

Travelling Across Cultures: Some Aspects of the Safavid Envoys' Travels to Venice

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Abstract The paper aims to explore the practical aspects of the Safavid envoys' travels to Venice in the sixteenth and the first part of the seventeenth centuries. In particular, it will reconstruct the itineraries of the journeys of the Safavid delegates to Venice, analyse the challenges and difficulties of long-distance travel experienced by them and the impact of the Ottoman factor on both the Safavid and Venetian envoys' travel planning and trajectories. The paper reveals that the first Safavid trade mission to Venice was sent in 1597 and not in 1600, as previously known in the historiography. We will shed light on the social status of the Safavid envoys and clarify the role and duties of the *garak-yaraq*s (purveyors) of the Safavid Royal Household among them. We will examine the impact of the overall character of the Safavid-Ottoman relations both on the size of the missions and the intensity of the diplomatic and trade contacts between the Republic of Venice and the Safavid Empire.

Keywords Venice. Safavid-Venetian relations. Safavid envoys. Early modern travel. Diplomatic history.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Practical Aspects of Safavid Journeys to Venice: Itineraries and Difficulties of Travelling. – 3 Nature and the Size of the Safavid Embassies to Venice. – 4 Conclusion.



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1 Introduction

The emergence of the Safavid Empire in the early sixteenth century marked a significant change in the geopolitics of the Middle East. Ottoman threat and commercial interests contributed to the emergence and development of diplomatic, cultural and trade relations between the Republic of Venice and the Safavid Empire, which lasted until the end of the seventeenth century.¹

Giorgio Rota divides the history of Safavid-Venetian diplomatic relations into two different phases (Rota 2012, 152). During the first period (1501-87), each of the two states still saw in the other a possible military ally against the Ottomans.² The first two Safavid envoys visited Venice in the first half of 1509 with the hope of securing military support against the Sublime Porte. However, Safavids' defeat at the battle of Chaldiran (23 August 1514), Shah Ismail I's death (1524), and Venetian policy of reconciliation with the Ottomans resulted in a lull in the relations between the two polities (Rota 2012, 150). Safavids looked again to Venice after the outbreak of the Ottoman-Safavid war in 1578. In 1580, when the Safavids sent the embassy led by Haji Mohammad in an attempt to get at least 'moral' support against the Ottomans, it resulted in failure due to Venetians' unwillingness to break peace with the Ottomans (Rota 2012, 150).

The second phase started with the accession to the throne of Shah 'Abbās (r. 1587-1629) and lasted throughout the seventeenth century. In this stage, the commercial agenda increasingly characterized the Safavid diplomacy towards Venice as diplomacy and commerce had become inextricably intertwined. Shah 'Abbās, who attached importance to trade relations with Venice, within the period covering from 1597 to 1629 dispatched no fewer than eight missions there.³ Venice, by contrast, is known to have not reciprocated with any missions in the same period. The prospect of a military alliance against the Ottomans, which had shaped the agenda of occasional Safavid-Venetian negotiations in the sixteenth century, was largely put aside. In the first third of the seventeenth century, the Safavid representatives were merchants of relatively low status who were not in charge

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1 For Safavid-Venetian relations, see Rota 2002; 2009a; 2009b; 2012 and Guliyev 2022.

2 Rudi Matthee points out that "Venice, continuing its role as Europe's window on the east, was instrumental in shaping the image of the Safavids as a potential ally against the Ottoman threat" (Matthee 2013, 9).

3 For Safavid missions to Venice in a period from 1509 to 1634, see Appendix 1.

of military negotiations, but carried letters from the Shah and dealt exclusively with commercial matters. In 1601, the only Safavid embassy, headed by Husayn Ali Bey Bayat that was charged with discussing a military alliance against the Ottomans was not given permission to enter Venice.

While the history of the diplomatic relations between the Safavid Empire and the Republic of Venice has been relatively well studied, practical aspects of the Safavids' travels to Venice, especially the itineraries of their journeys, the impact of the Ottoman factor on the intensity of the travels between these two powers, challenges and difficulties associated with the envoys' travels, as well as size and characteristics of the missions has been largely neglected. Moreover, there has been very little effort to explore the travels of the Safavid and Ottoman envoys to Venice from a comparative perspective.

Drawing on the documents from the Venetian State Archives and other contemporary sources, the paper aims to explore practical aspects of the travels of the Safavid envoys to Venice in the sixteenth and the first third of the seventeenth centuries. Particularly, we will try to reconstruct the itineraries of the journeys of the Safavid envoys to Venice. In order to provide a complete picture, we will also refer to the travels of the Venetian diplomats to the Safavid court. Taking a comparative perspective, we will examine the sizes and composition of the Safavid embassies to Venice and the Ottoman Empire, as well as the social status of the Shah's envoys in order to provide insights into the understanding of the nature of the Safavid-Venetian and Safavid-Ottoman relations. Furthermore, we will seek to analyze the challenges and difficulties of long-distance travel experienced by the Safavid delegates and the impact of the Ottoman factor on both the Safavid and Venetian envoys' travel planning and trajectories.

