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- 1 Four centuries after his journey to Persia and the final failure of his attempts to forge an anti-Ottoman military alliance between the Safavids and the states of Western Europe, as well as to secure his own social and financial position, the personal and diplomatic adventures of Anthony Sherley do not cease to attract the attention of the scholars. This is entirely understandable given the complexity of Anthony's personality and the importance of the period in which he was operating. In this article Vasco Resende provides a useful survey of the career of the English adventurer, starting from

his beginnings as a soldier in Flanders during the Dutch-Spanish conflict and ending with his death in complete obscurity around 1636 (which is itself very remarkable for a man who had enjoyed the confidence and protection of several rulers in two different continents and who had been, among other things, ambassador, Count of the Holy Roman Empire, admiral and Knight of Santiago). The Author is interested “plus à l'évolution personnelle de la carrière de Sherley qu'aux circonstances politiques contemporaines” (p. 235) and in understanding how “à partir d'un comportement visiblement anti-ibérique, l'agent anglais a réussi à se faire accepter au service du roi espagnol” (p. 236). He is of the opinion that Sherley's journey to Persia initially had purely commercial aims, and that Sherley alone should not be credited as the one who had convinced Šāh 'Abbās I to send an embassy to Europe (p. 238). Unfortunately, however, Resende neither pays enough attention to Sherley's first sojourn in Venice, which is still not sufficiently investigated although it is clearly a key stage of his story, nor does he deal with the question of the Venetian government's refusal to admit Sherley into the city in 1601. Also, the Author's claim that “il semble probable que tout au long de sa carrière” Sherley wanted to return to England (p. 255) seems implausible. Indeed, he showed total disregard for Elizabeth I's anti-Spanish and pro-Ottoman strategies, and his long presence in the service of the Spanish crown must have made it very difficult even for James I to allow his return.

- 2 As a conclusion, Resende rightly stresses (p. 256) Sherley's “capacité d'observation et d'interprétation des événements, tout comme son habileté à s'adapter à des circonstances imprévues” (which were often, one must admit, the result of Sherley's own schemes), although his closing exhortation that, among different possible interpretations, “chacun choisit son Sherley” (p. 257) appears unduly “post-modern” and somehow out of place in an otherwise accurate study such as this. One has to remark that the Author would have reached a better understanding of Sherley's “évolution personnelle”, of his conflicting political loyalties, and of the way he was able to obtain credit from different rulers despite his record of failures if he had placed the Englishman into the larger context of a personality type very widespread at the time, that is, the adventurers who haunted the European courts of the time in search of money and who were, at the same time, indispensable tools for diplomacy. Admittedly, however, this would require space and time which may not have been available to Resende on this occasion. More importantly, the Author somehow neglects the importance of the “human factor” in the whole story: there is no doubt that, in order to dispel the smoke-screen of lies and half-truths behind which Sherley always moved and therefore to understand his “objectifs réels” (p. 236) (provided he ever had a consistent strategy in mind, which cannot be taken for granted), a better appreciation of Sherley as a man is necessary. Nonetheless, the Author offers a number of interesting facts and observations on this point (p. 247, 254, n. 67 p. 251) and makes it quite clear (although sometimes only implicitly) that one can take neither Sherley's statements nor those of most of his contemporaries at face value.
- 3 An appendix to the article provides an edition of two hitherto unpublished letters in Portuguese written in 1598 by the Viceroy of India, D. Francisco da Gama, to King Philip III of Spain. In addition to presenting the Viceroy's personal opinion about Sherley's presence in Persia, they summarize letters addressed to da Gama by the Augustinian Nicolau de Melo and the Portuguese emissary to the Safavid court, Rui de Gouveia. The letters have not been translated into a “major” European language and rightly so, since

Portuguese is of primary importance for the study of Safavid Persia, a fact which ought not to be forgotten.

- 4 To sum up, this is a very interesting article showing, among other things, that the “Sherley question” is far from having exhausted its potential for further research and that new findings (and therefore, hopefully, new conclusions) are still possible, as demonstrated by the two documents published in the appendix.
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Thèmes : 4.2.1. Safavides et Qâjârs

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