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1 This dissertation explores the influence and multifaceted agency of powerful Eastern women in the establishment of early modern Anglo-Eastern diplomatic and commercial relations between 1570 and 1673. I examine three case studies of powerful Eastern women who played a role in the furthering of Englishmen’s personal, national and corporate interests in the East: Sultana Safiye in the Ottoman Empire, Teresa Sampsonia Sherley in Persia and Mariam Khanum in Mughal India.

2 In my first chapter, I investigate how these women came to be solicited by English actors in the East in order for England to benefit from their influence at the foreign courts of Constantinople, Isfahan and Agra. Then, through a close reading of their refracted presences in various cultural productions in England, I demonstrate the ambivalent attitudes of English writers toward these women and how they were represented as both romantic figures to court and strategic objects to conquer in proto-imperialist fantasies of oversea expansions. Finally, I compare the early modern perception of these powerful Eastern women with the Saidian conception of the
Western male’s gaze on Oriental women. Through this comparative study, I hope to show that the imperialist and orientalist prejudices of the British Empire in the nineteenth century had only just started to emerge in the English imagination of the time. Consequently, Said’s argument, when applied to the early days of English incursions into the East, fails to take into account the ways English actors and writers acknowledged these women’s individual influence and agency.

Introduction

Defining the East in the early modern period

“It has become something of a commonplace among literary scholars that the early modern period was the crucible in which the practices of the later British Empire were formed”. According to Jonathan Burton, the origins of the orientalist, imperialist and colonialist practices that came to define the British Empire in the East from the eighteenth century onward can be traced back to the early modern period. This was a period of rapid changes on many levels. In Europe, religious dissentions stemming from the Reformation ended the medieval dream of a European república Christiana and papal hegemony was undermined by the emergence of national empires. The end of the fifteenth century also marked the beginning of a global form of imperialism, with European incursions into the New World in the west and around the Indian Ocean in the east. Religious conflicts and the rise of mercantile interests led former European allies to disavow each other and to race for control of the territories charted during the Age of Discovery. Europe was also confronted to a brutal change in its frontiers when the Ottoman Empire expanded all the way up into the Mediterranean, taking control of important stretches of land in Eastern Europe and North Africa during the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. In fact, the fall of Constantinople in 1453 can generally be considered the beginning of the early modern period.

During the Renaissance, the “East” did not yet hold the prejudices that Edward Said theorized in Orientalism (1978). It was not a fixed “set of representative figures, or tropes” encompassing fantasies of “sensuality, promise, terror, sublimity, idyllic pleasure, intense energy”. Instead, it appeared as a “malleable” term, covering biblical lands from the crusades, such as Babylon, Jerusalem or Constantinople, Islamic empires, Greek conceptions of Asia Minor and Major, and, with the discovery of the sea route to the East Indies, South and Southeast Asia. Even as military conflicts between the Catholic Habsburgs and the Ottomans intensified over control of the Mediterranean, the Renaissance was a period of intense diplomatic contacts and commercial exchanges of material goods and skills between Europe and Islamic powers. All of these new global processes complicated the European notion of the “East”, which was both a religious enemy and commercial ally for Europe.

For England, a small island on the Western margin of Europe, isolated from the continent both physically since the loss of Calais in 1558, and spiritually since Elizabeth I’s excommunication by the Pope in 1570, Islamic empires sparked paradoxical feelings of fear and envy. Indeed, they were perceived as both historical foes encroaching more and more into Christian Europe, and as “enviable model[s] of successful imperial might”, thanks to their impressive land conquests and their commercial strength based on the exotic goods that they traded such as dyes, fabrics or spices. Compared to these...
giants, Elizabethan England was crippled by the costs of war against Spain and any ambitions to expand into the New World or in the East Indies appeared as mere fantasies since England did not have the actual means to achieve them. And yet, between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, England managed to leave the margins of Europe to become a central member in the trade of Eastern goods. This rise to power can be understood through a close study of the overlapping worlds of diplomatic and commercial enterprises in the East starting after Elizabeth I’s excommunication. English expansion in the East was made possible by a variety of actors, from joint-stock company agents, to official ambassadors to rogue adventurers. These English actors did not travel into the East with expectations of dominance or superiority. They came from a country that was economically and militarily inferior to Islamic powers such as the Ottoman, Persian and Mughal empires, and, consequently, they displayed a cosmopolitan attitude that came to define England’s relationship with the East during the transformative age of the early modern period. These men all came to the East looking to further personal, national and/or corporate ambitions. To do so, they studied the inner workings of foreign courts, learned new languages, acquired new skills in foreign diplomacy and long-distance trading, adapted to cultural, ethnic and religious differences, married local women and courted the favours of Muslim rulers. The Eastern travels of Englishmen sparked national interest at home. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Englishmen and women writers became aware that “personal and national desires and identities were no longer constructed only from within the local, the familiar, and the traditional, but increasingly became inseparably connected to the global, the strange, the alien”. As a consequence, the early modern period saw the rise of a variety of productions, either in iconography, on the page or on the stage, which acknowledged English involvements in the East by portraying cross-cultural encounters, alliances and marriages between Englishmen and Eastern women.

“What About the Women, Then?”; gender studies and the global early modern

Gender studies and the global early modern have found their most famous intersection in the letters of Lady Mary Wortley-Montagu, wife to Sir Edward Wortley-Montagu, the English ambassador sent to the Ottoman Empire in 1717. An eighteenth-century English aristocrat, Lady Montagu became a focal point in gender and oriental studies with her *Turkish Embassy Letters* (1763), where she wrote about the private world of Ottoman women without the prejudices, erotic expectations or strategies of domination often tied to the male Western gaze of the eighteenth century. However, Lady Wortley-Montagu’s journey to the East happened toward the end of the early modern period, when England was already firmly rooted as a commercial and diplomatic power in the Levant as well as in the Middle-East and South-East Asia. Though she looked at the Ottoman Empire and its women with an open-mindedness reminiscent of the cosmopolitan attitude of English travellers during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, her perspective was still that of a white, English female aristocrat travelling to the East as part of her husband’s official ambassadorial mission, a position that was well-recognized and respected in Constantinople at the time. Consequently, Mary Wortley-Montagu’s journey into the Levant happened at the very end of a transitional era for Anglo-Eastern relationships and cannot tell us how England rapidly grew from an isolated Protestant power on the fringe of Western Europe during the sixteenth
century to a consolidated diplomatic and commercial power in the East at the beginning of the eighteenth century. But these processes can be uncovered through the micro study of powerful Eastern women in the macro context of global early modern history.

7 Before the officially sanctioned journey of the Wortley-Montagu couple, English diplomats, merchants and adventurers travelled to the East mostly alone. At the time, female English aristocrats were discouraged from travelling outside the boundaries of their home countries, and since England did not yet have the military power to protect its agents east of the Mediterranean, the journey was considered too dangerous to allow English wives to follow their husbands. Thus, before English women were allowed to see the East for themselves, Englishmen abroad first came into contact with Eastern women. Just as English actors were diverse in their statuses, origins or motives for coming to the East, so were the powerful Eastern women they interacted with. Some of them were royal Muslim women, approached formally by English diplomats or rulers through official letters and petitions asking for their help and their involvement in English foreign affairs when their royal husbands could not be approached directly by English officials. Others were aristocrats from ethnic and religious minorities, raised in the harems of royal households, who married English agents sent to the East outside of the official channels of diplomacy. In these cases, Englishmen relied on their Eastern wives’ influence to help secure them favourable positions in foreign courts. No matter their background, religion or status, the powerful Eastern women that first came into contact with Englishmen abroad deserve our attention for several reasons. First and foremost, they did not conform to the Saidian outlook on the Western male perception of Eastern women. They were not essentialized, eroticized, exotified, reified or silenced by their English interlocutors. In their home countries, they were in a position of strength as Englishmen needed to court their favours in order to obtain their help in the furthering of their personal and/or national goals. This calls for a thorough study of the gendered and cultural power dynamics that were at play in the interactions between Eastern women and Englishmen abroad. Moreover, in the case of Eastern wives, those that followed their English husbands back home defied early modern patriarchal norms which disapproved of high-ranking women travelling extensively. Thus, one can wonder how these women were treated in England when they defied common English expectations. Furthermore, these Eastern women’s agency was such that they were acknowledged in various cultural productions, including, in the case of Eastern wives, promotional works of art about their English husbands. Since these productions were meant to portray English travellers in a favourable light, it will be interesting to see how contemporary anxieties about patriarchal norms and cross-cultural marriages were translated by English authors and painters in their fictional treatment of these powerful Eastern wives. Finally, it is necessary to see how England’s gradual rise to power in the East changed the perception and reception of these Eastern women by English actors, in England and abroad.

Looking at the macro picture of History through the micro lens of individual histories

8 For the purposes of this thesis, I have chosen three case studies of powerful Eastern women from the three biggest Islamic powers that England encountered in the East during the early modern period: the Ottoman, Persian and Mughal Empires. Each came
to be in contact, either in person or in writing, with a wide variety of English actors in the East: from official diplomats to rogue adventurers to chartered company agents to English rulers. Moreover, all these women left traces of their influence and agency in English records, sometimes through documents they had control over and sometimes through the artworks that they inspired during or after their lifetimes.

My first case study is Sultana Safiye (c. 1550-1605), the wife of Murad III, Sultan of the Ottoman Empire from 1574 to 1595, and the mother of Mehmed III, Sultan from 1595 to 1603. Contemporary records identify Safiye as a native of Albania, brought to the harem at age thirteen, probably after being kidnapped and sold as a slave, as was the case for most of the non-Ottoman concubines in the palace. Safiye was the Ottoman name she was given upon her conversion to Islam and her real name is still unknown today. Safiye was a very influential figure in Constantinople: she was Murad’s favorite concubine and mother to his heir, which gave her a preferential position as hasseki, and when her son Mehmed took the throne, she became known as valide Sultan, that is to say Queen Mother and head of the royal harem. Thanks to these privileged positions, Safiye also played a part in Ottoman foreign affairs and she was solicited by English ambassadors in Constantinople during the early years of Anglo-Ottoman diplomatic relationships. Though Safiye never became Murad’s wife and remained a concubine all her life, the fact that English agents in the Levant called her “Sultana” highlights her image in England as a powerful figure close to a queen. Most notably, Safiye kept a correspondence with Elizabeth I from 1593 to 1599 and exchanged gifts with the English Queen on several occasions. Though there are no copies of Elizabeth’s letters to the Sultana, three letters written by Safiye have been found today, the first one of which became widely known in early modern England when it was published in Richard Hakluyt’s Principal Navigations (1598-1600). Safiye and Elizabeth’s correspondence gives us an example of two powerful women corresponding between East and West, raising the question of the role of female friendship in foreign diplomacy, a subject that is only recently coming into light in gender studies of the early modern period.

My second case study is a female aristocrat from the Persian Empire, Teresa Sampsonia Sherley (1589-1668), wife of the famous English adventurer Robert Sherley (c. 1581-1628). Teresa was a Christian Circassian raised in Persia under the reign of Shah Abbas I. She converted to Catholicism and married Robert Sherley during his time as a political hostage in Isfahan in 1608. Thanks to her influence at court, Teresa helped her English husband secure the position of Persian ambassador to Europe, and together they travelled back and forth between European courts and Persia from 1608 to 1628. Teresa Sampsonia appeared during her lifetime in several productions commissioned by her husband and the Sherley family, though in an often warped, fragmented and inaccurate way, including John Day, William Rowley and George Wilkins’ The Travels of the Three English Brothers (1607). In this play depicting the adventures of the Sherley brothers Thomas, Anthony and Robert, she appears as a nameless Persian princess, niece to Shah Abbas. Teresa’s refracted presence can also be found in the second part of Lady Mary Sidney Wroth’s The Countess of Montgomery’s Urania (1621). This continuation appears in a manuscript which was never published until Josephine Roberts’ scholarly edition in 1999. The Urania is considered to be the first prose romance written by a woman in the English language, and it is possible that the three instances of Christian Persian princesses present in the manuscript continuation were influenced by Teresa Sampsonia. Indeed, Mary Wroth would have heard of Robert Sherley and his Eastern
wife through her family connections: first, through her father, Robert Sidney, who hosted Anthony and Robert Sherley on their way to Persia in Flushing, then through Thomas Herbert, a relative of Wroth’s aunt Mary Sidney, who accompanied Robert and Teresa back to Persia as part of the English ambassador’s retinue in 1627.

My final case study is Mariam Khanum (dates unknown), an Armenian Christian from the Mughal Empire, who married two East India Company agents during her lifetime. Similarly to Teresa Sampsonia, Mariam was an aristocrat from an ethnic and religious minority raised in the harem of the Mughal court in Agra. There, she met William Hawkins (c. 1560–1613), captain for the East India Company sent to the court of Emperor Jahangir, and the two married in 1610. Together, they departed for London, but Hawkins did not make the journey back alive and Mariam arrived in England a widow. There, she met with the East India Company board of directors before marrying Gabriel Towerson (1576–1623), another Company captain, in 1613–4. Hoping to benefit from Mariam’s influence in the royal court of Agra, the Company paid for the couple to go back to India, but the newlyweds separated soon after their arrival. Towerson would make one final round trip from London to the Spice Island of Ambon where he died at the hands of the rival Dutch East India Company in 1623. Towerson’s death in the spice war between the English and Dutch East India Companies inspired John Dryden’s nationalist play Amboyna (1673), a heroic tragedy portraying Towerson’s final days in Ambon. Just like Teresa Sampsonia, Mariam Khanum appears as a warped, distorted and almost unrecognizable version of herself in this play, through the fictional avatar of the Indian lady Ysabinda who marries Towerson.

**Thesis statement and outline**

Through a thorough analysis of these three case studies, I wish to explore to what extent English writers in the early modern period used Eastern women as an ambivalent tool to negotiate England’s identity in its diplomatic and commercial dealings with the East, by presenting them as both powerful figures to court and strategic objects to conquer.

To do so, I will first see how these powerful Eastern women were involved in England’s transition from an isolated kingdom on the Western margin of Europe to a rising diplomatic and commercial power in the East. In the first chapter, I will take a close look at the different types of English agents that went to the East during the early modern period as well as at the ambitions they hoped to achieve during their time abroad. Indeed, whether they were official ambassadors sent by Queen Elizabeth or marginal actors acting on the periphery of the main channels of diplomacy, English travellers in Eastern empires were often driven to the East by overlapping aspirations and, at times, they used the influence of powerful Eastern women to serve personal, national and/or corporate interests. These women, in turn, used their influence and agency to help Englishmen abroad in the hope of benefitting from cross-cultural alliances.

In my second chapter, I will see how these interactions between famous English travellers and powerful Eastern women were translated on the page and on the stage, most notably through the mode of the romance that permeated early modern representations of Eastern encounters and cross-cultural marriages. This will lead me to see that, even before England had the means to become an empire in the East,
English writers, male or female, already displayed proto-imperialist strategies of writing which allowed them to fantasize a white, Christian, English expansion overseas through the union of Englishmen with Eastern women. These strategies included processes of reification which deprived powerful Eastern women of their agency, and emphasized the early modern anxieties of moral corruption that these powerful Eastern women defying Western patriarchal norms could represent. As a consequence, English writers turned these women into fictional avatars fitting the trope of the helpless heroines of romance, waiting to be willingly conquered by a fantasized English empire.

However, in my final chapter, I will see that in spite of the proto-imperialist and sometimes proto-orientalist fictional treatment of these women by English writers, early modern English actors abroad could not afford to look down on these women, as they relied on them to pursue their personal, diplomatic and commercial goals in the East. I will thus show how the early modern period, though it contained the seeds of the later practices of the nineteenth-century British Empire, was characterized by England’s acknowledgement of these Eastern women’s cultural, ethnic and religious individuality and agency.

Chapter 1: Leaving the Margins; or, The Courting of Powerful Eastern Women

In her study *The Web of Empire*, Alison Games states that “[w]hen they started voyaging to the Mediterranean in large numbers, the English acquired for themselves valuable survival skills that derived from their position of weakness”.15 From our twenty-first century perspective, defined largely by our experience of the British Empire’s dominion over the Middle-East and the Indian Ocean in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, talking about the “position of weakness” of English travellers and merchants in the Mediterranean may seem surprising. However, toward the middle of the sixteenth century, England was considered by European as well as by Eastern kingdoms to be nothing more than a remote island on the edge of a map, literally. Indeed, early modern cartographers inherited the medieval tradition of what is now familiarly called the “T-O map”.16 This world map depicted the three continents known at the time, dividing them in a T-shape (inside the circular form of the oceans) with Asia at its centre top, Europe on the bottom left and Africa on the bottom right. These maps pointed toward the east and Jerusalem and the Mediterranean basin were at their centre while England, being on the Westernmost corner of Europe, was marginal, to say the least. And yet, between the end of the sixteenth century and the end of the seventeenth century, England managed to go from a geographically, religiously, militarily and commercially isolated position to being one of the rising empires in the Americas, as well as a strong long-distance trader around the world, with the chartered Muscovy, Levant and East India companies.

In this first chapter, I will study the ambivalent roles that Eastern women came to play in England’s expansion throughout the East. From Sultana Safiye in the Ottoman Empire, to Lady Teresa Sampsonia Sherley in Persia and Mariam Khanum in the Indian subcontinent, I will stress how the peripheral position of these aristocratic Eastern women was exploited by England through complex relationships intermingling diplomacy, commerce and marriage. Each woman participated on a micro level to the
furthering of English interests on a macro level, sometimes on the national front, sometimes on the private front, but more often than not, they interacted with both. Whether in the Ottoman, Persian or Mughal empires, Safiye, Teresa Sampsonia and Mariam Khanum all came to interact with a variety of English actors (sovereigns, diplomats, merchants, sea captains, adventurers) who either embraced them as potential allies to be courted, or rejected them as potential threats in order to pursue England’s diplomatic and commercial ambitions in the East.

Before looking at my first case study, it is necessary to see how England’s isolated position in Europe led to a series of Anglo-Eastern alliances in the sixteenth century. Having lost Calais, its last stronghold on the continent in 1558, England was geographically isolated from the rest of Europe; but it was also in a vulnerable position from a military, religious and commercial point of view.

After Elizabeth I succeeded Mary I as Queen of England, her Parliament passed the 1559 Act of Supremacy which restored the Church of England’s independence from papal authority and named Elizabeth Supreme Governor of the Church. This return to Anglicanism after the Catholic reign of Queen Mary I, on top of Elizabeth’s continuous refusal to marry a Catholic Prince, ultimately led Pope Pius V to excommunicate Elizabeth in his 1570 Papal Bull “Regnans in Excelsis”. This strained relationship between England and the Holy Roman Empire was made worse by England’s support of Dutch Protestant rebels in the Netherlands as well as by the execution of the Catholic Mary Stuart in 1587. This series of events led Philip II of Spain, former ruler of England alongside his wife Queen Mary I, to plan an invasion of England in order to replace Elizabeth with a Catholic monarch. The Anglo-Spanish War put a strain on England’s economy and military resources as Elizabeth dispatched several privateers – pirate ships privately serving the interests of England – to plunder Spanish ships in the West Indies and around the Mediterranean.

During this time, England managed to inflict several blows on Spain, such as in 1587, when privateers led by Sir Francis Drake destroyed a number of naval and merchant ships anchored in the harbour of Cadiz, thus delaying Philip II’s plans of invasion; or in 1588, when his armada failed to invade England.

This long war with the Catholic Habsburgs and the religious isolation that resulted from it led England to search for alliances outside of Europe. By being excommunicated, Queen Elizabeth I was free from the papal embargo that prevented any direct trading with Muslim heretics, while Catholic nations at the time had to trade through Eastern Christians or Jewish intermediaries instead. This led England to form a series of Anglo-Eastern alliances. At the turn of the seventeenth century, the Barbary States thus became unexpected allies which could help destabilize the Spanish trade around the Mediterranean. On the private front, some famous English privateers such as John Ward joined the Barbary pirates to keep on plundering Spanish ships along the coast of Tunis, Algiers and Tripoli. On the royal front, Elizabeth I started a correspondence with Moroccan Sultan Mulay Ahmad al-Mansur and hosted for six months the Moroccan ambassador Abd el-Ouahed ben Messaoud ben Mohammed Anoun in London. Though the ambassador was sent to secure a military alliance against Spain, England wished mainly to secure trading privileges around the Mediterranean, as an open military alliance with Muslim heretics would have only complicated the country’s already strained relationship with its Catholic European neighbours.
The Mediterranean, at the time, was considered “the international marketplace of the old world”, which was mainly divided between competing empires such as the Catholic Habsburgs around the Western coast and the Muslim Ottoman Empire, which controlled no less than three-quarters of the sea along the Eastern coast. On top of these two giants, other powers such as Venice or the Barbary States also engaged in trade around the Mediterranean. While the Mediterranean was a key-place of commercial power in the long-distance trade, England’s commercial offer was substantially weaker than that of Western or Eastern countries. In his essay “Marginal England: The View from Aleppo”, Peter Stallybrass emphasizes that “Western Europe highly valued the silks, dyes, jewels, and spices of the East, but it had little to offer in exchange” and that “[w]hile England was an important producer of wool and unfinished cloth, it remained incapable of producing the sophisticated dyeing and finishing processes that were established in (...) Italy, Persia, India, and China”. Thus, already politically and religiously isolated because of the Anglo-Spanish war, England was also commercially inadequate, and was unable to claim a share of the exotic riches that were circulating around the Mediterranean. This isolation prompted Elizabeth I to seek trading alliances with powerful rulers outside of Europe, such as Murad III, the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire.

Starting from the battle of Lepanto in 1571 where the Spanish gained the upper-hand over their Muslim enemies, a new wave of conflict started between the Ottoman Empire and the Catholic Habsburgs. The Ottomans, who were already battling Persia in the East, needed ammunitions in great numbers, and England, eager to enter powerful diplomatic and commercial alliances, stepped in to become the empire’s new supplier. In 1578, Queen Elizabeth I sent the businessman William Harborne to Istanbul (then Constantinople) to petition Sultan Murad III to allow English trading in Ottoman ports around the Mediterranean. His response to Elizabeth I in March 1579, carried again by Harborne, promised her that her merchants would be safe in the Mediterranean and in his empire. This was a personal victory for England since Spain had failed to obtain the same capitulations – that is to say, trading privileges – in 1578 when it had signed a peace treaty with the Ottomans. England was now, along with France and Venice, in the ranks of states which were granted safe passage in the Mediterranean and in the Levant, as the original letter of privileges from the Sultan states: “this our favour, which before wee had extended onely to as fewe of her people [that is to say, Christians]: (...) as namely the French king, the Venetians, the king of Polonia and others”. Harborne, Elizabeth I’s first ambassador in Constantinople, managed to secure commercial privileges for England to sell “powder, and munition”. In exchange, English ships would return home with exotic goods from the intra-Asian trade that passed through Ottoman ports, such as currants, malmsey wine, indigo and raw wool which would fuel the textile industry back home. These commercial privileges granted by the Ottoman Empire resulted in the Turkey Merchants, the charter company created by Elizabeth I in 1581, which would become the more well-known Levant Company in 1592. Having access to expensive Asian goods directly, and not having to go through Venetian or minority merchants (such as Jews and Armenians) who acted as intermediaries, would not only make England richer, but also strengthen its position against Spain in the strategic region of the Levant. The Anglo-Ottoman rapprochement initiated by Elizabeth I was thus a commercially and politically motivated one.
The Queen’s excommunication, England’s initial isolated position due to its religious and naval conflict with Spain, the battle of Lepanto and the Ottomans’ subsequent need for artillery were thus all part of a correlation of events that allowed the small kingdom of England to obtain a preferential relation with the biggest empire around the Mediterranean at the time. But this preferential relationship would also come to rely on the Queen’s starting a correspondence with a more discreet but nonetheless key player in Constantinople: Murad III’s favourite concubine, Safiye.

Part 1: Elizabeth I and Sultana Safiye’s correspondence as an example of peripheral channel for diplomatic relationships

To initiate a dialogue with the Sultan right after her excommunication was a bold but lucrative move on the Queen’s part. However, this alliance with the Ottoman Empire was still a fragile one at this stage, and would require strengthening over the years. This could prove difficult since, as Rayne Allinson points out in her study of Elizabeth I and Murad III’s correspondence, “[a]ccording to Ottoman custom, the sultan could not engage in diplomatic relations with a foreign prince - especially a Christian prince - on equal terms.” To this analysis, one could easily add “a female unmarried Christian prince”, which was another obstacle that Elizabeth I had to overcome if she wanted to be considered seriously by the Sultan. Moreover, the relationship between the Ottomans and England was still new, and so was the English embassy in Constantinople. Edward Barton, Harborne’s successor as official agent of the Queen in 1588 – made full ambassador in 1593 –, realized that having the Sultan’s ear was more difficult than expected. In 1592, Barton tried, in vain, to petition the Sultan in order to obtain his help against Spain. Confronted to the silence of the Ottoman advisors who would not relay his memorial to the Sultan, Barton decided to try another channel to negotiate England’s interests against Spain, one that would go over the heads of the advisors and directly to Murad III: the Sultan’s hasseki Safiye.

Barton wrote another petition, this time addressed to Sultana Safiye, and asked her to act as his intermediary with the Sultan. To have his letter delivered inside the harem, where the Sultan’s concubines resided, he needed the assistance of the kira. A kira was the Ottoman equivalent of a lady-in-waiting, acting as the Sultana’s contact with the outside world, delivering letters, buying goods and generally going wherever the Sultana could not. Safiye’s kira at the time was the Italian Jew Esperanza Malchi. In order to keep his informal channel to the Sultana – and thus to the Sultan – open, Barton needed to foster a good relationship with her. In a 1595 letter, he stresses the importance of the kira in his dealings at the court: “because my selfe cannot come to the speech of the Sultana, and all my business passes by the hands of the said Mediatrix [the kira], loosing her freindshippe, I loose the practick with the Sultana”. By befriending Esperanza Malchi, Barton was able to convey his memorial to Safiye. In the letter written in Italian (probably so that the kira would translate its contents to Safiye), Barton petitions the Sultana “to deign to intercede with the Sultan that he may ask for my memorial from those Ministers, or at least their opinion thereon.” But more than simply ask her for the Sultan’s attention, Barton actively involves her in the matter he wishes to resolve – that is, to fight against Spain alongside Elizabeth I. To do so, he emphasizes Elizabeth’s strength as a female ruler in order to help sway Safiye’s opinion, and subsequently the Sultan’s, over which the hasseki holds much influence.
"[Elizabeth I] is a woman, and yet has fought and harassed for a long time [the King of Spain]. Worthy therefore is she that his Majesty’s power should be displayed in her favour".

