Sinem Arcak Casale,

Gifts in the Age of Empire: Ottoman-Safavid Cultural Exchange, 1500-1639,

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Arcak Casale's book investigates gifts interchanged between the Ottoman and Safavid courts from the early sixteenth century to the opening decades of the seventeenth century. The book concentrates on a diverse array of gifts, primarily now-lost precious objects of art like luxury manuscripts, precious textiles, and bejeweled belts, which are conceptualized as agents of cultural and diplomatic exchange by the author. Drawing on diverse sources involving diplomatic correspondences, archival documents, chronicles, poems, and illustrated manuscripts, Arcak reinterprets the Safavid-Ottoman diplomatic relations in this era through the lenses of art and culture. Her interdisciplinary methodology seamlessly integrates history, anthropology, and art history.

The first chapter, titled "Scandal and Decorum", scrutinizes the Safavid-Ottoman gift exchanges in the early decades of the sixteenth century, under the reigns of Ismail I, Bayezid II and Selim I. Arcak defines the whole era between the emergence of the Safavid state and the aftermath of the Chaldiran War as an episode of crisis and analyses the gifts interchanged in these decades in three periods, including the era of Bayezid II, and the periods before and after the Chaldiran Battle. She displays that despite political crisis, balanced and refined gift exchanges governed the Safavid-Ottoman dialogue, and both sides sent each other gifts that matched the courtly and diplomatic decorum in the age of Bayezid II. In this era, coveted gifts like gold-woven fabrics, cash and horses, which corresponded to those presented exclusively to the sultan's family and highest-ranking bureaucrats, were sent to Ismail I by Bayezid II. Similarly, the shah's gifts to Bayezid II, including Safavid tajs, robes of honor, golden belts, and saddles, were chosen among emblematic courtly favors bestowed to the most devoted adherents of Ismail I. After the enthronement of Selim I, gifts interchanged between the two courts turned to openly insulting objects such as opium, women's garments, and dervish clothes that challenged the rival's masculinity, legitimacy, and religious orientation. Chaldiran marked the end of the only period in which the two rival courts exchanged diplomatic gifts in a balanced manner. After the defeat at Chaldiran,

the shah sent elaborate gifts like Qurans, belts, and tajs without any equivalent response from the Ottoman sultan. This irreciprocal gifting mode established in the post-Chaldiran era was maintained as the diplomatic manner between the Safavids and Ottomans for over a century.

The book's second chapter, "An Exquisite Shahnama", explores the Safavid gifts sent to the Ottoman court during the long period of Shah Tahmasb, with a particular focus on an iconic illustrated Shahnama manuscript. Prepared for Tahmasb by a team of outstanding Safavid artists in nearly two decades, the Shahnama manuscript, known as *Shāhnāma-i Shāhī* or Shahnama of Tahmasb, was sent to Selim II to congratulate his enthronement. Arcak interprets Shahnama of Tahmasb as a potent symbol of the Safavid ideology that partly drew on the memory of the ancient Iranian kingdoms' heritage. A second precious manuscript accompanying Tahmasb's Shahnama, a rare Quran that was believed to be copied by Imam Ali, represented the other base of the Safavid legitimacy, namely the dynasty's embracement of Twelver Shi'ism and its genealogy that reached Prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali. Safavid family's representation as devoted Shi'i sovereigns in some paintings in Tahmasb's Shahnama similarly underscored the dynasty's adhesion to Imami Shi'ism. Arcak argues that besides being symbols of the dual bases of the Safavid legitimacy, these two manuscripts consolidated Tahmasb's image as a model sovereign through his artistic patronage, refined aesthetical taste, religious devotion, and having of the most rare and precious objects under his possession. According to the author, the Quran manuscript attributed to Imam Ali had special symbolic significance within the context of Tahmasb's endeavors to enforce Shi'i orthodoxy and orthopraxy within his realms, partly motivated by the Ottoman accusations concerning the Safavids' negligence of communal prayers and disrespect for the houses of worship.

The third chapter, "King of the World", discusses the iconography of Safavid gifts in a series of illustrated manuscripts produced in the second half of the sixteenth century, most of which were *Şehnāme*s prepared for Selim II and Murad III. In this chapter, the author shows that beginning with the later years of Sultan Süleyman's age, several illustrated manuscripts commenced to display Safavid diplomatic gifts in their ceremonial context. These elaborate illustrations had their focus on the Safavid gifts, which were depicted as invisible objects often wrapped in textiles or hidden in boxes, in a manner deemphasizing their materiality. The sultan's reception of gifts in courtly settings formed the central theme of these paintings that picture the gifts as hierarchically organized, conveying a sense of

control and order. The author associates this new iconography's emergence with a new visual image of the Ottoman sultan as the sovereign of the world. She argues that these depictions represented and defined the sultan's claim to world dominion through his ability and right to take gifts from all rulers of the world. Among these rulers were the Safavid shahs, who dispatched gifts to signify their subjugation to the Ottoman sultan. According to Arcak, receiving gifts was a significant reference point for articulating the new sultanic image. The paintings' concentration on the gifts and their reception conveyed those contemporary rulers, including the Safavid one, recognized the Ottoman sultan's superiority.

