



Ideas beyond Borders: Studies in Transnational Intellectual History

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES IN MODERN ITALIAN CULTURE

**KNOWLEDGE AND REPRESENTATION
OF THE WORLD IN ITALY FROM THE SIXTEENTH
TO THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY**

Edited by Guido Abbattista



Global Perspectives in Modern Italian Culture

Global Perspectives in Modern Italian Culture presents a series of unexplored case studies from the sixteenth to the twentieth century, each demonstrating how travellers, scientists, Catholic missionaries, scholars and diplomats coming from the Italian peninsula contributed to understandings of various global issues during the age of early globalization. It also examines how these individuals represented different parts of the world to an Italian audience, and how deeply Italian culture drew inspiration from the increasing knowledge of world “Otherness.” The first part of the book focuses on the production of knowledge, drawing on texts written by philosophers, scientists, historians and numerous other first-hand eyewitnesses. The second part analyses the dissemination and popularization of knowledge by focusing on previously understudied published works and initiatives aimed at learned Italian readers and the general public. Written in a lively and engaging manner, this book will appeal to scholars and students of early modern and modern European history, as well as those interested in global history.

Guido Abbattista is Professor of Modern History at the University of Trieste.

Ideas beyond Borders: Studies in Transnational Intellectual History

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Edited by
Guido Abbattista

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8 A Persian Matteo Ricci

Muḥammad Zamān's seventeenth-century translation of *De Christiana Expeditione apud Sinas*

Francesco Calzolaio – Stefano Pellò

In a short paragraph devoted to the Persian dignitaries (*manṣabdār*) at the court of the Mughal emperor Awrangzeb (r. 1658–1707), the Venetian traveller Niccolò Manucci, who was in India between ca. 1655 and 1720, introduces the reader to an Iranian polyglot émigré by the name of Muḥammad Zamān,¹ whom the Venetian describes as follows:

Among them I had the opportunity of making the acquaintance of Muhamedzama (Muḥammad Zamān), a man of great intelligence, whom Shāh 'Abbās, King of Persia, sent to Rome as a student early in his reign. He had to learn how to answer our missionaries who in Persia confounded the mullas and doctors of Maomedan faith. This Muhammad Zaman, well acquainted with his own faith, by study came to know the Truth; and instead of becoming more stubborn in the faith of Muhammad and of Ali, he renounced it and turned Christian, and taking the name of Paul, called himself Paulo Zaman. He then went back to Persia. There the learned man of Persia became aware by their talk with him that he was more favorable to the Christians than the Mahomedans (although he concealed his being a Christian). They began to speak against him, and fearing some harm, he fled from Persia and claimed protection from Shah Jahan. He was given the pay of a *mansabdār* and sent to Kashmir to join the other Persians. On the occasion when they were sent for by Aurangzeb, he came to Dihli and made friends with Christians, chiefly with Father Buzeo (Busée). They discussed theological questions, he having several Latin books. Yet, although he was, and declared himself to be, a Christian, his way of life differed in no respect from that followed by Mahomedans.²

Much like Manucci himself, the Safavid nobleman described in these lines seems exemplary of the variously idealized figure of the go-between in the early modern era, or, to use the French expression coined by Louise Bénat-Tachot and Serge Gruzinski, *porteur culturel*.³ While Manucci's biographical and intellectual figure received much attention, the same does not, however,

apply to Muḥammad Zamān.⁴ Yet the life of this rather obscure character and the role he played in the intellectual world of seventeenth-century northern India seem no less tortuous and compelling than those of his Venetian peer. The reference to the “Latin books” near the end of the paragraph, in particular, hints at a neglected net of linguistic and socio-textual connections projecting some products of early modern Italian culture onto the wider Eurasian mirror of the Persianate world.⁵ This article is devoted to the exploration of these connections by considering Muḥammad Zamān’s role as a mediator of Italian culture in the Persianate world.

As a matter of fact, two Persian-language works bear Muḥammad Zamān’s name, and both point to a close connection with Italy and Italian culture. These are two translations, perhaps the very first renderings of European literary works in Persian in the modern age: the *Ḥadīqa-yi ‘ālam* (The garden of the world), the translation of a treatise on medicine and natural philosophy, written in Italian; and the *Chīn-nāma* (The Book of China), a rendition of the Latin version of the seminal book on China by the Italian Jesuit Matteo Ricci, *De Christiana Expeditione apud Sinas*. After a brief discussion of Muḥammad Zamān’s historical identity and connection to Italy through the Carmelites, we will tackle the main themes of this book by focusing on the latter work, the *Chīn-nāma*, and introducing the first-ever comparative analysis (tentative as it may be) by reading it alongside Matteo Ricci’s *De Christiana Expeditione*.

The result of a translator translating another translator, Zamān’s Persian reading of Ricci’s *China* is a fine example of the unexpected turns that a certain Italian “global” regard for Asia could take when filtered through the lens of a still largely misunderstood multilingual praxis.⁶ Rather than as a mere trace of an evanescent Italian presence in the early modern Persianate *oecumene*, we look at Zamān’s translation as a case study of how a text by a “global” Italian intellectual could be recast and further globalized through a dominant Eurasian precolonial linguistic practice such as literary Persian. In other words, we preliminarily show how Zamān’s work can be read as a textual episode of the de-provincialisation of Matteo Ricci’s *China* – thinking, however, much more of the Jesuit concept of *provincia* than of Dipesh Chakrabarty’s postcolonial “provincialized” Europe.