This choice of going through the Sultana to sway the Sultan was a well-thought move on Barton’s part, one that shows his acquaintance with the inner-working of the Ottoman court at the time. Indeed, Murad III’s reign was part of a period for which historian Ahmed Refik coined the appellation “the Sultanate of Women”, a time when the wives, concubines and mothers of Sultans yielded great power at the Porte. This power enjoyed by Safiye, first as hasseki during Murad III’s time as Sultan, then as valide (mother of the Sultan) during the reign of her son Mehmet III, had already been acknowledged by other foreign officials in Constantinople. Indeed, in 1581, the Venetian ambassador Jacopo Sorenzo reported that Safiye and Nurbanu – Murad III’s mother – “governed everyone” and that whoever desired “favours and graces at the Porte” needed to befriend them, or at least “not to cross them”. Barton’s entreaty to Safiye must have been a success since, when Elizabeth I sent gifts to Murad III a year later, the shipment also included a letter and a series of presents just for Safiye.

In March 1593, the Ascension entered Constantinople’s harbour, carrying on board royal presents from the Queen to the Sultan and his hasseki. During an elaborate ceremony, Barton presented Elizabeth’s gifts to Murad III: “12 goodly pieces of gilt plate, 36 garments of fine English cloth of all colors, 20 garments of cloth of gold, 10 garments of sattin, 6 pieces of fine Holland, and certaine other things of good value”. After presenting these customary gifts, Barton kissed the hand of the Sultan to confirm his ambassadorial status to the entire court. However, the ceremony did not end there:

[H]e shortly after presented the Sultana or empress who (by reason that is mother to him which was heire to the crown Imperial) is had in far greater reverences then any of his other Queens or concubines. The Present sent her in her majesties name was a jewel of her majesties picture, set with some rubies and diamants, 3 great pieces of gilt plate, 10 garments of cloth of gold, a very fine case of glasse bottles silver & gilt, with 2 pieces of fine Holland.

This series of presents contrasts with that of the Sultan in the portrait that is offered to Safiye. Indeed, the gifts sent to Murad III were rather utilitarian (such as expensive fabrics) and would have been valued for their material worth primarily. However, the presents sent to Safiye included not only items of material wealth, but also a personalized gift – a portrait of the Queen herself. This special attention already suggests that the relationship between the Queen and the Sultana started in a less formal and more personalized way than her dealings with the Sultan. The gift was very well-received, so much so that Safiye immediately wished to send a favour of her own:

[The Sultana] sent to know of the ambassador what present he thought she might return [which] would most delight her majestie: who sent word that a sute of princely attire being after the Turkish fashion would for the rareness thereof be acceptable in England. Whereupon she sent an upper gowne of cloth of gold very rich, an under gowne of cloth of silver, and a girdle of Turkie worke, rich and faire, with a letter of gratification.

The gifts that the Queen and the Sultana sent to each other thus appear more personal than simply expensive items exchanged by foreign rulers.

The “letter of gratification” reached Elizabeth in 1594. Its translations in Italian and English appear in Hakluyt’s Principal Navigations, but the original letter in Turkish is described by Skilliter in her study as “an outstanding specimen of Turkish calligraphy”,

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visually exotic like the dresses and belt that accompanied it. The letter itself was “liberally flecked with gold”, written in “black, blue, crimson, gold and scarlet” ink, and adorned with a “valuable jewel-studded seal”. As Allinson puts it: “Even for those who, like Elizabeth, were unable to read the contents, this letter proclaimed - both visually and rhetorically - the supreme magnificence of the sender and the sophistication of the bureaucratic culture in which it was produced”. Elizabeth and Safiye did not write or read in the same language. While the letters Elizabeth wrote to Safiye have been lost, her correspondence with Murad III was sent in Latin, which could suggest that she wrote to Safiye in the same language. As for the Sultana’s correspondence, she wrote exclusively in Ottoman Turkish, but each of her letters was sent with an Italian translation, which suggests that Elizabeth read Safiye’s words in Italian. However, this royal correspondence passed through many hands before it reached its original recipient: Safiye’s 1593 Turkish letter, after being delivered by her kira, was first translated in Italian by a clerk at the English Embassy in Istanbul. But once in London, its appearance was deemed too poor to be shown to the Queen and another official translation was made by the secretary for the Levant correspondence. Due to these many linguistic and physical barriers, the visual aspect of the original Turkish letter – as well as that of the gifts that came with it – was the most direct form of communication the two women could have.

Aside from the appearance of the message, its contents inform us that Safiye was willing to do more than simply help the Queen’s ambassador. The letter starts with all the formalities of an Ottoman royal correspondence, with an invocation to God running over nineteen lines and a list of Murad III’s titles stretching over twenty lines – in which Safiye’s own title as mother to his heir is included: “most worthy Mehemet Can, the sonne of Sultan Murad Can (...): on the behalf of whose mother this present letter is written”. The language of the letter is rather flowery and metaphorical, close to poetry in its expression of friendship toward the Queen: “I send your Majesty so honourable and sweet a salutation of peace, that al the flocke of Nightingales with their melody cannot atteaine to ye like, much less this simple letter of mine.” The self-deprecative “simple letter of mine” is here obviously a rhetorical tool, considering that the visually glorious appearance of the Turkish letter was meant to impress whoever would lay eyes on it. But this is not the only contradiction present in the Sultana’s letter. Indeed, after acknowledging the arrival of the Queen’s gifts and message in Constantinople, Safiye suddenly switches from courteous poetry to political and diplomatic matters:

I thine it therefore expedient, that, according to our mutuell affection, in any thing whatsoever may concerne the countreys which are subject to your Majesty, I never faile, having information given unto me, in whatsoever occasion shall be ministred, to gratifie your Majesty to my power in any reasonable and convenient matter, that all your subject businesses and affairs may have a wished and happy end. For I will always be a sollicitour to the most mighty Emperour for your Majesties affaires, that your Majesty at all times may be fully satisfied.

In these sentences, the Sultana offers to act almost as a second ambassador for the Queen in Constantinople. Interestingly enough, she does not offer her diplomatic assistance in the same way she offered her friendship to Elizabeth I. Here, there are no hyperboles, no metaphors, no singing “flocke of Nightingales”. Instead, the Sultana stresses the fact that she will act only on “reasonable and convenient matter[s]” for the Queen. This sudden return to down-to-earth considerations after a letter overflowing
with words of friendship suggests that Safiye was very much aware of the extent of her power at the Porte and that she did not offer her help to Elizabeth lightly. This first letter from Safiye to the Queen thus offers an insight into the ambivalent attitude of the Sultana who wanted to visibly impress the English Queen with her exotic gifts and colourful letter representative of her high status; but who was also ready to act as an intermediary for the Queen in Constantinople simply because Elizabeth I was thoughtful enough to send her gifts and to correspond with her personally.

Elizabeth I and Safiye would not write to each other again for the next six years, but during this time, Safiye seemed to keep her promise of helping Elizabeth I's representative in his dealings at the Porte. During his embassy, Barton relied heavily on the Sultana to strengthen his influence in Constantinople, so much so that John Sanderson, his secretary at the embassy, writes in his diary:

> Many wourthy thinges passed in that my longe aboad at Constantinople. Emongest other I note the extraordinary esteeme [that] was had of the ambassiatour afornamed with them all in generall, both Christians, Turks, and Jewes. By meanes cheffelie of the Turks mother[']s favoure and some mony, he made and displaced both princes and patriarchs, befriended viseroys, and preferred the sutes of cadi es (who ar thier chefe preests and spirituall justisies).  

Thus, courting the favour of the Sultana not only allowed Barton to have the Sultan's ear, but it also strengthened his own influence as a foreign ambassador at the Porte.

In August 1599, the Hector arrived in Constantinople, officially to bring gifts to Murad III's son, Mehmet III, on his accession to the throne, and unofficially to bring Henry Lello his letter of credentials as the new English ambassador after Barton's death in 1598. The letter of credentials as well as the gifts for Mehmet were necessary if England wanted to see its trading privileges renewed by the Sultan. It had been more than six years since the Queen had last sent gifts to the Ottomans, and the gifts for Mehmet's accession were four years late since Murad III had died in 1595. These circumstances might explain why the gifts sent aboard the Hector were considerably more elaborate than the previous ones that had been sent in 1593. For the Sultan, the Queen dispatched an organ-clock so delicate that it was sent with its maker, Thomas Dallam. Once again, the Sultana received her own gift, a luxurious coach worth over 600£. To transport such large and delicate examples of English craftsmanship by sea was no easy feat at the time, and, unsurprisingly, the organ was slightly damaged during the journey. Skilliter tells us that the coach was almost offered to the Sultan instead of his mother, but that Lello refused at the last minute. In a letter to Secretary of State Robert Cecil, he explains that word had gotten out about the Sultana's gift from some Englishman abroad in Constantinople. As a consequence, Safiye was expecting her coach and to deny it to her would be a grave diplomatic incident: “The coache must of necessity be given to the Old Sultana because itt hath byn brutted here longe agone by some out of Ingland that hir highness had ordained the same, for hir, who longe seince have taken notic ther of”. The organ was thus first repaired and then each gift was presented to its original recipient. Lello's choice seemed to have been the right one since in another letter to Cecil, he reports: “The Sultana is very pleased with her present and has promised to be my friend”.

Building on Sanderson's comments about how Safiye's influence had helped Barton in his ambassadorial mission, Lello must have known how useful the Sultana's friendship could be to him.

Just as she had done in 1593, the Sultana wrote back to the Queen and sent some presents of her own. She wrote two letters, both very similar in contents. In fact, the
descriptions of the items sent seem to be the only difference between the two messages. These gifts are not as personalized as they were when Barton suggested a Turkish dress for the Queen: this time, Safiye included “a robe, a girdle, a sleeve, two golden embroidered handkerchiefs, three towels, one crowne studded with pearls and rubies” with the first letter and “a crown of rubies mixed with diamonds” with the second. Sanderson witnessed the arrival of these gifts at the embassy and dismisses them in his diary as “none of the finest”. Similarly, in a letter to Cecil, Lello describes the gifts as “but trifles (…), yet these (…) in general esteemed a great matter of freindshyp, because it is not [the Ottomans’s] use to send presents to any prynce whatsoever”. Thus, despite the fact that the gifts are not considered luxurious enough for the Queen, Lello’s remark still stresses the exceptional nature of the relationship between the Queen and the Sultana. As for the letters themselves, while Safiye’s first missive was visually impressive, her next letters to the Queen appear much simpler. In 1599 there is no coloured ink, no gold leaf on the paper and no jewel used as a seal. Instead, Skilliter describes the letters as “crude in appearance”, written in simple black ink with the valide’s personal seal on the margin. Sanderson tells us that the letters were not written by a scribe at the Palace, but by “som woman in the seraglio”. This change of hand suggests a shift in Safiye’s correspondence to Elizabeth I. While her first 1593 letter represented the very official and public sphere of the Palace, these two letters seem to convey a more personal and informal feeling. It appears the Sultana did not care about impressing the Queen anymore, but simply wished to convey her message in a fast and convenient way. Thus, the letters are much shorter, the language in them is simpler and their content is rather straightforward. The Sultana thanks the Queen for her coach (“it has our gracious acceptance”), reaffirms her friendship to her (she speaks of “pure mutual confidence and the abundance of amity”) and assures her she has not stopped promoting English interests in front of her son. Indeed, she keeps telling him to “act according to the treaty”, that is to say, to abide by the capitulations that were first granted by Murad III. These letters were the last correspondence between Safiye and Elizabeth I, but they still highlight the Sultana’s role in the strengthening of the English embassy in Constantinople at the turn of the seventeenth century.

Safiye thus appears as a parallel channel of diplomatic communication, one that could be won over easily with gifts and special attentions. She was a direct link to the Sultan’s ear, which was especially useful when the Sultan’s advisors were reluctant to help Christian foreign ambassadors. However, it is necessary to differentiate the role of Safiye’s influence in helping England pursue its national interests, and her role in the furthering the ambassadors’ private interests at the Porte.

Indeed, while England managed to keep its trading privileges with the Ottoman Empire under the reigns of Murad III and Mehmet III, the extent of Safiye’s participation in this is hard to identify precisely. It appears that before the Sultana was perceived as a potential ally for England, she was first and foremost seen as a tool for English ambassadors to pursue their own agenda in Constantinople. It is important to remember that the first two English ambassadors at the Porte – William Harborne from 1583 to 1588, and Edward Barton from 1593 to 1598 – were not simply diplomats working for the Queen, they were also agents for the chartered Levant (formerly Turkey Merchants) Company. As such, they had two separate missions: “as agent[s] for the Company of Turkey merchants [they were] expected to encourage trade and protect merchants from extortion; as representative of the Queen [they were] charged

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with a political mission as well, to hamper Spain”. In spite of this double mission serving two different institutions, the two men’s main source of income did not come from the Queen but from the Company’s treasury. As a consequence, mercantile matters sometimes took precedence over the expressed commands given to them by the Queen. In 1593, the Venetian ambassador remarks that though Barton was supposed to get the Turkish fleet to fight against Spain, the trade between England and Turkey remained his first priority: “Probably the Ambassador used language suited to the inclination of the Turks and the position of affairs [the Anglo-Ottoman trade], rather than expressly ordered by the Queen. He [Barton] is dependent on the English merchants who pay his salary and employ him in the interests of their trade”. This divided loyalty between the country that dispatched them and the company that actually paid them was made even more difficult by the small salary of the English ambassadors, described by Barton himself as well below that of other countries such as France or Venice. In a letter written to the Company’s Lord Treasurer, Barton complains: “Whereas other Ambassadors here resident have most honourable allowance, viz., the French 8,000 or 10,000 crowns, (...) and the Baylo of Venice 8,000 ducats of gold (...), I am allowed only 3,000 ducats, and yet as much is required at my hands as at theirs.” Thus, while Harborne and Barton had to work for both the State and the Levant Company, they were only paid by one of them, and not very comfortably at that.

However, foreign ambassadors usually received another source of income, not from England or its chartered companies, but from the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, all ambassadors at the Porte perceived a certain amount of money from the Sultan himself; but in order to receive it, they first required a royal present from their own country to present to the Sultan. Only after this ceremony were they allowed to kiss the Sultan’s hand and to receive their rent. In 1592, Barton asked Safiye for help in presenting his petition to the Sultan specifically because his status as ambassador had not yet been confirmed. Harborne had left Constantinople in 1588 and Barton had stayed behind to take over as ambassador but, despite having the Queen’s letter of credentials, he still required a gift in order to be paid. Only after the arrival of the gifts aboard the *Ascension* in 1593 did Barton receive the payments that were due to him: “[Barton’s] stipend from the Porte, which amounts to about four thalers a day and is now in arrears for many months, is to be paid to him. This sum the Porte is in the habit of paying to the Ambassadors after they have kissed hands.” Thus, in order to get a decent allowance at the Porte, Barton needed to stay in the Sultan’s good favours, otherwise his rent could be withheld. Moreover, he needed to encourage the Anglo-Turkish trade, otherwise the Levant Company could reduce his salary. These personal matters could explain why Barton was so ardent in fostering a good relationship with the Sultana; she could help him achieve his goals by facilitating his relationship with her husband and her son, which in turn would further the interests of both England and the Levant Company, and would ensure the ambassador’s financial stability, all at the same time.

By keeping in mind the dual role of ambassadors like Barton, one can fully appreciate the complexity of the relationship between the Sultana and England. Sultana Safiye, by herself, fostered a private relationship with Queen Elizabeth I, pushed her son to renew the Levant Company’s trading privileges in 1599 and helped ambassadors such as Barton and Lello carve a place for themselves in the unwelcoming environment of the Porte. Thus, her influence over the Sultans Murad III and Mehmet III helped English...
dealings with the Ottoman Empire on the macro-level of the country’s national interests, and on the micro level of the ambassadors’ own personal interests. All of this was made possible by her peripheral position as a woman, one with whom Barton, Lello and Elizabeth I herself could communicate outside the official channels of the Sultan’s advisors. Moreover, by using Safiye’s discreet influence to sway the Sultan’s opinion toward England, the Queen could thwart Spanish advances in the Mediterranean without being openly seen as conspiring with Muslim heretics – something that would complicate her relationship with her Christian European neighbours. Sultana Safiye exemplifies the ambiguous role that Eastern women could play in England’s eyes: she was perceived as a potential ally whose unique peripheral position could be exploited by a variety of public, private and personal actors.

**Part 2: Marrying Eastern women; foreign wives as potential tools in diplomatic and commercial relations**

I have shown the role that a royal Eastern woman like Safiye could play in the building of diplomatic relationships between England and the Ottoman Empire, and how her influence was exploited by English diplomats in Constantinople. However, not all diplomatic enterprises were conducted by official ambassadors sent by their monarchs. In the Persian and Mughal empires, official English ambassadors were not dispatched until 1615 for India and 1626 for Persia. But that does not mean that there were no Anglo-Persian or Anglo-Indian diplomatic relationships before these official missions. Before that, marginal actors such as English adventurers or traders came to act as diplomatic agents to pursue their own personal ambitions in the absence of official ambassadors. At a time when England was only a minor player on the Eastern scenes of commerce and diplomacy, these marginal actors had no protection, whether because they had left England without official supervision or because the chartered companies that sent them did not hold the necessary influence to help them in those regions. Therefore, they sometimes had to rely on the influence of Eastern women from ethnic and religious minorities in those foreign courts, who were more accessible to them than female Muslim aristocrats. By marrying them, they hoped to exploit these women’s liminal position and use them to win favours from Persian or Mughal rulers. In exchange, these women profited from the high status that they could obtain for their English husbands at home, and even sometimes abroad. These marital arrangements were acknowledged in England through diverse propaganda productions in print or in paint, sometimes directly commissioned by these travelling Englishmen to enhance their own image at home. However, these marital arrangements depended on many unstable factors: from the willingness of these Eastern women to help their husbands, to the level of reciprocity that they expected in exchange for their help.

**Teresa Sampsonia, Robert Sherley and the Persian Empire**

The last official Anglo-Persian contacts in the sixteenth century had been made by merchants from the Muscovy Company, who wished to enter the Eastern trade through Russia and Central Asia. However, Anglo-Persian commercial enterprises were cut short by the war between the Ottomans and Persia, which blocked the trading routes English merchants were using. In 1581, the region was deemed too dangerous to further engage with and English merchants decided to focus on the Levant region and
on the Mediterranean instead. The war between Persia and the Ottoman Empire had started anew under the reign of Shah Abbas I, who, in 1588, saw that the Turks were weakened by the conflict with the Habsburgs in the West and decided to take advantage of the situation to gain back some territories Persia had previously lost. But the war against the Ottomans had strong economic consequences for Persia. In the early modern period, raw silk was “Iran’s most important export commodity and the mainstay of trade between the Safavid realm and the outside world”. European cities such as London and Amsterdam were the fastest growing markets for silk which, in the seventeenth century, had become an expensive “symbol of social mobility to an urban [European] elite of greater financial means and increasingly refined taste”. But the Persian exports of silk to Europe relied mainly on the Ottoman land routes that led westward to the port of Aleppo, “the terminus of trade from Iran and India”. This gave the Turks economic leverage in times of war, as they were able to restrict Persian exports. From Aleppo, the silk was sent to Venice where Armenian and Jewish merchants acted as intermediaries between the Eastern suppliers and the European buyers.

43 The conflict between Persia and the Ottoman Empire led Shah Abbas I to seek commercial and military alliances with European powers and, during his reign, he sent out several emissaries to Europe in order to relay his military and commercial offers. Firstly, he hoped to divert Persian silk from the Ottoman trading routes and to sell it directly to European markets instead. The Persian island of Hormuz could provide a good maritime alternative to Aleppo and, if European merchants started to trade there, it would also help Persia counterbalance the trading monopoly Portuguese merchants had managed to establish around the Persian Gulf ever since they had established a fortress in Hormuz in 1507. Secondly, the Shah wished to forge a Christian-Persian military alliance against the Turks, an offer which, though it would never actually be put in place, was received favourably by Pope Clement VIII in Rome. At the time, the Pope wished to foster good relationships with Abbas I so that the Shah would let Catholic missionaries settle in Persia. Abbas’s reign was marked by his tolerance of Christian minorities as he relied on them to counterbalance the influence of the Qizilbash. These Shi'i tribal leaders, who saw the Safavids as their divine leaders, had helped the dynasty get to power and they held a prominent position in the Persian army where they fiercely fought against the Sunni Ottomans. However, under Abbas I, the Qizilbash fanatics felt the centralization of power in Persia was a blow to their tribal and religious identities and they started to threaten the Safavid dynasty in power. As a consequence, Abbas filled his army and administration with Christian Armenians, Georgians and Circassians from the Caucasus region who would be loyal only to him. This strategic move was made to weaken the Qizilbash but, to European eyes, it made him more tolerant of Christian minorities than his predecessors.

44 In England, the conflict between the Ottoman Empire and Persia came to be politically exploited by rival factions at the court of Elizabeth I. As I have previously shown, the end of the sixteenth century saw increasing diplomatic and commercial contacts between England and Turkey. This Anglo-Ottoman alliance was a profitable one since it allowed English merchants to benefit from the silk trade in Ottoman lands without going through the Armenians or the Jews in Venice. Thanks to the trading privileges granted by Sultan Murad III in his correspondence with Elizabeth I, the Levant Company merchants were able to handle the Asian trade from Iran and India directly in
Aleppo from as early as 1586. Good Anglo-Ottomans relations were encouraged by the Secretary of State Robert Cecil, to whom English ambassadors and company agents like William Harborne or Edward Barton reported. However, a rival faction at court, led by Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex and a member of the Queen’s Privy Council, saw in the Persian Empire an opportunity to counter this alliance with the Ottomans, which would destabilize the influence of the Cecil faction. As a consequence, the Earl of Essex decided to fund a private mission to broker an alliance with Persia. This secret task was carried out in 1598 by two English adventurers: Anthony and Robert Sherley. The Sherleys were a family of impoverished aristocrats, whose estate had greatly diminished ever since their father had been caught embezzling money from the crown during his time as Treasurer-at-War against Spain. Wishing to get closer to the influential Earl of Essex, who was at the time a favourite of the Queen, Anthony had secretly married one of his relatives, but this move had backfired when he was exiled from Elizabeth I’s court, whom he had already upset a few years before when he had accepted a knighthood in France from Henry IV. Now disgraced and banished from court, Anthony became a private agent for the Earl of Essex, his only benefactor, and, after a failed mission in Venice in 1599, he left with his younger brother Robert as part of a convoy for Persia. This mission was not sanctioned by the Queen who was officially allied with the Ottomans, but, in his 1613 account of this private venture, Anthony justifies it to the public as a journey meant to ultimately benefit England: “[the Earl of Essex] proposed unto me (...) the voyage of Persia (...) It might prove a subject to extract great and good matter out of for the honour of her Majestie and the particular good of our Country”. Anthony and Robert Sherley arrived in Qazvin, the capital, in the winter of 1599, where they met Abbas I. The Sherleys were warmly welcomed by the Shah who saw in Anthony the opportunity to send a group of diplomatic emissaries in Europe to negotiate a Persian-Christian alliance against the Ottoman Empire. Along with the Persian nobleman Hasain Ali Beg Bayat and the Augustinian friar, Nicolo de Mello, Anthony was sent by Abbas to negotiate an alliance against the Turks “betweene the Princes Christian and himselfe”. In May 1599, he departed from Persia, leaving his younger brother Robert as hostage to ensure that he would return from his mission: “his [the Shah’s] infinite desire of my returne (...) he thought would be more assured by so deare a pawne”. It is important to remember that, in Persian culture, diplomatic emissaries were merely considered as messengers, which explains why Abbas was sending several of them at the same time. This was vastly different from the European perception of the ambassador as the unique representative of a foreign ruler in a country. This cultural misunderstanding led the three emissaries to quarrel over who would receive the honours associated with being the Shah’s only ambassador at court, and they each tried to sabotage the others. In 1600, during their stay in Russia, Anthony managed to have the Augustinian friar put in a monastery, which left only Sherley and the Persian Hasain Ali Beg. However, when they moved to Germany, Anthony’s strange position as an Englishman representing Persia created confusion, as the Venetian ambassador there explains: “[t]he Ministers cannot make out the object of this journey for the Queen [Elizabeth] is an ally of the Turk”. The confusion created by an Englishman pretending to be the official ambassador for Persia was exploited by Hasain Ali Beg who saw the opportunity to be rid of his last rival. When the two arrived in Rome in 1601, Hasain Ali Beg accused Sherley of having stolen the diplomatic gifts intended for the Pope. This blow to Sherley’s reputation was made worse by the Englishman’s financial...
situation, as he had accumulated substantial debts during his embassy. As the Venetian ambassador in Rome at the time remarks: “[h]e has done many out of much money, and loud are the lamentations”. These circumstances led Anthony to desert from his diplomatic mission and to leave Rome on his own.