2 Practical Aspects of Safavid Journeys to Venice: Itineraries and Difficulties of Travelling

Early modern travel was subject to dangers and hardships. This was particularly true for the Safavid and Venetian envoys that covered long-distance to visit each other's capitals. Geographical remoteness and difficulties of travelling were among the factors hindering the close cooperation between Venice and Safavids, particularly in times of war with the Ottomans.

There were five possible routes between the Safavid Empire and Venice, each had its own difficulties. These were: overland through Anatolia and Balkans; by land through Syria and Iraq to the Eastern Mediterranean ports (Beirut and Alexandretta) then by sea; over the Caspian sea, then overland through Russia and Poland; overland through Georgia, then over the Black Sea to the Balkans; from Hormuz by sea.

All the voyages to Venice involved a combination of land and sea travel. Safavid envoys arrived in Venice mainly by two routes, which were controlled by the Ottomans.

1. From Anatolia:
 - a. via Gallipoli (Gelibolu) and Balkans, like Haji Mohamad⁴ in 1580;
 - b. from Istanbul, like Khoja Shahsuvar in 1612).
2. From Syrian ports of
 - a. Beirut, like the first Safavid envoy in 1509;
 - b. Alexandretta, like Fathi Bey in 1603. Before reaching these ports envoys had to travel overland through Mesopotamia and Syria.

These routes were the shortest, but most complicated (even dangerous during the war times) due to the political tensions between the Safavids and the Ottomans. Due to Venice's geographical location, most Safavid envoys arrived in the city by sea from the east; only on rare occasions did envoys reach it by land as in the case of Khoja Sa-far in 1610, who came to Venice by way of Florence.⁵

a) The route across Anatolia

The route through Anatolia was the shortest but the most complicated one between Venice and the Safavid Empire. The periodic military engagements and wars along the Safavid-Ottoman frontiers had direct consequences for the Safavid embassies. Some contemporary travellers referred to the strict controls by local Ottoman officials in the border regions of Anatolia and other common dangers of overland travel. This was evident from Venetian traveller Niccolò Manucci's description, who in 1654 accompanied English envoy Henry Bard⁶ (Viscount Bellomont) to the Safavid court of Shah 'Abbās II (r. 1642-66):

After having passed over this wearisome road in the midst of dangers [...] we arrived at Erzerum [...] lying upon the Turkish frontier; they [Ottoman officials] examined our baggage with great severity (a common occurrence at this town, one of which all travellers complain). We were able, however, to conceal several presents that we were carrying for the King of Persia. (Manucci 1907, 16)

⁴ He had previously visited the city, where he had been freed thanks to the efforts of Vincenzo degli Alessandri after being captured as a 'Turk' by a Venetian ship during the War of Cyprus (1570-3) (Rota 2009a, 20).

⁵ ASVe, CEP, fz. 18, 30 gennaio 1609 (*more veneto*).

⁶ For Henry Bard's missions to the Safavid and Mughal courts, see Lockhart 1966.

Particularly, the road remained a dangerous place for envoys to and from the Shah, especially during the Ottoman-Safavid and Ottoman-Venetian wars. In 1580, Haji Mohammad set out from Tabriz in a caravan of 200 persons, and travelled overland, passing through Van, Tokat, Bursa, Gallipoli (Gelibolu), and Narenta, then over the sea to Venice.⁷ This was also the case for the Venetian envoys, who had to conceal their identities in order to pass through the Ottoman territories on the way to the Safavid capital. For example, in 1539, Venetian envoy Michele Membrè, while travelling through Anatolia, disguised himself in the "Turkish fashion" (*alla guisa Turchesca*) (Membré 1969, 6).

By contrast, in the same period, the Ottoman envoys had a much greater advantage when travelling to Venice. In this case, they usually could take the land route that passed through the Ottoman-ruled territories in the Balkans, and enter directly into the Venetian domains on the Dalmatian coast (Pedani 1996, 188).⁸

Intermittent peace periods with the Ottomans facilitated the travels of the Safavid envoys to Venice. For example, in 1612, Safavid envoys Khoja Shahuvar and Aladdin Mohammad sailed from Istanbul to Venice on a galley named *Boldù*, carrying the Shah 'Abbās I's missive and a recommendation letter from the Ottoman Grand Vizier Nasuh Pasha.⁹ Shahuvar probably travelled to Istanbul in the retinue of the Safavid envoy Qazi Khan al-Husayni, who was sent by Shah 'Abbās to the Ottoman court to conduct peace talks in the summer of 1612.¹⁰

b) Levantine route

Since a traditional overland travel route through Anatolia was dangerous for Safavid envoys, they mainly took the sea route from the Eastern Mediterranean to Venice. As a result of the Ottoman conquest of Egypt and Syria in 1517, the overland route connecting the Safavid lands with Eastern Mediterranean ports fell under Ottoman

⁷ ASVe, CEP, fz. 3, 1 maggio 1580, c. 329v.