A six-year-old Safavid prince, Haydar Mirza, sent to the Ottoman court by Abbas I as a hostage with several gifts, constitutes the theme of the book's fourth chapter, "Little Prince Bearing Gifts". Haydar Mirza was dispatched to the Ottoman capital in 1590 as a stipulation of the Istanbul Treaty that ended the twelve-year-long military conflict between the Ottomans and Safavids. It marked the Safavids' defeat at war and their loss of some significant territories. Arcak conceptualizes Haydar Mirza as an extraordinary tribute that manifested the Safavid king's acceptance of vassalship to the Ottoman sultan. She argues that being more than a compulsory and routine tribute, the Safavid prince was received and understood as a gift par excellence, who embodied the Ottoman sultan's supremacy over the Safavid shah and represented the Safavid subordination. Gifts accompanying this infant hostage, including Qurans, luxury textiles, carpets, and elaborate manuscripts, are interpreted by Arcak as precious objects accommodating a variety of royal activities related to collecting art, religious devotion, and reading. The author contends that the objects carried by Haydar Mirza as a group fitted the pattern of gifting formulated by Tahmasb, who established the custom of sending a defined set of precious objects and courtly items that manifest the refined cultural power of the Safavid shah and the extent of the riches under his possession. This pattern was inherited and maintained by Tahmasb's successors, Khudabanda and Shah Abbas, the latter altering the custom at the turn of the seventeenth century.

The book's fifth and last chapter, "Diplomacy and Interaction", examines the Safavid gifts sent to the Ottoman court during the era of Abbas I. In this chapter, the author traces Shah Abbas's reformulation of the entire language and custom of diplomatic gift exchanges in three stages. She shows that in the first stage in the 1590s, Abbas I dispatched elaborate objects of art as groups, sustaining the custom established by Tahmasb. The shah's sending of twelve keys to the newly conquered fortresses in Khurasan to the Ottoman sultan in 1599

marked the second stage, which, according to Arcak, represented the end of the period of boundless gifts initiated by Tahmasb. She reads these keys as offensive and scandalous gifts manifesting the shah's Twelver Shi'ite identity and escalating military power and communicating the message that he will pose a challenge to his adversary both religiously and militarily. The third stage, which began in the early seventeenth century, witnessed a change from gifts to tributes, namely silk, rare animals, natural materials, and manufactured objects, all exchangeable. The author interprets this radical change in the manner of gifting as a result of both empires' integration into an increasingly monetized economic system and their participation in an increasingly globalized trade network. She proposes that marketable gifts rather than precious objects of art that represented refined courtly cultures, kingly values, and courtly occupations fitted the novel economic conditions and defined the new manner of diplomatic gift interchanges in the opening decades of the seventeenth century.

With its novel sources,[1] multi-disciplinary approach, and well-grounded arguments, Arcak's book makes an essential contribution to the literature on the Safavid-Ottoman relations. Her study aims to give a new direction to the field of the history of Ottoman-Safavid interactions, dominated by studies focusing on religio-political conflict and warfare.[2] Few academic inquiries have been made into the material and artistic aspects of Ottoman-Safavid relations, and existing studies tend to concentrate on particular groups of manuscripts, paintings, and albums.[3] Arcak's most significant contribution is analyzing gifts of different kinds

1 Especially the Venetian reports on the Safavid diplomatic relations constitute new primary sources for studying the era and this particular topic. For another novel study on Italian sources shedding light on the Safavid history and Safavid-Ottoman gift exchanges, see Ahmad Guliyev, *Safavids in Venetian and European Sources* (Venecia: Venice University Press, 2022).

2 See Adel Allouche, *The Origins and Development of the Ottoman-Safavid Conflict (906-962/1500-1555)* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1983); Bekir Kütükoğlu, *Osmanlı-İran Siyasi Münasebetleri (1578-1612)* (Istanbul: İstanbul Fetih Cemiyeti Yayınları, 1983); Özer Küpeli, *Osmanlı-Safevi Münasebetleri* (Istanbul: Yeditepe Yayınevi, 2014); Hamidreza Mohammednejad, *Osmanlı-İran İlişkileri (1482-1576)* (Istanbul: Doğu Kitabevi, 2017).