**Teresa Sampsonia’s influence in Persia and her role in the Sherley propaganda during the first embassy to Europe (1608-1613)**

Left to his own devices, Robert stayed in Persia for more than eight years. During this time, his relationship with the Shah fluctuated greatly because of Anthony’s defection from his mission, which threatened Robert’s own status at court. In a 1606 letter to his brother, Robert reminded him of his overdue return to Persia: “it is [seven] yeares since he sentt you into cristendum, [Abbas I] knows not wheare (you) are, nor what you have dun in his [service], nor the reason why you retorne not unto him”. Since Robert had been left behind, officially as a guest, but implicitly as a hostage, his status at the Persian court depended entirely on the Shah’s favours towards him. However, a stranded Englishman isolated by his brother’s betrayal could hardly win the affections of Shah Abbas by himself. This led Robert to ally himself with the Christian minorities at court, from the Circassians serving Abbas I and his household, to the Catholic missionaries sent by the Pope and who settled in Isfahan with the Shah’s permission. That is how he came to marry Teresa Sampsonia, the niece of one of the Shah’s Christian wives. Teresa was the daughter of Isma’il Khan, a “Circassian chieftain” from the Caucasus region, and she had been brought to court by her aunt to be raised there. Born a “schismatic Greek or Georgian by religion”, her background as Circassian Christian minority made her accessible to Robert Sherley, while her family connections to the Shah still gave her influence at court. Robert exploited Teresa’s liminal position to earn the Shah’s favour and to secure for himself the position of ambassador to Europe. At the time, Persia was still waging war against the Turks and Abbas I still needed to find trading routes to divert the silk trade from Ottoman lands. Robert thus offered to take up the role his brother had abandoned and to broker an alliance with Christian rulers. However, to avoid repeating his brother’s mistakes, he needed to be sent as sole ambassador to Europe. This is how Teresa’s strategic position at court could be exploited. By marrying her, Robert would have an Eastern wife to prevent him from defecting, encourage him to serve the interests of her home country and ensure his eventual return to Persia after his embassy. This would show the Shah that he was trustworthy enough to be sent to Europe with credentials of his own, without other courtiers likely to claim the title of ambassador for themselves. However, Teresa did not only play a role in convincing the Shah, she also helped Robert secure the support of the Carmelite missionaries sent to Persia by Pope Clement VIII in 1607. According to the Carmelite records, Robert helped the Carmelites secure an audience with the Shah who allowed them to build a church in the capital. But considering that Shah Abbas wished to maintain good relationships with Rome in the hope of gaining a commercial and military alliance against the Turks, Robert Sherley’s actual role in the matter was probably limited. It is more likely that Carmelites painted a flattering depiction of Sherley’s intervention because he brought Teresa Sampsonia into their church and got her to convert to Catholicism. As opposed to the Muslim ladies of the court, Teresa’s background as a Christian Circassian meant that she could be converted. The missionaries had been sent to Persia by the Pope specifically in the hope that they
would convert the people there, and the conversion of a woman who had been raised at
the Shah's court helped them fulfil their goal. Their support was especially useful to
Robert considering that his embassy would eventually take him to Rome to meet
Clement VIII. If the Carmelite records are to be believed, Robert’s attempt at earning
the Shah’s favour through Teresa was a successful one, since he appears to have been
married on the same day as he was dispatched as Abbas’ only ambassador to Europe –
which was also the day he and Teresa were converted to Catholicism: “having been
received into the Church, they were there married the same day, 2nd February, 1608,
Feast of the Purification: that the same day the newly married couple set off for
Europe”. It appears clear that Teresa Sampsonia’s role as an Eastern woman from an
ethnic and religious minority in Persia was instrumental in helping Robert Sherley – a
solo adventurer stranded in a hostile country – fashion himself as a suitable
ambassador for the Shah.

But Teresa’s influence was not limited to Persia, and her role in the furthering of her
husband’s ambitions did not stop when the couple left for Europe. Robert’s father and
his older brother Thomas, who were in England at the time, heard of his new
diplomatic mission and attempted to smooth their family’s reputation before his
arrival in England. In 1607, right before Robert left Persia, they commissioned from the
English author Anthony Nixon a pamphlet with the aim of depicting a glorious portrait
of the brothers and their travels in the East. Entitled *The Three English Brothers*, the
pamphlet was clear in its intent to change the public’s opinion on the scandalous
brothers, as Nixon writes in its opening pages: “me thinks they were unkindly used by
us, to be made strangers here at home”. Interestingly, Nixon’s pamphlet paved the
way for Teresa’s arrival with her husband in England by distorting her identity. Instead
of presenting her as she was, that is to say, an aristocrat from a religious and ethnic
minority, Teresa is mentioned by Nixon as being directly related to the Shah. In the
title, she is said to be the “neece” of the “Emperour of Persia”, while in the final pages
of the pamphlet, she is described as “the cousin Germaine to the King of Persia”, who
“(beeing the widowe of a Duke in that countrey)” fell in love with Robert and decided
“to rest her whole estate vpon his prowesse”. This misrepresentation allowed Nixon
to stage Robert as a glorious adventurer who had managed to win over the heart of a
powerful Persian princess related to the Shah, which would certainly excite some
curiosity at James I’s court and possibly help him secure an audience with the King.
However, Teresa’s role in Nixon’s pamphlet was not just meant to introduce her to
English readers before her arrival in England. Its purpose was also closely linked to
Robert’s diplomatic mission, which Nixon promoted in the pamphlet. Indeed, Robert
hoped to broker a commercial and military alliance between Persia and European
powers. Consequently, Nixon describes the material wealth of Persia and the
opportunities it could represent for English merchants: “[t]hey haue great plentie of
silkes of all colours, great store of spices, drugs, pearles, and pretious stones, Carpets
they make of diuers kindes, in which workes they are excellent”. Then, by presenting
the Ottomans as the “the common Enemie of Christendome”, Nixon champions the
military alliance against the Turks that Shah Abbas wished for and that Robert was
supposed to obtain from Christian Princes. However, Nixon goes even further in
promoting this alliance when he presents the possibility of Shah Abbas converting to
Christianity and links this hope for conversion to Teresa Sampsonia, who was herself
converted when she married Robert (though Nixon omits that she was already born a
Christian):

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[A]fter their private interchanging of faith and troth, their several desires were made joyntly happy in the honorable ende of marriage. (...) It is reported, that Ma. Robert Sherley since his marriage with the Kings cousin Germaine, hath had issue by her, two children, both Christened in that Countrey, in the Christian faith, the King himselfe being a wittnesse to one of them in Baptisme. He labours the King very much to christianisme, to which (it is said) he lends such attent[v]e [c]are, that he doubteth not, but by Gods assistance and his good persuasions, he may in time bee brought to become a Christian. 99

None of these events are historically true. Robert and Teresa did not have any children in Persia as they left for Europe immediately after their wedding and any European fancies that Shah Abbas I could be converted to Christianity were wishful thinking stemming from his unprecedented tolerance of Christian communities in Persia. As I have shown, Abbas’ treatment of Christian minorities was only a political move meant to strengthen his position on the throne and weaken the Qizilbash tribal leaders. However, Nixon’s misrepresentation of Teresa Sampsonia became even more popular when, the same year, his pamphlet was adapted into a play entitled The Travels of the Three English Brothers (1607), written by Day, Rowley and Wilkins. 100 Just like Nixon’s pamphlet, the play aimed at painting a glorious picture of the Sherley family and was meant to pave the way for Robert’s embassy in England. In the play, Teresa is described as the nameless “niece to the Shah”. Though the playwrights did not make her a widow like Nixon, they still present her as an Eastern princess, whose forbidden romance with “Sherley the Great” (1.7.66) was almost derailed by jealous Persian courtiers. However, the play happily ends with Robert and Teresa’s marriage, the birth of their son and his baptism overseen by the Shah, thus pointing out once more the possibility of Shah Abbas’s conversion. Thus, even before the couple reached England, they had already been (mis)represented in several works of propaganda which relied on distorted representations of Teresa, her conversion to Christianity and her fruitful marriage to Robert as tools to help Sherley’s diplomatic mission in Europe.

However, the Sherley propaganda that was printed in England did not make Robert’s diplomatic mission in Europe easier and, during his travels, he achieved more for himself than he did for Abbas I. After departing from Persia, the couple reached Prague in June 1608, where Robert was made a knight and a count palatine. In Rome, in September 1609, after wearing a turban adorned with a cross to put on display his identity as a Catholic who had been converted in a Muslim country, 101 he was made a count of the Lateran by the Pope, who no doubt appreciated his help in converting a Circassian woman from the Shah’s court. 102 In 1610, Robert went to Spain, where his proposal of a military alliance against the Ottomans was denied but, as the English ambassador to Madrid remarks, his commercial offer of diverting the trade of raw silk that was sold by the Turks through Aleppo and of selling it directly to Spanish merchants through Hormuz was deemed interesting enough. 103 However, Robert’s efforts were thwarted by the arrival of Dengil Beg Rumlu, a silk trader sent as part of a diplomatic mission by Shah Abbas I, 104 whose presence undermined Robert’s ambassadorial status at the Spanish court. The couple had no choice but to leave for England in 1611. Building on the propaganda works that had already been commissioned by his elder brother and father in 1607, Robert had the writer Thomas Middleton translate a Latin pamphlet written by Andrew Leech praising his 1608 embassy in Poland, hoping that its circulation in London would overshadow the diplomatic incident in Madrid. 105 This event exemplifies how Robert himself used propaganda to legitimize – or at least salvage – his status as ambassador after his
credentials had been challenged by Dengil Beg Rumlu. His attempt seemed to have been successful as the couple was favourably received by James I in 1612, though the English king, like his Spanish counterpart, was reluctant to start a military alliance. As in Spain, Robert’s commercial proposition was carefully considered, London being one of the fastest growing markets for silk in the seventeenth century. However, diverting trade through Hormuz meant going against the interests of the Levant Company merchants in Aleppo and of the East India Company merchants who, at the time of Robert’s arrival in England, were able to profit from the inter-Asian trade that was passing through their trading post in Surat which they had obtained that year. As a consequence, both companies saw Robert as a rogue diplomatic actor trying to compete with their dealings in the East, and they endeavoured to thwart his proposal of any military or commercial alliance. Furthermore, Persia had managed to win back the Caucasus region from the Ottoman Empire by signing the Treaty of Nasuh Pasha and news of the peace agreement reached the English court in 1612, making Robert’s offer of a military alliance obsolete: “The Persian and Turk have agreed on points of trade, so Sir Robt. Shirley’s negociation is over, and he may go back when he pleases”. Thus, when the couple left England and sailed for Persia aboard the Expedition in 1613, Robert had nothing to show for his embassy. These events exemplify the delicate position of Robert, who had managed to obtain the status of ambassador by exploiting Teresa’s strategic position as both an insider and outsider at the Persian court, but who was also constantly struggling to legitimize his diplomatic role in Europe.

**Teresa Sampsonia’s role in the Sherley propaganda during the second embassy (1615-1628)**

By the time Robert and Teresa arrived in Persia in 1615, the war between the Ottoman Empire and Persia had started anew as a consequence of Shah Abbas’s refusal to pay the tribute the Sultan was due in accordance to the Treaty of Nasuh Pasha. Therefore, Abbas I needed once again to divert the trade of Persian silk from Ottoman roads and to secure a military alliance with Christian powers. This is why Robert and Teresa were sent back to Europe right after their first audience with the Shah in 1615. However, Robert’s status as ambassador was still questioned in European courts, especially after the failure of his first embassy. Teresa, who travelled with Robert once more, saw her fate and reputation entirely intertwined with her husband’s. Stranded in Europe, far from her family and home country, she relied completely on her husband’s status as ambassador for Persia, which explains how she came to play a central role in the visual propaganda meant to legitimize Robert’s second embassy. As Robert had learnt from his first embassy, European rulers were rather skittish to enter in a military alliance with Persia, but they were very interested in the raw silk it produced, and in the possibility to buy the silk directly through Hormuz, without being restrained by the Ottomans who limited Persian exports in times of war. Thus, to help Robert, a rogue adventurer who engaged in a peripheral form of diplomacy, legitimize his position as ambassador, the couple relied on strategies of visual performance to stage themselves as representatives of Persia’s lucrative silk trade. During their second stay in Europe, they put their “household in silk of various colours”, and Robert was described by his contemporaries as “account[ing] himself never ready till he had something of the Persian habit about him”. This constant need to rely on visual self-staging only emphasizes how hard Robert and Teresa needed to work to legitimize the Englishman’s...
position in the eyes of foreign rulers. When the couple arrived in Rome for a second time in 1622, they were not welcomed as warmly as they had been during their first stay in 1609. Robert had trouble securing an audience with the Pope, which is why he resorted to visual propaganda once more and commissioned a pair of portraits from the Flemish painter Anthony Van Dyck. In his portrait, Robert appears in full Persian garb, with a turban and dressed in rich silken clothes, advertising to European courtiers the economic power of the Shah whom he represented. Teresa had her portrait as well, and the matching pictures illustrate once more the central role she played in her husband’s performance as a legitimate ambassador. It is interesting to point out that, while Robert’s own portrait emphasized his role as a representative of Persia, hiding his Catholic English identity under Oriental paraphernalia, Teresa’s portrait depicts her dressed in European fashion, with a golden Roman veil on her head. Some exotic elements remain, such as her feather headpiece, but compared to her husband who advertised his fabricated “Persianity”, Teresa’s own Persian identity was downplayed. This desire not to make Teresa appear too foreign or unfamiliar is visible in Anthony Van Dyck’s sketch of the portrait, where a monkey was supposed to be playing on the table next to her. This exotic element was ultimately removed from the final portrait, probably because Teresa was meant to symbolise a part of Persia that would be familiar to Europe: one which had produced a white Circassian Catholic princess, completely assimilated into European fashion, and entirely devoted to her English husband. For those European courtiers who had heard of Nixon’s pamphlet and her supposed royal position as the Shah’s niece, Teresa came to represent an idealized “Christian princess of the east”, which would not offend religious or racial norms in Europe. Through their portraits, Robert and Teresa’s “self-staging” appears “as part of a complex rhetoric of diplomatic self-legitimation and improvised trade negotiation”. Indeed, Robert and Teresa’s Persian representation achieved the delicate balance of putting on display the country’s silk while removing any signs of Islam or of threatening foreignness. And all this was only made possible by Teresa’s liminal position as a Circassian raised in the Shah’s court and converted to Catholicism by missionaries in Persia, which Robert exploited for his diplomatic dealings.

But, though this performance centred around Persian silk was successful in Rome, it was bound to anger the English companies in charge of the silk trade at home, which were much displeased with Robert’s return in Europe. Indeed, in 1622, the East India Company merchants had gained a foothold in the Persian trade by helping dislodge the Portuguese from their fortress in Hormuz, which had secured them some trading privileges with Shah Abbas I. Consequently, when Robert arrived in England and was granted an audience with James I in 1624, the Company perceived his offer of a better commercial alliance between the crown and Persia as direct competition to their own trade. The court minutes of the East India Company board of Directors illustrate the company men’s hostility toward Sherley’s infringing on their trading monopoly: “whether Embassador or not, it concernes not the Company who have noe need of Sir Robert Sherley’s helpe, neither desire to have anything to doe with him”. However, Robert’s efforts to convince the King were cut short when James I died in 1625. As opposed to his predecessor, Charles I did not have much sympathy for Robert and the East India Company saw their chance at derailing Sherley’s plans when Shah Abbas I, tired of Sherley’s failures and his decade-long absence, sent yet another diplomatic emissary to Europe. Naqd Ali Beg was immediately championed by the East India Company “with an affected honor, beyond that done to the other Persian ambassador,
Sir Robert Sherley”, and they petitioned to get him an audience with Charles I in 1626. To add to Robert's embarrassment of being once more undermined by another ambassador, Naqd Ali Beg claimed that Robert’s credentials were fabricated and that he was “an Imposter” who dared “to presume to say, he had married the King [Abbas I] his Masters Neece”. Robert, who had spent his entire time as ambassador crafting the image of his wife as an Eastern princess to add to his own prestige, was now accused of having fabricated everything, from his status as ambassador, to his wife’s royal connections. He denied all the accusations, assuring that he “never said he had married the Kings Neece; but the Queens kinswoman”. Since Charles I didn't know which of the two men was Abbas' official ambassador, he sent Naqd Ali Beg, Robert and Teresa back to Persia with his own ambassador, Dodmore Cotton, to clarify the matter in March 1627. Unfortunately, this mission would not give any satisfactory answer to anyone. According to Thomas Herbert who was part of the journey with Dodmore Cotton as junior member of the embassy, Naqd Ali Beg “dared not see his Master, nor plead his defence against his Aversary Sir Robert Shirley” and committed suicide before their arrival in Persia. This did not make things easier for Robert Sherley who, after being spurned by the Shah for his second failed embassy, died of a fever in Qazvin in June 1628. Now the widow of a failed ambassador, back to a country she had left for over ten years, Teresa's options outside of a remarriage were limited. She thus used the little influence she had left to obtain the help of the Carmelite missionaries in Persia to leave the country and settle, with her husband’s remains, in a Carmelite convent in Rome, where she spent the remainder of her life.

From Robert’s time as a hostage in Persia to his death in Qazvin, Teresa’s status had been intertwined with that of her husband. Together, they had used her liminal position as an aristocratic woman from a religious and ethnic minority to help make him an ambassador in Persia. However, during his two embassies in Europe, Robert kept being perceived as a marginal player by European rulers and he needed to rely on a steady stream of propaganda to assert his position in foreign courts. In these various works, Teresa had to play the part of the Christian Persian princess to support his performance as a legitimate diplomat abroad. Her role was instrumental in helping this rogue adventurer achieve the status of diplomatic and commercial agent outside of the official channels of English diplomacy and of chartered merchant companies. But ultimately, her influence as a peripheral agent helping further her English husband's personal ambitions was limited to her status as a wife. Without a husband, the influence that derived from her position as an asset in a rogue adventurer's gambit for power disappeared completely. A similar fate would await another aristocratic woman from a religious and ethnic minority in Mughal India.

Mariam Khanum, William Hawkins, Gabriel Towerson and the Mughal Empire

England's first contacts with India were rather belated compared to other European powers. During most of the sixteenth century, trade around the Indian Ocean was monopolized by the Spanish and the Portuguese who had divided this part of the world amongst themselves with the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas. During this time, they limited their activities to the Indian coast and to the lucrative Spice Islands which Spain eventually relinquished to the sole control of Portugal with the 1529 Treaty of Saragossa. On the Indian continent, power struggles between the Mughal Empire, a Central Asian dynasty, and Hindu Indians went on until the reign of Emperor Akbar.
who conquered the territories of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Bengal in the 1570s, extending the reach of the Mughals into the subcontinent. Much like Abbas I in Persia, Akbar was tolerant of religious minorities which he strategically exploited to weaken the Central Asian elite that had historically shared power with the Mughal dynasty and to centralize power around himself. Under Akbar’s reign, Hindu Rajputs, Muslim Indians and Iranians came to rise amongst the Mughal army and administration. During his conquests of the Gujarat and Bengal, Akbar came across Portuguese merchants and Jesuits and allowed them to remain in order to benefit from the international trade that they brought in, especially in the port of Surat. To strengthen the economy of the capital, Akbar also allowed the Armenian Christian community to settle in Agra and to build a church there, and profited from their trading and manufacturing skills. The Dutch East India Company was the first competitor to the Portuguese in the lucrative spice trade of clove, pepper and nutmeg, though their ventures in the mainland were limited and they mainly focused their activities on the islands of Java and Ambon where they established trading posts in 1603 and 1610 respectively. The English East India Company was similarly attracted to the Southeast Asian market of cotton, spices and dyes, and the first two trips of the company were centred around the Spice Islands of Java, Sumatra and the Moluccas between 1601 and 1603. The third trip, however, was to the Indian mainland. Incentivized by Akbar’s tolerance of Portuguese Jesuits and traders, the company sent one of their agents to carry a letter from James I to the Emperor, asking for permission to build an English trading post in Surat, which would help the company gain a foothold in the mainland trade. This agent was the English merchant and adventurer William Hawkins, who departed for Agra in 1607.

**Mariam Khanum’s role in Hawkins’s narrative**

When Hawkins arrived in the capital in 1609, Akbar had died and left the throne to his son, Emperor Jahangir. As opposed to Robert Sherley who had come to Persia as part of a secret mission, Hawkins was under the patronage of a royal chartered company. But just like Robert, he profited from the absence of a formal English ambassador in India to pursue his own personal ambitions at Jahangir’s court and presented himself, not just as a merchant representing a company, but as a full-fledged diplomatic agent. Hawkins won over Jahangir’s favours by partaking in the Emperor’s habit of drinking liquor and smoking opium, which earned him a privileged position at court. Since the East India Company would not have taken this behaviour favourably, Hawkins resorted to propaganda to present the privileges he obtained from Jahangir as symbols of his legitimate role as a diplomatic agent in India. In his diary, which would later be published, he wrote that he had become “one of his [Jahangir’s] Courtiers”, and received the title of “Chan [Khan], that is to say, English Lord, but in Persia, it is the Title for a Duke and this went currant throughout the Countrey”. Hawkins’ attempt to pass as an ambassador in India when he was only a marginal English merchant trying to gain power and privilege at Jahangir’s court would have lasting consequences on the Mughal’s perception of English diplomats. Indeed, when Thomas Roe, the first actual ambassador sent by James I, arrived in India in 1612, he complained about men like Hawkins having undermined the importance of his title: “I landed at Suratt, where I was esteemed an Imposture like my Predecessors (...); two before having taken the title of ambassador, Master Hawkins and Master Edwards, but so that they have almost
made yt ridiculous to come under that qualetye”. More interestingly, just like Teresa Sampsonia and Robert’s marriage had been exploited by English writers to shed a favourable light on Robert’s time in Persia, Hawkins used a local female aristocrat to convince his readers that Jahangir favoured him over other foreigners. Indeed, Hawkins describes how, when he was “in the highest of favours”, Jahangir offered him a Christian woman from his palace to marry, as a sign of trust and friendship between the Mughal Emperor and the English merchant. This woman was Mariam Khanum, daughter of a rich Armenian trader who had been favoured by Jahangir’s father, Akbar. Though Hawkins did not turn Mariam into a relative of Jahangir like Nixon or the playwrights of The Travels had done with Teresa, he still gave her the dramatic role of a destitute victim whom he heroically saved from misery: “[His Captaine [her father] died suddenly, and without will, worth a Masse of Money, and all robbed by his Brothers and Kindred, and Debts that cannot be recovered: leaving the Child but only a few Jewels”.

The paternalist term of “Child” here conveys Hawkins’ compassion toward Mariam and, coupled with the dramatic mention of her relatives’ greed, it could almost distract the reader from the fact that Hawkins did not just rescue Mariam from her familial misery, but he also acquired her “Jewels” in the process. Unlike Robert who needed to present Teresa as a Persian Princess related to the Shah to inflate his own status in European eyes, Hawkins decided to undermine Mariam’s agency as an aristocratic woman raised in the Mughal harem, and instead depicted her as a destitute victim in need of rescuing. This allowed Hawkins to present himself as a chivalrous hero whose presence in Agra was a blessing not only to his native country whose commercial interests he supposedly defended against the Portuguese, but also to the helpless women of Jahangir’s palace. In truth, women at Jahangir’s court were allowed to choose their husbands, and Mariam was not rescued by Hawkins so much as she agreed to marry him, probably to secure some financial security from this foreign stranger who was so well-treated by the Emperor at the time.

Moreover, it is possible that this sensational description of Mariam as a diplomatic gift from Jahangir that Hawkins could not refuse was meant to justify his marriage to a foreign woman to his employers. Unlike Robert Sherley’s rogue venture into Persia, Hawkins’ journey had been under the patronage of the East India Company and everything he did in India, he had to report back to them. The company was no doubt aware of the influence of Armenians traders, who were used to act as intermediaries between European merchants and local rulers in the East. Therefore, it is possible that Hawkins saw in his bride an opportunity to use the knowledge and connections of the Armenian minority in India to promote the East India Company’s interests in the region, and thus his own position in England as a company man.

Because of her ties to a successful ethnic and religious minority in India, Mariam Khanum found herself very early on at a crossroad between her husband’s personal ambitions at the Mughal court and the East India Company’s corporate interests around the Indian Ocean. However, Hawkins’s privileged position at Jahangir’s court ultimately backfired. In 1611, disorderly English sailors caused some havoc in Agra and Hawkins, who had been presenting himself as the closest thing to an English ambassador in India, was made to take the fall by all his rivals at court, from jealous Portuguese merchants to Mughal advisors displeased with the preferential treatment he had received. Along with his wife Mariam, he left India in 1612 aboard a company’s ship bound for Britain. Hawkins would not survive the trip and Mariam was a widow when she arrived in England in 1614 – but she was also newly engaged to another East India Company captain.
Mariam Khanum’s influence in India and the East India Company’s hope to benefit from it

Captain Gabriel Towerson had sailed with the Hawkinses from Bantam to Ireland. Sometime between Hawkins’ death in the last months of 1613, and her arrival in London in 1614, Mariam was engaged to Towerson. To find a new fiancé so soon after her first husband’s death suggests a sense of urgency, possibly because Mariam, an Armenian woman from India, was stranded in England without any means to go home. Her status as a powerful aristocratic woman depended entirely on her family connections in India, and the only entity in England that could be interested in those was the East India Company, Gabriel Towerson’s employer. During Robert Sherley’s embassies, Teresa Sampsonia had played her part in his self-staging as a legitimate ambassador because her fate as a Persian woman in England depended entirely on her husband’s status in European courts. Similarly, Mariam Khanum’s survival in England depended entirely on her ability to convince both Towerson and the East India Company that she could be an asset to them – but only if they helped her get back to her home country. Therefore, in February 1614, Mariam went to the board of directors of the East India Company in order to expunge Hawkins’s debts and to claim some money for herself as his widow. As the court minutes from the meeting highlight, Mariam’s upcoming marriage to another one of their captains helped sway the company directors’ opinion in her favour: “The company be charitably affected towards the widow that is a stranger and to be married very shortly they thought it fit to give her some token of their love”. This “token of their love” was a gift of “200 gold sovereigns”. Mariam received the money on the 21st of February 1614, the very same day that she married Towerson. This might not be a coincidence since “[u]nder English law, a married woman’s money came under the control of her husband, in this case Towerson”. It is thus possible that Mariam and Towerson helped each other by getting money from the board of directors, something that would have been more difficult if Mariam had come to them as a destitute Indian widow stranded in England. Just like Teresa Sampsonia and Robert Sherley’s marriage, Mariam Khanum and Gabriel Towerson’s union was a reciprocal alliance based on common aspirations for influence and material wealth.

