin depicted the plethora of coffeehouses at the center of social interaction in seventeenth-century Isfahan in which, alongside games of chess, and recitals of poems and stories, mullahs would give sermons and dervishes speak of the vanity of materialism. Chardin indicated that "the speeches of mollahs or dervishes are moral lessons similar to our sermons, but it is not scandalous to ignore them […] Ultimately, there is here ample liberty."[18]

18. Savory, *Iran*, p.101; Abisaab, *Converting Persia*, passim, esp. p.27 and 34–35, 47–49; Newman, *Safavid Iran*, p.57; Dressler, "Inventing orthodoxy," p.151–73;

In the second half of the seventeenth century, there were increasing demands made by members of the ulama to set religious policies more restrictively, and increasing suggestions that shahs themselves should take orders from the ulama in establishing religious policies. In the words of Chardin, the "pious" and "devotees" and those who "confess themselves as people who precisely fulfill the religious duties" were raising questions about how rulers "who drink wine and are driven by passion" could gain the "necessary light to guide the believers" and "solve matters of conscience and doubts concerning the faith as a representative of God must do." According to Chardin, some preachers suggested that, because "the mutjahid is holy" and possessed of "knowledge," the king should be the mutjahid's "minister." But Chardin noted that this was still a minority view among the ulama, let alone in the population at large, emphasizing the much more substantial support for the divinity of the shahs. At the end of the seventeenth century, when he became Shaikh-al-islam, Majlisi Jr. supported a restrictive version of Shi'ism, declaring that Sufis were "apostates" or "infidels" who ought to be "destroyed." According to many scholars, under Majlisi Jr. Shi'ism became "more uncompromisingly orthodox." In that period collections and collations of Shia traditions and commentaries on the four Shi'i canonical books were issued in significant numbers, and religious figures are registered as having put some to death for Islamic "heresies" and "sins." There were campaigns against dancing, music, and drinking of wine—all associated with Sufi practices—together with enforcement of veiling. But these efforts by Majlisi and texts against dancing and music can be read as indicating the extensiveness still of such Sufi practices, and the continued widespread variance within Shi'ism in beliefs about what was religiously required. Some scholars, including Newman and Abisaab, have therefore recently suggested that Safavid rulers and culture maintained room for Sufism and for spiritual balance within Shi'ism even in these years. Sanson, who came to Persia as a missionary as late as the 1680s, held that "There are in Persia different Mahometan sects: for Mahometanism is there so divided, that there are almost as many different Opinions, as there are different Conditions. The Belief of a Tradesman is not the same with a Scholar; and the Courtier has also one particular to himself." And

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Babayan, *Mystics*, p.439–40; Laurence Lockhart, *The Fall of the Safavi dynasty and the Afghan occupation of Persia* (Cambridge, 1958), p.1–11.

he noted "The Persians do not well agree amongst themselves about the points of Religion."[19]

VI

Safavid Persia provided toleration to significant numbers of non-Muslims, as European authors often stressed. But Safavid Persia limited this toleration at moments, including by severe persecutions and by wars against "infidels," only some of which were discussed in European travel literature. Seventeenth-century Persia was home to Armenian, Orthodox, and Roman Catholic Christians, to Jews, to Zoroastians, and to Hindus. Surveying the plethora of different faiths and ethnic and national origins within one city, Herbert declared in the early seventeenth century that "in matters of conscience they question none where there is no breach of peace." Thévenot asserted that "The Persians give full liberty of conscience to all Strangers of whatsoever Religion they be." Daulier-Deslandes's 1673 *Beauties of Persia* suggested that "All these different peoples, in spite of their various religions, live together in friendly relations at Isfahan, and have a system of justice which gives no preference to either Christian or Muhammadan." Chardin declared that the "most commendable Property of the Manners of the Persians, is their Kindness to Strangers; the Reception and Protection they afford them, and their Universal Hospitality, and Toleration, in regard to Religion." Chardin indicated that "Their Religious Principles […] [allowed] all sorts of worship"—though he also indicated that the allegedly "universal" support for toleration excepted their "Clergy" who, "as in all other places, hate to a furious degree, all those that differ from their Opinions." Chardin declared of the population at large that "They believe all men's prayers are good and prevalent; therefore, in their illnesses, and in other wants, they admit of, and even desire the prayers of different Religions; I have

19. Savory, *Iran*, passim, esp. p.234–39; Lockhart, *The Fall of the Safavi dynasty*; Shireen Mahdavi, "Muhammad Baqir Majlisi, family values, and the Safavids," in *Safavid Iran and her neighbors*, ed. Michel Mazzaoui (Salt Lake City, UT, 2003), p.81–100; Andrew Newman, "Clerical perceptions of Sufi practices in late seventeenth-century Persia," in *The Heritage of Sufism*, ed. L. Lewisohn, vol.3, p.135–64; Newman, *Safavid Iran*; Babayan, *Mystics*; Babayan, "Sufis, dervishes and mullas"; Abisaab, *Converting Persia*; Chardin, *Voyages* (1811), vol.5, p.205–17; Engelbert Kaempfer, *Am Hofe des Perischen Großkönigs* (Stuttgart, 1984), p.130; both in Heinz Halm, *Shiism* (Edinburgh, 1991), p.94–95; Olearius, *Voyages*, p.301–303; Sanson, *Present state*, p.154, 180.

seen it practiced a thousand times," something he attributed to "the sweet Temper of that Nation."[20]

Armenian Christians were the largest communities of non-Muslims in Safavid Persia—numbering hundreds of thousands in the seventeenth century in a total population of perhaps 6 to 8 million. The largest community of Armenians was in Isfahan, a city which reached perhaps 500,000 in the seventeenth century. The Armenian community there was divided in the early seventeenth century between wealthy merchants in the suburb of New Julfa and a poorer artisanal community in the old city. There were also Armenian communities numbering in the thousands in other locations, including at Shiraz and Mazandaran. From 1619 wealthy Armenian merchants were granted a royal monopoly on the export of silk, by far the single most important export of the country, and were central in the import of specie. Chardin declared that the fortune of the richest Armenian merchant in 1673 was the equivalent of 2 million *livres tournois*—thirteen and thirty times that of the two richest merchants in France. Comparing them to the bankers to the Spanish rulers, Della Valle described Armenians as "to the king of Persia like the Genovese are to the king of Spain, neither can they live without the king, nor the king live without them." As McCabe has recently shown, the king received taxes on silk exports, and 85 percent of the silk consumed across Europe was produced in Persia; he also gained the specie with which to pay his army and his officials; and he levied poll taxes and gained many "gifts" from the Armenian community. In these important senses, Shia wars against Sunnis, and Shia absolutism, were built significantly on toleration of the wealthy Armenians. Armenians also often served as ambassadors outside of Persia and welcomed European visitors to Persia as the Safavids sought alliances with various European powers against the Ottomans. Wealthy Armenian merchants were given land and houses by the shah, with mansions built on the same lines as the palaces of the shahs on the banks of the river in a city that was a fertile oasis in a desert, complete with impressive gardens, plazas, wide avenues, shopping areas, leisure pavilions, and a host of new architectural marvels, such as the thirty-three-arch bridge over the river that linked the rich Armenian suburb

20. Thomas Herbert, *Travels in Persia: 1627–1629* (New York, 1929), p.178–79; Matthee, "The Safavids under Western eyes," p.168; André Daulier-Deslandes, in Nora Kathleen Firby, *European travellers and their perceptions of Zoroastrians in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries* (Berlin, 1988), p.55.

directly to the royal palaces, and was described at length in many European travel accounts as the site at which Armenians welcomed European ambassadors on behalf of Persia.[21]

In their suburb of New Julfa Armenians were allowed to build a cathedral and many new churches—numbering twenty-four by the 1660s, with seventy-one Armenian churches in all of the suburbs of Isfahan by the end of the century. They were allowed to ring church bells. They were allowed to rule their own community through an official approved by the shah. Under Shah Abbas I leading Armenian Christians were made members of the royal household. In his 1678 *Voyages* Tavernier reported that Abbas I had "usually" attended the Christian baptism of infants in the Zayand river and gone to dinner afterward at the home of the leader of the Armenian community; shahs Safi and Abbas II continued these dinners, served by royal chefs on royal gold tableware. Safi let regional governors know that "the population of Christian Armenians of Julfa are attached and allied to the Royal Private Household, and the compassion and affection of his royal highness concerning the aforementioned Armenian population is exceptional."[22]

Tavernier declared that "The Armenians of Zulpa have this advantage over all the other Christians of the Orient, that they possess land and have more beautiful franchises, the king not permitting that the least injustice be done towards them nor that any Mahometan live in Zulpa." Tavernier pointed to their many churches, and their privilege to be "as well clad as Muslims." Fryer emphasized that Armenians lived in "sumptuous houses" with "many of them credible Merchants"; for this East India Company official, "mightily do they increase […] in Riches and Freedom; for whilst they sit lazily at home, their Factors abroad in all parts of the Earth return to their Hives laden with Honey." Fryer declared the shah a prudent emperor "by favouring their designs, and […] at home securing them from the Treachery and Envy of his own subjects; not only allotting them a place over against his own palace to build their city,

21. Ina Baghdiantz McCabe, *The Shah's silk for Europe's silver* (Philadephia, PA, 1999), passim, esp. p.1, 4–5; Ina Baghdiantz McCabe, "Princely suburb, Armenian quarter or Christian ghetto? The urban setting of new Julfa in the Safavid capital of Isfahan 1605–1722," *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 107–10 (2005), p.415–36; Babaie *et al.*, *Slaves*, passim, p.69.

22. Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *The Six voyages of John Baptiste Tavernier through Turkey into Persia and East-Indies* (London, John Starkey, 1678), p.2, 190; Babaie *et al.*, *Slaves*, p.69–70; McCabe, "Princely suburb," p.436.

but encouraging them to Rear Costly and well Endowed temples, without any Molestation, to the Honor of the Blessed name of Christ." Sanson declared similarly that "He loves the Christians, and will not suffer 'em to be disturbed in the exercise of their religion," and that "whereas in Turkey the Christian professors groan under a cruel and intolerable slavery, in Persia (if the Will of the Prince be but observed) they enjoy an undisturb'd and serene liberty." Montesquieu was thus following in a long line of commentators on the toleration provided to Armenians in Persia when he had Usbek warn in the *Persian letters* that "in outlawing the Armenians, one may in a single day destroy all the merchants and almost all the artisans of the kingdom. I am certain that the great Shah Abbas would have preferred to cut off his two arms than to sign such an order."[23]

The relocation of Armenians from Julfa to New Julfa in Isfahan in 1603–1604 was, however, designed to make gains for the shahs in the extremely lucrative silk trade whose exports he thereafter taxed, to help him to build his new secure capital of Isfahan far from war zones with the Ottomans, and the result of a scorched earth policy adopted in war against the Ottomans. It was the consequence of religious warfare against Sunnis, and designed to foster the very Shia absolutism that European writers otherwise condemned. Moreover, thousands of poorer Armenian artisans were forced to relocate to old Isfahan and given neither land nor high status, and thousands of poor Armenian farmers were relocated to silk-growing marshes south of the Caspian Sea at Gilan and Mazandaran, where labor was arduous and the air unhealthy and many died of cholera, malaria, and starvation. This received less emphasis in most European accounts, but Chardin recorded that in Mazandaran "the number of Christians was reduced to about four hundred families, from the thirty thousand that were there at first." The Armenian priest Kach'atur wrote in 1606 that during relocation itself "more than 100,000 souls died of the cold and many a father ate his son […] and the strong the weak […] and other hardships came to the Armenian people." The Carmelites said that "10,000 children and girls had been carried off into Muslim households and the practices of Islam" in the relocation, and that, while the shah had ordered that they could be bought back, he had done little to facilitate this.

In the 1650s, many of the poorer artisanal Armenians were forcibly relocated again, this time from Isfahan to much less desirable areas

23. Sanson, *Present state*, p.7, 9; on Montesquieu using Chardin here, see Harvey, *The French Enlightenment*, p.23.

of New Julfa than the riverine mansions of the wealthy merchants. The allegation made by the Grand Vizier was that their presence was polluting to Muslims who came into contact with them, or with water that they had contacted—a point that we indicated earlier had been noted as a general Shia "superstition" connected to non-Muslims and Shia beliefs about Sunnis. This belief was often emphasized and condemned in European accounts. While such attitudes involved considerable disdain in general toward Armenians on the part of Muslims, however, Chardin associated such attitudes with helping wealthy Armenians gain their role in Persian trade, as for Shias the "Law forbids them to eat Flesh either Dress'd or Kill'd by a Man of a different religion, and likewise to drink in the same Cup with such a one […] [and] even forbids in some Cases, the touching Persons of a contrary Opinion." The Armenian chronicler Arakel, who visited Isfahan in 1657, however, gave a very different reason to rejoice at the relocation which suggests that such attitudes about pollution by proximity were not widespread in the population, but rather that familiarity and intimacy and conversions to Islam were common. Arakel declared that "Continuous exposure to the brutal and sensual mores of the Mahometans" had formerly led to many conversions of Armenians to Islam and frequent intermarriage; relocation to an almost entirely Armenian suburb protected Armenians from converting. There were a number of highly publicized conversions to Islam by leading Armenians in the later seventeenth century, including the single wealthiest merchant of their community and even an archbishop who was persuaded by reading Islamic philosophy.[24]

At some moments, however, conversion of Armenians had involved force. In 1613 a demand for funds to be repaid by the poorer members of the relocated Armenian community by Abbas involved demand for children from those in default of payment, and it was recorded that to save their children some Armenians converted. In 1621 the conversion of all Armenians was briefly demanded by Abbas, backed by threats of dissolving Armenians' marriages, and, while this was rescinded after two weeks when wealthy Armenians withheld funds, two regions still underwent what Munshi directly called forced conversions. In 1629

24. *A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia: the Safavids and the papal mission of the 17th and 18th centuries*, ed. J. Chick, 2 vols. (London, 1939), vol.2, p.100; Babaie *et al.*, *Slaves*, p.56, 61; McCabe, *The Shah's silk*, p.119, 184; Alice Taylor, *Book arts of Isfahan: diversity and identity in seventeenth-century Persia* (Oxford, 1995), p.5–6, 51; Sanson, *Present state*, p.181–82.

it was provided that a convert to Islam automatically inherited the property of deceased Christian kin, based on the Shia law of Imam Ja'far. Thévenot declared that local Islamic magistrates, knowing "the iniquity of this," circumvented this "unjust law, devised for the propagation of the Faith of Mahomet," by allowing alleged sales of goods by the deceased before their death, and Sanson described the law, "thought to draw Armenians into Mahometanism," as one "not well approv'd of by the Governours who lose their Tribute when Christians turn Mahometans" and so did "what they can to oppose it." But Sanson declared that some Armenians had converted due to this "wicked law" which "destroys thousands of souls" due to the "false zeal of these ministers." Sanson noted that any who converted and then said that they could not "keep to Mahometanism" were given permission "to return to their Tribute, and exercise their religion freely."[25]

In the seventeenth century there were resident congregations of Carmelites, Augustinians, and Dominicans in Persia, even if it was estimated that only perhaps 600 people professed Catholicism in the realm. Many European writers indicated with Sanson that the regime "Never exacts tribute from missions," and that shahs granted missionaries "the free exercise of their Religion, and a power to establish it where they please." This did not stop some hostility allegedly being expressed by ordinary Muslims. In 1671 the Carmelites recorded that "in the streets they call out after all Christians and Religious: 'Dog! Become a Muslim', and that the little children in the streets shout 'Cursed be the Franks'."[26]

It was, however, primarily from Armenians rather than Muslims that Catholic missionaries faced opposition. The Armenian Church had been independent from all other Christian churches since the fifth century because of divergence about how the divine and human coexisted in the person of Christ. To Catholics, Armenians were schismatics, heretics, and blasphemers; their missions were directed at reclamation. Armenians repeatedly petitioned the shahs to restrain missionaries, including when the Carmelites were allowed a Roman

25. Chick, *Carmelites*, vol.1, p.288; Sanson, *Present state*, p.143–44; P. Raphaël Du Mans, *Estat de la Perse en 1660* (Paris, 1890), p.46–47; Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *The Six travels* (London, 1684), vol.1, p.16, in Vazken S. Ghougassian, *The Emergence of the Armenian diocese of New Julfa in the seventeenth century* (Atlanta, GA, 1998), p.75–76.
26. Chick, *Carmelites*, vol.1, p.406–407, in McCabe, *The Shah's silk*, p.187.

Catholic church in New Julfa in 1691, and Armenians petitioned against it. It was expelled in 1694, only to be returned in 1697 by order of the shah, with missionaries then exulting that the "schismatic" Armenians were therefore "gnashing their teeth."

European travelers' accounts were often unsympathetic to Armenians. Thévenot called them "obstinately wedded" to their own religion and campaigners against "Franks so that some had to leave Persia." He indicated that, while he believed that some Armenians were good, they were "not Christians," and that others were "every whit as bad as infidels," holding "many of the Mahometan superstitions," including "but one nature in Jesus Christ." Thévenot even declared that, "when they rob or murder," they were told by their confessor that this was less bad than "not fasting."[27]

VII

Olearius described some rich Georgian Christians in the suburbs of Hasenabath, "mostly merchants and wealthy men" who desire to live "where they might live quietly and enjoy the freedom of their conscience." He indicated that Persians "permit them to live anywhere," and have "affection for them" from advantages of trade and from their making of wine. But in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries Georgian Christians had very considerable force used against them. In his official *Chronicle of the reign of Shah Abbas I* Munshi described the "extirpation of Infidels" in Georgia by Shah Tahmasp as based on "the necessity of conducting a holy war against the infidel" as he was "the defender of the faith," with surviving residents becoming thereby subjects of the shah "contracted to pay the poll tax and the land tax" as "the infidels of those regions were reduced to submission by the sharp swords of the warriors of Islam." Munshi recorded of the first of four campaigns against them that "On a night which was even darker than the hearts of men before the advent of Islam, they stormed into the city of Tiflis, which they subjected to fire, the sword, and plunder. The men were put to death and the women and children were taken captive by the gazis." Those "divinely guided to make the twin professions of the Muslim faith were spared; the rest packed their bags and took their abode in hell." According to Munshi, in a second campaign, "the armies of Islam marched against the wicked infidels. When they reached the Georgian centers of habitation, the swords of the gazis began lopping

27. Ghougassian, *The Emergence of the Armenian diocese of New Julfa*, ch.7.

off heads, and they reddened the ground with the blood in infidels and priests." A third campaign had involved "The warriors of Islam, who were fighting a holy war" demonstrating their valor in fulfillment of the Koran, "by penetrating to the retreats of the polytheists" and slaying "thousands of wrongdoers […] "dispatched […] to an evil destination," with Georgian women "beautiful as the maidens of paradise" and youths "handsome as Joseph, of the breed of the youths of paradise," taken prisoner. Muslim soldiers had scaled a fortress, and "By a clear miracle of the Islamic Faith" its male defenders "were all put to the sword," and its church "razed" "and in that infidel place of worship" Tahmasp had "put to death twenty irreligious priests and sent them to perdition. The church bell, which had been cast of the finest bronze, was smashed and destroyed like the lives of the Georgians." The final campaign "incorporated" the province "into the lands of Islam, as in conformity with the Koranic injunction: 'Kill those who ascribe partners to God, one and all' they slay any of those irreligious polytheists […] who refused to accept the burden of the poll tax."[28] Abbas I's rule had then continued such "holy wars" with "various vain religions" in Azerbaijan, Sirvan, and Georgia being "smitten by his shining sword," "great slaughter" in Georgia, and "many thousands of Georgian women and children, non-Muslims […] taken prisoner and brought within the fold of Islam."[29]

And many tens of thousands of Circassian, Georgian, and Armenian prisoners were brought to Persia also as the result of sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century Safavid–Ottoman wars. They were viewed as Ottoman subjects, and so capable of being slaughtered or captured, with men mainly killed on the spot in what an Armenian priest called an "epidemic of death." In 1605–1606, Abbas I attacked the Ottoman province of Albaq, and took captive "around a thousand women and children belonging to Christian infidels who had fought the Muslim forces and who had therefore forfeited their right to protection as non-Muslim peoples under Muslim rule; their being taken as prisoners of war was consequently quite legal." Under Abbas I, many male Georgians and Circassians became Muslim ghulam soldiers (slaves) in his armies, and Abbas had one hundred castrated Georgian slaves serving him in the royal palace and harem. Such slavery as soldiers or eunuchs could be very high status as provincial governors and viziers,

28. Munshi, *Shah Abbas*, vol.1, p.139–46; Matthee, "Christians in Safavid Iran: hospitality and harrassment," *Studies on Persianate societies* (2005), p.3–43 (16).
29. Olearius, *Voyages*; Munshi, *Shah Abbas*, vol.1, p.519.

but was slavery nonetheless, subject to execution at royal whim, with removal from homeland and families and forcible conversion. For some captured women, it involved being placed into the royal harem. Although European travelers' accounts mentioned ghulam troops and Circassian and Georgian women in the harem, the first were officially converts and the second were not always required to convert, and, with further conquests of Georgia not attempted after 1617, they were not discussed as consequences of intolerance in texts which emphasized contemporary Safavid provision of toleration to wealthy Armenians and other non-Muslims.[30]

VIII

Persia, a home to Jews ever since the reign of Cyrus, usually accorded toleration to its Jewish community, numbering in the thousands, but at moments intolerance toward them was severe. When in 1619–1620 the Jewish community deposed their leader in Isfahan, he accused them of magic against the shah, who first took measures against their holy books, and then forced mass conversion when charges persisted. One man was martyred gruesomely—torn apart by dogs—when he refused to convert; Della Valle's *Travels* recorded this. Once religious freedom for Jews was restored under Shah Safi, it then continued until the 1650s, but, when all non-Muslims in Isfahan were expelled from wherever Muslims lived, the persecution of Jews was especially severe. Many Jews ostensibly converted in Isfahan and Kashan, even as the towns of Farahabad, Gulpaygan, Khurramabad, Khunsar, and Yazd refused to comply with orders to convert Jews by force, and some Muslim clerics refused to support their forced conversion. The most significant Islamic chronicle of the period, Qazvini's *Abbasanama*, celebrated the conversions as "wondrous," but Babai Ibn Luft's *Book of a forced convert* recorded the experience of the persecution by the Jewish community as "devastating." He indicated that, despite full payment of the jizya and prayers for the shah, the Grand Vizier Muhammad Beg had been "driven by the desire to afflict the Jews" and had invoked Shia belief that Jews were "unclean and impure as far as our faith is concerned, yet your bodies come in constant contact with our own" in

30. Babaie *et al.*, *Slaves*, passim; McCabe, *The Shah's silk*, passim; Munshi, *Shah Abbas*, vol.2, p.869; Abisaab, *Converting Persia*, p.62–63; Vera Basch Moreen, "The status of religious minorities in Safavid Iran," *Journal of Near Eastern studies* 40:2 (1981), p.119–34 (132).

expelling Jews from the city of Isfahan. Babai Ibn Luft suggested that Jews had then very temporarily been placed in a suburb among those whom he termed "ugly, afflicted" Zoroastrians, but declared that the Zoroastrians, persuaded by Beg to declare their area "given to us by the Paradise-Dwelling Shah until the Day of Resurrection," and having "hated the Jews throughout the Ages," had petitioned for their removal, after which "cruel soldiers killed many of them mercilessly" before mass conversions had occurred under duress and with promises of monetary reward. Blaming Beg, Babai Ibn Luft recorded, nonetheless, that the shah had specifically declared to the Grand Vizier that "you should not bring compulsion into this business in order to make them confess the Shi'i faith." In 1661, Beg was dismissed, and Jews were allowed to resume open profession of their faith throughout Persia.[31]

Discussing these events, Thévenot described for his European audience a preceding chancellor (Beg) as having undertaken "to oblige all the Jews to turn Mahometans" and as using both "mild" ways and "violence," but declared that this was thought a "very strange proceeding" and that once it was found that external profession of Islam under duress did not stop practice of Judaism, this had been given up. Tavernier recorded similarly that Jews had been persecuted to change their religion, but that the shah saw that this had occurred only "from fear," and that Jews had then been "suffered to resume their own religion" and to "live in quiet." In 1678, however, Carmelites recorded a further bout of persecution against Jews in Persia, this time backed by allegations that the presence of Armenians as well as Jews was causing Muslims' prayers for an end to a drought to go unheeded. According to the Carmelites, Jews were seized and "the abdomens of their principal men […] ripped open"; "The bellies of the Rabbi […] and two of their chief men having been split open, they perished: and their corpses, thrown into the great royal square, called the Maidan, lay for a week unburied." Further punishment of other Jews was, however, said by the Carmelites to have been waived on payment of a large fine.[32]

31. Moreen, "Religious minorities," p.123–25; Vera Basch Moreen, "The Kitab-i Anusi of Banai ibn Luft," in *Intellectual studies on Islam*, ed. Michel Mazzaoui and Vera Basch Moreen (Salt Lake City, UT, 1990), p.41–48 (44); Vera Basch Moreen, *In Queen Esther's garden: an anthology of Judeo-Persian literature* (New Haven, CT, 2000), p.223–32; Vera Basch Moreen, *Iranian Jewry's hour of peril and heroism* (New York, 1987); Abisaab, *Converting Persia*, p.85.
32. Chick, *Carmelites*, vol.2, p.408, in McCabe, *The Shah's silk*, p.193–94; Lockhart, *The Fall of the Safavi dynasty*, p.32; Matthee, "Christians," p.31.

IX

There were perhaps 8000–10,000 Hindus and 80,000–100,000 Zoroastrians in Persia. Many Hindus, bankers or traders in luxury items, resided in Isfahan. Until the end of the seventeenth century they seem to have been tolerated; at the very end of the century, Majlisi Jr. declared them idol-worshipers and their worship not protected by dhimmi status, and Mizra Rabi suggested in 1699 that they should be forced to leave Persia, convert, or pay the poll tax. Zoroastrians were described by European travelers as usually tolerated in their beliefs and religious practices, but as remarkably reticent, practicing endogamy, and interacting little with Muslims, who were said to disparage them. Chardin recorded that they generally "live very peaceably" under officials approved by the Persian government, but that, when it had been said in 1628 that they possessed an ancient book of prophecy that Abbas wanted, he had two Zoroastrians killed and impounded various religious works in his search for it. Having been settled in Isfahan by Abbas as a labor force, in the 1650s Zorastrians in Isfahan were required to move to New Julfa amid the exodus of non-Muslims, but seem to have continued to have been subjected primarily to poll taxes with toleration thereafter. Della Valle indicated that they were said "on account of the extraordinary care with which they preserve it, to adore fire" but that these were false reports. Du Mans indicated that they tended the fire "day and night with great veneration" as the "most noble and profitable of all the elements" but not God. Della Valle held that they "believe[d] in one God only, creator of all things, invisible and all powerful," and recounted trying to explain his (Trinitarian) beliefs to them, only to be met by a mocking response "from which" he had inferred "that the name of idolaters which they are given does not perhaps fit them." He indicated that their belief in a supreme God was better than that of Hindus who worshiped "idols." Others, however, reported that Zoroastrians worshiped fire and were condemned for this by their Muslim compatriots. Herbert noted that the Persians "think basely of them, they adore the Fire and other elements." Thévenot declared that they "adored fire" and were "extremely hated of all men, as well Christians as Mahometans." Chardin called them fire worshipers. Disparaging their religion roundly, Chardin declared that "all the learning of their priests is limited to a little astrology, a slight and rough knowledge of Mahometanism and an even more imperfect

acquaintance with their own religion, from which they draw maxims which have neither probability nor foundation."

European travelers thus grasped little of Zoroastrians' religious views about the natural world. They often presented these inaccurately and extremely disparagingly. They nonetheless used discussions of Zoroastrians to disparage further their Shia Muslim hosts. European travelers such as Manrique contrasted Zorastrians' manners with Muslim "idleness" as they were "possessed of greater moral virtue" and "far harder workers than the Moors." For Chardin, these "ancient Persians" had "gentle and simple ways," holding that cultivating an untilled soil was virtuous. If Zoroastrians again ruled Persia, he held, it would be restored to its "ancient glory."[33]

33. McCabe, *The Shah's silk*, p.199, 156; Olearius, *Voyages*, p.291–303; Matthee, "Christians," p.33; Firby, *European travellers*, p.23–83, esp. 32, 62–63; Mary Boyce, *Zoroastrians: their religious beliefs and practices* (London, 1979), p.177–82. In his *Persian letters* Montesquieu described Persians as forcing Zoroastrians out of Persia despite them being "so gifted in farming," depriving the nation of labor "suited to overcome the sterility of our lands," as noted by Harvey, *The French Enlightenment*, p.23.

Persian theology and the checkmate of Christian theology: Bayle and the problem of evil[1]

Marta García-Alonso

A typical characteristic of Pierre Bayle is his comparison of different ideas and beliefs, coming from all the known corners of the world during his time. Sometimes he did this to show that his ideas were more universal than what his dialectic enemies argued; in other cases, his objective was to discuss prejudices or the supposed rationality of doctrines that were well established in his epoch. Travel books provided the Philosopher of Rotterdam with an abundance of material regarding non-Christian customs and religions.[2] The detailed information on the Middle East provided by the book *Histoire critique de la créance et des coûtumes des nations du Levant* (1684) by the Catholic exegete Richard Simon (published under the pseudonym sieur de Moni) is an indispensable tool for Bayle when it comes to criticizing the Islamophobia of his time, for example.[3] In the same way, he uses the *Remarques curieuses sur Rycaut* (1677) by the Dutch rabbi Bespier, a text that corrects the errors of the English travel writer Paul Rycaut

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2. See Joy Charnley, "The influence of travel literature on the works of Pierre Bayle with particular reference to the *Dictionnaire historique et critique*," doctoral thesis, Durham University, 1990, http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/6574 (last accessed January 22, 2021).

3. Pierre Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (hereafter DHC), 5th ed., 4 vols. (Amsterdam, Leiden, The Hague, Utrecht, P. Brunel, 1740), "Mahomet" L. See also *Historical and critical dictionary: selections*, translated by Richard Popkin (Indianapolis, IN, and New York, 1965).

regarding the supposed intolerance of Muslims (*Histoire de l'état present de l'empire Ottoman*, 1670). These materials allowed him to discuss religious violence and, contrary to the Islamophobia of his time, to characterize the Christian religion as the most violent religion in history.[4] Similarly, his discussion of the secular state and his famous defense of the virtuous atheist rest upon the information known about China in the seventeenth century, which Bayle obtained from the writings of the missionaries, such as the book by the Jesuit Guy Tachard, *Voyage de Siam des pères jésuites* (1686).

The Persians are also abundantly present in Bayle's work. The *Dictionnaire historique et critique* devotes entries to the Persian kings Darius, Cyrus, and Achaemenes, to whom the foundation of the royal dynasty is attributed.[5] In some cases, they appear together with the Muslims, for example when he deals with medicine and astrology; in other cases, we find them together with the Romans, when he speaks of the divine adoration given to their kings.[6] Apparently, Bayle had two main sources regarding the Persians, the *Bibliothèque orientale* by the Frenchman Barthélemy d'Herbelot de Molainville (1625–1695) and the work of Thomas Hyde (1636–1703), an English Orientalist who was the first to articulate a description of the Zoroastrian religion in his *Historia religionis veterum persarum* (1700). In the entry "Zoroastre," he also uses the *Historia philosophiae orientalis* (1656) by Thomas Stanley,

4. DHC "Mahomet" AA.
5. DHC "Darius," "Cyrus," and "Achemenes."
6. PD XIX OD III.I 20 and PD CV OD III.I 72, respectively. Bayle's texts are cited following the electronic edition of his complete works published by Garnier, following the *Œuvres diverses de Mr Pierre Bayle, professeur en philosophie et en histoire à Rotterdam*, 4 vols. (The Hague, P. Husson *et al*., 1727–1731). These works are cited using the initials of the work, followed by the volume in which it is found in the *Œuvres diverses* (OD), and the page. CG: *Critique générale de l'Histoire du calvinisme de M. Maimbourg* (1682); PD: *Pensées diverses écrites à un docteur de Sorbonne, à l'occasion de la comète* (1683); NRL: *Nouvelles de la république des lettres* (1684–1687); NLCG: *Nouvelles lettres de l'auteur de la Critique générale de l'histoire du calvinisme* (1685); CP: *Commentaire philosophique sur ces paroles de Jésus-Christ: contrain-les d'entrer* (1686); *Supplément*: *Supplément au commentaire philosophique* (1688); APD: *Addition aux Pensées diverses sur les cometes* (1694); *RQP*: *Réponse aux questions d'un Provincial* (1703–1707); CPC: *Continuation des pensées diverses à l'occasion de la comete* (1704); EMT: *Entretiens de Maxime et de Themiste* (1707). Some recent English editions: *Pierre Bayle: Dialogues of Maximus and Themistius*, ed. Michael Hickson (Leiden and Boston, MA, 2016); "Reply of a new convert," ed. J. C. Laursen, *History of European ideas* (2017), p.1–27; "The condition of wholly Catholic France," ed. J. C. Laursen and Charlotte Stanley, *History of European ideas* 40 (2014), p.312–59; *Philosophical commentary*, ed. John Kilcullen (Indianapolis, IN, 2005).

the first compilation of philosophy that did not take into account the religious confession of the authors. However, the use that Bayle makes of these works is, almost always, critical. He does not accept all of the assertions of the specialists, but rather analyzes them in the light of other sources—in this case, Greek sources. He distinguishes the information that travelers present from the analysis of this information.[7] And so he concludes that, even though Hyde describes the doctrine of Zoroaster as presenting no apparent contradiction with the monotheistic tradition, we know from the Greeks that Zoroastrian theology explained the world according to two coeternal causes: one the origin of evil and the other, the origin of good.[8] It is this Persian ontological dualism, combined with Christian creationism, that characterizes Manichaeism and that creates difficulties for a natural Christian theology right from the start. Bayle simply makes these contradictions evident, as we shall see.

Bayle is familiar with the Manichaean doctrine through the work of Augustine of Hippo,[9] the West's main source regarding Manichaeism until as recently as 1929, when papyri written in Coptic containing the *Letters of Mani*, the *Psalm-book*, and the *Kephalaia of the wisdom of my Lord Mani*, among other texts, were discovered.[10] Augustine of Hippo was for a time a member of the Manichaean sect, whose members he always considered to be fellow believers, that is, Christians. Bayle also accepts that point, always calling them heretics, never pagans, just like the saint from Hippo.[11] Manichaean emanationism was one of Augustine's main targets, and he responds to it with what would

7. Nora Kathleen Firby, *European travellers and their perceptions of Zoroastrians in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries* (Berlin, 1988), p.178ff.
8. DHC "Zoroastre" E and F.
9. Augustine is an essential source in the entries "Manichéens," "Marcionistes," and "Pauliciens." The Augustinian doctrines on grace, the Manichaeans, merit, freedom, etc., are not found in the entry "Augustin," but rather are distributed throughout the entries in the *Dictionnaire*.
10. Gijs M. van Gaans, "The Manichaean bishop Faustus: the state of research after a century of scholarship," in *Augustine and Manichaean Christianity*, ed. Johannes van Oort (Leiden and Boston, MA, 2013), p.199–227 (200). Also, J. Kevin Coyle, "What did Augustine know about Manichaeism when the wrote his two treatises *De moribus*?," in *Augustine and Manichaeism in the Latin West*, ed. Johannes van Oort, Otto Wermelinger, and Gregor Wurst (Leiden and Boston, MA, 2001), p.43–56.
11. Recently, the discovery in Egypt in 1970 of the *Cologne Mani Codex* points to Mani as a Judeo-Christian, not a Persian Zoroastrian dualist: see Oort, *Augustine and Manichaean Christianity*, p.x.

be the thesis of orthodox Christian theology thenceforth: The good is the work of the creator, who does not engender the world from himself (emanating it from his essence) but rather creates it from nothing, *ex nihilo*.[12] This ontological difference between creator and creature permits Augustine to defend the idea that evil originates from human will, not from the divinity. However, since the creature cannot create (be the cause) in a strict sense (there is only one creator, ergo a single cause), evil is defined in a negative sense, as a privation, with no existence in itself.[13] This privation of good (evil) is explained as a corruption of the will that, in turn, has its roots in the original sin that we inherit from Adam and his bad use of free will, which he employed to disobey the divine mandates. Following Augustinian theology, the disappearance of evil is explained by the role of Christ in salvation. Creation, free will, original sin, and redemption are concepts that are fully linked and are articulated philosophically to explain the existence of evil in the world.

Therefore, even though Bayle initiates the debate on evil with the Persian dualist theses, the debate that he develops is not between pagan philosophers and Christians, but between heretics and orthodox Christians. It is a debate about how to articulate the dogma of divine creation (as a unique cause) with the presence of evil in the world, which links ontology and anthropology by means of a complicated dogma. This is the theological construction, based on the philosophical explanation of the details of revelation, which Bayle discusses in a paradigmatic fashion in the entries "Manichéens," "Pauliciens," and "Marcionites" in the *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, right from the first edition of 1697, and to which he adds clarifications and expansions in later additions, the most famous of which are known as the *Eclaircissements*.[14] Similarly, the problem of evil and Persian theology are dealt with in the *Réponse aux questions d'un Provincial* (1703–1707), a debate which he takes up again and enlarges upon in his work *Entretiens de Maxime et de Themiste*, published posthumously in 1707, in response to the theses of Jean Le Clerc and Isaac Jaquelot, representatives of the rational theology of his time.

12. See Marie-Anne Vannier, "L'interprétation augustinienne de la création et l'émanatisme manichéen," in *Augustine and Manichaeism in the Latin West*, ed. J. van Oort, O. Wermelinger, and G. Wurst, p.287–97.
13. Augustine, *De Genesi contra manichaeos*, I, 9, 15.
14. A recent edition of the *Eclaircissements* was edited by Hubert Bost and Antony McKenna, *Les Eclaircissements de Pierre Bayle* (Paris, 2010).

What I propose to do in this article is to read Bayle's treatment of the problem of evil as a polemic, as a philosophical attack on the need for theology. As I see it, this controversy is not about—or not mainly about—the scope of rationality or philosophy.[15] From my point of view, Bayle's proposal here is more modest, inasmuch as his objective is less to create doubt about the possibilities of philosophy in an absolute sense, than to question the illegitimate use made of philosophy in religious affairs. I also believe that the philosopher of Rotterdam does not limit his criticism to the Calvinist theology of his time—whether it be orthodox or rational—but, rather, he directs it toward the very essence of Christian theology, represented by Augustine of Hippo.[16] Therefore, I could not agree more with Hickson when he indicates the importance of analyzing the theological debate that gives meaning to Bayle's work,[17] as long as this debate is not reduced to Bayle's contemporary interlocutors.[18] This is the reason why I hold that it was not by chance that Bayle chose Persian theology as his adversary,[19] as the debate that it initiates between the articulation of the dogma of a single God and the principle of evil has accompanied Christianity since Augustine, putting the very heart of Christian theology in checkmate.

15. I agree with Haakonssen when he points out that the vision of the philosophical discussion as focused on epistemic debates is a nineteenth-century reconstruction that projects its own way of understanding philosophy on the past. This does not allow us to understand properly the discussions of earlier centuries, when the debates were mainly moral, religious, or political: see Knud Haakonssen, "The history of eighteenth-century philosophy: history or philosophy?," in *The Cambridge history of eighteenth-century philosophy*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge, 2006), p.3–25.
16. Johannes Brachtendorf, "The reception of Augustine in modern philosophy," in *A Companion to Augustine*, ed. Mark Vessey (Oxford, 2012), p.478–91.
17. Michael Hickson, "Theodicy and toleration in Bayle's *Dictionary*," *Journal of the history of philosophy* 51:1 (2013), p.49–73 (52).
18. In his English edition of the *Entretiens*, Hickson indicates that it is in these dialogues that Bayle's main doctrine on evil is found, thus encouraging the discussion with the *rationaux* theologians ("Introduction," in *Dialogues*, p.xv). Van der Lugt prioritizes the discussion Bayle holds with Jurieu in the Dictionnaire: Mara Van der Lugt, *Bayle, Jurieu and the Dictionnaire historique et critique* (Oxford, 2016).
19. It is important to point out that Zoroastrianism must be understood not as a secular philosophy, but as a pagan theology because, as Bayle indicates, the Persians called those capable of knowing God magicians (DHC "Zoroastre").

The discussion of evil

The *Dictionnaire* deals with the problem of evil in three main entries: "Manichéens," "Marcionites," and "Pauliciens," something that Bayle himself presents explicitly.[20] These are not the only places where this subject is considered, evidently, as the very structure of the *Dictionnaire* involves multiple intertwining of entries;[21] however, these instances constitute different expressions of the same problem. Bayle himself indicates that "Pauliciens" is nothing but the name given to the Manichaeans in Armenia. However, an important clarification is necessary: The origin of the doctrine of the two principles should not be attributed to the Manichaeans, nor should its origin be situated in Rome. Its provenance must be located in the East, and so the Manichaeans are only one of the forms that this Persian theology can adopt. Thus, in the article "Manichéens," Bayle begins the debate on this problem of evil with the discussion between the philosophers Melissus of Samus and Zoroaster (DHC "Manichéens" D).

The beginnings of the analysis are ontological, but very soon it moves into moral discussions. In effect, the issue is to try to understand which of the two systems offers a better explanation of evil in the world—the dualist or the monist system—but for Bayle a philosophical system proves itself stronger and more accurate not only in its logical-abstract articulation, but in its capacity to account for experience.[22] Bayle's argument can be summarized as follows. The dualist Zoroaster questions how the presence of physical (sickness, cold, pain) or moral (crime) evil in the world can be explained if we accept that man is the creation of a sovereign good, holy, and powerful principle. The monist Melissus responds that man was created good but became perverse when he did not follow the light of his conscience, so he deserved divine punishment and, with this, evil appeared. God, therefore, is not the cause of evil, but rather causes its punishment. But, as Bayle points out, Zoroaster would not have been satisfied with this answer, but would have responded that the very inclination toward evil needed to be explained, as such a defect cannot be justified by appealing only to the principle of good. If the human being is a creature whose existence depends on a creator, he or she cannot be the cause that

20. DHC "Prudence" F, n.48.
21. See Van der Lugt, *Bayle, Jurieu*, p.42–44.
22. DHC "Manichéens" D.

introduces any other thing. If free will exists due to God's action, and if God foresaw that human beings would use their free will to sin, he could certainly have prevented this. There is nothing in the logic of the causal reasoning that prevents us from thinking that God could have eliminated any trace of the inclination toward evil from the soul of his creatures. His goodness and omnipotence would both be perfectly articulated and explained without the presence of evil and sin in the world.[23]

In the *Réponse aux questions d'un Provincial*, Bayle insists, once again, on the same reasoning. The theological debate that attempts to articulate free will with the idea of God as a unique principle ends up in an aporia:[24] stating that God is and is not the cause of all things at the same time. Actually, if we state that God is the unique cause,[25] his attributes (omnipotence, goodness, justice) would be compromised and, along with them, all of the dogma that makes Him a just and omnipotent being.[26] If we assume that evil in no way originates in divinity, we must conclude that there is a cause outside of God himself, which figures alongside Him as an ontological foundation of the world, and so we would be arguing in favor of a metaphysical dualism that is incompatible with Christian doctrine.[27] Set forth in metaphysical terms, the discussion between dualism and monism is not too relevant but, when it is articulated with information about revelation, it causes Christian dogma to implode. The issue is that the discussion not only affects the definition of God—natural theology—but also encompasses moral theology, as Christianity situates the problem of evil at the foundations of morality, when it argues that virtue is not possible without sin.

