



The Fascination of Persia

The Persian-European Dialogue in Seventeenth-Century Art & Contemporary Art of Teheran

The Sherleys and the Shah

Persia as the Stakes in a Rogue's Gambit

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The second of the three sons of the Sussex peer Sir Thomas Sherley (ca. 1542–1612), Sir Anthony Sherley (1565–ca. 1638), suffered from—and made others to suffer even more from—a personality disorder of the kind we encounter in con men. He was a keen judge of men who used his insights only to manipulate those who trusted him, in the first place his father, brothers, and protectors. During his wide travels, nearly every move he made left others holding large uncovered loans and debts. His twentieth-century biographers Boies Penrose and Edward Denison Ross were unable to contain themselves when it came to describing Anthony's character: "He was an inveterate and unscrupulous intriguer, a sententious hypocrite devoid of all real sentiment ... He had all the natural devotion of a buccaneer, and his cupidity was only equalled by his extravagance."¹ He was "a self-seeking adventurer pure and simple, a born intriguer, a complete opportunist, a man whose word could never be relied on and whose personal dishonesty leaves us gasping."² These judgments are no different from several testimonies from Anthony's lifetime. His secretary Tomas Pagliarini wrote to the Spanish ambassador in Venice: "Don Antonio is a man who comes running whenever there is an offer of money. He is fickle and corrupt and ... mendacious

1 Ross 1933, p. 86.

2 Penrose 1938, pp. 244–45.

by nature ... He lies awake all night devising schemes to extract money from princes ... He is a man who affects an air of mystery in everything," and it would be well if "such a pestiferous weed" be "expelled from the company of illustrious men surrounding the King."³ James Wadsworth wrote in 1625: "This Sir Anthony Sherley is a great plotter and projector in matters of state, and undertakes by sea-stratagems to invade and ruinate his native country, a just treatise of whose actions would take up a whole volume."⁴ Like other successful miscreants of his kind, he was able to evoke admiration from his victims while robbing them blind or selling them down the river. The English ambassador in Madrid heard in 1606 of his stay in Morocco "by one that attended him in Barbary that he hath there played many parts of mountebankery which I fear some merchant factors in London will bitterly taste of; that those of Lisbon will hardly escape him, who hold him either in the account of a saint or a great sorcerer, so apt is the confused and promiscuous multitude to worship rather in Samaria than in Jerusalem."⁵

As the latter testimony reveals, Anthony Sherley enjoyed the full complement of qualities associated with his faults. He spoke several languages, knew how to comport himself with different kinds of people, and although short in stature, was able to command respectful attention in a crowd. He could think swiftly on his feet, he was not afraid of a fight and was able to endure the discomfort of extensive travels. He was particularly skilled in acquiring appointments and offices, and in lesser measure emoluments, from rulers. To those who fell for his act, he came across as a hero, a model of aristocratic pride. That image was immortalized in Samuel Purchas's 1625 publication of extracts of writings on the Sherleys: "remoter India, Moscovia, Africa hath felt the Sherleian working, Poland, Spaine, the Emperour and Pope have admired and adorned the English name of Sherley ... Who ever since the beginning of things and men, hath beene so often by Royal Employment sent Embassadour to so many princes, so distant in place, so different in rites? Two Emperours Rudolf and Ferdinand, two Popes Clement and Paul, twice the King of Spaine, twice the Polonian, the Muscovite also have given him audience."⁶ This is all true, but did it mean anything more than that Anthony knew how to flatter princes? A third biographer, David W. Davies, tends to think not. At the end of his book on the Sherleys, he writes:

One must inevitably ask oneself if the story of the Sherleys is important, and the answer is, of course, that it is not. The Sherleian adventures point no moral, embody no inspiration, and are remarkable only in that one family should have had so many of them. These men shaped no great moments in history, but they were typical of their age, and in certain aspects, of any age. The grasping,

greedy world of old Sir Thomas was more typically Elizabethan than the good fellowship of the Mermaid Tavern.⁷ And in a postscript to his article "The Sherley Myth," Roger Savory comments: "The following point may be thought not to be irrelevant: In 1888 the Rev. Scott Surtee, of Dinsdale-on-Tees, published a pamphlet entitled *William Shakespeare of Stratford-on-Avon*, in which he assigned to Sir Anthony Sherley the honour of writing Shakespeare's plays."⁸

The present article assigns more significance than that to the Sherleian adventures. As statecraft and in the history of diplomacy they may have been insignificant, but had Davies enlarged the scope of his study to include the history of art, travel literature, cultural exchange, and costume, he might have arrived at a less dismissive conclusion.

What, then, could be the reasons for the prominent appearance in the present volume of a self-centered rogue like Anthony Sherley? That story, dear reader, has its beginning in a certain turn of events in Venice in the spring of the year 1598. A mission to the court of Ferrara that Anthony had undertaken for his patron, the Earl of Essex, had aborted when the political situation changed. Anthony and his companions, considering it beneath their dignity and that of their lord to return to London empty-handed, took a detour to Venice, where, one of the party wrote, "we did solace ourselves almost three months,"⁹ while Anthony "cast about for a new enterprise."¹⁰ The choice for a new enterprise was mainly the product of happenstance. The participant we have just quoted, George Manwaring, tells it as he saw it:

And in that time we lay in Venice Sir Anthony did fall into some conversation with a Persian merchant, which did traffic in Venice for the King of Persia, for which commodities as were wanting in his own country, which was English cloth, both woollen and linen. This merchant told Sir Anthony of the royalty of the Sophi, his king, which pleased Sir Anthony very well; yet not resolved to go thither, but to take his voyage another way: but in the same city of Venice it was his fortune to hear of a great traveller, newly come to Venice from the Sophi's court, whose name was Angelo, born in Turkey, but a good Christian, who had travelled sixteen years, and did speak twenty-four kind of languages. This Angelo did likewise acquaint Sir Anthony of the worthiness of the King of Persia, that he was a gallant soldier, very bountiful and liberal to strangers, and what entertainment he had at his court; assuring Sir Anthony that, if he would go thither, it would be greatly for his advancement; and moreover that he would be his guide, and attend on him thither, which Sir Anthony did consent unto, yet kept it very close, for fear it should be known in Turkey, because we must pass through that country, and the Great Turk and the King of

3 Quoted in Davies 1967, pp. 211-12.

4 Quoted in Ross 1933, p. 85 and Savory 1967, p. 80, in slightly different transcriptions.

5 Quoted in Davies 1967, p. 203. Writing in the early years of the twenty-first century, I cannot help thinking of Bernard Madoff, a man of the same mold, who also commanded the fanatic admiration of his prey.

6 Quoted in Savory 1967, p. 77.

7 Davies 1967, p. 285.

8 Savory 1967, p. 81. The myth Savory debunks with some degree of overkill is that the Sherleys taught the Persians to manufacture and employ artillery. In the early seventeenth century this garnered Anthony and Robert much unmerited acclaim.

9 George Manwaring, *A True Discourse of Sir Anthony Sherley's Travels into Persia*, 1607, first published in 1825, quoted in Ross 1933, pp. 176-77.

10 Davies 1967, p. 81.

Robert Sherley—both ‘fallen’ and deeply in debt to the Crown.”

One of the central problems of the “fallen” courtier was the completeness of his collapse. Once it was clear that a previously powerful and wealthy gentleman had incurred the wrath of his sovereign, no one could risk being associated with that person in any way ... A fallen courtier like Sherley, who had just lost his reputation and all of his support at court ... was not likely to be extended much credit either by local tradesmen or the unofficial moneylenders of Elizabethan England ... In order to change this situation, the Sherleys would have to regain their reputation for honor and for favor among the nation’s great. To gain financial credit, they would need reputational credit. The search for credit led all three of Sir Thomas’s sons—Thomas, Anthony, and Robert—to take to the seas ... Each of them sponsored a series of publications detailing their exploits in Islamic lands, seeking to turn their travels abroad into credit at home.¹⁸

This background helps us to understand what was going through Anthony’s mind fourteen months after his father’s fall. He was out for all or nothing, and the Persian ploy being dangled before him in the taverns of Venice, whether engineered by the Signoria or not, looked like just the thing. Upon his return, he was not slow in attempting to cash in on his credit. Why the *Relation of his travels* was not published until 1613 is unclear. But in 1600, in the first months of his presence in Europe, a London printer brought out a pamphlet entitled *A true report of Sir Anthony Shierlies iourney ouerland to Venice: fro[m] thence by sea to Antioch, Aleppo, and Babilon, and soe to Casbine in Persia: his entertainment there by the great Sophie: his oration: his letters of credence to the Christian princes: and the priuiledg obtained of the great Sophie, for the quiet passage and trafique of all Christian marchants, throughout his whole dominions*. Acceptance at a major court, credentials at the courts of the princes of Christendom, privileged status for Christian merchants—that was worth a lot, was it not?

