

Fidan, G.; Garcıa-Noblejas Sanchez-Cendal, G.; Fidan, A. G. (2023). "Before Mendoza: Rethinking The Overlooked Origins Of Sinology in Europe". *Asya Arařtırmaları Uluslararası Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*. 7 (2), 141-158.

Arařtırma Makalesi

**BEFORE MENDOZA: RETHINKING THE OVERLOOKED ORIGINS OF
SINOLOGY IN EUROPE***

Mendoza'dan nce: Avrupa'da Sinolojinin Kkenlerini Yeniden Dşnmek

Giray FIDAN**

Gabriel GARCA-NOBLEJAS SANCHEZ-CENDAL**

Ayře Gl FIDAN**

Abstract

This article re-examines the view that Juan Gonzalez de Mendoza's 1585 Historia signifies early modern European Sinology's genesis. It highlights overlooked pre-1585 Iberian and Ottoman texts on China, including 16th century Portuguese travelogues and histories, 1575-1605 Spanish accounts, and Ali Akbar's 1516 Ottoman Khataynameh portraying Ming China. The objective is stimulating debate on re-conceptualizing fledgling Sinology's origins, potentially shifting its roots further back before Mendoza's 1585 work. Early Portuguese and Spanish eyewitness narratives and compilations on China preceded sixteenth century treatises methodically gathering information for European audiences. Meanwhile, Akbar's Khataynameh offered Ottoman circles an authoritative profile of China. Highlighting these overlooked pre-1585 perspectives challenges Western European assumptions about Sinology's genesis, inviting scholarly rethinking. The diverse preliminary attempts at comprehending China reveal embryonic Sinology emerging through incipient Sino-European interactions before coalescing as a formal academic discipline in nineteenth century Europe. Retrieving evidence of pre-1585 engagement broadens conceptualizations of early modern Eurasian knowledge accumulation.

Keywords: Sinology, Spain, Portugal, Ottoman Empire.

z

Bu makale, Juan Gonzalez de Mendoza'nun 1585 tarihli Historia'sının erken modern Avrupa Sinolojisinin kkenini temsil ettiėi grřn yeniden incelemektedir. 16. yzyıl Portekiz seyahatnamelerini ve tarih kayıtlarını,

* Geliř Tarihi / Received: 08.11.2023, Kabul Tarihi / Accepted: 13.12.2023. <https://doi.org/10.58640/asyar.1377527>

** Prof. Dr., Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli niversitesi Edebiyat Fakltesi Doėu Dilleri ve Edebiyatı Blm in Dili ve Edebiyatı ABD, giray.fidan@hbv.edu.tr, ORCID ID:<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5002-9253>

** Prof. Dr., University of Granada, ggnoblejas@hotmail.com, ORCID ID:<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7853-6890>

** Dr. ėr. yesi, Milli Savunma niversitesi Kara Harp Okulu Dekanlıėı, aysesahin85@gmail.com, ORCID ID:<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0720-3321>

1575-1605 arası İspanyol kayıtlarını ve 1516 tarihli Osmanlı Ali Ekber'in Ming Hanedanı dönemi Çin'ini betimleyen Hitayname adlı eserini de içeren, Çin hakkında göz ardı edilmiş İberya ve Osmanlı metinlerini öne çıkarmaya çalışmaktadır. Makalenin amacı Sinolojinin kökenlerinin yeniden kavramsallaştırılmasını ve potansiyel olarak köklerini Mendoza'nın 1585 tarihli eserinden daha da erken olabileceğini tartışmaktır. Erken dönem Portekiz ve İspanyol anlatıları ve Çin üzerine derlemeleri, 16. yüzyıl Avrupası'ndaki sistematik yazılı kaynaklardan öncedir. Ayrıca Ali Ekber'in Hitayname'si Osmanlı elitlerine Çin'in bir portresini sunmaktadır. Göz ardı edilen 1585 öncesi bakış açılarını yeniden değerlendirmek Sinoloji'nin kökenleri hakkındaki Batı Avrupa varsayımları sorgulanmasını gerektirmektedir. Çin'i anlamaya yönelik bu girişimler 19. yüzyıl Avrupası'nda bilimsel bir akademik disiplin haline gelmeden önce sinolojinin varlığına işaret etmektedir. 1585 yılından önceki etkileşimlere dair kanutları yeniden düşünmek, erken modern dönemde Avrasya bilgi birikimine dair kavrayışlara yeni bir bakış açısı getirmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sinoloji, İspanya, Portekiz, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu.