3 See Filiz Çağman and Zeren Tanındı, "Remarks on Some Manuscripts From the Topkapı Palace Treasury in the Context of the Ottoman-Safavid Relations", *Muqarnas*, 13 (1996), pp.132-148; Lale Uluç, *Türkmen Valiler, Şirazlı Ustalar, Türkmen Okurlar: XVI. Yüzyıl Şiraz Elyazmaları* (Istanbul: İşkültür Yayınları, 2006); Zeren Tanındı, "Safevî, Osmanlı ve Özbek İlişkisinin Kitap Sanatına Yansıması: Bir Saray Albümü ve Şeyhzâde Nakkaş", *Filiz Çağman'a Armağan*, eds. Ayşe Erdoğdu, Zeynep Atbaş and Aysel Çötelioğlu (Istanbul:

as heterogenous groups in chronological order and integrating the material and artistic aspects of the Safavid-Ottoman relations into these rival empires' diplomatic, political, and military history. Rather than analyzing objects of art stylistically and individually, as has been made in the catalog books of several blockbuster exhibitions on imperial gifts,[4] she attempts to locate the gifts as groups within a proper diplomatic context, shaped by the political, religious, and military disputes and cultural concurrences between the two rival courts. This particular methodology, namely chasing after the diplomatic, political, and religious meanings of gifts rather than analyzing them with stylistic and descriptive approaches, made it possible to overcome the biggest challenge of such a study that centers on objects most of which did not reach today.

Gifts in the Age of Empire has some flaws and weaknesses, too. The book's most notable shortcoming is its omission of discussing two significant points. The first is the reasons behind the asymmetries governing the gift exchanges after the early sixteenth century. In different chapters, the author underscores that the Safavids did not receive any diplomatic gifts from the Ottomans in the aftermath of the Chaldiran. However, she does not explain the causes of the Ottoman refusal or omission of sending corresponding gifts to the Safavid court in this era. The second point that needs to be discussed in a short section -better as the epilogue- is the role of the gifts in artistic and aesthetic interaction between the two empires. It is true that this study's central theme is diplomatic exchanges rather than artistic dialogue. However, considering that most of the gifts constituted precious objects of art, it would be meaningful to conduct a short discussion, at least drawing on existing studies, about their artistic appropriation and role in the emergence of comparable aesthetic flows and visual-artistic vocabularies.

In general, the book achieves to portray the religio-political and military contexts in which diplomatic gift exchanges took place. However, its second chapter fails to refer to some discussions and sources concerning Shah Tahmasb's religious policies and contemporary Ottoman accusations against the Safavids. In the

Lale Sanat, 2019), pp. 579-590; Emine Fetvacı, *The Album of the World Emperor: Cross-Cultural Collecting and Album Making in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2019).

4 See, for example, Linda Kamaroff (ed.), *Gifts of the Sultan: The Arts of Giving in Islamic Courts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011); Aleksei Konstantinovich Levykin, et al. (eds.), *The Tsars and the East: Gifts from Turkey and Iran in the Moscow Kremlin* (Washington, D.C.: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, 2009).

related section, the author rearticulates an opinion that has been proven otherwise and states that to cement his dynasty's religious and political legitimacy, Tahmasb commissioned a novel genealogy reaching Prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali via the Seventh Imam Musa al-Kazem (p. 86). In an article penned in 2010, Kazuo Morimoto demonstrated that the dynasty's "official" genealogy predated the Safavid State, and the earliest known records of this genealogical chart belonged to the second half of the fifteenth century, not to Tahmasb's era.[5] Arcak's text lacks any reference to Morimoto's discussion. In the same section, she expresses that the scarcity of mosques in Iran was one of the mainstays of the religious accusations made by the Ottomans (p. 73). This assertion seems to have lacked a concrete basis because sixteenth-century Iran had numerous mosques that were built by different successive dynasties predating the Safavids for almost a millennium, and the Ottomans rather and more often blamed their Shi'i adversaries for abandoning and vandalizing the places of worship.[6]

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5 Kazuo Morimoto, "The Earliest Alid Genealogy for the Safavids: New Evidence for the Pre-dynastic Claim to Sayyid Status", *Iranian Studies*, 43/4 (2010), pp. 447-469.

6 For the most recent discussion on this theme, see Damla Gürkan Anar, "Masjed-e Jame'-ye 'Abbasi: A Twelver Shi'ite Congregational Mosque in the Context of the Debate on the Friday Prayer in the Safavid World", *Entangled Confessionalizations? Dialogic Perspectives on the Politics of Piety and Community-Building in the Ottoman Empire, 15th-18th Centuries*, eds. Tjana Krstic and Derin Terzioğlu (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2022), pp. 401-428.