By printing his “verbatim” speech, the pamphlet evoked the classical histories that sought to glorify the deeds of great men; by printing the letters of credence, the pamphlet used the formal features of a letter to bolster Anthony’s credibility ... The *True Report* thus employed the conventions of both history writing and foreign newsprint in its efforts proactively to legitimate Anthony’s status as ambassador.¹⁹

Whatever Anthony’s intentions may have been, he failed to achieve them. It is actually doubtful whether the pamphlet reached its audience at all. Schleck seems not to have noticed that publication of the *True Report* was suppressed not once but twice, on October 2, 1600 and September 7, 1601. Having failed to place this weighty instrument where he wanted it, Anthony, aided by his brother Thomas, resorted to lighter forms of literature. In 1601, a more conventional travel account written by one of Anthony’s companions, William Parry, saw the light of day: *A new and large discourse of the trauels*

18 Schleck 2011, pp. 64–66.

19 Ibid., p. 68.

of sir Anthony Sherley Knight, by sea, and ouer land, to the Persian Empire, wherein are related many straunge and wonderfull accidents. It was followed in 1607 by three pieces of Sherleian propaganda: two different editions of Anthony Nixon's *The three English brothers Sir Thomas Sherley his trauels, vvith his three yeares imprisonment in Turkie: his enlargement by his maiesties letters to the great Turke: and lastly, his safe returne into England this present year, 1607*. Sir Anthony Sherley his embassy to the Christian princes. Master Robert Sherley his wars against the Turkes, with his marriage to the Emperour of Persia his neece, and a stage play by John Day, William Rowley, and George Wilkins, *The trauailes of the three English brothers Sir Thomas Shirley Sir Anthony Mr. Robert. As it is now play'd by her Maiesties Seruants*. In 1609 and 1611 three more publications, by Thomas Middleton, Robert Chambers, and John Cartwright, featured Sir Anthony in the titles and in the limelight of various writings. Anthony or Robert even has a walk-on role in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, staged in 1601 or 1602, as "fencer to the Sophy."²⁰

Twelfth Night aside, none of these publications is distinguished by literary merit, and although they do not depart substantively from the known facts, they all display one tendentious feature that misrepresents Sir Anthony's stature: the emphasis which they place on his ambassadorship, the very crux of the matter.

The story of the embassy which Shah Abbas sent to Europe is sometimes befogged because readers have certain preconceptions of the dignity of an ambassador which the Persian monarch never had. The word "ambassador" suggests a prestigious person to whom all members of the party or embassy are subordinate. In the view of Shah Abbas the honors attached to an embassy were scanty and he was inclined to distribute them among the participants. In the group which left Persia for the courts of Europe there was a venerable Persian, Husein Ali Beg, and a Dominican friar, Nicolão de Melo, both of whom, in addition to Sir Anthony, may have had ambassadorial status.²¹

The truth of this observation is borne out by the unceasing bickering over precedence during the campaign, especially between Husain 'Ali Beg and Anthony.²² There was more at stake than one's place on the dais or at the dinner table. By contemporaneous custom, the host nation that received a foreign ambassador defrayed the envoy's expenses and honored him with expensive gifts.²³ To be accepted as 'Abbas's ambassador meant being in receipt of substantial funds underway,

which one shared or did not share with other members of the mission.

'Abbas's easygoing ways with ambassadorships were also manifest in his habit of sending off one accredited envoy after another to the same courts. Certain patterns emerge from the history of this subject. Newly arrived emissaries never confirmed the status of their predecessors. Their claims of precedence created uncertainty on the part of the courts to which they were sent, which were already negotiating with the earlier arrivals. This unpleasantness overcame Robert Sherley not once, but twice. In 1611 he was in Madrid, toward the end of his first ambassadorship, when the Augustinian friar Antonio Gouvea and a Persian named Jangiz Beg came to the city. They took it upon themselves to sabotage Robert's mission and undermine his reputation. "Jangiz Beg ... declared to the King's councilors that Count Robert was not an ambassador and that the Persian letter of credence he carried did not give him that title."²⁴ The grandest example of this disagreeable phenomenon, during Robert's second tour of duty for the shah, was actually engineered from the west. Count Robert was in London in 1625, conducting talks with the court of the new king, Charles I (1600–1649; r. 1625–1649), about opening alternative trade routes to Persia alongside that of the East India Company. The Company did not take kindly to this, and asked Shah 'Abbas to send someone else, at their expense, to stand up for their interests. The shah complied, and dispatched the court dignitary Naqd (also Nuqd) 'Ali Beg to London. "When he arrived there in February 1626, aboard a Company ship, Nuqd 'Ali Beg promptly and dutifully proclaimed that Sherley was an impostor and that his credentials were forgeries."²⁵ What happened when the two were brought together for mediation is described in detail by Sir John Finnett, the master of ceremonies to James I (1566–1625; r. 1603–1625; as James VI, King of Scotland from 1567 until his death).

Sir Robert Sherley, unfolding his letters, and (as the Persian use is in reverence to their King,) first touching his eyes with them, next holding them over his head, and after kissing them, he presented them to the Ambassador, that he receiving them, might perform the like observance, when he suddenly rising out of his chair, stepped to Sir Robert Sherley, snatched his letters from him, tore them, and gave him a blow on the face with his fist, and while my Lord of Cleaveland stepping between kept off the offer of further violence, the Persian's son next at hand, flew upon Sir Robert Sherley, and with two or three blows more, overthrew him.²⁶

That this habit of the shah's tended to undermine the standing of Persian ambassadors in general is not dwelt on in the publications glorifying Sherley's "embassy to the Christian princes."

The other general rule is that none of the Persian dignitaries sent by 'Abbas to Europe survived the experience. Husain 'Ali Beg may be called fortunate to have died on the

20 Ibid., p. 70.

21 Davies 1967, p. 114. The point is worked out further by Burton 2009, pp. 24ff. Burton examines the differences between the resident English ambassador and the transient Persian *safir*.

22 Their altercation in Rome, at a papal reception on April 5, 1601, was noted with wonderment in the ceremonial diary of the Vatican. See Orbaan 1920, p. 8.

23 "On their departure from his court Philip III generously provided for the expenses of the embassy by land to Lisbon, and thence on by sea with a free passage to the Persian Gulf: for besides many magnificent presents, the Persians were given 11,000 ducats in cash for journey money. Indeed all along their route, on taking leave in audience of the various sovereign princes to whom the embassy was accredited, the ambassador and his secretaries had invariably received a variety of gold cups, often some gold chains, and much silver plate. This in addition to cash, namely from the Pope 2,000 ducats, from the Emperor 4,800, from the Tzar 3,800, a grand total of 21,600 ducats." Le Strange 1926, p. 8.

24 Davies 1967, p. 233.

25 Ibid., p. 262.

26 Quoted at greater length in *ibid.*, p. 263.

way back to Persia after his embattled travels with Sir Anthony. Naqd 'Ali Beg, sailing home with his son and Robert, with whom he was now on amicable terms, committed suicide by swallowing excessive amounts of opium four days before his ship landed. He undoubtedly knew of the lot of Jangiz Beg, who had returned to Shah 'Abbas fifteen years earlier, and who was beheaded on charges of swindling the shah and maligning his ambassador.²⁷ Indeed, when the subject arose, the shah was heard to remark of Naqd that "had he come, and been found faulty, by my head [an oath of no small force] he should have been cut in as many pieces as there are days in the year and burnt in the open market with dog's turds."²⁸ A considerably less attractive way to die than an overdose of opium on the waves, Nadq must have thought.

Whatever western misconceptions concerning the dignity of the ambassador Anthony Sherley may have harbored in the early days of his Persian adventures would have been reinforced by certain Persian court usages. The way George Manwaring describes the first official reception of the Sherleys comes closer to a Hollywood fantasy than anything a European of any period would ever have experienced. The shah took Anthony by the hand and insisted that he sit beside him on his throne, kissing him and calling him his brother. Any Persian who objected, he said, however high and mighty he might be, would have his head cut off.²⁹ As the object of these and other over-the-top displays of imperial favor, Sherley might be forgiven for assuming that he and no one else was the shah's representative to Europe.