Introduction

Most scholarly works on Sinology conventionally acknowledge Juan González de Mendoza's 1585 book *Historia de las cosas más notables, ritos y costumbres del gran reyno de la China* [History of the Most Notable Things, Rites, and Customs of the Great Kingdom of China] as one of the earliest and most widely disseminated European publications about China and "the beginning of the first great age of Western sinology" (Lee, 2012: 100-101).¹ However, in this article, we aim to re-examine this consensus by highlighting examples of earlier Portuguese, Spanish and Ottoman texts on China preceding Mendoza's work. Our objective is to shed light on the nascent origins of Sinology in Europe prior to the late 16th century and encourage rethinking the genesis of this field in the European context. By drawing attention to overlooked Iberian and Ottoman writings on China before 1585, we hope to stimulate debate on re-conceptualizing the origins of fledgling Sinology, potentially shifting its roots further back before González de Mendoza's seminal volume. Excavating evidence of pre-1585 European engagement with China challenges conventional assumptions and invites us to reconsider the early timeline in the development of Sinology. This article represents an initial foray into broadening the lens on the genesis of early modern European perspectives on China.

The Chinese term “汉学” denotes a unique tradition of scholarship divergent from the philosophical principles and reasoning emphasized during the Song dynasty, known as “理学” or “Neo-Confucianism.” Instead, “汉学” specifically refers to the scholarly practices that flourished during the Qing dynasty, particularly the Qian-Jia School of textual criticism and exegesis. This school of thought rigorously focused on the intensive study of classical Chinese texts, especially those from the Han dynasty, and placed significant emphasis on the meticulous analysis of language, textual variants, and historical context. The scholars of the Qian-Jia School were renowned for their scrupulous attention to detail and rigorous methodological approach, which involved the systematic comparison of multiple versions of a text and a thorough analysis of its structure and content. This approach contrasted with the more abstract and theoretical nature of Song Neo-Confucianism, which prioritized metaphysical and moral philosophy over textual analysis. The profound influence of the Qian-Jia School on the trajectory of Chinese intellectual history remains undeniable, as its lasting legacy is evident in the current approach of Chinese scholars towards the intensive study of classical texts, emphasizing textual details and historical context. In conclusion, the term “汉学” in Chinese refers to a specialized branch of scholarship that emerged during the Qing dynasty, and is representative of the meticulous methods used by the Qian-Jia School. This scholarly tradition ardently focused on classical Chinese texts, employing thorough textual analysis and historical examination as its defining methodological features. The unique legacy of this influential school continues to shape the study of classical Chinese texts by scholars in China today (Zhang, 2011).

In Western language traditions, the concept of “Sinology” has undergone developmental phases. The earliest dedicated establishment of a Sinology academic chair in the West occurred on December 11, 1814, when the French Academy officially founded the “Chair of Chinese and Tartar-Manchu Languages and Literature.” This momentously inaugurated Sinology studies in France while also significantly impacting the broader European Sinology community. At this time, “Sinologie” had not emerged in French, nor “Sinology” in English. The first documented French usage of “Sinologie” appeared in L.A.M. Bourgeat's 1814 article “L'histoire de la sinologie” in “*Mercure étranger*,” although it only officially entered French dictionaries in 1878. The English “Sinology” likely derives from French, potentially entering English dictionaries around 1882. Prominent sinologist Herbert Franke proposed that employing suffixes like “ology” to denote academic disciplines arose in the 19th century. In English, “Sinology” first appeared in 1838 and 1857 before gaining wider currency around 1882 as studying China. Thus, around 1860-1880, the hybrid term “Sinology” gradually acquired its common meaning. During this period, studying China grew into a distinct academic subject. Some scholars use the variant “Sinologue”, occasionally seen in contemporary European sinological works. Franke's interpretation suggests the Greek root “Sin” combined with the Latin suffix “ology” denoting a field of study. Japanese

¹ Colin Mackerras stated that González de Mendoza's work signifies “the beginning of the first great age of Western sinology” see: (Brook, 2000: 16); “La obra de González de Mendoza culmina una tradición textual [...] e inaugura otras” (“González de Mendoza's work is the apex ending of a textual tradition [...] and the beginning of a new era”), states Lara Vilà. See: (Lara Vilà, 21, 74).

scholars alternatively propose “Sin,” “Sinai,” and related linguistic forms stem from the Chinese “秦” (Qin), via the Beijing pronunciation “tsin” (commonly “chin”), which led to dropping the “ch” sound and eventual forms like “Sin” and “Thin.” This evolution purportedly yielded variants like “Sinae” and “Thinae.” Despite disagreements on the etymology, “Sinology” is generally understood as Western academic study of Chinese language, civilization, and history. In early Western Sinology, Chinese scholars participated significantly, with many early Sinological works by Jesuit missionaries in China extensively refined and co-authored by Chinese literati. However, once established as a European academic discipline, Sinology specifically denoted Western scholars’ study of Chinese language, civilization, and history, excluding direct Chinese participation. Regarding contemporary trends of increased Chinese scholars teaching and publishing in Western Sinology departments, this is a separate issue not altering the fundamental meaning of Sinology. In Chinese academia, “汉学” (Hanxue) emerged referring to the study of China by foreign scholars. The comprehensive *Hanyu Dacidian* dictionary defines “汉学” as foreign scholarly inquiry into China. This usage traces back to the Qing scholar Yu Yue’s *Cha Xiang Shi Cong Chao*, referencing “汉学” first describing Japan’s study of China, specifically Ito Jinsai’s work. Additionally, Mo Dongyin’s *Hanxue Fada Shi* confirms “汉学” became established in the 19th century as Western missionaries and scholars progressed in studying China (Zhang, 2011).