⁸ Anatolian merchants also preferred to pass through the Balkans in order to reach Adriatic ports and then to sail to Venice, since the presence of pirates made sea voyages more dangerous than before. The chances of a sea voyage sometimes turned a merchant into a prisoner and then a slave (Pedani 2008, 162).

⁹ ASVe, SDeIC, fz. 12, 14 febbraio 1612 (*more veneto*).

¹⁰ Shah 'Abbās dispatched *Sadr* (head of the Safavid religious administration) Qazi Khan al-Husayni in the company of *gazis* of Qazvin and Isfahan, as well as additional envoys to Ottoman grand vizier Nasuh Pasha who was in Diyarbakir. The Safavid embassy, which carried two hundred loads of silk, arrived at Diyarbekir at the beginning of the summer of 1612. Nasuh Pasha, without loss of time, set out for Istanbul with the above silk and the messengers and reached it on 27 September of that year (Çelebi 2016, 1: 448-9; Naimâ 2007, 2: 390-1; Munshî 1978, 2: 863-4).

control. To reach these ports (usually Beirut and Alexandretta)¹¹ Safavid envoys had to pass through Ottoman-held Iraq and Syria. To complete this task, they travelled under the guise of the merchant (actually many of them were merchants by trade). Safavid envoys usually sailed on the Venetian merchant galleys trading with the Levant.

In 1509, the first known Safavid envoy, set off from Beirut, sailing on a galley (*galie di Baruto*) to Venice (Sanudo 1879-1903, 8, col. 14). In the same year, the next Safavid envoy, before reaching Beirut had briefly sojourned in Damascus where the Shah Ismail I's (r. 1501-24) letter addressed to the Doge was translated into Latin or Italian by Pietro Zen, a Venetian consul at that time. The same envoy, first made his way to Cyprus, from where together with an envoy of Qaraman Oghlu sailed on a Venetian galley under the command of Francesco Malipiero (Sanudo 1879-1903, 8, col. 232). The second Safavid embassy, who on their return journey sailed from Venice on a galley of Cyprus, made a stopover in Crete as evidenced by the report of its government, dated 24 July 1509, which states: "We signal the passage of the three envoys of the Signor Sofi, whose passage has been favoured" (Iorga 1916, 6: 61). The length and physical dangers of travel caused great fatigue and illness. The two members of the second Safavid embassy, which sailed from Venice on a galley of Cyprus, were sick when they arrived in Crete.¹²

It seems that in the seventeenth century, envoys or merchants travelling through Aleppo preferred the port of Alexandretta due to its security and proximity compared with Tripoli (Syria) and Beirut. It took only three days to get from Aleppo to Alexandretta, while eight-day travel was required to reach another Levantine port of Tripoli (Berchet 1865, 142; Barozzi 1857, 221). Furthermore, sailing from Alexandretta was also beneficial in economic terms, since merchants had to pay only half the amount of taxes they paid for at Tripoli. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Safavid merchants trading with Venice paid a reduced tax (*cottimo*) of 2 percent fixed by the Venetian government (Berchet 1866, 159).

The ships from Beirut and Alexandretta to Venice usually made stopovers at one or more ports along the way, located in Cyprus, Rhodes, Candia (in Crete), Modon (in Peloponnese), Corfu, Zara, Ragusa, and Pola. However, under exceptional circumstances, the crossing between Syrian ports and Venice could even be completed without stopping at any port of call (Arbel 2017, 192). Ideally, sea travel from Beirut or Alexandretta to Venice could take about five weeks (Charayron 2005, 47), but usually, it lasted two to five months and even

¹¹ Also known as Scanderun or İskenderun.

¹² "Di Candia. Di oratori di Sophi zonti li, parti di qui, do di qual erano amalati" (Sanudo 1879-1903, 9: col. 166).

more depending on the weather conditions and availability of the ships travelling in the direction of the desired destination, the number and duration of stopovers along the route, and diseases.¹³

At the end of September of 1602, the Safavid mission to Venice under the leadership of Fathi Bey embarked on a Venetian galley named *Nave Liona*¹⁴ under the command of Straviano de Paris¹⁵ trading across the Eastern Mediterranean. Fathi Bey's travel from Alexandria to Venice lasted about 5 months and they probably landed at Venice at the end of February 1603 before being presented into the *Collegio* in early March of the same year.¹⁶ According to his testimony, he made in March 1603, it had been one year since he left his country.¹⁷

The maritime route could at times be disadvantageous and subject to the dangers of the sea (storms, shipwrecks, plague, and pirates). The death of the envoys during the voyage was not uncommon. Due to the illness and subsequent death of Khoja Mehmed Emin Bey on the ship *Nave Liona*, the Safavid envoy and merchants had to make an emergency stopover after the passing of Corfu before proceeding to Venice.¹⁸ According to the testimony of certain Husayn from Nakhchivan, Mehmed Emin died on 21 *Sha'ban* 1011 of the Islamic Calendar/3 February 1603.¹⁹

Following Mehmed Emin's death, the silk and other merchandise in his name were transferred to Fathi Bey on the testimony of five witnesses - Safavid merchants who had travelled with them on the

13 Two Carmelite fathers had left Venice on 28 August 1610, sailing via Crete, Cyprus, and Tripoli (Syria) reached Aleppo on 30 November 1610 (Chick 1939, 193). Ottoman envoy Mehmed bey travelling from Aleppo reached Venice after three months (Sanudo 1879-1903, 23: col. 361). In 1605, Portuguese traveller and writer Pedro Teixeira travelled from Alexandria to Venice in three months (Teixeira 1610, 111-14). Being the main route eastward, this trajectory was used not only by merchants and envoys sent to and from the Safavid court but also by Christian pilgrims travelling to Jerusalem. See Bianchi 1606; Loyola 2001.