It is good at this juncture to point out one striking circumstance concerning the mutual relations between the Persians and their European visitors: all the quite extensive and detailed information that has come down to us concerning the Sherley missions, which ran from 1599 to 1628 and marked the lives of many Europeans, has left no trace whatsoever in Persian historiography. (The Safavid archives are no more; they were dumped into the Zayandeh River in Isfahan by Afghan invaders in 1722.) Since 1933, no one seems to have expanded on the evidence then culled by Edward Denison Ross:

As a result of careful search I have only discovered one passage which could refer to Anthony and his party ... Among the events of A. H. 1007 (1598–9) he [Jalal ud-Din Muhammad Munajjim Yazdi, author of a history of Persia from 1524 to 1611] records that "after the conquest of Khurasan, envoys came from Europe saying 'We have done much harm to the Turks, and have defeated them. You must now endeavour to regain your own territory so that the aspirations of us both may be realized.'"³⁰

This unnerving situation presents us with a cultural gap as significant as it is difficult to fathom. A border-crossing phenomenon that took on nearly legendary status in the writings of one of the partner cultures did not even merit mention by

27 Ibid., pp. 140 (Husain 'Ali Beg), 273 (Naqd 'Ali Beg), and 234 (Jangiz Beg).

28 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 276.

29 Manwaring, quoted in Ross 1933, pp. 209–10.

30 Ross 1933, p. 20.

the other.³¹ This particular form of asymmetry is undoubtedly related to the world view underlying history writing in Persia in general. As David Morgan has written,

For most of the Middle Ages, writers in the Islamic world did not rate western Europe very highly, if indeed they thought about that part of the world at all. For Islam, Europe was a remote and barbarous backwater. Civilization ended at the Pyrenees. Muslim geographers sometimes made an attempt to describe the area, but historians largely ignored it ... Rashid ad-Din's *History of the Franks* [1305/06; for centuries after the Crusades, all Europeans in the east were called Franks] is then of rather considerable historiographical interest. Yet even here there is a very significant contrast between his treatment of the Franks and what he has to say about the other peoples in his world history. For one thing, other areas—notably China and India—are incorporated into the text of his main history: the lands of the Franks, never. For another, he generally gives us details about the identity of his informants—a Buddhist monk in the case of the history of India, for example. He tells us nothing about his informants on the Franks ... One would never guess from reading this History that there were extensive contacts between Europe and Mongol Persia during Rashid al-Din's time. Yet there were.³²

This was still the prevailing attitude in Safavid historiography, from which one would also never guess that European contacts, including those with the Sherleys, formed an increasingly important part of Persian statecraft and commerce. Eerily, it was also the prevailing attitude two thousand years before the time of the Sherleys. As much as one would like to avoid stereotypes in attributing characteristics to nations, and as universal as self-importance may be in the formation of national identities, it would be all too cavalier to ignore the correspondences between what David Morgan wrote in 1994 of the Persians and what Herodotus wrote in 430 BC:

Of nations, they honor most their nearest neighbors, whom they esteem next to themselves; those who live beyond these they honor in the second degree; and so with the remainder, the further they are removed, the less the esteem in which they hold them. The reason is that they look upon themselves as very greatly superior in all respects to the rest of mankind, regarding others as approaching to excellence in proportion as they dwell nearer to them; whence it comes to pass that those who are the farthest off must be the most degraded of mankind.³³

An exception that proves the rule is provided by the only piece of writing by a Persian concerning the events and per-

sons here covered. That is a 345-page Spanish book, published in Valladolid in 1604, by one of the four secretaries of the mission, Husain 'Ali Beg's cousin Uruch Beg. In Europe Uruch Beg, like five other Persian members of the mission, was converted to Catholicism, changing his name to Don Juan. The passages in Don Juan's book on the Christian faith and his praise for Charles V and the Pope are reflections of his post-Persian attitudes, put into words under his name by his coach and translator, Licentiate Don Alfonso Rémon.³⁴

Beside geographical proximity, essential features such as language had heavy impact on the Persian *weltanschauung*. The court language of Safavid Persia was Azerbaijani Turkish, while Persian was spoken in the Mogul court of India. This furthered a Persian self-image as a people at the center of a world stretching from the Bosphorus to the eastern shore of the Indian subcontinent. Who could take account of the doings, further to the west, of peoples who spoke a bewildering variety of languages that no one in Persia understood?

A year after leaving Venice on the sly, calling himself a merchant to mask his real purpose, Anthony was escorted out of Isfahan by the shah of shahs himself, who accompanied him for two days on the road. "So the king kissed Sir Anthony three or four times," wrote Manwaring, "and kissed us all, and said that if we did return again we should receive great honour."³⁵ For all his demonstrations of confidence in his great Frankish friend, 'Abbas nonetheless felt it wise to assure himself of Anthony's return or at least allegiance by keeping the nineteen-year-old Robert as a hostage. Anthony never did return. The shah kept Robert in Persia for nine years, alternately as a palace favorite and a detainee, before sending him to Europe to see what had happened to his brother and perform the same mission which Anthony had failed to accomplish.

The disappointing outcome of Anthony Sherley's mission, with colorful incidents that "leave us gasping," has been described in detail in contemporaneous and later writings, and will not be rehearsed here.³⁶ One small sample of its flavor will have to suffice: no sooner had Anthony's embassy hit the road than all hell broke loose. The rivalry between the English Protestant, the Persian Muslim, and the Spanish Catholic (a common friar pretending to be the Procurator General of all the East Indies) erupted regularly not only in arguments concerning protocol, but in fistfights and one instance of attempted murder. At Astrakhan, the two having completely fallen out, Sherley made de Melo a prisoner, which he did, he explained, "with good confidence because I was in a country [Russia] in league with my Mistress [Queen Eliza-

31 Yet Anthony's grand procession through Europe, being received royally from court to court, is not always traceable in the archives. This is commented on "with astonishment" with regard to Augsburg and Munich by Franz Babinger. Babinger 1932, p. 23.

32 Morgan 1994.

33 Quoted after William Stearns Davis, *Readings in Ancient History: Illustrative Extracts from the Sources*, vol. 2: *Greece and the East*, Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1912, pp. 58–61. Accessed at <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/herodotus-persians.asp> on March 26, 2013. For another reference to an exceptional instance of Persian distinction between European peoples see Rudolph P. Matthee's essay in this catalogue. My thanks to the author for allowing me to read his typescript.

34 Le Strange 1926, p. 10. This presentation of the facts would be disputed by Jonathan Burton, who writes, "Taking the case of the Shah's two ambassadors as a working example, this essay will consider the significance of Safavid histories and institutions in order to indicate how non-English sources can inform, and even modify, our accounts of early modern English literature ... Entire genres are imagined to be singularly, essentially Western, while their global forms are ignored or dismissed as unrelated." Burton 2009, p. 25. However, the only evidence Burton produces, Don Juan's book, proves in my judgment the exact opposite of what Burton makes of it. In terms of history writing, accounts of east-west contact are truly exclusively western.

35 Manwaring, quoted in Ross 1933, pp. 225–26.

36 The most complete collection of citations from European sources regarding the travels of the delegation is to be found in Babinger 1932.

beth; in fact Sherley was under a ban from his Mistress, who forbade him from ever returning to England].” Later it was said that Sherley tried to drown de Melo. The Persian members of the party declared that Sherley threatened to kill the friar simply because the latter had asked for the repayment of a thousand crowns he had loaned Sir Anthony and for the return of ninety diamonds he had entrusted to Sherley for safekeeping. The English also quarreled with the Persians, “insomuch that had we not had a guard in our company, one of us had killed another.”³⁷

In and out of jail and favor, now claiming to represent the shah, then (or at the same time) the Emperor, the Pope, the King of Spain or various English or Scottish protectors, at different times a Catholic, a Protestant—and, who knows, perhaps a Muslim, too—Anthony made his picaresque way to Moscow, Prague (1600), Florence, Rome, Venice (1601), Prague (1604), Sicily, Prague, Morocco, Genoa, Alicante, Cadiz, Morocco (1605), Lisbon, Madrid (1606), Naples, Livorno, Florence, Ferrara, Prague (1607), Ferrara, Madrid, Valladolid (1608), Alicante, Palermo, Trapani, Messina, Syracuse, Palermo, Naples, and finally back to Spain (1610), where he was stranded for life, having exhausted all possibilities for cover elsewhere. One chance that presented itself a year later, when his widely respected brother Robert arrived in Madrid and put Anthony up in his lodgings, was spoiled by Anthony himself. Their brotherly arrangement had been in effect only a few months before Robert found out that Anthony had betrayed him behind his back in a move that could have put Robert in jail. It is fitting that Anthony, under the assumed title *El Conde de Leste* (which, to modern ears, sounds for all the world like a Wizard of Oz-like Count of the East), spent the last, obscure two or three decades of his life in Granada, the burial place of many a myth. I see him at one tapas bar after another, dining off stories so unbelievable that his interlocutors will have laughed at their own incredulity. How could they have known that those bizarre tales were true, albeit embroidered, and that the man telling them had been certified in his noble standing by more than half a dozen rulers?

