This new English/Spanish publication from Spanish historians José Cutillas Ferrer and Óscar Recio Morales contains several scholarly studies by leading European historians in the fields of Spanish, Russian, and Iranian studies. Their papers were presented at the international scholarly seminar The Other Europe: Eastern Europeans and Safavid Communities in Spain and Its Wider World as one of the activities of the EUROEST project (the Spanish Government-coordinated Project of Excellence). The articles are mainly devoted to the history of international contacts between the Iberian Peninsula, Eastern Europe, and Safavid Persia in the 16th and 17th centuries.

The publication begins with a short introductory study by Luis Gil Fernández, Un pionero Iranista español: Fr. Juan Tadeo de San Eliseo (1574–1633) (pp. 15–22). Here, the author presents one of the first Spanish experts on Iran and the Persian language, Tadeo de San Eliseo, and his contribution to the knowledge of the Iranian world in the 17th century.

The following section of the publication, entitled Eastern Europe, Persia and Spain, starts with an article by the Polish historian Joanna Partyka: Spanish Court Etiquette and Persian /“Pollish”/ Carpets. The Culture of the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth between East and West (pp. 25–34). In the first part of the article, she points out how Persian decorative art influenced Polish carpet production. In the second part, she describes how the Spanish court etiquette brought to Poland by the representatives of the Habsburg dynasty became naturalized at the Polish royal court. With these two different, from our point of view unrelated examples, the author attempts to show that the culture of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 16th and 17th centuries was of a syncretic nature, being a mix of various elements.

The well-known Polish historian and ottomanist Dariusz Kołodziejczyk presents a rather interesting paper, The Relations between the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Safavid Iran. Some comments on their character and intensity, in which he offers a generalizing picture of Polish-Persian diplomatic relations, especially in the 17th and the early 18th centuries (mediated primarily through the Armenian diaspora). Although these contacts were irregular, they contributed to the mutual recognition and development of relations between the two countries.

Marina A. Egea Fernández provides some notable findings in her paper The role of Persia in the beginning of Russian-Spanish relations. The author’s analysis, based on archival documents from RGADA (Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts) and AGS (Archivo General de Simancas), demonstrates that Persia played an important role in the relationship between the Muscovite Tsardom and the Spanish Monarchy from the end of the 16th century and especially in the 17th century. Both states considered Persia a potential ally in the fight against the Ottoman Empire.

The following study by Ryszard Skowron, La contribución de Tadeusz Krusiński S. I. al conocimiento de Persia y del Cáucaso en Europa.
La circulación de la información y de la propiedad intelectual en el siglo XVIII, paints a similar picture. The author, however, focuses solely on a certain aspect of Polish-Persian relations—the role and significance of the work of the Polish Jesuit and missionary Tadeusz Kruśinski, who lived in Persia and other parts of the Orient from 1705 to 1728. R. Skowron points out how Kruśinski’s work contributed not only to contemporary knowledge of Persia but also to the general intellectual development of the 18th century in Europe.

The third section of the book, titled Exiles and Circulations, contains two articles. The study of José Manuel Floristán Imízcoz, Los musulmanes de Cristo. Reconciliados griegos y albaneses en los territorios de la Monarquía Hispánica, based on archival documents from the Archivo General de Simancas, presents the particular fates of Muslim renegades (sp. Renegados) from the Ottoman Empire—Greeks and Albanians who converted from Islam to Christianity, were forced to leave the Ottoman Empire, and sought refuge in the Spanish Kingdom. These cases of religious refugees are explained within the broader historical context of the end of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th centuries. The author examines both the social-economic and personal intentions and motives of these apostates / converts to Christianity. The study extends the historical research on Muslim converts to Christianity as presented by the French historian Bartolomé Bennassar and his wife Lucile in their book Les Chrétiens d’Allah (Paris, 1989).

Valentina Oldrati, in her article Inquisitorial immunity and other tempting offers. The Spanish Monarchy and the renegade Cayto Ferrato (Tripoli, 1571–1579), offers a rather detailed analysis of espionage activities, practices, and negotiations between Spanish intelligence and Ottoman apostates, especially through the example of the Ansalone brothers and the Genoese renegade Cayto Ferrato (Ottoman governor of Tripoli) in 1571–1579. The study shows how, in addition to official policy, these behind-the-scenes espionage activities and actions could have influenced political decisions at the highest state level. The religious question played a particular role in espionage negotiations as well. Guarantees of religious and inquisitorial immunity were immensely important to the renegade “traitor” Cayto Ferrato. This was a priceless privilege in the context of a changing political as well as religious master.

The fourth and final section of this publication bears the title Frontiers and Empires. First, Natalia Królikowska-Jedlińska, in her study The Northern Caucasus viewed by the Catholic missionaries, 1625–1720s, based on archival documents (especially the correspondence of the Propaganda Fide Historical Archives in Roma), presents the journeys of Dominican missionaries (Emidio Portellid’ Ascoli, Giovanni de Lucca) from Crimea to the Caucasus and their efforts to spread the Christian faith. In their reports, they left a vast amount of information about tribal policy and life, mutual tribal relations, and the social system and religion of the local population of the North Caucasus (especially Circassia).