14 Another Safavid envoy who took this ship to Venice in 1604 was Zeynal Bey Shamlu (ASVe, SDeIC, fz. 10, 29 giugno 1604).

15 ASVe, SDM, fz. 157, 14 marzo 1603.

16 ASVe, QC, fz. 114, 3 marzo 1603.

17 ASVe, QC, fz. 114, 3 marzo 1603.

18 ASVe, SDM, fz. 157, 13 marzo 1603. According to the testimony of Anthony Sherley in his trial held by the Commission appointed by the Venetian Senate, Mehmed Emin was his friend in Persia, and being informed by his brother that he was coming to Venice, in deference to the Safavid Shah he wanted "to show him as much honor as possible" (ASVe, QC, fz. 114, 1603, 2 aprile 1603).

19 ASVe, SDM, fz. 157, 14 marzo 1603. Mehmet Emin bey was not the only Safavid representative that lost his life during the mission. Asad bey died in Baghdad on the way home in 1600 (ASVe, QC, fz. 114, 3 marzo 1603). Former Safavid envoy to Venice Khoja Shasuvvar, who accompanied Naghdaly bey's embassy to England, died in London in August 1626 (Ferrier 1973, 89).

same ship to Venice.²⁰ Fathi Bey's return journey was also accompanied by hardships. The trip was made all the more difficult by the outbreak of war between the Ottomans and Safavids. He set off from Venice in September of 1603 and sailed on the galley *La Nave Moresina e Agustina*²¹ under the captain Batta Tagier, which was destined for Alexandretta. When arrived in Alexandretta major parts of his goods and merchandise were confiscated by the local Ottoman authorities and he himself was arrested.²²

In 1609, Khoja Safar travelling from Alexandretta embarked on a French merchant ship heading to Marseille and then proceeded to Venice via Livorno reaching it in January 1610, only after ten months.²³ He was sent by Shah 'Abbās to retrieve the remaining part of the goods of Fathi Bey which had been transferred to Venice by its consul in Aleppo, Giovanni Francesco Sagredo.

As it is evident from the cases above, some Safavid envoys could not return to the Safavid court due to their deaths. However, Safar's case was different, as he did not come back to the shah's palace of his own will, which was confirmed by Pietro della Valle's letter from Isfahan dated 26 August 1619 (Della Valle 1843, 2: 43).

3 Nature and the Size of the Safavid Embassies to Venice

The Safavid missions to Venice, except for embassies of 1509 and 1580, were primarily trade missions rather than diplomatic. From the very beginning of his reign, Shah 'Abbās I must have considered Venice a commercial rather than a military partner (Rota 2012, 152). The majority of the embassies sent in the first quarter of the seventeenth century had commercial dimensions. Safavid envoys, combining the roles of royal agent and merchant, were tasked to sell royal silk and purchase the things needed for the royal household. In terms of diplomatic practice, they were not classic envoys, but messengers tasked simply to deliver the Shahs' letters. Venetians called them "*latori delle lettere*" or "letter-bearers" (Berchet 1865, 38). Prevalence of trade-related issues in its relations with the Safavids served to the interests of the Venetian government, which pursued a cautious policy not to antagonize the Ottomans.

²⁰ ASVe, SDM, fz. 157, 14 marzo 1603.

²¹ The owner of this ship was Francesco Moresini (ASVe, SDeIC, fz. 10, 23 dicembre 1604).

²² "Le quali mercantie, et denari furono consignati a lui medesimo al suo sbarco eccetto casse quatro in Alessandreta dove subito giunto fù fatto prigione di Turchi che gli levarano ogni suo havere eccetto le casse quatro predetto rimaste in Nave con di più tre archebusi et una armatura, et che essendo state ricondotte dette case" (ASVe, SDeIC, fz. 10, 23 dicembre 1604).

²³ ASVe, CEP, fz. 18, 30 gennaio 1609 (*more veneto*).