By the time Shah ‘Abbas released Robert from his house confinement in 1609 and dispatched him to Europe with the same brief as his brother—create a military alliance against the Turks and expand trade—the young man had been through a lot. Anthony had spent only half a year in Persia; Robert had stayed for nine, during which he learned Persian and distinguished himself in military campaigns. His treatment by the shah was largely determined by events beyond his control, such as dips in Perso-European relations or nasty tidings about Anthony, when the shah would cold-shoulder his hostage for a while. Those who knew Robert as well as Anthony were unanimous in their judgment of the two: Robert was a true gentleman, Anthony a low scoundrel pretending to be a gentleman. Francis Cottington, English ambassador in Madrid, wrote in 1610: “Mr. [Robert] Sherley hath here gotten very great reputation through his wise and discreet carriage, he is judged both modest and moreover brave in his speech, diet and expenses, and in my poor opinion to those vices

37 Quoted in Davies 1967, p. 119.

which in Sir Anthony do so abound, in this many may be found the contraries."³⁸ In eloquent fulfillment of his superior dignity, Robert saw it as his duty, during his visit to one European city after another, to settle the debts and unpaid loans that Anthony had strewn across the continent.³⁹ Another turn in life that endears Robert to us is his marriage. Shortly before leaving Isfahan, Robert married a woman who, sixty years later, inscribed her name on the gravestone for herself and Robert as *THERESIA SAMPSONIA AMAZONITES SAMPHUFFI CIRCASSIAE PRINCIPIS FILIA*, translated by David W. Davies as "Theresia Sampsonia, native of the region of the Amazons, daughter of Samphuffus, prince of Circassia." The two were deeply attached to each other. On his way to the Christian courts, following the same northern route as Anthony, Robert spent the winter of 1608/09 in Kraków, where he and his party were entertained sumptuously. Leaving Teresia at a convent in the former Polish capital, he went on to Prague, where like Anthony he was appointed Knight of the Golden Spur, Milan, Florence, Rome, Spain, and Lisbon. There Teresia rejoined him in December 1609, and with only a few interruptions they spent the remaining years of Robert's life together.

That life, too, like Anthony's, cannot here be recounted in other than abbreviated form. From Lisbon, Robert and Teresia sailed on to the Netherlands in a futile attempt to obtain an import license for Persian silk from the States General, and then to England, where they remained for a little over a year. In 1612 they set sail from Gravesend for Persia, which they reached only after a harrowing two-and-a-half year voyage via India on which they were nearly killed both at sea and by the Portuguese. None of their English companions on the journey made it alive to Persia. Shah 'Abbas showed his gratitude by commissioning a new ambassadorship, to commence within a month. Robert managed to wrest three months out of his master before sailing to Goa and Lisbon. He, Teresia, and their entourage arrived on September 27, 1617, having shared their water and food with the Portuguese when provisions ran low at sea. There followed a long sojourn in Madrid until March 22, 1622. In diplomatic terms, nothing was achieved before the Sherleys set out eastwards once more, to Florence, where they were received by the Grand Duke of Tuscany, to Rome for a papal audience, Warsaw, and perhaps Moscow. December 1623 saw them back in England for the last time, where some progress on a Persian accord was being made with James I until his death in March 1625. Talks with the new court of Charles I were so spooked by the démarche of Naqd 'Ali Beg that Charles sent them all packing back to Persia under the command of Dodmore Cotton (1600–1628) to find out whether Robert was acting on orders of the shah or not.

Robert's third arrival in Isfahan, via Surat, India, and Gamron on the Persian Gulf, was the prelude to a tragic betrayal. After spending thirty years of his life in the faithful service of Shah 'Abbas, at a juncture when he stood in des-

perate need of recognition and confirmation of his status, the shah turned his back on him. For whatever reason—Davies refers to disappointments in Perso-English relations over the last years—the shah allowed his chief minister Muhammad 'Ali Beg to tell Cotton he was sure that

the Shah had not authorized Count Robert to make the proposals for trade which he had made in England. The English were welcome as were all other nations to trade in Persia, and when they no longer desired to trade they were free to depart. Mahomet Ali Beg declared that Sherley's letters of credence were not genuine, and that when he had showed them to Shah Abbas, the latter had destroyed them in a rage.⁴⁰

Exhausted and weakened by his travels and travails, Robert died in Qazvin on July 13, 1628.

What happened next was equally ugly. The Sherleys had a rival for the favor of Shah 'Abbas in the person of the Dutch painter Jan Lucasz. van Hasselt (b. before 1600, d. after 1653). Although he did not come to Isfahan until 1618, in the following of the intrepid Italian traveler Pietro della Valle (1586–1652), Van Hasselt established a remarkably successful relationship to 'Abbas. Thanks to his appointment as painter to the shah and his status as a free man, bolstered by his usefulness to the Dutch East India Company when it shouldered its way into Persia in 1623, Van Hasselt enjoyed far superior access to the ruler than the hostage Robert Sherley. Somehow, the Dutchman and the Englishman are largely lacking in the literature on one of them or the other, although they belong in each other's story. Van Hasselt was a nasty piece of work who was to bring about his own downfall within three years of an incident reported by a close observer of the scene, Thomas Herbert (1606–1682). A member of the Dodmore Cotton embassy, the young Herbert wrote an outstanding book on the mission, published in London in 1634: *A relation of some yeares travaile, begunne anno 1626. Into Afrique and the greater Asia, especially the territories of the Persian monarchie: ... Together with the proceedings and death of the three late ambassadours: Sir D. C., Sir R. S. and the Persian Nogdi-beg: as also the two great monarchs, the king of Persia and the great mogul*. As he tells it,

a Dutch Painter (who had served the King of Persia twenty yeares) complies with *Mahomet-Ally-Beg*, and pretending an Ingagement he was in, to one *Crole a Flemming* (for some monies Sir Robert Sherley had long since borrowed of him) he is beleueed, and got a Warrant from the *Caswee* or Iustice to seize vpon the Ladies goods, which wicked plot could not be so priuate, but was knowne by a faithfull honest Gentleman Master *Hedges*, a Follower of our Ambassadour, who straight-way acquaints the Lady with it.⁴¹ Teresia hastily tore out a piece of satin into which she threw her most valuable jewels and gave them to Hedges, who ran off just before

the Pagan Serjants, with *John the Flemming*, entred her Chamber, carried away what was valuable or vendible, his Horses, Camels, Vests, Turbants, a rich *Persian Dagger*, and some other things, but after narrow search finding no

38 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 232.

39 "William Trumbull, the English representative at Brussels, ... heard that Count Robert 'hath paid a good part of his brother Sir A. Sherley's desperate debts.'" Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 226.

40 Quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 276–77.

41 Quoted in Schwartz 2009, pp. 133–34.



Fig. 29



Fig. 30

Jewels (for they had seene him weare many and twas them, hee had woorried in his Ostrich appetite [he would have liked to swallow in his intemperate appetite]) made, angry and ashamed, they departed unsatisfied.⁴² Teresia was able to save that much of the situation, but she was then incarcerated for three years for having converted to Christianity from Islam as a child. Upon her release she made her way to Constantinople, where she remained for another three years. In December 1634 she moved to Rome, where she bought a house in Trastevere near the church of S. Maria della Scala, staying there until her death in 1668. Having brought Robert's remains to Rome, she had him buried in that church in advance of herself, beneath a plaque commemorating them both (fig. 44, p. 99).