8.1 A translator, a painter, and two Italian books: Retracing the life of Muḥammad Zamān

Reconstructing the life of the educated Safavid nobleman that Manucci met in India is no easy task. There is, in fact, almost no trace of Manucci’s “Muhamedzama” in historical sources. To reconstruct his life and understand how and why this learned Iranian nobleman came to translate two Italian books we must make do with the few pieces of information we can scrape from contemporary sources, as well as from the two Persian translations themselves.

The short biography of Muḥammad Zamān written by Manucci himself in his *Storia do Mogor*, which is by far the most complete account available of this enigmatic figure, constitutes the starting point for our discussion. According to the Venetian traveller, the two met at Awrangzeb's court soon after the latter ascended to the throne. This indicates that Muḥammad Zamān was in India in about 1660. Furthermore, Manucci states that Muḥammad Zamān was born in Iran, that he was a convert and that, in India, he enjoyed the company of Western missionaries. In this regard, Manucci also reports that Muḥammad Zamān read "Latin books" with a Western missionary, Father Buzeo. This seems to show that the Safavid émigré had a certain proficiency in Latin.

These few main points regarding Muḥammad Zamān's life suggest that Manucci's "Muhamedzama" is identical to a certain "Zamān" mentioned in the chronicles of the Carmelites' mission in Persia: a young man of noble origin, whom the Safavid king Shāh Ṣafī (r. 1629–1642) had sent to the Carmelites in 1629 to be taught Italian and who, in 1641, aged twenty-three and proficient in "two or three languages," eventually became a convert with the name of "Paul Armand."⁷

Nothing more is known of this high-ranking convert. However, it should be noted that the Muḥammad Zamān responsible for the Persian translation of Ricci's book, as we anticipated in the introduction, also translated an Italian book on medicine and natural philosophy, the *Idea del Giardino del mondo* (The idea of the garden of the world) by Tommaso Tomai, a sixteenth-century scholar from Ravenna.⁸ The translation, titled *Ḥadīqa-yi 'ālam*, is preserved in a unique manuscript currently held at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris.⁹ In the preface to the text, the translator announces his identity as Muḥammad Zamān *farangī-khwān* (lit., "reader of Frankish language"), and states that he had achieved translation while travelling from Isfahan to the Mughal domains, in order to relieve the boredom of the journey and to further sharpen his linguistic skills.¹⁰ This proves that Muḥammad Zamān, much like the "Zamān" of the Carmelites' chronicle, was proficient in both Italian and Latin.

Things seem thus to come full circle: the "Zamān" who converted to Christianity in Safavid Iran is the same Muḥammad Zamān who translated Tomai's treatise and Ricci's book. If we accept the veracity of the Carmelites' chronicle, stating that he was aged twenty-three in 1641, he must have been born in Safavid Iran in 1618. Having been sent to the Carmelites in his youth, he learned Latin and Italian and eventually converted to Christianity. Later on, around 1650, he left for India, translating Tomai's treatise on the way. He then settled there, where he kept company with Western missionaries and eventually met Manucci. His translation of Ricci's work also dates to this later period of his life. More precisely, the translation must have been completed sometime between 1647 and 1667, for in the introduction to the *Chīn-nāma* Muḥammad Zamān states that he found Ricci's book in Father Buzeo's library – the same Buzeo mentioned by the Venetian traveller as

the closest Christian friend of “Muhamedzama” – and that it was he who encouraged him to take up the task of translating it to Persian.¹¹ Given that Buzeo left Europe for India in 1647 and died there in 1667, these two dates constitute respectively the *terminus post* and *ante quem* of the translation.¹²

Several scholars proposed to identify our Muḥammad Zamān *farangī-khwān* with a famous contemporary painter by the same name, Muḥammad Zamān *farangī-sāz* (lit., “painting Frankish-style”), who was active in Safavid Iran during the second half of the seventeenth century. On the basis of the above reconstruction, however, this identification – which is taken at face value even by the editor of the modern critical edition of the *Chīn-nāma*, Lu Jin – appears problematic.¹³

First, there are chronological issues. The biography of the painter Muḥammad Zamān is, to say the least, murky. Nevertheless, his professional life spans from shortly after Shāh Sulaymān’s (r. 1666–1694) second accession in 1668, when he produced his first works for the Safavid royal household, to the late 1690s. He died sometime before 1701.¹⁴ It could be argued that Muḥammad Zamān left Iran for India around 1650, then came back some ten years later and joined the Safavid court. However, and this brings us to the second issue, if they were one and the same, the man would have lived a second life. This identification would imply that Muḥammad Zamān was born in Iran, joined the missionaries there as a child, learned Latin and Italian, and moved to India, where he perfected his skills as a translator of works in Western European languages. Then he experienced a major career and life change: aged about fifty, he suddenly abandoned language learning for painting. Nothing, in fact, suggests that he had any interest in art before the 1660s. First, there are no artistic works by Muḥammad Zamān before 1668. Second, Manucci makes no mention of the artistic prowess of the man he met at Awrangzeb’s court. Third, neither do any of the missionaries with whom he kept company in Iran and India. This is particularly important because, at the time, Christian missionaries in Asia relied heavily on the visual arts as a vehicle for evangelization and were thus always on the lookout for painters.¹⁵ In this regard, it is worth pointing out that European painting was in vogue in seventeenth-century Iran. Under Shāh ‘Abbās I (r. 1588–1629), Italian art could be purchased directly at the Venetian Alessandro Scudenoli’s shop in Isfahan, and the chronicles of the Carmelites in Iran report that, at the time of Shāh ‘Abbās II (r. 1642–1666), the missionaries had been unsuccessfully looking for painters to take advantage of the shah’s interest in European art entering the court.¹⁶ Oddly enough, Muḥammad Zamān left for India precisely around this time. Furthermore, considering the Indian context, this was some fifty years before the Jesuits in Goa had been so set on having a painter that they had to virtually kidnap an Englishman to serve as one.¹⁷ Against this background, it is hard to believe that, had the Carmelites in Iran (or the Jesuits in India) had a convert painter of noble birth at hand, they would have made no mention of him.