Safavid merchant-envoy class, particularly during the Shah 'Abbās' reign, appears to have been dominated by a particular group known as *garak-yaraq*s.²⁴ This is evident from the extant letters where three out of five envoys were mentioned as *garak-yaraq*s. Except for Khoja Safar and Khoja Kirakos, other Safavid envoys, namely Asad Bey (1600), Fathi Bey (1603), Khoja Shasvar (1613 and 1622) belonged to this group.²⁵ Possessing expert knowledge of goods and having previous long-distance trade experience as merchants, made *garak-yaraq*s particularly well qualified for the envoy position to be dispatched to Venice. A recommendation letter that we have found in the *Lettere e scritture turchesche* series of Venetian State Archives, suggests that the first Safavid trade mission to Venice was sent in 1597, not in 1600 as previously known to the historiography. This mission was headed by Khoja Ilyas (*Yeias*) and Mehmed Emin Bey.²⁶ Addressing the Venetian Doge Marino Grimani (r. 1595-1605), Shah 'Abbās asks him to facilitate the purchases of his envoys.²⁷

Some Safavid envoys bore the title *khoja* (*khwaja*) which put them on a certain social scale in society. Khoja being a title of respect signified wealthy merchants both Muslim and non-Muslim. Among the Safavid envoys, Mohammad Tabrizi carried the title of *Haji*, indicating that he had undertaken the pilgrimage to Mecca. Furthermore, this title indicates his having had enough independent economic means to have made hajj mission.

Usually, they had little knowledge of political conditions in Venice or the rules and protocols of Venetian diplomacy. Rota argues that Venetian authorities had no illusions about the status of the merchant-envoys, however personally important or close to the Shah any one of them may have been. Their views can probably be exemplified by the words of Giovanni Francesco Sagredo who, in 1609, advised the Senate to receive Khoja Safar favourably, even if "he was not able to understand such honours fully and properly" (Rota 2009b, 235).

On many occasions, Shah 'Abbās I appointed two envoys to head the embassy jointly, probably one as a chief envoy and another as his deputy. The missions of Mehmed Emin Bey-Khoja Ilyas (1597), Fathi Bey-Mehmed Emin Bey (1603), Khoja Shasvar-Aladdin Mohammad (1613), Khoja Shasvar-Haji Eyvaz Tabrizi (1622) could serve as examples. As it is evident, chief envoys had mainly ceremonial responsibilities. A deputy or second envoy would take up the duties of the

²⁴ The compound stands for "purveyor of necessary things, or of arms" (Tadhkirat al-Mulūk 1943, 178).

²⁵ ASVe, *Documenti Persia*, nos. 3, 7 and 18.

²⁶ ASVe, *Lettere e scritture turchesche*, fz. 5, cc. 195r-v. See also Pedani 2010, 138.

²⁷ The letter exists only in Italian translation in the Venetian State Archives; the original document appears not to have survived.

chief one upon his death or arrest.²⁸ Fathi Bey's testimony could explain the reason for the assignment of two envoys at the same time. According to him, "in the absence of one of them, the available one had to execute the orders of the Shah".²⁹

Generally, Safavid embassies sent to Venice were small in number and size. Compared with the sixteenth century, the average size of the Safavid embassies tended to be a little larger in the seventeenth century, but it never exceeded ten persons (Guliyev 2020, 106). The biggest known mission was that of Fathi Bey's embassy in March of 1603, who came to the Venetian *Collegio* with nine attendants.³⁰ His retinue was comprised of six Turkic/Turcoman (*Turchi Persiani*) and three Armenian subjects of the Shah 'Abbās I. These six Turcomans probably were merchants, who travelled to Venice in the company of Fathi Bey. The names of five of them (Khalil ibn Miri, Garakhan ibn Haji Bayram, Sahib ibn Murat, Hasan ibn Haji Abulgassim, Husayn ibn Ali) we found in an archival document concerning the testimony about the transfer of merchandise of the deceased Safavid merchant-envoy Mehmet Emin Bey to Fathi Bey.³¹

It appears from the diaries of Marin Sanudo that the first Safavid envoy (1509) travelled alone (Sanudo 1879-1903, 8: 14). In the same year, the second Safavid envoy was attended by four people, including an envoy from Qaraman oghlu (Sanudo 1879-1903, 8: col. 255). In 1580, Haji Muhammad had five persons, including a servant in his suite.³² The 1600 Safavid embassy, led by Sujaddin Asad Bey, was comprised of eight people.³³ Venetian government became aware of Asad Bey's imminent mission to the lagoon city from Michelangelo Corrai, who appeared before the *Collegio* in November 1599.³⁴

On 30 January 1610, Khoja Safar appeared before the *Collegio* with four persons (probably, Ismail Zulfatino and Kodis were among them).³⁵ In February of 1613, Khoja Shahsuvar (*Oggia Sassovar*) arrived in Venice with a small entourage of five merchants, namely:

28 For example, Bastam Qulu Bey, Shah 'Abbās's envoy to Spain in 1603, died on the way to Europe and the leadership of the embassy had to be taken by his secretary (Steensgaard 1974, 238).

29 "Che il sudetto Signore Memet, mio compagno venisse a morte in nave, sapendo che il volere di Sua Maestà era che mancho uno di noi l'altro dovesse eseguir li suoi ordini" (ASVe, SDM, fz. 157, 13 marzo 1603).