"Turbants, a rich *Persian Dagger*": Anthony and Robert Sherley would not have gone down in the history books were it not for Robert's wardrobe, which, from the beginning, was remarkable and remarked upon. When in 1599 the brothers rode out for their first meeting with the shah, on his way back from the Uzbek wars, with the heads of hundreds (according to Don Juan no less than 24,000) of enemy soldiers on pikes, they were dressed to the nines. George Manwaring, in a first-person report:

In this sort was Sir Anthony and we of his company appointed: first, Sir Anthony himself in rich cloth of gold, his gown and his undercoat, his sword hanging in a rich scarf to the worth of a thousand crowns, being set with

pearl and diamonds, and on his head a turban according, to the worth of two thousand dollars, his boots embroidered with pearl and rubies; his brother, Mr Robert Sherley, likewise in cloth of gold, his gown and undercoat, with a rich turban on his head; his interpreter, Angelo, in cloth of silver, gown and undercoat; four in cloth of silver gowns, with undercoats of silk damask; four in crimson velvet gowns, with damask undercoats; four in blue damask gowns, with taffety undercoats; four in yellow damask, with their undercoats of a Persian stuff; his page in cloth of gold; his four footmen in carnation taffety.⁴³ Details of this kind are not reported at every stage, but whenever they are, the writers are impressed, sometimes overwhelmed, by the appearance of the Sherley parties and the value of their costumes and accessories. The brothers stage-crafted their public appearances, which were often accompanied by conspicuous acts of gift-giving. In 1606 Anthony "stayed five months in Safi and became the sensation of Morocco. He dressed magnificently, wearing not only the order of Saint Michel which Henry IV had given him, but the regalia of the orders of the Holy Ghost and of the Golden Fleece which no one had given him." When Moulay Abou Fares sent five hundred soldiers to conduct him and his party to court, "Count Anthony presented each man with a new turban, and after his arrival in Marrakesh he continued to be fabulously generous." His largesse was paid for by others. "Such was his charm and generosity that two Spanish mer-

⁴² Quoted in *ibid.*

⁴³ Quoted in Ross 1933, p. 204.



Fig. 31

Fig. 29 Aegidius Sadeler (ca. 1570–1629), *Husain 'Ali Beg*, 1601, engraving, 20 x 13.4 cm (Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, RP-P-1941-285)

Inscribed: *CVCHEIN OLLIBEAG INCLYTVS DOMINVS PERSA SOCIVS LEGATIONIS MAGNI SOPHI REGIS PERSARVM*
(Husain 'Ali Beg, friend of the illustrious Persian lord, legate to the Grand Sophi, king of Persia)

cum priuile. S. Cae. M.tis
(with privilege of His Imperial Majesty)

Husain 'Ali Beg ilchi fristadan hamrah-i hazrat-i amirzada
(Husain 'Ali Beg, legate despatched as travel companion to the exalted *amirzada* [son of the prince])

S: Cæs. M.tis sculpsit Aegidius Sadeler ad viuum delineavit Pragæ 1601
(Made after life by His Imperial Majesty's engraver Aegidius Sadeler in Prague, 1601)

Fig. 30 Aegidius Sadeler (ca. 1570–1629), *Sir Anthony Sherley*, datable to January 1601, engraving, 19.4 x 13.4 cm (London, The British Museum, P.1.169)

Inscribed: *ANTONIVS.SHERLEYNS.ANGLVS.EQVES.AVRATVS*
(Anthony Sherley, Englishman, Knight in the Order of the Golden Spur)

cum priuile. S. Cae. M.tis. (With privilege of His Imperial Majesty)



Fig. 32

Magni Sophi Persarum Legatus inuictissimo / Cæsari Ceterisque Principibus Christianis: huiusce Amicitie et Auctor et ductor
(Legate of the invincible Great Sophi of Persia to the emperor and other Christian princes, initiator and promoter of their mutual ties)

EX ORE, AD OS. (From the gaze [of the artist] to the face [of the sitter, that is to say, after life])

S. Cæs. M.tis sculpsit Aegidius Sadeler D[ono]D[edit]: (Aegidius Sadeler, printmaker to His Imperial Majesty, gave this offering as a present)

Fig. 31 Dominicus Custos (Dominicus de Coster; 1560–1612) after Aegidius Sadeler, *Sir Anthony Sherley*, datable to February 1601, engraving, 17.3 x 12.8 cm (London, National Portrait Gallery, NPG D26056)

Inscribed: *ANTON. SCHERLEYNS ANGL. EQ. AVRAT. MAG. SOPH. PERSAR. AD CAESAREM, etc. LEGATVS*. (Anthony Sherley, Englishman, knight in the Order of the Golden Spur, legate of the Great Sophi of Persia to the Emperor and others)

ANTONI Orator Persæ, Angliae, regis, ad istud / Excelso munus peruenis ingenio (O Anthony, legate of the Persian king to the king of England, you were given this appointment thanks to your great gifts)

In the entry on this print in Evelyn Shirley's book on the Sherley genealogy and coats of arms, *Stemmata Sherleiana* (1841, 2nd ed. 1873), three additional verses followed:



Fig. 33

Multorum mores hominum qui vidit et urbes,
A Persa Orator Rege Britannus hic est.

A Persis aliquem tanti factum esse Britannum,
Historici veteris num liber ullus habet?

Extremis placuit sed Lusitanus ut Indis,
Sic, extreme, favet Persa, Britanne, tibi.

(This is the Briton who saw the customs and cities of many peoples, the ambassador of the Persian king. / Does any book of an historian of old mention a Briton who was esteemed as highly by the Persians? / But just as the Lusitanian pleased the faraway Indians, so, greatest of the Britons, the Persian favored you.)

Fig. 32 Dominicus Custos (Dominicus de Coster; 1560–1612), *Husain 'Ali Beg*, 1601, engraving, dimensions unknown (reproduced from Babinger 1932, fig. 4)

Inscribed: *CVCHEINOLLIBEAG MAGNI SOPHI PERSARUM REGIS LEGATIONIS SOCIUS*, &c. (Husain 'Ali Beg, associate of the legate of the Great Sophi, king of Persia, etc.)
stratVrVs dVrCas beLLIs reX persa CeLebrIs, / Cæsar DIve tVas hVnC per aDIVIt opels. (The chronogram adds up to 1601.)

Fig. 33 Giovanni Orlandi (active 1590–1640), *Anthony Sherley*, 1601, engraving, 19.8 x 14 cm (London, National Portrait Gallery, London, NPG D33607)

Inscribed: *ANTONIVS SHERLEYNS ANGLVS EQVES AVRATVS / Magni Sophi Persarum Legatus Santiss. D.N. Clem. VIII. ceterisque*



Fig. 34

Principibus Christianis huius amicitiae et Auctor et Ductor (Anthony Sherley, Englishman, Knight of the Order of the Golden Spur, Legate of the Great Sophi of Persia to the Our Lord Clement VIII and other Christian princes, initiator and promoter of their mutual ties)

Ioannes Orlandi formis Romae in platea pasquini Anno Domini 1601. Super. P[er]messu (Made by Giovanni Orlandi in Rome in Piazza Pasquino, in the year 1601. With permission [of the authorities])

Fig. 34 Giovanni Orlandi (active 1590–1640) after Aegidius Sadeler (ca. 1570–1629), *Husain 'Ali Beg*, 1601, engraving, dimensions unknown (reproduced from Babinger 1932, fig. 5)

Inscribed: *CVCHEIN.OLLI.BEAG.INCLYTVS.DOMINVS.PERSA.SOCIUS. LEGAT. MAGNI.SOPHI.REGIS.PERSARUM. Qui die V. Aprilis 1601 ingressus est Romā exped. ad S. m. D.N. Clem. VIII. ab eos. Rege Persarum* (Husain 'Ali Beg, friend of the illustrious legate of the Great Sophi, king of the Persians who entered Rome on April 5, 1601, sent to His Holiness Our Lord Clement VIII by the king of the Persians)

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chants vied with one another in lending him money." Left holding the bag when he took his indecorous leave were a group of Jewish merchants, who were fleeced for 250,000 florins, and Christians, for 60,000 or 70,000. The Christians he denounced "as persons who were defrauding Abou Fares of customs duties, a charge that ruined many of them."⁴⁴

We are here dealing with modes of self-fashioning and self-presentation that are interwoven with affairs of state, private interests and, for Anthony, irresistible opportunities for embezzlement. Because of the basic hollowness of their enterprises in themselves, it is the shell that has remained, and its interplay with the parts of Persian, Russian, and European society that responded to it. As Julia Schleck argues, the "conclusion to the Sherleys' efforts to unite England with Persia—militarily, economically, and textually—remind us that the Sherleys' success was highly determined by the audience to which they addressed themselves."⁴⁵ The first and most important of these were the court and the merchant community. They were addressed in the *True Report* of 1600, which has the appearance of a serious news pamphlet. Publications of this kind often contained the texts of official documents, and so does this one. The documents concerned, following an "oration" by Sherley himself, were "Coppies," in English translation, of Sherley's letters of credence from "the great Sophie" and of "the free Priviledges ob[tai]ned by Sir Anthony Shierlie, of the great Sophie, for all Christians to trade and trafique into Persia." Sherley was bringing back the goods.