Zhang Xiping introduces the concept of early sinology, which he labels as “Early Western Travelogue Sinology” (西方早期的游记汉学). China and Europe are situated on opposite extremities of the European and Asian continent, geographically separated by expansive deserts and mountain ranges. In antiquity, the primary means of connecting these distant regions was through interactions with the nomadic tribes inhabiting the Eurasian heartland. Oral traditions and accounts passed down through generations formed the earliest Western knowledge of China, encompassing a blend of myths and legends. Subsequent to the Roman conquests and later the Mongol invasions, Europeans began to acquire more factual information about the East. Marco Polo’s renowned travelogue, “The Travels of Marco Polo,” stands as a prominent example of early “travelogue sinology” in the West. This travelogue served as a cornerstone, establishing the foundation for Western comprehension and perceptions of China. Through Marco Polo’s narrative and experiences, European audiences gained insight into the realities of China, contributing to a more realistic understanding of the distant land and its civilization (Zhang, 2011).

Historic engagement between China and the Western world dates back to the Qin and Han dynasties, but substantive cultural exchange and objective understanding of China in the West did not occur until the 16th century, enabled by the discovery of new trans-Eurasian maritime routes. In this significant process, Portugal, a small peripheral European country, played a pioneering role. Portugal’s Asian exploration and colonization, particularly in China, facilitated the introduction of Western knowledge, technology, and culture. By establishing the first direct trade links with China, Portugal’s presence in Macau served as a vital hub for Sino-Western intellectual and cultural exchange. Notably, Portuguese Jesuit missionaries like Matteo Ricci and Diego de Pantoja were instrumental in transmitting Western science and philosophy to China, engendering “Western Learning” or “Western Studies” (西学) as a distinct field. The Portugal-China engagement profoundly impacted global trade and Christianity’s spread in China. Portugal’s early role laid the groundwork for subsequent Sino-Western cultural and intellectual exchange, initiating cross-cultural communication and paving the way for further developments. Portugal made major early Sinology contributions during two key periods: The Travelogue Sinology Period (游记汉学时期) and Missionary Sinology Period (传教士汉学时期). The former began via Portuguese adventurers’ documented experiences in China, establishing “travelogue Sinology.” Portugal’s early 16th century Guangdong presence offered influential accounts of China. The Missionary Sinology Period commenced with Macau’s Jesuit mission serving as a gateway for cultural exchange. Beyond spreading Christianity, the Jesuits earnestly studied Chinese language and culture, advancing Sinology. Distinguishing themselves from travelogue Sinologists, the Jesuits delved deeper into Chinese language and culture through translating classics, introducing Western science and technology, and pioneering Chinese language study methods. A prototype example is Michele Ruggieri sj (1543-1607), a Jesuit born in the kingdom of Naples when it was part of the Spanish Empire, and who was the first to translate a wide and extensive part of 论语 in 1590. In conclusion, Portugal significantly

influenced early-stage Sinology, with the Jesuits playing a pivotal role in Sino-Western cultural exchange and making substantial scholarly achievements that enriched mutual understanding between the two civilizations (Zhang, 2011).

But before the Jesuits, the Franciscans were the first missionary group to travel to China and document the country in letters. (Thierry Meynard, SJ & Roberto Villasante, SJ, 2018) (Cervera, 2014) They mostly travelled by land to Karakorum to visit the Tartars and, then, to China under Tartar rule. The first Franciscan friar to travel to China was Giovanni de Piano Carpini (also known as da Pian del Carpine, c. 1182-1252), who went to the court of the Great Khan in Karakorum in 1246, before the Tartars conquered China. He returned to Rome in 1247, after which he wrote the *Historia Mongalorum* in Latin.² Guillermo de Rubruk (c. 1220-1293) also traveled to the court of the Great Khan in Karakorum. He returned to the Holy Land in 1254, where he wrote the *Itinerarium*, describing many difficulties and adventures he experienced. His text does not describe China itself, but rather his journey into and out of Tartar territory.³ China was conquered by the Tartars in 1260. Juan de Montecorvino (1247-1328) was sent by the Pope to the Orient in 1291 and visited the Great Khan. He succeeded in not only having an audience with him, but also entering central China and building a church in Beijing, where he lived alone for eleven years. Later, another Franciscan friar, Arnold of Cologne, joined him there. Montecorvino's letter provides rich documentation about China.⁴ However, Montecorvino's letter cannot be considered a comprehensive account of China. It should be noted, though, that he stated he learned the Tartar language and translated the Book of Psalms and New Testament into it. He also wrote religious hymns and prayers in the Tartar language. However, the most extensive and detailed account of Yuan Dynasty China was written by the Franciscan friar Odorico de Pordenone (c. 1265-1331). In his work "Relatio de mirabilibus orientalium Tatarorum," he chronicled his eventful travels through many eastern kingdoms (Firenze: Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2016) (Bucarest: Cartea Universitaria, 2007).

