

# New perspectives on the Ottoman-Safavid conflicts: Writings on the war by soldiers, spies, friars, and travellers (late 16<sup>th</sup> - early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries)

## Responsable

**Sacha Alsancakli**  
(Inalco / CeRMI)

**Mercredi 12 juillet 2023**  
**14h30-16h30**  
**Salle Déméter 047**

## Discutant

**Ladan Niayesh**  
(Université Paris Cité / LARCA)

## Intervenants

**Sacha Alsancakli**  
(Inalco / CeRMI)

**Werner Gaboreau**  
(Université Sorbonne Nouvelle /  
CeRMI)

**Lukas Rybar**  
(Comenius University in Bratislava)

**Davide Trentacoste**  
(The Haifa Center for  
Mediterranean History)

## Résumé de l'atelier

In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Ottoman Empire and Safavid Iran fought a series of wars for control of the frontier provinces of the Caucasus and Arabian Iraq. Following Ismā'il I's crushing defeat at Chāldirān at the hands of Selīm I (1514), and the signature of the Treaty of Amasya between Süleymān I and Ṭahmāsp I (1555), the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries saw a series of three conflicts in short succession (1578-1590, 1603-1618, and 1623-1639). The war only ended with the signature of the Treaty of Qaṣr-i Shīrīn in 1639, enacting terms for peace and a longer-lasting border between the two states.

The present panel will examine the three conflicts of the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, notably the 1578-1590 war, with the objective of providing new perspectives based on original sources. Although these wars have been extensively chronicled by both Ottoman and Safavid court historians, and subsequently discussed in secondary literature, we endeavor to shift focus by relying on hitherto little studied texts written by soldiers, spies, friars and travelers, in order to develop novel insights and research questions on the broader conflict between the two states. As such, this panel is conceived in the framework of the "Reading Sources in Area Studies" program developed at CeRMI (Paris) and IREMAM (Aix-en-Provence) since 2021, which intends to make a broader case for the use of non-courtly chronicles to write a history of Turco-Iranian encounters, connections and conflicts.

## Programme

### Sacha Alsancakli

*Ebūbekir b. 'Abdullāh's ghazavātnāme of the Shirvan campaign (1578-1579): An example of "anti-war" Ottoman discourse?*

The beginnings of the 1578-1590 Ottoman-Safavid war were marked by important Ottoman successes on the Caucasian front, as the Sultan's army dealt several devastating blows to the Safavids and quickly conquered Tbilisi and the province of Shirvan. Despite minor setbacks in the winter, the early campaign of Shirvan is thus presented, in chronicles like Muṣṭafā 'Alī's Nuṣretnāme (c. 1584), as an all-around success. There is, however, another aspect to this story in the perspective of rank-and-file soldiers, voiceless yet primary actors of the glorious battles depicted in the Nuṣretnāme and many other texts. The present communication is concerned with the war memoirs of one such soldier, the Tevārīḥ-i 'Osmān Paṣa, composed in Turkish in 1582 by Ebūbekir b. 'Abdullāh, a cavalryman in the Ottoman army.

In Ebūbekir's story, heroics are quickly brushed aside; rather, the reader is constantly reminded of the terrible cost paid by soldiers and confronted with tragic depictions of the horrors of war. As a window into the mindset of an Ottoman veteran of the Safavid conflict, Ebūbekir's text thus represents an original and important source worthy of discussion. In this paper, I will present the *Tevārīḥ* and examine it as a possible example of 'anti-war' Ottoman discourse; I will then discuss how such a discourse might tie in with crucial developments in the Empire at the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Werner Gaboreau**

*Connected perspectives in writing the Ottoman-Safavid wars in 17<sup>th</sup> century Iran and Europe: Faithful European copies of Iranian chronicles, or mutatis mutandis adaptations?*

In Persian accounts of the Ottoman-Safavid wars of the late 16<sup>th</sup> -early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, denominational factors are often used to highlight the Shia legitimacy of the Safavids, as well as the cohesion of the territories they dominated in Iran. In this context, chroniclers like Iskandar Beg Munshī (*Tārīkh-i 'Ālamārā-yi 'Abbāsī*, c. 1616-1629) and Fażlī Işfahānī Khūzānī (*Afzal al-Tawārīkh*, c. 1616-1639) have endeavoured to construct in their texts a uniform narrative for these conflicts.

This period of confrontation was also the beginning of European diplomatic interest in "Persia", connected with the quest for an anti-Ottoman rear alliance. In European sources, Safavid origins are thus studied in a comparative perspective, related to the ongoing struggle between the two states. Combined with increased knowledge of Persian, long-term settlement in Isfahan at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century also puts forth the question of European access to official Safavid chronicles. In this paper, I will compare official Persian sources, such as those mentioned above, and European scholarly sources, like the accounts by Paulo Simone (early 17<sup>th</sup> century) and Jean Chardin (late 17<sup>th</sup> century), to investigate how and to what extent the official Safavid narrative circulated in Europe.

### **Lukas Rybar**

*Searching for an alliance: Habsburgs, Rurikids, and the Third Ottoman-Safavid War (1578-1590)*

During the 16<sup>th</sup> century, several European states had constantly been involved in attempts at forming an anti-Ottoman alliance. The goal was to cooperate on the elimination of Ottoman power and its expansion in Europe. In doing so, some of these states (including the Austrian Habsburg Monarchy) counted on the help of Eastern empires such as the Russian Tsardom and Safavid Iran, and they sought to maintain diplomatic contact with these countries. After the outbreak of the Third Ottoman-Safavid war (1578-1590), the issue of the anti-Ottoman alliance once more became relevant.

The impetus for renewed contacts was provided by Safavid Shah Muḥammad Khudābanda (r. 1578-1587), who sent his messenger Hādī Beg to Moscow in 1587 with a request to Russian tsar Fyodor I Ivanovich (r. 1584-1598) for military help against the Ottomans. Russian and Habsburg documents further indicate that the Safavid messenger suggested involving Holy Roman Emperor Rudolph II (r. 1576-1612) in this matter. The mission of Hādī Beg in Moscow subsequently launched a new round of Safavid-Russian-Habsburg diplomatic negotiations to forge a joint alliance against the Ottomans. Based on the analysis of archival and published documents, the aim of this paper is to reveal and examine the goals and attitudes of all negotiating parties (Safavids, Rurikids, and Habsburgs) in relation to the constitution of an anti-Ottoman alliance at the end of the 1580s.

**Davide Trentacoste*****Safavid news and Florentine archives: The Medici eye on the Ottoman-Safavid war of 1578-1590***

Italian archives preserve an impressive amount of documentation on Safavid Persia, much of it relating to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. This rich body of sources represents an invaluable database that can be integrated with the Safavid documentation, very often providing a more detached and/or neutral point of view. In fact, in most cases, these are informative documents concerning the wars between the Safavids and the Ottomans, written by agents sent to the Levant with the specific task of gathering and communicating as much information as possible to Europe. This news was indeed of great importance for Catholic states that had regular relations with the Ottoman Empire or were engaged militarily against it.

Although the archives of Venice and Rome are generally considered, with good reason, to be the most important for information on the East, many such reports can also be found among the papers preserved in other archives. One in which the documentation relating to Persia is particularly rich is that of Florence, mainly due to the extensive information network that the Medici spread throughout the Eastern Mediterranean. With this paper, I intend to provide an overview of the "Persian" news kept in Florence, notably as they related to the Ottoman-Safavid war of 1578-1590.