However, the East India Company board of directors hoped for something in return from Mariam: “it may be for the honor of the company if she [Mariam] shall signify their bounty and kind resort towards her, unto her friends in those parts [India]”. Thus, while company men saw Teresa Sampsonia and her fabricated image as a relative of the Shah as leverage they could use to undermine Robert Sherley’s position in England, they saw Mariam and her liminal position of Armenian Christian as a potential asset in their future dealings in India, especially with her family’s connections in the palace. This strategy was linked to the rise of Mehr-un-Nissa (also called Nur-Mahal or Nur-Jahan) in Jahangir’s court at the time. Jahangir married Nur-Jahan in 1611, and she quickly grew powerful and influential, so much so that the Englishman John Ogilby writes that she “was acknowledg’d as a Queen, and being honor’d above all the Ladies of [Jahangir’s] Court, bore a great sway, nothing being done in the Kingdom but by her Conduct and Power”. Just like Safiye in the Ottoman Empire, Nur-Jahan represented a peripheral political force to be reckoned with, as it was said that she had “in the Court made many alterations by deposing, and displacing almost all the old Captains and
Officers” and “advance[ed] to dignities other new ones of her own creatures, and particularly those of her blood and alliance”. If the East India Company earned her favours, Nur-Jahan could prove instrumental to their dealings with the Mughal Empire, but if they failed to do so, she could jeopardize their trade around the Indian Ocean. Thomas Roe, the company man and English ambassador to the court of Jahangir from 1615 to 1619, seemed to be very much aware of Nur-Jahan’s influence since he wrote a letter to the company, urging them to send a gift to the Empress after they had failed to do so the year before: “[t]he neglect of her last yeare, I haue felt heauely”. The East India Company seemed under the impression that Mariam, having been raised in the harem, could intercede in their favours with the powerful Empress. Roe, too, believed that Mariam could be of help in gaining Nur Jahan’s trust: “his [Towerson’s] wife may assist me to Normahall better than all this court”. Finally, Towerson hoped that his wife could be of use to pursue his own agenda: “it was in the hope of pushing his fortunes in India with the help of his wife’s relatives that Towerson had persuaded the Company to grant the passage”. During her second marriage, Mariam Khanum thus found herself once again at a crossroad between the personal interests of her new husband and the corporate interests of his employer, the East India Company.

In 1616, the company paid for the Towersons’ journey to India, hoping to profit from Mariam’s connections at court to further their interests in the East, implementing the very strategy for which they would blame Robert Sherley ten years later when they questioned his credentials as ambassador and his wife’s legitimate connection to the Shah. However, once back safely in India, Mariam Khanum would prove much less helpful than Teresa had been to her husband. After all, while Teresa had spent most of her married life travelling abroad in foreign countries where she was entirely dependent on her husband’s status, Mariam Khanum was back in a country that valued her and her family more than they valued Towerson or the East India Company. When Towerson and his wife arrived in Agra in 1617, Roe reports the harsh reality that Towerson found there: “Her [Mariam’s] frends are Poore and mean and weary of them. Hee came with hopes of great Diamonds and they looke for guifts of him. I am sorie for him and his little vanetie”. In 1618, the couple separated and Towerson left his wife with her family in Agra to go back to England, but this would not be the last that the East India Company heard of Mariam. Towerson had left her with very little money, and, by 1619, she had accumulated such debts that she regularly petitioned the company’s agents for money: “Captain Towersons ladye or wife, who remaynes at present in Agra, who hath spent all the meanes hir husband left with hir for hir expence, and is att present in debte to my knowledge two or three hundred ru[pees]; (...) shee and hir mother sent (...) daylye to borrow 200 ru[pees] until hir husbands retorne”. Now that she was separated from her husband, Mariam was of little help to the company, who only saw her as an asset through her marriage to Towerson, and so they denied her any financial aid. However, as I have previously said, Mariam was not stranded in Europe without any support like Teresa had been. Her family must still have held some sway at the Mughal court, since William Biddulph, head factor in India, reports to the Company in a 1619 letter:

[T]hey [Mariam and her mother] rayled uppon hir husband and nation, but principallye hir mother, which is noe smale discreditt to our nation. Soe yf the next yeare hir husband come not nor send hir meanes, shee will breed much trouble to your [the EIC’s] factors at Agra and the court with theire exclamations; therefore is needfull you take some course with hir husband for hir
mayntaynnance, or send for hir to him to avoid expence, trouble and scandall; which yf [she] remayne here and want meanes will follow in the end.  

This event suggests that Mariam was very much aware of the power she held over the East India Company in her homeland, especially at a time when English merchants still relied on local powers to grant them trading privileges and rights over their factories in Mughal territories. She was not afraid of using her strategic liminal position as both a favoured lady from a minority at court and a company wife to take advantage of the East India Company financially, making her not an asset to their dealings in the East as much as a burden.

After abandoning his wife, Towerson went back to England by himself in 1620 until he was sent back to South East Asia by the company, this time to Jakarta where the trade competition with the Dutch East India Company was growing more and more violent. He was then dispatched by the company to the island of Amboyna in 1623, where the Dutch had monopolized the spice trade through a bloody reign of terror: “[b]y 1606, the Dutch had driven the Portuguese out of much of the region and become the primary traders in pepper, nutmeg and cloves. (...) Outgunned, and outfinanced, the English were forced to sign a treaty in 1619 guaranteeing the Dutch two-thirds of the trade in the region”. As a consequence, when Towerson was suspected of being at the centre of a Japanese-European plot to take over the fort and factory in Amboyna, he was ruthlessly tortured and executed by the Dutch East India Company which accused England of breaching the treaty. After this gruesome event, the directors must have remembered Mariam’s attitude in Agra, since they dismissed her rights as a widow entirely and, instead of having the reparation money for Towerson’s death sent to India, they gave it to his brother in England. Ultimately, Mariam’s treatment by the East India Company depended entirely on her marriage to their agent and, once Towerson was dead, she was of no use to them anymore.

Thus, through her marriages to two company agents, Mariam came in direct contact with the East India Company as she relied on them for money and for travels between England and India. However, as opposed to Teresa Sampsonia Sherley who was entirely devoted to her husband’s personal interests at home and abroad, Mariam Khanum was often at odds with her second husband Towerson, and their disagreements over financial matters had to be mediated by the company on several occasions. From the beginning to the end, her married life was intertwined with the company’s designs for the Indian Ocean, from her status as a potential ally to her final perception as a liability.

Teresa Sampsonia’s and Mariam Khanum’s statuses as Christian women from ethnic minorities in two different Muslim Empires made them the perfect intermediaries for Englishmen to use to further their personal interests in the East. Through these two parallel case studies, I hoped to show these marital arrangements between marginal English actors and aristocratic Eastern women under different angles. Teresa Sherley offers the example of a wife who helped her English husband legitimize his delicate position as ambassador for Persia through works of propaganda in which she willingly participated. In Southeast Asia, Mariam Khanum illustrates the material reciprocity that she expected from her second husband and his employer to support her financially in exchange for her influence. But, though Teresa and Mariam’s statuses in their home countries initially made them superior to these marginal adventurers or traders, they gradually lost their influence as their fate became intertwined with that of their...
English husbands. Ultimately, any reciprocity they could hope from their marriages died with their husbands and the two women ended up destitute widows, which illustrates the limits of what these marital arrangements could bring to Eastern women once they had been exploited by English actors.

Part 3: Courting powerful Eastern women – in real life and in fiction

As I have previously shown, Sultana Safiye, Teresa Sampsonia Sherley and Mariam Khanum were all powerful Eastern women who came to be considered of use by Englishmen and women at home and abroad in order to further English interests in the East. Looking at the way English actors tried to win the favours of these powerful women, one could describe the diplomatic and economic strategies that were deployed as courting. From the language of love that was used to woo them, to the many gifts that were offered, and not forgetting the fact that Teresa Sampsonia and Mariam Khanum ended up marrying foreigners, English actors used a courtly approach towards these women in order to benefit from their influence in their home country (and in Europe, in the case of Robert Sherley’s embassies).

The English Oxford Dictionary describes the process of courtship as a “period during which a couple develops a romantic relationship before getting married”, but also as “the action of attempting to win a person’s favour or support”. Building on the first definition which considers a courtship as the period preceding marriage, Elizabeth and Safiye’s correspondence can be seen as an instance of feminine platonic courtship which was meant to lead, on a political level, to the diplomatic and commercial marriage between England and the Ottoman Empire. From the very first letter sent by Safiye to Elizabeth I, the Sultana speaks of the “singular love which we have conceived one toward the other”. This “singular love” is described in highly poetic terms and is compared to “a garden of pleasant birds”. The vivid imagery of the Ottoman prose is not unlike the rhetoric that one might find in courtly poems or romances, though of course here this “singular love” is a platonic one between two powerful queens. Still, from the beginning, their correspondence is clearly marked by gendered terms of female sexuality. Safiye refers to Elizabeth not only as the queen of a foreign Christian nation, but as the virgin Queen of Christendom and describes her as “follow[ing] the steps of the virgine Mary”. Moreover, it is interesting to see that Safiye’s letter frames Elizabeth I as a female suiter who initiated this process courtship when her letter first entered the Sultan’s harem. Indeed, in Skilliter’s translation of the Turkish letter, the Queen’s first missive is said to have passed through “the Door of chastity and modesty” and to have been delivered “by the hand of the highest attendant of the curtain of chastity”. The start of their correspondence is thus noted twice as an act which breached the “Door” or “curtain” of the harem. This insistence on the harem as a place of female chastity which seems to have been temporarily compromised by Elizabeth’s correspondence is much more telling than the simple rendering of “a letter from your Majestie, which with great honour was presented unto us by our eunuks” present in the translation published by Hakluyt. It is possible that the embassy translators in Constantinople may have deemed the Ottoman prose too evocative for the virgin Queen. To build on Safiye’s framing the Queen as a platonic suitor, the presence of the letter that came from England is embedded in the Sultana’s own message, where it is described in highly sensory terms with an insistence on its scent: “the paper (…) did smell most fragrantly of camphor and ambargriese, and the incke of
perfect muske". This elaborate hyperbole presents Elizabeth’s missive as one with the intentions to please, framing it almost as the correspondence between two lovers. The same insistence can be found in the second letter, this time described as “rose-perfumed”.2 The platonic courtship between Safiye and Elizabeth I is also visible in the gifts that the English Queen sent to the Sultana, such as her portrait in 1593 (“a jewel of her majesties picture”) or the coach in 1599. However, a third series of presents was mentioned at Safiye’s request by the kira Esperanza Malchi in a 1599 letter to the Queen. In this letter, the kira relays the Sultana’s demand for clothes and makeup:

[O]n account of Your Majesty’s being a woman I can without any embarrassment employ you with this notice, which is that as there are to be found in your kingdom rare distilled waters of every kind for the face and odiferous oils for the hands, Your Majestie would favour me by sending some of them (...) for this most serene Queen [Safiye]; by my hand as, being articles for ladies, she does not wish them to pass through other hands. Likewise, if there are to be found in your kingdom cloths of silk or wool, (...) she will hold this more dear than any jewel whatsoever that Your Majestie might send her.

The very gendered nature of the gifts requested by Safiye illustrates the relationship between the Queen and the Sultana: Safiye knows that she is being courted to help the Queen’s ambassadors in their dealings with her son and she is not afraid of asking for very specific gifts in exchange for her continuous help. It is unclear whether or not Elizabeth did send the gifts that she was asked for, but this letter still highlights Safiye’s attempt at taking advantage of their “singular love” to ask for feminine items in the context of a diplomatic courtship.

The same strategy of courting powerful Eastern women with affectionate words and gifts in return for diplomatic help is visible in Mariam Khanum’s interactions with the East India Company board of directors. As previously seen, when Mariam Khanum was engaged to her second husband Gabriel Towerson, she received two hundred gold sovereigns from the board of directors, which they called a “token of their love”.2 The directors claimed that this was an engagement gift for “the widow that is a stranger and to be married very shortly”, but they mainly wished to earn her favour so she would use her family connections in Agra to help Towerson and the company in their commercial dealings in the East. It is interesting to point out that, by marrying Hawkins and Towerson, two captains working for the East India company, Mariam Khanum was also married in some way to the company itself. Indeed, Mariam was expected to help enrich both Towerson and the company through her connections in the Mughal court, though they both would be sorely disappointed in the end. Moreover, Mariam was linked to Towerson first and foremost by financial ties created by the East India Company, since they were married on the same day she received the two hundred gold sovereigns from the board of directors. Later on, when her husband refused to provide for her after their journey back to India, Mariam expected the company to take over his role as caretaker. After Towerson abandoned Mariam, the company would have to send several more “token[s] of their love” to prevent this Indian bride from “breed[ing] much trouble”. It appears that Mariam was very much aware of the company’s need to please her and to court her affection since she repeatedly took advantage of her marital ties to company captains to cover her own expenses in her home country. As a consequence, when Towerson died, his death severed all her marital and financial ties to the company, which stopped trying to win
her over and dismissed her entirely when they paid Towerson’s family compensations for his brutal death in Amboyna.

Looking at these examples, it is no surprise that contemporary writers translated these evidences of diplomatic and commercial courting into plots of actual romantic courting in their works of fiction. In plays like Day, Rowley and Wilkins’s *The Travels of the Three English Brothers*, Dryden’s *Amboyna* (1673), or in romances like Wroth’s *Urania* (1620-1630), Teresa Sampsonia and Mariam Khanum are turned into almost unrecognizable versions of themselves whose main purpose is to be courted by English gentlemen.

In *The Travels of the Three English Brother*, Teresa Sampsonia appears as a nameless “[h]onoured princess” (1.3.107), “niece to the Sophy”. Her main role as love interest is defined by scenes of rival courtship between Robert Sherley and Calimath, one of the Shah’s advisors who comes to woo the princess on behalf of his brother Halibeck. Her first appearance in this one-act play is in scene 3, when her maid, Dalibra, sings the praise of the Sherley brothers and their courtly nature: “They speak as well or, rather, better than our own countrymen” (3.22-3). The princess confirms this depiction of the Sherleys as superior in character to the Persians when she learns that some in the Shah's entourage are jealous of the brothers’ popularity at court: “I hold them [the Sherleys] the more worthy for that, for envy and malice are always stabbing at the bosom of worth” (3.30-1). Moreover, when Calimath comes to court her on behalf of his brother, the princess spurns him and prefers to hear about the Sherleys’ exploits in the war against the Turks: “It came to us by letters the English brothers took more prisoners than any of our commanders in the camp” (3.45-8). The princess’s main role is the play is to highlight the Englishmen’s superiority both at court and on the battlefield, as opposed to her spiteful and scheming countrymen. Soon after, Robert appears in the scene and the nature of his interaction with the princess is defined by the codes of courtly romance. She compares him to a “wandering knight” (3.119) and describes him as “a goodly personage, composed of such rich perfection as valour seems his servant” (3.63-5). Robert explains that he comes bearing a “love mixed with duty” (3.67), his love for her being intermingled with his duty as the Shah’s messenger. In turn, she tells him that “our love in fair requital shall be shown” (3.75). The infuriated Calimath, upon witnessing this courtly exchange where Robert “kisses her hand” wishes “[d]eath to a Christian!” (3.76). After Robert’s departure, the princess reminds herself that her affection for Robert is pointless since “he is a Christian, and his state too mean to keep even wing with us” (3.114-5). And yet, by the end of the play, even the Shah recognizes that Robert’s courtship is a successful one: he “like a cunning adder twine[d] himself about our niece’s heart!” (11.26-7). However, this courtship has very strong political implications since, in the play, Teresa Sampsonia’s character appears as a direct line to the Persian throne: “She once his own, he’s lord of us and of the Persian crown” (11.27-8). In the final scenes, the Shah, furious that his niece would choose a Christian to love, pretends that Sherley has been beheaded so that she will admit her treacherous feelings for the Christian. But, moved by her unwavering affection, he reveals that Robert is still alive and consents to their union – which implies that Robert now owns “the Persian crown”. Thus, even in a work of fiction where Teresa’s role is reduced to that of a love interest, earning a powerful Eastern lady’s favour becomes a signifier of political worthiness.
Similarly to what happened to Teresa Sampsonia’s character in The Travels of the Three English Brothers, Mariam Khanum alter-ego is reduced to the role of a love interest. In Dryden’s play Amboyna, she appears as an “almost-unidentifiable re-creation”, in the form of Ysabinda, a local Ambonese woman betrothed to Gabriel Towerson. Ysabinda is a tragic female figure, whose happy marriage to Towerson is destroyed by Harman Junior, son of the Dutch governor of Amboyna, after he raped her. Towerson and Ysabinda are already engaged when the play starts, thus removing from the stage the actual process of courtship leading up to their marriage. However, just as the Shah’s niece rejected Calimath’s suit in favour of the worthier Robert Sherley, Ysabinda spurns Harman Jr. and stays true to her English fiancé instead. And just as in The Travels of the Three English Brothers, Ysabinda’s choice of lover has very strong political and economic implications. In the opening lines of the play, Fiscall, advisor to the governor, speaks with Van Herring, a Dutch merchant, and tells him they need to remove the English presence from the region so they can be the sole European power in the Spice Islands. Van Herring hesitates and reminds him that the English “were first discoverers of this Isle, first Traded hither, and shou’d us the way” (1.1.60-1). The matter of who came first is of great importance in the play since Amboyna is a strategic island of enormous wealth, described by Towerson as “o’erflowing” with “Luxuries”, “bounties”, “Spices”, “Gums” and “Gems of richest value” (1.1.224-7). Already, Dryden’s piece of nationalist propaganda states that, because the English were first in Amboyna, they deserve to profit from its riches more than the Dutch, who only came second. The precedence of England’s claim on Amboyna is doubled in the person of Ysabinda who is described, just like her island, as “beauteous, rich, and young” (1.1.124) and who was already engaged to Towerson before Harman Jr laid eyes on her. As the only Ambonese given a name and spoken lines in the play, Ysabinda easily stands for her native island, and her union with Towerson becomes a symbol of the flourishing trade between England and Amboyna. This is most visible when Harman Jr. confronts Towerson and offers him anything he wants in exchange for his bride. During this dialogue, the English merchant refuses and speaks of his engagement to Ysabinda in terms of commerce and contract: “Hold, you mistake me Harman, I never gave you just occasion to think I wou’d make Merchandise of Love; Ysabinda you know is mine, contracted to me e’re I went for England, and must be so till death” (2.1.81-4). The romantic courtship of Ysabinda appears strongly linked to the commercial contracts binding the Ambonese with European traders. Towerson, by being engaged to Ysabinda, is presented as having a legal claim to the profits yielded by the island but, should she be seduced away, these profits would go to the Dutch competitors. This staging by Dryden is especially interesting when considering that Amboyna was, in real life and in the play, controlled by the Dutch East India Company. As Harman Jr. reminds Towerson threateningly: “She must not Towerson; you know you are not strongest in these parts, and ’twill be ill contesting with your Masters” (2.1.85-6). Even though the English are not the “Masters” of the island, by winning the affection of Ysabinda, Dryden presents Towerson – and the English East India Company – as the legitimate husband of the island she stands for. Thus, even though Ysabinda recognizes that Harman Jr.’s “Countrymen have the advantage” (2.1.25-6) on a military level, she insists that, romantically, her choice is not “to [the Dutch’s] advantage” (2.1.20). Dryden clearly points out that, because Towerson and Ysabinda’s love is reciprocated, the trade relations between England and Amboyna are nobler and more legitimate than the physical and metaphorical rape of Ysabinda and her island perpetrated by the Dutch.
Thus, the Dutch empire’s way of business – described by Dryden as illegitimate – is repeatedly translated into their uncourtly attitude towards the Eastern bride. Towerson, tired of fighting Harman Jr. for Ysabinda’s affections, tells him: “I will not stay to take [your provocations]; Only this before I go, if you are truly Gallant, insult not where you have power, but keep your Quarrel secret, (...) meanwhile, I go to Marry Ysabinda” (2.1.121-4). Of course, Harman Jr. will prove the opposite of gallant as he will eventually rape Ysabinda, after which event, plagued by guilt, Fiscal will remind him that it is only the nature of the Dutch: “Those fits of conscience in another might be excusable; but in you, a Dutchman, who are of a race that are born rebels, and live every where on rapine, - would you degenerate, and have remorse?” (4.2.61-4). As opposed to this criminal attitude, Towerson and his companions are always described as “Noblemen” (2.1.392), worthy of Ysabinda’s affections and, consequently, worthy of trading in the Spice Islands. Even though these contemporary works do not depict Englishmen like Robert Sherley or Gabriel Towerson as courting powerful Eastern women because they need their assistance in political or financial matters, they still show them benefitting from these women’s love.

However, nowhere is the importance of properly wooing an Eastern woman more clearly shown than in Wroth’s Urania, where Teresa Sampsonia appears even more distorted than Mariam Khanum’s character of Ysabinda. In this romance, she is only vaguely perceptible through the Christian Persian princess named Lindafilia. While Teresa’s role in The Travels of the Three English Brothers was limited to being a direct line to the crown of Persia for Robert Sherley, Lindafilia is a political force to be reckoned with. Described as either the daughter or niece of the former Sophy, she was supposed to take over as regent before her uncle, the “usurping Sophy”, stole her throne and tried to force her into marriage. She might also be sister to Rodomandro, King of Tartaria, whose kingdom was described by Wroth’s contemporaries as stretching from “the utmost bounds of Asia to Armenia, and from Bengal to Volga, ye[t] their incursions pierced e[v]en to Nilus and Danubius. The Macedonian and Roman Empires were ne[v]er so large”. Her claim to the Persian throne, described as “better” than her uncle’s, and her brother’s powerful kingdom make her a strategic ruler in Wroth’s imagined geography of the East. During one episode, she appears in full regalia, sitting “in a throne of pure Golde”, “[a] Crowne upon her head of the most matches stones” and “[h]er apparel of the Asian fashion”, demonstrating her power to all. However, the Urania being a romance, it is her heavenly beauty – repeatedly compared to an “Orient pearle” or “the purest pearle the Orient cowld afforde” – which strikes Western admirers. In a pattern that is now familiar, Lindafilia spurns the advances of one of her countrymen (her incestuous uncle) and instead praises the courtly attitude of a Westerner. When Rosindy, King of Morea and Macedon, comes to her castle, she explains that she has spent the last few years evading her uncle: “hee (...) still courting mee; I modestly refusing and excusing my self many ways”. Then, she reveals that an oracle told her of Rosindy’s coming and that he, “of all men the sivilest to Ladys”, would help her “demaund ayde of all Christian princes (I being a Christian my self) to assist mee and deliver mee out of the hands of such wickednes and treacherie”. Rosindy’s courtly attitude towards women seems to be of great importance in this prophecy, and it ultimately earns him a political reward. Indeed, at the end of the manuscript, Lindafilia barely has time to be made “absolute Monarch of Persia” before she is kidnapped, and Rosindy is named “Governour of Persia” in her absence, underlining once more the political benefits of properly courting powerful
Eastern women. This event is even more significant when considering that another Western monarch had the opportunity to win her favour and failed early in his courtship. Earlier in the manuscript, an anonymous Tartarian-Persian princess (who closely resembles Lindafillia), held captive by a Persian giant, is saved by Licandro, Prince of Athens, who immediately falls in love with her. Though Licandro is supposed to be “most Civile and courtious to Ladyes”, he forgets himself in a moment of passion and “kisse[s] her hand, butt soe fervently as if his lips would have dwell ther. She, never Used to such moist salutes, tooke her hand away, some what more neere snatching than courtious taking itt, and with a fro[w]ne, (...) turned away”. This episode is an example of a Westerner’s failing to properly court a powerful Eastern woman and, as Bernadette Andrea points out, “[Lindafillia’s] questioning of Licandro’s worthiness as a result of his ignorance of Eastern norms shows that cultural relationships between Asians and Europeans do not necessarily favour the latter”. As a consequence of his mishap, Licandro is prevented from pursuing the princess, and is told that “[t]his Lady is nott for you”, leaving the spot of courteous suitor – and future governor of Persia – open for Rosindy.

It appears that, at a time when England had no means to act as an empire in the East, its ability to court and win over powerful Eastern women was a sign of its success among Muslim powers. The role of some of these women was picked up in contemporary works of fiction, where the economic and military inferiority of England at the time is translated into the position of inferiority usually displayed in romance by gentle knights courting their ladies. In these courtly adaptations, Englishmen display their ability to woo powerful Eastern women with their sophisticated manners, far superior to those of other nations, and benefit from these ladies’ political and economic influence. Comparing the historic reality of Eastern women such as the Sultan a Safiye, Teresa Sampsonia Sherley or Mariam Khanum, to their warped depictions in literature highlights the ambivalent position of English writers toward foreign women from the East. These women appear to have been considered both as diplomatic forces to be reckoned with and as exotic objects of fantasy sparking nascent imperialist desires in English writings.

Chapter 2: The representation of Eastern women in English writings as proto-imperialist fantasies of conquest

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, England was not the empire that it would later become in the second half of the eighteenth century. It was isolated from its European neighbours due to religious conflicts and was relying heavily on trade with Muslim powers to sustain the economic toll of war against Spain. As a consequence, England did not have any means to engage in large-scale conquests overseas. And yet, an imperialist rhetoric can still be traced back as early as 1533, when Parliament passed the Act of Restraint of Appeals, laying the legal foundations for the English Reformation. The act denied the authority of the Pope over English citizens, making Henry VIII the highest legal authority of the British Isles, and declared that “this realm of England is an empire”. This first reference to the notion of empire is described by David Armitage as a nationalist effort to shed off Papal suzerainty over the English crown and to replace it with the Roman notion of imperium, which Armitage
defines in three separate steps: “[i]n the first, empire meant simply authority or sovereignty. In the second, it meant the territory over which such authority or sovereignty was claimed. In the third, it meant rule over many dominions (...) as a shorthand for domineering ‘universal’ monarchy”.