To sum up, were we to “merge” the two Muḥammad Zamān(s) we would be left with an Iranian convert who, having learned Latin and Italian, went to India, suddenly picked up painting there at the age of fifty, came back to Iran and, being a remarkably quick learner, impressed the Safavid royal household with his artistic skills, thus entering royal service. Never to translate a European book again, he died in Iran aged about eighty. Between the story of a man with a remarkably long life marked by a sudden, radical career and life change at about fifty, and that of two different men, a translator and a painter, who lived two different lives and had two different, hard-to-acquire and highly specialised sets of skills, we would rather believe in the second.

8.2 Translating Matteo Ricci in Mughal India

Matteo Ricci’s book was originally written in Italian. As is well known, however, the original Italian text passed unnoticed until the beginning of the twentieth century, when it was finally discovered and brought to light by Pietro Tacchi Venturi.¹⁸ Until then, European – or, more correctly, Eurasian – readers had to turn to its Latin version and its various translations. Another Jesuit, Nicholas Trigault, had in fact done a marginally reworked Latin translation of Ricci’s work, which he published under his own name in 1615. As the existence of multiple editions of Trigault’s work as well as of French, German, Spanish and Italian translations show, his translation circulated widely and eventually became a must-read on Ming China in early modern Europe.¹⁹ Ricci’s work thus became Trigault’s.

Given that Zamān was proficient in Italian and had contemporary Italian-language works at his disposal, as attested by his translation of Tomai’s *Idea del giardino del mondo*, the possibility that he carried out his Persian translation based on Ricci’s original cannot be ruled out. This is even more true since Trigault started translating Ricci’s book during his return journey from China, and he stopped in India on his way to Europe. Had he translated the original Italian version of the book, Zamān would have given Persian-reading intellectuals access to Ricci’s book about three centuries before its discovery and publication in Italy. A comparative reading of the two texts, however, shows that this is not the case. The toponyms and ethnonyms mentioned in the *Chīn-nāma* are all consistent with the Latin text. Furthermore, whenever Trigault’s rendition of Ricci’s book differs from the original, the *Chīn-nāma* consistently follows Trigault’s text. This is all conclusive proof that Zamān translated Trigault’s version of the book.

Having determined the original work from which Zamān carried out his translation, it is now time to turn our attention to its quality, and on how it stands vis-à-vis the Latin original. Reading the *Chīn-nāma* against Trigault’s *De Christiana Expeditione*, the first striking element is the quality of the Persian translation: the Latin original is always rendered correctly and in a plain and pleasant style. This suggests that Zamān was remarkably proficient in Latin or, as Michele Piemontese suggested, that he

worked under the close supervision of a European missionary.²⁰ Should this be the case, this was most probably Father Buzeo. As far as his rendition of the text goes, Zamān seems to have been a discreet and attentive yet resolute translator. Far from being satisfied with carrying out a word-to-word translation of the Latin original, he strove to produce a work on Ming China that could stand as a book in its own right. To do so, he was not afraid of making significant changes to his source.

First, he carried out some major structural revisions. A comparative reading of the indexes of the two texts shows that Muḥammad Zamān prepared a preliminary selection of his source's contents. The first chapter of the original text – which, as its title (*scriptionis huius cause & modus*) suggests, is essentially a short preface – was thus left out of the translation.²¹ This is probably due to its context-specific nature, for in these few preliminary pages Ricci explains that he was moved to compile the work by his will to preserve the memory of the efforts of the first Christian missionaries in China: when Christianity will flourish in these distant lands, he writes, these pages will be read in a new light. Given its content, the translator must have felt that the chapter would have been of little or no interest to a non-European, non-Christian audience, and thus he decided to cut it out altogether. The same goes for the eleventh and final chapter, which does not really deal with China and the Chinese so much as with “the Saracens and the Jews, and on the vestiges of the Christian faith in China” (*de Saracenis ac Iudais ac fidei demum Christianae apud Sinas vestigiis*).²² It is worth mentioning that, in choosing to cut this last chapter, Muḥammad Zamān was actually re-establishing Ricci's original text. The eleventh chapter of the *De Christiana Expeditione* is, in fact, a later addition by Trigault, who put it together by collecting information originally scattered throughout the text. Therefore, its contents clash with the rest of the first book, which describes various aspects of private and public life in Ming China in due order. The fact that Muḥammad Zamān chose not to include this chapter in his translation shows his good understanding of the original text, which he even – albeit unknowingly – re-established in his translation. Last, in an effort to better structure his work, he split the second chapter of the *De Christiana Expeditione*, titled “On the name, position, and amplitude of the Chinese kingdom” (*de nomine, situ, & magnitudine Regni Sinarum*), into two shorter yet perhaps more thematically coherent chapters, focusing respectively on “The analysis of the name ‘China’ and its etymology” (*dar taḥqīq-i ism-i Chīn wa ishtiḳāq-i ān*) and on “The amplitude and vastness of China and its position” (*dar bayān-i wus‘at wa buzurgī-yi Chīn wa waḏ‘-i ān*).²³ These are the first two chapters of the Persian text.