How, then, can Zoroaster's question be answered? How can the existence of perverse actions be explained in the framework of a monotheistic theology? Evil needs an explanatory cause because it is as real as good; it is not a mere privation, something that Bayle concedes to Zoroaster in conflict with what Augustine defends.[28] Some theologians hold that good and evil are mutually necessary

23. DHC "Manichéens" D.
24. RQP II, CXL, OD III 785.
25. RQP II, CXLI, OD III 789.
26. RQP II, CXLV, OD III 846.
27. RQP XXVI, OD III 1076.
28. "Je sais cette note afin qu'en ne viens pas m'alléguer que le mal n'est qu'une privation" (DHC "Manichéens" D, n.53).

concepts, just as the Epicureans held that pleasure and pain cannot be understood in isolation; the one is necessary for the other to exist. However, this would involve stating that God needs evil to produce virtue, says Bayle, a hypothesis that not only denies the experience that indefinite pleasure and chronic pain exist, but also endangers the information of the revelation: the description of paradise (where good is eternal), of hell (where evil is eternal), or of the very nature of the angels (DHC "Pauliciens" E). Nevertheless, just as the idea that human beings could be created with sin is indefensible, it is nonsensical to deny that human beings could be created without free will, or to deny that God is responsible for the use of this free will. Cicero, says Bayle, held that the nature of the gift given does not demonstrate the will or intention of the giver—the fact of using the gift well or badly does not prove friendly or evil intentions on the part of the giver. However, if reason seems to be the origin of all evil, we can hardly say that it is a good attribute. Translating Cicero into theological terms, Bayle objects that it is easy to understand that, if the first man granted free will (Adam) led to the downfall of humankind, to the eternal damnation of the majority of his descendants, and to the arrival of the flood, this freedom can hardly be described as good. In light of the consequences, we could have done fine without it. If reason seems to be the origin of all evil, we can hardly say that it is a good attribute.[29]

Defining free will by a double nature—good because of its cause (as a divine gift) and bad because of its consequences—does not solve the problem of its origin. In fact, tolerance of evil would be better understood as an act of cruelty than as an act of goodness.[30] It would be simpler and more like a just and good God to avoid any harm than to contribute to a lesser evil in order to avoid a greater one. Therefore, according to Bayle, the damnation of Adam is not determined by his nature—it is not a necessary consequence—but rather it constitutes a good argument against the omnipotence and divine goodness that could have created human beings in a way that they would have been protected from the consequences of their acts.[31] And it is absolutely impious to suppose, as some theologians indicate, that God uses evil to do good, because asserting that the end justifies the means links evil

29. Cicero, *De natura deorum*, III, 28.
30. DHC "Pauliciens" M.
31. RQP II, LXXXI, OD III 661–63.

to God inexorably, since producing an effect by oneself is the same as producing it through another.[32]

In his entry "Pauliciens," Bayle shows that the four main paths to articulate human freedom and divine attributes, taken by the Christian theology of his day (Calvinists, Jansenists, Thomists, and Molinists), only indicate what they each oppose, without resolving the real problem: The Calvinists' proposal is opposed to the Council of Trent, the Jansenists' is opposed to the papal decrees (the constitution of the popes), the Thomists end up being against reason, and the Molinists indicate a solution that is contrary to the teachings of St Paul.[33] According to Bayle, the Church Fathers do not come out any better with their response to the problem, with the exception of Augustine. In his entry "Marcionites," he points out that neither Basil nor the rest of the Fathers of the Church have a clear teaching about the relationship between free will and grace, as they feel that sin should be indissolubly linked to free will. But according to Bayle, free will is not essential for explaining that human beings' inclination to love God is voluntary (free).[34] Bayle says that it is incomprehensible that neither the Fathers of the Church nor their adversaries noticed that the insistence on linking evil to free will is the great flaw of the Christian system. It is true that these discussions did not have the importance that they would later gain in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, regarding the discussion of grace and human freedom—he refers to the disputes of Auxiliis and the Synod of Dort, without citing them.[35] But, for the philosopher of Rotterdam, the order in which God foresees sin and decrees it lacks relevance, as the result is always

32. RQP II, LXXXIX, OD III 675. Domingo Bañez had employed similar reasoning in 1595 in his *Apología* against Molina's thesis: Bañez, *Apología de los hermanos dominicos contra la Concordia de Luis de Molina*, ed. Juan Antonio Hevia Echevarría (Oviedo, 2002), p.169. Bayle knew this assertion (RQP II, CLXI, OD III 835).
33. DHC "Pauliciens" N.
34. DHC "Pauliciens" E.
35. Paul V ended the disputes between Bañecians and Molinists when he pronounced in favor of the freedom of both to defend their doctrine, under the express prohibition of describing the opinion of the other as heresy (DS 1090: *Formula pro finiendis disputationibus de auxiliis…*). However, the arguments did not stop and he had to publish a decree in 1611 prohibiting the continuation of the disputes (Decr. S. Off. January 13, 1611: *De libertate docendi in quaestionibus de auxiliis*). The Calvinist dispute, among Gomarists and Arminians, however, ended with the condemnation of the Arminians: *Revisiting the Synod of Dordt (1618–1619)*, ed. Aza Goudriaan and Fred Van Lieburg (Leiden and Boston, MA, 2011).

the same: Infralapsarians or supralapsarians,[36] the true problem is the very existence of sin, not the order in which it appears in the world.[37]

In his discussion with Leclerc and Jaquelot in the *Entretiens de Maxime et Themiste*,[38] Bayle makes the same arguments, goes into greater depth, and offers new criticisms, but the result remains unaltered: They do not manage to resolve the contradictions.[39] In fact, Bayle had indicated that Descartes could have responded better than the Church Fathers to the objections of the Manichaeans, but this was because he was not subjected to the requirements of revelation,[40] as is the case with theologians (however Cartesian they may be).[41] For this same reason, the pagans came out better because, in the end, their public religion accepted the idea that the gods had passions and allowed them to take sides, attacking or favoring different factions, which allowed them to explain the presence of crime in human history.[42] But when we introduce the Christian dogma of original sin, all of the hypotheses that the Christians have created to describe it are rationally weak.[43] Bayle states that it is as if Marcion and the rest of the sectarians knew that this was the weak point for orthodox Christians.[44] The proof is that the Manichaean heretics were the ones, among Christians, who best adapted the hypothesis of evil to the hypothesis of God.[45] Therefore, over and above using philosophy to account for revelation—whether Platonic, Aristotelian, or Cartesian—natural theology twists reason infinitely, in order to excuse God and close the

36. RQP II, CLII, OD III 814.
37. RQP II, XLVII, OD III 804.
38. Both were Arminians. It has been pointed out that Arminius was enormously influenced by Molinism: Keith D. Stanglin, "Arminius and Arminianism: an overview of current research," in *Arminius, Arminianism, and Europe*: *Jacobus Arminius (1559/60–1609)*, ed. Theodoor Marius van Leeuwen, Keith D. Stanglin, and Marijke Tolsma (Leiden, 2009), p.3–24; Eef Dekker, "Was Arminius a Molinist?," *Sixteenth century journal* 17:2 (1996), p.337–52.
39. In fact, the arguments are refined and multiplied, as can be seen in Hickson's magnificent introduction to his English edition of the EMT: Hickson, "Introduction," in *Dialogues*, p.1–102.
40. DHC "Marcionites" F. The fact is that the theologian does not have the same freedom of expression as the philosopher: DHC "Charron" O and "Pomponace."
41. Also, Hickson, "Introduction," in *Dialogues*, p.9.
42. DHC "Pauliciens" G.
43. DHC "Pauliciens" F, n.44.
44. DHC "Marcionites" F.
45. DHC "Pauliciens" E.

doors to atheism: "Why so many assumptions? What's the rule, what's the principle of so many attempts? It is the will to excuse God, we clearly understand that religion is all about it. As soon as we dare to teach that God is the author of sin, we will lead men into atheism."[46]

Bayle identifies a resolution to this dilemma in these entries of the *Dictionnaire*: the appeal to faith, the silence of philosophy, the incomprehensible nature of revelation.[47] Reason admits no middle road: Either one accepts its methods and results, with all of the consequences (in this case, the coherence of the concept of divinity is endangered), or one abandons the idea—contradictory in itself—of creating a theology that attempts to resolve the basic aporia between biblical revelation and reason.[48] And so this aporia leads Bayle to assert that, to avoid the impious and atheistic consequences that result from the criticism of the contradictions of theology, one must completely abandon the attempt to define God philosophically.[49] The latter was a strategy he had upheld years before he published the *Dictionnaire* or the *Entretiens*.[50]

Is the silence of natural theology the hegemony of the Gospel?

Is the appeal to the Gospel Bayle's last word? Like Bayle, Calvin held that it was a waste of time to want to know God through an analysis

46. "Pourquoi tant de suppositions? Quelle a été la mesure, quelle a été la regle de tant de démarches? C'est l'envie de disculper Dieu; c'est qu'on a compris clairement qu'il y va de toute la Religion, & que dès qu'on oseroit enseigner qu'il est l'auteur du péché, on conduiroit nécessairement les hommes à l'Athéïsme" (DHC "Pauliciens" I).
47. DHC "Pauliciens" F. Also DHC "Marcionites" F, "Pauliciens" E, "Pauliciens" M, and "Manichéens" D.
48. See Gianluca Mori, "Bayle e le socinianesimo," in *Fausto Sozzini e la filosofía en Europa*, ed. Mariangela Priarolo and Maria Emanuela Soribano (Siena, 2005), p.179–210; Antony McKenna, "La norme et la transgression: Pierre Bayle et le socinianisme," in *Normes et transgression au XVIII^e siècle*, ed. Pierre Dubois (Paris, 2002), p.117–36.
49. See Fernando Bahr, "Pierre Bayle contra los teólogos," *Cuadernos salmantinos de filosofía* 27 (2000), p.75–94; Gianni Paganini, "Bayle et les théologies philosophiques de son temps," in *Pierre Bayle (1647–1706), Le Philosophe de Rotterdam: philosophy, religion and reception*, ed. Wiep van Bunge and Hans Bots (Leiden, 2008), p.103–20; Stefano Brogi, "Bayle, Le Clerc, et les 'rationaux,'" in *Pierre Bayle dans la république des lettres: philosophie, religion, critique*, ed. Antony McKenna and Gianni Paganini (Paris, 2004), p.211–30; Stefano Brogi, *Teologia senza verità* (Milan, 1998).
50. See also *Commentaire* (CP I, I, OD II 368).

of his attributes or causality.[51] In contrast to earthly things, heavenly things such as knowledge of God cannot be accessed by reason but only by faith.[52] In opposition to the scholastic tradition, the reformer claimed that God was, simultaneously, a living God and an *absconditus* God, whom it was impossible to know through reason but to whom access could be gained through his Word.[53] What was truly important was not abstract or philosophical knowledge of the divinity, but what he wants in relation to us.[54] After sin, though, Scripture is the only way that we have access to this divine will, which it is not possible to understand without faith and the prompting of the Holy Spirit.[55] Calvin is firm in his conviction that, after the fall, reason cannot even attempt to accept on its own what the Gospel shows as evident in itself.[56]

As we can see, both Calvin and Bayle rejected philosophy as a means to understanding or knowing God. But the reformer offers a solution to this problem: biblical hermeneutics. Does Bayle accept this?[57] It would seem so, as he indicated on numerous occasions in the *Dictionnaire* that, when we deal with the meaning of Revelation, we

51. Calvin, *Institution de la religion chrétienne* (hereafter IRC) I, 5, 10. Also: *Com. Ps.* 73, 16 (CO 31, 681–83). For the critical English edition of Calvin's *Institutes*, see *John Calvin collection* (CD-ROM), ed. Ford Lewis Battles and André Malan Hugo (Rio, WI, 1998). CO refers to John Calvin, *Joannes Calvini opera quae supersunt omnia*, ed. Johann Baum, August E. Cunitz, and Eduard Reuss (Braunschweig, 1863–1900), digital edition by Herman J. Selderhuis (Apeldoorn, 2005).
52. IRC II, 2, 18.
53. IRC I, 13, 2.
54. IRC III, 2, 6.
55. IRC II, 2, 20.
56. *Com. Hebr.* 8, 10 (CO 55, 102–104). This doctrine makes a secular ethics impossible: Marta García-Alonso, "Biblical law as the source of morality in Calvin," *History of political thought* 32 (2011), p.1–19.
57. Elisabeth Labrousse indicates that Bayle became initiated in exegesis during his sojourn in Geneva, although it was only from 1675 onward that he was in a position to continue to develop his philological critique, through Justel who was, in turn, very close to Richard Simon (*Pierre Bayle: héterodoxie et rigorisme*, The Hague, 1964, p.324). Bayle alludes to Justel on numerous occasions in the *Nouvelles de la république des lettres* during the year 1684. One of these allusions is significant in reference to Bayle's regard for Justel (NRL March 1684, VI, OD I 16). Similarly, the *Nouvelles de la république des lettres* includes mentions of many of the works of Simon, edited or reedited (NRL April 1684, VIII and IX; May 1684, II and III; September 1684, VII; November 1684, III; December 1684, XI; January 1685, VI; April 1685, VI; May 1685, IX; December 1686, VII).

must silence philosophy and put ourselves in the hands of Scripture.[58] However, this Protestant solution was nothing more than a specious way of resolving the problem, as Scripture does not have the same status in Calvin's doctrine as in Bayle. In effect, according to the philosopher of Rotterdam, all of the Christian confessions declare that Scripture cannot be interpreted on its own, so it must be acknowledged that its assertions are not self-evident. Because of this, hermeneutics sets forth two main problems for Christianity: deciding who is the authorized interpreter, and deciding on rules of interpretation. Based on this, different dogmas are created (CP II, I, OD II 396), dogmas which have given rise to infinite discussion and, indeed, chaos (CP II, VII, OD II 421). For example, Scripture does nothing to elucidate the dogma of the Eucharist. How should the meaning of Jesus Christ's words, "this is my Body," be interpreted? Is the meaning literal or figurative?[59] The same goes for the Trinity (CP II, VII, OD II 421). But the chaos of interpretation is a result of the theological labor that attempts to rationalize the mysteries of faith; this is not something that affects the believer.[60]

Scripture cannot be the key for revealed truth, both because of its obscurity and because of the kind of certainties it provides. Contradictions and errors can be found in the domain of physics, astronomy, and even history, not only linked to the work of copyists, but also intrinsic to the very content of the material concerned.[61] Because of this, according to Bayle, religious truth depends not on its rational articulation but on persuasion, on the trust we have in the source, which is none other than our conscience. This is why these truths are defined as relative or putative.[62] Not even moral certainty or probabilistic certainty are necessary to account for these truths;[63] they are mere subjective certainties. Faith offers no rational pretext other

58. DHC "Pauliciens" F.
59. CP II, X, OD II 438.
60. DHC "Socin" H.
61. Related to sin: EMT II, 21, OD IV 72.
62. NLCG XXII, OD II 334.
63. It is true that Bayle indicates the possibility that these are moral certainties (CP II, X, OD II 438). However, according to Pitassi, just two years after the *Commentaire* (1686), in the *Supplément* (1688), Bayle denies the very existence of moral conditions that would make it possible to obtain any kind of certainty, beyond a merely subjective certainty, from the interpretation of Scripture: Cristina Pitassi, "Religious freedom and strength of belief in Bayle," *Reformation and Renaissance review* 14:1 (2012), p.70–84.

than the faithful person's intimate conviction.[64] And it is precisely to this second area of subjective truths that religious dogma refers, where it is full of rational contradictions and lacking any empirical proof to uphold these assertions. Believers accept these truths because they find them convincing, not because their credibility can be objectively justified. This claim demolishes the validity of any hermeneutics, declaring the very impossibility of inferring the intention or meaning of the biblical authors. Subjective uncertainty is as nonobjective as taste.[65] Therefore, orthodoxy and heterodoxy lose all meaning, as there is no way to discern or judge in matters of taste. Thus, religious belief becomes something private, subjective, and impossible to analyze according to any rules. And, with this, hermeneutic theology itself loses all meaning, just as was the case with natural theology before.

> Does not one man's Tast tell him that such Food is good, and the Tast of another tell him it's bad? And does this Diversity hinder each from finding his Sustenance? And is it not sufficient that the Senses shew us the relation which Bodys have to our selves, without discovering to us their real Qualitys? It's sufficient, in like manner, that the Conscience of every particular Person shew him not what Objects are in themselves, but their relative Natures, their reputed Truth. Every one will by this means discern his own Nourishment. He must, 'tis true, endeavor to find the best, and employ his utmost diligence in the Search; but if when fairly offer'd, his Conscience kecks, finds an utter disrelish for it, and a longing for some other thing, let him in God's name leave the one, and cleave to the other.[66]

Bayle's proposal: a stalemate between theology and philosophy?

So far, we have presented Bayle's criticism of Christian theology and have ruled out the possibility that he adopted the Protestant solution of the authority of Scripture to explain evil. But if Christian theology does not manage to respond with a rationally coherent theodicy, should we accept as the only possible response to the problem of evil the response offered by Zoroaster or its Christian version, the doctrine of the Manichaeans? Does Bayle have any constructive proposal to make or is his purpose to deconstruct the Christian proposal? Perhaps

64. CP II, X, OD II 442–43.
65. CP II, X, OD II 441.
66. CP II, X, 5 (p.271 of Kilcullen's English edition).

Bayle has said more than we thought. Let us attempt an approximate reconstruction of his response: the doctrine of the invincible erroneous conscience.

The problem of erroneous conscience could be simplified as follows:[67] given that acting while in doubt is a sin, in case there is uncertainty regarding divine mandates, should the believer follow the law or exercise free will? For Augustine, there was no doubt: Sin is an action, utterance, or desire that is against the law.[68] Bayle will turn this around, claiming, as the disputes about the hermeneutics of Scripture show, that the law is not as easily accessible as Augustine thought, so that only by following what the conscience takes to be true can a person behave morally; otherwise, not a single virtuous act would be possible.[69] As he states in the *Commentaire philosophique*, the essential elements that shape the rights of erroneous conscience are the following: To disobey God voluntarily is a sin; to disobey one's conscience voluntarily is the same as transgressing against divine law. Consequently, everything that is done against one's conscience is done against God, and the greatest infamy one can commit is to sin consciously. An action is good if it conforms to one's conscience and it will be held to be criminal if it goes against it. So it is better to follow a conscience that is mistaken than to act against one's conscience even if the consequences are good.[70]

Despite what he had already done in his *Cours de morale*,[71] Bayle's first analyses of erroneous conscience are found in his works devoted to the work of Maimbourg, the *Critique générale de l'histoire du calvinisme* (1682) and the *Nouvelles lettres de l'auteur de la Critique générale de l'histoire du calvinisme* (1685). And, in both works, he accepts the general theses defended up to that date by the Jesuits.[72] Following the example of

67. About the Baylean doctrine of conscience: John Kilcullen, "Bayle on the rights of conscience," in *Essays on Arnauld, Bayle, and toleration* (Oxford, 1998), p.54–105; J. C. Laursen, "The necessity of conscience and the conscientious persecutor: the paradox of liberty and necessity in Bayle's theory of toleration," in *Dal necessario al possibile: determinismo e libertà nel pensiero anglo-holandese del XVII secolo*, ed. Luisa Simonutti (Milan, 2001), p.211–28; Antony McKenna, "Pierre Bayle: free thought and freedom of conscience," *Reformation and Renaissance review* 14:1 (2012), p.85–100.
68. Augustine, *Contra Faustum*, XXII, 27.
69. CP II, X, OD II 437. Also: APD V, OD III 180.
70. CP II, VIII, OD II 425. Also, RQP II, OD III 1016.
71. *Cours de morale*, OD IV 263.
72. Jurieu himself, according to Kilcullen, attributed his doctrine to the influence of his student days at the Jesuit school in Toulouse (Kilcullen, "Bayle on the

Maimbourg himself, the philosopher from Rotterdam explains this theory in a fundamental illustration of the Christian doctrine of obedience: the impossibility of distinguishing, in practice, between biological and putative fathers.[73] Bayle knows that obedience to the paternal figure is a metaphor for obedience to God himself and to the sovereign, which is justified not only by the Pauline mandate present in Romans 13, but also by invoking the fifth commandment regarding filial respect. In chapter 10 of the *Commentaire philosophique*, he takes up the discussion about erroneous conscience and points out that laws do not exist to be applied literally, but indicate general obligations that must be adapted to particular situations and particularized in order to make sense. Insisting on the example of the fifth commandment, for example, he specifies that God does not oblige a person to love a specific father or do so in a concrete way, but simply to honor the person one believes to be one's father.[74]

As far as we know, all God obliges us to do is to respect the truth, as it is completely impossible to act according to a truth that is not known, just as it is impossible not to act according to an error that conscience accepts as truth,[75] because what leads us to act in one way or another is the persuasion that these reasons exercise upon us.[76] The natural tendency of free will is not evil, as Augustine points out; rather, there is a natural tendency to choose the truth and no one chooses error or lies in good faith.[77] The problem is the status of this truth: whether it is absolute, relative, or subjective. Bayle's response is well known: Religious truth (divine law) is inaccessible to us, and we can only know what our individual reason is persuaded is true, and this truth is filtered by passions, custom, and education.[78] It is our epistemic constitution that explains error; there is no need to resort to original sin.[79]

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rights of conscience," p.55). He refers to the doctrine of invincible erroneous conscience, not to erroneous conscience in general, also accepted by Jurieu.

73. NLCG I, Lettre IX, OD II 223.
74. CP II, X, OD II 434.
75. NLCG I, Lettre IX, OD II 219.
76. CG II, XX, OD II 86.
77. NLCG I, Lettre IX, OD II 222.
78. Labrousse, "Les causes de l'erreur," in *Pierre Bayle*, p.60ff.
79. "[C]ette force et ce mouvement vers la vérité est déterminée par ceux qui nous élevent, tantôt à droite, tantôt à gauche, selon qu'ils nous disent que là ou là est le chemin qui conduit au but, où nous tendons naturellement. Ce ne sont donc point deux impressions ou deux mouvemens différens en leur nature, que celui

Besides being universal, these psychological-epistemological limits cannot be overcome, and it is not possible to eliminate them.[80] It is in this sense that error occupies the place that original sin had occupied but, in contrast to original sin, there is no redemption that eliminates it.[81] These are the reasons why Bayle indicates that the obligation to follow our consciences regarding religious belief must be formal, and not depend on any material content.[82] If this were not so, God would have made the law impossible to comply with, putting it beyond our cognitive capacity.[83] Years later, in the *Addition aux Pensées diverses sur les cometes*, he insists on the same thesis.[84] From this assertion, it does not follow that anyone who acts according to his or her conscience is free from sin; only a person whose error is invincible is free from it, as the Jesuits rightly point out,[85] when they hold that invincible ignorance is not sin (whether or not it is an error in practice or in law).[86] This is where Bayle takes the thesis of erroneous conscience farther than his Protestant colleagues,[87] when he states that the dictates of conscience must be followed, whatever they are, as long as one is sincere and

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qui nous porte à la vérité, et celui qui nous porte à l'erreur; celui-ci n'est autre chose, que le premier détourné de son chemin et déterminé vers une autre ligne par la rencontre d'une espece de corps réfléchissant, savoir l'éducation, et la pédagogie d'un certain maître. N'allons donc point recourir ici à la tache du péché originel, et à je ne sais quelle corruption de la volonté. Est-ce cela qui nous fait naître dans la maison d'un Hérétique ou Mécréant, plutôt que dans celle d'un enfant de Dieu?" (*Supplément*, XVI, OD II 527).

80. See also J. C. Laursen, "Skepticism against reason in Pierre Bayle's theory of toleration," in *Pyrrhonism in ancient, modern, and contemporary philosophy*, ed. Diego E. Machuca (London, 2011), p.13–144 (139).
81. The consequences of error, which should be controlled, are one thing; the error itself, which is inevitable, is another: Sin only indicates the impossibility of human beings doing good, but it implies the need for grace: Elisabeth Labrousse, "Bayle, ou l'augustinisme sans la grâce," in *La Raison corrosive: études sur la pensée critique de Pierre Bayle*, ed. Isabelle Delpla and Phillipe de Robert (Paris, 2003), p.19–25.
82. CP I, V, OD II 379.
83. CP II, X, OD II 437.
84. Chapter 5 is titled "Réponse aux objections qui concernent les droits de la conscience erronée" (APD V, OD III 179–80).
85. Avoidable ignorance ought to be condemned: CP II, IV, OD II 406; APD VI, OD III 181.
86. APD V, OD III 180.
87. This is the reason why I do not agree with Labrousse when she says that this is an extension of the classic Calvinist theses, insofar as the debate is moved from the content of the law to the intention with which it is followed. See Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle*, p.600.

convinced of their truth.[88] In this context, the Calvinist appeal to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit disappears completely.[89]

> Whence I infer, that Ignorance without Malice or Affectation acquits in the most criminal Cases, as those of Adultery and Theft, and consequently in all other Cases: so that a sincere Heretick, even an Infidel, is accountable to God only for his evil doings committed under the Conscience of their being evil. For I can never persuade my self, that Actions committed by 'em from the Instincts of Conscience, I mean a Conscience not wilfully and maliciously blinded, are really Sins.[90]

As we can see, we could think that the doctrine of invincible erroneous conscience constitutes Bayle's philosophical response to the problem of evil, at least in part. It is a proposal that is equally distant from Persian metaphysical dualism and Christian theology. It is far from Persian theology and its Manichaean version insofar as Bayle does not attempt to give a metaphysical solution to the problem of evil; he does not argue the need to establish one or several explanatory causes for the universe. And it is far from Christian doctrine because it unlinks sin and error, defining error in solely psychological terms, not in a moral or ontological sense, as Augustine does: The law is incomprehensible because our faculties do not permit us access to it (prejudices, context, education, etc.). Instead, he links obedience to the private conscience of the believer. He rejects linking it either to objective law—unachievable by conscience after sin—or to biblical hermeneutics, as Calvin had proposed.[91] What is important is sincerity, the good faith with which one believes, and it does not make sense to speak of divine law in

88. McKenna points out that "The self-evidence of moral principles is such that those who are ignorant of them are necessarily guilty of lazy-mindedness or ill will […] Moral rationalism is thereby sustained at the expense of the rights of the erring conscience." McKenna, "Pierre Bayle: free thought and freedom of conscience," p.96.
89. CP II, X, 439.
90. CP II, X, 7 (p.196 of Kilcullen's English edition).
91. We must remember that Augustine defined sin as a bad use of free will (Augustine, *Contra Faustum*, XXII, 22), as the use of freedom does not involve the power to choose between one thing and its opposite, but there is only freedom when one acts in a good way: "Quae est enim peior mors animae, quam libertas erroris?" (Augustine, *Ep.*, 105, 10). Calvin, on his side, had described original sin as a fault of disobedience to the Word of God and his commandments which, after the fall, we only know through Scripture (IRC II, 1, 4).

objective terms. And, given that it is impossible to argue about the sincerity of belief, we must accept it on principle.[92]

Heresy, ecclesiastical mediation, and tolerance

As we have seen, the discussion about the existence of evil affects one of the main dogmas of Christianity, the dogma of original sin. But this is not the only one it affects, and the theologians with whom Bayle argues knew this quite well. The existence of evil is also linked to the dogma par excellence of Christianity, redemption, which is the greatest example of divine mercy.[93] Bayle expresses the opinion that, in order to manifest God's justice, it is not necessary to defend the perversion of humanity, as everyone knows that it is better not to allow a murderer to kill anyone than to punish the murderer after the crime has been committed. In the same way, it would be absurd to say that God makes laws against crime that he himself violates in order to have an excuse to punish those who break them.[94] Similarly, we could say that sin is not necessary to an explanation of divine mercy.[95]

For Augustine, however, saying that human beings are free and lack the capacity to sin implies accepting that human beings could deserve salvation without having to appeal to grace, as the Pelagians had held. But for the so-called Doctor of Grace, this assertion implies eliminating the need for Christ as Savior and Redeemer. Only by accepting that we are all sinners (as we all have inherited the original sin introduced into the world by Adam) can the meaning of the sacrifice of Christ be defended. Redemption requires corrupt nature (*natura vitiata*) as an indispensable correlate. For Thomas Aquinas, in this same way, no man can deserve eternal life until sin is eliminated, and this is exclusively the work of grace.[96]

The ecclesiological consequences of this link between sin and redemption are evident for Bayle, who has discussed them in several works and has made this problem the axis of his doctrine of freedom of conscience. We must not forget that the debate of Augustine against

92. "Qui est-ce qui peut répondre de ce qui se passe dans le cœur de chaque particulier?" (RQP II, OD III 1015).
93. The link between redemption and evil is analyzed by Hickson in relation to the use of Origen's theology by Leclerc. Hickson, "Introduction," in *Dialogues*, p.43ff.
94. DHC "Pauliciens" I.
95. DHC "Pauliciens" E.
96. Augustine, *De natura et gratia*, 6, 6. Thomas, ST I-II, q.114 a.2.

the Donatists—the need for the Church to mediate in the administration of salvation through baptism—was also present in Bayle's time, and he takes it up in the third part of this *Commentaire*, as the research of Walter Rex shows.[97] In effect, it is well known that the universality of redemption in Augustine is inevitably linked to the incorporation of people into the heart of the Mystical Body of Christ, and this incorporation is carried out through the Church by means of the sacrament of baptism.[98] Thus, insertion into the Church is a necessary step for incorporation into divine life and, therefore, salvation. Following the councils of Capua (392) and Carthage (397), and in contrast to the Donatist theses, the bishop from Hippo insists that only the Catholic Church is capable of transmitting this grace and eliminating original sin, thus converting belonging to the Church into an inescapable step toward incorporation into divine life, the Spiritual Kingdom of God. Baptism is the way that the sinner is inserted into the Mystical Body of Christ, and, precisely because of this, it is the way that the subject is integrated into the legal life of the Church.[99] Universal sin offers the motive for a universal redemptive action. And in this process of redemption, the need for the Church as a mediator in the sacrament of baptism is emphatically held: *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*.[100] And no matter how hard Augustine defended the idea that faith cannot be

97. Rex, however, does not see Bayle's orthodoxy as threatened by the existence of his Augustinian critique, as it is in perfect consonance with the Calvinist rejection of the authority of the Tradition: Walter Rex, "Pierre Bayle, Louis Tronchin et la querelle des donatistes: étude d'un document inédit du XVII[e] siècle," *Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire du protestantisme français* 105 (1959), p.97–121. Also, Hubert Bost, "Bayle (1647–1706)," in *The Oxford guide to the historical reception of Augustine*, ed. Karla Pollmann and Willemien Otten (Oxford, 2013).
98. Although the theology of baptism predates St Augustine (Tertulian's treatise *On baptism* dates from the end of the second century), it acquires special relevance in his work in the context of his struggle against heresy. In Greek patristics, sin is closer to being understood as personal sin (Pelagius) or as universal or cosmic sin (preexisting, in the case of Origen). It is the saint from Hippo who links it to the idea of universal redemption: Maurice Huftier, "Libre arbitre, liberté et péché chez saint Augustin," *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 33 (1966), p.187–281; Walter Simonis, "Heilsnotwendigkeit der Kirche und Erbsünde bei Augustinus," *Theologie und Philosophie* 43 (1968), p.481–501. In the same way, Alexander Evers, "Augustine on the Church (against the Donatists)," in *A Companion to Augustine*, ed. M. Vessey, p.375–85.
99. For a study of the meaning of baptism from a legal perspective, see Jean Gaudemet, "*Baptismus, ianua sacramentorum* (CJC, c. 849): bâpteme et droits de l'homme," in *La Doctrine canonique médiévale* (London, 1994), p.273–82.
100. Formulated initially by St Cyprian of Carthage in the third century, the dictum

imposed by force, he ended up accepting the mediation of the secular branch of the state. All in all, it was the duty of good Christians to oblige all human beings to enter into the heart of the Church (*compelle intrare*, Luke 14.23), given that their eternal salvation depended upon it. Governments have to contain the evil that sin introduces into the world and the justice belonging to the earthly city (its law) depends on its concordance with divine law, in order to be authentically just,[101] as the only true people are the City of God.[102]

In the same way, Calvin held that original sin was a fault of disobedience.[103] Disobedience submerged the world in chaos, corrupting our species completely. And again, the redemption from this sin could only be carried out by Christ's sacrifice: If our corruption is absolute, only He can achieve a complete regeneration. The difference is that redemption for Calvin is not universal; rather, the decree of double predestination separates the chosen and the damned *ante praevisa merita* (without taking into account the behavior or the merit of the believer). However, mediation, once again, is ecclesiastical, because only in the true Church is the divine Word preached correctly. In effect, Calvin began in 1536 by defending that only ecclesiastical authority had corrective and preventive functions, but soon after—in the 1545 edition of his *Institution*—we can see how ecclesiastical authority is extended and is now made up of three powers. First, there is a doctrinal power, whose purpose is to set forth the articles of faith, as well as to explain the principles contained in Scripture. The second is a legislative power, which refers to the capacity to create laws. Finally, the third is a judicial or penal power. Based on this faculty, the Consistory was created, with power to judge noncompliance with or offense against Christian laws—an ecclesiastical institution with the capacity to define truth and to persecute heresy.[104] This ecclesiastical institution had the power not only to censure but also to excommunicate,

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found its clearest expression in the *Unam Sanctam* bull announced by Boniface VIII in 1302.

101. Augustine, *De civ. Dei*, V, 24.

102. Augustine, *De civ. Dei*, XIX, 23, 5. Cf. Marta García-Alonso, "La Ciudad de Dios como alternativa al Sueño de Escipión," *Pensamiento* 65:244 (2009), p.197–220; Robert Markus, *Saeculum: history and society in the theology of Saint Augustine* (Cambridge, 1989); Robert Dodaro, *Christ and the just society in the thought of Augustine* (Cambridge, 2004).

103. IRC II, 1, 4.

104. See Marta García-Alonso, "Calvin and the ecclesiastical power of jurisdiction," *Reformation and Renaissance review* 10:2 (2008), p.137–55.

in contrast to what the Lutherans held.[105] This is the reason why some authors assert that heresy is worse than atheism, as Bayle mentions. Once the truth is known—always transmitted by what is considered to be the true Church—to disobey it is worse than to oppose it without knowing it.[106] Bayle discovered this notion when he was judged by the Walloon Consistory because of the publication of his articles about the problem of evil.[107]

As we have seen, the discussion about the existence of the double metaphysical causality proposed by Persian theology and adopted by the heretical Christian Manichaean doctrine affects Christian theology as a whole, as the philosophical articulation of the dogmas is very close, and we cannot touch one part and expect it not to affect the rest. This is why, as I see it, the link between the problem of evil and the doctrine of freedom of conscience is so close. But I do not believe that it is Bayle's rationalism that explains his position, as Mori and McKenna indicate.[108] I believe that we must unlink the discussion about the extent of religious skepticism present in the religious debate—regarding evil, religious belief and its consequences, and the viability of theology itself—from the foundations of the moral life, where the debates on the natural light of conscience and the role of atheists play a fundamental role.

I also believe that the close link between evil and tolerance proposed by Hickson cannot be explained by appealing to theological or ecclesiastical tolerance as a response to the unresolvability of the debate on evil.[109] If the theological articulation between original sin, the dogma of universal redemption, and ecclesiastical mediation is so tight, then it is the very existence of evil, linked to the idea of a kind God who eliminates sin by means of the sacrifice of his son, that serves

105. See Marta García-Alonso, "Le pouvoir disciplinaire chez Calvin," *Renaissance et réforme/Renaissance and Reformation* 33 (2010), p.29–49.

106. It is not possible to discuss the important debate on atheism here; I only wish to indicate its link to ecclesiastical truth and the persecution of heresy (CPC LXXVII, OD III 298).

107. Also articles "David" and "Pyrrhon": *L'Affaire Bayle: la bataille entre Pierre Bayle et Pierre Jurieu devant le consistoire de l'Eglise wallonne de Rotterdam*, ed. Hubert Bost and Antony McKenna (Saint-Etienne, 2006).

108. Gianluca Mori, *Bayle, philosophe* (Paris, 1999), p.295ff.; McKenna, "Pierre Bayle: free thought and freedom of conscience," p.85–100.

109. Michael Hickson, "The message of Bayle's last title: providence and toleration in the *Entretiens de Maxime et de Thémiste*," *Journal of the history of ideas* 71:4 (2010), p.547–67.

as a justification for persecuting heresy and admits that Christian proselytism and its appeal to the secular branch of the state are right. Even though the ecclesiological differences between Catholics and Protestants are evident, Bayle was able to see that what they share is as fundamental as what distinguishes them. This is the reason why his doctrine of freedom of conscience is constructed in opposition to Christian theology and ecclesiology as a whole, no matter whether it is Catholic or Protestant.[110] The Baylean doctrine of tolerance is not an Irenist theological proposal, but rather the political framework that should be imposed by the sovereign on all the confessions in order to limit their interference with individuals and other religious groups. Political tolerance is the *conditio sine qua non* for religious freedom of conscience as a practice.[111]

Conclusion

With the irruption of Protestantism in the sixteenth century, the debate about the articulation between divine attributes and the extension of free will was renewed and made more complex. Catholics and Protestants argued about the responsibility or impotence of the presence of evil in the world, and accused one another of heresy in a dialectical battle that was impossible to resolve, as they had given up on establishing a shared judge. These dialectical battles destabilized civil peace and generated constant political conflicts, as we know. When Bayle arrives on the scene, more than a century afterward, the dispute continues, renewed by the adoption of Cartesianism by contemporary theology. In this context, Bayle rekindles the discussion of evil, not by undermining the authority of his contemporaries, but because he returns the discussion to its origins, introducing the Persians back into the debate.

In effect, Bayle insists on situating the conflict about evil not in the context of a dispute between Catholics and Protestants—or among different Protestant theologies—but among heretical (Manichaean) Christian theologians and orthodox (Augustinian) ones. This involves

110. It seems to me that reducing his ecclesiological criticism only to the visible Church is, as Labrousse indicates, quite forced (Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle*, p.286ff.). After all, Calvinist theology articulates justification and sanctification closely, to show the need for the visible Church in the daily life of the faithful.

111. See Marta García-Alonso, "Bayle's political doctrine: a proposal to articulate tolerance and sovereignty," *History of European ideas* (2016), p.1–14.

Zoroaster appearing as a constant and inescapable reference in the discussion. The case is that the theology of the two main explanatory principles of the world was not original to the Manichaeans (or the Marcionists, or the Paulicians); rather, its roots are in Persian theology. This is the reason why his interest in the Persians is mediated by his main objective, which is none other than to present to his contemporaries the theological roots of the Christian Manichaean sect and the difficulties that natural and biblical theology present. As Bayle said, the Manichaeans are the ones who philosophically articulate the Christian dogma best, even though Christianity has adopted the Augustinian doctrine as its foundational theology. It is not surprising, then, that the purpose of part of Bayle's arguments regarding evil was to show that Augustine had not philosophically resolved the problem of evil, but had offered a fallacious resolution, resorting to mystery and to the defeat of reason when his philosophy could not reach far enough. Since then, Catholics and Protestants have followed this same strategy. Because of this, the discussion about the Manichaeans—the Christian version of Persian theology—enables Bayle to show that the problem of evil is irresolvable in the framework of Christian orthodoxy.

I do not think, then, that the philosopher of Rotterdam is ambiguous or leaves the problems he faces unsolved.[112] The fact that his skepticism prevents him from defending absolute truths does not mean that, in the philosophical discussion, the scale is leaning indifferently from one side to another. In the case we are dealing with here, we can see that the scale is clearly leaning toward the failure of Christian theology. Biblical revelation does not become intelligible through theology, because there is no philosophy that can articulate monotheism and the existence of evil in the world without contradictions: not the Platonic philosophy taken up by Augustine, not the Aristotelian philosophy to which Thomas appeals, and not the Cartesian philosophy of the *rationaux*. But neither does biblical hermeneutics make religious truth accessible, as Luther and Calvin asserted. The consequence is obvious: If the objective of theology is destined to fail, the function of the theologian becomes irrelevant—both teaching and censure—and, with this, the institutional Church loses its mediating role between the believer and the Word of God. In this sense, Baylean skepticism is radical.[113]

112. Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle*, p.593.

113. Killcullen denies that Bayle defends skepticism, either in religion or in any other sphere, and defines him as a fallibilist: Kilcullen, "Bayle on the rights

However, I do not feel that the door that Bayle attempts to close definitively is the door of religion. Bayle's objective, as I see it, is to dissolve the objective sense of religious belief that theology assumes, not to argue about the meaning of religion. This is why I argue that the discussion about evil does not involve a dispute between reason in an absolute sense and religion, but rather commits only to the abandonment of the use of reason in the interpretation of religious revelation. Arguing against the need for theology and defending the inoperativity of ecclesiastical institutions do not imply a defense of atheism or a secular state as an alternative, as Mori asserts. From my perspective, freedom of conscience can be articulated through religious associations (as a formula to articulate intersubjective relations) in political contexts that allow religious pluralism.[114]

Nevertheless, the dissolution of theology does not imply the acceptance of ignorance or the adoption of silence as a final strategy, either;[115] nor does it defend the fideism *faute de mieux* that Popkin and Rex think it does.[116] That religion only has a subjective sense does not mean that the fideism to which Bayle's criticism leads is Christian,

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of conscience," p.101ff. On the contrary, Popkin attributes this method to the Jesuits, and its result would be extreme skepticism: Richard Popkin, "Pierre Bayle: superscepticism and the beginnings of Enlightenment dogmatism," in *The History of scepticism: from Savonarola to Bayle* (Oxford, 2003), p.283–302 (288). This is not the place to discuss the scope of his skepticism, which is a complex debate. See José Maia Neto, "Bayle's academic scepticism," in *Everything connects*, ed. James E. Force and David S. Katz (Leiden, 1999), p.264–75; Gianluca Mori, "Pierre Bayle on scepticism and 'common notions,'" in *The Return of skepticism*, ed. Gianni Paganini (Dordrecht, 2003), p.393–414; Laursen, "Skepticism against reason," p.13–144; Michael Hickson, "Disagreement and academic skepticism in Bayle," in *Academic skepticism in early modern philosophy*, ed. Plínio Junqueira Smith and Sébastien Charles (Cham, 2017), p.293–317.

114. Baylean political tolerance does not imply an atheist state, as Mori holds. But, in contrast to the thesis of Labrousse, even though the state does not have to be atheist, it certainly can be so. See Marta García-Alonso, "Tolerance and religious pluralism in Bayle," *History of European ideas* 45:6 (2019), p.803–16.

115. As Van der Lugt points out, this is a false silence, as Bayle never stops extending the discussion of these issues throughout the different editions of the *Dictionnaire* (Van der Lugt, *Bayle, Jurieu*, p.250).

116. Walter Rex, *Essays on Pierre Bayle and religious controversy* (The Hague, 1965), p.187; Richard Popkin, "Introduction," in *The History of scepticism*, p.xxii. Hickson, for his part, specifies that the abandonment of reason is an *a posteriori* conclusion that philosophy leads to when it analyzes the problem of evil, not an *a priori* taking of sides, as the fideist interpretation seems to suggest: see Hickson, "Introduction," in *Dialogues*, p.105.

much less Calvinist. By unlinking religious belief from its connection with grace or the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, faith is nothing more than another way of naming subjective religious belief, the testimony of the conscience which Bayle describes as psychological adherence to the putative truth, whatever it may be, depending on education and the passions, which are limits shared by all human beings. These are the epistemological foundations that explain the faith of Christian, Muslim, Jewish, and pagan beliefs. This is a message that the Europe of Bayle's time greeted with scandal, but which would be one of the main paths of future secularization. In this process, Persian theology, or its heretical Christian version, Manichaeism, is used by Bayle as a heuristic strategy to show that philosophy is not the *ancilla teologiae* of Christianity, as the scholastics said, but rather its gravedigger.

Oriental patriotism? Eighteenth-century French representations of Nadir Shah

Rolando Minuti

European attitudes toward Asia during the long eighteenth century have been a subject of revisionism in methods of inquiry in contemporary scholarship—mainly, although not exclusively, coming from world history approaches and connected or entangled history perspectives—and of a growing number of general inquiries and research on various specific topics.[1] Inside this moving framework, a work like Edward Said's *Orientalism*,[2] which for so long has had such a profound impact on scholarship in diverse fields of research, and which has raised a great deal of criticism,[3] seems to have come up against substantial limits. Notwithstanding the insightfulness of its methodological proposals, which still can be useful when applied to various aspects of modern culture, *Orientalism*'s general view of the European fashioning of the concept of "Orient" has been increasingly shown to be unsatisfactory and sometimes misleading. In particular, eighteenth-century culture has suffered from this approach, having been restricted to an interpretation which does not pay sufficient attention to the variety of interests, views, and intellectual involvements in Oriental matters, and to the

1. See mainly, for a starting point and a masterly survey, Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Entzauberung Asiens: Europa und die asiatischen Reiche im 18. Jarhundert* (1998), 2nd ed. (Munich, 2010). English edition, *Unfabling the East: The Enlightenment's Encounter with Asia* (Princeton, 2018).
2. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1978).
3. See among the huge literature concerning Said's work, Bernard Lewis, "The questions of Orientalism," *The New York review of books* 24 (1982), p.49–56; Fred Halliday, "Orientalism and its critics," *British journal of Middle Eastern studies* 20:2 (1993), p.145–63; Robert Irwin, *Dangerous knowledge: Orientalism and its discontents* (London, 2006); Ibn Warraq, *Defending the West: a critique of Edward Said's Orientalism* (New York, 2006); Daniel Martin Varisco, *Reading Orientalism: Said and the unsaid* (Seattle, 2007).

real discontinuities between the eighteenth-century cultural context and the nineteenth-century one. This variety of interests, views, and intellectual perspectives is sometimes sacrificed to the single-minded will to demonstrate the consistency and long-standing life of Eurocentric prejudices, particularly focused on the Islamic world.[4]

Observing and remarking discontinuities need not mean drastic elimination of cultural continuities. Connections, persistences, and the strength of traditions, in parallel to innovations and new perspectives, are common ingredients in intellectual and cultural history, and it is a fascinating task for historians to notice them in various contexts, in order to better appreciate the very nature of discontinuities as well. We can see, for instance, Enlightenment ideas operating deeply in the nineteenth century, connected to new general approaches to history and society, and this is also true for what concerns attitudes toward the Oriental world. We can also observe these continuities and changes in what concerns erudition and scholarship between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries—Koselleck's *Sattelzeit*[5]—and also beyond, a special topic for which the Saidean ideological approach is not compelling.

The history of Persia in the eighteenth century and particularly the events which marked the rise and fall of the power of Nadir—subsequently named Tahmasp Qoli Khan and, after his accession to the throne of Persia, Nadir Shah—give us interesting evidence from this point of view, showing the variety of ways in which this extraordinary chapter of Oriental history was read and interpreted in the European intellectual context and proposing various connections among historiographic and erudite reconstruction, philosophic reflection, and ideological use. In this contribution, we limit our attention to the French intellectual context, though extending the analysis throughout the European context is certainly deserving of further examination.

The example of Nadir Shah is an impressive installment in the "history of revolutions"—one of the main frameworks of the historiographical literature of the *âge classique*,[6] already rich in Oriental

4. See Osterhammel, *Die Entzauberung Asiens*, and mainly "Nachwort zur Neuauflage" in the 2nd ed., p.311–18.
5. Reinhart Koselleck, "Einleitung," in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, ed. Reinhart Koselleck, Werner Conze, and Otto Brunner, vol.1 (Stuttgart, 1972), p.xiii–xxvii.
6. See Jean Marie Goulemot, *Le Règne de l'histoire: discours historiques et révolutions, XVII^e–XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1996).

chapters.[7] To summarize some major events of this complicated story, the decline of authority of the Safavid dynasty at the beginning of the eighteenth century spectacularly culminated in the rebellion of the Ghilzai Afghans (or Ghilji Pashtuns) led by Mirwais Hotak, which the Persian shah was not able to oppose.[8] The shah's army was then defeated by the Afghans led by Mahmud Hotaki at the Battle of Gulnabad in 1722, and this opened the way for the taking of the capital, Isfahan, which was conquered after a dramatic siege. Shah Sultan Husayn abdicated and left the throne to his son, Shah Tahmasp II, who was obliged to flee and found refuge with the Qajar tribe in Tabriz. The deep crisis of Persian power encouraged the initiatives of the Russian and Ottoman empires, which took advantage of the situation by declaring war and seizing important areas of Persian territory, sanctioning their new acquisitions with the Treaty of Constantinople in 1724, which was in fact a treaty for the partition of Persia.

It was at this dramatic moment that the figure of Nadir arose and soon acquired a paramount role in the evolution of Persian events, quickly changing the fate of Persian power and acquiring immense personal authority and popular renown. Coming from humble origins in a herdsmen tribe in Khorasan, Nadir fortuitously connected with Husayn's court at Ispahan, and after the Afghan conquest he had the opportunity of showing his exceptional qualities as a military leader. After succeeding in defeating the Ghilzai Afghans in Khorasan and exposing the treason of the Qajars' leader, the shah bestowed on Nadir the prestigious title of Tahmasp Qoli Khan, that is "servant of Tahmasp." This was just the beginning of a series of spectacular enterprises. He reconquered Isfahan at the end of 1729, replacing Shah Tahmasp II on the throne of Persia. He then waged war against the Ottoman empire and, after the abdication of Tahmasp in favor of his son Abbas III, was proclaimed shah in January 1736. Thus the history of Nadir Shah began, leading to the conquest of the Mughal empire in the wake of the great Battle of Karnal in February 1739,

7. The events of the "revolution of Siam" of 1688, for instance, received a great deal of European and mainly French historiographical attention between the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the following one.
8. See *The Cambridge history of Iran*, vol.7: *From Nadir Shah to the Islamic Republic*, ed. Peter Avery, Gavin Hambly, and Charles Melville (Cambridge, 2008), p.3–62; Michael Axworthy, *The Sword of Persia*: *Nader Shah, from tribal warrior to conquering tyrant* (London, 2006). A reference work is still Laurence Lockhart, *Nadir Shah: a critical study based mainly upon contemporary sources* (London, 1938).

which in turn opened the way to Delhi, and the undertaking of a second war against the Ottoman empire. From a situation of profound crisis and near extinction, the Persian empire regained in a very few years an imposing authority and aggressive role on the international scene. The following years saw Nadir Shah strengthening Persian authority both domestically and internationally, but also highlighted his difficulties in establishing stability and order in his government. The shah's authority was threatened by rebellions and conspiracies, to which Nadir responded with extreme violence and legendary cruelty. His death, in June 1747, occured at the peak of a period of turmoil, leading to anarchy and power struggles that ended only with the establishment of the Zandiyeh dynasty and the accession of Karim Khan Zand in 1760, who gave to Persia a short period of stability and relative prosperity until his death in 1779.