According to these first two steps, when Henry VIII declared his kingdom an empire, he replaced the Papal authority under which all Catholic citizens were supposed to fall with the notion of imperium which gave kings complete and independent sovereignty over their own territories and the people living there. Thus, the notion of empire that can be found at the heart of the Reformation was first and foremost about the independence of Protestant England under the Tudor rule. It is only later that the Protestant notion of imperium came to be associated with the territorial expansion that Armitage describes in his third step, with the integration of Wales (Law in Wales Acts of 1535 and 1542) and Ireland (Crown of Ireland Act of 1542) to the empire. During Elizabeth I’s reign, some ambitions to extend the reach of the “Brytish Impire” to Scotland and to the newly discovered territories of North America were promoted by thinkers like Richard Hakluyt or John Dee, but these enterprises would only be put forward under James I, formerly James VI of Scotland, whose accession to the throne united the crown of Scotland with that of England, Wales and Ireland. Similarly, even though Hakluyt had written his ‘Discourse on the Western Planting’ in 1584 at the request of the Secretary Walsingham to obtain royal funds for the colonization of North America proposed by Sir Walter Raleigh, the first successful settlement in Virginia would only take place in 1607 with the creation of Jamestown. As Armitage puts it: “the emergence of the concept of the ‘British Empire’ as a political community encompassing England and Wales, Scotland, Protestant Ireland, the British islands of the Caribbean and the mainland colonies of North America, was long drawn out, and only achieved by the late seventeenth century at the earliest”.

Considering that England was first referred to as an empire by Henry VIII to shed off the yoke of Papal authority, it is not surprising that Elizabeth I still cultivated the same imperial rhetoric after being excommunicated by the Pope. Indeed, even though Elizabeth I’s reign was not one of actual conquests overseas (not as much as the reign of her successor James I), the Elizabethan period still inspired a certain type of writing defined by a desire for imperial expansion. This stemmed from the fact that the Elizabethan period was marked by increasing global contacts which came to redefine the perception Englishmen and women had of their country’s place in the world. In only a few decades, England had known new diplomatic relationships with Eastern countries (exemplified by the visit of the first Moroccan ambassador to London in 1600), the creation of chartered companies aimed at long distance trade (the Muscovy Company in 1555, the Levant Company in 1571 and the East India Company in 1600), ambitious maritime enterprises (Francis Drake’s circumnavigation from 1577 to 1580) and unexpected victories at sea (the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588). Emboldened by these events, the imperialist rhetoric of the Elizabethan era started to look for territories outside of the Atlantic. An ideological discourse presenting Elizabeth I as head of a global empire emerged in print and painting, especially after the naval defeat of the Spanish enemy. Following this victory over what was thought to be an invincible empire, the Armada Portrait depicted the Queen with a triumphant hand over the globe, while in the background, the Spanish vessels sank into the seas and the victorious English fleet sailed out to discover, trade and interact with the world. Building on this symbolism of global imperialism, George Peele dedicated his
Polyhymnia to “Elizabeth great Empresse of the world,/Britani"as Atlas, Star of Englands globe" , while Edmund Spenser referred to her as “the most Mightie and Magnificent Empresse”. It is interesting to consider the discrepancy between the reality of England’s imperial project in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (which was mainly centred around a budding westward expansion in the Atlantic) and the fiction of proto-imperialist fantasies generated by England’s victory over Spain which extended all over the globe. Hakluyt’s Principal Navigations, a collection of travel documents relating English enterprises overseas which was first published in 1589 right after the defeat of the Armada, projected the idea of a naval empire in the making, spread out all over the globe, trading and interacting with all sorts of foreign and exotic people. The success of this detailed account of English diplomatic and economic activities overseas demonstrates that early modern readers were interested in reading about England’s place in the world, especially after the 1588 victory which seemed to confirm England’s legitimate status as a Protestant empire. This interest in travel literature depicting English interactions with foreign and sometimes antagonist empires like the Spanish, Portuguese, French or Ottoman ones has been described by several researchers as part of an “imperial envy”, that “produced both emulation and disavowal”. For example, by publishing the diplomatic correspondences between Elizabeth and foreign monarchs such as Murad III and Safiye, Hakluyt presents England as an equal to these Eastern empires and Elizabeth I, the Queen of a remote island waging war against its European neighbours, appears on an equal footing with the Ottoman Sultan. Under Hakluyt’s pen, the diplomatic ties between Elizabethan England and Eastern empires are described as an unprecedented achievement in the country’s history: For, which of the kings of this land before her Ma"esty, had theyr banners euer seene in the Caspian sea? Which of them hath euer dealt with the Emperor of Persia, as her Maiestry hath done, and obteined for her merchants large & louing privileges? Who euer saw before this regiment, an English Ligier in the stately porch of the Grand Signior at Constantinople? Who ever found English Consuls & Agents at Tripolis in Syria, at Aleppo, at Babylon, at Balsara, and which is more, who euver heard of Englishman at Goa before now? In a mirror effect created by Hakluyt, the greatness of Persia and of the “stately” Ottoman Empire reflects on England, which shares their glory by being in a commercial and diplomatic alliance with them. This is not surprising considering that, ever since the Turkish conquest of Constantinople in 1453, which marked the beginning of Ottoman encroachment into the Occident, “the Islamic [Ottoman] Empire continued to provide a threatening but also enviable model of successful imperial might”. English interest in the conquests of the Ottoman Empire is visible through Richard Knolles’ chronicle of “the mightie Empire of the Turks” which, “from a small beginning”, had become “the greatest terror of the world, and holding in subiection many great and mightie kingdomes in Asia, Europe, and Affricke”. Thus Hakluyt’s fantasized English empire had global ambitions which relied on the increasing cosmopolitanism of the Elizabethan period: wherever an English sailor, trader or diplomat could go, so the fantasy of empire could follow. While Elizabeth I herself had no ambitions to create an actual empire overseas, English writers like John Dee or Richard Hakluyt did fantasize about the possibility of an English empire able to rival with the Habsburg enemy in Europe and even with Muslim empires in the East. However, as I have shown before, England was only a marginal
player in the East and its emissaries heavily relied on peripheral actors such as Safiye, Teresa Sampsonia Sherley or Mariam Khanum to carve a place for themselves on the diplomatic and commercial scene of Eastern empires. Moreover, as the demise of Gabriel Towerson in Amboyna highlights, the English were incapable of competing with other European commercial powers like the Dutch, which had more advanced maritime and military means to monopolize trade. Thus, as opposed to England, which was witnessing the emergence of an imperial rhetoric in print and paint, the Ottoman, Mughal and Persian empires were all actual empires, because of their “imperial dynast[ies] and the vast maritime and territorial areas that they governed”. Still, it is interesting to see that, even though England’s earliest imperial ambitions were concentrated in the “westward enterprise” of the Atlantic, the “swing to the East” of proto-imperialist fantasies had already started under the pen of English writers as early as the beginning of the seventeenth century. As I have shown in the previous chapter, Eastern women such as Safiye, Teresa Sampsonia Sherley and Begum Mariam Khanum were all powerful aristocratic women with undoubtable agency, which Englishmen and women wished to use to further their own diplomatic and commercial ambitions in the East. However, in this chapter, I will demonstrate that under the pen of English writers (male or female), the power of these Eastern women was undermined by the use of tropes from medieval romances, which turned Teresa and Mariam into idealized objects of courtships. This process of undermining these women by reifying them was part of a global strategy to promote a fantasized white, Christian, English empire that could stretch into the East through the courtly love between Eastern women and Western men. Since these fantasies of empire were only viable on paper, English writers such as Day, Rowley, Wilkins, Wroth and Dryden turned powerful Eastern women into distressed female characters of romance that could be wooed and won over by chivalric European suitors, in order to find a fictional catalyst for proto-imperialist fantasies.

Part 1: English writers and the fantasy of an empire avant la lettre

Hakluyt’s idea that wherever English merchants and travellers went, they would carry with them the glory of their home country was exploited to justify the proto-imperialist fantasy woven into the Sherley brothers’ propaganda. Indeed, in Day, Rowley and Wilkins’ play, Robert Sherley does not simply marry the Shah’s niece (which secures his position in the line to Persia’s throne), he also plants the seeds of English imperialism in Persian soil. At the end of the play, Robert explains that he has had a child with the Shah’s niece and presents his offspring as the first of a line of Christians in Persia: “This present day I have an infant born/Who, though descended from the emperor’s niece,/A pagan, I’ll baptise in Christian faith;/Confute their ignorance, heaven assisting me,/That my own soul this comfort may partake:/Sherley in Persia did the first Christian make” (1.13.50-5). Unlike Teresa and Robert’s real son Henry who was born in England and was raised there, Robert’s son with the Shah’s niece (as well as their future children) will stay in Persia, but they will still be raised in an English-like environment. In the final act of the play, the Shah grants Robert’s wishes to “erect a church/Wherein all Christians that do hither come/May peaceably hear their own religion” (1.13.178-180) and to “raise a house/Where Christian children from their cradles/Should know no other education,/Manners, language nor religion/Than what by Christians is delivered them” (1.13.187-191). Thus, even though Robert’s
son will be born in Persia from a “pagan” mother, the play makes sure that this child born from a racially and religiously mixed marriage is shielded from all Muslim or Persian influence. By letting Robert build English-like institutions on Persian soil and by stating that the influence of these institutions will not be limited to Robert’s children but will concern all future Christians in Persia, *The Travels of the Three English Brothers* goes even further than Hakluyt’s proto-imperialist rhetoric and weaves a fantasy that can well be called proto-colonialist.

Another blatant example of an early modern proto-imperialist fantasy only sustainable in writing is the second part of Lady Mary Wroth’s *Urania*. Wroth’s proto-imperialist fantasies probably stemmed from her family’s interest in John Dee’s writings, as her uncle Philip Sidney and his sister the Countess of Pembroke were particularly interested in his work. However, Wroth did not fantasize about an all-encompassing “Brytish Impire” like Dee. In her scholarly edition of the manuscript, Josephine Roberts aptly points out that “[a]t the heart of the *Urania* lies one of the most powerful political fantasies of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe – the revival of the Holy Roman Empire in the West”. At its beginning, the Holy Roman Empire was presented as the Christian legacy of the fallen Roman Empire in Western and Central Europe, revived almost four hundred years later by Charlemagne when he was crowned Emperor by the Pope in 800. During the early modern period, the Holy Roman Empire had been severely weakened by the German, Dutch and English Reformations which undermined the authority of the Pope and of the Emperor who were supposed to rule in God’s name. By the time Lady Wroth started writing her romance, the Holy Roman Empire was challenged in the East by the Ottomans and in the West by rival empires such as the French or Spanish. Faced with the crumbling of the Holy Roman Empire’s political might, some writers started to dream nostalgically about European kingdoms uniting under a common banner of Christianity in order to transcend religious conflicts and defeat the Muslim enemy in the East. Already in the sixteenth century, Bishop John Jewel lamented:

> I told you that the empire of Rome contained sometimes a great part of the world, as England, France, Spain, Germany, etc. Where is England now? It is divided from, and is no part of the [Holy Roman] empire. Where is France, Spain, Italy, Illyricum? Where is Rome itself? They are taken away from it, and now no part of the empire. Where is Macedonia, Thracia, Graecia, Asia, Armenia, etc.? We cannot think of them but with heaviness: they be now under the Turk: they are taken away and are no part of the empire.

The Ottoman threat crystallized Christian anxieties all over Europe, since it possessed “the foure greate Patriarkal Sées [seats] of the Churche, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioche, and Hierusalem”, and threatened to subdue “this parte of the worlde [Europe], (...) as he hath subdued Grece, Asia, Egypte, Syria, and al the Easte Churche”. And yet, through the “wish-fulfillment of romance”, Wroth was able to create a Holy Roman Empire that would incorporate European imperialist fantasies of reclaiming the Eastern parts of the world that the Ottomans had previously conquered. And this was achieved through the intervention of a powerful Eastern woman.

The main love story of Wroth’s romance is the one between Pamphilia, Princess of Morea, and Amphilanthus, Prince of Naples. Though Pamphilia does not share as many resemblances with Teresa Sampsonia as the “True Sophy” of Persia Lindafilia, she remains another instance of a Christian Eastern Princess in her work. In the second part of the *Urania*, Pamphilia is Queen of an eponymous kingdom that her uncle left for
her on the Western-most border of Asia, part of present-day Turkey, and she goes by the name of the “easterne starr’. As for Amphilanthus, her lover, he is now the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and bears the title of “Light of the Western World”.

Through her constant love and devotion for Amphilanthus, Pamphilia integrates her Christianized Eastern kingdom to the Holy Roman Empire, incorporating back the Eastern territories lost to Ottoman conquest in the fifteenth century. In spite of this political union, Amphilanthus and Pamphilia are not married in Wroth’s manuscript. Instead, he marries the Princess of Slavonia so that “hee may inlarge his Empire [and] bring his dominions into the Easte”. Pamphilia, who hears about this betrayal, resolves to marry Rodomandro, King of Tartaria, who has professed his love to her. These separate unions are a tragic turn for the romance, but for Amphilanthus’ Holy Roman Empire, they represent immense opportunities. Indeed, Rodomandro is described as “an exquisite man in all things”, “a Christian” and is “intimate in frendship with the Emperour [Amphilanthus], who esteem’d him above all forraine Princes”. By the end of the romance, Pamphilia and Amphilanthus have forgiven each other and the manuscript suggests the fantasy of East and West united through the happy triangle of Pamphilia, Rodomandro and Amphilanthus. None of this would have been possible without the “easterne starr” and her strategic kingdom which lies at the very limit between Orient and Occident. Furthermore, let us not forget that Pamphilia’s brother, Rosindy, is also loyal to Amphilanthus and is, at the end of the story, Governor of Persia, granting the Holy Roman Empire an unstoppable reach into the East.

However, it would be naive to think that Wroth’s all-encompassing Holy Roman Empire was built solely on marriage, love and friendship. The main plot of the second part of the Urania revolves around the war against the “usurping Sophy” who, though he rules over Persia, is described in terms usually associated with the Ottoman Empire. Throughout the romance, he is referred to as “Sultan”, “Saldame”, “Souldan” or “Soldan”, which draws a constant parallel to the Ottoman Sultan. Moreover, even though his niece, the true Sophy, is a Christian, he is implicitly described as a Muslim since we learn that he calls Amphilanthus, Rodomandro and all the other Princes “Christian Villaines”. Thus, the war against the usurping Sophy closely resembles the war against the Muslim Ottoman Empire and is reminiscent of the crusades through episodes of religious violence and conversion. For example, when Amphilanthus’ soldiers win a battle against some of the Sophy’s force, Wroth justifies the desecration of their bodies by their non-Christian religion: “Ther durty bodys slaine (…) [are] to bee caried in the bace Court and throwne to the dogs, nott fitt for Christian burial”.

Before that, the first part of the Urania opened with a scene of mass conversion on the island of Cyprus. Amphilanthus and several other princes are stranded “in a strange Country, among barbarous people, (…) at the mercy of unchristened creatures”. Historically, Cyprus had been an Ottoman stronghold since 1571, thus marking it as Muslim Ottoman territory even though most of its people were Orthodox Christians. However, Wroth’s romance completely erases the Ottoman Empire’s rule over Cyprus that was taking place at the time of her writing. Thanks once again to the help of Pamphilia, Amphilanthus manages to convert the whole island and to incorporate it into his empire: “to Pamphilia’s tent they came, where most sumptuousely shee entertain’d them: then did all the great Princes feast each other, the last being made by the King of Cyprus, who out of love to the Christian Faith, which before he contemned, (…) desired to receive it, which Amphilanthus infinitely rejoicing at, and all the rest,
Christened him (…), and so became the whole Island Christians”.

Under Wroth’s pen, an Ottoman colony suddenly becomes a colony of a fantasized Holy Roman Empire which now encompasses all sorts of Christians without any religious divisions between Roman Catholics, Orthodox Christians or Protestants. Much like Hakluyt, whose Principal Navigations projected the fantasy of a naval British Empire even when England had no means to engage in large-scale conquest, Wroth projects onto the Holy Roman Empire her fantasy of “a ‘multicultural’ Christian empire that incorporates East and West even as it effaces the reality of contemporaneous Islamic Empires”.

Though Wroth’s proto-imperialist writing is centred around a unified Christian empire encompassing Greeks, Persians and Tartarians, it is not bereft of racial differences that imply her desire to ultimately make this empire a white one. Indeed, two of the main Eastern characters of the romance, Lindafillia and Rodomandro, are characterized by a trope that Kim Hall summarizes as “black but beautiful”. Though the true Sophy and the King of Tartaria are considered Christian allies, worthy of praise and admiration, their respective physical appearances are still depicted in “a language of contradiction”. Rodomandro’s skin is defined by paradoxes of colours. Though his face is described as “sunn-burnt”, his hands are said to be “soe white as wold have become a great Lady”. This splash of white apparently allows the King to show that he is more than a “tawny Tartar”, and that he is worthy of marrying a white queen like Pamphilia. Rodomandro’s white hands thus legitimize his interracial marriage to Pamphilia without upsetting (too much) English racial norms in the seventeenth century. Similarly, Lindafillia’s outstanding beauty is built on a contradictory blazon emphasizing the contrast of her white skin and dark hair: “[h]er heair (…) as gold upon black (...), for a dainty light Browne itt was. (...) But thorough that – O what? The milky way was durt to that! The snowe on the Mountaine topes, the black sea to it! What was itt, then? The perfect figure of the most immaculate soule, shining in her skinn”. This rhetoric of contrast and paradox reveals that foreign characters like Lindafillia and Rodomandro are not integrated into the Holy Roman Empire simply because they are Christians, but because they are white enough not to challenge a white idea of Christianity. In this, Wroth may have been inspired by accounts of Teresa Sampsonia Sherley, on whom she had possibly based the character of Lindafillia, since her contemporaries described her in similar terms of contradictions: “[s]he had more of ebony than ivory in her complexion; yet amiable enough, and very valiant, a quality considerable in that sex in those countries”. The “black but beautiful” trope that permeates Wroth’s treatment of Eastern characters highlights the limits of her all-encompassing Christian empire and shows that, even though there are no Christian dissentions in the Urania, racial hierarchies are still at work, and actively play in favour of the white characters.

Much like what happens in Wroth’s romance, Dryden’s Amboyna is centred around two rival commercial empires: the English and the Dutch. However, Dryden’s conflict does not revolve around religious lines so much as ideological ones. The naval English empire imagined by Dryden is based on the “righte of navigation in the sea, & the right of traffique” promoted in Hakluyt’s writings about the Americas where the Spanish were trying to prevent English commerce. And while Wroth was contrasting the Western light of Amphilanthus’ Christian empire with barbarous non-Christians, Dryden’s tragedy focuses on the greed of the Dutch overseas empire and sets it against the free and generous spirit of the English naval empire. As opposed to the violent Dutch merchants who would like to keep the island of Amboyna and Ysabinda for
themselves, Towerson readily admits that “[t]his ile yields Spice enough for both [countries]; and Europe, Ports, and Chapmen, where to vend them” (1.1. 215-7). Just like Wroth needed to erase Ottoman rule in Cyprus for her episode of mass conversion, the Manichean conflict between greedy Dutch and good-natured English is only sustainable in Dryden’s writing by erasing the empire that was actually prominent in South East Asia at the time: the Muslim Mughal Empire. Dryden presents Amboyna as a virgin garden of Eden, devoid of any previous commercial ties before the arrival of European powers. In order for English virtues and Dutch vices to appear in full light, the playwright needed a clean state, which he obtained by erasing “East Indian sultans and traders” from the stage.235 Both Wroth and Dryden respectively erased the historical influence of the Ottoman and Mughal empires from their stories in order to let the actually minor role of England on the international scene flourish. But that is not the only historical detail that Dryden omitted from his play. Just as The Travels of the Three English Brothers erased Teresa Sampsonia Sherley’s Christian faith and presented her as a “pagan”, Dryden’s Ysabinda is not a born Christian like her real-life counterpart Mariam Khanum. Instead, she is said to have “receiv’d Baptism for his [Towerson’s] sake” (1.1.120-1). Despite this first mention of conversion, Ysabinda’s willingness to become a Christian for her English lover is reiterated when she sees that Towerson has returned from his journey safely: “I shall love your God, because I see that he takes care of lovers” (2.1.277-8). These inconsistencies reveal that drawing on the lives of historical characters like Teresa Sampsonia Sherley or Mariam Khanum is only a strategy deployed by English writers to justify their own white, Christian proto-imperialist fantasies in the East.

Despite the fact that these stories have been written at different times, by different authors, in different genres and for different purposes, The Travels of the Three English Brothers, The Countess of Montgomery’s Urania and Amboyna all share the same characteristics. Firstly, they use the malleable canvas of fiction to create fantasies of empire even before England had the means or the will to become an empire in the East. Secondly, they all rely on powerful Eastern women falling in love with Western men. Finally – and most interestingly – they all mingle processes of courtship and conquest to make the territories of these Eastern women fall into the hands of Western men, thus inevitably incorporating the East into a white, Christian, Western conception of empire.

Part 2: Turning active women travelers into objects of romances as a way to domesticate them

As we saw in the previous part, various English writers drew inspiration from the lives of Teresa Sampsonia and Mariam Khanum to serve their own proto-imperialist narratives. But, though they exploited the real lives of these women, they did not put them as they were onto paper. Teresa and Mariam were women born to ethnic and religious minorities in Muslim empires, who travelled back and forth between England and their home countries at a time when aristocratic English women very rarely travelled out of their homeland. All of these elements, had they been faithfully translated into narratives about their lives, would have probably made them too alien for an English audience to relate to. This might be why English writers felt the need to change their life stories and, as opposed to their English husbands whose exploits were conflated, the agency of these two women was undermined to make them fit into a
mold that English audiences could enjoy without upsetting social norms. That mold is
that of the romance heroine.

The romance has historically been problematic to define because of the multiplicity of
genres across which it can be found, from poetry to prose to drama. However, in the
early modern period, it was still recognizable by its “its multiple, sprawling plots, its
exoticism, its love of long journeys to exotic places”, its motifs of chivalric heroism
and illicit love, as well as by its conventional characters, such as “the beautiful heroine”
or “the solitary knight”. The protagonists of the romance are often one-dimensional
aristocratic characters meant to exemplify “chivalric ideals” and “heroic virtue”. In
the corpus under study, Wroth’s Urania is the work most clearly identifiable as a prose
romance with its pastoral and medieval themes, its endangered princesses and its
“violations of verisimilitude” in the forms of evil giants and mysterious spirits.

However, both The Travels of the Three English Brothers and Amboyna follow the pattern of
the romance, especially in the description of their main male protagonist. Indeed, both
Robert Sherley and Gabriel Towerson are clearly presented in their respective plays as
possessing chivalric and heroic virtues taken from medieval romances, starting with
their military prowess. Early in The Travels, Robert proved his “valour” by defeating the
Turks on the battlefield and the Shah’s niece asserts that “to England’s fame/Ranked
with best warriors stands brave Sherley’s name” (1.3.89-8). Similarly, Amboyna opens
with Gabriel Towerson’s saving Harman Jr. from pirates and, before he even appears on
stage, he is said to already inspire “fear and reverence” (1.1.159). In spite of these
extraordinary talents, both characters share the same humility. Robert attributes this
quality to his English origins by saying that “tis the nature of our English coast/
Whate’er we do for honour not to boast” (1.3.104-5), while Towerson refuses any offer
of payment after saving Harman Jr.’s life and asserts: “You over-rate a little courtesie:
in your deliverance I did no more, than what I had my self from you expected” (1.1.181-2).
Finally, in the thirteenth scene of The Travels, the sudden appearance of a
hermit, a character typical of medieval romance whose role it is to act as a spiritual
guide for worthy knights, seals Robert’s implicit comparison with a romance knight.

However, it is the representation of powerful Eastern women through the discursive
treatment of the romance that is of interest to us. Indeed, ever since the crusades, the
romance had been the preferred genre to write about the interactions with the East. Its
far-reaching geography, its nostalgic longing for chivalric prowess, its recurring breaks
from verisimilitude and its use of allegories made it the perfect genre to depict the
Eastern Other in a “space of counter and encounter”. However, the sixteenth and
seventeenth centuries were not concerned with the crusades but with increasing
diplomatic and commercial contacts with Muslim empires and, as such, its treatment of
the Eastern Other could not be the same as in medieval romances. As Benedict
Robinson puts it: “the terms of romance alterity migrated with the migrations of the
English”. Starting from the sixteenth century, the romance started to acknowledge
these “new contacts and complicities” by focusing on love plots between Eastern and
Western characters, such as the marriage between the Christian Bradamante and the
Saracen knight Ruggiero (himself the son of a Christian knight and an African princess)
in Ariosto’s epic poem Orlando Furioso (1532), or the tragic love affair between
Shakespeare’s Antony and Cleopatra in the eponymous play at the beginning of the
seventeenth century. As a consequence, it is not very surprising that English writers
used the romance as a way to familiarize English audiences with unfamiliar Eastern
figures like Teresa Sampsonia Sherley or Mariam Khanum. But while Robert Sherley and Gabriel Towerson were linked to the figure of the knight from medieval romances, the Shah’s niece in *The Travels* and *Amboyna’s Ysabinda* seem to have been molded after heroines of “Greco-Roman erotic romances”.

Already in Nixon’s pamphlet, Teresa is compared to the mythological figure of Andromache: “In these warres against the Turkes, this yonger brother purchased such honour and estimation, as the cousin Germaine to the King of Persia (beeing the widowe of a Duke in that countrey) entred into such liking of his worthinesse, as shee resolued (with Andromache) to rest her whole estate vpon his prowesse.”

Andromache, the wife of the Trojan Prince Hector, became a widow after the victory of the Greeks and she was sold off as a concubine to Neoptolemus, Achilles’s son. Nixon’s description of Teresa as a widow is pure fiction, but is necessary to point out that he used this fabrication to make her familiar to an English audience, while still flattering the Sherley family who had commissioned his pamphlet. After all, it would not be very useful to the Sherley propaganda to say that Robert, a captive of the Shah, had been abandoned by his brother Anthony and had to rely on the influence of the aristocratic Circassian Teresa to be made ambassador to Europe. Instead, Nixon turned Teresa into an Eastern Andromache, a fallen widow completely submitted to her new husband, which served the double purpose of associating Robert with the heroic figure of the conqueror Neoptolemus, and of restricting Teresa’s role to one which would not offend patriarchal English norms.