30 ASVe, CEP, fz. 13, 5 marzo 1603.

31 "Calil figlio di Miri della città di Nacsivan, Caracan del Agi Beiran della [città di] Nacsivan, Saap del Murat della città di Tauris, Assan del Agi Ebulcasin della di Nacsivan, Ussein del Alli della [città di] Nacsivan" (ASVe, SDM, fz. 157, 13 marzo 1603).

32 ASVe, CEP, fz. 3, 1 maggio 1580, c. 330r.

33 ASVe, CEP, fz. 11, 8 giugno 1600.

34 ASVe, CEP, reg. 14, 18 novembre 1599, 71r.

35 ASVe, CEP, fz. 18, 30 gennaio 1609 (*more veneto*).

Khoja Aladdin Mohammad (*Oggià Àladin Mehemet*), Khoja Hidayatullah (*Oggià Idaètullà*), Khoja Musa (*Oggià Musà*), Khoja Dervish (*Oggià Dèrvis*), and Khoja Qubad (*Oggià Cubat*).³⁶ Venetian government had been informed two months in advance by the bailo Cristoforo Valier's dispatch, dated 22 November 1612 about the forthcoming visit of Khoja Shahsuvar to Venice.³⁷ Venetian Senate in its letter to the bailo in Istanbul noted that he should assure Nasuh Pasha that the Safavid merchants, who arrived in Venice on his recommendation, "would be treated well and all the assistance will be done to facilitate their activities in the city".³⁸

On his second visit (1622), Shahsuvar was accompanied by six persons, including Haji Eyvaz (*Aivas*) Tabrizi and Imad.³⁹ There are no references to the sizes of the retinues of Khoja Kirakos and Ali Bali who reached Venice in 1609 and 1634, respectively. Some Safavid envoys included family members in their retinues. For example, among the retinue of the Haji Mohammad was his nephew.⁴⁰ Ali Bali travelled to Venice several times with one of his brothers.⁴¹ The main aim of Ali Bali's mission was the recovery of the proceeds of the sale of 69 bales of silk and a certain quantity of woolen cloth belonging to the *sarkar-e khasse-ye sharife*, which had been deposited in the Venetian mint in 1624, following a squabble among the people engaged in selling them (Rota 2012, 154).

The Safavid envoys stayed in Venice for an average period of three to five months with the exception of Fathi Bey and Ali Bali whose sojourn in the lagoon city exceeded six months. Over the course of a mission, the size of the retinue could be changed, either decreased in cases of (influenced by several factors), the death or dissolution of some members, or increased through adding new companions. For instance, while Khoja Safar in Venice was attended by four persons, he came to Rome in June of 1610 with a retinue of eight.⁴²

³⁶ ASVe, *Documenti Persia*, nos. 22-3.

³⁷ "Sopra il Galeon Balbi, che con primo ben tempo deve partire da questo Porto per il suo ritorno [da] Costantinopoli si sono imbarcati quattro Persiani con alcune somme di seta, et con diversi Diamanti per transferirsi à farne esito a questa città, quali da me sono stati raccomandati al Patrone et al scrivano... Questi hanno da presentare alla Serenità Vostra una lettera del loro Rè che per quanto ho potuto sottrarre con contiene altro in sostanza che raccomandatione de loro negocij" (ASVe, SDC, fz. 74, 22 novembre 1612, c. 116r).

³⁸ "Detti merchanti saranno da noi favoriti, come sono ben veduti, et trattati in tutte le loro attoni et che ricotraremo sempre volentieri ogni occasione di poterle" (ASVe, SDeIC, fz. 12, 2 aprile 1613).

³⁹ ASVe, *Documenti Persia*, nos. 26; Berchet 1865, 213.

⁴⁰ ASVe, CEP, fz. 3, 1 maggio 1580. In this place pagination discontinued, should be c. 330r.

⁴¹ ASVe, SDeIC, fz. 26, 13 maggio 1634.

⁴² BAV, Urb. lat. 1078, pt. 2, 26 giugno 1610, c. 454 r.

In the first half of the sixteenth century, unlike their Safavid counterparts, Ottoman diplomats were followed by a large group of people to make it more magnificent and display the superiority and importance of the sovereign they represented. Especially, for important missions, such as the peace negotiations or the accession to the throne of a new sovereign, it was important for the envoy to have a large retinue. The dragoman Ali Bey arrived in Venice in 1514 with eighty companions (of this number 25 were *sipahi*) for the purpose of peace negotiations (Sanudo 1879-1903, 17: col. 504), Yunus, in his fourth mission of 1533, was followed by twenty-seven persons and in his sixth trip even by forty-six (Pedani 1994, 51). However, in the seventeenth century, the sizes of the Ottoman retinues were shrunk and mostly were not more than ten. For example, in 1600 Davud came to Venice with a suite of seven persons⁴³ and Khalil in 1602 with ten.⁴⁴

The largest, as well as the first fully-fledged Safavid mission to Europe, was that of 1599 led by Husayn Ali Bey Bayat and Anthony Sherley. When they departed from Isfahan, his entourage totalled 42 people (Don Juan of Persia 1926, 234); however, they entered Prague with a retinue of 20 or 25 persons.⁴⁵ In contrast, among the small-size embassies, we can mention the one led by Ali Qulu Bey Mohrdar had only three people in his entourage when he reached Rome in late August 1609.⁴⁶

In contrast, Safavid envoys travelled with numerous delegations to the Turco-Muslim courts of the Ottoman and Mughal⁴⁷ sovereigns. Particularly, the retinues sent to the Sublime Porte were exceptionally impressive. Retinues that accompanied envoys were usually quite large, encompassing as many as seven or eight hundred, and sometimes even a thousand people.⁴⁸ Travelling with a large retinue was

⁴³ ASVe, CEP, reg. 14, 15 maggio 1600, c. 111r.