The alliance with Persia is thus presented as a *fait accompli*—Sherley the Englishman speaks with the voice of the Persian king and "You shall Credite him in whatsoever you shall demaunde, or he shal say, as mine owne Person." ... This speech act simultaneously lends a powerful boost to the credibility of the "True Report" and establishes the absolute credibility of Sherley's embassy in Europe ... The statement repeatedly enacts the living link between England and Persia through the medium of Anthony's body, a body that could then be metaphorically figured into the corps of a joint Anglo-Persian army ... Evoked as a witness to the accuracy of reported events, this letter *makes witnesses of its readers* to an embassy already metaphorically accomplished through the living link of Sherley himself.⁴⁶

The trouble was that the message was not accepted by the intended audience. The publication was suppressed twice, and the authenticity of its contents doubted. Sherley's credit was not restored. At once, he played the media card, lowering his pitch, in Parry's *New and large discourse* of 1601, to the general reader, who was easier to convince. (Parry had left the main party off the Dutch coast to hurry on to London to prepare for Anthony's re-entry, which never took place.) "As the many ... references to the Sherleys during this time attest, they were quite popular among the London populace reading

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Twin print portraits of the two were also made in Augsburg and Rome, two further destinations on their journey. In Augsburg they encountered a Flemish colleague of Sadeler's, Dominicus de Coster (1560–1612), better known by the Latinized form of his name, Dominicus Custos. Custos had a large production of portrait prints of the great persons of the earth, including Shah 'Abbas. His prints of Sherley and Husain were put into Part III of his series *Atrium heroicum* (Atrium of Heroes), published in Augsburg in 1601. Following that edition, the portraits were also issued as separate prints (figs. 31 and 32). The astute German historian Franz Babinger, who made one of the signal contributions to research on Anthony Sherley, writes with categorical insistence that Sadeler's portraits were the model for all copies to follow and that Custos adapted Sadeler's models "with minor changes" for his own.⁴⁸ This may be true of Custos's portrait of Anthony, in which he is shown not in armor, but in civilian dress and wearing a chain with a medal of honor. These kinds of changes could have been required by the sitter for the specific aims of the print. However, Custos's portrait of Husain departs from that of Sadeler in ways that suggest that it was made in the artist's studio during the six days of the party's stay in Augsburg in February 1601. The differences to which I refer are the substitution of a fur hat for the Shiite turban and the head itself, in its lighting, facial expression, and details of the pose, such as the uncovered ear. Whatever the truth of the matter, Dominicus's prints, with different captions than those of Sadeler, are careful productions and not mechanical copies after Sadeler.

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The similarities in composition, format, and lettering of the pairs leave no room for doubt that they came into being in

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To say that Robert was more aware of the possibilities offered by the visual arts for the propagation of his image is a gross understatement. When he was received by Pope Paul V—"after many months"; evidently the Pope was not desperate to meet him—on September 28, 1609,⁵² he let no grass grow under his feet before seeing to the publication of a portrait engraving by Matthias Greuter, provided with a small vignette of the audience itself (fig. 35). What is most striking about the portrait is that Robert is dressed in Persian garb and wearing a turban of a special kind. Alexandra van Puyvelde of the *Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire* in Brussels confirmed upon request that the turban is of a Persian variety, both in its fabric—light, perhaps silk, with a motif of small lozenges—and in its bulk. Also Persian is the upright rod sticking out of it, called a *taj*, around which the cloth of the turban is wound. The *taj* was worn from the late fifteenth century on by the *Qizilbash*, the Turkmen followers of the Safavid shahs, mainly in the military. It was taken on by Persians as well; in the seventeenth century it was still in use, though the original long rod had been shortened.

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⁵¹ He may not have followed the process through all of its steps. His own name seems to be misspelled in the caption around the frame of Sadeler's print. SHERLEYNS is engraved where SHERLEYUS would seem to be meant, a mistake that is easy to make in reading a handwritten "U". However, since the form with "N" is repeated both by Custos and Orlandi, there is the possibility that Anthony somehow or other preferred SHERLEYNS to SHERLEYUS.

⁵² The audience was recorded in the *Diario del ceremoniere* of the Vatican: "1609 Septembris 28. Ingressus est Romam dominus comes don Robertus Shcerleys Anglus, alter orator regis Persarum, missus ad Sanctissimum Dominum Nostrum post multos menses." [c. 509B-510] Published in Orbaan 1920, p. 8. Robert is called "the other ambassador." On August 27, his Persian counterpart had already been received by Roman noblemen.



Fig. 35 Matthias Greuter (1564–1638), *Sir Robert Sherley* (with vignette of his audience with Pope Paul V on September 28, 1609), engraving, 14.5 x 9.7 cm (trimmed inside the plate mark) (Collection of Loekie and Gary Schwartz, from an album owned by the Earl of Portland, William Bentinck [1649–1707])

Inscribed: *ROBERTVS SHERLEY ANGLVS COMES CAESARE EQVES AVRAT* (Robert Sherley, Englishman, Count in the Emperor's Order of the Golden Spur)

die 29. septembris (September 29)

Magni Sophi Persarū Regis Legatus ad SSmū D.N. Paulū P.P.V. Ceterosq. Principes Christianos. Ingress. Romam solenni pompa die 28. Septemb. 1609. aetatis sue. 28. (Legate of the Great Sophi, king of Persia, to His Holiness Our Lord Paul V and other Christian princes. Entered Rome in solemn ceremony on the 28th day of September 1609 at the age of 28.)

Supm. lic. / MG f. / Si vendino alla Pace / cū priuilegio. (Under license. MG [Initials of Matthias Greuter, intertwined] made it. On sale at the [Piazza della] Pace. With privilege.)



Fig. 36 Diego de Astor (1584–ca. 1650) after Matthias Greuter (1564–1638), *Sir Robert Sherley*, engraving, 17.8 x 12.9 cm (London, National Portrait Gallery, NPG D33608)

Inscribed: as in fig. 35, except for Robert Sherley's age, which is given as 30.

Supm. lic. / MG f. / Si vendino alla Pace (Under license. MG [Initials of Matthias Greuter, intertwined] made it. On sale at the [Piazza della] Pace)

dignitaries with this hat on very rare occasions, and in these unique circumstances it was decorated with a Christian crucifix to respect the beliefs of these special recipients.

This hat was also called the Taj-Hayedari, pronounced /tazh-high-eh-dahr-ee/, which means “Crown of Haydar.” Wrapped with a cloth turban made of cotton or linen, it was then sometimes wrapped with a decorative silk layer. The turban was also carefully arranged in order to display twelve distinct symbolic folds. These turbans were probably sewn on a hat form, rather than wrapped every time, as they are often seen pictured sitting on a pillow or tipped on a person’s head intact. As they were given in ceremonies by the Shah, it would make sense that the entire hat was sewn together.⁵³

If this is correct, then the cross was not added by Robert in deference to the Pope, as one might think; rather, it was included in the design by Shah ‘Abbas out of respect for the religious feelings of non-Muslim protégés like Robert. Gestures of this kind as well as occasional suggestive remarks by the shah contributed to the speculation that he was considering converting to Christianity, a supposition upon which Christian emissaries like the Sherleys could and did play on in Kraków, Rome, and elsewhere.