Earliest Portuguese Texts on China

The Portuguese were the first Europeans to methodically gather substantial information about China and disseminate knowledge of the Chinese empire in Europe through published writings. ("Relatos de viajes inéricos: Peregrinação y Viaje del mundo," 2015: 367). Some of the earliest extant textual accounts of China composed by Portuguese authors include Tomé Pires's *Suma Oriental*, the *Cartas dos cativos de Cantão* ("Letters by two captives in Canton") penned by Cristóvão Vieira and Vasco Calvo, and Galiote Pereira's *Algumas coisas sabidas da China* ("Some news on China") dated 1551. Pires's *Suma Oriental*, written around 1512-1515, represents one of the first attempts to compile information on the lands and peoples encountered by the Portuguese in Asia, including valuable descriptions of China gleaned through trade interactions. The *Cartas dos cativos* provides a rare early narrative of China based on direct observation, composed by two Portuguese merchants detained in Canton in 1534-1536. Galiote Pereira's 1551 manuscript offers another vital early Portuguese account transmitting intelligence on Chinese affairs and culture.

In addition to the aforementioned texts, numerous brief letters providing information on China reached Portugal from Portuguese individuals stationed in Guangdong during this early period. Zhang Xiping demonstrates that none of these early Portuguese texts could be classified as comprehensive sinological. Another notable early account is «Informação da China mandada por un Homen a Mestre Francisco» (1548, "Information about China sent by a man to Maister Francisco") (Zhang, 2011). From 1550 onwards, many texts about Asia and China began to be printed and circulated in Portugal. Examples include *Costumes e Leis do Reino da China* (1554, "Habits and Laws of the kingdom of China") and *Tratado das coisas da China* (Évora, 1569-70, "Treatis on the things of China"), authored by Friar Gaspar da Cruz. While containing some geographical, historical and ethnographic content, these short treatises predominantly focused on Chinese commodities like silk, porcelain and spices that could be traded by the Portuguese. The commercial orientation of these works reflects the mercantile priorities underlying early Portuguese engagement with China.

² <https://archive.org/details/historiamongalo00pullgoog> (8 September, 2023).

³ *The Journey of William of Rubruck to the Eastern Parts of the World, 1253-1255*, The Hakluyt Society, Second Series, vol. 4 (London: 1800), digitalized at www.archive.org/details/journeyofwilliam00ruys.

⁴ <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/corvino1.asp>, (8 September, 2023).

The Two Earliest Extant Texts About China Composed by Portuguese Writers

Tomé Pires, 1517, *Suma Oriental*⁵

The Portuguese explorer Tomé Pires traveled extensively throughout Portugal's Asian conquests, primarily present-day Indonesia, Malaysia, the Molucca Islands, and Macao. In 1516, he was dispatched by the Portuguese king on a mission to China, where he entered and likely died in 1524, although some sources claim he resided in Jiangsu until 1540. In his travelogue *Suma Oriental*, Pires wrote extensively about his voyages but provided limited information on China proper. He discussed China at the beginning of Chapter 5, focusing predominantly on Chinese trade commodities and transport routes to Malacca (116-134). Pires exhibited minimal interest in other topics related to China throughout this text. His writing reveals the commercial motivations underlying early Portuguese engagements with China.

***Cartas dos Cativos de Cantão*⁶**

The title refers to two distinct texts composed by two Portuguese men detained in Canton; it literally translates to “Letters by two captive men from Canton”. The *Cartas dos cativos de Cantão* comprises two separate texts penned by Portuguese men imprisoned in Canton. The first letter dated 1534 was authored by Cristóvão Vieira (107), largely describing the activities of Portuguese traders and diplomats in China based on the author's direct observations, with minimal research or consultation of prior European or Chinese texts evident. His cursory discussion of China proper begins in paragraph 27, superficially touching on topics like the geographical provinces, mandarin governance and lifestyle, military forces, penal system, land tenure, walled compounds, and a detailed portrayal of Canton city. Vieira frequently utilizes Chinese terms and names. The second letter from 1536 was written by merchant Vasco Calvo, who arrived in China in 1521 before being detained in Canton where he wrote this account. Unlike Vieira's text, Calvo's letter lacks any generalized perspective on China, instead focusing narrowly on Chinese riverine travel, coastal cities, Portugal's commercial interests in entering China (particularly paragraph 33 onwards), and proposals for Portuguese military conquest of Chinese cities. According to the author, his letter originally included attached illustrations and plans. As two of the first extensive eyewitness narrations of China following Marco Polo's book, both texts hold crucial significance despite their limitations.