The events of the "revolutions of Persia" were known to the European reading public mainly through the diplomatic channels that connected Isfahan to the European states or through occasional memoirs and reports. European gazettes frequently communicated development in the Persian crisis, whose effects on international relationships were undoubtedly relevant. On the Francophone side, beyond the *Gazette de France*[9] it is worth mentioning the importance of the Dutch gazettes—the *Gazette d'Amsterdam*, the *Gazette de Hollande*, and the *Gazette d'Utrecht*—which were primary sources for all that concerned international affairs. More extended works and narrative histories appeared too, responding to the growing European interest in the events of Persia, whose place in the intellectual world and literature was strongly established between the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries.[10] Highly celebrated and widely circulated travel reports like those by Jean-Baptiste Tavernier or Jean Chardin, among many others, attracted great attention and focused European interest in Safavid Persia which, as is widely known, became a topic of interest in all European representations of the Orient. It is worth remembering that, roughly at the same time as the crisis of Persia reached its peak with the Afghan invasion, Montesquieu's *Persian letters* were published.

9. See Henry Laurens, "Les révolutions de Perse au XVIII[e] siècle: leur interprétation par l'Occident," in *Les Origines intellectuelles de l'expédition d'Egypte: l'orientalisme islamisant en France (1698–1798)* (Istanbul and Paris, 1987), p.131–57.
10. See Olivier H. Bonnerot, *La Perse dans la littérature et la pensée françaises au XVIII[e] siècle: de l'image au mythe* (Paris and Geneva, 1988).

In 1728, the two-volume *Histoire de la dernière révolution de Perse*, attributed to Jean Antoine Du Cerceau, was published in Paris.[11] This work provided a narrative of Persian events extending from the crisis of Shah Husayn's power until the reign of Ashraf Hotak, who had succeeded the conqueror of Isfahan, Mahmud Hotak, and the signing of the Treaty of Hamedan with the Ottoman empire in October 1727.[12] As the author wrote in his preface, the information that the gazettes and journals reported about these far events was often unsatisfactory, and it was difficult to find reliable and direct testimony.[13] Du Cerceau was not a direct witness of these events, nor was his intellectual activity mainly devoted to Oriental matters, but his work was a compilation derived from the papers of a remarkable scholar who was a direct witness, the Polish Jesuit father Judasz Tadeusz Krusiński, procurator general to the Persian missions and secretary-interpreter to the bishop of Isfahan.[14] For the events following 1725—the year of Krusiński's

11. [Jean Antoine Du Cerceau], *Histoire de la dernière révolution de Perse: tome premier* (Paris, Briasson, 1728). About the author, see *Dictionnaire des journalistes (1600–1789)*, ed. Jean Sgard (Oxford, 1999), *ad vocem*. A continuation of Du Cerceau's work appeared subsequently with the title *Histoire des révolutions de Perse depuis le commencement de ce siècle jusqu'à la fin de l'usurpateur Aszraff: tome second* (Paris, Briasson, 1742).
12. It was a treaty which seemed to Du Cerceau to open a period of stability, excluding the possibility of Persia regaining its power: "Il ne paroît pas que les Persans naturels qui auroient le plus d'intérêts à le détrôner, puissent jamais être en situation de l'entreprendre. Presque toute l'ancienne Noblesse de Perse est détruite; le peuple par lui-même n'est capable de rien, et d'ailleurs on le tient si bas, et dans un état si humiliant, qu'on n'en peut rien apprehender." The establishment of a strong monarchy was seen by Du Cerceau as a providential gift: "Il y a tout lieu de croire que leur puissance [Afghans] s'affermira toujours de plus en plus […]. On peut la regarder avec raison, comme une de ces leçons extraordinaires que la Providence se plaît à donner de tems en tems aux Puissances de la terre, surtout dans ces contrées de l'Asie, où la plupart des Princes croupissent dans la mollesse et l'oisiveté." *Histoire de la dernière révolution de Perse: tome second*, p.395–96.
13. "Quoique depuis quelques années les Gazettes et autres nouvelles publiques, nous ayent donné bien des détails sur la Révolution de Perse; il n'y a peut-être point d'évenement de nos jours, sur lequel on soit moins au fait. On ne dit point ceci pour blâmer en rien les Auteurs, par le canal de qui nous viennent ces Nouvelles. Ils ne sont point garans des Relations qu'on leur envoye de si loin" (*Histoire de la dernière révolution de Perse: tome premier*, "Préface," p.i).
14. On the very little-studied figure of Judasz Tadeusz Krusiński, see mainly, Mikołaj Piotr Borkowski, "Tadeusz Juda Krusiński" and "Tragica vertentis bellis Persici historia," in *Christian-Muslim Relations 1500–1900*, eds. David Thomas and John Chesworth. See also Augustin de Backer, *Bibliothèque des*

departure from Persia—Du Cerceau's account derives from other uncertain sources.

The first part of the *Histoire de Thamas Kouli-Kan, sophi de Perse*, appeared in 1740,[15] and it seems to have been the first narrative of Nadir's career published in French. This work, followed by a second edition in 1741, comprising a second part with a narrative of the expedition against the Mughal empire,[16] is often attributed to the same Du Cerceau, as a continuation published posthumously of his *Histoire de la dernière révolution de Perse*.[17] This seems unlikely, however, because the events reported go beyond the accession of Nadir to the throne of Persia, many years after the death of Du Cerceau in 1730. Another *Histoire de Thamas Kouli-Kan nouveau roi de Perse* appeared in 1742,[18] which was not a reprint nor a new edition of the anonymous work published in 1740, but a different one, usually attributed to André de Claustre.[19] In fact, differences among the Amsterdam work of 1740 and de Claustre's *Histoire* are relevant, not only from the point of view of textual order and variants but also, and more remarkably, because of some heterodox judgments and reflections inserted in the 1740s work, which are not present in de Claustre's text.[20]

écrivains de la Compagnie de Jésus, 3 vols. (Liège and Lyon, 1869–1876), vol.2, col.533–35: "Introduction," in *The Chronicles of a traveller, or a History of the Afghan wars with Persia, etc.*, ed. George Newnham Mitford (London, 1840), p.vii–xi; Dawid Kolbaja, "Juda Tadeusz Krusinski SJ; misjonarz, uczony, dyplomata. Zycie i dzieło," *Pro Georgia: Journal of Kartvelological studies* 2 (1992), p.19–25. Krusinski publlished *Prodromus ad tragica vertentis belli persici historiam* (Lviv, Typis Coll. Societatis Jesu, 1733) and *Tragica Vertentis belli Persici Historia per repetitas clades ab anno 1711 ad Annum 1728vum continuata post Gallicos, Hollandicos, Germanicos ac demum Turcicos Autlioris typos auctior* (Lviv, Typis Coll. Societatis Jesu, 1740).

15. *Histoire de Thamas Kouli-Kan, sophi de Perse* (Amsterdam and Leipzig, Arkstée et Merkus, 1740).
16. *Histoire de Thamas Kouli-Kan, sophi de Perse: nouvelle édition* (Amsterdam and Leipzig, Arkstée et Merkus, 1741).
17. See for instance *Bibliothèque des écrivains de la Compagnie de Jésus*, vol.1, col.1169; Antoine Péricaud, "Essai sur la vie et les écrits du P. Du Cerceau," in *Œuvres de Du Cerceau* (Paris, 1828), p.xxv; Sgard, *Dictionnaire des journalistes*.
18. *Histoire de Thamas Kouli-Kan nouveau roi de Perse, ou Histoire de la dernière révolution de Perse, arrivée en 1732* (Paris, Briasson, 1742). A new edition, with variants, was published the following year (Paris, Briasson, 1743).
19. See Sgard, *Dictionnaire des journalistes*, *ad vocem*.
20. See for instance, what we read concerning the religious divisions inside Islam: "Si l'on y prend bien garde, on trouvera qu'il n'y a point de Religion où les mêmes divisions ne se rencontrent. On diroit que les Hommes, toujours la dupe de l'avarice des Prêtres, des opinions de leurs Docteurs, et de la politique des

Beyond the difficulties of a complicated editorial history (which I have merely outlined and which would merit more detailed investigation also on the side of European translations), these works share a fundamental element: high esteem for the exceptional value of Nadir's enterprises. His military genius and political virtues are explicitly recognized; he is portrayed as a hero of his nation. "On a remarqué en lui," we read in the *Histoire* of 1740, "une certaine grandeur d'ame, qu'on n'auroit pas attendue d'un Usurpateur."[21] His virtues were particularly discernible in his religious politics, again revealing the heterodox approach of this text, and in his practice of principles of religious tolerance: "Il ne croit pas que la différente manière de penser sur la Religion doive desunir les hommes, qui sont nés pour le commerce, et pour converser ensemble. Il souffre toutes les Sectes Chrétiennes. Luthériens, Réformés, Papistes, Arméniens, tout lui est égal, pourvu qu'on avance les intérêts du Commerce dans ses Etats."[22] The resulting image of Nadir offered by this work, therefore, was that of a great sovereign who had regained the respect of his nation and reestablished the authority of an ancient and powerful kingdom: "C'est ainsi que de simple Berger Kouli-Kan s'est élevé à la suprême Dignité du plus ancien et du plus florissant Royaume du Monde, où il règne encore respecté de ses Voisins, craint, estimé de ses Sujets, et adoré de ses Soldats."[23]

In de Claustre's work, the caption of the engraved frontispiece (pictured in Figure 1) summarized the representation of a more problematic combination of the profile of a usurper and that of a great monarch: "Ce nouveau Tamerlan, quoi qu'il dise, ou qu'il fasse, d'un spectacle si grand étonne le lecteur, qu'il s'en faut peu qu'en lui le monarque n'efface la honte de l'usurpateur."

Princes, sont toujours prêts à s'entredétruire, eux qui sont nés pour vivre en société; comme si la différente manière de penser sur des choses abstraites, avoit quelque rapport avec l'union des cœurs dans le commerce de la vie" (*Histoire de Thamas Kouli-Kan, sophi de Perse*, 1740, p.43). See also p.44–46.

21. *Histoire de Thamas Kouli-Kan, sophi de Perse* (1740), p.193. The laudatory image of Nadir continues as follows: "quoiqu'il l'ait démentie par des raisons d'Etat, il est pourtant certain que hors de-là il a donné des marques de générosité. Il a traité avec beaucoup de douceur les prisonniers de guerre; il a rendu aux morts les honneurs de la sepulture; témoins Topalt Osman—Bassa et le Sérasquier Abdallah Cuprogli, dont il fit chercher les cadavres, pour les ensevelir selon leur dignité."
22. *Histoire de Thamas Kouli-Kan, Sophi de Perse* (1740), p.193–94.
23. *Histoire de Thamas Kouli-Kan, Sophi de Perse* (1740), p.195.

Figure 1: *Histoire de Thamas Kouli-Kan nouveau roi de Perse, ou Histoire de la dernière révolution de Perse, arrivée en 1732* (Paris, Briasson, 1742). Frontispiece.

De Claustre's text gave a judgment which in fact was more balanced than in the 1740s *Histoire*—the author of which he often referred to as the "historien hollandois"—remarking Nadir's value and military virtues but also pointing out, particularly in a final portrait, undeniable faults which affected his otherwise splendid image. Nadir was certainly "un génie supérieur" who "a porté la vertu guerrière aussi loin que les plus fameux conquérans."[24] A comparison with Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, and Tamerlan was summoned when the events of the conquest of India were narrated,[25] yet his greatness was undoubtedly tarnished by his extreme ambition and by the means he used to ascend to the throne.[26]

24. *Histoire de Thamas Kouli-Kan nouveau roi de Perse*, p.430.
25. "Alexandre, Genghiscan, Tamerlan ont bien conquis les Indes, Nadir n'a pas moins d'ambition ni moins de valeur que ces Conquérans, et la fortune dont il a été si bien servi jusqu'à présent lui donne droit de prétendre à ses plus hautes faveurs" (p.321).
26. "Mais tout l'éclat de ses vertus politiques et guerrières se trouve terni par les voyes qu'il a employées pour s'élever au rang suprême: quelque heureux qu'ait été son crime, même pour les Peuples qu'il gouverne, il n'en est pas moins un très-grand crime; et dès-lors le Grand Homme disparoit pour n'offrir à nos yeux

As in the 1740s *Histoire*, de Claustre insisted on the character of Nadir as national hero and liberator of the Persian people from the yoke of the barbarian and traitor Afghans.[27] The comparison between the state of Persia after the Afghan conquest and Nadir's reestablishment of Persian authority highlighted the resurrection of an ancient monarchy due to Nadir's enterprise, an endeavor only obscured, as we have remarked, by his extreme ambition.[28] The image of Nadir as a national hero was reinforced by frequent references to his "patriotic" virtue, and the use of terms connected to the idea of the fatherland is often present in de Claustre's work. The Afghan usurpers whom Nadir opposed when restoring the rights of Shah Tahmasp II were "ennemis de la Patrie" and the main argument used by Nadir to stimulate his army was "la gloire, dont ils se couvriroient pour jamais, d'avoir été les libérateurs de la Perse."[29] At the time of the accession to the Persian throne, Nadir's image was that of a "Liberateur de la Patrie,"[30] and this representation is present throughout the whole work.

In a letter published in the twenty-fifth volume of the collection of *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses* concerning Nadir's conquest of India, we can read a similar judgment, which highlighted the brilliant profile of Nadir as military leader joined to that of a great and wise

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que l'ingrat, le parricide et l'Usurpateur" (p.430–31). See the variant of the 1743 edition, where this severe judgment is only slightly mitigated: "Mais il a mis une ombre à l'éclat de ses vertus politiques et guerrières par les voyes qu'il a employées pour s'élever au rang suprême: actions que l'histoire ne sçauroit taire, et encore moins lui pardonner" (*Histoire de Thamas Kouli-Kan nouveau roi de Perse*, p.451).

27. See the narrative of Nadir's entrance to Isfahan after the defeat of the usurper Ashraf: "Thamas Kouli-Kan y entra à la tête de dix mille Persans et y fut reçu des habitans, avec des démonstrations de joye inexprimables, son nom retentissoit dans toutes les ruës où chacun l'appelloit son Libérateur" (*Histoire de Thamas Kouli-Kan nouveau roi de Perse*, p.64).
28. "Aujourd'hui conduite par un homme de tête, c'est une puissante Monarchie, rétablie dans ses droits, tranquille dans ses possessions, redoutable à ses voisins et qui sçait s'enrichir de leurs dépouilles. Quelle gloire, dis-je, pour Kouli-Kan d'avoir produit un si grand changement? ou plutôt quelle eut été sa gloire? si au mérite de ses belles actions il eut sçut joindre la fidélité duë à son Souverain. Mais l'ambition a été sa première vertu et le fondement de toutes les autres qu'on admire en lui: il n'a travaillé que pour la satisfaire, pour la porter jusqu'à son comble, et la fortune a agi de concert pour l'y faire parvenir" (p.271–72).
29. *Histoire de Thamas Kouli-Kan nouveau roi de Perse*, p.31.
30. *Histoire de Thamas Kouli-Kan nouveau roi de Perse*, p.273.

monarch and politician, mainly concerning religious matters.[31] It concluded, however, with a contradictory image, summarizing that Nadir "délivra […] sa Patrie et son Roy des mains des Ennemis: mais il ne sçut pas borner là sa gloire et son ambition, comme il l'auroit du."[32] In a previous letter of the same volume, which collected various memoirs and carried on the narrative of the revolutions of Persia until Nadir's expedition in India,[33] the profile of a great leader and liberator of his people was still present—again recalling the comparison with Alexander.[34] Yet the despotic character of his government was more strongly emphasized.[35] Moreover, the ostensible toleration of his religious politics was portrayed as a tool used to impose his will.[36]

31. "Dès qu'il fut sur le Trône, il commença par réformer le luxe excessif de la Cour, et il établit quelques Loix nouvelles, fort utiles à la Milice et aux Peuples. Il ne paroît pas qu'il soit grand zélateur du Mahométisme, quoi qu'il fasse profession de la Secte d'Hali, ainsi que presque tous les Persans. […] Il a permis aux Missionnaires de prêcher publiquement la Religion Chrétienne dans tous ses Etats, et chacun est libre de l'embrasser, sans crainte d'être inquiété" (*Lettres édifiantes et curieuses, écrites des missions étrangères, par quelques missionnaires de la Compagnie de Jésus*, recueil 25 (Paris, Le Mercier et Boudet, et Marc Bordelet, 1741), "Lettre du P. Saignes," p.405–406.
32. *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, recueil 25, p.404–405.
33. "Relation historique des révolutions de Perse, sous Tamas Koulikan; jusqu'à son expédition dans les Indes, tirée de différentes lettres écrites de Perse par des missionnaires jésuites," in *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, recueil 25, p.311–401. In a note (p.311) we read: "Cette relation commence à peu près où finit l'Histoire des révolutions de Perse, imprimée chez Briasson en l'année 1728."
34. "Ses desseins ne furent pas moins vastes que ceux d'Alexandre, auquel il ne faisoit pas difficulté de se comparer" (p.382).
35. "Il ne consulte dans la distribution des emplois, ni la naissance, ni les talens, ni l'expérience: il a affecté d'abaisser tous les Grands de l'ancien Gouvernement, et il leur a substitué des gens de néant; son choix fait tout leur mérite; comme il les élève sans beaucoup d'attention il les dépose pareillement sans grande formalité: le moindre soupçon, le moindre sujet de plainte les fait descendre aussi promptement qu'ils sont montés, et les réduit à leur premier état. Nul Prince n'a gouverné la Perse d'une manière si despotique: rien de plus sacré que sa volonté: Religion, Loix, Coûtumes, il faut que tout lui cède" (*Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, recueil 25, p.389–90).
36. "Rien de plus respectable aux Persans que la Religion, et principalement la secte d'Hali, qui est parmi eux la dominante: il en a proscrit les cérémonies les plus solemnelles; il a réformé la manière de prier; il a fait défenses sous des peines très-sévères de prononcer anathême contre les Adversaires de leur Secte. Les plus zélés se contentent d'en gémir en sécret, mais ils n'ont garde de s'en plaindre publiquement. Le vin défendu par Mahomet, se vend par ses ordres indifféremment a tout le monde. A son exemple les Grands et les petits ne se font nul scrupule d'en boire" (p.390).

Thus the reader gets a picture of light and shadow from the reading of the *Lettres édifiantes*, where the image of the liberator was joined to that of a despotic ruler.

This was also the representation given in an important document concerning Nadir's profile, published in another volume of the same collection: the memoirs of the abbé Louis Bazin, who was physician of Thamas Kouli Khan and followed him during his expeditions and until his death, from 1741 to 1747:[37]

> Seul artisan de sa fortune, il ne dut qu'à lui-même son élévation. Malgré la bassesse de son extraction, il sembloit né pour le trône. La nature lui avoit donné toutes les grandes qualités qui font les héros, et une partie même de celles qui font les grands Rois. On aura peine à trouver dans l'Histoire un Prince d'un génie plus vaste, d'un esprit plus pénétrant, d'un courage plus intrépide.[38]

But his natural qualities as military leader, which had solicited parallels with Alexander the Great, took a wrong turn, and his thirst for power, violence, and cruelty transformed him into a detestable example of sovereignty:

> Tant de brillantes qualités auroient fait oublier sa naissance, et à force d'admirer le Monarque, on se seroit accoutumé peut-être à excuser l'usurpateur. L'avarice sordide, et les cruautés inouies qui fatiguèrent sa nation et occasionnèrent sa perte, les excès et les horreurs où se porta ce caractère violent et barbare, firent couler bien des larmes et bien du sang dans la Perse: il en fut l'admiration, la terreur et l'exécration.[39]

37. "Mémoires sur les dernières années de Thamas Koulikan, et sur sa mort tragique contenus dans une lettre du Frère Bazin, de la Compagnie de Jésus, au père Roger, procureur général des missions du Levant. A Bander-Abassy, le 2 février 1751," in *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses, nouvelle édition: mémoires du Levant*, vol.4 (Paris, J. G. Merigot le jeune, 1780), p.277–321; also in *Nouveaux mémoires des missions de la Compagnie de Jesus, dans le Levant*, vol.9 (Paris, H. L Guerin, et L. F. Delatour, 1755), p.13–82. "Seconde lettre du frère Bazin, contenant les révolutions qui suivirent la mort de Thamas Kouli-Kan," p.322–53. Also in *Nouveaux mémoires* ('De Goa, le premier novembre 1751'), p.83–132. On Louis Bazin as source for the history of Nadir see Lockhart, *Nadir Shah*, p.310–11.
38. *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses: nouvelle édition*, vol.4, p.316.
39. *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses: nouvelle édition*, vol.4, p.318. Bazin's conclusion matches the summary of Bazin's memoir at the opening of his letter: "s'il eut plusieurs des qualités qui font les Conquérans, il les altéra par des excès qui ne se trouvent pas même dans tous les usurpateurs; cette Relation nous le peint comme un monstre de nature, qui en faisant honneur au Génie par la grandeur de ses projets, et la

More inclined to point out the positive qualities of Nadir was the chevalier de Clairac, who in 1750 published a three-volume *Histoire de Perse* in which particular attention was devoted to Nadir's enterprises.[40] It was a careful and detailed history, with precise references to sources—for instance, the recently published *Voyage en Turquie et en Perse* by Jean Otter[41] and other published and unpublished documents—in which the narrative of military events played a primary role. Remarking that "la prudence, la valeur et les autres vertus politiques et militaires d'un simple Particulier produisirent un si grand évenement,"[42] that is, the overthrow of Afghan power, Clairac insisted on the personal virtues of the restorer of the Persian rule. Notwithstanding his dishonorable first exploits as a highwayman, about which however Clairac advanced some relativist considerations, Nadir demonstrated early on the special virtues and attitudes necessary to conceive great projects.[43] During his astonishing military and political career, he often displayed political talent and also moderation, especially revealed in the treatment of the defeated enemies[44] or in religious matters.[45] It was a portrait of

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bravoure de ses exploits, à deshonoré l'humanité par une avarice sans bornes, et une cruauté sans exemple" (p.278).

40. Louis André de La Mamie de Clairac, *Histoire de Perse, depuis le commencement de ce siècle*, 3 vols. (Paris, Charles-Antoine Jombert, 1750). See Lockhart, *Nadir Shah*, p.307–308. As says Lockhart (p.308–309), Clairac was an essential source, not adequately recognized, for Jonas Hanway, *An Historical account of the British trade over the Caspian Sea* […] *to which are added the revolutions of Persia during the present century, with the particular history of the great usurper Nadir Kouli* (London, Dodsley *et al.*, 1753), for a long time judged the best British work on the history of Nadir Shah.
41. Jean Otter, *Voyage en Turquie et en Perse: avec une relation des expéditions de Tahmas Kouli-Khan*, 2 vols. (Paris, les Frères Guerin, 1748).
42. Clairac, *Histoire de Perse*, vol.3, p.9.
43. "De pareils commencemens n'annoncent guère un héros mais Nadir ne pouvoit le devenir que par cette voie: il faut d'ailleurs observer que ce brigandage si odieux en Europe et si condamnable par-tout, n'est pas tout-à-fait regardé du même œil en Asie, où des peuples entiers, tels entre autres, que les Tartares et les Arabes, se font honneur de l'exercer" (p.12).
44. "On a toujours remarqué en lui beaucoup d'équité et de générosité, même envers ses ennemis, ayant toujours traité avec humanité les prisonniers de guerre, et fait rendre les honneurs funèbres à Topal-Osman Pacha et à Abdula-Kiuproli, Généraux des armées Ottomanes, tués dans les deux dernières batailles qu'il a gagnées fur les Turcs" (Clairac, *Histoire de Perse*, vol.3, p.344).
45. "Il confirma tous les privilèges de ces Missionnaires, leur dit qu'il les regarderoit toujours comme ses frères, et ordonna, sur le champ aux Gouverneurs et autres

a great leader and sovereign, exceptionally skillful in his military exploits and also politically astute and fair, demonstrating a talent for balancing equity and severity. These positive remarks were far from the laudatory character of Mirza Muhammad Mahdi's *Histoire de Nader Chah*, a work whose manuscript was purchased in Shiraz by Carsten Niebuhr and whose translation into French was commissioned by the king of Denmark, Christian VII, from the young William Jones at the beginning of his career as Orientalist.[46] He was a character, however, who contrasted markedly with the political and historical convictions of the young English Orientalist and his detestation for conquerors and despotic power, which Jones clearly expresses in the dedicatory pages of his work.[47] These sentiments were expounded upon at greater length in the preface to the following English edition.[48]

Officiers de la Géorgie d'avoir tous les égards possibles pour eux, sous peine d'être châtiés avec la dernière sévérité" (p.345).

46. *Histoire de Nader Chah, connu sous le nom de Thahmas Kuli Khan, empereur de Perse, traduite d'un manuscrit persan, par ordre de Sa Majesté le roi de Dannemark* […] *par M^r Jones, membre du collège de l'université à Oxford* (London, P. Elmsly, 1770). For the reasons which led to this translation see "Epitre" at the beginning of this volume (p.[i–iv]). For a recent intellectual profile of William Jones see Michael J. Franklin, *"Orientalist" Jones: Sir William Jones, poet, lawyer, and linguist, 1746–1794* (Oxford, 2011); on the *Histoire de Nader Chah*, ch.2, p.64–66.

47. "daignez donc souffrir, que laissant à mon auteur l'enthousiasme de la flatterie orientale, je ne fasse mention de son Héros que pour relever un contraste qui m'a frappé. C'est au successeur légitime d'une suite de Rois, aussi anciens qu'illustres, que je présente ce Nader Chah, usurpateur, et d'une origine obscure. Le crime et la terreur conduisirent ce fameux guerrier à la fortune, par une voïe remplie d'allarmes et de dangers […]. Il suffira à Ses historiens d'être éclairés et fidèles; ils ne seront pas obligés, comme celui de Nader, de donner au destructeur le masque du conquérant; à l'oppresseur ces magnifiques titres que la bouche servile accorde, et que le cœur honnête refuse à l'injustice, et à la tyrannie" ("Epitre," p.[iii]).

48. *The History of the life of Nader Shah, etc.* (London, printed by J. Richardson for T. Cadell, 1773). Jones writes ("The preface," p.[i]) that the infatuation for warriors and conquerors "arises, partly from the deplorable servility of our minds, and our eagerness to kiss the foot which tramples on us; partly from our ascribing to the superiour force and abilities of One Man that success, in which chance and treachery have often a considerable share, and which could never be obtained without the united effort of a multitude; and partly from our mistaking the nature of true Virtue, which consists, not in destroying our fellow-creatures, but in protecting them, not in seizing their property, but in defending their rights and liberties even at the hazard of our own safety."

Therefore, a general view of French literature around the middle of the eigtheenth century, about which we have just given some examples, offers two sides in the representation of Tahmasp Qoli Khan, then Nadir Shah, that are not always consistent: the bright side of the leader and, in some works, deliverer of the Persian nation and patriot, and the dark side of the prince devoured by ambition and power and destined to become a detestable despot.

We should first remark, on the bright side of the image, that at that time the astonishment and often admiration for the great enterprises of Asiatic conquerors and princes were not new. Tamerlan, in works such as those by Vattier or Sainctyon, was a frequent subject,[49] as was Genghis Khan, for instance in the *Histoire du grand Genghizcan* by Pétis de La Croix.[50] The comparison between princes and conquerors of the West—Alexander the Great above all—and those of the East, inside the great framework of profane history, was a scheme frequently used.

Could we say, therefore, that what was really new was not so much the admiration for and astonishment at Nadir's enterprises as the reference to the concept of fatherland, his role as deliverer of his nation and the patriotic value of his experience, notwithstanding its dramatic conclusion and the involution of his government into despotism? Was it the mark of a cosmopolitan perspective and, in a way, a sympathetic view of Oriental history which was destined to vanish with the ascendance of Western authority over the East, the growing weight of colonialist and imperialist ideologies and representations of universal history which were destined to prevail and acquire a dominant role in nineteenth-century culture?

It would be a hasty conclusion. *Patrie* and *patriotisme* were not absolutely new in eighteenth-century French culture, and we need not wait for the French revolutionary era to observe its significant presence in a French intellectual context, as clearly established by many relevant studies.[51] At the time of the publication of the cited works these words

49. Pierre Vattier, *L'Histoire du grand Tamerlan divisée en sept livres, contenant l'origine, la vie, et la mort de ce fameux conquérant* (Paris, Remy Soubret, 1658); sieur de Sainctyon, *Histoire du Grand Tamerlan, tirée d'un excellent manuscrit, et de quelques autres originaux: très propre à former un grand capitaine* (Paris, chez André Pralard, 1677).
50. François Pétis de La Croix, *Histoire du grand Genghizcan premier empereur des anciens Mogols et Tartares, etc.* (Paris, la Veuve Jombert, 1710).
51. Robert Derathé, "Patriotisme et nationalisme au XVIII[e] siècle," *L'Idée de nation: annales de philosophie politique* 8 (1969), p.69–84; Jacques Godechot, "Nation, patrie, nationalisme et patriotisme en France au XVIII[e] siècle," *Annales*

were well established in French in most important dictionaries, such as the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie* (1694)[52] and the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux* (1704).[53] Their meanings, in a way generic, referred to bonds with the country where one was born and love for it, and it was precisely this meaning which the authors cited related to.

It was, however, around the middle of the eighteenth century that a new meaning of the concept emerged. During the Seven Years War, as carefully analyzed in a remarkable inquiry by Edmond Dziembowski,[54] the spread of references to French patriotic values was significant, and a huge and various literature on this topic was published, quickly reversing the Anglophile enlightened approach and turning to a temporary Anglophobia clearly connected to the new international juncture. But just before the beginning of the war, the necessity of a new reflection on the meaning of *patrie* was particularly expressed by Gabriel François Coyer in his *Dissertation sur l'ancien mot de patrie*.[55] The French translation of Bolingbroke's *Idea of a patriot king*, with the title of *Lettres sur l'esprit de patriotisme*, was another mark of the evolution of the

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historiques de la Révolution française 206 (1971), p.481–501; Jean-René Suratteau, "Cosmopolitisme et patriotisme au siècle des Lumières," *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 283 (1983), p.364–89; Gonthier-Louis Fink, "Patriotisme et cosmopolitisme en France et en Allemagne (1750–1789)," *Recherches germaniques* 22 (1992), p.3–51; David A. Bell, *The Cult of the nation in France: inventing nationalism, 1680–1800* (Cambridge, 2001); Jay M. Smith, *Nobility reimagined: the patriotic nation in eighteenth-century France* (Ithaca, NY, 2005); Ahmed Slimani, *La Modernité du concept de nation au XVIII^e siècle (1715–1789)* (Aix-en-Provence, 2004). See also Reinhart Koselleck, "Patriotismus: Gründe und Grenzen eines neuzeitlichen Begriffs," in *Begriffsgeschichten: Studien zur Semantik und Pragmatik der politischen und sozialen Sprache* (Frankfurt, 2006), p.218–39.

52. "Le lieu natal, le païs dans lequel on est né." Variation in the 4th ed. (1762): "Le pays, l'Etat où l'on est né" ("Dictionnaires d'autrefois," ARTFL Project, http://artfl-project.uchicago.edu/node/17, last accessed January 25, 2021).
53. "Le pays où l'on est né." In the article "Patrie" we read that Romans and Greeks had "un violent amour pour la patrie, et se dévouoient pour la patrie," and, citing Saint-Evremond, that "dans les premiers temps de la République Romaine on étoit furieux de la liberté et du bien public" (*Dictionnaire de Trévoux: édition lorraine*, Nancy, 1738–1742; CNRTL, http://www.cnrtl.fr/dictionnaires/anciens/trevoux/menu1.php, last accessed January 25, 2021).
54. Edmond Dziembowski, *Un Nouveau patriotisme français, 1750–1770: la France face à la puissance anglaise à l'époque de la guerre de Sept Ans* (Oxford, 1998).
55. Gabriel François Coyer, *Dissertations pour être lues: la première, sur le vieux mot de patrie, la seconde, sur la nature du peuple* (The Hague, Pierre Gosse junior, 1755). See also Gabriel François Coyer and Jacob-Nicolas Moreau, *Ecrits sur le patriotisme, l'esprit public et la propagande au milieu du XVIII^e siècle*, ed. Edmond Diembowski (La Rochelle, 1997).

concept in the new intellectual context.[56] *Patrie*, wrote Coyer, was a very old word. It was a concept which should not be limited to the ancient world and was instead rooted in French history from the Middle Ages to the present. But it was not the simple reference to the land where one was born and lived, as in the definition of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie*, which offered, as Coyer wrote, only a "froide définition."[57] Nor was *patrie* to be conceived as a synonym of *royaume*, because it expressed a more extensive meaning of community, of shared values which are not necessarily opposed to, but nevertheless different from, the mere idea of being subject to a king. Coyer's thought about a balanced monarchy, connected to the ideas of Boulainvilliers, for instance, is clearly present in his reflections about the meaning of the term *patrie*. This word, in Coyer's mind, is the expression of a responsible participation in civic life and political community, and a reference to Montequieu is made explicitly in this context. It is, however, a reference which is not completely correct, because Montesquieu, in *L'Esprit des lois*, had limited to the ancient republic the meaning of virtue as a synonym of "amour des lois et de la patrie."[58]

Debates on *patrie* and *patriotisme* were more and more connected to the debates about the history of political institutions in France, the meaning of these concepts in the contemporary world, and their implications from a political, moral, and historical point of view. They involved a great part of the French intellectual world, showing various and sometimes diverging approaches, for which Voltaire and Rousseau can be seen as opposite sides. What can be observed as a largely prevailing attitude was the sharp distinction between East and West, and the impossible extension of these values to Asiatic governments.

From this point of view, Montesquieu had a special importance. In *L'Esprit des lois* he established a clear link between the notion of *patrie* and the values of political participation typical of republican governments, where "l'amour pour la patrie" was the main expression of political virtue which was their principle—a principle which was not that of the monarchies,[59] and which was

56. Henry St. John, viscount Bolingbroke, *Lettres sur l'esprit de patriotisme, sur l'idée d'un roi patriote, et sur l'état des partis lors de l'avénement de Georges I, traduit de l'anglois* [*par C. de Thiard, comte de Bissy*] (Edinburgh, aux dép. de la Compagnie, 1750).
57. Coyer, *Dissertations*, p.15.
58. Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois*, ed. Robert Derathé, 2 vols. (Paris, 1973), book 4, ch.5; vol.1, p.41.
59. See Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois*, book 3, ch.5 ("Que la vertu n'est point le principe du gouvernement monarchique"); vol.1, p.29–31.

connected to feelings which requested "une préférence continuelle de l'intérêt public au sien propre" and which gave rise to "toutes les vertus particulières."[60] His previous astonishment at the extent of the conquests of the Tartars and the comparison with those of Alexander the Great, expressed in the *Lettres persanes*, are consistent with attitudes variously expressed in the literature of that time, as we have seen, but these vanish in *L'Esprit des lois*, where the notion of Oriental despotism was a common mark of all Asiatic governments and societies.[61] Montesquieu's interest in Persia, which was not only a disguise in the *Lettres persanes*, revealed instead a real interest and the reading of many sources on Persian matters, and that interest did not end after the publication of his masterpiece. As shown in some passages in the *Spicilège* or the *Geographica*, he continued to follow the evolution of contemporary Persian events, occasionally addressing his attention to Nadir's enterprises.[62] But these are just scattered remarks, concerning particular aspects of military and political organization; they do not involve any important question about the conceptual framework of despotism, in which modern Persia had a primary role.

What the chevalier de Jaucourt wrote in volume 12 of the *Encyclopédie*, published in 1765 (his article "Patrie" strongly connected to Montesquieu's ideas), can be seen as a direct expression of an impossible extension of the meaning of *patrie* beyond the political boundaries of European liberty:

> Après ces détails, je n'ai pas besoin de prouver qu'il ne peut point y avoir de patrie dans les états qui sont asservis. Ainsi ceux qui vivent sous le despotisme oriental, où l'on ne connoît d'autre loi que la volonté du souverain, d'autres maximes que l'adoration de ses caprices, d'autres principes de gouvernement que la terreur, où aucune fortune, aucune tête n'est en sureté; ceux-là, n'ont point de

60. Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois*, book 4, ch.5; vol.1, p.41.
61. See Rolando Minuti, *Una geografia politica della diversità: studi su Montesquieu* (Naples, 2015), ch. 4; English edition, *Studies on Montesquieu – Mapping Political Diversity* (Springer, 2018).
62. See Montesquieu, *Spicilège*, ed. Rolando Minuti and annotated by Salvatore Rotta, in *Œuvres complètes de Montesquieu* (hereafter *OCM*), ed. Pierre Rétat and Catherine Volpilhac-Auger (Oxford, 1998–), vol.13 (2002), n.619, 620, 722; Montesquieu, *Extraits et notes de lectures I: Geographica*, ed. Catherine Volpilhac-Auger, *OCM*, vol.16 (2007), p.410–13; and also *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence*, ed. Françoise Weil et Cecil Courtney, *OCM*, vol.2 (2000), p.119.

> patrie, et n'en connoissent pas même le mot, qui est la véritable expression du bonheur.

In other words: "Il n'est point de patrie sous le joug du despotisme."[63]

What the same Jaucourt wrote in the pages of the article "Empire de Perse" concerning the history of Nadir Shah and his astonishing enterprises is quite consistent with this idea, which excluded the possibility of a positive political and moral judgment. Notwithstanding what James Fraser,[64] an authority which Jaucourt quotes and appreciates, had written concerning the "choses remarquables de ce prince, et propres à convaincre toute la terre qu'il y a peu de siècles qui aient produit un homme aussi étonnant," Jaucourt's conclusion was the opposite:

> cela se peut; mais à juger de cet homme singulier selon les idées de la droite raison, je ne vois en lui qu'un scélérat d'une ambition sans bornes, qui ne connoissoit ni humanité, ni fidélité, ni justice, toutes les fois qu'il ne pouvoit la satisfaire. Il n'a fait usage de sa bravoure, de son habileté et de sa conduite, que de concert avec ses vues ambitieuses. Il n'a respecté aucun des devoirs les plus sacrés pour s'élever à quelque point de grandeur, et ce point étoit toujours au-dessous de ses desirs. Enfin, il a ravagé le monde, désolé l'Inde et la Perse par les plus horribles brigandages; et ne mettant aucun frein à sa brutalité, il s'est livré à tous les mouvemens furieux de sa colère et de sa vengeance, dans les cas mêmes où sa modération ne pouvoit lui porter aucun préjudice.[65]

The astonishment at Nadir's enterprises and his relevance as deliverer of his fatherland had solicited, as we have seen, comparisons with princes and conquerors of the East and the West in French literature of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

The comparison between Nadir Shah and Alexander the Great was the specific subject of a *Parallèle* published in 1752 by the secretary of the Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres, Jean-Pierre

63. Louis de Jaucourt, "Patrie," in *Encyclopédie*, vol.12, p.178; ARTFL Encyclopédie Project (http://artflsrv02.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/philologic/getobject.pl?c.11:264.encyclopedie0416, last accessed January 25, 2021).
64. James Fraser, *The History of Nadir Shah, formerly called Thamas Kuli Khan, the present emperor of Persia* (London, W. Strahan, 1742). About the value of this work see Lockhart, *Nadir Shah*, p.304–306.
65. Jaucourt, "Perses, empire des," in *Encyclopédie*, vol.12, p.420; ARTFL Encyclopédie Project (https://artflsrv03.uchicago.edu/philologic4/encyclopedie1117/navigate/12/1637/, last accessed January 25, 2021).

de Bougainville.[66] In fact, the opposition between the profiles of Alexander and Nadir was clear since the opening of the essay,[67] and it was a "malheur" for Alexander "de compter parmi ses imitateurs le fleau de l'Asie, Nadir qui se regardoit comme l'instrument des vengeances de Dieu. Cet homme qui se vantoit d'être né pour le malheur des hommes, se qualifie de second Alexandre."[68] Contrasting motivations and the outcome of the conquest of India highlighted radical differences between the two profiles. Although the *Parallèle* cannot be read as an unalloyed panegyric to Alexander, the essential reason for his expedition to India is attributed to an "amour déréglé de la gloire"[69] which pushed him beyond the boundaries of a king's wisdom:[70] "Il vouloit moins être le plus grand Monarque de la terre, que l'homme le plus connu. […] La gloire fut sa divinité: c'est à cette idole qu'il sacrifia tant de victimes."[71] In contrast to the conquest of Persia, for which Bougainville finds historical and political justifications,[72] that of India "nuit à sa gloire et le rabaisse aux yeux des politiques."[73]

Nadir's motivations for the expedition against the Mughal empire were quite different, not only because they were based on more explainable political reasons,[74] but mainly because it was primarily

66. Jean-Pierre de Bougainville, *Parallèle de l'expédition d'Alexandre dans les Indes avec la conquête des mêmes contrées par Tahmas-Kouli-Kan* (n.p., n.n., 1752).
67. "Je suis bien éloigné de comparer le caractère de Tahmas-Kouli-Khan à celui d'Alexandre. […] Alexandre est seul de sa classe; et si quelqu'un pouvoit être mis à côte de lui, ce ne seroit pas l'avare usurpateur de la couronne des Sophi, malgré le titre de Conquérant, qu'ils n'ont que trop mérité l'un et l'autre, et quelques traits de détail qui leur sont communs" (Bougainville, *Parallèle*, p.9–10).
68. Bougainville, *Parallèle*, p.84.
69. Bougainville, *Parallèle*, p.85.
70. "Et si le cœur d'Alexandre eût été tourné vers un objet digne de lui, s'il eût compris qu'un grand Prince est le plus grand des hommes; avec les qualités rares qu'il reçut de la nature, il auroit fait le bonheur de son peuple, et mérité cette estime des sages, si supérieure à l'admiration du vulgaire" (Bougainville, *Parallèle*, p.91–92).
71. Bougainville, *Parallèle*, p.87.
72. "je crois pouvoir avancer que toute la suite de l'expédition contre les Perses offre un plan hardi, mais sage, formé par la prudence, exécuté par la valeur" (Bougainville, *Parallèle*, p.108–109).
73. Bougainville, *Parallèle*, p.109–10.
74. "L'invasion des Indes par Chah Nadir est bien différente à cet égard. Si de légers prétextes, si des raisons de convenances, si la certitude et la facilité du succès, si de nombreux avantages sont des motifs légitimes; jamais expédition ne fut mieux fondée. La couronne de Perse avoit d'anciens démêlés avec le

the greed for wealth and power, not glory, which pushed him;[75] his enterprise was "moins une guerre qu'une course, qu'une invasion de brigands,"[76] and the execution was that of a bloodthirsty barbarian:

> Nadir […] porta le fer et le feu partout: il a ravagé les Indes, plutôt qu'il ne les a soumises. Le massacre de Dilli suffiroit pour le rendre l'objet de l'horreur du genre humain. Je me refuse à toutes les réflexions que présente à l'esprit la barbare indifférence d'un tyran, qui mêle les plaisirs à cette affreuse scène; qui commande à la fois et du même ton, l'embrasement d'un quartier de la ville et les apprêts d'un festin.[77]

Nadir's profile, thus, was that of a brigand and a robber.[78] The essential difference from Alexander clearly emerges when Bougainville remarks that the great Macedonian, notwithstanding the reprehensible reasons of his expedition, "a laissé pour monument de ses conquêtes deux villes, qui devinrent considérables."[79] Alexander's conquest was portrayed as having lasting results, and as a contribution to the path of civilization.[80] Moreover, it is portrayed as having remarkable effects from a general cultural point of view, because "sans enrichir ses sujets aux dépens des Indiens, [l'entreprise d'Alexandre dans les Indes] augmenta leurs

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Souverain des Indes. […] Et cette guerre si facile livroit à son avidité les trésors de l'Indostan" (Bougainville, *Parallèle*, p.113–14).