Van Puyvelde goes on to examine Robert’s other garments:

The cloak he seems to be wearing is only partly visible. The cloth may well be Persian; ogival and vegetal motifs on velvet, lampas and other fabrics were widely available. The collar looks like fur, which was fairly common. A non-Persian element in the dress is the clasp at the top of the cape, which I have not encountered in Persian garments of this kind and which looks European to me. The robe beneath the cape may be Persian. The buttons with their decorative horizontal bands (called a “frogged front” in English) was widespread in Persia, adapted from Western models. The band across his chest does not look Persian to me.⁵⁴

In the vignette, Sherley kneels on a carpet at the feet of the enthroned Pope, who makes a gesture of benediction. Behind him stand three companions in turbans. Seated at the far wall are four cardinals. The inscriptions frame the image and the event rather pompously. Around the portrait in majuscules: “Robert Sherley, English count, Knight of the Golden Spur of the Emperor.” In the frame of the vignette is the date September 28, 1609, with a tablet below containing the text “Legate of the Great Sophi, king of Persia, to His Holiness Our Lord Paul V and other Christian princes. Entered Rome in solemn ceremony on the 28th day of September 1609 at the age of 28.” (Remarkably, in a copy after Greuter’s print by Diego de Astor, the same caption is repeated, except that Robert’s age is changed from 28 to 30 [fig. 36]. Robert’s year of birth is not documented, but is assumed to have fallen in 1581, making him 28 or at the most 29 in 1609.) The audience was a

personal success for Robert, if not for the interests of the shah. “The Pope made Count Robert a count and a chamberlain of honor, and what was more lucrative, granted him the right to sell blessed rosaries, crosses, medals, and images, although of course the Papal letter was not quite worded in that way.”⁵⁵

In the small circles in which they moved, Robert and Teresia became sights to see for their rich, exotic dress. As the representative of the shah, Sherley habitually appeared in honorific high-status Persian attire made of silk and silk velvet; since negotiations concerning the silk trade were part of his brief, this was particularly appropriate. The churchman and historian Thomas Fuller (1608–1661), a near-contemporary, observed that Sherley “much affected to appear in foreign Vestes; and, as if his Clothes were his limbs, accounted himself never ready till he had something of the Persian Habit about him.”⁵⁶ People were so accustomed to seeing Sherley in Persian attire that the Venetian ambassador in London commented that, exceptionally, “he went in English dress” when he was received by James I in 1611.⁵⁷ In their Persian guise, Robert and Teresia stood for viable contact between East and West. Here was an English knight representing—in his very body, as Fuller says—an eastern ruler, accompanied by a Christian princess of the east. That the knight was moreover decorated by the Emperor and the Pope added to Robert’s significance as a bridge between countries and courts, if not peoples. Robert’s way with religion—sometimes, like Anthony, propounding adherence to the Catholic church, sometimes to the church of England, with apparent sympathy for Islam as well—added to this valuable function. He and Teresia were, however, constantly on the move, which prevented them from building a “court” of their own where they might have established a permanent Persian presence in the West in a spirit that rose above confessional differences. As it is, almost everything depended on their appearance and charisma.

And in that respect, at a given fortunate moment, they hit the jackpot. In the summer of 1622, in Rome, their peregrinations crossed those of an up-and-coming artist who was to become the very author of grand appearance and charisma, Anthony van Dyck (1599–1641). Van Dyck was just back from his first stay in England, where he executed a confidential commission for James I and painted what Karen Hearn calls a “cutting-edge portrait of the leading aristocratic art patron and collector [Thomas Howard, Lord] Arundel.” These contacts paved the way for portrait commissions of English people in Italy. Among them was George Gage (ca. 1582–1638), “who also had his portrait painted by van Dyck in Rome. It may have been Gage who recommended van Dyck to the Shirleys.”⁵⁸ However this may be, during the few weeks between July 22 and August 29, Van Dyck painted life-size portraits of a standing Robert and a seated Teresia (figs. 40 and 41). Teresia’s somewhat uncomfortable pose may be explainable by physical infirmity. Twelve years earlier, in Madrid, an observer had written of the couple:

55 Davies 1967, p. 228.

56 Quoted in Hearn 2007, p. 52.

57 Davies 1967, p. 236.

58 Hearn 2007, pp. 40, 52–55.

53 “16th-Century Safavid Persian Headwear: Part II; Styles for Men, by Master Safi al-Khansaa’ OL, CB, OM, OT, KOE,” accessed March 31, 2013 at http://www.scapersianu.com/Class%20Notes/mens_hat.pdf.

54 Alexandra van Puyvelde, in an e-mail of November 7, 2012.

Sir Robert came [to the Spanish court] well attended, but with no Englishmen or women, having lost them all in Persia, were some of them were poisoned, and so was he himself and his wife, and she hath not yet totally recovered it yet, but it fell down into her legs, and so she passeth with it, but with much pain.⁵⁹

It would not seem too much to conjecture that Teresia's complaint was not a passing thing, and that she was unable to endure the rigors of sitting for a portrait in any other pose than with splayed legs on a low bench.

The chief feature of the portraits is the spectacular gold- and silver-colored attire of the couple. That of Robert is indisputably Persian; the cloak is surmised to be a *khil'at* or honorific garment of a particular, nearly mystically exalted kind. The shah would invest a departing ambassador with a *khil'at* as a token of his imperial immanence in the ambassador's person.⁶⁰ More exceptional was the right to wear a *taj*. "Sometimes," wrote Pietro della Valle, quoted by Willem Floor, "His Majesty, as a token of esteem for a foreigner, makes him a Kizilbashi, by bestowing on him the *taj*, this, however, is rarely the case." "In fact," Floor adds to this quotation in paraphrase, "the only person, he [della Valle] learnt, to whom had befallen this honor was Robert Sherley."⁶¹ This is surely one of the high points in Persian-European relations. To my mind it is second only to the gift to 'Abbas in January 1608 by the bishop of Kraków, Cardinal Bernard Maciejowski (1548–1608), of one of the great treasures of European art, the Bible of Louis IX (known since 1916 as the Morgan Picture Bible⁶²). So numerous and splendid are the illuminations in the manuscript that no one could imagine it to have been made for anyone but a king. The gift was instigated by Pope Clement VIII as part of his drive to bring Persia into the Christian fold.⁶³ In fact, there might be a close connection between the two events. Within a month of the receipt of this royal gift, 'Abbas released Robert from his semi-captivity, married him off to a lady of the Safavid court and dispatched him on his ambassadorial mission. After a stop in Moscow, his first long stay abroad was nowhere else but Kraków.

Van Dyck's Teresia is more down to earth, in color-matching garments of Ottoman or European origin. Three drawings made by the artist in preparation for the paintings have survived in his Italian sketchbook in the British Museum (figs. 37–39). One of them shows Robert in profile rather than frontal pose, with the apparent intent of recording with some precision the cut of his clothing. Van Dyck inscribed the drawing *Ambasciatore de Persia in Roma* and *drapo doro / le figure et gli fogliagi / de colori differenti / de veluto* (gold cloth / figures and foliage / [in] velvet of different colors). Another sheet bears the slightest outline of the composition of Robert's portrait and a



Fig. 37 Anthony van Dyck (1599–1641), *Sir Robert Sherley*, from Van Dyck's Italian sketchbook, datable to the period of the sitter's visit to Rome between July 22 and August 29, 1622, pen and ink on paper, 19.9 x 15.7 cm (London, The British Museum, ME 1957, 1214.206.62r)

Inscribed: *Ambasciatore de Persia / in Roma / drapo doro / le figure et gli fogliagi / de colori differenti / de veluto* (Ambassador of Persia in Rome / gold cloth / figures and foliage / [in] velvet of different colors)

third a sketch for the portrait of Teresia, inscribed *habito et maniera di Persia* (Persian costume and manner). Although this is not literally true of Teresia's clothes, Van Dyck endowed her with an air that has always been interpreted as one of Oriental magnificence. On the left, a monkey plays with a frame on a table. In Italy the portraits, which soon passed by inheritance into the Egremont Collection in Petworth House, made such an impression that they were still being written about half a century later. Gian Pietro Bellori wrote in 1672 in his life of Anthony van Dyck: "During this time Sir Robert Shirley, an Englishman, had come to Rome while traveling about Christendom as the ambassador of Abbas, king of Persia, who had sent him primarily to Gregory XV for the campaign against his enemy, the Turk; and Anthony portrayed this gentleman and his wife in Persian dress, enhancing the beauty of the portraits with the charm of their exotic garments."⁶⁴ On the

59 From a letter by Walsingham Gresley to Sir Thomas Pelham, dated Madrid, January 22, 1610. Shirley 1848, p. 215.

60 Riding 2008, p. 49.

61 Floor 1999, p. 285. With thanks to Professor Rudolph P. Matthee for referring me to this rich, too little known source, with its exhaustive descriptions of Persian costume.

