
Colin P. Mitchell
This article details the invitation and singular visit of Šāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn (r. 1694-1722) to the main Isfahani residency of the East India Company in 1699. Matthee provides a lucid description of late 17th century Iranian political economy, and the degree to which Dutch and English East India Company officials contested one another over access to staple commodities (namely silk). Most important, however, was the ability to access the Safavid royal household, and enter into direct negotiations over precedence and privilege. According to Matthee, the English were especially adept at denigrating their Dutch competitors on the basis that the Estates-General of Holland constituted an anti-monarchical republic. In an effort to revive their flagging presence in Iran, East India Company residents in Isfahan regularly played the card of imperial fraternity and legitimacy to a sympathetic Safavid audience (an ironic ploy given that the English themselves had committed the ultimate crime of regicide in 1649). Thus, when Šāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn and his retinue ambled by the East India Company residence in July
1699, and announced his desire for a later formal visit, the chief resident James Bruce seized upon this as an opportunity to engage with the Safavids through institutions and rituals – namely hosting, elaborate ceremony, and ostentatious gift-giving – which were the cornerstones to medieval Iranian diplomacy. Bruce laid out a staggering £1,200 for the expenses of hosting the Shah and his entourage, but the gambit paid off; the English used this occasion to forefront the sense of imperial fraternity which existed between England and Iran, all the while castigating the Dutch for their plebeian republican sensibilities. This article, in turn, emphasizes the importance of inter-European rivalry and how the Safavids seized upon these tensions to built the best negotiating positions possible.

INDEX

Thèmes : 4.2.1. Safavides et Qâjârs

AUTEURS

COLIN P. MITCHELL

Dalhousie University - Halifax