Spanish Sinological Works before Mendoza⁷

The first two likely comprehensive works on China were written in 1575. The authors were a captain, Miguel de Loarca, and a friar, Martín de Rada. They traveled to China together and wrote separate accounts. Their treatises may represent the earliest extensive sinological works that abandon the only-travelogue model and put forward a mixed model of travelogue and encyclopedic account of China.

Miguel de Loarca, 1575

The full title is “Relacion del viaje que hezimos a la China desde la ciudad de Manila en las del poniente año de 1575 años, con mandado y acuerdo de Guido de Lavazaris governador i Capitan General que a la sazón era en las Islas Philipinas”, which translates to “Description of the travel we made to the kingdom of China from the city of Manila in the year 1575, under the orders and approval of the Governor and Captain General of the Philippine Islands, Guido de Lavazaris”. The author is a captain who traveled with Friar Martín de Rada to China. The text contains 33,199 digitized words across 37 pages written front and back from page 113 to 150. It is structured in two main parts. The first part recounts the fight and victory over the Chinese pirate Limahon, followed by the trip to Chinese coasts and inland as a guest of Chinese authorities, rewarded for defeating the pirate who had also attacked Chinese ports. It also provides some description of Chinese ports, cities, and city life, including two references to drama plays (“farsas”). It translates two official letters from high Chinese authorities to

⁵ The *Suma Oriental* of Tomé Pires and *The Book of Francisco Rodrigues* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1944).

⁶ *Cartas dos cativos de Cantão*, Instituto Cultural de Macau, Lisboa, 1992. National Library of Portugal, [<https://purl.pt/26864/1/index.html#/32-33>], (11 September, 2023).

⁷ See the best recent research on the topic: D. Folch, *En el umbral de la China Ming: Las relaciones en el siglo XVI de Martín de Rada, Francisco de Dueñas, Miguel de Loarca, Pedro de Alfaro y Agustín de Tordesillas* (Navarra: Icaria, 2021). See also: 张铠, 西班牙的汉学研究 (1552-2016) (北京: 中国社会科学院出版社, 2017).

the chief of the Spanish expedition in Manila. This first part is essentially autobiographical and narrative, historically accurate with details of places, dates, distances, etc. The second part, starting on page 138, extensively describes China itself, summarized in the following lines.

The author states he used information from Chinese books in his report and was aided by interpreters to understand Chinese printed material (138). He notably provides many items in the Chinese language. Each entry corresponds to a chapter:

The vastness of the land in precise measurements.

The most significant cities and provinces of China with exact figures and names.

The different costumes and caps by social rank and office; how high officials travel within cities and villages; homosexuality; mines for silver and other minerals.

The division of the land into 13 regions and its governance; personnel of the government in each province.

The power and work life of government mandarins; the tributary and tax system of mandarins; two soldier types; military weapon types; military boat types; soldier amounts in major forts and cities.

China's history since mythical origins; the mythical origin of Chinese language and other human tools; the agriculture god; the origin of clothes, ships, gold and silk as currency; the list of kings from first to present with reign durations.

The religions of Chinese people; the supreme God or Heaven and subordinate gods over life spheres; men turned gods via good deeds and their stories; how they pray and conduct rituals.

The monks and nuns of China.

Chinese marriage ceremonies and dowries; adultery cases and punishment.

The Chinese writing script. The nature of books. Main book topics. How they write letters and print books.

The taxes the king receives for household and expenses.

The ports in Oquiam (湖广) province.

Martín de Rada, 1575

The text is titled “Relaçion Verdadera delas cosas del Reyno de TAIBIN por otro nombre china y del viaje que ael hizo el muy Reverendo padre fray martin de Rada provincial que fue dela orden del glorioso Doctor dela yglesia San Agustin. quelo vio y anduvo en la provincia de Hocquien año de 1575 hecha por el mesmo”⁸, which translates to “A faithful description of the things in the kingdom of TAIBIN, also called China, and of the travel that Father Fray Martín de Rada, head of the province of the Saint Augustin order, glorious Doctor of the Church, did; in which is exposed what he saw and where he went in the province of Hocquien in the year 1575; description written by himself”. The text contains 16,711 words across 15 pages written in recto and verso. The "Description" can be divided into two parts based on content. The first part describes the travel to China. The second part covers many aspects of Taybin, or China. The following lines summarize the contents of this second part.