As far as structure is concerned, Muḥammad Zamān thus carried out his translation according to two main principles: synthesising and delocalising the original text. These principles run together and support each other: the first and the last chapter are discarded (synthesis) precisely because, owing to their local character, they would fail to appeal to a non-European, non-Christian audience (delocalisation). A comparative reading of the full

text of the *De Christiana Expeditione* alongside the *Chīn-nāma* shows how the very same general principles directed Muḥammad Zamān's rendition of the contents of Trigault's text as well.

Regarding synthesis, virtually no content has been added to the original work. On the contrary, Muḥammad Zamān indeed systematically abridged it. His rendition of the fourth chapter of the *De Christiana Expeditione*, "On the mechanical arts of the Chinese" (*De artibus apud Sinas mechanicis*), is a good case in point.²⁴ To get a sense of the extent to which Muḥammad Zamān abridged the original text, one needs only take a look at the number of pages it covers in the two versions: while in the first edition of the Latin text the chapter runs for seven pages, in the modern critical edition of the Persian text the corresponding fourth chapter (*dar bayān-i ṣanā'ī-i juz' iya-yi ahl-i Chīn*) barely occupies three pages – including a couple of footnotes.²⁵ Detailed paragraphs on various topics – such as the mechanical arts (*opera opificum*), architecture (*architectura*), and print (*typographiae antiquitas et libros imprimendi ratio*) – are strongly abridged. Others, such as those on painting, sculpture (*picturae* and *statuae*) or musical instruments (*ars musicae*), are left out altogether. Only a few, such as those on comedy (*comedarum usus frequens*) and on the fabrication of seals (*sigillorum usus varius ac frequens*), survive in their entirety.

While the fourth chapter received a particularly strict treatment by Muḥammad Zamān, a comparison between the two texts reveals that he frequently suppressed or abridged entire paragraphs of the Latin original. At first glance, this is simply due to his will to shorten the text. Muḥammad Zamān seems not to have suppressed or abridged paragraphs on the basis of their content, equally slashing excursuses on subjects as diverse as "how the Chinese write and talk" (*Scribendi apud Sinas ratio & loquendi*, [chapter 5](#)) and "in China only the doctors and the scholars can be governors" (*Reipublicae gubernatores soli Doctores & Licentiati*, [chapter 6](#)).²⁶ On closer inspection, however, there is indeed a recurring and discernible trend behind some of his decisions to cut short the original text. This is Muḥammad Zamān's already mentioned endeavour to produce a translation that is as non-culturally specific and non-localised as possible.

This endeavour, which we defined above as striving for delocalisation, is best seen in the fact that Muḥammad Zamān systematically cuts all or nearly all references to Europe found in the original text. In composing his book, Matteo Ricci methodically recurred to comparisons with contemporary Europe. He had two main reasons to do so. First, when the Italian Jesuit composed his book, European intellectuals were just discovering China. True, between the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries travellers from the Latin West such as Marco Polo (d. 1324) and Odoric of Pordenone (d. 1331) had described Mongol China in detail.²⁷ Their readers, however, did not identify the country they described in such depth with China up to the second half of the sixteenth century. In fact, by Ricci's time China largely remained a far-off and mysterious country to the Europeans. By discussing Chinese civilisation in a comparative framework with Europe, the

Italian Jesuit aimed to better explain such alien realities to his audience. Moreover, by offering a favourable image of the Chinese as a “civilised” people, Matteo Ricci aimed at showing their ripeness for conversion to Christianity.²⁸

Muḥammad Zamān, on the other hand, did not share any of the Italian Jesuit’s concerns. It is therefore no surprise that, whenever possible, he did away with all references to Europe. This is often the case with single words such as ethnonims, which could be safely left out without having to rewrite the whole paragraph. Reflecting the point of view of an Italian Jesuit in sixteenth-century China, for instance, the *De Christiana Expeditione* frequently mentions the Portuguese and the Spaniards. By contrast, Muḥammad Zamān often omits these mentions. The same goes for Japan, in which the Jesuits had taken by then a keen interest, and which in the original text is frequently mentioned in connection with China: whenever Trigault remarks that such and such product is found in China as well as in Japan, the reference to the latter is omitted in the Persian text.²⁹ This being said, however, Muḥammad Zamān had no issue with slashing even entire paragraphs whenever he felt they were too strongly localised. In the second chapter of the Latin text, for instance, Trigault reports that silk is abundant in China and opens a short excursus on the Spanish and Portuguese trade of Chinese silk.³⁰ The *Chīn-nāma* follows the original text up to the excursus. Then, it omits it altogether to jump directly to the next paragraph.³¹ Similarly, in the following chapter Trigault again broaches the subject of Chinese silk, which he describes in comparison with the European one.³² Once again, the Persian translator omits the paragraph altogether.³³