⁴⁴ ASVe, CEP, fz. 12, 27 maggio 1602.

⁴⁵ ASVe, SDG, fz. 30, 28 ottobre 1600, c. 252v. Due to the conversion to Catholicism among some of its members, the embassy was further shrunk. While Husayn Ali Bey was in Rome, three members of his retinue abandoned him and became Catholics. At the Spanish court, the envoy's nephew, Ali Qulu bey Bayat, Oruj bey Bayat, and Bunyad bey left Husayn Ali Bey's retinue and converted to Catholicism. For more see García Hernán 2011, 294-9; 2016, 75-80.

⁴⁶ BAV, Urb. lat. 1077, f. 415v.

⁴⁷ Typically, the Safavid delegation to the Mughal court consisted of hundreds of individuals, and Mughals also reciprocated with large embassies. In 1598, Manuchehr Bey led a Safavid embassy to the Mughal court accompanied by "500 Turkamans in rich dresses" (Akbarname 1907-39, 3: 1113). In 1618, Mughal envoy Mirza Barkhudar, better known as Khan Alam came to Qazvin accompanied by 700 or 800 attendants (Munshī 1978, 2: 1159).

⁴⁸ In 1568, the Safavid embassy, led by Shah Qulu Sultan Ustajlu reached the Ottoman court in Edirne bearing a letter, immense gifts, and presents (*pîşkeş u hedâyâ*) from Shah Tahmâsp (r. 1524-76) and accompanied by 1000 *Qizilbashs* (*surh-ser*, lit. read-

a common practice intended to display the importance attached to the mission and the dignity of the envoy.⁴⁹

The size of the entourage, along with the rank of the guest, was the determinant factor in fixing daily allowances for foreign envoys in Venice. In 1509, the second Safavid envoy was given two ducats a day (Sanudo 1879-1903, 8: col. 432) for his expenses and those of his retinue of 4 persons (Sanudo 1879-1903, 8: col. 255). Venetian sources sometimes called this kind of allowance "food expenses" (*spese di bocca*) and this evidence suggest that the Senate calculated daily allowances according to the number of the "mouths" (*boche*) i.e. persons (Guliyev 2020, 99). However, available documents suggest that particularly in the seventeenth century, the amount of the refreshments (*refrescamenti*)⁵⁰ offered to the Safavid envoys was the same, which constituted 100 ducats (Predelli 1907, 7: 63, 107; Berchet 1865, 198), irrespective of the size of their retinue. The exception was the embassy of Fathi Bey of 1603. Due to their longer stay (more than 6 months) in Venice, in accordance with the decision of the Senate, dated 14 August 1603, a sum of 200 ducats (Berchet 1865, 198) was allotted in addition to the previous one of 100 ducats given in early March of the same year.

4 Conclusion

It was difficult for diplomats to travel between Venice and Safavid capitals and this was evident in the accounts of the contemporary envoys and travellers. In most instances, the envoys to and from the Qizilbash court travelled incognito through the Anatolian and Levantine routes, which were held and strictly controlled by the rival Ottomans. Due to the fatigues of long-distance travel, the deaths of envoys were not uncommon. In spite of their difficulties and disadvantages, they remained the most frequented roads between Venice and the Safavid Empire throughout the whole period of their contacts. In Sa-

heads) (Selânikî 1989, 1: 67). In 1596, Shah 'Abbâs I sent Zulfiqar Khan Qaramanlu, as his envoy to the Ottoman court with a retinue of more than 1000 persons (Selânikî 1989, 2: 634, 638). The large size of the embassies was also confirmed by the Venetian baili in Istanbul. According to the Venetian bailo, in 1582 the Safavid envoy Ibrahim Khan entered Erzurum with 400 horsemen (ASVe, CCX, Lett.Amb, Costantinopoli, b. 6, 18 febbraio 1581 [*more veneto*], c. 26v).

49 While Shah Qulu Khan Ustajlu and his son Mohammad 'Tokhmak' Khan Ustajlu were beylerbeyis of Chukhur-e Sa'd province, Zulfiqar Khan Qaramanlu was a governor of Ardabil (Selânikî 1989, 1: 67, 112; 2: 634).