It should be noted that the author does not solely rely on his own observations, but also on information from books in Chinese that he mentions obtaining in page 21 recto. He specifies comparing “seven different printed books that came to my hands” to each other and his own studies and observations “para que se pudiese mejor conocer la verdad” (“in order to better know the truth”). Martín de Rada's work can thus be considered proper sinology research based on both fieldwork and sound bibliography in Chinese. A summary of contents follows:

The name and names of China, «queson, Han, ton, tzon, guan, Tong, gu, cantay». -The extension of the whole territory, its maritime limits, its islands. -All the provinces of China, and its names, and its location. -All the cities of China, and «villas» (smaller towns), and the military forts that exist to defend

⁸ <https://arxiu-web.upf.edu/asia/projectes/che/s16/radapar.htm>, (8 September, 2023).

them from tartars. The villages position and the exact number of them. -Military people composition: amount of men, distribution in the territory, the existence of mercenaries, of horsemen and of infants; the weapons that they use, with names and descriptions of them. -The tax system and the different of taxes according to social status. The taxes currency: silver; rice and other cereals; cotton; silk. -History of China. The narrative starts by the myths of origin, mentioning Pan Gu and comes down from the god's realm to History and the first human king. -Different clothes according to status, from the king to commoners; etiquette, politeness in movements and in greetings. -Different etiquette in dinners and banquets; use of chopsticks, variety of dishes and drinks, music. -Detailed architectural description of houses and settlements; materials and design of houses; the layout of cities and streets; the place for labor land, the ways of watering labor land; the way of sewing and planting. -Exposition of mines and mineral and their use. -The existence of currency. -The writing system, paper, brushes. -The use of compass. -Knowledge of medicinal herbs. -The judiciary system, laws, penalties, punishments; the judges. -The gods, deities, sacrifices to them, religious festivities. -The religious persons: monks, nuns.

Bernardino de Escalante, 1577

The work by Friar Bernardino de Escalante is titled “Discurso de la navegacion que los Portugueses hazen à los Reinos y Provincias del Oriente, y de la noticia que se tiene de las grandezas del Reino de la China”, which translates to “Discourse on the navigation of the Portuguese to the oriental kingdoms and provinces, and on news about the great things of the Kingdom of China”. It contains 28,383 digitized words and was first published in Seville in 1577. It is divided into 16 chapters, the first 5 covering the maritime routes of the Portuguese worldwide, including Brazil, Africa and India. Chapters 6 to 15 contain a description of China organized thematically as follows:

6th: Description of the territory of China, its Provinces and memorable kingdoms that it contains.

7th: How the soil is, and the things that it produces.

8th: About the greatness of cities and temples and buildings, and that are spread all over China.

9th: About gestures, costumes, and habits of this people.

10th: About the Chinese shipping techniques in seas and rivers.

11th: About writing, letters, and general studies.

12th: About how the whole land is governed by a single king and lord, about his counsel, about the greatness of his house and court.

13th: About the presidents and ministers that the King has in each Province, and how they govern.

14th: About how the king prevents war and makes it.

15th: About their religion, rituals and ceremonies that they have.

Last chapter, 16th, deals on how the Chinese could be gained to Chistianity.

After the encyclopedic account on China by Bernardino de Escalante, and before Mendoza's book, the following extensive descriptions of China should be taken into account: Agustín de Tordesillas and his *Relación* (1578)⁹; Francisco de Dueñas and his *Relación* (1580)¹⁰; Pedro de Alfaro's extensive letters

⁹ Full title: *Relación del viaje que hicimos en China nuestro hermano fray Pedro de Alfaro con otros frailes de la orden de nuestro seráfico padre san Francisco de la provincia de San José del año del señor de mil y quinientos y setenta y nueve años, hecha por mi fraile Agustín de Tordesillas* (see Folch, 2021: 265 and ff.), which reads “Description of the trip we made in China with our brother Friar Pedro de Alfaro and with other friars of the order of our seraphic Saint Francisco all belonging to the province of San José in the year of thousand and five hundred and seventy nine, done by myself Firar Agustín de Tordesillas”.

¹⁰ Full title: *Relación de algunas cosas particulares que vimos y entendimos en el reino de China, especial de la ciudad de Cantón y otras particulares [...]. Hecha por mí el alférez Francisco de Dueñas* (see Folch, 2021: 299 and ff.), which reads “Description of some typical things that we saw and heard in the kingdom of China, mostly about Canton city and another ones [...]. Done by myself, liutenant Francisco de Dueñas”.

(1579)¹¹, and Fray Martín Ignacio de Loyola and his *Viaje alrededor del mundo* (1585, Travel all over the world), which Chapter XVII is fully devoted to China¹².