75. "Aussi quoique l'amour de la gloire, et le desir d'égaler Alexandre influassent sur le projet que Nadir forma contre les Indes, ce ne furent que des motifs accessoires: les véritables, les principaux étoient l'espérance de grossir ses trésors, et de s'étendre jusqu'au Sinde, en réunissant à la couronne de Perse les cinq provinces situées en-deçà de ce fleuve et dépendantes du Mogol" (Bougainville, *Parallèle*, p.115–16).
76. Bougainville, *Parallèle*, p.125.
77. Bougainville, *Parallèle*, p.133–34.
78. "Les trésors de l'Indostan suffirent à peine à l'avarice de Nadir; Alexandre y sema les siens: les récompenses qu'il prodiguoit à ses troupes les enrichirent, au lieu que son prétendu rival a pillé jusqu'à ses soldats. Les meurtres, les incendies, les ravages; fruits terribles de l'invasion que Nadir fit des Indes, en sont les seuls monumens: elles ont payé cher le malheur d'être riches et voisines d'un conquérant aussi sanguinaire qu'avare" (Bougainville, *Parallèle*, p.134). In Bougainville's concluding judgment, "sa conduite est celle d'un brigand, d'un meurtrier, d'un incendiaire, d'un fléau du genre humain" (p.141).
79. Bougainville, *Parallèle*, p.134.
80. This representation of Alexander the Great was widespread in eighteenth-century French philosophical and historical culture. See Pierre Briant, *Alexandre des Lumières: fragments d'histoire européenne* (Paris, 2012).

connoissances sur l'Histoire naturelle et la Géographie: les païs découverts par ce conquérant, et ceux dont il frayoit la route, parurent un nouveau monde; la science du globe terrestre doit beaucoup à ses exploits."[81] Thus Alexander's conquest was positively contrasted with that of Nadir.[82]

It was thus possible to propose a comparison between two leaders who inspired astonishment for the greatness of their enterprises, particularly concerning the conquest of India. But the result of the comparison, Bougainville wrote, was "que les différences des deux expéditions étant plus importantes, plus essentielles, plus nombreuses, que les rapports qu'on découvre entre elles, on doit les comparer, mais non les mettre sur la même ligne; et que Nadir a, comme Alexandre, envahi les Indes, mais qu'il ne mérite pas le titre qu'il prend de second Alexandre."[83]

Thus we should note a shift in the evaluation of the profile of conquerors and princes of East and West: Bougainville shifts from a profile of the military leaders themselves, to that of the lasting results of their enterprises. From this perspective, Nadir's conquest of India, notwithstanding the reference to his role as a deliverer of his country from the Afghans, is informed by the aforementioned darker side of his character.[84] Thus what seemed to be patriotism or political virtue was in fact the result of a devouring ambition and greed for power and wealth.[85]

81. Bougainville, *Parallèle*, p.138–39. In contrast, "l'invasion de Nadir n'a pas étendu nos connoissances; il marchoit dans des païs aujourd'hui plus fréquentés par les Européens, que les bords du Pont-Euxin ne l'étoient jadis par les Grecs: mais elle a fait refluer dans l'Asie, et de-là par une suite de la circulation générale, dans l'Europe et le reste de l'univers, tout l'or qu'il a puisé dans l'Indostan" (p.139).
82. "L'entreprise d'Alexandre sans toucher aux bornes des Indes, sans les dépouiller comme celle de Nadir, y produisit une révolution plus durable et plus réelle; en assujettissant à Porus plusieurs Nations, jusqu'alors indépendantes, il a diminué dans l'Inde le nombre des Etats libres, et fait au systême politique de cette vaste région un changement dont les suites influent peut être sur son état actuel" (Bougainville, *Parallèle*, p.138).
83. Bougainville, *Parallèle*, p.141.
84. "D'abord brigand, bientôt chef d'un parti formé pendant les guerres qui désoloient la Perse, enfin général et ministre de son légitime Souverain, il avoit sçû, par sa conduite autant que par sa valeur, délivrer sa patrie du joug des Afgans, les chasser de la Capitale, y ramener en triomphe l'héritier de Chah Huseïn, et réunir en moins de dix ans à la Monarchie Persanne, presque tout ce qu'elle avoit perdu depuis la révolution de 1722" (Bougainville, *Parallèle*, p.39–40).
85. "La Perse lui devoit tout; et si le bonheur de son pays eût été l'unique but de ses démarches, sujet aussi fidèle que grand politique, aussi bon citoyen qu'habile général, il eût mérité d'être mis au rang des héros, de ces hommes rares, en qui

Bougainville's judgment about the contrast between the results of Alexander the Great's and Nadir's enterprises can be connected to a more general approach, which in Enlightenment historiography sharply highlighted a special interest for the topic of the dynamics of civilization. It was an essential character, as is widely known, of Voltaire's approach to universal history. The author of the *Essai sur les mœurs* devoted some pages to Nadir's history as well, which is depicted as the most recent chapter in the dramatic vicissitudes of civil wars of Persia.[86] Until recent years, and surely at the time of Shah Abbas, Voltaire wrote, Persia was in fact a prosperous and civil country. "Tout ce qu'on dit de la Perse," Voltaire writes, following Chardin's travels in Persia, "nous persuade qu'il n'y avait point de pays monarchique où l'on jouît plus des droits de l'humanité."[87] Persia was "plus civilisée que la Turquie; les arts y étaient plus en honneur, les mœurs plus douces, la police générale bien mieux observée."[88] However, after the glorious, although violent and cruel, reign of Shah Abbas, the decline was quick, opening the way to the Afghan invasion.[89] It was in this dramatic scenery that Nadir's profile arose, starting from his humble origins as a member of a shepherd tribe[90] and soon after becoming the leader of the Persian army "à force d'ambition, de courage, et d'activité."[91] His striking career as a military leader, then emperor, and finally conqueror, did not contribute to the recovery of order, stability, and prosperity in his country. His enterprises, summarized in short passages, were only a sequence of violence and cruelties which, beyond their impressive character, did not deserve much attention and did not mark any significant step on the path of civilization. What

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les talens font briller les vertus, en les rendant utiles. Mais l'ambitieux travailloit pour sa propre grandeur, en paroissant se dévouer à celle de son Roi. Il ne l'avoit rétabli sur le trône que pour l'en faire descendre, et s'y placer lui-même" (Bougainville, *Parallèle*, p.40–41).

86. Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations*, ed. Bruno Bernard, John Renwick, Nicholas Cronk, and Janet Godden, in *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*, vol.26c (Oxford, 2015), p.263–74 (ch.193, "De la Perse, de ses mœurs, de sa dernière révolution, et de Thamas Kouli-Kan, ou Sha-Nadir").
87. Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, p.267.
88. Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, p.263.
89. Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, p.272.
90. Voltaire, however, remarks that "Il ne faut pas se figurer ces bergers comme les nôtres. La vie pastorale qui s'est conservée dans plus d'une contrée de l'Asie, n'est pas sans opulence: les tentes de ces riches bergers valent beaucoup mieux que les maisons de nos cultivateurs" (p.272).
91. Voltaire, *Essai sur les moeurs*, p.272.

could give Persia some hope to recover its ancient splendor and power was instead society and the long-lasting strength of a nation: "Tant de dévastations," Voltaire writes in the last passage of his essay, "y ont détruit le commerce et les arts, en détruisant une partie du peuple; mais quand le terrain est fertile et la nation industrieuse, tout se répare à la longue."[92]

It was the same representation of Persian events and Nadir's history that the marquis d'Argens had proposed some years earlier in his *Lettres chinoises*, where some chapters are devoted to the narrative of Persian events,[93] finding no reason for distinguishing Nadir among other "criminels" who have marked Asian history.[94] Nadir, in the framework of the recent revolutions of Persia, was simply "un criminel aimé, un habile politique," but nothing more.[95]

Was it possible, then, to conceive an "Oriental patriotism," giving the example of Nadir Shah? For all writers variously connected to the French Enlightenment culture, the answer was apparently not, marking a remarkable break with previous approaches to the history of Asian empires, which cease to have a prevailing relevance.

Oriental despotism, following Montesquieu's approach, absolutely excluded the possibility of conceiving the very idea of a patriotic sentiment where the primacy of law was not established and where every possibility of civic participation was excluded. The lack of interest in the establishment and development of civilization, following Voltaire's approach, prevented a positive image of greedy and destructive figures like Nadir Shah. A careful comparison of the profile of ancient and modern conquerors, following Bougainville, showed the substantial limits and the real falseness of the representation of Nadir as a patriotic

92. Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, p.274.

93. Jean-Baptiste Boyer d'Argens, *Lettres chinoises, ou Correspondance philosophique, historique et critique, entre un Chinois voyageur et ses correspondans à la Chine, en Moscovie, en Perse et au Japon*, 5 vols. (The Hague, Pierre Paupie, 1739–1740), vol.4, letters 91–93, p.1–24.

94. "Il semble que la fortune produise dans le seul Orient des hommes aussi extraordinaires que Kouli-Kan; il y a eu plusieurs autres personnages aussi fameux que lui, et qui d'un état obscur se sont élevés au plus haut dégré de gloire, et ont conquis plusieurs grands Empires. Tamerlan fut un homme aussi surprenant que Kouli-Kan, et peut-être fut-il plus vertueux; car il ne dut sa grandeur qu'à sa bravoure, et le Sophi la doit en partie à sa trahison. Tous les ménagemens, dont il a usé en dépouillant le Prince Thamas et son fils ses légitimes Souverains, ne peuvent garentir sa gloire d'une tâche considérable" (Argens, *Lettres chinoises*, vol.4, p.23).

95. Argens, *Lettres chinoises*, vol.4, p.24.

hero. If the image of the great and skilled military leader remains, it is more as a problematic figure than as the admirable character of a patriot who delivers his country and becomes a great sovereign.

This establishes a continuity with nineteenth-century representations about the substantial political and civic diversity between East and West—a diversity which should have been overcome by the expansion of civilization, which was the only way to introduce the real patriotism connected to free and representative institutions ignored by despotic governments. Thus, returning to the beginning of this article and the topic of continuities and discontinuities between the eighteenth-century intellectual context and that of the following century, concerning the interpretation of Oriental history, it is quite true that substantial differences must be seen between the centuries and that it is incorrect to read the eighteenth century from the perspective of nineteenth-century ideologies, philosophies of history, political thought, and so on. But it is also necessary to avoid introducing an overly rigid separation, looking at the eighteenth-century side as only marked by unprejudiced interest and, sometimes, appreciation, and at the nineteenth-century side as only marked by colonialist and imperialist ideology. The reality of intellectual and cultural life is always more varied, and the fascinating mixture of continuities and discontinuities is always present and has to be carefully investigated with special attention to the transformation of meanings and concepts in different contexts. We have seen that the concept of patriotism and its possible or impossible extension to a global context can offer, from this point of view, an interesting subject of investigation.

The tolerant Persia in Montesquieu's *Persian letters*

Antônio Carlos dos Santos

Interpretations of the *Persian letters* are as diverse as they are contradictory. In the eighteenth century, the first readers of the *Persian letters* were surely captivated by the exotic aspect of the Eastern world. The proliferation of narratives by explorers, missionaries, and travelers since the sixteenth century had helped to consolidate this kind of literature under the eyes of the exotic.[1] In the following century, it was read through the lens of "libertinage et […] légèreté."[2] At the end of the nineteenth century Jules Michelet attenuated the significance of the work's novelistic genre and emphasized its political aspects.[3] At the beginning of the twentieth century, some even doubted that it was a novel, preferring to call it a "recueil."[4] Other

1. According to Victor Segalen, exoticism is characterized by the impressions and adventures of travelers who tell their experiences from their perspective or describe the inhabitants' reactions to the traveler. Victor Segalen, *Essai sur l'exotisme: une esthétique du divers* (Paris, 1978), p.17–18. The *Persian letters* would fulfill this function, especially in evoking "bizarre" adjectives, using strong expressions such as "étonnant," "extraordinaire," and "singulier" and verbs like "admirer" and "étonner." It was thanks to this exoticism that the work was so successful for the time. For an analysis of Montesquieu's work from the perspective of criticism of the "exotic," see Pierre Berthiaume, "Les *Lettres persanes* ou l'exotisme sans l'exotisme," *Lumen* 24 (2005), p.1–18.
2. Abel-François Villemain, *Cours de littérature française: tableau de la littérature au XIX^e siècle* (Paris, 1841), p.368.
3. Jules Michelet, *Histoire de France*, vol.15: *Histoire de France au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1863), p.440–42.
4. "Dans *les Lettres persanes*, le caractère nécessairement décousu et fragmentaire d'un recueil de lettres correspond à une vision du monde relativiste et critique, où les valeurs reçues de l'Occident et de l'Orient se disqualifient les unes les autres." Jean Ehrard, *L'Invention littéraire au XVIII^e siècle: fictions, idées, société* (Paris, 1997), p.8.

readings, however, paid special attention to its stylistic and literary aspects.[5] Throughout the rest of the century, scholarship often focused on specific themes such as the seraglio,[6] religious conflict,[7] the feminine condition,[8] political reflection,[9] and the reader of the work,[10] among others.[11] With so many rich interpretations, what else could be extracted from it? What gap could we note in this long critical tradition? What stimulating theme could still be explored? The *Persian letters* seem to resonate in a different way with each generation. As for our own, I argue that rereading the *Persian letters* through the prism of tolerance is of central importance. I analyze this novel from within our own context of political struggle against prejudice, also typical of the era of Enlightenment, and the struggle for a more tolerant world. From this perspective, Montesquieu is more current than ever.

How can we best think about tolerance in the *Persian letters* of Montesquieu? In this work we can find two meanings of tolerance. First, tolerance is presented as something that requires openness to the knowledge of the "other," and so it is a personal ethical principle. Second, tolerance follows from the knowledge of the diversity of the world that is gained through travel. In both formulations, however, tolerance is an individual ethical construct as well as a political and social one. For this reason, this article is divided into two parts. In the

5. Jean Starobinski, "Préface," in *Lettres persanes* (1973; Paris, 2003); Pauline Kra, "The invisible chain of the *Lettres persanes*," *SVEC* 23 (1963), p.7–60; Roger Laufer, "La réussite romanesque et la signification des *Lettres persanes* de Montesquieu," *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* 61 (1961) p.188–203.
6. Roger B. Oake, "Polygamy in the *Lettres persanes*," *Romanic review* 32:1 (1941), p.56–62; Alain Grosrichard, *Structure du sérail: la fiction du despotisme asiatique dans l'Occident classique* (Paris, 1979).
7. Pauline Kra, *Religion in Montesquieu's Lettres persanes*, *SVEC* 72 (1970).
8. Diana J. Schaub, *Erotic liberalism, women and revolution in Montesquieu's Persian letters* (Lanham, MD, 1995).
9. Céline Spector, *Montesquieu et les Lettres persanes: de l'anthropologie à la politique* (Paris, 1997).
10. Marie-Emmanuelle Plagnol-Diéval, "Pour un lecteur éclairé: les leçons persanes de Montesquieu," *Rue Descartes* 84:1 (2015), p.97–109.
11. Our purpose here, far from exhausting the readings and interpretations of the work, is merely to show a general picture of the critical tradition by drawing the reader's attention to the gap of the subject of tolerance. For more details of this repertoire and more contemporary readings of this work, see Carole Dornier, *Lectures de Montesquieu: Lettres persanes* (Rennes, 2013). See also Laurence Massé, "Servitude et soumission," in *Lettres persanes*, ed. Laurent Versini (Paris, 2016), dossier.

first part, I consider the fable of the troglodytes as an illustration of how the "other" in the *Persian letters* brings about tolerance. In the second part, I analyze how tolerance results when we gain knowledge of the world through diversity and travel. Whether through imagination or reality, Montesquieu shows the European reader that there is much that binds them with Persia. I argue, then, that we can best read the *Persian letters* through the lens of tolerance.

The "self" and the "other" in the *Persian letters*

There is a well-known passage in which Montesquieu narrates the reactions of Parisians when they meet with Rica, a Persian newcomer to the French capital: "Je demeurais quelquefois une heure dans une compagnie, sans qu'on m'eût regardé, et qu'on m'eût mis en occasion d'ouvrir la bouche: mais, si quelqu'un, par hasard, apprenait à la compagnie que j'étais Persan, j'entendais aussitôt autour de moi un bourdonnement: Ah! ah! monsieur est Persan? C'est une chose bien extraordinaire! Comment peut-on être Persan?"[12] We can see in this brief passage the essential dilemma between the self and the other in the *Letters*. Here the Other is a romanesque strategy for personifying the foreigner who seeks wisdom and whose travels are the occasion for his inward exploration. The foreigner is a stranger seeking a space in the sun in lands unexplored. The foreigner is the Other that lacks something; fulfillment lies always in the future, in the promise of knowledge and inner enrichment. There is an aporetic situation: On the one hand, there is tolerance in the sense of acceptance, indulgence, assimilation, and permeability; on the other hand, there is modification and decharacterization. How to overcome this difficulty? In the work of Montesquieu, who is the Other? What does the Other represent? What is the position of the Other?

The purpose of this first part of the text is to analyze the relationship between the self and the Other in the *Persian letters*, demonstrating that tolerance is its central ethical principle. This problem is that greeting the foreigner must be understood as receiving someone while dismissing their difference, without, however, diminishing their identity, nor hindering their existence. This is the delicate tension at the heart of our contemporary multicultural interactions in our increasingly globalized world.

12. Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, ed. Philip Stewart (Paris, 2013). Henceforth we will refer only to the letter number.

Beginning in the second half of the seventeenth century, Europeans became increasingly curious about distant countries, especially in the East. The accounts of travelers such as Jean-Baptiste Tavernier and Jean Chardin inspired various writers of the time. Central to their narratives is the idea that foreigners are the bearers of a new vision, which allows the Europeans to be equally amazed by everything that happens on the other side of the world. Indeed, Europeans were increasingly noting the possibility of learning from others and they were learning from the experience and comparison of different cultures. On this issue, Bayle says

> Ceux qui voudraient faire un parallèle entre l'Orient et l'Occident se trouveraient courts quant à l'article de ces dettes payables en l'autre monde […] Ce serait une chose assez curieuse qu'une relation de l'Occident, composée par un japonais, ou par un chinois, qui aurait vécu plusieurs années dans les grandes villes de l'Europe. On nous rendrait bien le change. Les missionnaires qui vont aux Indes en publient des relations […] méconnaissent leurs défauts, et découvrent avec la dernière sagacité les vices d'autrui.[13]

Here, Bayle suggests the method that Montesquieu will follow: to observe the differences, to compare their movements, and, finally, to recognize human diversity. From knowledge of the Other comes a perspective of exchange and acceptance of difference. This is the spirit of the *Persian letters*: it is the antidote to absolute and dogmatic opinions. Above all, it is an invitation to the reader to open up to the world and to understand that human values vary in space and are thus extremely diverse. Man can lead his life beyond this diversity, reaching circumstances that bring men closer together. Those shared circumstances may lead to moral values to which all may adhere. Thus, in order to understand man and his institutions, it is necessary to cling not only to similarities but also to dissimilarities, developing a kind of "philosophy of difference" that reconnects humans despite the discrepancies between individuals and groups.

"How to accept the other, the foreigner, without abandoning 'the human being that you are'? How can we do this, without being essentially altered or absorbed by the other that we embrace or his roots that perhaps penetrate us?"[14] If a soldier tolerates an enemy

13. Pierre Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, vol.8 (Geneva, 1969), p.326.
14. Humberto Giannini, "Accueillir l'étrangeté," in *La Tolérance: pour un humanisme hérétique*, ed. Claude Sahel (Paris, 1991), p.16–30 (22).

and a saint tolerates evil, they are no longer the same for obvious reasons. Thus, tolerance toward the foreigner must be understood as the acceptance of a person that leaves their identity intact. Humberto Giannini labels this kind of tolerance as "active" and gives two reasons: First, accepting difference requires internal reorganization in a relationship of mutual forces. Second, the foreigner, after receiving and assimilating difference, transforms the Other into his or her neighbor, without destroying or dissolving them.[15] In both cases, the foreigner seeks to integrate himself into the environment, but this process is not always harmless. In the confrontation of ideas nerves can be struck and tolerance tested. Everything depends on the reciprocity between the parts, on the sensitivity of one to the other, on the aptitude of each one to listen, to assimilate ideas, and to argue. In this sense, understanding the foreigner is also a recognition of oneself through the Other.

When Rica arrives in Paris and narrates the reactions people have to him, an unknown man highlights the provincialism of the French in the face of difference. The question might be, "How can there be another so different from me?" This is how Rica expresses his vision in relation to the French:

> Je te parlais l'autre jour de l'inconstance prodigieuse des Français sur leurs modes. Cependant il est inconcevable à quel point ils en sont entêtés; ils y rappellent tout; c'est la règle avec laquelle ils jugent de tout ce qui se fait chez les autres nations; ce qui est étranger leur paraît toujours ridicule. Je t'avoue que je ne saurais guère ajuster cette fureur pour leurs coutumes, avec l'inconstance avec laquelle ils en changent tous les jours.[16]

How to put oneself in the place of the Other? In the quoted passage, well known by his readers, Montesquieu seems to situate a fundamental problem of morality: How does one establish a relationship or an exchange with the Other? For Montesquieu, it is necessary to know how to position oneself before what is different and also what is similar. In this way, the foreigner's perspective allows readers to question the world in which they live, in other words, European society. D'Alembert, referring to Usbek, agrees with him that the French are not the warmest toward foreigners. "Usbek expose surtout avec autant de légèreté que d'énergie, ce qui a le plus frappé parmi nous ses yeux

15. Giannini, "Accueillir l'étrangeté," p.19–20.
16. "Lettre C."

pénétrants; notre habitude de traiter sérieusement les choses les plus futiles, et de tourner les plus importantes en plaisanterie […] notre politesse extérieure et notre mépris réel pour les étrangers, ou notre prédilection affectée pour eux."[17]

The question of the Other, in Montesquieu's work, is even more visible and remarkable in the fable of the troglodytes. He portrays the troglodytes as savages with no idea of equality, whose society collapses under the weight of its own injustices. As the troglodytes regenerate, they move on to another phase, that of civilized beings, who can thus know virtue. In this phase, they realize that virtue is not easily acquired and that, even when acquired, it demands a great deal of restraint. The fable of the troglodytes demonstrates virtue to be a constant effort of active concern for the other, requiring education and a perpetual vigilance.

The first troglodytes are characterized by the evil that prevents them from any dialogue with the other. Says one member of the group, summarizing one way of thinking: "Qu'ai-je affaire d'aller me tuer à travailler pour des gens dont je ne me soucie point? Je penserai uniquement à moi. Je vivrai heureux: que m'importe que les autres le soient? Je me procurerai tous mes besoins; et, pourvu que je les aie, je ne me soucie point que tous les autres Troglodytes soient misérables."[18] From this moment, the examples of cruelty snowball until a deadly disease appears and threatens everyone. A foreign doctor comes to help them, but, as the troglodytes do not recognize the value of the Other, they are unable to thank him for the cure. When later the disease returns stronger than ever, the troglodytes once again ask for the help of the doctor, who, angrily, answers them: "Allez, leur dit-il, hommes injustes, vous avez dans l'âme un poison plus mortel que celui dont vous voulez guérir; vous ne méritez pas d'occuper une place sur la terre, parce que vous n'avez point d'humanité, et que les règles de l'équité vous sont inconnues."[19] In this fable, it is important to understand that otherness is always understood as threatening, since it is deaf to the presence of evil: It is not about the ignorance of the Other, but the refusal to recognize the Other. Montesquieu uses the savage metaphor as a mechanism for looking outside of his own society. But, still more subtly, he takes the image of the Other as an identification of the savage, the deformed, the cruel, the terrible. In this sense, the Other is imaginary, the

17. Montesquieu, *Œuvres de Montesquieu* (Paris, 1827).
18. "Lettre XI."
19. "Lettre XI."

doubling of the "self" that is perceived when he thinks he sees this Other. Then another, also deformed, is produced by the foreigner's look. If one perceives evil in the Other, this perception becomes an obstacle that prevents dialogue and a just social connection based on mutual recognition.

The second phase of the troglodytes is marked by a new alliance. In their world, then, all virtues are present: justice, humanity, reciprocal love. They symbolize the good savage: peaceful, sweet, living in a state of innocence, an example of collective life. Kind and gentle, they seem to resemble the savages of Montaigne's *Essais*.[20] In this work, the author holds the idea that the discovery of the New World has become an excellent reason to think about different people and their customs, which leads us to limit our claim to universal knowledge. The discovery of America, in Montaigne's view, was a challenge to those who would be narrow-minded toward whoever might be on the other side of the Atlantic. After all, barbarian is all that is unknown. Is there a real difference between the savages and the Europeans? Is civilization superior to savagery? The discovery of new people invites reflection on their social life, because the savages would live happily in a kind of primitive "golden age." According to Montaigne, the savages are not barbarians. They would be subject only to the law of nature, without any knowledge of letters; there would be no wealth or poverty, no inheritance, no avarice, no forgiveness, and no private property. Europeans, on the contrary, would be guided by fanaticism and intolerance, as evidenced by their wars of religion. Hence Montaigne defends the anthropology of the savages as a criticism of the horrors of religious strife and European fanaticism. In analyzing the relationship between the savage and the French, specifically in the chapter "On cannibals," Montaigne gives voice to the savage. There, it is not a discourse about the Other, but a dialogue in which the Other reveals himself in the exchange of mutual knowledge. It is in this sense that Montesquieu finds himself in a tradition dating back to the sixteenth century, which would be made yet more remarkable through the pen of Rousseau, in his *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité.*

To Montesquieu, the troglodytes founded institutions so as to become civilized, but, over time, they fell into corruption. The savage, he suggests, is still present at the very heart of the civilized world. But, the reader asks, how then do we go beyond an antagonistic coexistence?

20. Michel de Montaigne, *Essais* (Paris, 1967), book 1, ch.31, "Des cannibales."

Montesquieu sees only one way out: the education of virtue. Only virtuous values could remove the troglodytes from corruption, because their institutions had become very strong. Amid the inconstancy of the troglodyte environment, stability resides precisely in moral values. The troglodytes sum up the essential commandments of their virtuous education in this way:

> Ils aimaient leurs femmes, et ils en étaient tendrement chéris. Toute leur attention était d'élever leurs enfants à la vertu. Ils leur représentaient sans cesse les malheurs de leurs compatriotes, et leur mettaient devant les yeux cet exemple si triste: ils leur faisaient surtout sentir que l'intérêt des particuliers se trouve toujours dans l'intérêt commun; que vouloir s'en séparer, c'est vouloir se perdre; que la vertu n'est point une chose qui doive nous coûter; qu'il ne faut point la regarder comme un exercice pénible; et que la justice pour autrui est une charité pour nous.[21]

Everything depends on justice, for equity is the balance that prevents excess. Equity is what makes one act with the other as if they were oneself. Social organization and education through dialogue both cause the student to be confronted with the practical difficulties of the world; for this reason, education is of great political importance. In short, education is the very root of the ethical character of dialogue, politics, and therefore tolerance. In short, what the first troglodytes lacked was the ability to recognize the other as equal. Sergio Paulo Rouanet, summarizing these relations of recognition, says: "Optics is inseparable from ethics. The gaze with which I see the Other should receive as a response the gaze with which the other sees me […] Each individual pole has its full intelligibility from the relationship with the Other. The Christian needs the Islamic gaze if he wants to understand Christianity."[22] What is important is that, in the work of Montesquieu, in order to know the other, it is necessary that, in a rational way, one understands the other, reciprocally, in a perpetual reconstruction of recognition. The regenerated troglodytes exemplify Montesquieu's point: that mutual understanding is central to recognition and, therefore, justice.

The recognition of the Other is most evident through culture. Culture provides the occasion of the encounter between people, because it mediates between the particular and the universal. As

21. "Lettre XII."
22. Sergio Paulo Rouanet, "Regard de l'autre, regard sur l'autre," *Diogène* 193 (2001), p.3–14 (13).

Hegel says, culture is "a system of reciprocal dependence" which appears initially as a simple medium.[23] It authorizes a type of cooperation because "subjective selfishness becomes a contribution to the satisfaction of the needs of all others, in the mediation of the particular by the universal, in a dialectical movement such that by gaining, producing and enjoying for oneself, each one gains and produces at the same time for the pleasure of others."[24]

Thus, the universal dependence of one on the other passes through the particularization of the self, in such a way that the assimilation of the culture of the Other is an intellectual virtuosity, that is, it is neither given nor forced. This cultural exchange is not an invasion, nor an authoritarian or seductive persuasion, but a gradual intermingling achieved through education. The principle of this exchange must be egalitarian, because hierarchy, in itself, would be a form of domination. The egalitarian encounter allows one to confront different points of view: It is the beginning of a new "geography of ideas."[25] In this space, people with different cultures and religions can share a common space in a climate of tolerance.

When Montesquieu, in the *Persian letters*, narrates about various cultures, people, or cities, he invites his reader to oppose any form of dogmatism or absolute position. Such a position would oppress and thus cannot represent his idea of tolerance. Is there no longer, in the confrontation of two civilizations, the desire to know the Other and make oneself known to the Other? Would the clash between the East and the West, the difference of languages, customs, beliefs, ways of living, and the difficulty in understanding each other, not explain vastly the process of the Persians in Paris? How can the foreigner adapt himself to a country with references that are unusual for him? How does one embrace customs where there is no place for us? It is no wonder that this book began with a philosophical journey, the journey of Usbek, from the East to the West. With this journey, Montesquieu demonstrates that nobody is born tolerant: It is only through the movement toward the "Other," of instruction and education, that one can become tolerant. Usbek's emigration, saturated with instruction and formation, is the starting point of the idea of tolerance in Montesquieu's thinking.

23. G. W. F. Hegel, *Principes de la philosophie du droit, ou Droit naturel et science de l'Etat en abrégé*, translated by R. Derathé (Paris, 1986), p.215.
24. Hegel, *Principes de la philosophie*, p.225.
25. Paul Hazard, *Crise de la conscience européenne* (Paris, 1961), p.19.

Finally, through culture, the gateway to tolerance, the other opens himself to difference and becomes willing to receive what is offered or taught to him. Cultural encounters allow one to see society with new eyes, to be amazed, to take on new values, and to reconsider the values one already has. One becomes disenchanted with some values and acquires others. To the question "How was tolerance incorporated into everyday life in the eighteenth century?" one possible answer is that the displacement of travelers into new lands and cultures became a way of overcoming prejudices, of discovering the Other, and of prompting the dialogue that yielded tolerance. The key point of this interpretive line is to show that the possibility of tolerance lies in the discovery of the Other—discoveries made, above all, by those who travel.

In this sense, "acquiring culture" is not a process of harmonious development, but of opposition to oneself, through the destruction and separation that allow us to receive, a little later, the wealth of the world. It is, in the end, to become foreign to oneself, losing oneself in order to be reunited. Having encountered other civilizations that are at the same time different and legitimate, this foreigner, or that other, is already a "new Other," because he no longer brings the traditional certainties. This is an invitation to tolerance or, rather, it is tolerance itself.

Crossing: tolerance through travel in the *Persian letters*

From the beginning of the *Persian letters*, Montesquieu makes a parallel between travel and wisdom. But what constitutes wisdom for Montesquieu, and how does one find it? Montesquieu does not say it directly, but suggests that it is necessary to have contact with people, to discuss with others, to travel beyond the familiar, and to be educated. Instruction through travel makes men wiser and more dignified.[26] Here the central point is that there is no learning or wisdom without dialogue or conversation.

In *Eloge de la sincérité*, Montesquieu criticizes the fundamental maxim of the wisdom of antiquity, especially the Stoic tradition that argues that, by virtue of self-analysis, one comes to know oneself. Against this idea, Montesquieu proclaims that the testimony of another is necessary, because men are naturally distanced from the truth: "les hommes se regardent de trop près pour se voir tels

26. "Lettre XXV."

qu'ils sont. Comme ils n'aperçoivent leurs vertus et leurs vices qu'au travers de l'amour-propre […] ils sont toujours d'eux-mêmes des témoins infidèles et des juges corrompus."[27] Wisdom does not come by decree or by will.

In Montesquieu's work, wisdom is the fruit of contact with others: Men serve as guides to each other, "so that they can see through their eyes what their self-love hides from them," writes Montesquieu in his *Eloge de la sincérité*.[28] The presence of another causes the individual to invite him to share in his feelings, and this reunion yields reflections and metamorphoses. Travel is the means of its realization, for "les voyages donnent aussi une très grande étendue à l'esprit: on sort du cercle des préjugés de son pays, et l'on n'est guère propre à se charger de ceux des étrangers."[29]

Montesquieu, through his Persian characters, is certainly this traveler divided between two different cultures; Montesquieu is Usbek, inviting the reader to travel with him, to go beyond appearances, and to pursue the unknown paths of knowledge and accept new interpretations. The traveler Montesquieu unties the threads of the novel, trying to understand it and making the reader a traveling companion, a new man, a "traveling salesman of knowledge."

The journey is a displacement in space and time that aims, above all, to enrichment through contact with different cultures: It is, then, the discovery of the world, of the Other and of the self. Lévi-Strauss goes further when he says

> On conçoit généralement les voyages comme un déplacement dans l'espace. C'est peu. Un voyage s'inscrit simultanément dans l'espace, dans le temps, et dans la hiérarchie sociale. Chaque impression n'est définissable qu'en la rapportant solidairement à ces trois axes, et comme l'espace possède à lui seul trois dimensions, il en faudrait au moins cinq pour se faire du voyage une représentation adéquate. Je l'éprouve tout de suite en débarquant au Brésil.[30]

On the road, constantly turning, everything becomes relative and temporal. The crossing takes the traveler to an old idea of Heraclitus: Man is always unfinished, an evanescent being, who never reaches a satisfactory state. In short, the Persians of the novel

27. Montesquieu, *Eloge de la sincérité*, in *Œuvres complètes* (Paris, 1964), p.43–45 (43).
28. Montesquieu, *Eloge de la sincérité*, p.43.
29. Montesquieu, *Eloge de la sincérité*, p.44.
30. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes tropiques* (Paris, 1995), p.79.

depart from the absolute and, during the journey, make a kind of immersion in human diversity, and they learn how to observe. They are nomadic philosophers who, arriving in Paris, do not seek particular knowledge or abstract theory, nor do they seek proofs or experiments. Rather, they seek practice in life and morality that differs from that which they have already had. In other words, the Persians want to acquire knowledge so that they can apply it as a guide to good choices and develop their moral actions. They want a "philosophie active" as Montesquieu himself says.[31] Here, philosophy and morality intersect: The search for wisdom is also the effort to find the good, because knowledge is an element of moral life that clarifies practical life. At the end of the *Persian letters*, the reader will not only have witnessed the confrontation of Parisian morality with that of Ispahan. Starobinski, summing up the spirit of displacement of the *Persian letters*, says:

> Il aura fait en esprit le tour du monde. Il aura parcouru tous les lieux illustres de l'histoire: la Judée, la Grèce, Rome. Et, découvrant la relativité des absolus qu'on révère en divers lieux et en divers temps, il aura senti la nécessité de s'élever à l'universel, il aura senti s'élever la sollicitude cosmopolite qui souhaite le bonheur et la prospérité de tous les peuples.[32]

From the point of view of travel as a means of acquiring knowledge, there is a link between Montesquieu, Montaigne, and Rousseau: In traveling, all three sought freedom and knowledge.

On June 22, 1580, Montaigne left his property and began his pilgrimages throughout Europe, which lasted seventeen years and eight days. This was at a time when travel was long, costly, and, above all, risky. There were three main reasons that urged him to travel.[33] The first consisted in ridding himself of the insipidity of the "duties of marital friendship," or of impatience with "domestic servitude," he says in the chapter "Of vanity" of his *Essais*. The second, perhaps most important, reason is that he wants to look for novelties and insights into human diversity. He remarks that "cette humeur avide des choses nouvelles et inconnues aide bien à nourrir en moi le désir de voyager."[34] There was another, political reason: The trip allowed him to escape

31. *Pensées*, in *Œuvres complètes*, p.853–1082, 196, 875.
32. Jean Starobinski, *Le Remède dans le mal* (Paris, 1989), p.104.
33. Charles Dédéyan, *Essai sur le voyage de Montaigne* (Paris, 1946), p.27.
34. Montaigne, *Essais*, book 3, p.382.

the corruption that was on the rise in France. "L'autre cause qui me convie à ces promenades c'est la disconvenance aux mœurs présentes de notre Etat," Montaigne explains.

Montaigne's travels were not escapist; rather, they spoke to a widening desire and restlessness in unknown and distant lands. In the chapter "From the instruction of the children," Montaigne recommends contact with foreign customs to open the spirit and to form what, in modern terms, would be called personality. He writes: "A cette cause, le commerce des hommes y est merveilleusement propre, et la visite des pays estrangers […] pour en rapporter principalement les humeurs de ces nations et leurs façons, et pour frotter et limer notre cervelle contre celle d'autruy."[35] Putting these concepts into practice, Montaigne becomes a *homo viator*: He takes the road as a philosophical procedure.

Rousseau traveled because he was a fugitive from very early on. He had no fatherland, no religion, no family, no profession. Without resources, without roots, undisciplined, unrefined, and an exile, his only way out was to take to the road. Always lonely, he learned from nature the simplicity of people and acquired the motivations to travel: "Je n'ai pas besoin de choisir des chemins tout faits, des routes commodes, je passe pourtant où un homme peut passer. Je vois tout ce qu'un homme peut voir et ne dépendant que de moi-même. Je jouis de toute la liberté dont un homme peut jouir."[36] Rousseau lacked the cosmopolitan outlook and resources of other enlightened eighteenth-century figures who enjoyed stability and safety in their journeys. He interpreted his permanent exile, however, as a means of being free, an escape from the intellectual tension and personal paranoia brought on by his persecution mania.

Like Rousseau and Montaigne, Montesquieu, through Usbek, makes his journey a way of acquiring knowledge and freedom. Thus says the Persian: "je résolus de m'exiler de ma patrie; et ma retraite même de la cour m'en fournit un prétexte plausible. J'allai au roi; je lui marquai l'envie que j'avais de m'instruire dans les sciences de l'Occident; je lui insinuai qu'il pourrait tirer de l'utilité de mes voyages: je trouvai grâce devant ses yeux: je partis."[37] In fact, Montesquieu's protagonist wants to be free of any guardianship. He is connected to Isfahan. He wants to learn new things in order to think for himself,

35. Montaigne, *Essais*, book 1, p.75.
36. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile* (Paris, 1981), p.772.
37. "Lettre VIII."

breaking from tradition and infusing his life with new perspectives. His desire for knowledge turns into a desire for political action, which, at that time, was forbidden. He reveals himself to be restless and dissatisfied, which is why he rejects traditional norms and makes the decision to flee from the court of the king of Persia.

Leaving the country was, for Usbek, a difficult decision, but it is also a wise decision and a political action insofar as it is an action undertaken for the good. If philosophizing is to face the unknown, then Usbek is a restless philosopher, who sets out on the journey looking for wisdom, the good life, and, at the same time, the nature of political things. But the difficulty lies in knowing how far Usbek will be able to go on his journey of understanding of the world while at the same time being able to deconstruct his "doxa," or his preconceived opinions and his prejudices.

In any case, more than the decision to leave, it is the feeling of restlessness, just as with Montaigne, that is evidence of the spirit of change already filling the soul. This incisive process allows the traveler to compare knowledge in everyday action, putting the idea of universal truth to the test, since it is always fragile and threatened by some new discovery. The trip, then, succeeds in breaking down the traveler's assumptions of universal immobility and absolute truth.

Montaigne travels on horseback[38] and Rousseau on foot.[39] The first is a Gascon, a rider who travels with people and pedestrians. He travels for the pleasure of discovery. The second is a hiker, a man on the periphery who travels perhaps more by necessity than for the joy of departure. The Bordeaux citizen always imagined his ideal traveling companion, whose absence he felt acutely, with whom he could talk.[40] The citizen of Geneva always traveled alone, letting himself be guided by emotion. However, both experience the journey as a reflection, a return to their own consciousness.

Usbek travels in a group. When he arrives abroad, free of any private ties and daily concerns, he forms a Persian community, in which he retains his dominant position in the private sphere, with two domestics, a chamberlain, Ibbi, and a young eunuch, Jaron, with whom he always speaks in Persian. In order not to lose control of Isfahan, he maintains a close correspondence with his guardians (the great eunuch, Narsit, Solim, the first white eunuch, and the eunuchs

38. Montaigne, *Essais*, book 3, p.385.
39. Rousseau, *Emile*, p.772.
40. Montaigne, *Essais*, book 3, p.394.

Nadir and Pharon) and his wives (Fatmé, Zélis, Zachi, Roxane), not to mention the numerous friends found on the Isfahan road to Paris. Despite his desire for knowledge and his willingness to break the chains with the Eastern world, Usbek brings with him the whole structure of the seraglio. This is nothing more than a strategy of the author: Usbek departs with innumerable local certainties, which are archipelagos in the ocean of uncertainties in which he travels, where he dialogues and acquires new knowledge.

In short, all three, in different ways, set out on a journey of curiosity, novelty, and openness toward the world and knowledge, which, over time, yields tolerance. Here, there is an approximation between reason and freedom or, even, between reason and knowing how to live: To think better is to live better. This does not mean that philosophy transforms the world; however, it can change life through the discourse of wisdom. If there is a theme on which philosophers agree, it is precisely the idea that wisdom brings some serenity, engendered by the rigorous exercise of reason. It is necessary to learn the know-how as an effective response to the barbarism, intolerance, madness, and disease that are always threatening.

The three philosophers agree on the fact that knowledge is acquired during the journey, and at the same time prejudice is shattered. Prejudice was the weapon of hatred in the spirit of Enlightenment, which is why it was necessary to fight it vigorously. The problem of prejudice is that it justifies the defective and pernicious order of traditional beliefs. As Alexandre Rodolphe Vinet points out, "prejudice is the original sin of eighteenth-century philosophy."[41] An absolute opinion, devoid of reflection, makes the moral development of humanity difficult. It is in this same vein that Dumarsais records: "C'est dans les préjugés qu'il faut chercher la vraie cause du peu de progrès des lumières et surtout de la morale."[42] Prejudice is dangerous because it is a partial or particularized point of view that is intended to be universal. Faced with this problem, it is impossible to remain indifferent, as Montesquieu points out in his preface to *L'Esprit des lois*. If prejudice means a lack of rationality, then it is the source of discord, injustice, intolerance; it is impious and irrational, and must be fought because its immediate consequence is that a way of thinking gives way to disproportionate, excessive action.

41. Alexandre Rodolphe Vinet, *L'Histoire de la littérature française au XVIII^e siècle*, 2 vols. (Lausanne, 1960–1961), vol.1, p.299.
42. César Chesneau Dumarsais, *Œuvres* (Paris, Pougin, 1797), p.300.

What Montesquieu wishes, in Starobinski's phrase, is to "compter pour nuls les préjugés, les certitudes traditionnelles, les prestiges."[43] Montesquieu refuses every form of discrimination: "Je me croirais le plus heureux des mortels si je pouvais faire que les hommes pussent se guérir de leurs préjugés."[44] Montesquieu seems to consider prejudice a disease that spreads in the social body, provoking wars and discord, for which the best remedy would be the knowledge of the self and the other, achieved through travel. Therefore, as the Persians enrich themselves with knowledge, in a world different from their own, spirits rise and, at each stage of this journey to wisdom, their taste is developed by speculation and great abstractions. In this sense, Rhédi, a great Persian lord in Venice, observes: "Je m'instruis des secrets du commerce, des intérêts des princes; de la forme de leur gouvernement; je ne néglige pas même les superstitions européennes; je m'applique à la médecine, à la physique, à l'astrologie; j'étudie les arts; enfin je sors des nuages qui couvraient mes yeux dans le pays de ma naissance."[45] The Persian is curious about the most remarkable features of the Western world. In fact, Usbek brings a spirit of curiosity and sympathy for differences that reinforce his cosmopolitanism. Open to difference, tolerance results, and that is why the journey takes on a central importance in the work. It is in this area that the philosophical polemic of the *Persian letters* is the richest and most complex. Throughout the journey, society is examined by way of a methodology of the gaze, in such a way that the values of the Western and Eastern life are reviewed simultaneously and criticized. The recurrent gaze in the *Persian letters* also has the purpose of assimilating knowledge.

Rhédi symbolizes the man who is bound by his prejudice, but who, recognizing his ignorance, travels via philosophy to arrive at an openness toward the Other, and thus arrive at human dignity. Here, wisdom is an instrument of tolerance that fights prejudices while at the same time highlighting human diversity. From his correspondence with Usbek and Rica, Rhédi develops a taste for freedom and, above all, seeks to combat despotism.

By contrast, Usbek, as a seraglio lord, shows that his itinerant reason remains attached to Persian values. The longer his stay in Paris, the more his distant seraglio, a system founded on unbridled desires, degrades. Despite his critique of despotism and his admiration for

43. Jean Starobinski, *Montesquieu*, (Paris, 1994), p.60.
44. Montesquieu, *Œuvres complètes*, p.529.
45. "Lettre XXXI."

the spirit of freedom in Paris, he remains a tyrant in distant Isfahan, reacting when order is threatened, demanding absolute obedience and silence in the seraglio. He criticizes this institution without doing anything to abolish it. In this sense, Usbek remains blind, masked by prejudice, which prevents him from clearly seeing the new world that appears before him.

Rica is Usbek's young traveling companion, with whom he shares his enthusiasm, anger, and concern. Appreciating the salons, witty people, and beautiful women, Rica represents the young person who delights in novelty, laughter, and openness of spirit. At the end of his stay in France, when Usbek decides to return to Isfahan, Rica insists on staying in Paris. Having seen the shadows of the Eastern world, his journey causes him to reflect. He breaks with ordinary prejudice and comes to the light of knowledge through the liberating and enlightening power of wisdom. In short, Rica breaks with the establishment to achieve intellectual liberation. Usbek, on the contrary, attached to the preconceived ideas of the Eastern world and tormented by what happens in the seraglio, prefers to return to his native land, resorting to revenge and the established order. There are two puzzles here. First, though they depart from the same country with the same goal, in the end they make totally opposite decisions. How is this possible? And how can Usbek's attitudes be so open to Parisian novelties yet so closed with regard to the subjects of Isfahan?

In the first case, Rica and Usbek's decisions are not contradictory, but rather different. Neither of them possesses the whole truth. For Montesquieu, truth exists in both at the same time. Montesquieu encourages the reader to discover, through Usbek, that truth depends on a multitude of facts and relationships and that, therefore, it cannot be identical for everyone at all times.[46] As for the second point, Usbek seems powerless to make moral choices. This stems from his inability to face truths that are related to him, from which he refuses to acknowledge the consequences. The confrontation between the two questions causes both prejudices to erupt. And that is no small thing.

In order to recognize and dismantle prejudices, it is necessary to act like Rhédi: to reject the clouds that prevent him from seeing. He relearns how to see, for vision implies knowing. From the province, Rica writes to Usbek: "Je me répands dans le monde, et je cherche à le connaître […] Je ne suis plus si étonné de voir dans une maison cinq ou six femmes avec cinq ou six hommes, et je trouve que cela n'est pas

46. "Lettre XCVII."

mal imaginé […] ici tout parle, tout se voit, tout s'entend."[47] If in Paris "everything is seen," in Isfahan "on ne voit point les gens tels qu'ils sont, mais tels qu'on les oblige d'être."[48] The comparison between the two cities results from the act of seeing, which then becomes an act of learning and concludes in changes of ideas. Understanding and knowledge require an explanation derived from the world of visual experience. Through vision, Rica loses all that binds him to Eastern life, but also destroys the threatening Other, and so he destroys the possibility of seeing well.

The reader may wonder why Montesquieu makes so many references to the eyes. Why do Rica and Rhédi so often make reference "au regard"?[49] Because the meaning of the eye is not only vision but, above all, thought. The gaze, in the Greek philosophical tradition, corresponds to knowledge. The verb *eido* expresses the relation between observing and knowing, informing oneself and instructing oneself. Seeing then takes the sense of *perscrutatio*, which means to scrutinize and examine in such a way that acquired knowledge gains clarity; reading and writing allow one to see well.[50]

The gaze is the living connection between the person and the world. It is the first contact with reality, and the most immediate and fascinating sense. The French verb *regarder* does not mean merely the act of seeing, but it also connotes waiting, concern, vigilance, deference, safeguarding, and the promise of return. "L'acte du regard ne s'épuise pas sur la place: il comporte un élan persévérant, une reprise obstinée, comme s'il était animé par l'espoir d'accroître sa découverte ou de reconquérir ce qui est en train de lui échapper," writes Starobinski.[51] It is in this sense that the eye expresses the power of discovery and, at the same time, becomes a reflection and a conscious thought. In addition, seeing transcends the faculty of immediate perception to become a process of fixing in a more durable form what is fleeting. That is why to reflect is to leave contact with the immediate to penetrate the complex universe of images, ideas, and feelings. The result of this

47. "Lettre LXIII."
48. "Lettre LXIII."
49. Some examples: "Je vis hier une chose assez singulière" ("Lettre XXVIII"); "Lorsque j'arrivai, je fus regardé" ("Lettre XXX"); "On peut avoir vu toutes les villes du Monde et être surpris en arrivant à Venise" ("Lettre XXXI"); "J'ai vu rentré un devis extraordinairement habillé" ("Lettre XXIX").
50. Marilena Chaui, "Janela da alma, espelho do mundo," in *O olhar* (São Paulo, 1989), p.31–61 (35).
51. Jean Starobinski, *L'Œil vivant* (Paris, 1961), p.11.

process is that, through perseverance, the reflective gaze is the pursuit of a hidden reality, and, with each discovery, there is an ever-present risk of blindness.[52]

It is important to note that Rhédi realizes that he sees better the more distant he is from Persia, where the attentive and reflective gaze was forbidden and even dangerous. Thus he says: "Chez nous, les caractères sont tous uniformes, parce qu'ils sont forcés […] Dans cette servitude du cœur et de l'esprit, on n'entend parler que la crainte."[53] The shock of leaving a closed world and reaching an open world is similar to Plato's philosopher who, emerging from the cave, is temporarily blinded by the sun. The observer cannot immediately know "the thing itself," because the new reality is grasped in the confusion of an indistinct glare, which stuns him and may even blind him. To know well, it is necessary to educate one's gaze.