Following this first characterization, Day, Rowley and Wilkins also compare Teresa to a mythological figure, but instead of the enslaved Andromache they associate her with Dido, “the kind-hearted queen of Carthage” who was seduced by the Trojan hero Aeneas. Nixon’s reference to Andromache was probably meant to justify Robert’s marriage to a foreigner during his embassies to Europe: by making her an Eastern Andromache, he could present Robert as a conqueror who brought back the spoils of his victorious stay in Persia rather than as a rogue adventurer who might have gone “native” when he married a lady of the Shah’s court. But as opposed to Nixon’s pamphlet, *The Travels* focuses on Robert’s actual time in Persia rather than its aftermaths. As a consequence, the play coins the Shah’s niece as a foreign queen who is courted and won over by the heroic wandering knight Robert Sherley. In both cases, one can see the desire to turn the foreign and unfamiliar figure that Teresa Sampsonia was into a familiar and recognizable trope from Greco-Roman mythology. As for Mariam Khanum, her textual treatment by Dryden explicitly links her avatar Ysabinda to the Roman figure of Lucretia. Indeed, Harman Jr. is compared by Towerson to “Tarquin” (4.3.110), the rapist of Lucretia, which turns Ysabinda’s plot line into an Indian version of the married woman who was raped before committing suicide. Through explicit comparisons or implicit resemblances, English writers used famous Greco-Roman figures to make these unfamiliar marriages between Eastern women and Western men familiar to their English audiences. However, more than a simple process of familiarizing, the romance tropes were actively used as part of a process of domesticating powerful Eastern women by undermining their agency.

Indeed, all these feminine figures – Andromache, Dido, Lucretia – are defined by their helplessness, their tragic fates being entirely subjected to the actions of the men around them. The use of Greco-Roman mythology is only one aspect of a vast attempt made by English writers to erase the actual diplomatic and political roles that Teresa and Mariam played in their husbands’ lives. Instead of showing Englishmen actively seeking the help of native Eastern women to further their dealings in the East, English...
writers turn the tables around and present the native women as the ones in need of rescuing. The most visual example of this textual strategy is the frontispiece to the 1735 edition of Dryden’s *Amboyna*. The engraving, taken from act IV, scene 3, illustrates the moment Towerson discovers Ysabinda tied to a tree after her rape by Harman Jr. Historically, England was powerless in its conflict with the Dutch East India Company, and it was precisely because of their maritime and military inferiority that the English company came to rely on Mariam Khanum and her Armenian family connections in the hope of extending their trade around the Indian Ocean. But this engraving emphasizes the distorted representation of Mariam’s avatar Ysabinda as a helpless heroine desperately needing English intervention. Here, Ysabinda appears alone, her exposed breast and leg symbolizing her vulnerability while her half-removed stocking acts as a reminder of her defilement by the Dutch. She looks up lovingly at her rescuer who is in the process of untying her and who, as opposed to her, is fully dressed and armed with a sword. The power imbalance between the two characters and the countries they each represent could not be more clearly in favour of the English Towerson. This is rather ironic considering that English merchants were the powerless ones in the Spice War with the Dutch: “[u]pon the newes of this Tragedy all the English as well at the Moluccoes and Banda, as the poore remnant at Amboyna (...) quitted their Factories in all those Islands: choosing rather to leave the places and their trade there, then their lives”. However, Dryden’s Towerson feels confident enough in his ability to battle the Dutch as he swears to avenge his wife and her island, who have both been violated by this crime: “Behold revenge for injured chastity./This sword heaven draws against thee./To guard this paradise from any second violation” (4.3.124-8). The use of “paradise” as a denomination for both Ysabinda’s body and her island is here significant, as it reinforces Dryden’s textual treatment of the island of Ambon as a new garden of Eden, filled with noble savages who did not know of sin until Europeans came along. As Ysabinda puts it: “fly this detested isle,/Where horrid ills so black and fatal dwell,/As Indians could not guess, till Europe taught” (4.3.20-2). This imperialist depiction of Ysabinda and the island of Ambon as virgin maidens who unsuspectingly welcomed foreigners with open arms had already been used before Dryden to represent the discovery of the Americas. In fact, it is interesting to see the similarity between the frontispiece of *Amboyna* and the illustration of the discovery of the Americas by Theodoor Galle. In both pictures, an allegorized rich and virgin country is sitting naked, entirely vulnerable, and welcomes the arrival of a fully dressed Western man. Dryden’s *Amboyna* thus uses the romance motif of the fallen woman whose honor needs to be avenged and intermingles it with the imperialist rewriting of the Spice Islands as a virgin territory filled with riches and innocent, unsuspecting locals who need to be protected from the corrupted influence of more advanced countries. This textual strategy undermines not only Mariam Khanum’s historical agency over the East India Company, but erases the competing influence of the inter-Asian trade that was taking place on the island of Ambon long before the arrival of European merchants.

The same scenario can be found in Wroth’s *Urania*, where Lindafillia’s rescue appears as both the motivation and justification for the invasion of Persia by the Holy Roman Empire. Indeed, much as Dryden’s conflict between English and Dutch merchants supposedly started because of Ysabinda, the war against the usurping Sophy in Wroth’s work stems from the need to “to succor the delicate, distressed princess, rightful Sophie of Persia”. Though Lindafillia is supposed to be the ruler of a powerful...
country, her plight is centred mostly around the threats of rape and incest from her uncle who wishes to marry her: “This beast wee last spake of (…) who lately hath an intent to marry her, beeing his naturall neece, which is as hatefull to her to think on as his lyfe is to all true and harty Christians”. Thus, Eastern and Western forces unite under the command of Rodomandro, King of Tartaria, and Amphilanthus, Holy Roman Emperor, to invade Persia. This war is not meant simply to put the rightful ruler on the throne, but fulfills one of the main quests of chivalric romances: the rescuing of a “delicate, distressed princess”. Despite the fact that, as rightful Sophy of Persia, Lindafillia is supposed to be a key political player in Wroth’s imagined geography of the East, she appears entirely helpless to the sexual threats that are made against her, and she has to rely entirely on “the aid of all Christian princes (…) to assist me and deliver me out of the hands of such wickedness and treachery”.

Wroth’s politics appear entirely subjugated to codes of romance and, just like Ysabinda’s rape started the conflict between Dutch and English merchants, the usurping Sophy’s plans to tyrannize his niece into an incestuous marriage spark the need to remove him from the throne. Even before the Orientalist tropes that would become popular in the nineteenth century, Wroth already associates the usurping Sophy’s implicit characterization as a Muslim with sexual coercion and polygamy. Indeed, the villain of the manuscript does not limit his untoward advances to Lindafillia, but he also wishes to add Pamphilia to his harem and writes her a letter “demaunding such a princess for wife by way of threatening and force”. This Orientalist trope of Eastern women being sexually violated and oppressed by a tyrant Sultan would fully develop at the end of the eighteenth century when European writers would “elaborate[e] a myth of oriental tyranny and locat[e] its essence in the sultan’s harem”, with “[o]rgiastic sex [becoming] a metaphor for power corrupted”.

It is here necessary to point out the imperialist bias of Wroth’s romance since Amphilanthus, the main protagonist, actually performed polygamy where the usurping Sophy only threatened to. Indeed, when he fears that Pamphilia will fall in love with his rival Rodomandro, Amphilanthus marries her during a secret ceremony, before leaving her to marry the Princess of Slavonia. Thus, Wroth associates the proto-Orientalist trope of the Oriental tyrant sexually preying on women with the romance motif of the helpless princess needing to be rescued by valiant knights. However, by presenting Lindafillia, Teresa Sampsonia Sherley’s avatar, as a Christian aristocrat suffering the assault of a Muslim man and needing to be rescued by Western forces, Wroth was merely following the path that had previously been paved by contemporary accounts of Teresa’s life. Thomas Herbert, who was part of the retinue sent to Persia with the English ambassador Dodmore Cotton to determine who, of Naqd Ali Beg or of Robert Sherley, was the Shah’s ambassador, similarly describes Teresa’s fate in Persia after her husband died of a fever in Qazvin. It is likely that Teresa, a Catholic widow in a Muslim country that she had left for more than ten years, now disgraced by her husband’s two failed embassy, had used her connections with the Carmelite missionaries who had converted her to go to Rome with her husband’s remains. However, Herbert paints a vastly different picture and speaks of a “John, a Dutch man, a Jew, a Painter” and a Persian nobleman “Mamet- Ally-Beg” who conspired together to steal Teresa’s fortune after Robert’s death. Teresa Sampsonia, without whom Robert could never have left Persia or pretended to be an ambassador for the Shah, is turned by Herbert into an “amazed Lady” with “feeble hands” and “pathetique vertue”, trapped in “those uncharitable Regions, where women are made slaves to libidinous Pagans”. Thus, Teresa appears under the pen of an English writer as a...
distressed heroine who would have starved without the intervention of “a faithfull honest Gentleman”, the English Robert Hedges who supposedly saved her by helping her hide some jewels. In spite of the historical agency that Mariam and Teresa held, English writers translated their stories “not as active heroes but as passive victims whose dramatic significance is defined by their pathetic situation rather than their aristocratic merit”. This allowed the respective marriages of Robert Sherley and Gabriel Towerson to be fictionally rendered as instances of Western imperialism, where English chivalric heroes selflessly rescue distressed Eastern romance heroines. As opposed to the Western male characters who became national martyr (for Towerson) or Christian conqueror (for Sherley) in the popular imagination of English audiences, Mariam and Teresa’s literary avatars are defined by their passivity and helplessness.

This need to not only make powerful Eastern women familiar to English readers but to actively undermine their agency might actually reveal the threat that these active women travelers posed to English patriarchal norms in the early modern period. In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, aristocratic English women were not often allowed to travel outside the borders of their home countries, and contemporary accounts emphasize that upper-class travelling women were associated with sexual disorder. As Jerome Turler puts it in his sixteenth-century guide for travelling abroad: “the wide wandring of Weemen cannot want suspition, & bringeth some toke[n] of dishoneste” and “any far trauelling Woman” is often believed to be “incontinent”, that is to say prone to marital unfaithfulness. As I have shown, Teresa Sampsonia Sherley and Mariam Khanum were extensive women travelers, going back and forth between Orient and Occident on several occasions during their lifetimes and, as such, they did not comply with English norms of aristocratic women and their limitations to the domestic sphere. Moreover, as women native of Eastern empires, they were branded with the proto-orientalist image of Eastern women as more sexually wanton than European women. This stereotype had already started to appear in the early modern period and was derived from Occidental writings on Eastern harems, such as in Theodore Spandounes 1538 account of the Ottoman empire: “[Oriental] ladies are very lascivious and voluptuous and for this reason they are kept indoors with eunuchs to guard them”. This double branding of foreign Eastern women and women travelers might explain why English writers undermined Teresa and Mariam’s agency in their fictions. As breakers of English patriarchal norms, they would not have been perceived by English audiences as just “dark but beautiful” but also, more worryingly, as “beautiful but dark”.

This double-edged perception is already contained in the reference to Dido in The Travels. Indeed, the Queen of Carthage was not just any figure out of Greco-Roman romance. By keeping Aeneas in her palace for more than a year and offering that the last Trojans settle in Carthage so she and Aeneas could rule as equals, she almost prevented the construction of Rome and its great patriarchal empire. As a consequence, she became one of the great literary “temptresses who get in the way of [a] man’s conquest and mastery of the world”. This is especially interesting when considering that the Shah’s niece in The Travels is implicitly associated to another figure of Eastern temptress: Cleopatra herself. Shakespeare’s Antony and Cleopatra was first performed in London around 1607, the same year Day, Rowley and Wilkins were writing The Travels. Thus, it might not be a coincidence that in both plays the third scene of act I opens with a powerful Eastern lady (Cleopatra and the Shah’s niece) talking to her maid (Charmian and Dalibras) about a Western man they love (Antony
and Robert) before said man enters the room. This mirror scene clearly links the foreign princess figure of the Shah’s niece with the infamous Egyptian queen, thus making Robert Sherley a glorious new Antony. In a paradoxical move, the Shah’s niece from *The Travels* is associated twice with powerful Eastern queens who threatened to ruin Western empires because of the sexual temptation they represented, and yet she remains nameless during the whole play. Moreover, the Shah’s niece disappears from the story as soon as the Shah agrees to her wedding with Robert Sherley, and she is only briefly mentioned for the child she gave Robert offstage. This dual treatment of Teresa’s avatar as both a new Dido or Cleopatra and a nameless female love interest highlights her complicated perception by English writers: because she was a foreign woman from a faraway empire married to an Englishman, she appeared as a fascinating literary figure; but because she was not conforming to patriarchal English norms, there was a need to contain her and her possibly corrupting influence in England.

The same can be said of Dryden’s Ysabinda who, though she appeared in the first act of the play as the perfect noble Indian savage, converted to Christianity and consistently faithful to her white husband, is later described as “dark” after her rape by Harman Jr. Upon being discovered by Towerson, she exclaims: “Look on me as thou would’st on some foul leper; And do not touch me; I am all polluted” by “horrid ills so black and fatal” (4.3.18-21). While Towerson tries to reassure Ysabinda by telling her that she is still “white, and cold as falling snow” (4.3.43), she insists that “the foul speckled stains/ Are from my body ne’er to be washed out./But in my death” (4.3.51-3) and goes on to call herself “a black adulteress” (4.3.55). The black versus white rhetoric displayed by Dryden may refer only to the black immorality of the Dutch in the Moluccas, which polluted even the pure and naive Indians of Amboyna. However, this alone cannot account for Towerson’s initial reaction when he sees Ysabinda tied to a tree in the opening of act IV, scene 3: before recognizing his wife, Towerson wonders “What’s that, which seems to bear a mortal shape,/Yet neither stirs nor speaks? or, is it some/ Illusion of the night? some spectre, such/As in these Asian parts more frequently appear?” (4.3.6-9). Even before Towerson discovers the tragic rape of Ysabinda, he unconsciously associates her with an Asian spirit, possibly an Eastern succubus meant to lead men astray. Interestingly enough, the same perception of Eastern women as dangerous spirits can be found in Wroth’s *Urania*. In fact, the manuscript of the second part opens with the encounter between the brave knight Selarinus and another avatar of Lindafillia. Selarinus, who is already married to Pamphilis’s sister Philistella, falls under the spell of this nameless lady who claims to be “daughter to the King of Tartaria; my mother was a Persian” and nearly forgets his vows, enthralled as he is by her dark eyes whose “bright blacknes threatened to [kill] aspiring harts, if nott such as were to bee obliged by them”. This threatening physical description of a mistress capable of killing her suitors, “all turnd idolaters to tow black eyes”, should they refuse to obey her, is revealed to be even more frightening when the lady admits to be one of the “vaine spirits (...) who delight in our selves onely in abusing mortalls”. Thus, even before Lindafillia appears in Wroth’s manuscript, the reader has already been warned about the sexual danger that a Tartarian-Persian princess can represent for the men of the romance.

Looking at the characterization of the Shah’s niece as a new Dido and Cleopatra, the comparison of Ysabinda with an Asian ghost and the association of Lindafillia with a trickster spirit, one can see a recurring pattern in the fictional treatment of Eastern women. They appear as both white princesses of romance meant to be rescued and as
dark sexual temptresses needing to be tamed. This pattern fits with Kim Hall’s study of the imperialist description of white Eastern female characters in the early modern period, who were not visibly branded as a racial Other like black women would have been, but who were still deemed foreign enough to be described as dark. This liminal characterization, between black and white, between foreign and familiar, serves the dual purpose of allowing English authors “to praise “fair” European women while simultaneously reminding their audience of the disguised, potentially unruly sexuality and destructiveness of these potentially “dark” women.”

English writers translated Teresa Sampsonia Sherley and Mariam Khanum, two foreign aristocratic women travelers, into paradoxical figures of romance, half-damsels in distress, half-evil temptresses. This textual strategy made them entertaining subjects for English audiences, while also justifying their status as objects to be conquered both romantically and literally, as they become associated with their home countries.

**Part 3: From literary courtship to literal conquests**

As we have seen, early modern English writers depicted Eastern women as helpless heroines in need of rescuing to legitimize their fantasies of empire. Through the mode of the romance, which undermines the agency of female Eastern aristocrats and conflates the heroic roles of Englishmen abroad, English writers are able to present these cross-cultural marriages as an idealized, non-violent and consensual way of incorporating the East into a fantasized English empire. However, these unions may not be as consensual or mutually beneficial as the mode of the romance makes them appear to be. Consequently, English writers sometimes have to resort to strategies of writing presenting the conquest of Eastern lands as inevitable in order to justify the violence that creeps into their imperialist narratives.

Carmen Nocentelli explains how the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries’ “penchant for cross-racial couples” embodied the period’s idea of empire “as a marriage between European metropole and non-European periphery”, where the Western male character stands for Europe while the foreign female character stands for her native region. Building on this theory, Nocentelli describes a pattern in the early modern treatment of cross-cultural couples, where foreign countries come to be incorporated into a European empire through the female submission that results from marital bond: “[In a setting more or less remote, a European man and a non-European woman meet and fall in love; the latter willingly renounces her background in order to embrace his; and the tale ends with the happy pair either betrothed or married.” In early modern English patriarchal society, women were expected to give up their previous affiliations in order to become part of their new husbands’ families, which is symbolically represented through the change in their last name. However, in the early modern fictions centred around Teresa Sampsonia and Mariam Khanum’s lives, this process of giving up one’s native family in order to be part of a new one is subverted to serve imperialist ambitions. In *The Travels*, the *Urania* or *Amboyna*, powerful Eastern women come to stand for their homelands, and these Eastern lands are stripped of their cultural and religious differences in order to be incorporated into the white, Christian empire that Western men come to represent. This subversion is most visible in *The Travels* and in *Amboyna*, where the Shah’s niece and Ysabinda both renounce their home country’s culture and/or religion in order to willingly become part of their English husbands’ world. In scene eleven of *The Travels*, the Shah’s niece is tricked by her uncle who brings...
her “a counterfeit head like Sherley’s” (1.11). Horrified by the supposed death of the Englishman, the niece finally confesses her forbidden love in front of the Persian court and publicly sides with Robert’s home country, asking for revenge: “Were I his brother, countryman, or slave/I’d kill his murderer, or dig my grave/Under the Sophy’s feet. O you have won/The ire of heaven and hate of Christendom” (1.11.225-8). Here, the Shah’s niece briefly sheds her original identity as a Persian princess to identify herself as a Christian kinsman of the English adventurer since she now hates her uncle like Sherley’s “brother”, “countryman”, or “slave” would. This moment is meant to illustrate the niece’s – and by extension Teresa Sampsonia’s – loyalty for Robert Sherley but also her willingness to be incorporated into “Christendom” even though she is supposed to be born “a pagan” in the play. This public display of loyalty ultimately leads to the happy resolution mentioned by Nocentelli since the Shah, moved by his niece’s pure love for Sherley, reveals the severed head to be only a trick and brings back Robert safe and sound. Now that the Shah’s niece has proved her loyalty to Robert, England and the Christian faith, she can marry him on the stage without generating any potential religious or nationalist anxieties in the audience. Moreover, thanks to her, Sherley becomes the Shah’s “dearest nephew” (1.13.200), which allows him to bring Abbas I into Christianity as he stands “godfather” (1.13.173) at the baptism of Sherley’s child. Thus, the marriage between Robert and the Shah’s niece comes to stand for the symbolic marriage between England and a Christianized Persia that willingly sides and submits to England. Similarly, Ysabinda has “receiv’d Baptism for [Towerson’s] sake” (1.1.120-1) and renounced her original religion to marry the Englishman. But Ysabinda does not prove her willingness to embrace her husband’s country simply by becoming a Christian. The marriage between Towerson and Ysabinda, which stands for the symbolic marriage between England and the Spice Island of Amboyna, has strong economic implications for Anglo-Dutch relations in the Moluccas. At the beginning of the play, Harman Sr. welcomes Towerson back to Amboyna: “Oh my sworn Brother, my dear Captain Towerson (...), never to be false-hearted” (1.1.210-3), to which Towerson replies: “You ne’er shall have occasion on my part: the like I promise for our Factories, while I continue here: This Ile yields Spice enough for both [of us]” (1.1.214-6). However, this promise of the fertile land of Amboyna being peaceably and equally divided between England and the Netherlands is contradicted after Towerson and Ysabinda’s marriage. Indeed, in act IV, scene 3, Harman Jr. tries to convince Ysabinda to be unfaithful to her new husband, and complains that she keeps all of her love solely for the Englishman: “You are a Woman; have enough of Love for him and me; I know the plenteous Harvest all is his: he has so much of joy, that he must labor under it. In charity you may allow some gleanings to a Friend” (4.3.30-3). The terms chosen by Dryden to describe Ysabinda’s affection (“plenteous harvest”, “gleanings”) are here directly related to the fertility of the island that was previously mentioned by Towerson in act I, scene 1. Consequently, though the play first seemed to denounce the Dutch’s greedy attempt to keep Ysabinda and the island of Amboyna for themselves, the argument made by the playwright against the Dutch East India Company actually appears more subversive. After marrying Towerson, Ysabinda is unwilling to share her affection, and by extension, her island’s harvests. Thus, in Dryden’s fantasy, the island of Amboyna, its people and its spices, willingly offer themselves up to the sole monopoly of England through Towerson’s and Ysabinda’s marriage. Just as a faithful wife is supposed to only love her husband, the island of Amboyna should reserve its bounty to England. The Dutch, on the other hand,
are unable to obtain Ysabinda’s “free consent” (4.3.41) and Harman Jr. resorts to violence to steal that monopoly away. The actual marriages of Teresa Sampsonia and Mariam Khanum to Robert Sherley and Gabriel Towerson are thus subverted by English writers who saw in these cross-cultural unions an opportunity to depict a consensual and peaceful incorporation of Eastern territories into a fantasized English empire overseas.

The Shah’s niece and Ysabinda appear as fictional avatars whose only purpose on the stage is to demonstrate their countries’ willingness to be subjugated to English rule through the patriarchal bond of marriage. As I have previously shown, Teresa and Mariam initially married Englishmen in the hope of entering a relationship of reciprocity which would be mutually benefitting for both parties. But when their husbands died, the inequality of these relationships was made obvious as the two women were left without protection or financial support in their home countries. Similarly, under the spectacle of the romance reaching across boundaries of cultures and countries, early modern English writers can hardly hide the inequalities that actually come out of these unions. Indeed, the mode of the romance that permeates English imperialist writings participates in creating the illusion that these cross-cultural encounters benefit the heroines: Wroth’s rightful Sophy of Persia is saved from her tyrannical and incestuous uncle by courtly Western knights; the Shah’s niece in The Travels marries the man she loves instead of plotting Persian courtiers like Halibeck and, before the tragic ending of her story, Ysabinda is brought into the light of Christianity through her happy marriage to the gallant Towerson. These positive aspects are supposed to justify the dangers that Eastern women had to overcome to be with their English lovers. Indeed, both the Shah’s niece and Ysabinda have to fight their counymen to marry the men they love. Harman Sr. comments on Ysabinda’s engagement with Towerson by saying that “[t]is much against the will of all her friends, she loves your Countryman; but they are not disposers of her person” (1.1.122-3). The Persian Shah, however, can dispose of his niece’s body as he pleases and almost has her executed when she admits her feelings for the English Sherley: “Take her hence. /She dies but she acknowledges her offence” (1. 11.205-6). English writers present love as the ultimate justification for what appears at first as forbidden cross-cultural romances.

But in her study of early modern imperialist writings, Kim Hall points to a gendered inequality that lies at the very heart of the romance: “men desire conquest, whereas women desire men”. Thus, while Teresa Sampsonia and Mariam Khanum are represented by English writers as defying their countries’ expectations and even endangering their own lives simply to marry the men they love, their English husbands appear to unilaterally profit from these unions. In The Travels, Robert Sherley had been presented as a favourite of the Shah until he was seen “giving life to thirty [Turkish] prisoners” (1.11.13). While Shah Abbas I wished for him to “mount those prisoners’ heads on thirty spears” (1.11.143), the Ottoman Sultan warned Robert that he would kill his older brother Thomas, who was a prisoner of the Turks at the time, if Sherley complied with the Shah’s orders. As a consequence of his betrayal, Robert is stripped of the “offices and titles” (1.11.176) the Shah had previously bestowed upon him. However, when his niece confesses her love for the Englishman to the Shah, she convinces him that he “has done amiss” (1.11.230) in punishing Sherley. The Shah then gives in and declares that Robert “still shall stand/Loved of the Sophy, honoured in this land” and that “[a]ll styles and offices we late took off/We back restore” (1.11.238-41).
Thus, the Shah’s niece single-handedly saved Robert’s life, helped him gain back the political privileges he had lost and made him her husband, even though the play clearly stated that “his state [is] too mean/To keep even wing with [her]” (1.3.114-5). But what did the Shah’s niece get in return from her marriage to Robert Sherley? Nothing. The playwrights make it explicit from the start, by leaving the Shah’s niece nameless, in spite of her crucial role in the plot. Not only does she remain an anonymous entity throughout the play, but she also disappears from the stage as soon as she helps Robert gain back the Shah’s trust and the privileges that come with it. Her last words in the play – “Then lives young Sherley?” (1.11.238) – illustrate her pure motive: she only wished to have her beloved back and will supposedly be completely fulfilled with her happy marriage. As for Robert, he wins the influential position of nephew to the Shah and uses it to incorporate Persia into Christendom through Abbas’s suggested conversion and the construction of a Christian church in the capital. Similarly, Dryden’s Towerson secures through his marriage to Ysabinda the full control of the spice trade in Amboyna, even though the Dutch clearly had the upper-hand around the Indian Ocean, thanks to their superior navy which gave them control of the spice trade in Amboyna. As Harman Sr. states in the opening lines of the play, the Dutch were able to charge all English goods that passed through the island: “we being in power, and therefore Judges of the Cost, that we exact e’re we please” (1.1.67-8). But despite the fact that whoever holds Ysabinda holds control over the spice trade, the play clearly strips Ysabinda and her fellow countrymen of any direct gain from their island’s economy. Indeed, the profits derived from the spices in Amboyna are at the heart of the play from its very first lines, when the Dutch merchant Van Herring informs his fellow countrymen that “the price of pepper, and of other spices, was raised of late in Europe” (1.1.10-1). This echoes the historic reality of European involvement in the spice trade, where English and Dutch merchants purchased pepper, nutmeg, cloves and mace at only a fraction of the price they would later sell them in Europe. This was an immensely profitable business for the English and Dutch East India Companies, but it wreaked havoc on the Spice Islands’ local economy which used to rely on the prices set by the inter-Asian trade but now witnessed a European takeover of the spice trade. Thus, Marrying Towerson does not give Ysabinda any agency over her island’s commerce with England, nor is it more profitable to the people of Ambon. Instead, she is simply expected to be faithful to her husband, which metaphorically translates into her handing the monopoly of the spice trade to his employer, the English East India Company, rather than to keep on sharing it with the Dutch East India Company.