The author Enrique García Hernán, in his article La Diócesis de Naxiván y la Monarquía Hispánica en los siglos XVI y XVII, focuses on the relations of the Spanish royal court (from the reign of Charles V to Charles II) and the Roman Curia with the Armenian diocese in Nakhichevan (currently an autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan). In this study, the author expands our knowledge of the relatively frequent contacts between the Eastern and Western Christian worlds in the 16th and 17th centuries.

In his article Don Antonio Sherley y la seda de Persia, the author Luis Gil Fernández presents the role of the English adventurer Antonio Sherley in the silk trade between Spain/Portugal and Persia and other eastern countries. He focuses primarily on the period after Antonio Sherley’s departure from Persia (1599) and entering the service of the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II and later King Philip III of Spain (1605).
The main sources are yet unpublished archival materials from the Spanish General Archives in Simancas (Archivo General de Simancas). The issue is presented against the backdrop of the broader geopolitical and economic-trade context at the beginning of the 17th century. The study offers information on both the activities of Anthony Sherley after his departure from Persia and the Spanish-Portuguese trade in the first decades of the 17th century.

Polish historians Stanisław Jaśkowski and Dariusz Kołodziejczyk analyze the Persian manuscripts of the Carmelite monk Juan Tadeo (stored in the archives in Naples) during the reign of Shah Abbas I (1587–1629). For a time, Juan Tadeo became a translator and interpreter at the Persian court. The authors of the study examine the reasons the manuscripts were elaborated and their connection to the original documents of the Safavid chancery. The analysis of the documents is based on comparisons with preserved Persian manuscripts from the Polish Main Archive of Old Acts in Warsaw (AGAD). The authors also offer the translation of these documents into English. All in all, this study significantly expands our knowledge on the little-preserved correspondence and communication between the Safavid shahs and European rulers in the 17th century.

A recent study by José Cutillas Ferrer, Mission of Friar Prospero del Espíritu Santo and Shah Abbas; strategic maneuvers (1621–1624), shows a picture of gradual changes in Shah Abbas’s political strategy towards the Kingdom of Spain, the Pope, and their Catholic missions in Persia. This is based on the analysis of letters from one of the Carmelite missionaries in Isfahan, Brother Prospero de Espíritu Santo. His records provide relevant sources for the Abbas’s gradual change of attitude towards Spain, Portugal, and Catholics in general (especially converts), who became a thorn in the Persian Shah’s eye in the 1620s. The main reasons for his turn were Spain/Portugal’s possession of the island of Hormuz and their inaction in the creation of an anti-Ottoman alliance between the Habsburgs and Safavids.

The final short article is devoted to the important Spanish historian Luis Gil Fernández and provides a brief summary of his life’s work (with a bibliography). At his respectable age (he celebrated his 93rd birthday in 2020), he also participated in the compilation of this publication with his two above-mentioned studies.

The topic of this volume is related to that of the previously published book The Spanish Monarchy and Safavid Persia in the Early Modern Period. Politics, War and Religion edited by Enrique García Hernán, José Cutillas Ferrer, and Rudi Matthee (Valencia, 2016). However, in this case, this publication seeks to further extend the scope of the scholarship to Eastern Europe, which played a very important role in Euro-Persian trade and diplomatic connections, especially from the middle of the 16th century. In addition to several key Spanish, Polish, and Russian publications on the subject1 (with the exception of some partial studies), it is the first comprehensive publication to take note of such a broad geopolitical dimension.

Given the wide-ranging relevance of international relations, it would be both appropriate and useful to provide at least a standard English summary (especially for the Spanish articles) that would allow scholarly readers from around the world to read a brief of the study.

Furthermore, I consider some articles (for example Los musulmanes de Cristo or Inquisitorial immunity and other tempting offers) as lacking a thorough coverage of all the three respective geographical units at the same time. The attention dedicated by these studies to the areas of Eastern Europe and Persia is rather negligible. Needless to say, this deficiency in no way reduces the quality of the studies themselves. Moreover, within the context of these complex, branched international relations of the 16th century (among the Iberian Peninsula, Eastern Europe, and Safavid Persia), little attention is paid to the role of the Muscovy Tsardom’s actions. In fact, only one article (The role of Persia in the Beginning of the Russian-Spanish Diplomatic Relations) addresses this issue.

Each study contributes in its own way to our knowledge of the complex and interconnected diplomatic, commercial, and cultural-religious relations between the Iberian Peninsula, Eastern Europe, and Safavid Persia in the 16th and 17th centuries. The advantage and, at the same time, the disadvantage of this publication, is its wide geographic and thematic range, which has generated a compendium of high-quality but excessively diverse studies. On the other hand, it shows that there are many possibilities in research on the international relations of the 16th and 17th centuries between these disparate regions. Based on my own research in archives of Eastern European and Central European provenance, Russian archives or Austrian archives alone have a plenty of relevant documents. For example, the Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts in Moscow (RGADA, funds to Hispania – No. 93 and Persia – No. 77) or the Austrian National Archive Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv in Vienna (HHStA, funds Persien, Russland and Spanien), promise a rich host of material, which still awaits full examination in relation to this issue. Despite its thematic scope, the publication effectively complements existing scholarship on the history of contacts between Safavid Persia, Eastern Europe, and the Spanish monarchy. At the same time, it offers a wide range of potential opportunities and prospects for future research.

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