Persian travelers have two ways of learning new things in Paris. In the first, they come to understand things by observing at a distance, and comparing the things that they see in Paris with those of Isfahan. This is the method Usbek follows when he learns about women, concluding, "Je le puis dire: je ne connais les femmes que depuis que je suis ici; j'en ai plus appris dans un mois que je n'aurais fait en trente ans dans un sérail."[54] In the second, a detailed description of external appearances takes place, giving rise, in addition to the pleasure of demystification, to humor. A good example is his critique of the Catholic religion:

> Ce que je te dis de ce prince ne doit pas t'étonner: il y a un autre magicien, plus fort que lui, qui n'est pas moins maître de son esprit qu'il l'est lui-même de celui des autres. Ce magicien s'appelle le Pape: tantôt il lui fait croire que trois ne sont qu'un; que le pain qu'on mange n'est pas du pain, ou que le vin qu'on boit n'est pas du vin; et mille autres choses de cette espèce.[55]

These observations demand sensitivity in one's regard. Here, in addition to the Persian's exotic view of the dominant Western religion, one sees cross-glances and comparisons for mutual understanding. The knowledge generated from this look can weaken the "esprit de vertige," typical of "fanatiques aveuglés," as defined by Diderot, and

52. "Lettre XXXII."
53. "Lettre LXIII."
54. "Lettre LXIII."
55. "Lettre XXIV."

it can lead us "à s'aimer, à se tolérer."[56] According to Pujol, "la notion d'esprit est d'abord liée à une certaine culture, celle de la société de cour où l'on se plaît à briller en public à coup de saillies et de bons mots."[57] Montesquieu uses "esprit de vertige" in "Lettre LXXXIII" to designate an evil spirit, bordering on delirium or madness, and which opposes the free *esprit* typical of philosophers. Pujol adds that "ce type d'esprit trouve tout naturellement sa place dans la littérature satirique: s'y déploient en effet un ethos intellectuel et social, une langue déliée et spirituelle, un sens certain de la provocation et du débat d'idées qui caracterisent tout particulièrement des auteurs comme Montesquieu ou Voltaire."[58]

Walking through the streets of Paris, Usbek makes a thorough description of everything that goes on in the city. Despite the distance that separates him from his seraglio, he maintains contact with Isfahan, thanks to his eunuchs, who are his "auxiliary eyes." Usbek's gaze, sometimes passionate, especially when he refers to the women of his seraglio, where all eyes are watched by other glances, becomes the driver of irrational powers that mislead the subject and lead the reader's look beyond Usbek's eyes.[59] This character is aimed at a society which explores the problems with the Eastern world and, paralleling these problems, infers consequences involving Paris and Isfahan.[60]

The lack of the gaze is an engine of despotic power in the East: The regime is maintained through the blindness of its subjects. It is the empire of a mortified gaze, for it is dangerous to reason. This is a consequence of a political form which, Montesquieu says, "saute, pour ainsi dire, aux yeux."[61] In this sense, "seeing" is the king's task

56. Denis Diderot, "Avertissement," in *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, ed. Denis Diderot and Jean D'Alembert, vol.8, ARTFL Encyclopédie Project, ed. Robert Morrissey and Glenn Roe, https://artflsrv03.uchicago.edu/philologic4/encyclopedie1117/navigate/8/2/ (last accessed January 26, 2021).
57. Stephane Pujol, "Intolérance religieuse et 'esprit de vertige': la lettre LXXXIII des *Lettres persanes* et l'invention d'un nouveau paradigme," *Diciottesimo secolo: rivista della società Italiana di studi sul seccolo XVIII* 2 (2017), p.167–84 (176).
58. Pujol, "Intolérance religieuse," p.176.
59. "Lettre LV." On this subject, see Megan Gallagher, "Fear and loathing in the French Enlightenment: despotism and republican citizenship in Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes*" (unpublished paper).
60. On this theme, see also C. Volpilhac-Auger, *Montesquieu* (Paris, 2017). See also Montesquieu, *Mémoire de la critique*, ed. Catherine Volpilhac-Auger (Paris, 2003).
61. Montesquieu, *Lois*, in *Œuvres complètes* (Paris, 1964), book 5, ch.15, p.553.

and "obeying" blindly is the task of the subject.[62] The monarch may possess all imperfections, but he cannot be blind; he has a monopoly on "seeing." If anyone defies him, he orders that his pupils must be removed.

> Le Roi donne un ordre par écrit d'aller aveugler un tel enfant, et cet ordre se donne au premier venu (car en Perse il n'y a pas de bourreau d'office) […] L'ordre porté dans le Sérail est bientôt compris, et il y excite des pleurs et des cris; mais enfin il faut laisser aller l'enfant. Les Eunuques l'amènent au cruel message, qui leur jette l'ordre, ou, comme vous diriez, la Lettre de Cachet, et puis se mettant en terre, il saisit l'enfant, l'étend de son long sur ses genoux, le visage tourné en haut, en lui serrant la tête du bras gauche. Puis d'une main il lui ouvre la paupière, et de l'autre il prend son poignard par la pointe, et tire les prunelles l'une après l'autre, entières, et sans les gâter, comme on fait d'un cerneau. Il les met en son mouchoir et va les porter au Roi.[63]

This intense, despotic scene shows all the power of the king, the only person who can "regarder le regard lui-même qu'il tient entre ses mains."[64] How to open your eyes in a world where everything is blind obedience? In this desert region, the thought-gaze is forbidden, and it is only out of this world that the invisible can be noticed. Here is the reason why visitors to Montesquieu in Paris are surprised by everything they see and begin to think through the gaze of the other:

> Ceux qui aiment à s'instruire ne sont jamais oisifs: quoique je ne sois chargé d'aucune affaire importante, je suis cependant dans une occupation continuelle. Je passe ma vie à examiner; j'écris le soir ce que j'ai remarqué, ce que j'ai vu; ce que j'ai entendu dans la journée. Tout m'intéresse, tout m'étonne: je suis comme un enfant, dont les organes encore tendres sont vivement frappés par les moindres objets.[65]

The Persian is continually surprised, and his gaze leads him where he least expects. The most common things catch his eye, and through his gaze they take on another meaning. "Ce regard, qui m'est autre, en sait plus sur moi que moi-même." Grosrichard again synthesizes the function of the look: "Et lorsque je tente d'aller voir, derrière ce que je

62. "Lettre II."
63. Grosrichard, *Structure du sérail*, p.75.
64. Grosrichard, *Structure du sérail*, p.74.
65. "Lettre XLVIII."

crois être le point, là-bas dans l'autre monde, d'où ça me regarde, c'est moi-même, et notre monde, à la fin que je retrouve."[66]

After the shock of the gaze, his certainties collapse: European conceptions of religion and, mainly, of politics, resulting from blind order and imposed by a despotic regime, fall apart. From that moment, the Persians are no longer the same. Disconcerted by their travel experiences, their spirits open to the world and can thus compare the multiplicity of cultures. It is the meditation on the journey that will provoke the change. Drawing on the journey of his characters, Montesquieu proposes to the reader a relative gaze that enlarges understanding. It is the look-cognoscendi: a restless, unsatisfied sign of change that requires intervention in the world.

Montesquieu's travelers, with a careful and thoughtful gaze, are not like modern tourists, who, so often hurried, prefer "monuments to human beings."[67] The quick trips do not allow the in-depth knowledge of the inhabitants, which takes time. That is why the Persians stay in Paris for ten years, from 1710 to 1720: Travel cannot be touristic because it is the philosophical exercise of contact with the other.[68] Usbek symbolizes the constant struggle between sensibility and reason, between tradition and progress, between freedom and oppression. And is it not true that, for the traveler, the encounter of the other can enrich his knowledge of himself? Through the surprised gaze of the Persian visitors, Montesquieu wishes not only to apprehend the diversity of things and the world, but also to order phenomena methodically, in such a way that one might have answers about oneself and the world: A man of spirit like Usbek cannot close his eyes before a disconcerting world. Only the attentive and thoughtful gaze grants him the understanding to know and tolerate. In this sense, we agree with Genevieve Lloyd, when she evokes the cosmopolitanism of Persian travelers as a way of claiming tolerance for cultural difference. In her words:

> In *Persian Letters*, the emphasis is not on the requirements of eternal happiness but on understanding how knowledge and power operate in

66. Grosrichard, *Structure du sérail*, p.33.
67. Tzvetan Todorov, *Nous et les autres* (Paris, 1989), p.453.
68. According to Genevieve Lloyd, "Rica is more susceptible to the transient delights of the passing moment. His cosmopolitanism in some ways anticipates that of Baudelaire's flaneur celebrated by Walter Benjamin—a delight in the movement of crowds on European streets." "Imagining difference: cosmopolitanism in Montesquieu's *Persian letters*," *Constellations* 19:3 (2012), p.480–93 (484).

> this life. The content of "tolerance" is here suffused with cosmopolitanism, which, as we have seen, is enacted in the form of *Persian Letters* as well as articulated in its content. What emerges is the possibility of a "tolerance" not associated with a granting of concessions from a passive standpoint of presumed moral superiority or greater access to truth. "Tolerance" here becomes, rather, a readiness to enter—through imagination and empathy—into an active and open-ended engagement with difference.[69]

Therefore, in our interpretation of the *Persian letters*, we emphasize two points. First, the Persians in Paris cannot restrict themselves to a simple journey of exoticism because it is a philosophical journey.[70] Through them, Montesquieu shows the French the commonplaces to which they are accustomed, which may lead them to understand the other by criticism of themselves. It is in this difficult and delicate terrain that the author of the *Persian letters* defends the theme of tolerance in an environment in which there was little space for this type of claim. The two Persians thus symbolize the light of knowledge that comes from the East, and which frees the Europeans from ignorance through the work of reason and understanding and leads them to tolerance. In this sense, the *Persian letters* remain current and "at the service of thought."[71] The second argument is that the novel presents itself as an experimental space in which other worlds are possible. This means that there is a refusal of geographical or political immobility, which is why they move from city to city and country to country in a constant, unrelenting search for different worlds. If the troglodyte fable in its first phase elaborates a critique of the unstructured and corrupt society, in the second part it points to a kind of happy, tolerant, and regimented society. The invention of the new is presented by the allegorical and provocative record. This means that the reader will have a lot of work to do: rework these ideas and think about a better world in which tolerance has a central place.

69. Lloyd, "Imagining difference," p.492.
70. "Ses Persans ne représentent pas une peuplade exotique dont il faille imaginer de toutes pièces le système politique […] Ils sont les représentants crédibles d'une civilisation concurrante de l'occidentale et mise d'emblée sur le même pied […] La démarche de Montesquieu n'est pas imaginative mais rationnelle." Eléonore Reverzy, Romuald Fonkoua, and Pierre Hartmann, *Les Fables du politique des Lumières à nos jours* (Strasbourg, 2012), p.22.
71. Roger Mercier, "Le roman dans les *Lettres persanes*: structure et signification," *Revue des sciences humaines* 107 (1962), p.345–56.

George Lyttelton's *Letters from a Persian*: Persia and politics in eighteenth-century English fiction

Cyrus Masroori

There is a tradition that treats the Enlightenment as an intellectual enterprise standing above transitory affairs and "prejudiced" polemics that address profane political struggles. Consequently, the politics of the Enlightenment, how concepts associated with the Enlightenment were "weaponized" in political battles, has not received the scrutiny that it deserves. The revolutionary who cried for liberty during the American or the French revolution has been recognized as a voice rooted in the Enlightenment. However, the encounters where concepts such as liberty, toleration, and equality were utilized to oust an opponent from royal favor, advance a policy, or win an election have received by far less attention.

One may suggest that most of those political battles were not of enough impact to deserve scrutiny by students of intellectual history. Such a suggestion is misplaced. As this chapter shows, political discourse, sometimes launched for causes which could be labeled as mundane, myopic, and even personal, could lead to (intentional or unintentional) conceptual developments important to the study of ideas. The intellectual legacy of the Enlightenment's engagement with Persia developed in response to different contingencies. A significant part of that engagement advanced in the context of moral debates and religious disputes. George Lyttelton's *Letters from a Persian in England, to his friend at Ispahan* provides an important example of utilizing Persia primarily in response to a specific and explicit political campaign. Lyttelton's "Persian" introduced a new language and promoted an important discourse, which took the stage at the heart of one of the most heated political campaigns in eighteenth-century England. In doing so, however, it also contributed significantly to the political discourse of its time.

George Lyttelton (1709–1773) was the eldest son of Sir Thomas Lyttelton, a nephew of Sir Richard Temple (Viscount Cobham,

1675–1749), and a cousin of William Pitt (1708–1778). After attending Eton and Oxford, Lyttelton was sent on a Continental grand tour in 1728, which among other places took him to France and Italy. After his return to England (1730), Lyttelton was elected to the House of Commons in 1735. A couple of years later, he began serving as the secretary to Fredrick, prince of Wales (1707–1751). In 1755 Lyttelton was appointed Chancellor of the Exchequer, and a year later he was elevated to the peerage, becoming a member of the House of Lords. Lyttelton authored several texts, including *Observations on the reign and character of Queen Elizabeth* (1730, unprinted), *Observations on the life of Cicero* (London, Lawton Gilliver, 1733), *Letters from a Persian in England, to his friend at Ispahan* (London, J. Millan, 1735), *Observations on the conversion and apostleship of St. Paul: in a letter to Gilbert West, Esq.* (London, R. Dodsley, 1747), *Dialogues of the dead* (London, Sandby, 1760), and *History of the life of Henry II* (London, J. Dodsley, 1767).[1] Some of Lyttelton's books, including *Letters from a Persian in England, to his friend at Ispahan*, went through multiple editions.

Alexander Pope (1688–1744) mentions Lyttelton in his *Epistles of Horace* with admiration.[2] Similarly, James Thomson (1700–1748) referred to him in *The Seasons*.[3] Finally, Henry Fielding (1707–1754) dedicated *Tom Jones* to Lyttelton. A significant part of Lyttelton's political life was defined in terms of his opposition to Robert Walpole (1676–1745), who served as Prime Minister from 1721 to 1742. As a member of the Cobhamite faction, Lyttelton was politically associated with Richard Temple and William Pitt. Opposition against Walpole also put Lyttelton in the circle of Henry St. John Bolingbroke (1678–1751).

Letters from a Persian in England, to his friend at Ispahan (hereafter, *Letters from a Persian*) was reprinted three times the year that it was first published (1735).[4] In the same year it was also translated into French. That the book's impact was substantial is supported by the fact that Lyttelton's opponents rushed to discredit it immediately by publishing two responses in the same year it was published. The first response

1. Lyttelton also produced a number of poems, and some of his speeches in Parliament are also noteworthy.
2. Alexander Pope, *The First book of the epistles of Horace*, epistle 1, lines 23–30.
3. James Thomson, *The Seasons*, "Spring," lines 865–929.
4. Other editions of the book appeared in 1744, 1761, and 1793. All references in this article are to George Lyttelton, *Letters from a Persian in England to his friend at Ispahan*, 6th ed. (Dublin, Geo and Ewing, 1761).

was a book, *The Persian letters, continued: the second volume of letters from Selim at London, to Mirza at Isphahan* (London, A. Davis, 1735). This book, virtually as long as Lyttelton's *Letters from a Persian*, was also reprinted in 1735. Simultaneously, another attack against Lyttelton was launched via an essay entitled *The Persian strip'd of his disguise, or Remarks on a late libel, intitled Letters from a Persian in England to his friend at Ispahan* (Dublin, S. Power, 1735). In 1748, Edward Moore (1712–1757) wrote *The Trial of Selim the Persian: for divers high crimes and misdemeanours* (London, Cooper), a poem which defended Lyttelton against his enemies. Finally, it is worthy of notice that *Letters from a Persian* was remarkable enough to be included in the list of books recommended by Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826) to his son-in-law, Robert Skipwith.[5]

Other pseudo-Oriental letters, clearly influenced by Lyttelton, appeared soon after. Among them were *Letters from an Armenian in Ireland: to his friends at Trebisond* (London, W. Owen, 1757), and Elizabeth Hamilton's *Translation of the letters from a Hindoo rajah* (London, G. G. and J. Robinson, 1796). Horace Walpole's *Letter from Xo Ho, a Chinese philosopher at London to his friend Lien Chi, at Peking* (London, Graham, 1757) is also both influenced by and a response to Lyttelton's *Letters from a Persian*. This single letter of about five pages, written by one of Lyttelton's chief foes, takes the polemical genre of Oriental letters to its extreme. Walpole's *Letter from Xo Ho* was followed by *An Answer from Lien Chi, in Pekin, to Xo Ho, the Chinese philosopher in London* (London, M. Cooper, 1757), which interestingly adopted the approach taken by *The Persian letters, continued*, but to ridicule Walpole. Finally, we should mention Oliver Goldsmith's *Citizen of the world*.[6] The text achieved reasonable success among English readers, but its French translation received by far more attention.[7] While it has been suggested that the text was influenced by Horace Walpole, Levette Joy Davidson shows that the greatest influence on Goldsmith appears to be Lyttelton's.[8]

Lyttelton's *Letters from a Persian* was the first text in the Persian letters genre written in English. Srinivas Aravamudan suggests that

5. For the title of these books, see https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-01-02-0056 (last accessed January 27, 2021). Also, see Alf J. Mapp Jr., *Thomas Jefferson, America's paradoxical patriot* (Lanham, MD, 1987), p.60.
6. First appeared as a set of letters in the *Public ledger* in 1750.
7. Katherine Redding, "A study of the influence of Oliver Goldsmith's *Citizen of the world* upon the *Cartas marruecas* of José Cadalso," *Hispanic review* 2:3 (1934), p.226–34.
8. Levette Jay Davidson, "Forerunners of Goldsmith's *The Citizen of the world*," *Modern language notes* 36:4 (1921), p.215–20.

the book "made Montesquieu truly English."[9] Pat Rogers goes further. Comparing Lyttelton's *Letters from a Persian* to Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* he suggests that Lyttelton "wisely abstains from excessive fictional intrigue with which Montesquieu complicates his main thematic lines."[10] Lyttelton borrows from Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* a few points, including Persian characters, use of satire in social and political critique, and the utilization of a fabricated Orient to engage with European (and in this case particularly English) identity.[11] Mirza is a figure common to both texts, and Usbek is mentioned a couple of times in Lyttelton's *Letters from a Persian*. Both authors also include letters to Shia clergymen. Like Montesquieu, Lyttelton insists that the letters he has translated were written by a Persian. Finally, Lyttelton continues Montesquieu's story of troglodytes.

By contrast, there is little mention of Selim's wives in *Letters from a Persian*. In one letter, in which he asks an Englishwoman for her daughter's hand in marriage, Selim mentions that he has several wives in Persia.[12] Also at the end of the book, Selim reveals his love for a married woman. He stays faithful to his moral standards, but he can no longer bear staying in England and decides to return to Persia.[13] Another difference between *Lettres persanes* and *Letters from a Persian* is that, while Usbek's letters are dated, Selim's letters are not. One may speculate that Montesquieu was more concerned than Lyttelton to justify the authenticity of his "Persian" letters.

The most distinctive characteristic of Lyttelton's *Letters from a Persian* is its explicitly political identity, as the text is unapologetically polemical. Christine Gerrard argues that "Lyttelton was not the first to turn Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* to political purpose," using as evidence a letter attributed to Philip Wharton and published in Mist's *Weekly journal* (August 28, 1728).[14] This one-page letter signed by Amos

9. Srinivas Aravamudan, *Enlightenment Orientalism: resisting the rise of the novel*, Kindle ed. (Chicago, IL, 2011), location 1945.
10. Pat Rogers, "Introduction," in George Lyttelton, *The Persian letters, being letters of a Persian in England to his friend at Ispahan, originally published in London in 1735* (Cleveland, OH, 1988), p.xxiv.
11. Both *Lettres persanes* and its English translation, which first appeared in 1722, were available to Lyttelton. It is also conceivable that he met Montesquieu while he was visiting England.
12. Lyttelton, *Letters*, p.58–59.
13. Lyttelton, *Letters*, p.225–26.
14. Christine Gerrard, *The Patriot opposition to Walpole: politics, poetry, and national myth, 1725–1742* (Oxford, 1994), p.39, n.75.

Dudge, a pseudonym associated with the duke of Wharton, is not in the tradition of Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes*. To begin with, its purported author is a European who has traveled to Persia. Also, while one can justifiably hypothesize that the letter utilizes Persia to criticize the British politics of the day, it is also a relatively accurate account of Persian political events. In contrast, Montesquieu and Lyttelton show very little interest in current events in Persia. It is also important to remember that the literature warning Europeans by referring to the social and political conditions in Persia has a much longer history than Wharton's letter in 1728. While Wharton's letter could have been inspirational to Lyttelton, it is far from turning "Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* to political purpose."

Montesquieu and Lyttelton's choices of names for the main figures in their fictions are quite intriguing. Usbek was a name that would be virtually impossible to find in Isfahan, as it was closely associated with the Safavids' enemies on the eastern borders of Persia.[15] Selim was also a very unlikely name to find in that city, as it was a name common among the Ottoman Turks, Persia's Sunni enemies to the west. It is certainly odd that the two earliest texts of purported Persian letters present main characters who, judging from their names, would be very unlikely to be Persians. There is little doubt that Montesquieu was aware of the abhorrence Shia Persians felt about Uzbeks. Both Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (1605–1689) and Jean Baptiste Chardin (1643–1713), whose accounts of journeying to Persia were in Montesquieu's library, pointed to the hostility between Uzbeks and Persians.[16] We also know that Lyttelton was aware of the hostilities between the Ottoman Turks and Safavid Persia, since he makes explicit reference to them.[17]

Two of the Ottoman caliphs who lived before Lyttelton were named Selim. Selim I (*c.*1466–1520) was widely known for his successful campaigns in the Middle East and North Africa, which extended Ottoman rule over Egypt, Syria, and parts of today's Saudi Arabia. Selim II (1524–1574) ruled the Ottoman empire during the time

15. Uzbeks (sometimes spelled Usbecs) are a Turkic people who make over 80 percent of the population of today's Uzbekistan.
16. Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *The Six voyages of John Baptiste Tavernier through Turkey into Persia and East-Indies* (London, John Starkey, 1678), p.162; Jean Baptiste Chardin, *Voyages de M. le chevalier Chardin, en Perse et autres lieux de l'Orient*, ed. L. Langles, 10 vols. (Paris, 1811), vol.3, p.9.
17. For example, see Lyttelton, *Letters*, p.75.

of Elizabeth I, whose reign was studied by Lyttelton. While not particularly known as a remarkable ruler, Selim II succeeded his father Suleiman the Magnificent (1494–1566), who was very well known in Europe, since he personally led the Ottoman invasion of Serbia and Hungary, and unsuccessfully laid siege to Vienna (1529). Suleiman also launched one of the most successful military campaigns against Safavid Persia between 1532 and 1555.[18]

It has been suggested that Lyttelton's writings are but an echo of Henry St. John Bolingbroke's ideas.[19] Little evidence supports that suggestion, which appears to be first made by one of Lyttelton's foes, Horace Walpole. Comparing *Letters from a Persian* to Bolingbroke's *Dissertation upon parties*, printed first as a series of articles by *The Craftsman* during 1733–1734, one finds substantial differences in both style and contents between the two works. In style, Bolingbroke's *Dissertation* is made of lackluster political essays, while Lyttelton's *Letters from a Persian* is an example of fiction enriched by political satire.

In content, one of the most striking differences is that Bolingbroke, while known for his opposition to the Church of England, intentionally avoids any criticism of that institution and its members. In contrast, Lyttelton frequently attacks the Church in a language similar to the Cambridge Neo-Platonists. In fact, it is safe to say that in *Letters from a Persian* no other institution or group of people is as frequently attacked as the Church of England and its clergy.[20] Another significant difference between Bolingbroke and Lyttelton is their respective views on monarchy. Bolingbroke was a monarchist who believed in hereditary succession, as he unequivocally stated: "I esteem Monarchy above any other form of government, and hereditary Monarchy above elective."[21] Lyttelton, following Montesquieu, viewed monarchy as a

18. Another Selim well known in Lyttelton's time was Selim Khan Girai, a seventeenth-century Ottoman general who successfully led some campaigns during the Ottoman–Polish wars of 1672–1676.
19. *The Persian strip'd of his disguise, or Remarks on a late libel, intitled Letters from a Persian in England to his friend at Ispahan* (Dublin, S. Power, 1735), p.3. See also Gerrard, *The Patriot opposition*, p.39; and Sophia Rosenfeld, "Before democracy: the production and uses of common sense," *The Journal of modern history* 80:1 (March 2008), p.1–54 (32).
20. Gerrard states in passing that Lyttelton's "attack on the bishops was clearly independently motivated" (Gerrard, *The Patriot opposition*, p.39, 34).
21. Henry St. John Bolingbroke, *Idea of a patriot king*, in *Political writings* (Cambridge, 1997), p.217–94 (226–27).

consequence of a decline in human virtue. In addition, he argued that hereditary monarchy is a further sign of a society's corruption.[22]

Given that Lyttelton had written the first draft of *Letters from a Persian* in 1728, years before Bolingbroke's publication of his *Dissertation*, we can speculate about three hypotheses: First, one may argue that Lyttelton's *Letters from a Persian* was written independently of any significant influence by Bolingbroke. Second, it could be said that the printed version of *Letters from a Persian* was in fact substantially influenced by Bolingbroke's ideas. Finally, the third hypothesis would suggest that it was Bolingbroke who was influenced by Lyttelton, at least in using some of the language of political polemics introduced in the *Letters from a Persian*. In the absence of sufficient evidence, these hypotheses remain subject to debate. However, the second hypothesis appears to be the least plausible one, since there is no evidence that between the return of Bolingbroke from exile (1723) and Lyttelton's departure for his Continental tour (1728) there was any contact between the two. This is not surprising, given that Lyttelton was too young to be taken seriously by Bolingbroke, even if the two had met.

In addition, Lyttelton's acquaintance with Bolingbroke was through his uncle Lord Cobham (Richard Temple), and due to his opposition to Walpole. But Cobham did not oppose Walpole until 1733. Meanwhile, as Rose Mary Davis has pointed out, by 1733 Lyttelton had already written *Observations on the reign and character of Queen Elizabeth*, which contained "many principals of Bolingbroke's *Dissertation upon parties*."[23] Finally, while there is no mention of "orient" and "oriental" in Bolingbroke's *Dissertation*, in the first page of *The Patriot king* Bolingbroke makes a statement taken right out of Lyttelton's *Letters from a Persian*, declaring the "oriental" subjects slaves to their monarchs. It is also noteworthy that originally Bolingbroke had dedicated *The Patriot king* to Lyttelton.[24] At the end, we have no reason to conclude that Lyttelton was (at least substantially) in intellectual debt to Bolingbroke. Meanwhile, although Lyttelton's debt to Montesquieu is undeniable, as we shall see here, it is also obvious that *Letters from a Persian* enjoys substantial conceptual originality.

22. See letter 16, p.40–42, and 18, p.44–45.
23. Rose Mary Davis, *The Good Lord Lyttelton: a study in eighteenth-century politics and culture* (Bethlehem, PA, 1939), p.35–36.
24. Ananda Vittal Rao, *A Minor Augustan: being the life and works of George, Lord Lyttelton, 1709–1773* (Calcutta, 1934), p.161.

The fabricated Persia in Lyttelton's *Letters from a Persian*

Persia had a dual role in the construction of the modern European identity. First, it played a part in establishing the boundaries that separated "the European" from "others." Second, it provided an umbrella of immunity for critics of the early modern European status quo, making both utopian and dystopian models available to European advocates of reform during the Enlightenment. The commonly recognized Persia in the European Enlightenment was, by and large, a fabrication. Early modern Europe had little interest in the "real contemporary Persia" beyond a distant potential ally against the Turks, and an imagined land of fabled wealth and exotic sexual fantasy. It is true that some travelers who visited Persia reported their observations in some detail, but reading volume after volume of their travel diaries was not the source of knowledge of Persia for the average literate European. Instead, many Europeans became familiar with Persians primarily through the writings of Denis Veiras, Montesquieu, and Lyttelton, whose Persian heroes, Sevarias, Usbek, and Selim, had very little in common with the Persians of the Safavid era.

What was the purpose of fabricating the Persian? The predecessors to Edward Said's Orientalists were rarely interested in any systematic study of Persia, or a methodical description of the Orient which would facilitate and justify colonialism.[25] Instead, they used Persia as a platform for diverse domestic purposes, to criticize various European institutions and practices, and to shape what it is to be French, English, or European. It is this domestic utility of an invented Persian that is bluntly present in Lyttelton's *Letters from a Persian*. In reading Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* one can engage in a hermeneutical enterprise, entertaining the discovery of a "hidden chain." As such, the *Lettres persanes* may claim a greater value for contemplation than *Letters from a Persian*. There is not much "hidden" in *Letters from a Persian*, which blatantly presents itself as a political manifesto. However, as we shall see shortly, this explicit partisan nature does not undermine the text's significant contribution to political theory. Lyttelton utilizes "the Persian," in a much more immediate and concrete way than Montesquieu, to discredit his political opponents. In that very process

25. Where we find organized studies, for instance in the travel reports of Europeans who visited Persia, the purpose was far from the colonial agenda of Saidean Orientalists.

his fabricated Persian anticipates several topics vital to the conceptual debates of modern political thought.

It is apparent that Lyttelton had some information about Persia.[26] He was aware that Persians were Shia, and hostile toward Sunnis. In a satirical statement, he even compares the Whigs and the Tories to the followers of Osman and Ali.[27] Lyttelton also knows that the Shia clergy are called mullahs (in places misspelled as "Mollac," which appears to be a printing error), and two of his letters are to a mullah.[28] Lyttelton also knows about the Safavid's most famous monarch, Shah Abbas. In fact, he fabricates a story about Shah Abbas, describing how he decided to abandon a life of excess and luxury, something that the shah never did.[29]

Evidence signaling that Lyttelton could have had some current information about Persia is found in letter 73 (p.198), where he mentions an Englishman's positive view about a Persian statesman named Kouli (Qoli) Khan. The reference appears to be to Tahmasp Qoli Khan (1688–1747), a highly praised general who by the late 1720s had risen to the most prominent position in the Safavid government, and was crowned as Nadir Shah in 1736. Meanwhile, Lyttelton feels little commitment to providing his readers with extensive and accurate information or consistent accounts about Persia and Persians. That is because such information and accounts would be of little value to his project. Yet, his fictitious portrayal would be the image of Persians most effectively and durably left in the minds of the many English readers who learned about Persia through his book.

Lyttelton utilizes Persia and Selim in two general ways. First, he draws a dystopian image of the Orient and Persia to warn against specific institutions and practices, and to challenge certain concepts. For instance, he claims that the idea of divine right originated in

26. Thomas Herbert's travel report, *A Description of the Persian monarchy* (London, W. Stansby and J. Bloome, 1634), Chardin's *Travels in Persia, 1673–1677* (London, J. Smith, 1720), as well as reports related to the Shirley brothers were among the English sources available to Lyttelton. In addition, it is conceivable that he knew of travel accounts by French and Italian travelers to Persia.
27. Osman (aka Uthman) was the third caliph, who was killed in 656 during a riot by supporters of the first Shia imam, Ali. The event contributed to the significant hostilities between the Shia and the Sunni that followed.
28. It is rather curious that he chooses Kouli, which means "gypsy" in Persian, for this clergyman. However, he could have meant Qoli, which means "servant." But that is not a name used by Shia clergy either.
29. Lyttelton, *Letters*, p.208–209.

Islam.[30] Classifying (in Montesquieu's tradition) the "sophi" and the "Turk" as despots analogous to eunuchs, Lyttelton warns not only that an absolute monarch does not enjoy any greater respect than his constitutional counterpart, but also that his throne and personal safety are constantly in danger.[31] Second, at times Persia also plays a utopian role for Lyttelton, as he praises Persians and claims that some of their institutions are superior to their English counterparts. An example is the judicial system. He points out that in Persia the cadi (*qazi*/judge) charges a sum to make a judgment. In England the judge does not charge the two sides of a dispute, but "the attorney, the advocate, every officer and retainer on the court, raise treble that sum upon the client."[32] On other occasions, the Orient/Persia is used to shame the Europeans/English about their institutions and practices. For example, Lyttelton argues that the English, like the Persians, practice polygamy "only leaving out the ceremony."[33] On another occasion he declares that even the Persians, who are considered slaves to their ruler, are protected from having their correspondence reviewed by government agents, which is practiced by some European states.[34]

An important example of utilization of Persia by Lyttelton is in his call for empathy. In letter 40, Selim has a memorable visit to a noblewoman's salon.[35] He reports, "She treated me as a stranger that came to see, not like a monster that came to be seen; and seemed more desirous to appear in a good light herself to me, though a Persian, than to set me in a ridiculous one to her company."[36] Calling for such empathetic hospitality was not a common trend in early modern Europe. Even Rousseauian romanticism, which appeared long after *Letters from a Persian*, largely ignores the prerequisite of empathy for arriving at any genuine sympathy toward the noble savage.[37] In the same letter, Lyttelton suggests that the English

30. Lyttelton, *Letters*, p.173.
31. Lyttelton, *Letters*, p.114–15.
32. Lyttelton, *Letters*, p.67. Also, see Lyttelton, *Letters*, p.202.
33. Lyttelton, *Letters*, p.59.
34. Lyttelton, *Letters*, p.146.
35. There were a number of intellectual female salonists in England during Lyttelton's time, among them Elizabeth Montagu (1718–1800) who had close intellectual ties with Lyttelton.
36. Lyttelton, *Letters*, p.117–18.
37. For a discussion of empathy in eighteenth-century Europe, particularly in the writings of Adam Smith and Diderot, see Helmut J. Schneider, "Empathy, imagination, and dramaturgy: a means of society in eighteenth-century theory,"

and the Persian can understand each other based on a common language. On his encounter with an Englishman in the same salon Selim writes:

> His wit was all founded on good sense; it was wit which a Persian could comprehend as easily as an Englishman; where as most I have met with from other men, who are ambitious of being admired for that accomplishment, is confined not only to the taste of their own countrymen, but to that of their own peculiar set of friends.[38]

One can argue that the cosmopolitan accommodation admired here is contingent on one's multicultural competency. Given the scarcity of the means to achieve such competency at the time, observations from the vantage point of a fabricated Persian give the typical English reader of the book the opportunity to reexamine her prejudices. Cosmopolitanism requires the tension between Selim's "foreign and out of the way" observations on the one hand, and the undeniable sensibility of this "lover of liberty['s]" comments on the other hand. Lyttelton calls for a dialogical engagement to dislodge prejudices and partiality, whose prerequisite is encountering strangers. The consequence is achieving a transcultural reasonability. Thus, Selim enjoys the "impartiality of the foreigner" because his journey to England has afforded him the encounter with "others." In addition to his call for empathy, Lyttelton's Persian anticipated a number of concepts central to modern European discourse.

Anticipating Rousseau's criticism of the modern arts and sciences

Rousseau, as he states in his *Confessions*, experienced a revolution upon reflection on the famous question asked by the Academy of Dijon in 1749 regarding the moral impact of the arts and sciences.[39] His well-known response was that civilization has corrupted morality through arts and sciences, promoting idleness and ruining some of the greatest civilizations. Samuel Chew has pointed out that Lyttelton could have been a source of influence on Rousseau's conclusion that

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in *Empathy: epistemic problems and cultural-historical perspectives of a cross-disciplinary concept*, ed. Vanessa Lux and Sigrid Weigel (London, 2017), p.203–21.

38. Lyttelton, *Letters*, p.118.

39. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Les Confessions*, in *Œuvres complètes de J.-J. Rousseau: Les Confessions, discours, politique* (Paris, 1852), p.1–375 (202–203).

the arts and sciences have (or could have) a corrupting impact.[40] We know that Lyttelton's *Letters from a Persian* was available to Rousseau, since it had been translated and published in French some fifteen years before the *Discourse on the arts and sciences*.

Chew makes two important observations. First, he points out that both Lyttelton and Rousseau use the language of satire in their respective works. Second, and more importantly, Chew shows the proximity of the particular language Rousseau used in refining his views in the *Discourse on the arts and sciences* to the language presented by Lyttelton in his *Letters from a Persian*. In Chew's words:

> [I]t is convenient to quote the passage which best sums up the position that Rousseau finally adopts: "I never said that luxury was the offspring of the sciences, but that they were born together and that the one was hardly ever found without the other being present also. Here is how I would arrange this genealogy. The primary source of evil is inequality: from inequality came wealth; for the words rich and poor are relative and wherever men are equal there will be neither rich nor poor. Luxury and idleness sprang from wealth; from luxury came the fine arts and from idleness the sciences." This is precisely Lyttelton's argument.[41]

Meanwhile, Chew ignores two other points made by Lyttelton which also appear in Rousseau's writings. First, like Lyttelton, Rousseau expresses a general dislike for philosophizing. Lyttelton calls philosophy "idle curiosity […] into things that don't concern us."[42] Philosophy replaces "quiet temper" and "love of truth" with "fondness for dispute" and "habit of evasion."[43] For Lyttelton philosophy is responsible for irreligiosity and moral relativism. Further, because of philosophy, some of the best men are taken away from public service and into philosophizing. Lyttelton regrets that the most useful part of society, those engaged in production of goods, should support the least useful part of society, the philosophers.[44] In a satirical statement, Lyttelton's Selim mentions an English philosopher who wants to go to Persia to commit suicide by overdosing on opium.[45]

40. Samuel C. Chew, "An English precursor of Rousseau," *Modern language notes* 32:6 (1917), p.321–37.
41. Chew, "An English precursor," p.334.
42. Lyttelton, *Letters*, p.49.
43. Lyttelton, *Letters*, p.50.
44. Lyttelton, *Letters*, p.51.
45. Lyttelton, *Letters*, p.115–16.

Very much like Lyttelton, Rousseau's overall assessment of philosophy is negative. As Christopher Kelly has observed, "Rousseau rarely has a good word for philosophy or philosophers. Instead of referring to himself as a philosopher, from at least the midpoint of his career as an author, he consistently called himself 'a friend of truth.'" Strikingly similar to Lyttelton, Rousseau argues that "rather than being genuinely motivated by desire for truth [philosophers] characteristically are driven by a desire to feel superior to other people."[46] Again, closely resembling Lyttelton, in the *Discourse on the sciences and arts* Rousseau finds the topics studied by philosophy trivial, as he asks philosophers:

> Répondez-moi, dis-je, vous de qui nous avons reçu tant de sublimes connaissances; quand vous ne nous auriez jamais rien appris de ces choses, en serions-nous moins nombreux, moins bien gouvernés, moins redoutables, moins florissants ou plus pervers? Revenez donc sur l'importance de vos productions; et si les travaux des plus éclairés de nos savants et de nos meilleurs citoyens nous procurent si peu d'utilité, dites-nous ce que nous devons penser de cette foule d'écrivains obscurs et de lettrés oisifs, qui oisifs, qui [*sic*] dévorent en pure perte la substance de l'Etat.

Repeating Lyttleton, Rousseau continues "Mais ces vains et futiles déclamateurs vont de tous côtés, armés de leurs funestes paradoxes; sapant les fondements de la foi, et anéantissant la vertu. Ils sourient dédaigneusement à ces vieux mots de patrie et de religion, et consacrent leurs talents et leur philosophie à détruire et avilir tout ce qu'il y a de sacré parmi les hommes."[47]

Meanwhile, Lyttelton's argument about how the golden age came to an end is more specific and arguably more plausible than Rousseau's. The real threat to the noble savages' community is the neighboring civilized society. When the two confront, the former has little choice but to either become enslaved by the latter, or engage in a process which brings its golden age to an end. Lyttelton's proposed response to this inevitable and irreversible decline is not a speculation about government based on "general will," but a representative democracy.

46. Christopher Kelly, *Rousseau on philosophy, morality, and religion* (Lebanon, NH, 2007), p.xxii–xxiv.
47. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur cette question: si le rétablissement des sciences et des arts a contribué à épurer les mœurs*, in *Œuvres de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, vol.1 (Amsterdam, Marc-Michel Rey, 1769), p.5–44 (25–26).

It is this form of government that allows the closest proximity to the golden age by turning inequality into an engine for progress. Lyttelton suggests that given the irreversibility of becoming civilized, representative democracy would make every member of society better off than under any other form of government, resembling a Rawlsian state of fairness in which unequal distribution of wealth benefits the worst off.

Anticipating Madison's observations on factions

A concept pointed to by both Lyttelton and Madison is the impact of factions. Madison is celebrated for his observations on the nature and function of factions. Lyttelton, as did Madison later, considers good government a matter of sound institutional arrangements and not individual virtue.[48] In fact, Lyttelton explicitly and implicitly accuses members of the court, ministers of the government, the clergy, and members of Parliament of corruption. However, despite such widespread corruption, in his assessment England is a free country. Lyttelton provides an explanation for this otherwise perplexing outcome. He agrees, as did Madison later, that factions are corrupting. He also associates factions with private property, and links protection of private property to national prosperity and liberty.[49] In a satirical statement Lyttelton compares Parliament to the seraglio, and the parliamentary factions and their leaders to eunuchs and women. Thus, just as the "honor of the husband is preserved by the malice of the eunuchs and mutual jealousies of the women," the "animosities and emulation" of factions "secure the Commonwealth."[50] Therefore, while factions are costly, corrupt, and lead to gridlock, through competing with each other they put limits on power. This mechanism is absent in absolute monarchies, and consequently the citizens are enslaved.[51]

Madison is particularly given credit for the originality of his argument that, instead of removing factions, as an absolute monarchist might have suggested, the common good should be protected and promoted by two means. First, factions should be prevented from dictating public policy based on their respective narrow interests. This

48. See Lyttelton, *Letters*, p.62; and Lyttelton, *Letters*, p.179.
49. Lyttelton, *Letters*, p.150.
50. Lyttelton, *Letters*, p.55–56.
51. Lyttelton, *Letters*, p.156–57.

was not to be achieved via strangling factions through absolutism, but rather by having so many interests competing against each other that none would be able to take over. Second, Madison argued that, where there is a multitude of factions, they could be balanced against each other in a way that each would check the behavior of the government as well as other factions, making it difficult for any particular interest to dictate public policy.[52] As we saw, this is precisely what Lyttelton pointed out in *Letters from a Persian.*

Anticipating Mill's concept of "cultural tyranny" of the majority

While concern over the political tyranny of the majority has a long history going back to the critiques of Athenian democracy, concern for the cultural tyranny of the majority, particularly when directed against intellectuals, is a modern concept associated with an appreciation for deviance, which was absent from ancient and medieval discourses. John Stuart Mill's *On liberty* is frequently credited as pioneering an explicit concern for protection of the intellectual minority from the cultural tyranny of the majority via enforcement of what is perceived as customary.

R. B. Friedman suggests that Mill's concern here could be traced back to Alexis de Tocqueville.[53] However, Lyttelton stated the same concern nearly a century before Tocqueville. Thus, in letter 15 of *Letters from a Persian*, Lyttelton observes that "people of sense are forced to submit in […] many […] silly customs, to a tyrannical majority." Lyttelton makes a satirical observation that the outcome of this tyranny preserves "a certain degree of equality that providence intended among mankind."[54] This is the essence of Mill's concern in *On liberty*, where he is alarmed that "society has now fairly got the better of individuality," and that political tyranny of the majority, where it has been kept in check, has been replaced with the majority's social or cultural tyranny. This is the tyranny of the masses, who "exercise choice only among things commonly done," and have no

52. See James Madison's *Federalist number 10.*
53. R. B. Friedman, "A new exploration of Mill's essay *On liberty*," in *John Stuart Mill: critical assessments: volume 1*, ed. John Cunningham Wood (London, 1999), p.290–311 (296).
54. Lyttelton, *Letters*, p.121.

inclination "except for what is customary."[55] The greater problem is that these masses then act to force the intellectuals to denounce their individual inclinations and think and behave as dictated by what is customary.

We may, however, ask: Who are these "people of sense" whose submission to "silly customs" is regretted by Lyttelton? In Mill's case, we can safely speculate that his concern is to preserve the peculiarities of intellectuals such as philosophers, other men of letters, and perhaps artists. Considering Lyttelton's aforementioned criticism of philosophy as "idle curiosity," it is not as easy to see whose eccentricities Lyttelton is concerned with. After dismissing the "speculative sciences," Lyttelton makes it clear that he has his reservations about poets as well. In one letter Selim gives an account of a poet he meets when visiting a prison. The poet "had been bred to merchandize; but, being of too lively an imagination for the dullness of trade, he applied himself to poetry, and, neglecting his other business, was soon reduced" to bankruptcy and ended up in prison. The poet tells Selim that "his lucky confinement has given him more leisure for study." Quitting poetry in favor of mathematics, "he had found out the longitude, and expected to obtain a great reward, which the government promised to the discoverer." At the end of their conversation, however, Selim concludes that the man is "not in his perfect senses."[56]

One way to address the puzzle of who Lyttelton is trying to protect from the cultural tyranny of the majority is to suggest that he separates social critique and political theory from metaphysics. Political theorists and social critics are not wasting their time with pursuing "idle curiosity." They reveal, as Lyttelton did, vices associated with traditions and problems with customary political institutions and practices. That explains why, for instance, in discussing the decline of good government Lyttelton virtually repeats—without hesitation—concepts from Plato's *Republic*.[57]

In addition to anticipating Rousseau, Madison, and Mill, in his *Letters from a Persian* Lyttelton touches on three concepts essential to modernity: freedom of expression, toleration, and education.

55. John Stuart Mill, *On liberty* (Ontario, 2001), p.57.
56. Lyttelton, *Letters*, p.17.
57. Lyttelton, *Letters*, p.44–46.