Mendoza wrote in Mexico using received material. That is the reason why we decided to include Diego de Pantoja's work in the present article. His *Relación*, although published in 1605 after Mendoza's book, is a crucial and encyclopedic work conducted both as field research in China and as academic research based on Chinese and European books.

Diego de Pantoja, 1605¹³

The text has 131 written pages on both sides. The title reads "Relación de la entrada de algunos Padres de la Cōpañia de Iesus en la China y particulares sucessos q̃ tuuieron y de cosas muy notables que vieron en el mismo Reyno..." It is divided into two main sections. The first section (pages 1 to 54 verso) recounts the adventurous trip to China undertaken by the writer. The second section (page 55 recto to the end) can be considered a full, detailed, thorough and thematically organized description of China. The following lines attempt to summarize the contents of the text written by the Spanish Jesuit Diego de Pantoja. The account of China is written in Spanish and was completed by the author on March 9th, 1602 in Beijing. It was published in Spain in 1605, as he states on the last page (page 131 verso). Before summarizing Pantoja's text, it should be mentioned that he cites some written sources he read to supplement his data and information. Diego de Pantoja states that before leaving Spain for China, he read a book exposing "las cosas de China" ("the things about China") (page 59 verso). The second reference is on page 89 recto, mentioning a book by Paulo Veneto who was living in China when the Tartars took over. Further research on these two books mentioned by Pantoja should be done to trace earlier books on China. The topics covered in Pantoja's "Letter" from page 55 on are as follows:

- Geography and maps, peoples bordering China.
- International commerce with tributary kingdoms, products that the said kingdoms offer as presents to the "king" of China, and the presence of foreigners in Beijing.
- Pantoja states that the name «Catayo», which was currently used in Europe, designs in fact the same reality as the word «China».
- The administrative division of China (13 provinces, etc.).
- Architectural description of small villages and cities like Nanjing, Suzhou (which he compares with Venice).
- Lakes and its natural resources, kinds of fish that can be found in lakes, fish with cormorants.
- Detailed architectural description of common people's houses in little villages.
- The system of taxes in cities like Suzhou, currency used to pay taxes (silver, rice, spices).
- Detailed description of the canal from Suzhou to Beijing, and the level of water system for boats to sail through.
- Merchants and main merchandises.
- The fertility of China's soil: fruits, kinds of beans, vegetables, eggs, kinds of meat, sorts of fish, cereals.
- Eating habits of the Chinese people: how many foods per day, things normally eaten, how little common people can eat meat or fish and how much mandarins can eat them, the consumption of wild herbs.

¹¹ See Folch, 2021: 319 and ff., and [<https://arxiu-web.upf.edu/asia/projectes/che/s16/alfaro.htm>], (15 September, 2023).

¹² See Folch, D. (2021), passim, and Tellechea, J. (ed.), Martín Ignacio de Loyola, *Viaje alrededor del mundo* (Barcelona: Linkgua, 2010).

¹³ National Library of Spain, [<http://bdh-rd.bne.es/viewer.vm?id=0000255969&page=1>], (8 September, 2023).

-Etiquette at table: cleanliness. Pantoja points out that the Chinese people eat with more civility than Europeans, and that the habit of drinking always hot drinks is healthier than Europeans cold drinks habits.

-Kinds of timber and its many uses.

-The use of silver (not copper) as currency.

-China, its production and kinds.

-The clothing of common people: more usual cloths, and the shapes of clothes.

-How Chinese people value more Portuguese silk than their own silk.

-The social habit regarding men's heads: hair, huts, bonnets.

-Physical description of the Chinese people's faces.

-Common works and crafts.

-The habit of selling own children and selling prizes.

-Social distribution of wealth.

-The pyramid structure of civil power: the "king", the mandarins, the common people.

-Marriage, concubinage, inheritances.

-The ceremonies at deaths, rituals to the spirits of the dead, beliefs in post-mortem life, a description of the Chinese hell.

-The love for divination, description of the process and the diviners.

-Methods for obtaining longevity.

-The army, soldiers, distribution over the territory, punishments, arms and its types, the existence of "mandarins of soldiers" and "mandarins of letters".

-The education of children: what is studied, the Chinese language, the stress on Arts (morals, writing, rhetoric) and the total lack of studies on sciences; the inexistence of universities, and the private tutor teaching system of education all over China; the three degrees of studies: «bachiller, licenciado y doctor»; the system of the Imperial examinations is carefully described.

-The life of the mandarin elite.

-Books and the way of printing books.

-The importance of studying poetry and music; description of some musical instruments.

-How criticism against Power was conducted in the past, and the risks entailed by criticizing, with some historical instances.

-General description of the government of China, the main Offices, the mandarins and its functions within Offices.