More frequently, however, Muḥammad Zamān just could not or did not want to slash a whole paragraph. In those instances, he proceeded to carefully abridge and rework the original text to omit any culturally specific reference. Let us consider the following excerpt on Chinese paper from the third chapter of the *De Christiana Expeditione*:

The use of paper is much more common in China than elsewhere, and its methods of production more diversified. Yet the best variety produced here is inferior to many of our own brands. One cannot print or write on both sides, so that one of our sheets is equivalent to two of theirs. Moreover, it tears easily and does not stand up well against time. Sometimes they make paper in square sheets measuring one or two paces, and the kind they manufacture from cotton fibre is as white as the best paper found among us.³⁴

Now, let us compare it with the corresponding section of the *Chīn-nāma*:

In China, there are different kinds of paper, yet they all are of poor quality, for their paper sheets cannot be written on both sides. Each sheet is one or two cubits long.³⁵

Whereas Trigault's excerpt relied heavily on comparisons between Chinese and European paper, Muḥammad Zamān's, besides being remarkably shorter, does not refer to European paper and omits any reference to Europe. Much in the same vein, at the beginning of the sixth chapter, Trigault writes that aristocracy, democracy and polycracy (*Aristocratie porro vel Dimocratie, vel alterius cuiuslibet Policratiae*) are unknown to the Chinese, who, however, in the past had nobles "much like, among us, are dukes, marquises, counts, and others of this kind" (*quam apud nos Ducum, Marchionum, Comitum, atque caeterorum huiusmodi*).³⁶ Muḥammad Zamān follows the original text quite closely. However, he reworks the paragraph in order to omit any reference to aristocracy, democracy and polycracy, as well as to European titles of nobility.³⁷ This also applies to ethnonyms, so that specific European peoples, such as the Portuguese or the Spaniards, often just become "Westerners" (*farangiyān*).

In light of Manucci's mention of Muḥammad Zamān's supposed journey to Rome, it is worth noting that the same applies to Italy, which is never mentioned in the *Chīn-nāma*. As a matter of fact, when it comes to Italy, all specific reference to its people and culture are either erased or transfigured. Marco Polo, to whom Trigault correctly refers as a Venetian (*Marco Paulo Veneto*), thus becomes "Marco the Greek" (*Marqūs-i Yūnānī*), and the Venetian tunics compared by Trigault to the Chinese clothes become "the tunics of the people of Transoxiana (*mā warā al-nahr*)."³⁸ Considering that no references to Muḥammad Zamān's stay in Italy have so far been found, the historicity of this event seems doubtful. In the same fashion, references to Christianity or the activity of Christian missionaries in Asia are also either slashed or severely downplayed.³⁹ It should be noted, however, that Islamic equivalents do not take their place. Except for the customary eulogy to the Prophet found at the beginning of the Persian text and of some eulogies to Jesus, found in the Latin text and preserved by Muḥammad Zamān, the text thus comes off as consistently de-confessionalised.⁴⁰

The result of this process of abridgement and delocalisation of the Latin text is a well-structured and autonomous Persian treatise on Ming China. Perhaps the main difference between Matteo Ricci's original and Muḥammad Zamān's translation lies in the fact that, while the Italian Jesuit developed his discussion of Chinese civilisation resorting to systematic comparisons with Europe, Muḥammad Zamān discusses Ming China on its own terms. This possibility was available to him thanks to the existence of a centuries-long tradition of geographic and ethnographic writing about China in the Perso-Arabic textual universe.⁴¹ Already in the tenth century, the travels of Arab and Persian mariners towards the wealthy port cities of southern China had been textualised in a detailed Arabic travel book, the *Accounts of China and India* (*Akhbār al-Şīn wa'l-Hind*);⁴² by the fourteenth century, readers could find a complete Persian-language account on Chinese history in the *History of the Ruling Families of Cathay*

(*Tārīkh-i aqwām-i pādshāhān-i Khatāy*) by the Persian polymath Rashīd al-Dīn (d. 1318), which was directly based on Chinese sources;⁴³ and by the end of the sixteenth century, two more eyewitness Persian-language accounts on China, the journal of the Timurid envoy to the Ming court Ghiyāth al-Dīn Naqqāsh (flourished 1419–1422) and the *Book on China* (*Khatāy-nāma*) (1515) by the Central Asian merchant Sayyid ‘Alī Akbar Khaṭāyī, were available.⁴⁴

8.3 Conclusion

The existence of such a long tradition of what we may very well call “Perso-Arabic sinology” provided Muḥammad Zamān with a vast and responsive public, thus ensuring the *Chīn-nāma* a potentially wide dissemination. Moreover, when the Safavid nobleman did his translation, the Persian republic of letters stretched from the Balkans to India and Xinjiang. Given its strongly cosmopolitan outlook, which made it accessible to every Persian-reading intellectual regardless of location, ethnic origin and religious affiliation, the text could have circulated easily in this wide region. Quite surprisingly, however, Muḥammad Zamān’s work seems to have attracted just as little attention among his contemporaries as it did among modern scholars. The original being apparently lost, in fact, the *Chīn-nāma* survives only in a 1864 printed edition and in a nineteenth-century manuscript, which was possibly copied from the printed book.⁴⁵ It seems that the text never circulated beyond Mughal India, and even there – even accounting for the possibility of a few more manuscript copies still lying unidentified somewhere in South Asia or beyond – its circulation must have been restricted to local missionaries and converts.