62 New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS 638.

63 Gary Schwartz, Schwartzlist 292, "The caress of civilizations," available online at www.garyschwartzarthistorian.nl/schwartzlist/?id=128

64 Bellori 2005, p. 254.



Fig. 38 Anthony van Dyck (1599–1641), *Lady Teresa Sherley*, from Van Dyck's Italian sketchbook, datable to the period of the sitter's visit to Rome between July 22 and August 29, 1622, pen and ink, 19.9 x 15.1 cm (London, The British Museum, ME 1957, 1214.206.61v)

Inscribed: 61 / 57 | *habito et maniera di Persia* (Persian costume and manner)



Fig. 39 Anthony van Dyck (1599–1641), *Sir Robert Sherley and Attendant*, study for the painted portrait in Petworth House, from Van Dyck's Italian sketchbook, pen and ink on paper, 19.9 x 15.6 cm (London, The British Museum, ME 1957, 1214.206.63r)

basis of information provided by the late Patricia Baker, Karen Hearn ventured the following description of Robert's dress:

Robert stands, holding a bow and arrows, wearing his overmantle (or *balapush*) half off the shoulders, in a characteristically Persian style. His folded turban cloth, *balapush*, sash and close-fitting sleeved underrobe (or *qaba*) would all have been made in Persia, probably in the royal tailoring department which handled the most important honorific garments. Although no textiles identical to those depicted by van Dyck survive, fragments of similar fabrics—cut and voided velvets—are today in the Textile Museum in Washington.⁶⁵

Yet a nearly identical textile does survive. In the present volume, Jennifer Scarce illustrates a Persian silk and gold velvet coat of strikingly similar design to Robert's, a coat that Czar Mikhail Romanov presented to Queen Christina of Sweden in 1644 and that is preserved in the Royal Armory in

Stockholm (fig. 26, p. 66). We see the same combination of large human figures floating in graceful poses on a flat, golden cloth that is otherwise adorned with delicately spaced floral motifs.

To wear these clothes properly, one had to have precise information, preferably acquired at the Safavid court, as Robert had done. There is every reason to believe that his attire in the Van Dyck portrait, concerning which the artist and sitter conferred in detail, is perfectly authentic. One does not get the same feeling of complete confidence in Rubens's portrait in Kassel of the Antwerp merchant Nicolas de Respaigne of the following year, 1623 (fig. 54, p. 116), let alone from Rembrandt's self-portrait in oriental costume of 1633, in the Musée du Petit Palais, Paris. These paintings of Europeans in oriental clothing, from three countries, are evidence enough to indicate the existence of a fashion to which the Sherleys contributed not only with portrait commissions but in their public appearances as well.

During their last sojourn in England, between December 1623 and March 1626—probably sooner rather than later in

⁶⁵ Hearn 2007, p. 52.



Fig. 40 Anthony van Dyck (1599–1641), *Sir Robert Sherley*, 1622, oil on canvas, 200 x 133.4 cm (Petworth House, The Egremont Collection)



Fig. 41 Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641), *Lady Teresia Sherley*, 1622, oil on canvas, 200 x 133.4 cm (Petworth House, The Egremont Collection)



Fig. 42 Unknown British artist, *Sir Robert Sherley*, ca. 1623–25, oil on canvas, 195 x 105 cm (Trustees of the Berkeley Will Trust)



Fig. 43 Unknown British artist, *Lady Teresia Sherley*, ca. 1623/24, oil on canvas, 214 x 124 cm (Trustees of the Berkeley Will Trust)

this period—the Sherleys were painted once more in life size, this time by an anonymous English painter (figs. 42 and 43).⁶⁶ Teresia—in a standing pose that weakens the argument for her physical impairment—again wears European dress, of a splendid kind that Sheila Canby compares to the clothing in portrait prints of Elizabeth Stuart (1612/13) and Anne of Denmark (1616), while “her jewelled crown and veil represent a variation on the headdress of Isfahani women of the first quarter of the seventeenth century.”⁶⁷ In an astonishing detail, Teresia holds a long pistol in her right hand, conspicuously silhouetted against a large, empty red chair, as if aiming at the

back of a person sitting there. With her left hand she fingers a watch, often a symbol of transience or death, hanging on a bright red ribbon dangling from her waist. The explanations offered so far for this excitingly unusual iconography fail to link convincingly with the imagery. By comparison, Robert is portrayed in a more conventional pose, his left arm akimbo on his side, holding a rod in his extended right hand. He wears the same robe as in the portrait by Van Dyck, over a garment of which Canby writes that its pattern “relates to silks produced in the last quarter of the sixteenth century ... Sherley’s voluminous turban and silk sash would have also [like the robe of honor] been part of the gift of ceremonial costume presented by Shah ‘Abbas.”⁶⁸ Neither of these pairs of portrait

66 Christine Riding states that Robert was also painted by Richard Greenbury. Riding 2008, p. 49, no source given.

67 Canby 2009, p. 57.

68 Ibid., p. 56.



Fig. 44 The funerary slab for Robert Sherley and Teresia Sampson in S. Maria della Scala, Rome. The inscription reads:

D[eo] O[ptimo] M[aximo] / ROBERTO SHERLEÏO /
 ANGLO NOBILISSIMO / COMITI CESAREO EQUITI
 AURATO / RODULFI II IMPERAT[ori] LEGATO AD
 SCIA ABBAM / REGEM PERSARUM(,) (et) EIUSDEM
 REGIS SECUNDO / AD ROMANO[s] PONT[ifices]
 IMPERATOR[es] REGES / HISPANIAE ANGLIAE
 POLONIAE MOSCOVIAE / MOGORRI(,) ALIOSQUE
 EUROPAE PRINCIPES / INCLITO ORATORI / THERE-
 SIA SAMPSONIA AMAZONITES / SAMPHUFFI CIR-
 CASSIAE PRINCIPIS FILIA / VIRO AMATISSIMO ET

SIBI POSUIT / ILLIVS OSSIBUS SUIQUE LARIBUS /
 IN URBEM E PERSIDE / PIETATIS ERGO TRANSLA-
 TIS / ANNOS NATA LXXIX / MDCLXVIII

(To God, the Best and Greatest. For Robert Sherley, most noble Englishman, Count Palatine, Knight of the Golden Spur, Emperor Rudolph II's envoy to Shah Abbas, the King of Persia, (and) the representative of the same King to the Popes of Rome, to Emperors, to the Kings of Spain, Eng-

land, Poland, Muscovy, and the Mogul Empire, distinguished ambassador to other European princes. Theresia Sampsonia, native of the land of the Amazons, daughter of Samphuffus, Prince of Circassia, set up [this monument] for her most beloved husband and for herself, as a resting place for his bones—brought to Rome from Persia for dutiful devotion's sake—and for her own, aged seventy-nine. 1668.)

has ever been on permanent public display, which has limited their impact. Nonetheless they were there, backing up the glamorous image of the Three English Brothers and their adventures in the East.

"One must inevitably ask oneself if the story of the Sherleys is important, and the answer is, of course, that it is not." With that judgment of David W. Davies, as great an authority as he may be, and however much I am indebted to him for all that I know about the Sherleys, I can no longer agree. If Robert's release in February 1608 and his sojourn in Kraków were reciprocal gestures for the gift to Shah 'Abbas of the Bible of Louis IX, he played a key role in a great game between sovereigns. His mission may have failed, but that was not all there was to it. Legends and myths, costume and fashion, stories and images—let alone superior works of art—are just as much part of the human experience as the successful conclusion of

treaties and contracts. "The Sherley myth" that Roger Savory debunks fed the imaginations and spurred the ambitions of younger adventurers. Anthony's fabrications and Robert's vanity entered a mix that also included allusions in Shakespeare, the masterful portraits of Van Dyck, and a burgeoning body of written and visual facts and imaginings about the East. As futile as they may have been in terms of diplomatic history, they were precious incunabula of European orientalism. Four hundred years after their death, no study of Persia and Europe should try to ignore Anthony's magniloquence and Robert's magnificence.