Visions of Persia: Mapping the Travels of Adam Olearius.
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Rudi Matthee

- 1 This fascinating study of the work of Adam Olearius, the secretary of the Holstein embassy that visited Iran in 1636-37, is primarily concerned with the author as a man of letters and the tradition in which he operated, as well as with the dialogue between text and image in his well-known *Vermehrte neue Beschreibung der Moscovitischen und Persischen Reyse*. As such it only deals tangentially with Iran or the extent of the work's veracity and reliability as a source. Olearius is the quintessential baroque work reflecting the court of the Frederic of Gottorp, a quintessentially baroque ruler with ambitions to greatness. As the author explains, Olearius's work represents a transitional phase in being multifaceted. Deeply imbued with classical and Renaissance notions, his account also is experimental and experiential and as such constitutes more an ethnology of the lands he traversed than a geographical study. His work makes full use of the theatrical possibility of the illustration.
- 2 Chapter one is a learned disquisition on the frontispiece, seen here as a portal into the text that follows, its development and the meaning of its often allegorical imagery. The frontispiece remains central in chapter three which discusses Olearius as translator of Sa'di's *Gulistan*, relying heavily on Faramarz Behzad's 1970 study of Olearius' translation. The appearance of a lion leads the author to discuss the symbolism of this animal in the Iranian tradition, and the appearance of lion skins in illustrations prompts him to look for models in Rubens and contemporary travelogues. Chapter four, Olearius as cartographer, focuses on the traveler's dense map of Iran and in particular his rendering of the Caspian Sea, with particular emphasis on the graphic signs and the pictorial icons. Based on personal observations, Olearius's map of the Caspian represents a new level of realism and sophistication inasmuch as it was the

first realistic cartographic rendering of the area since Ptolemy. Careful comparison of measurements leads the author to speculate that Olearius may have been familiar with the works of some of the classic Islamic geographers.

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Thèmes : 4.2.1. Safavides et Qâjârs

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