Thus, as opposed to Sultana Safiye who corresponded with Queen Elizabeth I as an equal and obtained from her significant gifts in exchange for her help in supporting English interests in the Levant, marital arrangements between Eastern female aristocrats and Englishmen were perceived by English writers as defined by gendered inequalities. The early modern conception of marriage being a patriarchal one, it was perceived as “naturally unequal – after all, the husband was supposed to govern, the wife to obey”. Consequently, English writers subverted the inequality stemming from marital bonds to justify the power imbalance between England and Eastern countries that they fantasized about on the stage. Because Teresa and Mariam are supposed to be subordinated to their husbands’ authorities, so too should their home countries’ commercial, religious and political institutions be subordinated to an imaginary English empire overseas. This can lead us to see that “interracial romances were tales
of empire, the main purpose of which was to celebrate expansion and mystify inequalities via a rhetoric of exchange and reciprocity".271

However, the illusion of reciprocity conveyed through the mode of the romance cannot hide the aggression and coercion which inevitably result from the appropriation and incorporation of these Eastern countries into a fantasized Western Christian empire in the East. Dryden's play was meant to be a work of nationalist propaganda denouncing the immorality of the Dutch East India Company's actions in Amboyna. The rape of Ysabinda, who embodies her native island, should have served a double purpose: first, it highlights the cruelty of the Dutch by displacing their crimes unto a defenceless Christian(ized) Indian woman; then, it turns her English husband into a hero and martyr as he tragically attempts to avenge her honour, only to be savagely tortured and killed at the end of the play. However, while Dryden presents the Dutch East India Company as the villains of his moral drama, notably through the character of Fiscal who plots against English merchants and encourages Harman Jr. to force himself unto Ysabinda, the playwright fails to offer a sustainable counter-example in the English East India Company. Towerson was supposed to be the voice of the English company on the stage, just as the villainous Fiscal, whose very name points to his country's obsession with money, was meant to embody all the wrongs of the Dutch merchants who worship "interest [as] their god" (1.190). But the stage avatar of Gabriel Towerson never explicitly helps the audience see how an English trade monopoly over the Moluccas would be different from the Dutch rule that was already in place there. Dryden describes England as a heroic and chivalrous country through Towerson, who is said to be "apt to pitty the distress'd and liberal to relieve 'em" and whose only fault is to "[think] all honest, 'cause himself is so, and therefore none suspects" (1.1.130-4). This moral differentiation between the Dutch and English East India Companies, with the playwright accusing the former of cruelty and exploitation while praising the latter for being a peaceful and benevolent institution, appears simplistic when considering that "[n]either group could exist in the Spice Islands without the presence of the native populations to do their manual labor",272 Thus, in spite of the play's apparent efforts to present Dutch and English merchants as opposites, the two rival companies are not as different as Dryden's nationalist propaganda makes them out to be. Their disturbing similarity is best exemplified in the epithalamium that opens the third scene of act III. The marital song, chosen by Harman Sr. as celebration of Towerson's wedding to Ysabinda, tells the story of a "blushing bride" on her wedding night and her attempts to escape from her groom who, ""with Love and Fury in his Face; (...) prayers and threats at once do's use" to convince her to consummate their wedding. This threatening rape scene ends with the bride, who "now despairing shuts her Eyes" after crying "aloud for help" (3.3.12-24). Of course, the song was supposed to foreshadow the tragic rape that would later be perpetrated by the governor's son, Harman Jr. But in act III, before the rape, the figure of Ysabinda's violent groom can only stand for Towerson. Indeed, the sunny description of the lover in the epithalamium fits the brave and glorious Towerson better than the cowardly and treacherous Harman Jr., who started lusting after Ysabinda almost as soon as he got on the stage: "He destin'd to himself this Sun,/ And took the Reins and drove him on;/In his own Beams he drest him bright/Yet bid him bring a better night" (3.3.5-8). This rhetoric of the love between Towerson and Ysabinda as a race with the sun had already been used by the Indian lady herself in act II, scene 1, when she insisted she would not wait another day to marry the Englishman: "so well I love my Towerson, I will not lose another Sun, for it shou'd not rise to

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“morrow” (2.1.34-5). Thus, this epithalamium can be seen as proof that Dryden may not have been blind to the violence and oppression that inevitably resulted from the European conquest of the Spice Islands, be it a Dutch or English conquest. But, despite this initial awareness, the national propaganda ultimately takes over and the playwright displaces “the implicit English rape” of the epithalamium onto the explicit Dutch rape of Ysabinda by Harman Jr.\(^\text{72}\) However, the sexual violence against Ysabinda, presented by the play as the starting point of the spice war between England and the Netherlands, is soon overshadowed by the torture of English merchants, accused of planning a Japanese-English takeover of the Dutch fort in Amboyna. Indeed, there is a clear difference of treatment in the sufferings inflicted to the natives of Amboyna, and those of English characters. Ysabinda’s rape happens offstage, with only the dialogue between her and Harman Jr. being heard through the stage direction “within” (4.3.71). Similarly, the torture of the Ambonese who the Dutch believe conspired with the English merchants, is summed up by Towerson in one line: “[t]he natives, first, you tortured” (5.1.284). As opposed to these events of suggested violence, the torture of English merchants is graphically described by the Dutch characters onstage: first, “[y]ou shall be muffled up like ladies, with an oiled cloth put underneath your chins, then water poured above; which either you must drink, or must not breathe” (5.1.112-3); then, Harman Sr. continues: “matches be tied to your finger-ends” (5.1.116). While, the crimes committed by the Dutch against the people of Amboyna are downplayed, their attacks on the English are meant to appear more vivid and shocking to the audience. Subsequently, Dryden’s nationalist plot, though it pretends to use Ysabinda’s rape as a starting point, actually displaces the climax of the play and the true incentive of the Anglo-Dutch spice war onto Towerson’s death. By doing so, the playwright presents the conquest of Amboyna by European powers as inevitable since, had the Dutch not attacked English merchants overseas, England would not have contested their bloody monopoly over the Spice Islands. This is confirmed by Towerson who, when tortured, reminds the Dutch “that supremacy of power, you claim, extends but to the natives, not to us” (5.1.267-8). With this sentence, Towerson undermines the depiction of England as the chivalrous savior of the people of Ambon and exposes the imperialist rhetoric at work behind the romance plot: England and the Netherlands are free to oppress and take advantage of the natives as they please. Ysabinda’s rape by Harman Jr., though reprehensible, is not the triggering event of morality play but only a collateral damage of the real tragedy of Amboyna – the attack against the trading empire that England was setting up in the Spice Island.

As Ysabinda’s treatment in Dryden’s *Amboyna* illustrates, the mode of the romance is only the tip of the iceberg in the writing strategy used by English writers to legitimize their imperialist fantasies of Eastern countries’ being integrated into an English overseas empire. Another, more subversive, part of their strategy is to present the conquest of the East as an inevitable process, not because Western gallant adventurers are the only ones able to rescue distressed Eastern princess from the danger they face, but because, in the English imagination, Eastern lands such as Persia or South-East Asia appear unable and unwilling to rule themselves. Nowhere is this more visible than in Wroth’s *Urania*, where Persia is constantly perceived as a kingdom that would be “happily” conquered and ruled by Westerners. As Rodomandro, King of Tartaria, tells the Holy Roman Emperor Amphianthus when they devise a strategy to defeat the usurping Sophy: “[w]ee think it fitter to meete the tirant, then to let him come into these parts to waste and spoyle this Christnd world, and soe vanquishing him abroad,
wee may fall upon his unprovided country and happily may have a good conquest of that which is his”. Here, Rodomandro encourages Amphilanthus to conquer Persia and incorporate it into Christendom through military conquest, even though the rightful Sophy is a Christian princess herself. In spite of the fact that the Eastern plot of the second manuscript is about putting the rightful Sophy of Persia on the throne, Persia is repeatedly presented by Wroth as a country whose leadership needs to be managed by an outsider. Indeed, despite Lindafillia’s title as rightful Sophy of Persia, she will never get the chance to rule her kingdom herself. Even after the usurping Sophy is defeated, Lindafillia is whisked away by an enchantress, leaving the country unsupervised, though not for long. At the end of the manuscript, a Persian delegation comes to Pamphilia’s kingdom in Anatolia and asks her to “please send us one of your deere blood to governe uss”. This is how Lindafillia the Eastern princess comes to be replaced by Pamphilia’s brother Rosindy, King of Macedon, who becomes governor of Persia until Lindafillia’s return. By presenting Persia as a kingdom actively seeking a Western ruler, Wroth already shows the premise of what will later become “the colonial myth of the native freely yielding him/herself up to the colonizer’s protection and sovereignty”. The same proto-colonial rhetoric can be found in Amboyna: through the character of Ysabinda, the submission of the Spice Islands to a European merchant empire is seen as inevitable, whether it is through voluntary submission, when she chooses to marry Towerson, or through coercion, when Harman Jr. forces himself on her.

It appears clear that Teresa Sampsonia and Mariam Khanum’s lives and marriages to Englishmen abroad were taken up by contemporary English writers in order to further their imperialist fantasies of an English empire taking over Eastern lands. Moreover, this process of conquest is described by these writers as inevitable, whether because Englishmen like Robert Sherley and Gabriel Towerson are represented in works of propaganda as chivalrous heroes of romance selflessly rescuing distressed and oppressed Eastern ladies, or because the distant foreign lands where the plot takes place willingly submit themselves to a superior Western rule. Thus, after being turned into warped versions of themselves through the mode of the romance, and after being dispossessed of their power and agency in their homeland, all of these fictional Eastern ladies have completed their purpose in those nationalist and imperialist fantasies, and are thus no longer needed. The Shah’s niece is not mentioned in the final scenes of The Travels, even though her children and their education in the Christian religion and English language are at the centre of Sherley’s final dialogues with the Shah. In Dryden’s Amboyna, Ysabinda’s tragic rape is completely overshadowed by the brutal death of Towerson and the mention of her impending suicide barely makes an impact after the climax of her husband’s martyrdom. Wroth’s true Sophy of Persia never gets to rule her own country, and is instead kidnapped and spirited away at the end of the manuscript. Thus, Teresa and Mariam’s fictional avatars played a pivotal role in helping Englishmen abroad gain diplomatic and commercial powers in these Eastern lands and yet their presence is ultimately erased, perhaps to avoid the anxieties of contamination that would derive from the reality of trying to assimilate powerful Eastern women into a white, Christian, Western, patriarchal empire. But these distorted representations by contemporary English writers should not distract us from the legacy of powerful Eastern women in the furthering of England’s diplomatic and commercial interests in the East, as well as their possible reappraisal in the light of modern theories in imperialist, orientalist and feminist studies.
Chapter 3: Following the trail of Eastern women resisting instrumentalization and erasure

In his ground-breaking essay *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said defines the power dynamics at the core of the Orientalist field of study as “the ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority”. According to Said, the Western perception of the East can be defined by two main principles: firstly, that European powers have always considered Eastern countries and populations as fundamentally distinct, foreign and overall as “Other”; secondly, that in its dealings with the East, “Europe was always in a position of strength”. Though this assessment fits the period of the French and British dominations over the Eastern Mediterranean at the beginning of the nineteenth century, it cannot be applied so easily to the early modern period, which Said only mentions as a time of “innumerable voyages of discovery” and of “contacts through trade and war” between Orient and Occident. The “state of tension produced by (…) radical difference[s]” between Europe and Eastern empires advanced by Said should be questioned in light of England’s diplomatic and commercial ties with the Ottomans, the Persians or the Mughals in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As we have seen, early modern England needed the financial support of trade with the Ottoman Empire to fund its war against Catholic Spain, and when Elizabeth I first started corresponding with Sultan Murad III in 1578, she was not “in a position of strength” as her merchants needed the Sultan’s permission and protection to start trading around the Mediterranean. Similarly, when James I and the East India Company sent William Hawkins to the Mughal Empire, they wished to build an English trading post in Mughal territory, something they could not do without the Emperor’s favour and agreement. Consequently, English monarchs could not afford to see Eastern rulers only as “cultural contestant[s]” or as radical “Other[s]”, but they had to find a common ground in order for English trade to be able to compete with other European economic powers, such as the Catholic Habsburgs or the Dutch East India Company. In the early modern period, England and Eastern empires were thus not divided by “radical differences” of race or religion, but united by mercantile exchanges and diplomatic alliances. And powerful Eastern women played a pivotal role in the establishment of these relationships in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when English actors relied on their help to further their dealings in the East.

Indeed, Said was right in saying that the relationship between Orient and Occident is “a relationship of power, domination, of (…) hegemony”, but taking into account early modern contacts between England and Eastern kingdoms can help us see that this power, domination and hegemony used to be at times in favour of Eastern empires, and that the dynamics only shifted after several decades of England being a minor actor in the East. This gradual shift of power can be seen through England’s changing attitude over time toward powerful Eastern women, who were first seen as useful peripheral channels for diplomatic and commercial dealings, but who ultimately grew to be burdens. At the end of the sixteenth century, English diplomats, such as Edward Barton, or adventurers, such as Robert Sherley, were marginal players in Ottoman and Persian courts, and they relied on the influence of powerful women such as Sultana Safiye or Teresa Sampsonia to pursue personal and/or national interests abroad. But by
the middle of the seventeenth century, Eastern diplomatic and trade relationships were handled by chartered companies such as the Levant or the East India companies, and these conglomerates stopped requiring the help of peripheral channels like Mariam Khanum as they grew in power around the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. This gradual change of paradigm contradicts Said’s definition of the Western attitude towards the East as “unchanging” in its position of superiority and its dominance.  

Similarly, the crucial role of these powerful women from various ethnic and religious backgrounds goes against the Saidian perception of “the Oriental woman” or the “Asiatic woman” as a monolithic and passive stereotype in Westerners’ eyes. Taking examples of authors such as the Greek Aeschylus or the French Flaubert, Said examines the representation of Eastern women by Western men and finds it defined by the same power dynamics at work in the relationship between Orient and Occident. Taking advantage of their position of domination, Western men are in the habit of using all-encompassing terms such as “Oriental” or “Asiatic” to erase the individuality of Eastern women, and instead reduce them to “exotic beings”. This allows them to ventriloquize these women in their art and to “speak for” these women. However, Said does not mention the perception of Eastern women by Western men outside of fictional renditions and fails to take into account historical documents, such as Edward Barton’s petition to Sultana Safiye or the minutes from the East India Company Board of Directors with Mariam Khanum, which shed light on instances where Western men had to take into account Eastern women’s individuality as well as agency.

In this final chapter, I will thus show how individual case studies such as Sultana Safiye, Teresa Sampsonia and Mariam Khanum can help us rethink the early modern English perception of Eastern women as neither monolithic nor passive. Indeed, contrary to what Said theorized, Europeans did not always try to “encompass” the Orient by erasing the ethnic or religious specificities of its populations. English diplomats, merchants, adventurers and writers were highly aware of the religious and ethnic diversity of Eastern empires and they exploited this diversity in order to find allies in these foreign lands. These allies were powerful Eastern women, whose agency can still be traced back and recovered from their refracted representations in contemporary accounts.

Part 1: Reconsidering the Saidian outlook on essentialism through the influence of cross-cultural women

In his essay “Ottomanism before Orientalism?”, Gerald MacLean undermines Said’s argument on the Western perception of the Ottoman Empire by saying that “far from perceiving the Ottoman Empire to be an orientalised space awaiting Western penetration and dominance (…), it was necessary that [Europeans] should become capable of recognizing and understanding what was already there, firmly in place”. What was already in place at the time were the religious and political specificities of Eastern empires, which European powers such as England could not afford to simply dismiss or look down on. Far from “setting itself off against the Orient”, early modern England actively needed to find common points and similarities with Eastern kingdoms. In the Ottoman Empire, this is visible through Elizabeth I and Sultana Safiye’s correspondences, where feminine friendship between royal women is taken as a common ground able to transcend barriers imposed by religious, linguistic and cultural
differences. In Persia, one can see the close attention that is given to the religious conflict between Sunni and Shi'a Islam in the Sherley propaganda. In his memoirs, Anthony Sherley explains to his English readers the religious difference between Turks and Persians and details Abbas I's efforts to eradicate Sunni influences in Persia: “[f]or the king knowing how potent a uniter of mens minds the selfe-same Religion is for the tranquillity of an Estate: and the like dis-uniter severall Religions are for the disturbance of the peace of an Estate, hee is exceeding curious and vigilant to supresse, through all his Dominions, that Religion of Mahomet, which followeth the interpretation of Ussen and Omar, and to make his people cl[ose] to that of Aly”.

Similarly, the fictional Travels of the Three English Brothers depicts Robert’s fight against the Turks alongside Persian soldiers and, after the battle is won, the fallen Ottoman soldiers are offered to renounce Sunni Islam or to die. Robert asks the soldiers if they are ready to convert to Christianity: “Speak, do ye renounce your prophet Mahommet?/Bow to the deity that we adore/or die in the refusal” (1.7.17-9). When the soldiers refuse, a Persian general offers the Turks a second option of conversion: “Join Mortus Ali than with Mahomet,/That slew your prophets Omar and Uthman/(…) And yet you shall find grace in Persia” (1.7.20-3). This mirror scene of attempted conversion serves the double purpose of informing the English audience about the religious difference between Turks and Persians, while at the same time drawing a parallel between Protestant England and Shi'i Persia in their desires to cultivate religious homogeneity in their lands. Moreover, it is possible that an English audience would recognize itself in the plight of Shi'i Persia, which was at the time suffering from the attacks of the larger and more dominant Sunni Ottomans, just as Protestant England was fending off the Catholic Habsburgs in Europe. The religious dissensions among different branches of Islam in the East could thus provide a familiar mirror for the religious conflicts in England, and Shah Abbas’ desire to fight the influence of the Ottoman Empire would have resonated close to home for English Protestants. This contradicts Said’s argument that Western writings on the East always “promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, “us”) and the strange (the Orient, the East, “them”)”. Consequently, when in The Travels, Dalibra says of the Sherley brothers: “Strangers? I see no strangeness in them” (1.3.22), one can consider this as an invitation from the playwrights to see the similarities between Persia and England, rather than their differences.

But England was not simply aware of the religious conflicts in the East, it also focused on the particularities of the political systems there. At the end of the sixteenth century, Englishmen abroad needed to actively understand the inner workings of the courts in Constantinople, Isfahan and Agra in order to further their personal, commercial and diplomatic ambitions there. This led diplomats, merchants and adventurers to see the harem not as a place of sexual oppression and debauchery, but as a political institution of its own. Similarly, the women inside were not yet considered as lustful “exotic beings” guarded by eunuchs as they would later be in the eighteenth century, but as a cosmopolitan female population which could be courted and exploited. Indeed, Eastern women were not essentialized as a monolithic brown, Muslim female “Other” by European diplomats abroad. The French geographer Nicolas de Nicolay, who had been part of the ambassadorial mission sent by Henry II to the Levant in 1551, published his account of the women in the Ottoman harem, which was translated into English in 1585: “[b]eing the most part daughters of Christians, some being taken by courses on the seas or by land, aswel from Grecians, Hungarians, Wallachers, Mingreles, Italians as other Christian nations, some of the other are bought of merchants, and after warded...
by Beglierbeis, Baschas and Captaines presented unto the great Turke”. Early modern European travellers in the Levant were thus aware of the presence of familiar figures from Eastern or southern Europe in Muslim harems, which would complicate their attempt to see the East as a radically different “Other”. As such, the division between the familiar “us” and the strange “them” theorized by Said does not account for multicultural places such as the Ottoman, Persian or Mughal harems, where English diplomats, merchants and adventurers could find allies and intermediaries. In fact, some of these liminal figures carried traces of their cross-cultural backgrounds in their very names. Safiye was not the Sultana’s original name, but the patronym she was given when she entered the harem and was converted to Islam, “Safiye” meaning “Pleasing One” in Ottoman. Similarly, Teresa Sampsonia Sherley’s name emphasizes her involvement within a cosmopolitan Persian society: while Sampsonia was her Circassian “ancestral name”, Teresa was the name she was given after her baptism by the Carmelites in Isfahan, a tribute to their patron saint Teresa of Avila. Finally, Sherley was the name of her English husband, whom she met at court. The same can be said of Mariam Khanum, an Armenian raised in the Emperor’s harem in Agra, who took up two English names during her lifetime: Hawkins and Towerson. Various cultural influences can thus be found in these powerful Eastern women, but rather than seeing them as competing influences, where one culture has to win and take over the other, it would be more accurate to consider that Safiye, Teresa and Mariam successfully integrated cross-cultural elements into their individual identities.

Europe was not “shut in on itself” in this period as Said theorizes, nor did it always perceive the Orient as fundamentally removed from the Occident. Instead, Englishmen abroad had to take into account all sorts of liminal figures who had been integrated into Ottoman, Persian and Mughal courts for political purposes, whether as concubines like Safiye, or as useful minorities like Teresa and Mariam. Diplomats such as Edward Barton or Henry Lello could not share the monolithic and reductive Western perception of “the Oriental woman” defined by Said, not when they relied on the cosmopolitan court in Constantinople to pursue their ambassadorial duties. They needed the help of the Jewish kira Esperanza Malchi to pass on Italian letters to the Sultana, who was herself born in Albania according to some of her contemporaries. Similarly, Robert Sherley and William Hawkins were very much aware of the presence of Circassians and Armenians in Isfahan and Agra. These Christian minorities had been given a strategic position in those courts by Abbas I and Jahangir who used them to form factions based on political loyalty rather than on religious affiliations. However, the translations of these historically cross-cultural figures onto the stage and the page were not always faithful to the cosmopolitan identities of women such as Teresa or Mariam. Though Wroth’s narrative does incorporate cross-cultural Eastern identities such as the trickster spirit at the beginning of the manuscript who identifies herself as the daughter of a Tartarian King and a Persian mother, Teresa’s Circassian Christian identity is erased from Nixon’s pamphlet or from The Travels where she simply appears as Persian. However, even Teresa’s fictional avatar as a Persian noblewoman is still a more faithful adaptation than the distorted character of Ysabinda in Dryden’s Amboyna, whose sole common point with Mariam Khanum is the fact that she marries Gabriel Towerson. On can here see the change of paradigm in England’s treatment of Eastern women at the end of the seventeenth century through their fictional representations. Indeed, Mariam’s portrayal as Ysabinda already appears closer to the essentialist perception of Eastern women theorized in Said’s Orientalism, since any ethnic or
religious specificity is removed from her character and she is only referred to as an “Indian Lady”. This description fits the Western perception of the East as an essentialist invention, since “Indian” could refer to any non-European ethnicity, “from the Americas to the Spice Islands to Agra”.  

The early modern barrier between the familiar “we” and the foreign “them” was not the hard divide between West and East that Said makes it out to be in *Orientalism*. Instead, it was permeable, as English actors, big or small, were aware of the ethnic and religious diversity that made up Eastern kingdoms in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. England at the time could not afford to look at the East with prejudices or superiority, as it actively relied on the liminal position of Christian-born female figures that had been integrated into Eastern courts to further their own dealings in the East. The Ottoman, Persian and Mughal empires were not perceived by England as an unchanging, monolithic, threatening Oriental “Other”, but as a community of diverse people who were tied to Europe through bonds of diplomacy, trade and cross-cultural marriages to powerful Eastern women. These women did not conform to the essentialist perception of the “Oriental” or “Asiatic” women and, though English writers did erase their ethnic and religious individuality in their printed works in the hope of “representing [them] and speaking on [their] behalf”, the power and agency these women displayed in their home countries still allowed their individual voices to be heard.

**Part 2: Reconstructing the agency of highly mediated women**

In *Orientalism*, Said talks about the “widely influential model of the Oriental woman” which would become popular in the nineteenth century: “she never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence or history. He [the Western man] spoke for and represented her. He was foreign, comparatively wealthy, male, and these were historical facts of domination”. Even before the nineteenth century, traces of such prejudices against Eastern women can be found in early modern accounts, such as the Carmelite records in Isfahan, where the narrative of Teresa’s life appears as entirely fictitious: “[Robert Sherley] purchased a slave from Circassia (…), who belonged to the Muhammadan faith, kept her baptized by Fr. Paul Simon, the Discalced Carmelite, and married her – secretly, it is said – in order to celebrate the nuptials in Italy in public and with pomp”. This Carmelite account fits the Saidian characterization of “the Oriental woman” by making Teresa a silent, exotic, passive object in the narrative. The true actor of the tale and the subject of all the verbs is the gallant and pious Robert Sherley who “purchased”, “kept” and “married” her. Moreover, by making her a Muslim slave, the Carmelites removed any agency from her and gave Robert all the attributes of “domination” mentioned by Said: wealth, power, freedom, masculinity and Christianity. This distorted version of Teresa, which closely resembles Mariam’s portrayal as Ysabinda in Dryden’s *Amboyna*, helped the Carmelites paint a flattering portrait of her husband and is only one among other examples of her misrepresentation in the Sherley propaganda, along with her role in Nixon’s pamphlet or in *The Travels*. This type of narrative can be considered as part of a series of proto-orientalist attempts to ventriloquize Eastern women by controlling or silencing their voices. Even the voice of a royal woman such as Safiye is threatened to be taken over by the numerous mediators who read, translated and copied her words before bringing them to Elizabeth I. Indeed, Safiye’s letters were either written by an official scribe
from the palace or by a woman from the harem, before being taken to the Jewish kira, who delivered the letters to the embassy. There, they were translated and sent aboard a ship to London, where another translator and the Secretary of State read the letters before passing them on to the Queen – and those are only the agents that were given the official right to handle the correspondence. Numerous forms of mediations thus stand as obstacles between us and these powerful Eastern women, and it would be easy to agree with Said and consider that these women’s involvement with England and their misrepresentations in English writings bereaved them of their individuality and agency.

