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- 1 The Bible of the title is the Morgan Picture Bible, a mid-13th century illustrated manuscript which was entrusted in 1604 by the Polish Cardinal Maciejowski to three Carmelite fathers, en route to Isfahan, as a personal gift to Šāh ‘Abbās I. The history of the journey of the Morgan Picture Bible from Cracow to Isfahan and of its reception by the Shah is the starting point for an analysis of the gifts exchanged on this and other occasions between the Safavid court and some of the Catholic courts of Western Europe, in its turn a first step towards a broader study of the whole subject of gift giving between Safavid Persia and Europe. One cannot but agree with the Author when she remarks that modern scholarship “has, as yet, taken little notice of such gifts” (p. 144), which is unfortunate because, besides shedding light on such disparate questions as missionary history, the influence of European art on Safavid painting or the

knowledge of Persia and the birth of Iranian studies in Europe, the presents offered by diplomats, missionaries and traders (Persian and Christian alike) to foreign rulers also help understanding how the donor and the recipient saw (or, to use a fashionable term, “perceived”) each other. From this point of view, it is noteworthy that the Author stresses the importance of the principle of reciprocity but also remarks an asymmetry in gift giving between Šāh ‘Abbās I and the European rulers: while the Shah would send objects “that would have immediate resonance and direct meaning to their recipients” (such as, for instance, works of Christian art) in order to “connect” with them, the presents sent by the latter “were more curious and beautiful than culturally charged” (p. 148). The article relies on a solid bibliography which includes manuscript sources as well as several rare printed primary and secondary sources.

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Thèmes : 4.2.1. Safavides et Qâjârs

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