Defense of freedom of expression

Lyttelton attacks censorship on two fronts. First, he advocates freedom of the press. Using Persia as a straw man, Lyttelton argues that those opposing freedom of the press use moral concerns as an excuse, while their real motive is political. He goes on to state that freedom of the press is essential to liberty and the function of a truly representative government on two grounds. To begin with, if citizens are to be involved in politics, a hallmark of liberty, they need to be informed, and the free press is the most essential tool in securing an informed public. Second, the free press helps prevent corruption. Members of the government, both in legislative and in executive capacities, will be careful not to act licentiously, as such action could be reported by a free press and lead to their ruin.[58] Lyttelton concludes that the press is not simply a passive reporter of events, but an active defender of freedom. Important here is Lyttelton's foresight that it would be better to have no press than a censored press.[59]

Lyttelton's second attack on censorship targets the opening of mail by government agents. Here, Selim interjects that even in Persia and under tyranny, private correspondence is immune from review by state agents. Responding to the suggestion that inspection of private correspondence could prevent plots against the Commonwealth, in a prophetic voice reminding us of Orwell's *1984*, Lyttelton argues that in that case the state should station a spy in each house as well.[60]

Defense of toleration

In letter 33 of *Letters from a Persian* Selim declares, "there is nothing I abhor so much as persecution."[61] Lyttelton follows this statement with a multifaceted defense of toleration. He suggests that persecution is a practice of the mob who cannot accept any deviation from the norm, whether in clothing or religion, while the enlightened elite do not care about either one's appearance or one's religion. Lyttelton reminds his readers that "what was heresy in one age has been orthodoxy in another."[62] Civil wars have been fought on matters as trivial as where

58. Lyttelton, *Letters*, p.143–45.
59. Lyttelton, *Letters*, p.145.
60. Lyttelton, *Letters*, p.145–46.
61. Lyttelton, *Letters*, p.73.
62. Lyttelton, *Letters*, p.73.

a table should be located in a church. In reality, human opinion has always been diverse, which suggests that one should always suspect that one's opinion "may possibly be wrong."[63] We should then renounce use of violence, and use persuasion in our religious disputes. Those who continue to use violence are like Don Quixote, Lyttelton says, who would attack anyone who did not readily acknowledge that Dulcinea del Toboso was the most beautiful woman. The letter concludes that nothing is "so contrary to the nature of affection as constraint."[64] In letter 57 Lyttelton's Selim observes that "all sects are apt to strengthen and encrease by persecution."[65] Finally a few letters later he asks those who practice persecution: "Is this your way of making converts to your faith, by the terror of racks and wheels, instead of reason?"[66]

In letters 34 and 35, Lyttelton uses an allegorical love story to demonstrate how use of force is futile in converting people's hearts. The story takes place during Charles I's reign. Two neighboring aristocratic families decide that their children, Polydore and Emilia, should marry each other. When the time comes for the two to marry, Polydore complains that, although there is nothing wrong with Emilia, he is not interested in marrying her because, taking advantage of his youth, his father has deprived him of his "freedom of choice."[67] As a consequence of the English civil war, Polydore and Emilia are separated from each other. Several years later, Polydore, who had thought Emilia had died, meets a woman whom he falls madly in love with, only to discover that she is Emilia.[68]

Educational reform

Lyttelton recommends two educational reforms in *Letter from a Persian*. First, he argues that, since English women are actively engaged in all aspects of life, "Particular care should be taken in their education, to cultivate their reason, and form their hearts, that they may be equal to the part they have to act. Where great temptations must occur, great virtues are required; and the giddy situations they are plac'd in, or love to place themselves, demand a more than ordinary strength

63. Lyttelton, *Letters*, p.73.
64. Lyttelton, *Letters*, p.74.
65. Lyttelton, *Letters*, p.160.
66. Lyttelton, *Letters*, p.217.
67. Lyttelton, *Letters*, p.75–76.
68. Lyttelton, *Letters*, p.101–107.

of brain." Consequently, "It is the business of a lady to improve and adorn her understanding with as much application as the other sex, and, generally speaking, by methods much the same." Lyttelton makes it explicit that his demand is based on utilitarian grounds, and not advocacy of gender equality. Thus, a Persian woman, "who has no occasion for anything but beauty, because of the confinement in which she lives," must only learn how to make herself beautiful.[69]

Second, Lyttelton is critical of the British system of education on two grounds. First, he finds the practice of physical punishment and other measures of control used at schools destructive to the youth's virtues, as it turns students into "spies and cowards."[70] Second, he finds the schools' curricula to be ineffective and even counter-productive. Instead of becoming masters of English, students are required to "acquire some Greek and Latin words, by this only they are allow'd to try their parts, if they are backward in this, they are pronounc'd dunces, and often made so from discouragement and despair." Consequently, even the best students graduate as masters of "one or two dead languages, but could neither write nor speak" their native language.[71]

Forgotten letters

I have shown some of Lyttelton's contributions to the history of ideas. Against that background, it is puzzling that he has been generally ignored after his death. An attempt to solve that puzzle may start with observing that Lyttelton has been in part dismissed because traditionally his *Letters from a Persian* has been measured against Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes*. Samuel Chew, for example, declares that "a piece of third-rate journeyman-work has succeeded the work of genius."[72] Almost a century later Ros Ballaster writes, "Lyttelton presents little of the psychological depth found in Montesquieu's novel."[73] Similarly, Aravamudan suggests that "It is the literary

69. Lyttelton, *Letters*, p.142–43.
70. Lyttelton, *Letters*, p.139.
71. Lyttelton, *Letters*, p.139.
72. Chew, "An English precursor," p.324.
73. Ros Ballaster, *Fabulous Orients: fiction of the East in England 1662–1785* (Oxford, 2007), p.169–70. It appears that Ballaster was not careful in reading either the *Lettres persanes* nor *Letters from a Persian*. Her statement that "all eighty two letters [in *Letters from a Persian*] are written from Selim to Mirza, two newly invented characters not found in the *Lettres persanes*" is inaccurate on two accounts. First,

complexity of Montesquieu that has made his *Persian Letters* a perennial classic, whereas the thesis-driven version by Lyttelton is hardly read today."[74] The conclusion resulting from such a comparison may hold if one is engaged in literary criticism. However, those concerned with the history of ideas should consider Lyttelton in his own right.

There are four other reasons for Lyttelton's relative obscurity. First, Lyttelton had very powerful enemies who made him subject to sharp attacks and ridicule from the time he joined the opposition to Walpole. Later even some of his earlier allies and friends turned against him. Arguably this impacted Lyttelton's reputation. Second, Lyttelton has been a victim of the tyranny of perennial classics. The virtually undivided and exclusive attention paid to a list of canonic authors by scholars of intellectual history has led to ignoring some important figures in the history of ideas, even when the "perennial classics" themselves have clearly acknowledged their importance. If we submit to the suggestion that Locke, Montesquieu, and Rousseau have said it all, and done it flawlessly, there is little reason to pay attention to the likes of Robert Filmer and Lyttelton. That, as Quentin Skinner has observed, not only ignores their contributions, but also handicaps efforts to better understand the perennial classics.[75]

Third, Lyttelton is also a victim of confusion in assessing the genre and audience of a text. Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* is primarily a work of social and cultural critique. Lyttelton's *Letters from a Persian* is principally (although not exclusively) one of political polemics. Lyttelton writes for the politically "emancipated" post-Glorious Revolution English middle class. At the heart of his work there is the intention to dislodge Walpole's administration.[76] Montesquieu primarily writes for the salon intellectuals. While both Montesquieu and Lyttelton could be assessed as critics of their respective social norms and political institutions, they have different intentions in writing their letters. Neglecting that difference could lead to flawed comparisons of their works.

Finally, Lyttelton is a victim of presentism. Aravamudan is only partially correct when he compares the disparity in the contemporary

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Mirza is a prominent character in Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes*. Second, there are letters in *Letters from a Persian* written to people other than Mirza.

74. Aravamudan, *Enlightenment Orientalism*, location 5520.
75. Quentin Skinner, *Visions of politics*, vol.1: *Regarding method* (Cambridge, 2002).
76. Jerry C. Beasley is among the few who have appreciated this important point. See Jerry C. Beasley, "Portraits of a monster: Robert Walpole and early English prose fiction," *Eighteenth-century studies* 14:4 (1981), p.406–31 (420).

reception of Montesquieu's *Persian letters* and Lyttelton's *Letters from a Persian*.[77] Let us not forget that Marana's *Letters writ by a Turkish spy*, first published in English in 1689, went through twenty-six editions by 1770 in that language alone. Yet, today Marana and *Turkish letters* enjoy little popularity compared to Montesquieu and his *Lettres persanes*. Uncritical use of standards driven from contemporary tastes and values to assess historical texts leads to a skewed understanding of the past, which could hinder appreciation of our intellectual heritage. We should extend our curiosities beyond what is currently fashionable and exciting, in hopes of a better understanding of those very fashions and interests. Doing so encourages us to read *Letters from a Persian*, and see how Lyttelton fabricated a Persian to anticipate ideas associated with some of the most celebrated figures in modern intellectual history.

Conclusion

George Lyttelton engaged his political adversaries in *Letters from a Persian* of 1735. Criticizing the Robert Walpole administration through a fictional Persian allowed Lyttelton to protect himself from the accusations of partisan bias and extremism. The same also provided him with greater flexibility to attack political practices and government policies which he opposed, and call for substantial reforms. Lyttelton's Persia was at times a source of inspiration and at other occasions a basis for admonition. However, neither such inconsistencies nor Lyttelton's overt utilization of Persia for polemical ends prevented *Letters from a Persian* from presenting innovative political concepts. Lyttelton anticipated some of the ideas associated with Rousseau, Madison, and John Stuart Mill, and presented intriguing arguments advocating cosmopolitan empathy, freedom of the press, tolerance, and education reforms. Persia itself was never an important concern: It was simply a masked jumping-off point for criticism of British politics.

Lyttelton's achievements in political thought were significantly influenced by his political campaigns. Opposing Walpole led him to fabricate Selim, and it was Selim who created the space for Lyttelton's contribution to political thought. Without Selim, who shares so little with a typical Persian of the time (such as those described by the likes of Thomas Herbert and Jean Chardin), Lyttelton would have been forced to use different strategies to engage his foes, arguably ending up writing a text conceptually different from *Letters from a Persian*.

77. Aravamudan, *Enlightenment Orientalism*, location 5520.

Voltaire and Persia, or how to use Orient against Occident

Myrtille Méricam-Bourdet

In his work as a historian, Voltaire focuses on Persia during various epochs, especially when he writes his universal history *Essai sur les mœurs*. Only three chapters are devoted to Persia in this work: One (chapter 5) focuses on ancient history, that is to say, before the Muslim conquest. The others (chapters 158 and 193) focus on "modern" Persia, from the sixteenth century onward. Voltaire also develops his thoughts on Persia in *La Philosophie de l'histoire* written in 1765, which later constituted the "Introduction" to the *Essai*. His writings there are devoted to religion, and are not insignificant. Although the chapters on Persia may seem quite straightforward, Voltaire conceives of Persian history and civilization in a particular way that distinguishes him radically from Christian historians such as Bossuet, who insert all "exotic" civilizations into a Judeo-Christian perspective. On the contrary, Voltaire's universal history on China, India, Persia, and Arabia underlines how humanity finds its origins in the East. Voltaire therefore uses Persia's ancient history, and its ancient religion, as a polemical weapon against Judeo-Christianity and the pretensions of Occidental civilization.

These readings are the result of the historian's long process of maturation: The first stage of writing, which concerns only chapter 5, took place in the 1740s and was concerned only with historical events. Voltaire followed the example of great historical compilations such as *Universal history* by George Sale and George Psalmanazar, or *Histoire universelle, sacrée et profane* by the Benedictine Dom Calmet. Voltaire also drew material for his chapter from the *Bibliothèque orientale* of Barthélemy d'Herbelot (1697),[1] which was a general reference on the

1. Barthélemy d'Herbelot de Molainville, *Bibliothèque orientale, ou Dictionnaire universel contenant généralement tout ce qui regarde la connaissance des peuples de l'Orient* (Paris,

Eastern world, as well as from the many travel accounts published since the end of the seventeenth century. The later rewritings of this chapter 5 bear the mark of a new context: The 1760s are a time of struggle against "l'Infâme" that Voltaire leads on all fronts, both in openly polemic texts such as the *Dictionnaire philosophique* and in his historical texts. The evolution of chapter 5 reflects these polemical issues, because Voltaire reexamines the dogmas of a primitive religion, Zoroastrianism, which he had hitherto considered as a curiosity of ancient history. On the basis of a learned source he knew but he had neglected, Thomas Hyde's *Historia religionis veterum persarum* (1700), which had just been republished in 1760 under the title *Veterum persarum* […] *religionis historia*,[2] Voltaire proposes a new reading of Zoroastrianism that demonstrates Judeo-Christianity's immense debt to this religion.

The chapters devoted to the recent history of Persia carry the same polemic mark, although they concern another domain. Written for the 1756 edition, these chapters examine the political nature of the Persian government and respond to the attacks on this type of government carried out by Montesquieu in *L'Esprit des lois*. It will be seen that, in general, Voltaire tends to diminish all the features which may constitute defects in order to propose an image of Persia that would oppose the horrifying descriptions which were made at the time. His perspective must be understood in the context of the history of France and of Europe in general, and it is always a matter of arguing in light of Western concerns.

Zoroastrianism

As we briefly recall, reading the chapters of the *Essai sur les mœurs* must take into account the different layers of writing. At the time of the initial drafting in the 1740s, the historian's intention of opening his universal history to the Eastern regions was obviously not neutral insofar as he asserted against the whole European-centric tradition

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Compagnie de libraires, 1697); this edition is present in Voltaire's library; see *Bibliothèque de Voltaire: catalogue des livres* (Moscow, 1961, hereafter BV), BV1626.

2. See in his library: Thomas Hyde, *Veterum persarum et parthorum et medorum religionis historia*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, E Typographeo Clarendoniano, 1760, BV1705). The registers of the royal library attest that Voltaire borrowed the 1700 edition in 1745; see Ulla Kölving and Andrew Brown, *Voltaire, ses livres & ses lectures: catalogue électronique de sa bibliothèque et relevé de ses autres lectures*, https://c18.net/18/p.php?nom=p_vll (last accessed January 27, 2021).

that the "lights" came from the East.[3] Nevertheless, it was only twenty years later that Voltaire fully developed all of the polemical potentialities of this project, reversing in particular the traditionally defended interpretation of Judeo-Christianity and revelation as the sole source of monotheistic religions. The chapter on the primitive religion of Persia, Zoroastrianism, is thus part of a broader movement which also concerns the religion of the Chinese (chapters 1 and 2), the Indians (chapters 3 and 4), and Islam (chapters 6 and 7). Against all the orthodox readings which saw these religions as heresies, idolatries, or crass superstitions, Voltaire, on the contrary, wants to prove that they are the same as monotheistic religions with respect to everything reason prescribes. This interpretation, which is found in the other chapters that frame this chapter devoted to ancient Persia, is amply developed in the edition of 1769, and chapter 5 presents a particular face that absorbs materials initially published in other works. The critical edition provided in Voltaire's *Œuvres complètes* (Oxford, Voltaire Foundation) attests to the insertion of portions of texts and arguments developed both in the *Dictionnaire philosophique* and in *La Philosophie de l'histoire*, but also in a composite set entitled *Remarques pour servir de supplément à l'Essai sur l'histoire générale* published in 1763, the eleventh remark of which was entirely devoted to the religion of ancient Persia, and detailed the various sacred precepts (the "Portes") which Voltaire incorporated into the *Essai sur les mœurs* in the edition of 1769.

This insertion is sometimes made at the cost of some slight inconsistencies, since the new passages cohabit with the primitive lessons of the 1740s that Voltaire does not correct. Thus there remains a paragraph of the initial draft on Manichaeism, which emphasized the existence of two antagonistic principles which Voltaire recognized in other ancient paganisms such as those prevailing in Egypt or Greece.[4] Against this reading, the new passages written in the 1760s insist on the reverse: that it is monotheism at work in the ancient religion of the Persians and in its sacred text, the *Sadder.* Voltaire sees in it the cult of a single principle common to many ancient peoples, from which the Jews and Christians then borrowed a great deal. "Les

3. We refer to the title of an article by François Moureau more specifically devoted to the analysis of the role of China in the imaginary of Voltaire: "Itinéraires jésuites en Chine ou les Lumières naissent à l'Est," *SVEC* 2003:01, p.437–54.
4. See *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations*, ed. Bruno Bernard, John Renwick, Nicholas Cronk, and Janet Godden, in *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire* (hereafter *OCV*), vol.22–27 (Oxford, 2009–2016), vol.22, p.112–13.

dogmes du *Sadder* nous prouvent encore que les Perses n'étaient point idolâtres. Notre ignorante témérité accusa longtemps d'idolâtrie les Persans, les Indiens, les Chinois, et jusqu'aux mahométans, si attachés à l'unité de Dieu, qu'ils nous traitent nous-mêmes d'idolâtres."[5] To give concrete arguments to this interpretation, Voltaire relies on the text of the *Sadder*, which he reads in the Latin work of the English Orientalist Thomas Hyde. But the translation he proposes of the "Portes," that is to say, of the various precepts presented in this abridgment of the sacred text, is inspired freely by Hyde's account in order to refute the accusations of idolatry. The precept "Célèbre quatre fois par jour le soleil; célèbre la lune au commencement du mois" is thus commented upon: "Il ne dit point, Adore comme des dieux le soleil et la lune, mais célèbre le soleil et la lune comme ouvrages du créateur."[6] The explication "comme ouvrages du créateur" ("as works of the creator"), which puts into perspective the cult apparently devoted to the stars, is not included in Hyde's text and constitutes a voluntary addition by Voltaire. Conversely, the historian removes passages that could have been interpreted as superstitions, such as the explanation accompanying the wishes made to someone who sneezes, which was supposed to allow access to paradise.[7]

Not content with refuting idolatry, the historian aims above all to prove that many of the precepts of Judeo-Christianity, and some of the most essential, such as the immortality of the soul or the existence of hell, are present in the ancient religion of Persia. "Notre ignorante crédulité se figure toujours que nous avons tout inventé, que tout est venu des Juifs et de nous qui avons succédé aux Juifs; on est bien détrompé quand on fouille un peu dans l'antiquité. Voici quelques-unes de ces portes qui servirent à nous tirer d'erreur."[8] If the *Essai sur les mœurs* devotes no chapter to the Hebrews, we see here that the ferocious polemic against Judeo-Christianity in the 1760s is actually inserted in the chapters devoted to countries whose civilization is, in the eyes of Voltaire, anterior to that of the Mediterranean basin. Voltaire thus reuses several arguments developed in the *Dictionnaire philosophique* in order to ruin the hypothesis—which was rather a certainty for the orthodox minds of the time—making the Hebrews the original people. In doing so, Voltaire responds implicitly point by point to the

5. Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, vol.22, p.111–12.
6. Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, vol.22, p.107.
7. See Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, vol.22, p.106.
8. Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, vol.22, p.104–105.

argument developed by Dom Calmet in his *Commentaire littéral sur tous les livres de l'Ancien et du Nouveau Testament* (Paris, 1709–1734), which constituted a scholarly reference in terms of knowledge about the Bible and consequently on the history of religions. It should also be noted that by reversing the direction of borrowing—the Hebrews having taken everything from their neighbors and not the reverse—Voltaire also reverses the meaning of Thomas Hyde's demonstration. If Hyde's work had indeed constituted a valuable tool for Europe in the knowledge of the religion of the ancient Persians, it was nevertheless constrained by an entirely orthodox reading that endeavored to demonstrate the proximity of Persian religion to Judeo-Christianity, thus showing how the Persians were inspired by the Hebrews.

In addition to this relatively learned polemic, interested in the origins of different religions and in the direction of their mutual borrowings, Voltaire also endeavors to demonstrate the great morality of the Persian religion. Again, the stakes are heavily polemical, since it is a question of establishing the conformity of these moral precepts with reason, and of interpreting the religion of the Persians as a new illustration of a natural religion. Alongside the religion of the Chinese scholars (*lettrés*) who follow the precepts of Confucius, and also that of the Indian Brahmins, the religion of Zoroaster testifies to the decisive importance of great sages who have imposed on men the precepts of "enlightened" common sense and goodness, which Voltaire sees in Christianity. The thirtieth "Porte," which polemicizes against the Jesuits and their casuistry, is in this sense exemplary of this goodness: "Il est certain que Dieu a dit à Zoroastre, Quand on sera dans le doute si une action est bonne ou mauvaise, qu'on ne la fasse pas. *N.B.* Ceci est un peu contre la doctrine des opinions probables."[9] Apart from any argument justifying morally dubious actions, the principle of abstention is still the best one to follow because it will never harm anyone. If the precepts inviting the believer to abstain from theft and falsehood are expected,[10] others still refer to specific polemical intentions. The long "Porte" 40, which describes the model behavior of the ministers of religion ("Quiconque exhorte les hommes à la pénitence, doit être sans péché; qu'il ait du zèle, et que ce zèle ne soit point trompeur," etc.), contains, implicitly, denunciations of the abuses that the priests themselves authorize. The injunction "qu'il soit éloigné

9. Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, vol.22, p.108.
10. See for example Portes 67 and 70, Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, vol.22, p.109.

de toute débauche, de toute injustice, de tout péché" sounds somewhat ironic in light of the later chapters devoted to the popes.

The morality which Voltaire defends is more broadly that which corresponds to an ideal of reason and nature. In the eleventh of his *Remarques pour servir de supplément à l'Essai sur l'histoire générale* (1763), the historian highlighted the ninth "Porte," which forbids homosexuality: "Fuis surtout le péché contre nature, il n'y en a point de plus grand. *N.B.* Ce précepte fait bien voir combien Sextus Empiricus se trompe, quand il dit que cette infamie était permise par les lois de Perse."[11] This fact of civilization, which Voltaire also maintains in the article "Amour nommé socratique" of the *Dictionnaire philosophique* (1764)[12] and in chapter 11 of *La Philosophie de l'histoire* (1765),[13] before the passage quoted above was integrated in 1769 in the *Essai sur les mœurs*, was contested by one of the great opponents of Voltaire, the Jesuit Pierre-Henri Larcher (1726–1812). In his *Supplément à la philosophie de l'histoire*, the Hellenistic scholar proposes to distinguish between customs and prescriptive laws, and reproaches Voltaire for transforming one into another in his reading of Sextus Empiricus.[14] Indeed, it can be seen that Voltaire distorts the Greek philosopher's words, which in the translation of his *Hipotiposes, ou Institutions pironiennes* of 1725, which Voltaire used, evoked only the "coutume chez les Perses d'aimer impudiquement des garçons."[15] The will to rehabilitate these peoples of antiquity is such, given what is at stake, that the historian tends to involuntarily reinforce criticisms in order better to counter them. Basically, Voltaire agrees with Larcher: "Quoting" the sacred text of the Persians enables him to emphasize the way in which a "good" religion should correct aberrant practices.

Voltaire's remarks and quotations from the Persian sacred text are helpful because they give us more information about what would constitute a good religion for Voltaire as well as about what he classifies under the category of nature insofar as it depends on reason. They are

11. Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, vol.22, p.106.
12. *Dictionnaire philosophique*, ed. Christiane Mervaud, in *OCV*, vol.35–36 (Oxford, 1994), vol.35, p.331.
13. *La Philosophie de l'histoire*, ed. J. H. Brumfitt, in *OCV*, vol.59 (Oxford, 1969), p.129.
14. Pierre-Henri Larcher, *Supplément à la philosophie de l'histoire* (Amsterdam, Changuion, 1767), p.99–103.
15. Sextus Empiricus, *Les Hipotiposes, ou Institutions pironiennes* ([Amsterdam], n.n., 1725), p.73. Voltaire will continue his analysis and will answer Larcher on this point in *La Défense de mon oncle*, ed. J.-M. Moureaux, in *OCV*, vol.64 (Oxford, 1984), p.203–204.

less helpful when it comes to informing us on the true nature of the *Sadder* and Zoroastrianism. In the European cultural context of the eighteenth century, all religions other than Christianity were in any case viewed as idolatrous, and it is known that Islam in particular was an instrument of denunciation used by Catholics against Protestants, and vice versa.[16] Although Zoroastrianism was of much less interest to polemicists, it is evident that Christian scholars still endeavored to portray it as a deformation and a degradation of a cult taken from the Hebrews. Voltaire's instrumental narrative is a response to the biased reading that has always been that of the Western world. Though he reevaluates Zoroastrianism from a distant point of view, he is in no way objective. Voltaire's goals have nothing to do with neutral knowledge of ancient beliefs.

Despotism

The same polemical biases inform the writing of the chapters relating to modern Persia, written for the edition of 1756. In discussing recent history and the dynastic changes between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, Voltaire relies on travel accounts published since the end of the seventeenth century which, while drawing up a geographical and thematic panorama of Persia, addressed the question of its political government, as well as on the historical works published by French historians on the eighteenth century. Like many of his contemporaries,[17] Voltaire possessed the principal travel accounts on Persia, such as the French translation of the *Relation du voyage de Perse et des Indes orientales* by the Englishman Thomas Herbert (Paris, 1663, BV1628) and *Les Six voyages* […] *en Turquie, en Perse et aux Indes* (Paris, 1679, BV3251) by the merchant Jean-Baptiste Tavernier. But, like Montesquieu, Voltaire take the *Voyages de M. le chevalier Chardin, en Perse et autres lieux de l'Orient*, of which he possesses the augmented reedition made in 1711 in Amsterdam (BV712), as his main source on Persia. Although the book is not included in his library as it was sold to Catherine II of Russia, Voltaire also undeniably used the *Histoire de*

16. See, for example, the article by Sylvette Larzul, who is interested in the French translations of the Koran and their polemical stakes: "Les premières traductions françaises du Coran (XVII^{e}–XIX^{e} siècles)," *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 147 (2009), p.147–65.
17. See Myrtille Méricam-Bourdet, "Pourquoi s'intéresser à l'Orient musulman sous la Régence," *Cahiers Saint-Simon* 45 (2017), p.5–16.

Thamas Kouli-Kan nouveau roi de Perse, ou Histoire de la dernière révolution de Perse, arrivée en 1732 (Paris, Briasson, 1742) by André de Claustre, as well as Father Du Cerceau's *Histoire de la dernière révolution de Perse* (Paris, Briasson, 1728), though he criticizes this work in the marginalia of his copy of *L'Esprit des lois*.[18] Even if Voltaire read these works before reading Montesquieu, it is nevertheless undeniable that the concrete examples of Persian and Ottoman despotism that he encountered in *L'Esprit des lois* provoked the reactions and commentaries that first echoed in his *Essai sur les mœurs*.

Montesquieu and Voltaire are particularly interested in travel narratives that concern the states described as despotic in the West, beginning with Persia and Turkey, insofar as they offer a field of experimentation for the development of political power and allow comparisons with France. As Bertrand Binoche summarizes, these accounts enable us "to observe what is happening in empires in which political power has taken to its logical end the absolutist temptation which is perceived here and there in Europe, notably in France. The Orient is the realization, full-scale, of what Europe is getting at, namely the radical reduction of what will be called 'civil society.'"[19] The challenge is first of all to define what constitutes monarchical power: Where Montesquieu sees despotic regimes, Voltaire often sees absolute power as a good thing. The task remains to identify the signs of this monarchical power, whether it be called absolute or despotic. The difficulty of travel accounts is that they themselves present a certain number of contradictions in the descriptions of the power they give. They also do not necessarily share in Montesquieu's horrified judgment of certain political facts in *L'Esprit des lois*. However, both Voltaire and Montesquieu select from these abundant descriptions the passages most likely to support their interpretations of absolute or despotic power, and, predictably, Voltaire uses these discrepancies as opportunities for critique in the Persian chapters of the *Essai sur les mœurs*.

The first point of contestation is the social structure of the Persian empire, which is equally valid for the Turkish empire. "*Point de*

18. Above a note by Montesquieu in chapter 9 of book 3, indicating "Voyez l'histoire de cette révolution, par le père Du Cerceau" (see *L'Esprit des lois*, ed. Robert Derathé and Denis de Casabianca, 2 vols., Paris, 2011, vol.1, p.33), Voltaire remarks: "vous verrez un mauvais livre" (*Corpus des notes marginales*, ed. Natalia Elaguina, in *OCV*, vol.136–44, Oxford, 2006–2018, vol.140B, p.731).
19. Bertrand Binoche, *Introduction à De l'esprit des lois de Montesquieu* (Paris, 1998), p.214–15; translation the author's own.

noblesse, point de monarque. Mais on a un despote," says Montesquieu in chapter 4 of book 2 of *L'Esprit des lois*.[20] In the margin alongside this passage, Voltaire replied in the copy of the 1749 edition in his library: "Il n'y a point de noblesse en Turquie il y a un monarque."[21] Chapter 158 of the *Essai* develops this by explaining the reasons for an appreciation that is not self-evident: "Ce que la Perse a toujours eu de commun avec la Chine et la Turquie, c'est de ne pas connaître la noblesse; il n'y a dans ces vastes Etats d'autre noblesse que celle des emplois; et les hommes qui ne sont rien, n'y peuvent tirer avantage de ce qu'ont été leurs pères."[22] Voltaire deploys here the dream which he had sketched a few years earlier about France under Louis XIV, a dream of a society founded on merit, in which only the talents of each individual, and not their ancestry, made it possible to obtain a place. If this dream is implicitly based on Chardin's testimony,[23] he ignores the potentially despotic drawbacks of such a system, namely, the absolute arbitrariness of the prince who confers and withdraws the charges, and he neglects also to mention the ambition for power and the possibility of a hereditary transmission which he evokes.[24]

Another stumbling point lies in the question of private property. Montesquieu, relying in particular on Ricaut's testimony concerning the Ottoman empire, denies altogether the existence of private property under a despotic government.[25] Here again, Voltaire refutes this point by drawing on Chardin, whose explanations Voltaire simplifies in order to better refute the existence of a system that, in his eyes, is worse than despotism: feudalism and fiefs. Chardin asserts that "toutes les terres en Perse n'appartiennent pas à un seul homme: les citoyens y jouissent de leurs possessions, et paient à l'Etat une taxe

20. Montesquieu, *L'Esprit des lois*, vol.1, p.22.
21. Voltaire, *Corpus des notes marginales*, vol.140B, p.727.
22. Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, vol.26A, p.342.
23. Jean Baptiste Chardin, *Voyages de M. le chevalier Chardin, en Perse et autres lieux de l'Orient*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam, de Lorme, 1711), vol.2, p.224: "Il n'y a point de noblesse en Perse […] et l'on n'y porte de respect qu'aux charges, aux dignités, au mérite extraordinaire."
24. See Chardin, *Voyages*, vol.2, p.233–34.
25. See Montesquieu, *L'Esprit des lois*, book 5, ch.14, vol.1, p.69: "De tous les gouvernements despotiques, il n'y en a point qui s'accable plus lui-même, que celui où le prince se déclare propriétaire de tous les fonds de terre, et l'héritier de tous ses sujets. Il en résulte toujours l'abandon de la culture des terres"; book 6, ch.1, vol.1, p.82: "Il suit de ce que les terres appartiennent au prince, qu'il n'y a presque point de lois civiles sur la propriété des terres. Il suit du droit que le souverain a de succéder, qu'il n'y en a pas non plus sur les successions."

qui ne va pas à un écu par an."[26] He also first reported the existence of ninety-nine-year leases.[27] Were these leases accorded by the lord, opposed to any private property, not precisely the sign of feudalism which Voltaire attributed to Turkey and India, subjugated by the Tartars and their "droit de brigandage," when the Armenian emperor Ismael Sophi had, on the contrary, followed the "droit naturel" established in Persia?[28] The reappearance of this theme in chapter 193 of the *Essai* allows Voltaire to be a little more faithful to Chardin's testimony without appearing to deny what he said in chapter 158: "Les voyageurs comme Chardin, qui ont bien connu la Perse, ne nous disent pas au moins que toutes les terres appartiennent au roi. Ils avouent qu'il y a, comme partout ailleurs, des domaines royaux, des terres données au clergé, et des fonds que les particuliers possèdent de droit, lesquels sont transmis de père en fils."[29]

Montesquieu views all of the markers of despotism in the same manner: through the lens of population.[30] Specifically, Montesquieu's thesis sees bad government as the cause of depopulation: Fertility of the fields and abundance of goods[31] are contrasted with the desertion of territories that follows from ineffective security. Voltaire notes certain inconsistencies, but he does not linger and especially does not comment on them. Thus justice is certainly expeditious, but the Oriental people in general "ont été moins raffinés en tout que nous ne le sommes."[32] By contrast, he diverges radically from Montesquieu on the interpretation of certain phenomena, such as the presence of a militia under the sultan's orders. For Montesquieu, proof of despotism is an abuse of power, but for Voltaire it is a sign of weakness. Thus he judges the shah of Persia more absolute than the Turkish emperor since, by getting rid of this militia, Shah Abbas made himself truly "despotic."[33]

A paragon of absolute power (in Voltaire's positive sense), Abbas I nevertheless presents characteristics that inevitably disturb the historian. As with Louis XIV, Voltaire defends Abbas I without offering a critique of his absolute power, though he is not silent about

26. Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, vol.26A, p.340–41.
27. Chardin, *Voyages*, vol.2, p.244–45.
28. Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, vol.26A, p.341.
29. Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, vol.26C, p.266.
30. See Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, vol.26C, p.266.
31. See Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, vol.26C, p.266.
32. Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, vol.26A, p.342.
33. See Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, vol.26C, p.268.

the excesses of his reign, and he sometimes criticizes them. Voltaire distances himself from this "prétendu grand homme," but the cruelty which was attributed to him did not prevent him from bringing about happiness for his people, for "il y a des exemples que des hommes féroces ont aimé l'ordre et le bien public."[34] Voltaire distinguishes the targets of these cruelties, which partially excuses them: These "particuliers exposés sans cesse à la vue du tyran" must certainly be courtiers, when the rest of the people benefit from good administration of the kingdom. This paradox makes the "tyran" the "bienfaiteur de la patrie," and draws support from Chardin, to whose text Voltaire added ample marginalia. Voltaire also mentions the deportations of Christians, but comments in a laconic style "ces colonies réussissent rarement" before listing the "good" actions of the sovereign and his military victories.[35]

This reign is evidently compared with those of his successors who, during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, led the empire to its "decadence."[36] Returning to a common pattern of explanation, Voltaire highlights the softness, that is to say the weakness, of a dynasty which is then easily overthrown by its neighbors. Voltaire somewhat simplifies his sources, voluntarily or not, and highlights the cruelties exercised by successive sovereigns in an attempt to establish an increasingly staggering power. "Tous les tableaux des cruautés et des malheurs des hommes que nous examinons depuis le temps de Charlemagne, n'ont rien de plus horrible que les suites de la révolution d'Ispahan."[37] The Persian emperors, like all those in the despotic East, certainly surpassed the Europeans in cruelty when it came to evicting their rivals, so Maghmud "crut ne pouvoir s'affermir qu'en faisant égorger les familles des principaux citoyens,"[38] but they prove, like others, that cruelty is only a consequence of the lack of authority, and consequently the mark of the fragility of power. The political reading applied here is strictly identical to that used by Voltaire in the history of Western countries—as well as in the *Essai sur les mœurs*, in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, or in the *Annales de l'Empire*—and contradicts a possible interpretation of Oriental despotism as the omnipotence in which the French government is likely to degenerate, as Montesquieu and then

34. Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, vol.26C, p.267, and see n.17.
35. See Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, vol.26C, p.268.
36. See Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, vol.26C, p.269–71.
37. Voltaire, Essai sur les mœurs, vol.26C, p.271.
38. Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, vol.26C, p.271; see also vol.26A, p.341.

La Beaumelle had said in the 1750s.[39] Contrary to the interpretation defended by Montesquieu since his *Lettres persanes*, the Persian chapters of the *Essai sur les mœurs* establish in detail that the more royal power is strengthened, the less likely it is to become despotic through weakness.

Civilization

In spite of this contingent degeneration of politics, the Persian chapters of the *Essai sur les mœurs* tend to emphasize a form of superiority in the domain of civilization, which certainly has to do with manners, even if they perform perhaps a somewhat mythical function. In chapter 193, Voltaire concludes his narrative of the revolutions of palaces with this remark: "La Perse alors est devenue encore le théâtre des guerres civiles. Tant de dévastations y ont détruit le commerce et les arts, en détruisant une partie du peuple; mais quand le terrain est fertile et la nation industrieuse, tout se répare à la longue."[40] The hope of renewal is certainly not entirely independent of politics, but it does testify to the belief in the resources provided by a country and its people, which can oppose the degeneration caused by politics.[41] From this point of view, Persia is much more favorably judged by the historian than Turkey, and its analyses constantly underline the opposition which exists in the modern period between the Turks and the Persians under Arab domination, a separation that has been reinforced by the religious schism between the Sunnis and the Shi'ites since the end of the fifteenth century.[42]

> La Perse était alors plus civilisée que la Turquie; les arts y étaient plus en honneur, les mœurs plus douces, la police générale bien mieux observée. Ce n'est pas seulement un effet du climat; les Arabes y avaient cultivé les arts cinq siècles entiers. Ce furent ces Arabes qui bâtirent Ispahan, Chiras, Casbin, Cachan, et plusieurs autres grandes villes; les Turcs au contraire n'en ont bâti aucune, et en ont laissé plusieurs tomber en ruine.[43]

39. See his polemical edition of *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* […] *nouvelle édition augmentée d'un très grand nombre de remarques, par M. de La B****, 3 vols. (Frankfurt, Veuve Knoch et J. G. Eslinger, 1753).
40. Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, vol.26C, p.274.
41. On this topic, see Georges Benrekassa, *La Politique et sa mémoire: le politique et l'historique dans la pensée des Lumières* (Paris, 1983), ch.4.
42. See Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, vol.26A, p.337–38.
43. Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, vol.26C, p.263–64.

The opposition between destroyers and builders is interpreted by Voltaire as applying to sovereigns. In this framework, Voltaire judges Alexander the Great and Peter I favorably, and Charles XII unfavorably. More generally, Voltaire opposes the delicacy of the Persians to the rudeness of the Turks, which manifests in many different fields: "Les ouvrages de la main passaient pour être mieux travaillés, plus finis, en Perse qu'en Turquie. Les sciences y avaient de bien plus grands encouragements; point de ville dans laquelle il n'y eût plusieurs collèges fondés où l'on enseignait les belles-lettres. La langue persane plus douce et plus harmonieuse que la turque, a été féconde en poésies agréables."[44]

Nevertheless, this praise must be qualified: Although Arab art is undoubtedly superior to the art of the ancient Persians, which Voltaire criticized in chapter 5,[45] it is necessary to relativize the scope of these contributions in the light of the later developments of the human mind. Voltaire insists particularly on the so-called science of astrology, which is only a collection of superstitions. From this point of view, the Persians share a fault which is that of humanity: "Ils tenaient l'astrologie de leur propre pays, et ils s'y attachaient plus qu'aucun peuple de la terre […] Les Persans étaient, comme plusieurs de nos nations, pleins d'esprit et d'erreurs."[46] Above all, he argues, the West has undoubtedly surpassed the East in the last few centuries in the scientific and philosophical field. Thus Voltaire takes up the commonplace that knowledge in the East has stagnated.

The point on which Persia nevertheless constitutes a reference for Europeans is the Persian "humanity" which Voltaire surely idealizes from Chardin's account.[47] Voltaire illustrates this humanity in his description of the "maisons à café" where there reigns freedom both of religious practice and of speech:

> Tout ce qu'on nous dit de la Perse, nous persuade qu'il n'y avait point de pays monarchique où l'on jouît plus des droits de l'humanité. […] On se rassemblait dans des salles immenses qu'on appelait les maisons à café, où les uns prenaient de cette liqueur, qui n'est en usage parmi

44. Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, vol.26C, p.264.
45. "Mais était-ce un chef d'œuvre de l'art qu'un palais bâti au pied d'une chaîne de rochers arides? Les colonnes qui sont encore debout, ne sont assurément ni dans de belles proportions, ni d'un dessin élégant" etc. (Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, vol.22, p.100).
46. Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, vol.26C, p.264–65. See also vol.26A, p.344–45.
47. See Chardin, *Voyages*, vol.2, p.35, 67–69, 264.

> nous que depuis la fin du dix-septième siècle; les autres jouaient, ou lisaient, ou écoutaient des faiseurs de contes, tandis qu'à un bout de la salle un ecclésiastique prêchait pour quelque argent, et qu'à un autre bout ces espèces d'hommes qui se sont fait un art de l'amusement des autres déployaient tous leurs talents.[48]

But it is also the Muslim religion, so much detested by Christians, which furnishes a masterful example of tolerance for other cults, and which enables Voltaire to bring Persia closer to the Protestant model found in England. After having drawn up an inventory of the religions tolerated in Persia, Voltaire concludes: "Enfin toutes ces religions étaient vues de bon œil en Perse, excepté la secte d'Omar, qui était celle de leurs ennemis. C'est ainsi que le gouvernement d'Angleterre admet toutes les sectes, et tolère à peine le catholicisme qu'il redoute."[49] Unlimited tolerance obviously finds its limits in the political considerations that require one not to spare a dangerous adversary under any pretext. Once again, Voltaire's reading of the history of Persia is strongly marked by a consideration of the West: In certain respects, like its "humanity" and its tolerance, Persia is an example to follow. Its similarities with some Western nations provides a universal justification for certain policies, or, alternatively, provides new arguments for proscribing them.

Although the chapters devoted to Persia in the *Essai sur les mœurs* or in *La Philosophie de l'histoire* do not denounce any other writer by name, they contain without ambiguity polemical issues which aim at the Christian interpretations of history and the political vision of certain contemporaries, beginning with Montesquieu. Therefore, Voltaire's examination of Persian political history, religion, and civilization resonates with the political and religious problems of France and Europe at the time. The conclusion is not surprising: The Persian chapters are part of an interpretative line proper to Voltaire. The natural religion discovered by way of an examination of Eastern countries at the beginning of the *Essai sur les mœurs* is extended to a defense of an ideal of tolerance that Voltaire sees at work in the Persian civilization and the Muslim religion. This surprising observation tends to demonstrate how the encounter of religious, cultural, and, above all, political data highlights particular, concrete situations from which we might perhaps derive inspiration. From this point of view, it is

48. Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, vol.26C, p.267.
49. Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, vol.26A, p.343–44.

certain that Voltaire willingly allowed himself to be influenced by a vision which was also partly that of Chardin, a Protestant refugee in England who was particularly sensitive to these questions. As for the question of the boundaries between absolutism and despotism, it is viewed in the Persian chapters through the dialectic between strength and weakness, the ability to maintain a guiding line, and the exercise of cruelty as the only way to be feared. The chapters devoted to China—another great example of despotism according to Montesquieu—better allow Voltaire to define what positively allows the "good" power to develop and, above all, to maintain itself. In any case, the Orient offers a terrain of choice for the political imagination thanks to its remoteness which allows the European imagination to formulate criticisms and hypotheses without compromising too much.

Persia in Diderot's *Encyclopédie*[1]

Whitney Mannies

The *Encyclopédie* (1751–1772), edited by Denis Diderot and, for a while, the mathematician Jean D'Alembert, was the quintessential Enlightenment project. The enormous impact of its eleven volumes and 74,000 articles went far beyond providing a comprehensive reference for the arts and sciences; it was, above all, a vehicle for the advancement of Enlightenment (whatever its 130 authors thought that to be).[2] Given the epic sweep of the *Encyclopédie*, asking "What does the *Encyclopédie* say about Persia?" is no small question: The term *Perse* appears in approximately 752 discrete articles,[3] and approximately 471 articles deal specifically and substantively with Persia.[4] Most are of a straightforward nature, describing with little or no commentary geography or natural features (e.g., Jaucourt's "Golphe persique," Daubenton's "Lilac"), towns located in Persia (e.g., Jaucourt's "Zenjon" or "Hurmon"), or descriptions of various kinds of goods produced (e.g., Diderot's "Calencards," the anonymous "Soie"). Some articles are anonymous, perhaps too trivial to sign or too

1. I am grateful for the feedback and support of many people who all contributed to this article, my coeditors John Christian Laursen and Cyrus Masroori chief among them.
2. Articles cited from the *Encyclopédie* refer to *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, ed. Denis Diderot and Jean D'Alembert, http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu/ (last accessed January 28, 2021).
3. By my own count.
4. Rebecca Joubin, "Islam and Arabs through the eyes of the *Encyclopédie*: the 'Other' as a case of French cultural criticism," *International journal of Middle East studies* 32:2 (2000), p.197–217. Joubin estimates that 2313 articles—nearly 4 percent—of the 60,200 articles in the *Encyclopédie* deal with Islamic and Arab civilization.

subversive to claim ("Exotérique et Esotérique," "Palibotre"). By far the most prolific contributor on the subject of Persia is the chevalier de Jaucourt. Three-hundred and seventy of his more than 17,000 articles mention Persia, in a range of contexts, from brief references to the most in-depth examinations (e.g., "Perse (empire de)," "Despotisme").[5]

As with most other subjects, the *Encyclopédie*'s content regarding Persia was largely unoriginal. Firsthand knowledge was not so critical for the encyclopedists: Their goal was less to portray Persia accurately and more to advance their own social, political, and philosophical goals, including religious tolerance, freedom of expression, rule of law, and undermining revealed religion and arbitrary power.[6] The Orient was a useful heuristic for critiquing European tyranny while avoiding censorship; it allowed the encyclopedists to imply parallels between Islam and Christianity as well as Eastern despotism and domestic tyranny while pretending to contrast them.[7]

The encyclopedists did have access to nearly all of the European-produced content on Persia and Islam that had been generated up to that point, Paris being one main center for Orientalist studies at that time (along with Leipzig, Oxford, and Cambridge).[8] I argue in the first part of this article that the European Orientalist scholarship that proliferated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and on which the encyclopedists largely relied, developed historical and sociological perspectives that sometimes challenged European prejudices and sometimes reassured Europe of its superiority. But whether or not these sources expressed negative or positive views of Persia is actually less significant than the development of the historical-sociological perspective itself, which implied that religion and government are merely temporal, contextual, and artificial—not eternal, universal, and divine. Once the historical-sociological perspective was applied

5. Jaucourt—not Diderot—was the most prolific contributor to the *Encyclopédie*. His contributions increased with each volume until they accounted for over 40 percent of the last three volumes. For an in-depth account of the chevalier de Jaucourt, see Madeleine F. Morris, *Le Chevalier de Jaucourt: un ami de la terre (1704–1780)* (Geneva, 1979). For an account of his political theory, see Simone Zurbuchen "Jaucourt, republicanism, and toleration," in *New essays on the political thought of the Huguenots of the Refuge*, ed. John Christian Laursen (New York, 1995), p.155–70.
6. John Lough, *The Encyclopédie of Diderot and D'Alembert* (Cambridge, 1954).
7. See Alain Grosrichard, *The Sultan's court: European fantasies of the East* (1979), translated by Liz Heron (London, 1998).
8. Albert Hourani, *Islam in European thought* (Cambridge, 1991).

to Islam and Persian despotism, however, it was not clear why Christianity and French absolutism should be excepted. The encyclopedists embraced this consequence.

The second part of this contribution focuses on specific articles in the *Encyclopédie*, identifying five themes that emerge with regards to Persia: first, Persia as a once-great kingdom; second, Persia as a source of European ideas; third, Persia as tolerant and diverse; fourth, the triumph of religious fanaticism over natural religion; and finally, Persia's dissolution into despotism.