However, delving into the micro history of case studies such as Safiye, Teresa Sampsonia or Mariam Khanum can help us see, not simply the ways in which these women had their individual voices filtered and/or taken over by Western actors, but also how powerful Eastern women actively resisted this process of ventriloquizing. Indeed, even though Safiye’s letters to the Queen were highly mediated, and even though Teresa Sampsonia and Mariam Khanum did not leave any documents written by their hands, traces of their agency can still be recovered through their “refracted representations” in official and fictional productions. For example, the Sultana’s agency is visible first and foremost through the fact that she engaged in foreign diplomacy and attempted to promote good relationships between the Ottoman Empire and England. This is significant when considering that her very place in Constantinople had started from the kidnapping practices which brought white concubines into the Sultan’s harem. Even though she had become part of “Muslim royalty not by birth but through coercion”, her active role in Ottoman foreign diplomacy reflects her “successful appropriation of Ottoman identity”. Moreover, Safiye’s individual way of conducting diplomacy is visible through the change of style in her letters. Instead of having all of her missives go through the official channel of a royal scribe who would decorate her letters and use flowery prose, her second and third letters to the Queen were written by a woman from the harem in a simpler language. This choice emphasizes her desire to “personalize her relations with the English queen by making their correspondence less detached and less official”. Safiye’s decision to personalize her correspondence shows her unique approach to Ottoman foreign diplomacy. All of these elements can help us reconstitute her individual voice and contradict the Saidian perspective on the ventriloquizing of Eastern women by Western men. Similarly, even though Mariam Khanum did not leave behind any written documents, her refracted presence in the court minutes of the East India Company board of directors, as well as in the letters of company agents settled in Agra, tells us that she did not conform to the silent and passive stereotype of the Oriental woman. Though the board of directors only referred to Mariam as “the widow that is a stranger”, she did not remain a widow, nor a stranger for very long. After obtaining 200 gold sovereigns and the means to go back to India with Towerson, Mariam kept on requesting financial support from the Company, and she did so by making her voice heard, as company agents report that her complaints were likely to “breed much trouble to your [the EIC’s] factors at Agra and the court”. Thus, even though Mariam’s voice and presence were mediated by the East India Company through their court minutes and letters, it still appears clear that her involvement with the Company was not a passive one. Finally, Teresa Sampsonia presents to us the clearest instance of a powerful Eastern woman resisting the attempts of Western men to speak on her behalf. Indeed, even though the Sherley propaganda created her fictional character as a Christian Eastern princess entirely
devoted to her husband, and even though she willingly participated in this self-staging to help Robert in his ambassadorial mission, Teresa also promoted another fictional avatar, one that she had created for herself: the Amazon. This mythological figure of female power and strength was first associated to Teresa by an account of the Carmelites in Isfahan, relating an episode that happened after the Sherley couple left Persia for their first embassy to Europe. On the way, Robert was supposedly attacked by cut-throats, but Teresa heroically stepped in and saved her husband’s life in a surprisingly un-ladylike manner: “a sword fell from the hands of one miscreant and Sherley’s wife, like a true Amazon, bounded on it and proceeded to thrust and cut and kill some of the band, putting to flight the rest”. This very masculine depiction of Teresa’s fighting skills might appear as paradoxical compared to her first appearance in the Carmelite records as a “slave” bought by Robert. In this episode, Sherley unusually appears in the feminine role of the victim, while his wife takes on the mantle of the romance knight that English writers usually reserved for him. But it is likely that the Carmelites wrote this episode not to praise Teresa’s independence, but to emphasize the extent to which she was willing to go to serve and protect her husband. This episode may thus be read as another example of Western men trying to represent and speak for Teresa by underlining her female devotion and dedication while still blending it with the exotic image of the Amazon having been tamed by her English husband and master. However, this perspective fails to take into account Teresa’s own efforts to redefine herself as an Amazon whose status was, if not superior to her husband’s, at the very least equal to his own. I have already spoken about the pair of portraits by Anthony Van Dyck representing Robert Sherley and Teresa Sampsonia in Rome in 1622, but another pair was commissioned during the couple’s second stay in England around 1623. While Robert’s portrait still appears in full Persian paraphernalia, no doubt to legitimize his status which had been questioned once more by the arrival of Naqd Ali Beg in London, Teresa’s portrait is vastly different from her depiction by Van Dyck. Here she is portrayed standing tall, with a pistol in her right hand, which appears as a very masculine element when considering that, from a Western perspective, female aristocrats were not expected to fight. This symbol of bravery, uncommon in female portraiture of the early modern period, might have been her way of acknowledging the reports of her heroism when she supposedly saved her husband life. Moreover, she is depicted with a pocket watch in her left hand, tied to her waist by a red ribbon. This can be seen as a modern and technologically-advanced representation of the hour-glass usually present in vanities and as a nod to the mortal dangers she and her husband faced during their dangerous travels around the world. Thus, while Robert’s portrait is consistent with his previous attempts to stage himself as a legitimate Persian ambassador, Teresa’s depiction illustrates her desire to be perceived as something other than a Christian Persian princess, especially at a time when Robert was accused of lying about her parentage to the Shah. The watch and the gun show the successful appropriation of Western attributes by Teresa Sampsonia who appears once again as a liminal figure, not simply symbolizing the union of East and West, but as a modern Amazon standing between the worlds of masculinity and femininity. Thus, the Sherley propaganda and its appropriation of Teresa’s image should not distract us from her own self-staging as a brave Amazon, which she literally carried to the grave when her tombstone in Italy was engraved with the epitaph: “Teresa Sampsonia Amazonites”, or “Teresa Sampsonia, a native of the region of the Amazons”.

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Thus, in spite of the attempts made by English writers to ventriloquize Eastern women and to repress or suppress their agency, traces of their individual voices can still be found in cross-cultural productions, ranging from letters to court document to paintings. The influence displayed by powerful Eastern women actively subverted early modern English patriarchal norms, which explains why their renditions in English writings were sometimes so far from who they truly were. Moreover, the fact that these women were all linked to powerful men who held a more important or official position than them complicates the matter further, since public attention was so often on their husbands rather than on them. But the Saidian outlook on the treatment of Eastern women by Western men, though it might apply from the eighteenth century onward, does not account for the multiple instances where Sultana Safiye, Teresa Sampsonia and Mariam Khanum made their voices heard, whether directly through their own interventions in the way they were perceived and represented, or indirectly, through their highly mediated presences in English productions at the time.

**Conclusion**

My goal in this thesis was to show how a close study of the individual stories of powerful Eastern women on a micro level could help shed light on England’s rapidly changing relationship to the East in the early modern period on the macro level. Ever since Edward Said’s ground-breaking essay *Orientalism*, the relationship between Orient and Occident, between Western males and Eastern females, between the familiar and the foreign has too often been defined in terms of opposition and domination. But Said’s argument, though relevant for the nineteenth-century British empire and its dominion over the East, fails to take into account the diplomatic and commercial ties that bound England to Eastern empires as well as the strategic role that some powerful Eastern women played in the creation of Anglo-Eastern relationships during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Through my three case studies, I wished to illustrate the gradual change of paradigm in England’s involvement in the East, which went from an isolated kingdom to a well-organized diplomatic and commercial force, and how this transitional rise to power was mirrored in the ambivalent English attitude toward Eastern women. Safiye and Teresa Sampsonia enjoyed a certain level of agency over English diplomats and travelers in their home countries, as these men relied on their influence and support to achieve personal and national aspirations abroad. Mariam Khanum’s involvement with the East India Company, however, already shows the premises of the future power dynamic between the nineteenth-century British Empire and its Eastern dominions. As Bernadette Andrea puts it: “if Mariam Khanum’s path at the beginning of the seventeenth century was shaped by ‘marginal’ England’s proto-imperialist and proto-orientalist engagement with the vastly more powerful Mughal Empire, her effaced presence in English culture at the end of the seventeenth century signals the transition to a more fully realized anglocentric imperial project on a global scale”. Thus, looking at the individual roles and representations of powerful Eastern women in early modern Anglo-Eastern relationships and how they evolved can help us understand why, in the eighteenth century, only a rich, white, English, ambassadorial wife such as Lady Mary Wortley-Montagu could write about the East without worrying about having her voice silenced or distorted by her English audience.
As a last point, I would like to underline that this thesis has only been focusing on Eastern women of power whose influential position allowed them to be voluntary actors in foreign diplomacy, such as Safiye, or voluntary travellers to England, such as Teresa Sampsonia and Mariam Khanum. Moreover, their status as female aristocrats or royal concubines gave them the means to have at least some agency over the way they were perceived and represented during their lifetimes. However, many Eastern women did not share the same privileges and some of them did not interact voluntarily in the building of diplomatic and commercial relationships between England and the East. I here think of Hippolyta the Tartarian, a Nogay slave bought by Anthony Jenkinson, an English agent for the Muscovy Company, who gave her as a gift to Elizabeth I in 1561. A closer study of her involuntary involvement in Anglo-Eastern relationships could bring an interesting perspective into gendered forms of foreign diplomacy, especially when compared to Elizabeth I’s relationship with Sultana Safiye, who, let us not forget, was also bought and sold to a foreign power as a young girl. But while Safiye managed to rise out of her initial captive condition and into power by giving birth to a male heir for the Sultan, Hippolyta’s sole function in the Elizabethan court was that of a living exotic good.

Appendixes

Appendix A

Map of Europe and Eastern empires in the early modern period.
A 12th century "T-O" world map representing Asia, Europe and Africa. 
Appendix C

Map depicting the conquests of the Ottoman Empire from 1300 to 1683.

Appendix D

Enclosed in preceding Despatch.

18. MEMORIAL presented by the ENGLISH AMBASSADOR to the SULTANA, wife of the GRAND SIGNOR.

Most puissant Empress! in all humility I inform your Highness that my Queen and I are well aware of your benignity, for which I render infinite thanks to your Majesty, and I promise, in the Queen's name and my own, all gratitude which shall be made manifest on the first occasion, God willing.

I would now inform you of this which, seeing that it represents my Queen's intentions, is of the highest moment. I waited on the Mufti and the Capudan Pasha and after setting everything before them they advised me to draft a memorial and bring it to them, and they would present it to the Sultan, and use all their influence in support of it. I did so, but up to the present moment I have received no answer from them. I pray your Highness to deign to intercede with the Sultan that he may ask for my memorial from those Ministers, or at least their opinion thereon.
1592.

Furthermore, most puissant Lady, I have recently learned that certain galleys of Spain have touched at Rhodes and have seized a galley belonging to the Sultan, which was bringing back from Egypt the wife of Oweis Pasha, and all that Pasha’s belongings, and some chavannes of the Grand Signor. The whole of this has been carried off to Spain. This was an act verily worthy of Spanish peace and alliance, to effect which a Spanish Ambassador is on his way, but whether he comes in friendship or in fear I know not. However, in face of this act of friendship I trust that your Highness will warmly support the interests of my Queen. She is a woman, and yet has fought and harassed for a long time this mighty Sovereign. Worthy therefore is she that his Majesty’s power shew him displayed in her favour. I implore your Highness to show your benignity towards my Queen, and now is the time to do it; and I would pray you, as you please, to make use of Mehemet Aga to lay the matter before the Sultan.

[Italian.]

English translation of Edward Barton’s 1592 memorial to Sultana Safiye.

The Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts, Venice (1592-1603), ed. Horatio F. Brown (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1897), vol. 9, pp. 5-6.

Appendix E

A letter written by the most high and mighty Empresse the wife of the Grand Signior Sultan Murad Can to the Queenes Majesty of England, in the yeare of our Lord, 1594.

Il principio del ragionamento nostro sia scrittura perfetta nelle quatro parte del mondo, in nome di quello che ha creato indifferentemente tutte infinite creature, che non hovevano anima ni persona, & di quello che la girar gli nove cieli, & che la terra sette volte una sopra l’ altra si firmar; Signor & Re senza vicere, & che non ha comparzion alla sua creazione ne opera, & uno senza precio, adorato incomparable, l’altissimo Dio creator; che non ha similitudine, si come e descritto dalli profetii: a la cui grandessa non si serve, & alla perfettone sua comparzura non si oppose, & quel omnipotente creature & cooperatore; alla grandessa del quale inchiama tutti li profetii: fra quali il maggiore & che ha ottenuuto grazia, borto del paradiso, ragi dal sole, amato del altissimo Dio è Mehomet Mustaffa, al qual & suoi aderenti & imitatori sia perpetuas pace alla cui sepoltura odorifica si fa ogni honore. Quello che è imperator de sette climati, & delle quatro parti del mondo, invincibile Re di Giacco, Agiama, Ungaria, Tartaria, Valachia, Rossia, Turchia, Arabia, Bagher, Caramania, Abessi, Gownir, Sirvan, Barbaria, Algier, Franchia, Corezia, Beligno, &c., sempre felicissimo, & de dodici Aveli possessor della corona, & della stipe di Adam, di nova Imperator, figliuolo dell’Imperatore, conservato de la divina provi- denza, Re di ogni dignita & honore, Sultan Murat, che il Signor Dio sempre augmenti le sue forze, & padre di quello a cui aspetta la corona imperiale, borto & cypresso mirabile, degno della seda regale, & vero herede del comando imperiale, dignissimo Mehomet Can, signor
THE SULTANA'S LETTER

De Sultana Murat Can, che dio compie li suoi disegni, & allunga li suoi giorni felici: Dalla parte della madre del qual si scrive la presente alla serenissima & gloriosissima fra le prudensissime Donne, & eletta fra i triumfanti sotto il standardo di Jesu Christo, potentissima & ricchissima regitrice, & al mondo singularissima fra il femenil sesso, la serenissima Regina d'Inghilterra, che segue le vestigie de Maria virgine, il fine della quale sia con bene & perfezion, secondo il suo desiderio. Le mandò una salutacion di pace, così honorata, che non basta tutta la copia di regnanti con le loro musiche arriuere, non che con questa carta: l' amore singolare che e concepito fra noi, è simile a un' horta di Uccelli vagi; che il Signor Dio la faci degna di salvezione, & il fine suo sia tale, che in questo mondo & nel' futuro sia con pace. Dopo comparli li suoi honorati presenti da la sedi de la Serenità vostra, sapere che sono capitati in una ora che ogni punto è stato una consolation di lungo tempo, per occasione del Ambassadore di vostre serenità venuto alla feicce porta del Imperatore, con tanto nostro contento, quanto si possa desiderare, & con quello una lettera di vostra serenità, che ci estata presentata dalli nostri Euanichi con gran honore; la carta de la quale odorava di camfora & ambrausam, & l'inchiostro di musco perfetto, & quella pervenuta in nostro mano tutta la contienza di essa a parte a parte ho ascoltato intentamente. Quello che hora si conviene è, che corrispondente alla nostra afficcione, in tutto quello che si aspetta alle cose attenente alli paesi che sono sotto il comando di vostre serenità, lei non manchi di sempre tenermi, data notizia, che in tutto quello che li occorrerà, Io possi compiacerla; de quello che fra le nostre serenità & conveniente, accioche quelle cose che si interponderan, habito il desiderato buon fine; perché io sarò sempre ricordatelo al altissimo Imperatore delle occerenze di vostra serenità, per che sia in ogni occasione compiaciuta. La pace sia con vostra serenità, & con quelli che seguano dritamente la via di Dio.

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The same in English.

Let the beginning of our discourse be a perfect writing in the four parts of the world, in the name of him which hath indifferently created such infinite numbers of creatures, which had neither soul nor body, and of him which moveth the nine heavens, and stabiliseth the earth seven times one above another, which is Lord and king without any deputy, who hath no comparison to his creation and works, and is one inimitable, worshipped without all comparison, the most high God, the creator, which hath nothing like unto him, according as he is described by the Prophets, to whose power no man can attain, and whose absolute perfection no man may control; and that omnipotent creator and fellow-worker, to whose Majesty all the Prophets submit themselves, among whom the greatest, and which hath obtained greatest favour, the garden of Paradise, the bower of the Sunne, the beloved of the most high God is Mahomet Mustaf, to whom and to his adherents and followers be perpetual peace, to whose fragrant sepulture all honour is performed. He which is emperour of the seven climates and of the four parts of the world, the invincible king of Grece, Asia, Hungaria, Tartaria, Valachia, Rossia, Turcia, Arabia, Bagdect, Carmania, Abessos, Gouasins, Sirian, Beraria, Alege, Franchia, Corscia, Belgade, &c. always most happy, and possessour of the crowne from twelve of his ancestors; and of the seed of Adam, at this present emperour, the sonne of an emperour, preserved by the divine providence, a king woorthly of all glory and honour, Sultan Murad, whose forces the Lord God always increase, and father of him to whom the imperiall crowne is to descend, the paradise and wonderfull tall cypresse, worthy of the royall throne, and true heire of the imparrell authority, most woorthy Mahomet.

THE SULTANA'S LETTER

Can, the sonne of Sultan Murad Can, whose enterprises God vouchsafe to accomplish, and to prolong his happy dayes; on the behalfe of whose mother this present letter is written to the most gracious and most glorious, the sweet among women, and choosen among those which triumph under the standard of Jesus Christ, the most mighty and most rich governer, and most rare among womankinde in the world, the most gracious Queene of England, which follow the steps of the virgin Mary, whose end be prosperous and perfect, according to your hearts desire. I send your Majesty so honorable and sweet a salutation of peace, that at the fletche of Nightingales with their smellly cannot attaine to ye like, much lesse this simple letter of mine. The singular love which we have conceived one toward the other is like to a garden of pleasant birds: and the Lord God vouchsafe to save and kepe you, and send your Majesty an happy end both in this world and in the world to come. After the arrival of your honourable presents from the Court of your Majesty, your Highnesse shall understand that they came in such a season that every minute ministered occasion of long consolation by reason of the comming of your Majesties Ambassadors to the triumphant Court of the Empourer, to our so great contentment as we could possibly wish, who brought a letter from your Majestie, which with great honour was presented unto us by our enskies, the paper whereof did smell of most fragrantly of candeo and ambergrис, and the inks of perfect muske; the contents whereof we have heard very attentively from point to point. I think is therefore expedient, that, according to our mutuell affection, in any thing whatsoever may concern the countreyes which are subject to your Majesty, I never fail, having information given unto me, in whatsoever occasion shall be ministered, to gratifie your Majesty to my power in any reasonable and convenient matter, that all your subjects businesss and affaires may have a wished and happy end. For I will always be a solicitor to the most mighty Empourer.
for your Majesties affairs, that your Majesty at all times may be fully satisfied. Peace be to your Majesty, and to all such as follow rightly the way of God. Written the first day of the Moone of Babie Livel in the yere of the Prophet, 1022.

First letter from Sultana Safiye to Queen Elizabeth I, in Italian and English, 1593. Principal Navigations Voyages Traffiques And Discoveries Of The English Nation, ed. Richard Hakluyt (Glasgow: Glasgow University Press, 1904), vol. 6, pp. 114-118.

Appendix F

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English rendering: Document II</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seal:  Around the edge; Thou art my desire (my Murād), O dweller in the heavens! O Lord, O Mohammed, glory of the world!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre: The mother of Sultan Mohammed Khān.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Actes des congrès de la Société française Shakespeare, Ressources et prix du mémoire
Second letter from Sultana Safiye to Queen Elizabeth I, 1599. English translation by S. Skilliter.


Appendix G

Third letter from Sultana Safiye to Queen Elizabeth I, 1599. English translation by S. Skilliter.
Appendix H

Appendix I

Appendix J

Oil painting of Lady Teresa Sherley by Anthony Van Dyck, 1622, 2140 x 1290 mm, Petworth House and Park, West Sussex.

Appendix K

Sketch of Lady Teresa Sherley by Anthony Van Dyck, 1622, 19.9 x 15.1 cm, The British Museum, London.
Appendix L

Ellis's text of Esperanza Malchi's letter to Queen Elizabeth

Alla serenissima Regina de Ingelterra, Francia, et Iberna

Come il Sole aluna con noi raggi sopra la terra,
la virtù et grandezza di sua maesta si stende per tutto
el universo, sin tanto che quelli che sono di di-

terente nazione et legge desiderano servir sua maesta.
Questa dico io per me, che essendo io Hebreo di legge
et nacquente di si di sua maesta, da la prima hora che
piace al S* Iddio di mettere nel cuore di questa no-
stra serenissima Reggia 8 Madre servirsi de me, sempre
sono stato desideroso che me venisse occasione di po-
ter mostrar a sua Maesta questa mia vllaunta. Fora 9
che S.M. è mandato questo ill*mo. Imbassatior in questo
Regno con un presente per questa serenissima Reg-
gina mia 10 in quanto si à vulloto servir di me mà à
 trovato pròta. 4 Et hora alla dispidizione di esso ill*mo.
Imbassatior la serenissima Regina vullendo mostrar a
sua maesta el amor che gia, manda a sua maesta con
questo ill*mo Imbassiatore una veste, et una cintura, et
doi facioli lavorati de loro, et tre lavorati di seta al

1 Ser. I, iii (1824), 32-5. Ellis's faulty translation has been reproduced by C. Roth in

Anglo-Jewish letters, 1158-1917 (1928), pp. 38-6 and again in his The House of Nasi—Dosta


8 = “Reggia”.

9 = “Hora”.

10 = “pronta”.

Documents from Islamic Chanceries

Unanza di questo Regno, et un collar di perle et rubi-

i; il tutto manda la serma. Reggina all ill*mo. St. Im-

bassatior per mano del S* Bostanggi Basi e' per mia

mano gli ho consignato al ill*mo. St. Imbassatior una co-

rona di diamante gioia di sua setta, quelli dice piaaera

à sua maesta portar per amor di lei et de la receputa
dar aviso. Et per esser sua Maesta donna senza ver-
gogna alcuna la posio hoccupar con questo aviso il qual

è che trovandosi nel suo regno aque destillati fin de

honne sorte per la facia et hogli hodorifere per le

mani sua Maesta mi favorrìa mandarre per mia mano

(for this most serene Queen; by my hand as, being articles

for ladies, she does not wish them to pass through other hands.)

per il medesimo se si trovano nel suo Regno panini

di seta ho di lana cosse stravaganti et convenienti per

una tanta alta Reggina come lei sua Maesta potra

mandarli che più avera lei caro questo che qual si

govlia gioia che sua Maesta gli posia mandar non al-

tro sollo pregar il S* Iddio gli dia vittoria di soli ne-

mici et sempre sia S.M. prospera et fellice. Amen.

Di Constantinopoli 16 Nov. 1599.

Umilissima di S.M.

Esperanza Malchi.
English rendering

To the Most Serene Queen of England, France and Ireland. Just as the sun gives light with its rays over the earth, Your Majesty's power and greatness extend throughout the whole universe, so much so that those who are of other nations and religion wish to serve Your Majesty. This I say on my own behalf, although being as I am a Jewess by faith and of a different nation from Your Majesty, from the first hour since it has pleased the Lord God to put it into the heart of this our most serene Queen Mother to use me in her service, I have always been desirous that the opportunity might arise for me to be able to show Your Majesty this good will of mine. Now that Your Majesty has sent this most illustrious ambassador to this kingdom with a present for this most serene Queen my lady, in as much as he was wished to make use of me, he has found me ready. And now at the leave-taking of the aforesaid most illustrious ambassador, the most serene Queen, wishing to show Your Majesty the love she bears you, is sending Your Majesty with this most illustrious ambassador, a robe and a girdle and two handkerchiefs worked with gold and three worked with silk according to the custom of this kingdom and a necklace of pearls and rubies; all of which the most serene Queen sends to the most illustrious Lord Ambassador by the hand of the Lord Bostanghi Basi and by my own hand I have delivered for you to the most illustrious Lord Ambassador, a crown of diamond gems from Her Serenity which she says it will please Your Majesty to wear for her sake, and to give notice of the receipt. And on account of Your Majesty's being a woman I can without any embarrassment employ you with this notice, which is that as there are to be found in your kingdom rare distilled waters of every kind for the face and odorous oils for the hands, Your Majesty would favour me by sending some of them by my hand for this most serene Queen; by my hand as, being articles for ladies, she does not wish them to pass through other hands. Likewise, if there are to be found in your kingdom cloths of silk or wool, articles fantastic and becoming such an exalted Queen as she, Your Majesty will be able to send them, for she will hold this more dear than any jewel whatsoever that Your Majesty might send her. No more, only to pray the Lord God that He may grant you victory over your enemies and that Your Majesty may always be prosperous and happy. Amen. From Constantinople, 16 November 1599.

Your Majesty's most humble (servant),
Esperanza Malchi.

Letter by Esperanza Malchi to Queen Elizabeth I, 1599. In Italian with an English translation by Henry Ellis and Susan Skilliter.
Appendix M

Appendix N

17th century map from George Sandys’ *A Relation of a Journey begun an: Dom: 1610* depicting the kingdom of Pamphilia in Asia Minor, actual Turkey (London, Richard Field: 1615).
Appendix O

Appendix P

Illustration by Theodoor Galle of Amerigo Vespucci coming to shore and discovering America, circa 1600, 27 x 20 cm.
Appendix Q

Oil painting of Robert Sherley by unknown artist, c. 1623-4, Trustees of the Berkeley Will Trust.
Appendix R


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