Despite its limited circulation, however, Muḥammad Zamān’s *Chīn-nāma* does indeed deserve our careful consideration. As a matter of fact, the text finds its peculiar place within a vast north Indian scenery of transitions and translations, including the macroscopic and unparalleled process of translation and rewriting of Sanskritic literary culture into Persian,⁴⁶ the regional processes of relocation of the Persian imagined literary canon,⁴⁷ the globalisation of Eurasian philosophical debates,⁴⁸ and, what particularly concerns us here, the Jesuit efforts in the Persianisation of Catholic doctrines and narratives.⁴⁹ Yet, as the work of a translator translating another translator, the *Chīn-nāma* is a unique case among the many Persian translations carried out in early modern South Asia. As we have seen, Muḥammad Zamān unexpectedly and yet quite naturally de-Europeanises Italian Jesuit Matteo Ricci’s viewpoint, turned into Latin through the use of the whole Latinate intellectual community by his Flemish colleague Nicholas Trigault, and projects it into the international dimension of what we may call – paraphrasing Juri Lotman’s *Semiosphere* – the “Persosphere,” that is, the socio-semiotic world of Persianate intellectuals.⁵⁰ At the level of textual practice, this necessarily implies downplaying the continuous comparisons with Europe through which Ricci develops his discussion, as well as most references to specific European

countries or to their activities in Asia. Any further research on Zamān's translations will need to tackle the issue of the rhetorical strategies implied, against the background of the multilayered transcultural and trans-aesthetic interpretative experiences mentioned here.

Notes

1. We would like to thank Kaveh Hemmat for bringing Muḥammad Zamān's *Chīn-nāma* to our attention.
2. Niccolò Manucci, *Storia do Mogor, or Mogul India*, translated by William Irvine (London: John Murray, 1907), vol. 2, 17–18.
3. *Passeurs culturels: mécanismes de métissage*, edited by Louise Bénat-Tachot and Serge Gruzinski (Paris: Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2001).
4. A thorough reconsideration of Manucci's transitional figure, projecting a certain idea of "Italy" onto the stage of South Asian early modernity, can be found in Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Further Thoughts on an Enigma: The Tortuous Life of Niccolò Manucci, 1638–c. 1720", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 45, no. 1 (2008): 35–76.
5. The most recent and comprehensive survey on the Eurasian frontiers of Persian as a transregional medium is Nile Green, ed., *The Persianate World: The Frontiers of a Eurasian Lingua Franca* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019). See especially Nile Green, "Introduction: The Frontiers of the Persianate World (ca. 800–1900)", 1–74.
6. A thought-provoking essay on this subject is Francesca Orsini, "How to Do Multilingual Literary History? Lessons from Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century North India", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 49, no. 2 (2012): 225–246. A more rigorous historical point of view is found in Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Recovering Babel: Polyglot Histories from the Eighteenth-Century Tamil Country", in *Invoking the Past: The Uses of History in South Asia*, edited by Ali Daud (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 280–321. Some considerations about multilingualism and modernity can be found in Stefano Pellò, "A proposito di *Mondi connessi* di Sanjay Subrahmanyam: I. Un 'mondo Novo' di connessioni poliglote", *Quaderni Storici*, 149, no. 2 (2015): 567–577.
7. *A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia and the Papal Mission of the XVIIth and XVIIIth Centuries*, edited and translated by Herbert Chick, 2 vols. (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1939), vol. I, 315, 345. On the Carmelites' Persian mission see Francis Richard, "Carmelites in Persia", in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 4, fasc. 7 (1990): 832–834.
8. Tommaso Tomai, *Idea del giardino del mondo* (Bologna: G. Rossi, 1582).
9. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, ms. Persan 158. On this manuscript see Francis Richard, "Une traduction persane d'un ouvrage italien au XVIIe siècle", *Studia Iranica*, 7, no. 2 (1978): 287–288. For a preliminary discussion of the translation see Angelo Michele Piemontese, *La letteratura italiana in Persia* (Roma: Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 2003), 28–34. Mario Casari, "Idee dei giardini del mondo: Privilegiati scambi letterari tra Italia e Iran", in *Civiltà dell'Iran: Passato presente futuro, atti del convegno internazionale (Roma, 22–23 Febbraio 2013)*, edited by Pierfrancesco Callieri and Adriano Rossi (Rome: Scienze e Lettere, 2018), 207–255 (216–219).
10. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, ms. Persan 158, fols. 1r, 1v.
11. Muḥammad Zamān, *Chīn-nāma*, edited by Lu Jin (Tehran: Markaz-i Pazhuhishī-i Mīrāth-i Maktūb, 2008), 2.