Persia and the Orient: the emergence of a historical perspective

In the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, studies of the "Orient" began to move away from ideological and religious explanations and toward empirical research that explained the Orient in terms of geography, history, and institutions.[9] Edward Pococke's 1649 *Specimum historiae arabum*,[10] Barthélemy d'Herbelot's 1686 *Bibliothèque orientale*,[11] and Simon Ockley's 1708 *History of the Saracens*,[12] among other works, began to show Islam in a more positive light and confronted Europeans with the Eastern origins of their own ideas. George Sale's 1734 introduction to the first accurate English translation of the Koran argues that Muhammad, too, played a role in God's plan for humanity, and he makes a passionate case for treating Muhammad as a capable moral reformer and Islam as a civilizing, orderly religion.[13]

9. Hourani, *Islam*. The modern, historical approach to Islamic studies was first institutionalized at the Collège de France in Paris in 1587, when two Middle Eastern doctors established regular Arabic instruction. By 1634, chairs of Arabic (or Islamic studies?) had been established at Leiden, Oxford, and Cambridge.
10. Edward Pococke is cited at least three times in the *Encyclopédie*, but possibly eight or more times. Counting his citations is complicated by the fact that encyclopedists spell his last name differently and call him Edmund instead of Edward, and because it is not always clear if they are referring to Edward or Richard Pocock (author of *Description d'Egypte*).
11. D'Herbelot is cited at least sixty-three times in fifty-nine discrete articles, including D'Alembert's description of Persian contributions to "Algebre" and "Astronomie"; Barthès's "Femme," where d'Herbelot is used to correct the assumption that women are excluded from paradise in Islam; and Jaucourt's description of "Sabiisme," a religious minority in Persia.
12. Ockley is only explicitly cited once, in "Sarrasins ou Sarasins, ou Sarazins," with regard to the conquests by Muslim Arabs of Persia and other lands.
13. *The Koran*, translated by George Sale (1734; London, n.n., 1764). Sale is cited twice: in Yvon's "Polytheisme" as reporting that the Arabs attributed divine

More important than these partial rehabilitations, however, was the fact that the focus of critique shifted away from a religious framework that pitted Christianity against Islam and toward a framework that pitted philosophy against fanaticism in general. Richard Simon's 1684 *Histoire critique de la créance et des coutûmes des nations du Levant* argued against all excesses and perversions of religion, Christian or otherwise.[14] Pierre Bayle followed Simon in his *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1697), going so far as to regard Islam as a rational religion and the Ottoman empire as an example of tolerance (though he prudently repeats prejudicial views).[15] Henri de Boulainvilliers's 1730 *Vie de Mahomed* makes a host of positive claims: Both Western and Eastern societies contribute to one universal plan; Islam does not contradict Christianity; Islam is not inherently irrational or violent; Muslims desire tolerance; and it is *fanatisme*, not Islam itself, that is responsible for cruelty and superstition. Fanaticism, not religion, "makes perish from the face of the Earth all that which previous men had acquired regarding wisdom, arts, and sciences; ruining monuments, burning libraries…"[16] And the shift from a religious to a historical perspective of Islam was not limited to just England and France. Other centers of Islamic studies included Spain and the Netherlands, where Adriaan Reland produced his *De religione Mohammedica libri duo* (1705).[17] It is no coincidence that the very definition of "religion" shifted during this period to refer to any system of beliefs and practices constructed by human beings.[18] When religion was viewed in this way it became possible to also see Christianity as the product of human minds and institutions, and even to venture that Christianity was not necessarily the best religion for all people in all places.[19]

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power to celestial bodies, and in d'Holbach's "Zendicisme," which describes a religious minority that accepts Zoroastrian principles and opposes Islam.

14. See Thierry Hentsch, *L'Orient imaginaire: la vision politique occidentale de l'Est Méditerranéen* (Paris, 1988), p.147. Simon is cited dozens of times in the *Encyclopédie*, but usually for his biblical commentaries. Articles that draw on his *Histoire critique* include Mallet's "Antitype," "Chrétiens de S. Thomas," and also "Arméniens," whom he describes as both dispersed and tolerated by their Persian vanquishers.
15. See Maxime Rodinson, *La Fascination de l'Islam: les étapes du regard occidental sur le monde musulman—les études arabes et islamiques en Europe* (Paris, 1980), p.72.
16. Henri de Boulainvilliers, *La Vie de Mohamed* (Amsterdam, Changuion, 1731), p.4.
17. Hourani, *Islam*.
18. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and end of religion*: *a new approach to the religious traditions of mankind* (New York, 1963).
19. See Hentsch, *L'Orient imaginaire*, p.15.

Specifically with regard to Persia, the encylopedists also drew on sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century travelogues, including Jean Chardin's *Voyages de M. le chevalier Chardin, en Perse et autres lieux de l'Orient* (1711),[20] Jean-Baptiste Tavernier's *Six voyages* (1675),[21] Jean Thévenot's *Voyages de M. Thévenot tant en Europe qu'en Asie et en Afrique* (1705, 1723, 1725),[22] and Jean Antoine Du Cerceau's *Histoire de Thamas Kouli-Kan, sophi de Perse* (1741).[23] These travelogues oscillated between negative stereotypes of Persia and more positive observations, but, as Alain Grosrichard (1998) and Thierry Hentsch (1988) argue, the overall effect was to confirm, both for the voyagers and for readers, a collective European identity and to assure Europe of itself and of its modernity, over and above the ignorant, despotic Orient. Chardin and Tavernier, for example, both think that the peoples of the Orient excel in many domains, but, even so, they lack the "systèmes modernes" of Europe—the new, modern science with "belles méthodes."[24] For all their interest, their collecting, categorizing, systematizing, and alphabetizing resulted in a narrative of objectivity and scientific superiority that tended to affirm for Europeans the perception of their own modernity.

By contrast, this empirical perspective had the consequence of portraying religion and empire as artificial, temporal, and fallible—a conclusion that had obvious, if sometimes unintended, parallels to Europe. D'Herbelot's *Bibliothèque orientale*, one of the most frequently cited sources on the subject of Persia and Islam, was compiled from original Arab, Persian, and Indian sources. As such, no other European

20. Chardin is cited thirteen times. Formey and D'Alembert cite Chardin as having observed that the modern Persians invest heavily in astronomy, but they no longer reap any scholarly benefit from the study since they only study the stars to predict the future. He is cited as giving descriptions of marvelous ruins in Blandel's "Chelminar," of grand hotels in Mallet's "Caravanserai," and of an amazing capital city and royal court in Jaucourt's "Ispahan" and "Perse," respectively. Chardin seems to be the source of the opinion that the mixture of Georgian blood with the Persians' has caused Persians to become more beautiful.
21. Tavernier is cited sixteen times, but not always for positive reasons: Jaucourt complains of his inaccurate geographic coordinates in "Hawas," "Hesn-Medi," and "Gireft."
22. Thévenot is cited twenty-one times, but only once in relation to Persia: Mallet's "Goulam" describes the slaves who make up the sophi's army.
23. Du Cerceau is cited a few times, but only once in relation to Persia: Jaucourt cites him as describing the revolutions undergone there ("Perse, empire des").
24. Hentsch, *L'Orient imaginaire*, p.132.

work came as close to letting the "Orient" speak for itself. D'Herbelot was genuinely interested in providing a more positive perspective on this part of the world. If compiling information in this way—systematically, alphabetically—had the effect of implying the superiority of the modern European scientific perspective, for the encyclopedists, d'Herbelot's compilations tended toward critical ends. In the article "Aschariouns," for example, Diderot cites d'Herbelot as supporting his contention that, since there are so many enduring religious disputes, we really cannot know anything.[25] This argument is not one that d'Herbelot explicitly makes; it is, rather, what Diderot felt to be the inevitable skeptical conclusion that emerges when knowledge is systematically collected and compared. Diderot's use of Johann Brucker's *Historia critica philosophae* (1742) in his articles about "Eastern" philosophy (e.g., "Eclecticisme," "Eleatique," "Orientale," "Philosophie") has a similar consequence. Brucker, a German Protestant, had subtly undermined the Catholic Church's legitimacy by implying the human origins of its doctrines, an aspect that Diderot happily redeployed for the same purpose.

When religion is redescribed as a historical artifact, then, even Christianity becomes artificial. And what is more, when critique is delivered via the objective perspective of history, even censors cannot argue. One reason Diderot's account of the Crusades is so successful in stripping Christianity of its divine pretenses is because it just lists bare facts: "We see from the abridged history that we have just made, that there were around one hundred thousand men sacrificed in the two expeditions of Saint Louis. One hundred and fifty thousand in that of Barberousse. Three hundred thousand in that of Philippe-Auguste and Richard. Two hundred thousand in that of Jean de Brienne" and so on.[26] The historical perspective, ostensibly apolitical, has the radical consequence of destroying the reader's sense of the divine.

25. "Au reste, j'observerai que le concours de Dieu, sa providence, sa prescience, la prédestination, la liberté occasionnent des disputes et des hérésies partout où il en est question, et que les chrétiens feraient bien, dit M. d'Herbelot dans sa *Bibliothèque orientale*, dans ces questions difficiles de chercher paisiblement à s'instruire, s'il est possible, et de se supporter charitablement dans les occasions où ils sont de sentiments différents. En effet, que savons-nous là-dessus? *Quis consiliarus ejus fuit.*" Of this article, a scandalized Chaumeix rhetorically advised Diderot: "*En effet, que savons-nous là-dessus?* Ce que nous savons? Etudiez votre catéchisme et vous l'y verrez!" (emphasis in original; Lough, *Encyclopédie*, p.229–30).
26. Diderot indicates that the source for his article "Croisades" was Claude Fleury's *Histoire ecclésiastique* (1691–1720), a Church history noted for its lack of rhetorical exaggeration.

The critical eighteenth century

Before launching into a survey of Persia in the *Encyclopédie*, I would like to make two points about this historical perspective—the first in relation to the Frankfurt School's view of reason and the Enlightenment, and the second in relation to Said's Foucauldian analysis of Orientalism. First, the critical stance of many eighteenth-century thinkers toward European institutions was all the more interesting because it constituted a brief and ill-fated departure from the discourses of reason that had reassured Europeans of their modern superiority in the seventeenth century and would later justify their colonial dominance in the nineteenth. By emphasizing the way in which this empirical discourse was set against political and religious power in the eighteenth century—and specifically in the *Encyclopédie*—I want to add nuance to the interpretation of Horkheimer and Adorno, who argue that the Enlightenment's faith in reason left an oppressive and dangerous legacy. From this perspective, the observation that the encyclopedists deployed a historical and sociological perspective—albeit for liberal ends—is not a solution, but the problem itself. Joubin, for example, argues that, even though the *Encyclopédie*'s critique of Islam is meant as an implied critique of Christianity, it is nevertheless deeply and dangerously flawed because it advocates science and reason over religion. But to reduce the legacy of the Enlightenment to the ascendancy of a monolithic and oppressive reason fails to appreciate those instances when discourses of reason succeeded in detaching themselves, albeit incompletely and temporarily, from political and religious power.[27] Discourses of reason had emancipatory as well as oppressive effects.

Second, like the centuries before and after it, the eighteenth century appropriated what it imagined the Orient to be for its own ends. Only secondarily did the Orient function as an object of genuine inquiry. In this way, the vision of Persia embodied in the *Encyclopédie* conforms to Edward Said's hypothesis in *Orientalism*, in that, for Europeans, the "Orient" was a vague and undefined "other" which was significant mostly as a tool of European self-definition.[28] However, because the eighteenth century often deployed this appropriation for self-critical and liberal ends, it avoided the excesses of self-congratulatory

27. As Mark Hulliung points out, the *philosophes* themselves were wary of the discourse of reason. Mark Hulliung, *The Autocritique of the Enlightenment: Rousseau and the philosophes* (Cambridge, MA, 1994).
28. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978; New York, 1994).

condescension characterizing the earlier centuries' attitudes toward the Orient, and the exoticizing justifications of European domination of the nineteenth century. In this way, the engagement with Persia in the *Encyclopédie* differs from that described by Said, who argues that Europe systematically exoticized the "East" so as to reinforce its own cultural, military, and economic hegemony. Notably, Said dates this specifically modern form of otherization from Napoleon's 1798 invasion of Egypt, when French colonial power was most invested in generating its own self-justificatory forms of knowledge. By contrast, eighteenth-century European engagements with the imagined Orient were marked by a variety of agendas, but they did not generally aim at cultural, economic, or military domination.[29]

This article does not attempt to analyze the outcome of the eighteenth century's critiques of religion and absolutism vis-à-vis the Orient, but the scholarship of Said and others clearly suggests that this critical project was abruptly abandoned in the nineteenth century, collapsing back into enduring stereotypes cleansed of their critical components and co-opted by imperialism, confirming for European minds the justice and grandeur of their colonial enterprises.

With this historical context in mind, what does the *Encyclopédie* say about Persia?

A once-great kingdom

Generally, the example of Persia demonstrates larger themes explored throughout the *Encyclopédie*, such as the sufficiency of natural religion; the artificial origins of revealed religion; the craftiness of priests; fanaticism and violence; intolerance; the danger of arbitrary power; and freedom of expression. But Persia is unique, too, in that it is a cautionary tale: Having stood out among ancient nations as the most grand center of learning, good governance, and commerce, its present ignorance and poverty show all the more starkly how fanaticism and despotism may ravage a once-great society.

Persia is often described as having been the most impressive empire of the Orient with regards to scholarship (the anonymous "Bibliothèque"), governance (Boucher d'Argis, "Droit public"), wealth (Jaucourt's "Perse, empire de," which cites Chardin; Saint-Lambert's

29. Srinivas Aravamudan, *Enlightenment Orientalism: resisting the rise of the novel* (Chicago, IL, 2012).

"Luxe"), and military might (d'Authville's "Escadron," Saint-Lambert's "Luxe").

Persia was a center of philosophy and scientific advancement, both in ancient times and in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. D'Alembert's articles emphasize the contributions of Persians to mathematical discoveries ("Algebre," "Abaque"). Rousseau's "Economie," citing Chardin, assesses Persia as one of only two places that implemented a successful public education system. Jaucourt's "Fabuliste" describes Persian kings as having encouraged the translation of books of learning, which "dignified the throne." This could be read as a critique of the regime of censorship in France and an oblique argument in favor of freedom of expression: Instead of repressing scholarship, the monarchy should think of it as an asset. If even Persia's government encouraged this, how much more should Europe's modern governments! While Jaucourt's "Perse, empire de" describes Persia's as severely diminished after the Arab invasion, he also notes that the state of philosophy and the sciences had recovered by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries so as to be "in about the same state as ours." Persia's reputation as a center of science and learning is described as currently in a state of decline, however. In "Astronomie" Formey and D'Alembert cite Chardin as having observed that modern Persians invest heavily in astronomy, but they no longer reap any scholarly benefit from the study since they only study the stars to predict the future.

Jaucourt writes in "Ispahan, ou Hispahan" that the capital of Persia was the biggest, most beautiful city in the Orient. It cultivated science, he notes, though with the distancing caveat, "if I can use this term here." Persia built impressive mosques, caravanserais, and no fewer than forty-eight colleges. It was home to the most beautiful gardens (Jaucourt's "Jardin") and the most opulent royal court (Jaucourt's "Perse, empire de"). Persia succumbed to the corrupting effects of despotism, however, and was rapidly reduced to ruins and desolation by its neighbors.[30] The lesson to be drawn is that no amount of wealth and power can secure a state against bad governance. After all, "despotism" is not specific to Persia or Islam; it is an ill to which all powers are prone.

30. Jaucourt writes in "Ispahan" that "la célebre, la riche et superbe ville d'*Ispahan* a été pillée, saccagée, ruinée de fond en comble; son commerce a été anéanti […] [deux étranges révolutions] ont jetté le royaume de l'état le plus florissant dans le plus grand abysme de malheurs."

A source of European ideas

Demonstrating the correct use of the word "origin" in the grammatical article "Origine," Diderot writes this instructive sentence: "The religious practices of our days have almost all of their origins in paganism."[31] Indeed, the encyclopedists often emphasize the Eastern provenance of European philosophy and religion. A common theme is that learning flourished in Persia when scholarship was only just awakening in Europe, as in Vaugondy's "Géographie" or the anonymous "Bibliothèque." Diderot notes that Greek and Roman philosophers traveled to Persia to glean wisdom—for example Plotinus in "Eclecticisme" or Democritus in "Eleatique." Persian knowledge, in turn, is often described as coming from India, as in Diderot's "Indiens" or Jaucourt's "Latrunculi." These genealogies had the potential to disabuse European readers of their sense of philosophic superiority, perhaps encouraging more egalitarian intellectual engagement with the East. Also, the *philosophes* had a vested interest in portraying knowledge as a freely circulating, transnational phenomenon: This vision contrasted with the strict regulation of information in France.

Ancient religions had Persian roots: Jaucourt's "Mihir" traces the Roman cult of Venus to Persia (and then to the Arabs). More astonishingly, Christianity has Persian roots too: Polier de Bottens's downright heretical "Magicien" describes Moses as being instructed by the Persians in the sciences of the Egyptians. Almost as an afterthought, de Bottens adds that it is really a pity that, unlike his Persian tutors, Moses failed to trace miracles to their natural causes. That such a blithe dismissal of the existence of miracles could pass the censors testifies to the effectiveness of Persia and history as a subterfuge for critique.

Tolerant and diverse

Persia is portrayed as having been a bastion of diversity and model of tolerance, especially before the introduction of Islam, because of its openness toward foreigners and its own indigenous minority populations.[32] Boulanger's account of a dispersed Persian religious minority

31. "Les pratiques religieuses de nos jours ont presque toutes leur *origine* dans le paganisme." Also see Lough, *Encyclopédie*, p.228.
32. The abundance of different minority populations living within Persia is emphasized in one of the encyclopedists' main sources, Jean Antoine Du

in "Guebres" observes that, when religions are forced underground, they are subject to unfair accusations (a point echoed in Diderot's "Perses, philosophie des"); his appeal for religious tolerance for the Ghebres is clearly applicable to the European context. Jaucourt's "Perse, empire de" describes kings in ancient Persia as demonstrating generous hospitality and religious tolerance. King Khosroës the Great "never refused his protection to those who were oppressed." In "Hospitalité," Jaucourt describes Persian tolerance of the Greeks. He also criticizes the early Church Fathers in "Père de l'Eglise (Hist. ecclésiast.)" for destroying the temples of the Magi in Persia: After all, no one can escape the law of natural religion that one must pay for the damage one has done to one's fellow man. Here is a direct assertion that Christianity is subject to a higher law, and that intolerance of other religions is an evil to be remedied. Perhaps more than any other encyclopedist, Jaucourt was an advocate of religious tolerance.[33] He had a vested interest in tolerance: He was from a Protestant family that had elected to stay in France even after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685). Jaucourt's notion of tolerance, moreover, was indebted to the Huguenot tradition. He argued for tolerance from the premise that God alone was master of one's conscience, and thus an attempt to persecute certain confessional stances was usurping authority that was properly God's.[34] Moreover, Jaucourt was committed to a very broad notion of what comprised "Christianity": Basically, it was a commitment to core moral concepts upon which all humans could agree, and to which organized religion ought to defer.[35]

Jaucourt's "Zéle de religion" portrays ancient Persia as a place where inhabitants enjoyed full liberty of conscience. In this article, Jaucourt relates an episode in which one priest unleashes a torrent of persecution on Christians, thereby sparking a war with Rome. Jaucourt's commentary refrains from condemning Persian religion, instead seizing the opportunity to praise moderation: "See what the indiscreet zeal of just one person can produce," he writes, adding later, "If now we follow

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Cerceau, *Histoire de Thomas Kouli-Kan, sophi de Perse* (Amsterdam and Leipzig, Arkstée et Merkus, 1741).

33. Morris argues that this tendency runs throughout all of Jaucourt's contributions. "The chevalier's remarks," she writes, "suggest furthermore by their spirit of tolerance that public theological debates are in fact outmoded and tedious, do not convince anyone, and should cede their place to the private, individual search of spirituality." Morris, *Le Chevalier de Jaucourt*, p.43.
34. Zurbuchen, "Jaucourt," p.163.
35. Zurbuchen, "Jaucourt," p.163.

the cruel history that follows destructive zeal, we will find it full of so many tragic scenes, and so many deaths and carnage, that no evil on earth ever produced such disasters."[36] Jaucourt concludes by decrying the senselessness of war and the injustice wrought by all kinds of religious zeal. Indeed, the *Encyclopédie* consistently maintains the stupidity of all kinds of religious controversy, as in Diderot's "Aschariouns," "Croisades," and "Chevarigtes," and Deleyre's "Fanatisme."

Fanaticism and the weakening of natural religion

With regard to Persia, Islam is often portrayed as the unnatural and fanatical replacement of a more reasonable and natural ancient religion. Generally, the encyclopedists characterize natural religion as originating in human needs and as being reasonably adapted to a society's circumstances.[37] This religion can be good because it is useful ("Cristianisme"). Revealed religion comes about when natural religion is confused or manipulated by duplicitous priests who take advantage of the credulous masses (d'Holbach's "Prêtres" and "Théocratie," Jaucourt's "Polythéisme"). Priests invent superstition and idolatry so as to better manipulate them (Diderot's "Céremonies"). Over time, the priests' self-serving and unreasonable provisions proliferate until moral precepts become so contradictory and irrational that they collapse into chaos or war.[38] This critique of revealed religion demonstrates, by inference, that the Christian religion is unnecessary, and is actually harmful to natural, universal morality.[39]

The *Encyclopédie* describes ancient Persia's natural, usually Zoroastrian, religions as overcome by an intolerant and despotic Islam. "Fanatisme" by Deleyre associates intolerance of pagan religions in

36. "Voilà ce que le *zèle* indiscret d'un seul particulier peut produire. A peine trente ans suffirent à la violence des persécuteurs!" and, "Si maintenant nous suivions l'histoire cruelle des effets du *zèle* destructeur, nous la trouverions remplie de tant de scènes tragiques, de tant de meurtres & de carnage, qu'aucun fléau sur la terre n'a jamais produit tant de désastres."
37. Diderot had argued in his *Essai sur le mérite et la vertu* (1745), *De la suffisance de la religion naturelle* (1747), and the article "Noachides" that natural religion is sufficient and even superior to revealed religion, since it is closer to reason and eschews manipulation by crafty priests.
38. See Whitney Mannies and John Christian Laursen, "Denis Diderot on war and peace: nature and morality," *Araucaria: revista Iberoamericana de filosofía, política, y humanidades* 16:32 (2014), p.155–71.
39. See Joseph Edmund Barker, *Diderot's treatment of the Christian religion in the Encyclopédie* (Morningside Heights, NY, 1941), p.128.

Persia with the introduction of Islam. Jaucourt describes in "Mage" how the wise men of Zoroastrianism were the last holdout against Islam, maintaining a pure and ancient religion, before finally being repressed. In "Mihir," Jaucourt describes the basis of ancient Persian religion as love, a "natural sentiment which is the principle of the union and fecundity of living things." In "Perse, empire de," Jaucourt is clear that the ancient Persian religion was not opposed to reason, and that religious zeal, justice, and science can flourish together. Especially reasonable is their belief that God is not at all like humans.

Boulanger's "Guebres" describes how this Zoroastrian religious minority was driven into exile and dispersed by Islam, whose "bloody mission" forced them to convert from the faith of their fathers. The Ghebres, however, still manage to preserve their ancient religion. Boulanger contrasts the practical utility of the Ghebres' religion that leads them to coexist peacefully with their neighbors with despotic and bellicose Islamic states "who join contemplation with despotism." True, the religion of the Ghebres is not perfect: Their priests distribute the holy fire and cow urine only to those who can pay, and they merely pretend to have read the books of Zoroaster. To their credit, though, they manage to find a happy medium in the afterlife—somewhere between Islam's absurd paradise and Christianity's formidable hell. The story of the Ghebres is an appeal for religious tolerance in general, an appreciation of artless religion, and a condemnation of revealed religion.

The Gaures, another Zoroastrian sect in Persia, are also portrayed by Jaucourt as having a more natural and reasonable religion than the Islam forced onto Persia. Their fire-worship is absolved of accusations of idolatry on several occasions; they do not worship fire itself so much as the principle of natural forces. (Absolving natural religion of idolatry is a recurring theme in the *Encyclopédie* since, as was mentioned previously, idolatry was one means by which priests manipulated the credulous masses.) Contrasting this article by Jaucourt with an article by Mallet about a similar sect of Zoroastrianism reveals Jaucourt to be more concerned with portraying Persian religious minorities positively: Mallet does not contrast them with Islamic intolerance; he does not seize the opportunity, as would Jaucourt, to address fanaticism; he does not dispel the idolatry myth, but rather repeats that they worshiped fire.[40]

40. Incidentally, Islam is generally treated positively in the *Encyclopédie* as a consistently anti-idolatrous religion; in "Idolâtre," Voltaire even praises Islam for eliminating idolatry in Christian lands that Muhammad invaded.

There is a darker side to Zoroastrianism. An anonymous encyclopedist writes in "Exotérique et Esotérique" that kings are chosen from either a warrior class or a priest class, but, when they are chosen from the warrior class, they must first go to the priests to learn their secret knowledge. Such is the case, he argues, in Persia: "Les mages de Perse […] avoient de la même manière & dans la même vûe leur doctrine publique & leur doctrine secrete." This is repeated in "Megelle, (Hist. mod.)" where an anonymous encyclopedist writes that the *grands seigneurs* in the Persian court give important and secret counsel to the king, noting ominously, "Les mégelles ont été de tous les tems impénétrables."

Diderot's "Corasmin" is unique in that it describes a Persian religious minority entirely negatively: The Corasmin wandered around Persia vexing both the Christians and the Muslims. Eventually, they vanished from the earth, "as will happen to every race that compels the human race to treat them like an enemy." When a people is at odds with humanity, they will eventually perish. Their example demonstrates the larger theme in the *Encyclopédie* that religion is good only when it is useful. The Corasmin are interesting when contrasted with the Parsis, another Persian sect fleeing Muslim Arabs: Unlike the Corasmin, though they are not forbidden meat, the Parsis are sensitive to their Muslim neighbors, so they abstain for fear of offending them ("Parsis," d'Holbach). Here is a degree of tolerance and consideration that few Europeans would brook, but d'Holbach portrays it as a positive behavior conducive to peace.

Jaucourt praises the author Sadi (or Sady, or Saadi Shirazi, the medieval Persian poet), then says that his verse resembles the Hebrew verses, that God is the common link of truth, and that it makes known the genius of this Persian. Jaucourt clearly demonstrates that there is a natural religion linking all cultures and truths.[41]

The encyclopedists maintain a sense that the Persian people did not adopt and embrace Islam and its despotism, but were unfortunately conquered by it. In other words, there is a sense in which there is a kernel of essential Persian identity that is virtuous and enlightened, the true heir of antiquity, now unfortunately (though temporarily?) lost. The anonymous article "Sarrassins" is fascinating for having used Voltaire as a source, but failing to cite Voltaire. Instead, this author refers the reader to Ockley (1708), though it is not clear why. Also, this author portrays Persia as conquered by the Sarrassins, and so falling

41. Jaucourt, "Poesie orientale moderne."

to the religious power of Islam. Overall, then, the encyclopedists portray the peoples of Persia as having been a virtuous, enlightened people before despotic Islam took over.

The dissolution into despotism

Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European accounts describe Persia as despotic,[42] a view to which the encyclopedists subscribe. Saint-Lambert's "Manière" argues that the extreme submission of Persians is indicative of the despotism that reigns throughout Asia. In "Perse, empire de" Jaucourt gives a sometimes positive account of Persia, but still states unequivocally that modern Persia is a despotic state (in fact, Jaucourt describes "almost all of Asia" as despotic in "Despotisme"). But, whereas earlier accounts might have critiqued Persia's despotism to make Europeans feel more modern, the encyclopedists critique Persia so as to cause Europeans to recognize the tyranny they live under. Take for instance Chardin's earlier (1711) relief at not having to live in a country where the sovereign can kill a man for any reason: He seems genuinely oblivious to the fact that this same thing was currently occurring in his native France.[43] By contrast, the encyclopedists sometimes express the same admiration of France's monarchy and the same criticism of Persia, but, taken in the context of the *Encyclopédie* as a whole, these comments seem ironic. In "Despotisme," for example, Jaucourt expresses relief not to be in Persia. He is grateful "for having been born under a different government, where we obey with joy a monarch who makes us love him." This praise is *prima facie* ambiguous: A monarch who makes you love him sounds less than lovable. When one understands Jaucourt's statements in light of his liberal aims, Protestant background, and Huguenot sympathies, this statement seems downright facetious.

Persia's despotism becomes ridiculous as the absurdity of its submission becomes apparent: One cannot even present a petition in favor of a condemned person; the sophi can arrest anyone, without hope of recourse (Jaucourt's "Despotisme"). A "Kourouk" (anonymous) punishes with death those who would gaze on the wives of the king.

42. Jacquin's study of seventeenth-century travelogues observes that Le Brun, Tavernier, Chardin, Dom Garcia de Silva de Figueroa, and Adam Olearius all communicate this view. Frédéric Jacquin, *Le Voyage en Perse au XVII^e siècle* (Paris, 2010).
43. See Jacquin, *Le Voyage*, p.216–17.

Persia is sometimes characterized as the worst example of despotism—as when its kings demand more absurd titles (Jaucourt's "Despotisme"). In "Perse, empire de," Jaucourt writes out in its entirety the title of Sultan Ussein, king of Persia, which is so absurdly long that the reader cannot help but laugh at the pretensions to absolute power.[44]

Why is Persia so diminished? Generally, the *Encyclopédie* portrays religious fanaticism as precipitating a descent into despotism. The arbitrary, despotic abuses of power characterizing modern Persia are contrasted with the earlier, wiser, and more tolerant kings of Persia. Still, had Persia been sufficiently enlightened, it would never have been susceptible to the introduction of a new and violent fanaticism in the first place (anonymous, "Legislateur (Politique)"). Ancient Persia was already in decline from bad governance and excessive luxury. An anonymous encyclopedist in "Persanes, Dynasties (Hist. de. Perse.)" writes that the last of the thirty-one kings of the Schekkan dynasty was hated by his people for his tyranny, and the resulting factions left them vulnerable to Arab domination. Saint-Lambert's "Luxe" describes how Cyrus led the Persians to dominance over rich countries. Later, having become rich themselves, the Persians were dominated in turn by the poor Macedonians. Luxury, Saint-Lambert argues, is opposed to the creation of good citizens: The world has seen "le luxe s'élever par degrés avec les nations, les mœurs se corrompre, et les empires s'affoiblir, décliner, et tomber." Despotism could never have taken hold if the despot had not been aided by a rich, corrupt few. Muhammad took advantage of this sad state of affairs to introduce Islam, after which there was some progress of science and learning, but eventually only fanaticism, intolerance, despotism, and ruin. Now Persia is a theater of civil war, such is the destructive and factionalizing consequence of despotism (Jaucourt's "Mogol").

Persia's decline is a warning to Europe about the dangers of despotism and fanaticism. Even ancient Persia's enlightened leaders

44. "Sultan Ussein, roi de *Perse*, de Parthie, de Médie, de la Bactriane, de Chorazan, de Candahar, des Tartares Usbecks; des royaumes d'Hircanie, de Draconie, de Parménie, d'Hidaspie, de Sogdiane, d'Aric, de Paropamize, de Drawgiane, de Margiane & de Caramanie, jusqu'au fleuve Indus: Sultan d'Ormus, de Larr, d'Arabie, de Susiane, de Chaldée, de Mésopotamie, de Géorgie, d'Arménie, de Circassie; seigneur des montagnes impériales d'Ararac, de Taurus, du Caucase; commandant de toutes les créatures, depuis la mer de Chorazan, jusqu'au golfe de *Perse*, de la famille d'Ali, prince des quatre fleuves, l'Euphrate, le Tigre, l'Araxe & l'Indus; gouverneur de tous les sultans, empereur des musulmans, rejetton d'honneur, miroir de vertu, & rose de délices, *&c.*"

were still "a government of one only" ("le pouvoir arbitraire d'un seul"; Saint-Lambert, "Luxe"), leaving them vulnerable to despotism. Despotism in turn left them vulnerable to fanaticism. These vulnerabilities are not unique to Persia, rather they are attributed to more general institutional explanations, leaving the reader to extrapolate the consequences for Europe. A (judiciously) anonymous encyclopedist is surprisingly explicit about the Persia–France comparison in the article "Palibotre": Palibotre was originally the name of a revered Persian king, but inferior kings have vainly dared to take the name as well. It is annoying that the famous name of a good man can be sullied by the iniquities of those who come after, as with Palibotre in Persia or, say, Louis in France. It is astonishing that such a direct criticism of the current king of France could make it past the censor, but this just demonstrates why Persia was such an effective subterfuge: One could deliver a critique where readers and censors might not expect it.

Enduring prejudice

The encyclopedists repeat most of the old prejudices about Persia and the Orient: that Persians are given to luxury and amorousness; that Islam is despotic and fanatical; that there is a pan-Oriental philosophy (Diderot's "Orientale, Philosophie"). There is racism: In "Humaine espèce," Diderot repeats Chardin's observation that Persians have become some of the best-looking and whitest people on earth due to the introduction of Georgian blood.

Persian women are not portrayed negatively, but only because they cannot be blamed for what Persian men have compelled them to become: sedentary, opulent, sexual (Jaucourt's "Perse"). Beyond this theme, there is only sundry information about women in Persia. Jaucourt in "Regles" describes luxurious and sedentary Persian women as having two to three periods a month. "Ambassade" speaks of a female *ambassadrice* sent from Persia to Henry IV. In "Femme," Barthès uses d'Herbelot to correct the assumption that Islam does not allow women into paradise.

It is also interesting to note that there was variation in how the encyclopedists approached Persia. Mallet's articles about Islam often repeat prejudice without any detectable critical goal. His article "Al-coran" describes the Koran mockingly and inaccurately as having sixty suras arranged haphazardly, it being impossible to tell in which order they came from the sky. "Calenders" describes a particular sect of dervishes as debauched epicureans. Also, Mallet's articles

often portray as absurd aspects of modern Persian despotism. For example, "Abdar" describes the official responsible for keeping the king's water hidden, and a *courouk* is the decree the king issues when he travels, prohibiting people from daring to look upon his wives (also see "Kourouk," anonymous). He describes the *goulams*, or slaves, who make up the sophi's army. His article "Musulman" notes that Islam is divided between two sects, but he does not take advantage of the obvious opportunity to critique religious divisions in general, as Diderot, Jaucourt, or Deleyre might have done.

Conclusion

Leo Strauss suggested in *Persecution and the art of writing* that authors writing in unfree circumstances had to bury their true meaning under ostensibly unobjectionable language.[45] Certainly this occurs in the *Encyclopédie*. But the *Encyclopédie* demonstrates another kind of radical critique: the historical description itself that subtly undermines our ability to believe in the divine or in the absolutist government's legitimacy. To list with equanimity the luck or violence responsible for our present security; to record with detachment the rise and fall of civilizations and belief systems; to describe the artificial origins of our institutions: Laying bare the contingency of all circumstances equalizes the uniqueness of our own. In this way, historical investigation, as Margaret Leslie argues, "seems to destroy the very treasure that we seek, leaving only the dust of scholarship."[46]

Sometimes, however, dust and destruction are not such woeful and inevitable termini. Sometimes dust and destruction are desired—even actively sought. Deploying historical accounts so as to obliterate the divine and dismantle the infinite, the scholar knowingly profits from a patina of objectivity, ideological neutrality, and innocuousness. The censor is duped, since from isolated accounts he cannot perceive the radical critique of belief and politics that emerges only after internalizing the meta-perspective that phenomena are merely historical. Hence the destroying function of history is almost always detected too late, after readers reflect on their inability to believe—that their culture is morally superior, that the king is sovereign, that Jesus Christ is divine, and so on. The encyclopedists profited from the

45. Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the art of writing* (Chicago, IL, 1952).
46. Margaret Leslie, "In defense of anachronism," *Political studies* 18:4 (1970), p.433–47.

destructive potential and ostensible innocuousness of history to launch foundational critiques of religion and absolutism, and rarely did this work so well than with the subjects of Islam generally and Persia specifically.

"Peuplade estimable": late-eighteenth-century radical critics of religion and the Ghebres

Erica J. Mannucci

> Aujourd'hui encore, les Guèbres, descendants des anciens disciples de Zoroastre, adorent l'élément du feu […] On voit donc qu'il n'y a point d'époque où l'on ne trouve le culte de la Nature plus ou moins répandu dans la Perse.[1]

When they evoked the Ghebres—the followers of Zoroastrianism in modern Islamic Persia—French critics of religion of the revolutionary period like Charles-François Dupuis, Sylvain Maréchal, or Volney added their own radical perspectives to an abundant existing literature. By these authors, the Ghebres were made into a case for the deconstruction of religion.

"Cette peuplade estimable," Maréchal wrote in laudatory terms just before the Revolution in a "Notice sur la Perse," "pratique et réalise encore de nos jours les principes de la Philosophie naturelle dont nous possédons si bien la théorie."[2] By contrast, Volney, in his famous *Ruines*, was more interested in representing the Ghebres (or Parsis) as displaying the typical contentious attitude of the religious, regardless of the fact that they were a persecuted group, which might have made them more inclined to tolerance: "persécutés comme les juifs, et dispersés chez les autres peuples, ils reçoivent, sans discussion, les préceptes du représentant de leur prophète; mais sitôt que le *môbed* et les *destours* seront rassemblés, la controverse s'établira."[3]

1. Charles-François Dupuis, *Origine de tous les cultes, ou Religion universelle*, 3 vols. and atlas (Paris, Agasse, An III [1794]), vol.1, p.28.
2. Sylvain Maréchal, "Notice historique sur la Perse," in *Costumes civils actuels de tous les peuples connus*, 4 vols. (Paris, Pavard, 1788), vol.3, p.1–11 (2; each "Notice" in the book has separate pagination starting from page 1).
3. Volney (Constantin-François de Chassebœuf), *Les Ruines: méditation sur les*

In the late seventeenth century, travelers like Jean Chardin and Jean-Baptiste Tavernier had provided Europeans with accounts of the Ghebres, whose image would then serve critical purposes in France throughout the eighteenth century.[4] Indeed the frequent occurrences of these references to the Ghebres contributed to the development of a modern notion of the minority group and of its status as a source of rights in the French Enlightenment. As Philippe Roger argues: "la plus emblématique de toutes ces figures de l'identification et de la projection, celle qui court à travers tout le siècle, de Montesquieu à Voltaire, est sans conteste celle des Guèbres, ces anciens Persans adorateurs du Soleil, devenus minoritaires en leur propre pays conquis par l'Islam."[5]

The name "Guèbres," as Nicolas Boulanger explained in his article on them in the seventh volume of the *Encyclopédie*, was originally a disparaging term, a product of intolerance: "c'est de même le venin calomnieux que répandent les disputes de religion, qui a donné aux restes des anciens Perses le nom de Guèbres, qui dans la bouche des Persans modernes, désigne en général *païen*, un *infidèle*, un *homme adonné au crime contre nature*."[6]

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révolutions des empires (Paris, Dessenne, 1791), p.166. Volney like Dupuis, did use the name "'Parsis"' referring to the Zoroastrian Diaspora, then chiefly in India, later extended to various locations worldwide. On modern Zoroastrians, see Jenny Rose, *Zoroastrianism: an introduction* (London and New York, 2011), p.1–8, 173–88, 202–42; Tanya M. Luhrman, *The Good Parsi: The Fate of a Colonial Elite in a Postcolonial Society* (London-Cambridge, MA,1996); *Parsis in India and the Diaspora*, eds. John R. Hinnells and Alan Williams (Abingdon-New York, 2008).

4. Jean Chardin, *Voyages de M. le chevalier Chardin, en Perse et autres lieux de l'Orient*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam, de Lorme, 1711): The first volume came out in 1686. Rose observes that "One of Chardin's significant contributions to Zoroastrian studies is his recognition that the *Guèbres* were descended from those ancient Persians who had constructed the monuments of Persepolis." Jenny Rose, *The Image of Zoroaster: the Persian Mage through European eyes* (New York, 2000), p.92–93. On Chardin's Persian travels, see Dirk van der Cruysse, *Chardin le Persan* (Paris, 1998). Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *Les Six voyages en Turquie et en Perse* (1679), ed. Stéphane Yerasmos (Paris, 1981).

5. Philippe Roger, "Tolérance et 'minorité' à l'âge des Lumières," *Etudes littéraires* 32:1–2 (2000), p.161–73 (171).

6. On this last accusation, Boulanger launches into a comparative linguistic dissertation showing the same root in "les expressions populaires de *bogri* […] et *bougeri*, qui conservent encore l'idée du crime abominable dont les Guèbres sont accusés par les Persans modernes; nos ayeux n'ont pas manqué de même d'en décorer les hérétiques": Nicolas Antoine Boulanger, *Œuvres de Boullanger*, vol.7 (Paris, Servières, 1792), p.108. On the evolution of popular usage of "bougre" during the Revolution (as synonym of "calotin," but also applied in self-irony

Boulanger also affirmed that their religion was one of the most ancient. This was a popular narrative about the Ghebres, since anticlerical authors took advantage of any opportunity to challenge the idea of the supremacy of the Judeo-Christian revelation, an idea that was notably repeated by Thomas Hyde with respect to Zoroastrianism in his work of reference, *Veterum persarum religionis historia* (1700).[7] Moreover, Boulanger remarked that the religion of the Ghebres was close to an original cult of natural elements (fire, the sun). As a recent author has observed: "il s'intéresse à ce peuple comme témoin de l'origine naturelle de la religion."[8]

For other *philosophes* the image of the Ghebres, similar to other "exotic" or "Oriental" references, was mainly allegorical, polemical, or satirical, though their presentations still contained some empirical observations about Ghebre customs. Among the best-known examples, the "Histoire d'Aphéridon et d'Astarté" in the *Lettres persanes*, began by stressing the antecedence of Zoroastrianism: "Je suis né parmi les Guèbres, d'une religion qui est peut-être la plus ancienne au monde."[9] Voltaire not only returned many times to the subject of Zoroaster and Zoroastrians (suffice it to mention *Zadig*), but wrote a (never performed) tragedy, *Les Guèbres, ou la Tolérance*.[10] Boulanger's

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to "ordinary folks") and beyond, see Michel Biard, *Parlez-vous sans-culotte? Dictionnaire du père Duchesne, 1790–1794* (Paris, 2009), p.79–80.

7. Thomas Hyde, *Veterum persarum et parthorum et medorum religionis historia*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, E Typographeo Clarendoniano, 1760), declares his thesis in his dedication to Baron Evesham and in his "Praefatio" (not paginated: f.v): Zoroaster undoubtedly knew the Old Testament well ("*Zoroastri* quidem […] benè notum fuit *Vetus Testamentum*") through Jewish captives in Persia, and he drew much of his religion and ritual from that source. It would be quite outside the aims of this study to discuss the claim to antiquity asserted by the followers of Zoroastrianism themselves and given a certain political recognition by the "3000th anniversary of Zoroastrian culture" declared by UNESCO in 2003.
8. Marco Platania, "Morale naturelle et développement des sociétés: les troglodytes et les Guèbres dans la réflexion de Montesquieu," in *Etica e progresso: atti del convegno*, ed. Lorenzo Bianchi (Naples, 2007), p.49–76 (76).
9. Charles-Louis de Secondat de Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, ed. Jacques Roger (Paris, 1964), p.115. See Pierre Briant, "Montesquieu et ses sources: Alexandre, l'Empire, les Guèbres et l'irrigation," *SVEC* 2007:06, p.243–62; and Rolando Minuti, "Perse," in *Dictionnaire Montesquieu* (online), ed. Catherine Volpihac-Auger (Lyon, 2013).
10. The wider theme of Zoroaster and Zoroastrianism in eighteenth-century literature is beyond the scope of my focus here. For a work of reference, see Michael Stausberg, *Faszination Zarathustra: Zoroaster und die Europäische Religionsgeschichte der frühen Neuzeit*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1998); also see Nora Kathleen Firby,

article "Guèbres'—reproduced in 1792 in the *Encyclopédie méthodique* by Jacques-André Naigeon, the Holbachian veteran and supporter of the Revolution—can be considered a more direct antecedent of the revolutionary interpretations of this population, although further firsthand information on the religion and culture of the Ghebres was provided by later Orientalist studies, especially, as we will see, by those of Anquetil Duperron.[11]

Boulanger's perspective on the Ghebres was more historical than allegorical, and revolutionary intellectuals followed his lead by evoking past and present Zoroastrians less as metaphors than as actual illustrative cases promoting an objective that, at least for a few years, they were free to communicate quite straightforwardly: the global dismantling of religion itself. Despite a strong degree of intertextuality, each of these revolutionaries went about this in a distinctive way.

Maréchal's Ghebres: the unknowing pantheists

Sylvain Maréchal (1750–1803) was a Parisian poet who conveyed a materialist and egalitarian message in pastoral style or "moral fragments," in the literary tradition of *formes brèves*.[12] He was a *sous-bibliothécaire* until 1784, and he wrote in various genres, including illustrated serial works that he produced for commissions.[13] Among these commissions were *Antiquités d'Herculanum* and the previously mentioned *Costumes civils*, an enterprise he embarked upon for a fellow

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European travellers and their perceptions of Zoroastrians in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Berlin, 1988), and Rose, *The Image of Zoroaster*. For a survey on modern Zoroastrian studies, Michael Stausberg, "On the state and prospect of the study of Zoroastrianism," *Numen* 55:5 (2008), p.561–600.

11. Jacques-André Naigeon reprinted Boulanger's article in the *Encyclopédie méthodique: philosophie ancienne et moderne*, 3 vols. (Paris, Panckoucke, 1791–1794), vol.2, p.653–56.

12. See Eric Tourrette, *Les Formes brèves de la description morale: quatrains, maximes, remarques* (Paris, 2008). See the clandestine text by Sylvain Maréchal, *Ad majorem gloriam virtutis. Fragmens d'un poëme moral sur Dieu* ("Athéopolis," n.n., 1781), probably printed in Neuchâtel, and its later revised versions, *Dieu et les prêtres, fragments d'un poëme philosophique* (Paris, Patris, An II [1793]) and *Lucrèce français: fragments d'un poëme* (Paris, n.n., An VI [1798]). In 1793 he wrote: "c'est à la religion que les hommes sont redevables de l'humiliante inégalité des conditions qu'ils ont la lâcheté de souffrir parmi eux": Maréchal, *Correctif à la Révolution* (Paris, Cercle social, 1793), p.172.