50 Offering food and refreshments (*refrescamenti*) to foreign envoys was an essential part of Venetian diplomatic hospitality. Refreshments offered to the foreign envoys comprised mainly fine sugar, *zucchari* (sugar confections), various types of nuts, famous Piacenza cheese, fresh fruits herbs, and spices (Pedani 1994, 92).

favid-Venetian diplomatic encounters news travelled faster than envoys. By the time, the envoys returned home, news had already made the messages they carried obsolete due to a change of circumstances.

From the beginning of the reign of Shah 'Abbās I in 1587, the commercial agenda increasingly characterized Safavid diplomacy towards Venice as diplomacy and commerce had become inextricably intertwined. This is evident from the nature of the Safavid missions and the social backgrounds of the envoys dispatched to the Serenissima Republic. Particularly, in the seventeenth century, the majority of the Safavid representatives to Venice were merchants of relatively low status. The occupational background was significant for the selection of Safavid envoys in one other way. One reason why merchants were selected as envoys were the nature of the duties, which they were called upon to perform. Since they frequently travelled to and fro between Shah's lands and Venice, merchants were ideal candidates for recruitment. Even during the war times, they enjoyed the freedom of movement, as the frontiers that were otherwise closed were open to them.

In the first quarter of the seventeenth century, the role of the royal merchants in Safavid-Venetian trade contacts appears to have increased, as is evidenced by the number of merchant-envoys visiting Venice. In addition to bearing the shah's missives, Safavid envoys (purveyors), whose trade missions combined with diplomatic ones, were charged to sell the various commodities on the shah's account, including the royal silk, and procure the 'necessary goods' for the court.

The Safavid envoys usually travelled to Venice with small retinues. In addition to long-distance travel, other factors, such as the periodic wars with the Ottomans and the overall character of the Safavid-Ottoman relations obviously had an impact both on the size of the missions and the intensity of Safavid-Venetian diplomatic and trade contacts. Generally, Venice looked upon the Safavids through the prism of its relations with the Ottomans. It was also true for the Safavids, the nature of whose contacts with the Venetians was influenced by their attitude to the Sublime Porte.

Appendix 1

List of Safavid Envoys to Venice (1509-1634)

Name	Date of visit/s to Venice	Profession	Aim of the mission
Unknown	March 1509	Envoy	To get military support or negotiate an anti-Ottoman alliance.
Unknown	May 1509	Envoy	To get military support or negotiate an anti-Ottoman alliance.
Haji Mohammad	1580	Envoy, merchant	To give an account of the Safavid military engagement against the Ottomans and explore the Venetians' stance.
Khoja Ilyas (<i>Yeias</i>)	1597	Envoy, merchant	Together with Mehmed Emin Bey, he was charged with selling royal silk and other merchandise and procuring goods and luxuries for the royal court.
Sujaddin Asad Bey	1600	Envoy, Royal purveyor	Diego de Miranda stated that Asad Bey's real task was "to give money to Don Antonio (Anthony Shirley) for the embassy if he finds him".*
Angelo Gradenigo**	1602	Envoy	To obtain news of the Safavid embassy headed by Husayn Ali Bey Bayat and Anthony Sherley.
Khoja Fathi Bey	1603	Envoy, Royal purveyor	In addition to bearing Shah 'Abbās I's letter to the Venetian Doge, he was charged to sell the 139 bales of royal silk and procure the necessary goods for the Safavid court.
Khoja Kirakos	1608	Envoy, merchant	To retrieve the remaining goods and merchandise belonging to Fathi Bey, which were brought back to Venice following his arrest in Alexandretta (Iskenderun) in 1603 on his way to the Safavid court.

Name	Date of visit/s to Venice	Profession	Aim of the mission
Khoja Safar	1609	Envoy, merchant	To retrieve the remaining goods and merchandise belonging to Fathi Bey.
Khoja Shahsuvar	1613, 1622	Envoy, Royal purveyor	To sell the royal silk and procure the necessary goods for the Safavid court.
Ali Bali	1634-1636	Envoy, merchant	He was dispatched to Venice to announce the enthronement of Shah Safi I and recover the proceeds from the sale of royal silk.

* ASV, Fondo Confalonieri 22, *Le raggioni ch' allega il signor Don Antonio Shirleo inglese ambasciatore del Serenissimo Rè di Persia, per la verità et presidenza della sua embasciata*, f. 317v.

** He was a Venetian Jew converted to Christianity (Rota 2012, 151).

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ASVe = Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Venezia.

CCX, Lett. Amb-Capi del Consiglio di Dieci, Dispacci (Lettere) degli ambasciatori, Costantinopoli, b. 6.

CEP (Collegio, Esposizioni principi), fzz. 3, 11, 12, 13, 18; registro 14.

Lettere e scritture turchesche, fz. 5.

QC (Quarentia criminal), 114.

SDC (Senato, Dispacci Costantinopoli), fz. 74.

SdelC (Senato, Secreta, Deliberazioni Costantinopoli), fzz. 10, 12, 26.

SDG (Senato, Dispacci, degli ambasciatori e residenti, Germania), fz. 30.

SDM (Senato, Deliberazioni, Mar), fz. 157.

BAV = Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Roma.

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