12. H. Hosten, *Jesuit Missionaries in Northern India and Inscriptions on Their Tombs, Agra (1580–1803)* (Calcutta: Catholic Orphan Press, 1907), 26–27.
13. Muḥammad Zamān, *Chīn-nāma*, bistudu-siudu. This identification, which was first proposed at the beginning of the twentieth century, had already been deconstructed in the 1970s by the Soviet art historian A. A. Ivanov. See Ivanov, “The Life of Muḥammad Zamān: A Reconsideration”, *Iran*, 17 (1979): 65–70. It should be noted, however, that Lu Jin’s mistake had not gone unnoticed among Iranian scholars. See Ya’qūb Āzhand, “Bāz-kāwī-yi yak ishti-bāh: Muḥammad Zamān ‘Farangī-khwān’ (mutarjim); Muḥammad Zamān ‘Farangī-sāz’ (naqqāsh)” [A rectification of a mistake: Muḥammad Zamān “Farangī-khwān” (the translator); Muḥammad Zamān “Farangī-sāz” (the painter)], *Hunarhā-yi zibā*, 19, no. 3 (2014): 39–44. The most comprehensive study to date on the painter Muḥammad Zamān is Amy Landau, “Farangi-Sazi at Isfahan: The Court Painter Muhammad Zaman, the Armenians of New Julfa and Shah Sulayman” (PhD thesis, Oxford University, 2009).
14. Amy Landau, “Man, Mode, and Myth: Muhammad Zaman Ibn Haji Yusuf”, in *Pearls on a String: Artists, Patrons, and Poets at the Great Islamic Courts*, edited by Amy Landau (Baltimore: Islamic Courts Walters Art Museum 2015), 167–203.
15. For the north Indian Mughal context and the role of the Jesuits, a few introductory notes can be found in Hugues Didier, “Le rôle de l’iconographie dans les missions jésuites (Inde du Nord et Tibet, XVIe et XVIIe siècles)”, in *Images et diffusion du Christianisme: expressions graphiques en contexte missionnaire (XVIe–XXe siècles)*, edited by Jean Pirotte, Caroline Sappia, and Olivier Servais (Paris: Karthala, 2012), 45–56. As far as western Asia is concerned, see Bernard Heyberger, “Entre Byzance et Rome: l’image et le sacré au Proche-Orient au XVIIe siècle”, *Histoire, économie et société*, 8, no. 4 (1989): 527–550, which focuses especially on Palestine and the Syro-Lebanese area.
16. Chick, *Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia*, vol. 1, 404. On European art in Safavid Iran, see Axel Langer, “European Influences on Seventeenth-Century Persian Painting: On Handsome Europeans, Naked Ladies, and Parisian Timepieces”, in *The Fascination of Persia: The Persian-European Dialogue in Seventeenth-Century Art and Contemporary Art of Tehran*, edited by Axel Langer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 170–237.
17. This was James Storie (or Story), by then a prisoner in Goa. The Jesuits had him freed from prison in exchange for his joining the order and serving as their resident painter. See Jonathan D. Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (New York: Penguin, 1985), 171–173.
18. Pietro Tacchi Venturi, *Opere storiche del P. Matteo Ricci S.I. edite a cura del Comitato per le Onoranze Nazionali con prolegomeni note e tavole del P. Pietro Tacchi Venturi S.I.*, 2 vols. (Macerata: F. Giorgetti, 1911–1913). The most recent critical edition of the Italian text is Matteo Ricci, *Della entrata della Compagnia Di Giesù e Christianità nella Cina*, edited by Maddalena Del Gatto (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2000).
19. For a comparison of Trigault’s Latin translation with Ricci’s original and a brief assessment of its fortune in early modern Europe, see Luca Fezzi, “Osservazioni sul *De Christiana Expeditione apud Sinas Suscepta ab Societate Iesu* di Nicolas Trigault”, *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa* 34, no. 3 (1999): 541–566; and Jacques Gernet, “*Della entrata della Compagnia di Giesù e Christianità nella Cina* de Matteo Ricci (1609) et les remaniements de sa traduction latine (1615)”, *Comptes rendus des séances de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-lettres*, 147, no. 1 (2003): 61–84.
20. Piemontese, *La letteratura italiana in Persia*, 35.