13. See Erica J. Mannucci, "Radical customs: Maréchal's critique of religion and politics in serial works on distant civilizations," *Lumen* 36 (2017), p.161–76.

freethinker, successful publisher, and illustrator Jacques Grasset de Saint-Sauveur.[14]

Maréchal's literary career began in 1770, and, despite becoming quite well known in his time, he always remained extra-institutional and a less established figure compared to Dupuis and Volney. Before 1789, he had a more difficult life: He lost his post at the Mazarine, faced poverty, and went to jail because of some of his nonclandestine publications.

In 1789 he embraced the Revolution and became an influential radical journalist and playwright, but he consistently avoided official roles and political affiliations. Later, in 1796, Maréchal became a member of the directory of Babeuf's egalitarian clandestine organization, the Conspiracy of Equals, and authored some of their propaganda. He survived their traumatic failure undetected and, after a short period of silence, took up his pen again to fight his last political and intellectual battles in his signature literary style. During the period between the late Directoire and the Consulate—when more than once he eloquently signed himself "Homme-sans-Dieu," or H.S.D.—his most famous, provocative, and controversial work was the *Dictionnaire des athées anciens et modernes* (1800).

To produce this work, he collaborated with Jerôme Lalande, the atheistic astronomer of the Académie des sciences, who was also a friend of Helvétius and former venerable of the famous Loge des neuf sœurs. Before the Revolution, Maréchal had only attended the public emanation of the Loge, the Musée de Paris (later Lycée), which was guided by a figure he admired, Antoine Court de Gébelin.[15] Toward the end of the 1790s, Lalande and Sylvain formed a "socratic sect"

14. On Maréchal, see Maurice Dommanget, *Sylvain Maréchal, l'égalitaire* (1950; Paris, 2017); Françoise Aubert, *Sylvain Maréchal: passion et faillite d'un égalitaire* (Pisa, 1975); Erica J. Mannucci, *Finalmente il popolo pensa: Sylvain Maréchal nell'immagine della Rivoluzione francese* (Naples, 2012); Sanja Perovic, *The Calendar in revolutionary France: perceptions of time in literature, culture, politics* (Cambridge, 2012). On Grasset, Bernard Andrès, "Jacques Grasset de Saint-Sauveur (1757–1810), aventurier du livre et de l'estampe: première partie: la lettre de 1785 au comte de Vergennes," *Les Cahiers des dix* 56 (2002), p.193–215, and "Deuxième partie: du costume à la tenue d'Eve," *Les Cahiers des dix* 57 (2003), p.323–52.

15. See Maréchal's "Impromptu à M. Court de Gébelin auteur d'une langue universelle," copied by Jacques Lablée in the manuscript *Œuvres anacréontiques, érotiques et pastorales de Sylvain Maréchal, dit le Berger Sylvain*, Sylvain Maréchal Papers, International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam, 54, f.26. On the Musée, Hervé Guénot, "Musées et lycées parisiens (1780–1830)," *Dix-huitième siècle* 18 (1986), p.249–67.

(with other friends like the Italian translator Luigi Pio), echoing Toland's *sodales socratici* in the *Pantheisticon*. After Maréchal's death, Lalande would publish two supplements to the *Dictionnaire*.[16] Lalande had also been a patron of Charles François Dupuis: He was an early champion of the younger man's ideas, since the first cautious drafts (where no reference was made to Christianity) of what would become Dupuis's *Origine*. Lalande published these articles in 1779 in the *Journal des savants* and then in the fourth volume of his own *Astronomie* in 1781.[17] Both Lalande and Dupuis would later be members of the Institut national, launched in 1795.

Maréchal's *Dictionnaire des athées* included a short article on the Ghebres, not his first reference to them or to Zoroastrianism (Zoroaster was the focus of a substantial part of his *Voyages de Pythagore* in early 1799), but indeed his last. The presence in the *Dictionnaire* of this article implied that, in Maréchal's view, this population had been, and still was, either an example of atheism or an involuntary "testimonial" for atheism. In this short text, the Ghebres' religion is perceived as sacralization of an uncreated natural element, which produces an effect—a secondary principle—for which the name God is used: "*Guèbres (les)* Encore aujourd'hui ils révèrent dans la lumière le plus bel attribut de la divinité. Le feu, disent-ils, produit la lumière; et la lumière est Dieu."[18]

The *Dictionnaire*—introduced by a "Discours préliminaire," a philosophical and political essay defining the atheist, and his attitude toward life and death—has often been labeled superficially as grotesque and intellectually gross because it includes articles not only on individual theologians, but on Jesus himself. However, Maréchal was not inventing anything when he represented the theologians and Jesus as impostors, or as actual endorsements for atheism; rather, he consciously drew on a solid radical tradition.[19] In the *Système de*

16. On Bonaparte's strong reaction to this gesture, Alphonse Aulard, "Napoléon et l'athée Lalande," in *Etudes et leçons sur la Révolution française*, 4th series (Paris, 1908), p.303–16.
17. See Jerôme Lalande, "*Origine de tous les cultes, ou Religion universelle*, par Dupuis, citoyen français," *Supplément à la Gazette nationale*, vol.12:360 (30 Fructidor An III [16 September 1795]), p.737–41, in *Réimpression de l'Ancien Moniteur*, vol.25 (Paris, 1862).
18. Sylvain Maréchal, *Dictionnaire des athées anciens et modernes* (Paris, An VIII [1800]), p.177.
19. Olivier Bloch ("L'héritage libertin dans le matérialisme des Lumières," *Dix-huitième siècle* 24, 1992, special issue: *Le Matérialisme des Lumières*, p.73–82),

la nature, one of Maréchal's main modern philosophical sources, d'Holbach had pointed out how, even within the apologetic tradition, thinkers who offered weak arguments for God's existence had been treated by theologians as supporters of atheism.[20]

In turn-of-the-century France, radical critique of religion was in danger of being driven back underground, as the attacks Maréchal immediately came under promptly confirmed.[21] His intent was to oppose a revival of Catholicism and to fight the restoration in a crucial political role of what for him—and for "toutes les têtes saines"—was the religious lie. Bonaparte seemed to be promoting this regression with his negotiations for the Concordat, which would indeed be signed in the following year.

Maréchal reacted with his *Dictionnaire*—which he saw as a defense of the best legacy of his century—against a new generation of adversaries, who treated atheists condescendingly, like old fossils trying to revive a "vieille querelle."[22] This *querelle*, unfortunately, was proving to be more urgent than ever: If the eighteenth century was passing on to the nineteenth century the old religious institutions he saw as "monuments de honte," this was because opinions that were still too servile and conservative had evidently been prevailing until the end of the century of the Enlightenment. Maréchal felt it was his duty to publish his testament of radical opposition as an act of confidence in a future secular deliverance: "Il ne faut pas que ce débordement de paroles magiques, dont le mot Dieu est le sommaire,

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tracing back some argumentative strategies, particularly to the *Theophrastus redivivus*, confirms that Maréchal's *Dictionnaire* (and Dupuis's *Origine* as well, in his opinion) "se situe dans la droite ligne de la plus élémentaire des tactiques libertines" (p.81).

20. Paul Henri Dietrich, baron d'Holbach, *Système de la nature, ou Des loix du monde physique et du monde moral, par M. de Mirabaud*, 2 vols. ("Londres," n.n., 1770), vol.2, p.100. At the beginning of the 1790s Maréchal even edited the last chapter of the *Système* as a political pamphlet for current propaganda purposes: see Mannucci, *Finalmente il popolo pensa*, p.60–64. On the debate on the paternity of the "Abrégé du Code de la nature," see Jeroom Vercruysse, *Bicentenaire du Système de la nature* (Paris, 1970), p.13, and Alain Sandrier, *Le Style philosophique du baron d'Holbach, conditions et contraintes du prosélytisme athée en France dans la seconde moitié du XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 2004), p.525–29.
21. Among the attacks, see [Léonard Aléa], *Antidote de l'athéisme, ou Examen critique du Dictionnaire des athées anciens et modernes* (Paris, An IX [1800]); Jean-Baptiste Delisle de Sales, *Mémoire en faveur de Dieu* (Paris, 1802) and *Défense d'un homme, atteint du crime d'avoir défendu Dieu* (Paris, 1802).
22. Maréchal, *Dictionnaire*, p.lx–lxi.

qui sur les ruines de la raison, de la vérité et de la justice, traversa tant de siècles, puisse atteindre le XIX[e] sans être du moins accompagné des solennelles réclamations de la philosophie."[23]

One of Maréchal's key images is the upright citizen and family father who does not know he is an atheist, although the principles which are natural to him would imply this conclusion. In Maréchal's view—in itself not a novelty—entire populations exemplified this natural character of atheism. He saw them as unknowing atheists. Indeed, the notion that ordinary believers were not reliable sources for their own beliefs found support in studies on religion by contemporary writers, like Anquetil Duperron's work on the *Zend Avesta* (which he translated in 1771) and on religious knowledge among the Zoroastrians of his own time. Duperron, however, who always considered himself a religious man, could not be anticipating such an extreme antireligious interpretation of his words when he wrote in one of his studies on Zoroastrianism, "Ce n'est donc pas le peuple qu'il faut consulter sur les principes de son propre culte."[24] We could imagine Edward Said choosing this sentence to illustrate his point that early Orientalists thought they knew the Orient better than it could ever know itself.[25] Maréchal, however, thought along the lines of the *philosophie clandestine* tradition and its *topos* of the recourse of lawgivers to cunning or prudent simulation. What this particular *peuple* could not know, for Maréchal, was that Zoroaster, to catch their imagination, had concealed natural philosophy—the purest pantheism—under the guise of a new religion.[26] In Maréchal's *Voyages de Pythagore*, all ancient initiates were really natural philosophers and, among them, only

23. Maréchal, *Dictionnaire*, p.lix.
24. Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil Duperron, "Exposition du système théologique des Perses, tiré des livres Zends, Pehlvis et Parsis" (May 1767), *Mémoires de littérature, tirés des registres de l'Académie royale des inscriptions et belles-lettres* 69 (1780), p.86. See Claire Gallien, "Une querelle orientaliste: la réception controversée du *Zend Avesta* d'Anquetil-Duperron en France et en Angleterre," *Littératures classiques* 81:2 (2013), p.257–68. For another reading of Anquetil's intellectual role, Jonathan I. Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment: philosophy, revolution and human rights, 1750–1790* (Oxford, 2011), p.594–608.
25. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1978).
26. See for an example Maréchal, *Dieu et les prêtres*, p.87. Another atheist of the Revolution, Jean-Baptiste "Anacharsis" Cloots, used Duperron's recent research, but to represent Zoroaster according to this same tradition, though implying a harsher judgment: see the long footnotes of his *Certitude des preuves du mahometisme*, 2 vols. ("Londres," n.n., 1780), vol.2, p.210–27 and 249.

Pythagoras challenged the double doctrine and wanted to teach the real truth to people.

What marked the boundary between religion and atheism, for Maréchal, was the merging of deity with nature, an immanentism which dissolved religion itself. Transcendence, he explained in his *Discours préliminaire*, is just wordplay and deliberate misunderstanding, but an immanent God is no God. An immanent God is not divine, in other words, but is just the wrong name for Nature or reality itself.[27] As d'Holbach concluded in the *Système de la nature*, "Ces puissances invisibles dont l'imagination a fait les mobiles de l'univers, ou ne sont que les forces de la nature agissante ou ne sont rien,"[28] Maréchal paraphrased: "Dieu ne saurait être qu'abstraction ou matière […] Dieu est tout, ou n'est rien. Pour s'entendre et se faire entendre, le théologien est obligé de s'exprimer comme le philosophe. Mais si le tout est Dieu, Dieu perd sa divinité. D'une autre part, réduit à sa spiritualité, il n'a plus d'existence que dans la pensée de l'homme."[29]

In fact, Duperron's research could be construed as a basis for doubting that Zoroaster had believed in creation or a transcendent creative principle. Maréchal chose to quote this passage of Duperron in his article on "Zoroastre," the last in his *Dictionnaire des athées*: "L'*Eulma-Eslan* (ouvrage qui forme la tradition des Perses) nous apprend que dans la loi de Zoroastre, il est déclaré positivement que Dieu *a été créé par le temps avec le reste des astres*." God, thus, is not seen as creator, but as creation.[30] He went on to say that, according to some authors (Maréchal mentioned Thomas Stanley's *History of philosophy*, as he had done a year before in the *Voyages de Pythagore*),[31] Zoroaster said that he

27. "Quel est-il ce phantôme usurpant tous mes droits?" asks Nature in one of his *Fragmens*. "Dieu n'est encore que moi sous un nom différent": Maréchal, *Ad majorem gloriam virtutis*, p.17.
28. D'Holbach, *Système de la nature*, vol.2, p.189.
29. Maréchal, *Dictionnaire*, p.xlviii.
30. Time (*zurvan*) is in fact the focus of a religious movement within Zoroastrianism and of a variant cosmology. An aristocrat member of the Académie des inscriptions and of Mme Helvétius's salon, the Société d'Auteuil, revolutionary politician and member of the Institut, Claude-Emmanuel de Pastoret (*Zoroastre, Confucius et Mahomet, comparés comme sectateurs, législateurs et moralistes*, Paris, Buisson, 1787), understood this variant as the first dogma of Zoroaster (p.19). On today's debate on the orthodoxy of this interpretation, see Stausberg, "On the state and prospect of the study of Zoroastrianism," p.578–79.
31. Sylvain Maréchal, *Voyages de Pythagore*, 6 vols. (Paris, Deterville, An VII [1799]), vol.2, p.441: Zoroaster told Pythagoras the same things exactly and the same passage of Thomas Stanley's seventeenth-century work—which included a book

had come to announce to Persians the eternity of Nature, "ou le feu principe qui l'anime: voilà le Dieu qu'on adora dans les premiers temps, quand on rendit un culte au Soleil." Zoroaster revealed his strategy: "Le peuple perdra l'ensemble de la Nature, pour ne s'attacher qu'aux détails. Je l'y ramène sans qu'il s'en doute par cette loi physico-morale. Faite en sorte de plaire au feu, de plaire à l'eau." Largely treading in John Toland's footsteps, Maréchal thus felt entitled to conclude that Zoroaster—one of Diodorus's six Lawgivers—was in fact a pantheist, or a Spinozist, which for him was the same:[32] "le code religieux de Zoroastre, n'est que le panthéisme, ou le spinosisme réduit en culte," despite the fact that believers always tried to add famous philosophers, ancient and modern, to their list of supporters and good Christians.[33]

On the solar cult, Maréchal had created in the *Voyages de Pythagore* an illuminating sparring match between the Sage of Samos and Zoroaster:

> Pythagore. Je sais quelque chose de mieux à faire que de créer une religion nouvelle.
> Zoroastre. Dis!
> Pythagore. Fonder l'empire des moeurs sur la ruine de tous les cultes.
> Zoroastre. Tous?
> Pythagore. Oui! Tous; sans en excepter celui du Soleil.
> Zoroastre. Pourtant, c'est le seul excusable.[34]

In this case, Maréchal identified with both figures at the same time. Evidence can be found in several other works, where he did "excuse" the cult of the sun. He excused it, that is, not only in isolated or nomadic populations he considered close to nature or the golden age,

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on the Chaldeans—was quoted as a source. In this work, Maréchal is more systematic than elsewhere in quoting his sources, ancient and modern. He used Duperron's essays and his edition of the *Zend Avesta* extensively, as well as the classic authorities, Thomas Hyde and Edward Pococke, and Bayle, Hadrian Reland, Pastoret, of course the *Encyclopédie*; finally, he notably referred to Gabriel Naudé's *Apologie des grands hommes soupçonnés de magie*.

32. See the classic Paul Vernière, *Spinoza et la pensée française avant la Révolution* (Paris, 1954). On Toland's interpretation of the six lawgivers (Moses in particular), see Gavina Cherchi, *Pantheisticon: eterodossia e dissimulazione nella filosofia di John Toland* (Pisa, 1990), p.209; his position in *Origines Judaicae* has been treated by Jan Assmann in several books: see now Assmann, *Religio Duplex: how the Enlightenment reinvented Egyptian religion* (Cambridge, MA, 2014), p.54–61.
33. Maréchal, *Voyages de Pythagore*, vol.2, p.522–23.
34. Maréchal, *Voyages de Pythagore*, vol.2, p.440–41.

but also as a rational choice in a moral pedagogical perspective, as in the case of the *vieillard* of his revolutionary play *Jugement dernier des rois* (1793). In this work, a French *Ancien Régime* deportee to a remote island teaches the cult of the sun to natives who previously adored a volcano.[35]

In the *Costumes civils*, Maréchal constantly pursued opportunities to describe small populations that could suggest an alternative natural model: He did not neglect European cases, but this pattern worked better in environments that were or appeared less structured by civilization.[36] His notice on the Siberian Karakassians can illustrate his vision. The notice on this nomadic *peuplade* is introduced by Maréchal's own verses, taken from his ongoing work *Fragmens d'un poëme moral sur Dieu*. He represents the cult of the sun, "époux de la Nature," as the most spontaneous:

> Soleil! A ton flambeau, tout s'anime et s'épure;
> Ame de l'Univers, sans doute les mortels
> Te devaient honorer de leurs premiers Autels[37]

He did not reproduce another part of the Fragment, which seems relevant here:

> Ah! Pourquoi renoncer à ce culte innocent,
> Légitime tribut d'un coeur reconnaissant?[38]

35. Maréchal, *Jugement dernier des rois, prophétie en un acte, en prose* (Paris, Patris, An II [1793]).
36. In the "Notice historique sur les montagnards du nord de l'Écosse, et sur les habitans des Isles Hebrides," Maréchal, *Costumes civils*, vol.1, p.1–11, explained in a footnote that in the entire book he would provide cases showing that "l'Homme, pour vivre heureux et bon, n'a besoin d'autre Société que de sa Famille" (p.1).
37. Maréchal, "Moeurs et coutumes des Karakasses," in *Costumes civils*, vol.3, p.1. There are no direct references in his articles on Siberian populations to astronomer Jean-Sylvain Bailly's conjectures on the hyperborean origin of the cult of the sun and of fire, and on Kamchatka as the cradle of civilization, the real Atlantis, though Maréchal (who even owned a copy of Bailly's 1779 *Lettres sur l'Atlantide*: Aubert, *Sylvain Maréchal*, p.168) mentions that the "Kamtchadales" claim they descend directly from the time of Creation. See on the "monde primitif" theme and Bailly's role, Michael Sonenscher, *Sans-culottes: an eighteenth-century emblem in the French Revolution* (Princeton, NJ, 2008), p.251–60.
38. The whole fragment was not included in the 1781 edition of the *Fragmens*, but appeared for the first time in Sylvain Maréchal, *Dieu et les prêtres*, p.88–89.

In the *Costumes civils*, Maréchal dedicated more space to the Karakassians, and to many other *peuplades* he treated, than he did to civilized societies. Such *peuplades* were characterized by their fidelity to the cult of the sun, whose temple they felt was the entire universe. The Karakassians could not be converted, even if they did not dare refuse Christian baptism when it was required by their sovereign. In 1790, in the *Décret de l'Assemblée nationale portant règlement d'un culte sans prêtres*, a pamphlet proposing a civil religion to be practiced at home within the family, Maréchal would name the Karakassians, among others, as "pièces justificatives."[39]

The Ghebres were another example of closeness to Nature, as we have seen, and Maréchal devoted to this population about one-fifth of the whole "Notice historique sur la Perse"—to which he added another entire page on Zoroaster—although no illustration of their costume was provided. He presented them as "un contraste parfait avec le reste des Persans," who have "tous les vices et tous les agréments d'une Nation civilisée depuis long-temps, et qui a tout-à-fait perdu de vue les institutions primitives de la Nature." In fact, the rest of the "Notice" gave relatively more space to other happy minorities, living in the mountains like the shepherds of Gilan or otherwise isolated, than to a description—beyond the details of dress and typical products—of the majority, presented as divided into religious parties which hated each other, with great damage to the public good.

The modern Ghebres were ancient: Survivors of a glorious past, they had gone back to the model way of life of a natural golden age. They had, in Maréchal's vision, returned to private as opposed to public virtues, to a simple association of families governed by the elderly through their oral wisdom. The limits of modern Zoroastrians as informers on the doctrine of their religion observed by Duperron—their relative ignorance—became a moral asset: "Disciples de Zoroastre, ils ne savent plus lire dans le Code de leur saint Législateur; mais un coeur bon, un sens droit, sous la sauve-garde d'une tradition sacrée, les ont maintenus jusqu'à présent dans le véritable sentier qui mène au bonheur."

Gentle, frugal, unambitious, industrious: The Ghebres were born tolerant (praise that Maréchal otherwise extended only to the Quakers). "Ils ne trouvent pas mauvais qu'on pense autrement qu'eux," though

39. Sylvain Maréchal, *Décret de l'Assemblée nationale portant règlement d'un culte sans prêtres, ou Moyen de se passer de prêtres sans nuire au culte, suivi de notices historiques servant de pièces justificatives* (Paris, n.n., 1790), p.20–25.

they hoped that in a few thousand years all the universe would follow their cult. Peaceful by nature and by culture, they just avoided the "Musulman mal intentionné à leur égard, comme on se gare d'une pierre qui menace la tête du passant." At the same time they paid tribute to the crown so as to be allowed to obey only the "anciens de la Peuplade." Like the Karakassians and other populations Maréchal describes (relying on information provided by travel literature), they paid to live their life undisturbed, or, in other words, to remain characteristically "bien peu entichés de superstition."[40]

While he had availed himself of other sources in the *Costumes civils*, in the *Dictionnaire des athées* Maréchal quoted Dupuis as the direct source of his article on the Ghebres. In fact, he reproduced the exact words of the *Abrégé de l'Origine de tous les cultes* Dupuis had published two years before, after the 18 Fructidor coup, which the *parti philosophique* of the time essentially supported against the dangers of a royalist and consequently Catholic revival.[41] Maréchal recognized the scholar's work as the best support for his image of the Ghebres as unconscious pantheists. They were like other *peuplades* of the world, but they were more interesting because they were not semi-savage; they showed that it was possible to go back to a condition close to life according to Nature.

Moreover, Maréchal assigned a crucial role to the individual and powerful will behind their religion: They had had a great Lawgiver who concealed with a double doctrine his natural philosophy. In other words, Maréchal interpreted Dupuis's theory as confirmation of the classic heterodox idea that God is simply the Universe or Nature, or of what Maréchal like many before him in eighteenth-century France had understood to be the meaning of Spinoza's *Deus sive natura*. But his framework also maintained the crucial role of the Sage or the Lawgiver, who employs the pious lie to disguise a glorious yet tormented knowledge of the truth. This was a development, as already mentioned, of Toland's extension to the "six lawgivers" of the favorable image of a pantheistic "Moses Strabonicus"; Dupuis, by contrast, stayed closer to the position of the *Traité des trois imposteurs* and saw them all, Zoroaster included, as mere impostors.

Probably influenced by Lalande, Maréchal subscribed to Dupuis's

40. Maréchal, "Notice historique sur la Perse," quotations p.2–3.

41. Charles-François Dupuis, *Abrégé de l'Origine de tous les cultes*, 2 vols. (Paris, An IX [1801]), vol.2, p.95. This second edition of the 1798 work represented an anti-Concordat stance as much as Maréchal's *Dictionnaire*.

core ideas on the Egyptian or Oriental origin of the universal astral religion, and in the articles on "Druides" and "Isiaques" of the *Dictionnaire* he traced those ideas to Helvétius's *De l'homme*: "La religion payenne n'était proprement que le systême allégorisé de la nature," he quoted.[42] In his article on Dupuis himself, in the *Dictionnaire des athées*, he practically said his *Origine* could remain as the only book on God and religion in the world, after the destruction of all theological works.[43] To what extent, though, did their views really coincide?

Dupuis's Ghebres: a piece of evidence

Maréchal seems to have known of those theories on Egyptian mythology before the publication of the *Origine*: Court de Gébelin was already saying in 1773, in his monumental *Le Monde primitif*, that Notre-Dame in Paris was in fact Notre-Isis, a notion Dupuis would adopt, extracting it from its esoteric background.[44] In 1786, in *Paris et la province*, another serial commercial work—which ceased after the first two installments—Maréchal mentioned the continuity between ancient gods and Christian saints and described Notre-Dame, saying it was covered in hieroglyphs, still consulted by the "Adeptes français dans la science hermétique." He insisted on the Virgin to praise the cult of maternal love, "de tous les temps et de tous les Pays," but did not mention Isis, probably by choice.[45] Maréchal's priority was that of a moralist and political writer: extolling the universality of the natural, private virtues that were disfigured by religious and civil institutions.

Charles-François Dupuis (1742–1809) had, unlike Maréchal, a political career during the Revolution: He was a member of the Convention and was involved, albeit briefly, in Gilbert Romme's committee working on the new republican calendar. He was secretary of the Convention after Thermidor and, as we saw, a member of the

42. Maréchal, *Dictionnaire*, p.184; "Druides," p.113–14, "Isiaques," p.212. Jurgis Baltrušaitis, *La Quête d'Isis: essai sur la légende d'un mythe—introduction à l'égyptomanie* (Paris, 1967), was the first to notice the extent of Maréchal's debt to Dupuis's *Origine*, mentioning these articles of the *Dictionnaire*, p.41.
43. Maréchal, *Dictionnaire*, p.121–23.
44. For different suggestions on the relation between Dupuis, Court, and revolutionary politics, see Dan Edelstein, "The Egyptian French revolution: antiquarianism, Freemasonry and the mythology of nature," in *The Super-Enlightenment: daring to know too much*, ed. Dan Edelstein (Oxford, 2010), p.215–41.
45. [Sylvain Maréchal], *Paris et la province, ou Choix des plus beaux monuments d'architecture, anciens et modernes, en France* (Paris, Chez l'Auteur, 1786), 1re livraison, p.2.

Institut since the beginning. He was then a member of the Cinq-Cents and of the Corps législatif established after Brumaire by the year VIII Constitution, where in November 1801 his "élection comme président […] est perçue comme un affront à la politique ecclésiastique de Bonaparte."[46] His election was in fact the only way the members of this Assembly, where debate was prohibited, could signify their disapproval of the Concordat, signed by the First Consul a few months before. Bonaparte, as a contemporary anecdote narrated, pinpointed Dupuis as the one who thought that Jesus had never existed, that is, as the emblematical overt unbeliever.[47]

Obviously, Dupuis's political career did not last much longer, but this *savant* was not really a political man, or even a political mind. As a fellow scholar who knew him observed years later, the "opinion qu'ont gardée de Dupuis toutes les personnes qui l'ont connu" was "qu'il avait été placé hors de sa sphère en entrant dans les affaires politiques de son pays."[48] He was a timid scholar, so worried about the reactions that the publication of the *Origine* could provoke that, at first, he did not want to publish it. He had to be practically forced to do so by his wife and friends, particularly the abbé Leblond, another historian of religion, who, incidentally, had been a colleague of Maréchal at the Mazarine (as well as one of those inspiring him in the evolution of his ideas toward atheism). The "Préface" of Dupuis's *Origine* is itself an example of oscillation between prudent protestations and intellectual frankness.

However, the *Origine* had made Dupuis's name a political and cultural symbol: Whether he wished it or not, and all the more so after Brumaire, he was "la référence du courant athée."[49] The thesis of the *Origine* is still so well known it is barely necessary to repeat it: "Les Dieux étant la Nature elle-même, l'histoire des Dieux est donc celle de la Nature; et comme elle n'a point d'autres aventures, que ses phénomènes, les aventures des Dieux seront donc les phénomènes de la Nature en allégories […] l'ancienne Religion du monde […] est encore la moderne. Car presque rien n'a changé."[50] All religions, including

46. Jacques-Olivier Boudon, *Histoire du Consulat et de l'Empire* (Paris, 2003), p.94 and 114.
47. Dupuis did say this clearly: see Dupuis, *Abrégé*, vol.2, p.109.
48. Pierre-René Auguis, "Notice biographique sur la vie et les écrits de C.-F. Dupuis," in Dupuis, *Origine de tous les cultes* (Paris, 1822), p.vii–viii.
49. Jacques-Olivier Boudon, *Napoléon et les cultes* (Paris, 2002), p.47.
50. Dupuis, "Préface," in *Origine*, vol.1, p.x–xi.

Christianity, had a human and natural origin. The central allegories of religion originally descended from the basic experience of the senses: from the contrast between light and dark, day and night. The allegories were thus astronomical, and this essential meaning was as true for Greek gods as it was for Jesus Christ. It was equally true for Zoroastrianism:

> l'âge d'or des anciens, le paradis terrestre de Zoroastre et de Moïse ne sont autre chose que l'expression figurée de l'état dans lequel se trouve l'homme des climats septentrionaux, depuis l'équinoxe de printemps jusqu'à celui d'automne, et durant tout le temps que la terre éprouve l'action féconde et bienfaisante du soleil […] C'est alors que l'homme éprouve l'heureuse influence du principe de bien et de la lumière, d'Ormusd, d'Osiris, du Dieu bon, etc. jusqu'à ce qu'en automne il passe sous l'empire d'Ahriman, de Typhon, du prince des ténèbres.[51]

This monumental book was an inquiry into the source and development of all religious opinions, tying them together in a continuous chain: "Je ne parlerai point de Religions révélées, parce qu'il n'en existe point, et qu'il n'en peut exister," he clarifies in his "Préface." "Toutes sont filles de la curiosité, de l'ignorance, de l'intérêt et de l'imposture. Les Dieux, chez moi, sont enfants des hommes."[52]

Modern scholars have often focused more on the sources of Dupuis's idea—in earlier generations of materialist thinkers, but also in esoteric or Masonic culture—than on what would be seen in his time as his distinctive contribution to a long-term movement: his scientific methodology, based on the observation and analysis of an enormous body of comparative and astronomical evidence. With this method, he treated religion as an anthropological phenomenon, analyzing in particular what he perceived to be its genetic elements, in order to prove that all religions were intrinsically identical.[53] The *idéologue* Antoine-Louis-Claude Destutt de Tracy's *Analyse raisonnée de l'Origine de tous les cultes*, more readable than the original work, is illuminating on this point: "les prêtres ont fait de la religion une science, et une science qui a opprimé et étouffé toutes les autres […] cette mauvaise manière de philosopher ou de raisonner est fondée sur l'imagination et non sur l'observation."[54] The false science of religion had been the

51. Dupuis, *Origine*, vol.1, p.392.
52. Dupuis, "Préface," in *Origine*, vol.1, p.viii.
53. See Lalande, "*Origine de tous les cultes, ou Religion universelle*, par Dupuis."
54. Antoine-Louis-Claude Destutt de Tracy, "Discours préliminaire," in *Analyse*

instrument of the "empire des prêtres" at its worst, Destutt continued. An exact analysis of the "généalogie de tous ces roman" was the right procedure to "ouvrir les yeux au vulgaire."[55] Dupuis could thus symbolize for like-minded contemporaries the liberating opposition of a genuine science of religion as a human phenomenon and a unified history of religions to theologies, conflicting and self-serving sciences of manipulation.

In the work of his friend Dupuis, Destutt could not fail to recognize support for his essential epistemological program for a scientific study of man: *décomposition* of a phenomenon and *réduction*, down to the first, original fact.[56] The i*déologue* interpreted Dupuis's method precisely in this way: "Toutes les religions ainsi ramenées au pur sabéisme, au culte des astres et du feu par l'astronomie aidée de l'érudition, il n'est plus difficile à cette même astronomie, secourue de la saine métaphysique, de guérir l'espèce humaine du sabéisme lui-même."[57]

At that time, by "sabéisme," scholars meant the "first class" of polytheism, or a sort of "degree zero" of religion, referring in fact to those who are called today pseudo-Sabians of Harran.[58] Geographer Malte-Brun explained in 1803:

> Le Sabéisme, ou l'adoration des corps célestes, du soleil, de la lune et des étoiles, soit séparement, soit tous ensemble. Ce système, très-ancien, répandu sur l'étendue du globe, même au Mexique et au Pérou, s'est mêlé avec toutes les autres religions, mais il n'existe plus sans mélange que chez quelques tribus isolées. Son nom vient des Sabéens ou Sabiens, ancien peuple de l'Arabie.[59]

Dupuis quoted Thomas Hyde on the Sabians,[60] while his sources for information on the Ghebres were Duperron, Chardin, and the

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raisonnée de l'Origine de tous les cultes, ou Religion universelle: ouvrage publié en l'An III par Dupuis (Paris, An XII [1804]), p.xxvi. The first edition of this work had appeared in 1799.

55. Destutt de Tracy, *Analyse raisonnée*, p.13.
56. On Destutt's epistemology, Sergio Moravia, *Il pensiero degli idéologues: scienza e filosofia (1780–1815)* (Florence, 1974), p.319–64.
57. Destutt de Tracy, *Analyse raisonnée*, p.14.
58. See Michel Tardieu, "Sâbiens coraniques et 'Sâbiens' de Harrân," *Journal asiatique* 274:1–2 (1986), p.1–44; Dominique Urvoy, "La tradition vivante de l'Antiquité dans la philosophie arabe," *Pallas* 63 (2003), p.89–95.
59. Conrad Malte-Brun, *Géographie mathématique, physique et politique de toutes les parties du monde*, 2 vols. (Paris, An XII [1803]), vol.1, p.117.
60. See above, n.7.

account of a later journey (1774–1781), the *Voyage aux Indes* of Pierre Sonnerat, who met modern Zoroastrians in Surat.[61] Dupuis's Ghebres almost seemed close to *sabéisme.* He insisted on their simplicity: "Ils ont un temple à Surate qui, par sa simplicité, nous retrace celle des moeurs du peuple qui l'a construit; c'est une chaumière, qui renferme le feu sacré continuellement entretenu par des prêtres."[62] What he writes suggests that perhaps he saw them as if through their collective vicissitudes they had regressed toward the original religion, the simplest divinization of celestial bodies and their regular movements. In a passage of the *Origine*, he wrote that the Ghebres were convinced that celestial bodies were animated by intelligences "qui se mêlent de la conduite des hommes." The first intelligence was the sun, the second, the moon. "Le feu est la grande divinité des Guèbres, et dans leur idée le feu est un être intelligent […] capable d'entendre les prières des mortels […]. On sent, que cette opinion dut nécessairement les conduire à regarder tous les feux, qui brillent au ciel, comme autant d'intelligences divines; car ils pensaient que le feu est un être divin." However, he added a more theological element: "En conséquence, ils regardaient le soleil et la lune, comme les deux témoins de la Divinité; comme des êtres incrées, et des portions consubstantielles de Dieu; ce qui rentre dans l'opinion, qui place la divinité dans la totalité du feu Ether, dont chaque astre est une émanation."[63]

In Dupuis's framework, modern Zoroastrians are the illuminating remains of a theologically richer past, while ancient Zoroastrianism has an important role: Often mentioned in the whole work, it is treated with Christianity in the third volume of the *Origine* and seen in fact as one of its direct sources: "la religion des Perses, dont le christianisme n'est qu'une branche, et avec laquelle il a la plus grande conformité," he writes in his 1798 *Abrégé.*[64]

The principle of light, Zoroaster's intelligent fire, was the same as the Christians' Logos, Dupuis clarified. Significantly, he was not interested in the "Zurvanite" variant—Time as the creator of God—evoked by Maréchal to argue Zoroaster's Spinozism. This variant, while appealing for a classic philosophical materialist like Maréchal,

61. Pierre Sonnerat, *Voyage aux Indes orientales et à la Chine* (Paris, Philippe-Denis Pierres, 1782), p.40, was reproduced almost exactly by Dupuis, leaving out the part on their escape from Persia.
62. Dupuis, *Origine*, vol.1, p.28.
63. Dupuis, *Origine*, vol.1, p.281.
64. Dupuis, *Abrégé*, vol.2, p.41.

would not constitute good evidence for Dupuis's methodical general interpretation. In other words, despite the affinity of intellectual backgrounds and references, despite their political and cultural involvement in the same battle for the separation of state and Church and for secularization, and despite the similarity of the specific matter at hand, the "philosophie naturelle" Maréchal attributed to the Ghebres was not the same as the "cult of Nature" Dupuis recognized in their beliefs.

Although the impression of their similarity is reinforced by the insistence of both on the simplicity and closeness to origins of this *peuplade*'s relation with Nature, the two notions are situated at different levels: Maréchal's belongs to a moral and political dimension, Dupuis's to an anthropological and historical one. What Dupuis, uneasy about having his name in the *Dictionnaire des athées*, wrote to Lalande in 1803, around the time of Maréchal's death, is illuminating. Compared to Maréchal and Lalande, what he deduced from his evidence—of which ancient and modern Zoroastrians were part, of course—amounted to a form of methodological atheism, a modern agnosticism.

> Je ne dis pas, il n'y a dans la nature que la matière pensante; mais je ne dis pas qu'il y ait autre chose […] Je prouve […] que la croyance en Dieu est très moderne; que le matérialisme a été l'opinion la plus ancienne et la plus universelle; que l'existence de Dieu est une idée moderne, et que si c'est une vérité, elle a été longtemps ignorée, et qu'elle est sans preuve.[65]

Nineteenth-century French culture, both anticlerical and clerical, of course in opposed perspectives, would see the two works of these two different authors, who had developed the same intellectual tradition in different but not incompatible ways, as politically converging references, like Volney's *Ruines*.[66]

65. Jerôme Lalande, *Second supplément au Dictionnaire des athées* (n.p., 1805), p.99 (printed by the author).
66. For a clerical example, see the four more intolerably extreme productions of the eighteenth century selected by the *Dictionnaire des hérésies, des erreurs, et des schismes, ou Mémoire pour servir à l'histoire des égarements de l'esprit humain par rapport à la religion chrétienne*, ed. abbé J.-P. Migne, 2 vols. (Paris, 1847), vol.1, p.259: Naigeon's *Dictionnaire de la philosophie ancienne et moderne*; the *Origine de tous les cultes*; the *Dictionnaire des athées*; and Parny's *La Guerre des dieux*. At p.278, the author deplores the numerous new editions of Volney's *Ruines* that appeared after the Restoration in an "incredible" wave of *esprit d'irréligion*.

Volney's Ghebres: sectarians

It is well known that Volney (1757–1820) was even more personally connected to that tradition of radical critique of religion and had frequented d'Holbach enough to be deeply influenced.[67] The logic of briefly treating him and his image of the Ghebres as the last of the three authors discussed in this contribution, even if his *Ruines* were published before the *Origine de tous les cultes*, is well expressed in an article written by Ginguené in 1803: "Volney, qui a popularisé par l'éloquence, dans ses *Ruines*, ce que Dupuis avait établi par l'érudition dans son *Origine des cultes*."[68]

Volney's chapter 22, on the "Origine et filiation des idées religieuses"—mentioned by Maréchal in the *Dictionnaire des athées* to the same effect[69]—is testimony enough to the fact that in 1791 he had read Dupuis's previous works and knew exactly what conclusions to draw from them, in particular on Jesus and Christianity, as section 13 on Christianity as allegorical cult of the sun can prove. As Ginguené rightly implied, Volney had made Dupuis's erudition accessible to the general revolutionary public. The book had a second edition less than a year after the first: It was the one Maréchal had in his personal library.[70] Thanks to the eloquence of its genre, Volney's *Ruines* was arguably the most effective at vulgarizing or, better, democratizing antireligious culture—more effective than Dupuis's demonstration, and indeed, than all of the other texts analyzed here. It should come as no surprise, in this sense, that the English translation of *Ruines* became an important intellectual source in the making of working-class culture, as Edward P. Thompson shows in his famous study.[71] Obviously, the broader message of the *Ruines* is political: After the Revolution of 1789, the denunciation of the damages of the alliance between despotism and religion typical of eighteenth-century materialists becomes an effective call to action. Radical change now seems possible to both intellectuals and ordinary people.

67. See the classic Jean Gaulmier, *L'Idéologue Volney, 1757–1820: contribution à l'histoire de l'orientalisme en France* (1951; Geneva and Paris, 1980).
68. G. [Pierre-Louis Ginguené], "Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de notre littérature, depuis François I[er] jusqu'à nos jours, par M. Palissot," *Décade philosophique* 22 (10 Floréal An XI [1803]), p.210–27 (226).
69. Maréchal, *Dictionnaire*, p.505.
70. Aubert, *Sylvain Maréchal*, p.168.
71. Edward P. Thompson, *The Making of the English working class* (Harmondsworth, 1968), p.107–108.

While Zoroastrianism is treated in Volney's aforementioned chapter, the Ghebres appear in chapter 20, "La recherche de la vérité," which famously evokes the vision of an assembly and parade of representatives of all history's religious groups and factions. There are literally thousands: The narrator confesses to the Génie that he had thought there were no more than eight or ten belief systems, and even so had despaired of the possibility of reconciliation. Each system cannot admit the similarities it has with the other systems and is, even more importantly, internally divided into myriad factions, all vehemently persuaded they have the sole truth and spectacularly distinguished by special colors and attire. The description of beliefs "from the outside" assures that they appear all at the same level, that is, equally far-fetched and fantastic. Christians, for example, "convenant que *Dieu* est un être *incomprehensible*, *inconnu*, ils *disputent* néanmoins sur son essence, sur sa manière d'agir, sur ses attributs."[72]

The Zoroastrians appear in the parade immediately after the various representatives of the three monotheistic religions: The order of the parade is descending, from the most developed monotheism, Islam, to the most uncivilized *peuplades*, including some of those which got particular attention in Maréchal's *Costumes civils*, like the Kamtchatka populations. Even more explicitly than in Maréchal, these groups are devoid of cults, and enjoy Nature's gifts "dans l'irréligion où elle-même les a créées."[73] The savage members of various *peuplades* of the world will in fact represent the plain voice of reason or simple common sense in the following chapter, on the disputes among the priests of different religions.

The men composing the group of the Ghebres are dressed in white with veils over their mouths and have a banner the color of dawn, with the image of a half-white and half-black globe, emblem of the opposition between light and darkness, or Ormuzd and Ahriman. Volney insists on the fact they are "restes obscurs de peuples jadis si puissants," and, as we have seen, on their being persecuted and dispersed like the Jews in Europe (a comparison he repeats in a footnote). They might be seen as human ruins, amplifying the *leçons* of the archeological ruins. They were in fact not once, but twice over victims of despotism allied with religion, first in the course of the decline of their own ancient empire and again in Islamic Persia, where they were persecuted.

72. Volney, *Les Ruines*, p.161.
73. Volney, *Les Ruines*, p.173.

And yet as Volney imagines them, instead of trying to take their destiny into their own hands, they maintain the typical unsound vision of reality of the religious, ready to resume the fatal cycle of fanatical engagement on everything from higher principles to rituals. Contacts with other cultures would only exacerbate their sectarianism: "Et les Parsis se diviseront en sectes d'autant plus nombreuses, que dans leur dispersion les familles auront contracté les moeurs, les opinions des nations étrangères."[74] In the next chapter, a Zoroastrian will claim again the antecedence of his religion to monotheistic religions, exciting immediate accusations of idolatry and violent discussions on chronologies.

Therefore, though following Dupuis's ideas even more closely than Maréchal—and explaining them as a possible rational solution to this devastating power conflict—Volney too remains true to a more classical polemical argument against religion, the "Problème des contradictions religieuses" as he calls it in the title of the next chapter: evidence, of course, of the untruth of them all. This choice derives from the purpose he has here: not scientific fact-finding, or clear-eyed observation, as in his prerevolutionary *Voyage en Egypte et en Syrie*, but publicly circulating the moral and political arguments of the critique of religion at a crucial moment of the Revolution, when there is still the perception that new secular models can be experimented. Consequently, Volney keeps the conclusion of his book open.[75] The break with a tragically repetitive past, which has no models to offer (as he would later argue in his lectures on history at the École normale), is still in progress. Still, the future solution promised by the Revolution, based on the verifiable evidence of the laws of nature, cannot be formulated yet. Volney would try later, in 1793, to define *la loi naturelle*, using the form of a secular catechism.

The three revolutionary authors Dupuis, Maréchal, and Volney draw both their information and their vision of the Ghebres from the same sources, even if not always in concurrence: Volney in particular does not subscribe to the idea of the antecedence of Zoroastrianism, placing Zoroaster centuries after Moses in chapter 21.

Their philosophical and political ideas on religion are similar and based on the same intellectual tradition and *topoi*. Moreover, Dupuis has a pivotal role, as he is a significant reference for both Maréchal

74. Volney, *Les Ruines*, p.166–67.

75. On this aspect, see Paolo Viola, "Introduzione," in Volney, *Catechismo del cittadino francese ossia la legge naturale*, ed. Paolo Viola (Pisa, 1993), p.9–26.

and the more sophisticated Volney, who in turn are both more militant and democratic than the author of the *Origine*. These works, where the Ghebres are mentioned with a view to challenging and deconstructing the power of religion, are placed at the two ends of the Revolution, the early years, when all paths are possible, and later times, when the secularizing changes are in jeopardy: first, that is, in the context of political hope, and then in a context of resistance to backlash.

The images of the Ghebres these authors sketch, though, are different. Dupuis's is neutral: The Ghebres are a case helping to prove his theory. Maréchal's image is laudatory, because he identifies with what he believes the Ghebres represent. Consequently, he does not reduce them to their religion. He identifies it with the Zurvanite variant described by Anquetil Duperron, which Maréchal interprets as a form of Spinozism. This natural philosophy, which does not coincide with Dupuis's cult of nature, determines a set of moral characteristics, and consequently Maréchal is interested in the way the Ghebres live and manage to remain untouched by the outside, hostile society of Islamic Persia.

Finally, Volney's image is pessimistic, because he sees the Ghebres, like all religious groups, as part of the irrationality of the past weighing on present humanity. Their veiled mouths, to avoid contaminating the sacred fire, underline this image. The modern Zoroastrians are characterized as a victimized group, but even victims of intolerance do not seem capable of drawing rational conclusions from their unhappy history.

Do these visions from the revolutionary period, concerning a non-Islamic Persian minority, reflect a cultural turning point? Do they suggest a definite passage from metaphor and *persanerie* to a scientific interest? Do they signal an appreciation—never totally innocent—of facts about the life and identity of an Oriental *peuplade*? The impression is that of an open-ended transition: the attitude at a time of action more than theory, when, even after the failures of the Revolution and at the beginning of Bonaparte's rule, it was possible to believe the political and intellectual game was still on.

List of contributors

ANTÔNIO CARLOS DOS SANTOS is a professor of philosophy in the Centro de Educação de Ciências Humanas at the Universidade Federal de Sergipe, Brazil.

MARTA GARCÍA-ALONSO is a professor of moral and political philosophy at the Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, Spain.

JOHN CHRISTIAN LAURSEN is a professor of political science at the University of California, Riverside.

WHITNEY MANNIES teaches political science at California Polytechnic University, Pomona.

ERICA J. MANNUCCI is an associate professor in human sciences at the Università Degli Studi di Milano, Italy.

JOHN MARSHALL is Leonard and Helen R. Stulman Professor of History at Johns Hopkins University.

CYRUS MASROORI is a professor of political science at California State University San Marcos.

MYRTILLE MÉRICAM-BOURDET is a professor of French literature at the Université de Lyon, France.

ROLANDO MINUTI is a professor of modern history at the Università di Firenze, Italy.

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