21. Nicolas Trigault, *De Christiana Expeditione apud Sinas Suscepta ab Societate Iesu. Ex P. Matthaei Ricij eiusdem Societatis Commentarijs. Libri V. ad S.D.N. Paulum V. in quibus Sinensis Regni mores, leges atque instituta et novae illius Ecclesiae difficillima primordia accurate et summa fide describuntur. Auctore P. Nicolao Trigautio Belga ex eadem Societate* (Augsburg: apud Christoph. Mangium, 1615), 1–3.
22. Trigault, 116–126.
23. Trigault, 3–8; Muḥammad Zamān, *Chīn-nāma*, 3–5, 7–9.
24. Trigault, *De Christiana expeditione*, 18–25.
25. Muḥammad Zamān, *Chīn-nāma*, 17–19.
26. Trigault, *De Christiana expeditione*, 25, 46–47.
27. On Asia in late medieval European travel writing, see Kim Phillips, *Before Orientalism: Asian Peoples and Cultures in European Travel Writing, 1245–1510* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).
28. On the relation between the perceived degree of “civilisation” of non-European peoples and the possibility of achieving their conversion in the perception of early modern Jesuits, see Joan-Pau Rubiés, “The Concept of Cultural Dialogue and the Jesuit Method of Accommodation: Between Idolatry and Civilization”, *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu*, 74 (2005): 237–280.
29. On Jesuit activity in Japan between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, see J. F. Moran, *The Japanese and the Jesuits: Alessandro Valignano in Sixteenth-Century Japan* (London: Routledge, 1993). Jonathan Spence skilfully casts Matteo Ricci’s mission to China against the background of the wider Jesuit activity in East Asia, including Japan, in his classic *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*.
30. Trigault, *De Christiana Expeditione*, 4.
31. Muḥammad Zamān, *Chīn-nāma*, 3.
32. Trigault, *De Christiana Expeditione*, 12.
33. Muḥammad Zamān, *Chīn-nāma*, 14.
34. “Quoniam papyri usus apud Sinas latius, quam apud nos patet, ita varie conficitur, sed tamen quaelibet eius species longe ab nostra superatur, nam nulla Sinarum charta praeli patiens aut scriptionis ex utraque parte, itaque folium unum e nostratibus Sinicis duobus aequivalet, facile quoque laceratur, neque fert aetatem. Folia quaedam quadrata conficiunt, quae in unius alteriusve passus longitudinem vel latitudinem protenduntur, & eaque e gossipio sit, candore suo ne a nostrate quidem superatur”, Trigault, *De Christiana Expeditione*, 16.
35. Muḥammad Zamān, *Chīn-nāma*, 15.
36. Trigault, *De Christiana expeditione*, 43.
37. Muḥammad Zamān, *Chīn-nāma*, 35.
38. For the reference to Marco Polo, see Trigault, *De Christiana Expeditione*, 3; and Muḥammad Zamān, *Chīn-nāma*, 3. Interestingly enough, in the introduction to his Persian rendering of Tomai’s *Idea del giardino del mondo*, Zamān identifies Italian language as *yunānī* (literally, “Greek”). According to Piemontese (*La letteratura italiana in Persia*, 32), this is an attempt on the part of Zamān to raise the profile of the original text in the eyes of his potential readers. However, the analogous identification of Marco Polo as *yūnānī* seems to hint at a still unclear situation as far as the literary identification of “Italy” is concerned. On the Venetian tunic, see Trigault, *De Christiana expeditione*, 87; and Muḥammad Zamān, *Chīn-nāma*, 74.
39. As a small example, in the ninth chapter of his book Ricci invites the reader to pray for the souls of the Chinese, quotes from the gospel, and mentions that the Portuguese buy and baptize Chinese slaves, thus following God’s will. All these elements have been erased from the Persian text.
40. It seems simply superfluous to remark here that the figure of Jesus (Īsā) is perfectly at home in the Perso-Islamic tradition, both as a religious and literary character.

41. For a comprehensive survey on the representation of China in Islamic texts, focusing however on Arabic geographic literature, see André Miquel, *La géographie humaine du monde musulman jusqu'au milieu du 11e siècle* (Paris: Éditions de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 2001), vol. 2.1, 75–119.
42. Abū Zayd al-Sīrāfī, “Account of China and India”, in *Two Arabic Travel Books*, edited and translated by Tim Mackintosh-Smith (New York: New York University Press, 2014).
43. Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jāmi' al-tawārīkh: tārikh-i aqwām-i pādshāhān-i Khatāy*, edited by Muḥammad Rawshan (Tehran: Markaz-i pazhuhish-i mirās-i maktūb, 2006).
44. Ghiyāth al-Dīn Naqqāsh, “Report to Mirza Baysunghur on the Timurid Legation to the Ming Court at Peking”, in *Album Prefaces and Other Documents on the History of Calligraphers and Painters*, edited and translated by Wheeler Thackston (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 53–67; Sayyid 'Alī Akbar Khaṭāyī, *Khatāy-nāma*, edited by Īraj Afshār (Tehran: Markaz-i asnād-i farhangī-i Āsiyā, 1993).
45. The two texts are discussed by Lu Jin in Muḥammad Zamān, *Chīn-nāma*, hashtād-hashtādchahār. According to the editor of the catalogue of Persian manuscripts of what was then the Asiatic Society of Bengal, where the manuscript is held, the copyist dated the text to the year 1900 *hijrī* (2465 CE) but actually meant 1900 *samvat* (1843). Vladimir Ivanov, *Concise Descriptive Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in The Curzon Collection, Asiatic Society of Bengal* (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1926), 98.
46. A good introductory study dealing with the early modern Sanskrit-Persian “encounter” is by Audrey Truschke, *Culture of Encounters: Sanskrit at the Mughal Court* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).
47. The Bengali case, for instance, has been masterfully explored by Thibaut d'Hubert, *In the Shade of the Golden Palace: Ālāol and Middle Bengali Poetics in Arakan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).
48. As Jonardon Ganeri points out with reference to the seventeenth-century French traveller, philosopher and physician François Bernier, who was fully introduced into the Mughal court, Bernier's Persian renderings of Descartes and Gassendi, and the contemporary circulation of ideas between India and Europe, “With Gassendi's work rendered into Persian even before it was properly available in French, and the monistic pantheism of the Upaniṣads and Dārā Shukoh already in France and England years before Spinoza's *Ethics* were published, what more dramatic evidence could there be of intellectual globalization in the 1660s.” Jonardon Ganeri, *The Lost Age of Reason: Philosophy in Early Modern India, 1450–1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 16.
49. A fine example is the *Mir'āt al-quds*, “Mirror of holiness,” by Father Jerome Xavier, about which see Pedro Moura Carvalho, *Mir'āt Al-Quds (Mirror of Holiness): A Life of Christ for Emperor Akbar: A Commentary on Father Jerome Xavier's Text and the Miniatures of Cleveland Museum of Art, Acc. No. 2005.145* (Leiden: Brill, 2012). Some interesting observations of a wider scope can be found in Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Frank Disputations: Catholics and Muslims in the Court of Jahangir”, *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 46, no. 4 (2009): 61–72.
50. On the semiosphere, see Juri Lotman, *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).



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