-Penal punishments.

-Etiquette, protocols between mandarins and towards mandarins. Main presents that mandarins give to each other, the body language of etiquette, banquets (full description of foods and protocols).

-The cultural adaptation of Jesuits and its good results.

-The great interest of the Chinese people to learn about Europe and the Pope.

-Women: current polygamy, their social customs and habits, their clothes.

-Ancient History and ancient gods.

-Few scientific instruments in China, description of some brought as presents by a Tartar person.

-The salary of the people working for the government from top (the "king") to lowest persons.

-Bordering countries and its relationships with China: Korea, Japan, Macao (Portugal) and Philippines (Spain).

-The “king’s” harem and the imperial eunuchs, their power, psychological characteristics, and function in the court; description of the king’s palace; description of the king’s descendants, status and education; the heir of the throne.

Date and place of ending of writing: «Paquin, y de Março nueue, de mil y seiscientos y dos años», which means Beijing, March the 9th, 1602. The book was finally published in Sevilla by the editor Alonso Rodriguez Gamarra in 1605.

Ottoman Turkish Sinological Works before Mendoza

With the Western and European context, it is relevant to recognize that a distinctive form of early sinology similar to its Portuguese and Spanish counterpart materialized within the Ottoman Empire. A travelogue before the Ottoman era from the Turco-Mongol Empire of Timurids, (Green, 2019: 268) which controlled vast territories from Central Asia to Anatolia between 1370-1507, also has historical significance. “Travel Account of Khajeh Ghiyath al Din Naqqash” called “Acaib-ül-letaif” or “Hitay Sefaretnamesi” was authored by Hoca Gıyaseddin Nakkaş, a member of an official delegation sent in 1419 by Mirza Sahruh, son of Timur, to the Emperor of China during the Ming dynasty. Upon returning to Herat three years later, Nakkaş documented his observations from the journey. The original Persian text was later translated into Ottoman Turkish in 1727 by Şeyhislâm esbak Küçük Çelebizade İsmail Asım efendi under commission from Damat İbrahim Paşa during the reign of Sultan Ahmet III. (Özerdim, 1950: 345).

Ali Akbar’s Khataynameh, 1516

Trans-Asian communication and trade patterns underwent dramatic shifts over the course of the 15th century, which can be divided into three major periods. First, in the aftermath of Mongol rule, the early Ming dynasty emperors in China (1368-1644) and Timurid rulers in Iran (1370-1506) promoted robust commercial and political exchanges across Asia. The leading Chinese economy exerted significant influence, as Chinese envoys traveled overland to cities in Central and Western Asia and by sea to ports in the Western Indian Ocean. These visits were reciprocated by envoys and merchants from those regions arriving in the Chinese capital. This period saw active engagement between the two powers to facilitate trade flows in both directions across Asia. However, this climate of mutual outreach came to an end as China abandoned its maritime expeditions in 1433 and ceased dispatching embassies to Central and Western Asia around the same time. Communication patterns became unidirectional, with traffic flowing only toward China. The Ming court showed progressively less interest in foreign trade and began to view visiting merchants and envoys as a nuisance, although some external contact persisted owing to China’s proclaimed superiority and benevolence. The third major shift stemmed less from changes to Chinese policy than from expanding European influence that disrupted Islamic maritime networks starting in the late 15th century. The Portuguese Estado da Índia supplanted Arabic and Persian traders, although Islamic trade recovered temporarily in the 16th century, as did overland Levantine routes. At first glance, European colonial ventures, spearheaded by Portugal and later the Dutch East India Company, also seemed responsible for the concurrent decline of the Silk Road as a vital artery across Asia. However, instability within Central Asia more directly impacted overland routes, as the collapse of the Timurid Empire gave way to bitter rivalry between the Sunni Shaybanids in Central Asia and the Shiite Safavids in Iran, preventing the smooth interactions seen in prior centuries. Religious and political turmoil within the region disrupted the Silk Road, independent of European expansion. In summary, trans-Asian communication and trade was initially facilitated by mutually beneficial outreach between the Ming and Timurid states in the early 15th century. This broke down as China turned inward, forcing trade to flow one way, before European expansion disrupted maritime networks. Meanwhile, inner Asian instability severed overland ties, with the Silk Road’s fate driven more by regional political turmoil than colonial interference. The 15th century saw dramatic shifts in trade patterns, from reciprocal Ming-Timurid engagement to unilateral trade toward isolationist China, before European colonialism impacted maritime routes and Central Asian conflict disrupted overland Silk Road links (Kauz, 2005).

The Khataynameh, commonly viewed as a travelogue composed in Persian language in the early 16th century, offers valuable perspectives on the era preceding its writing (Ali Ekber Hitaî, 2021: i).

Though commonly regarded as a travelogue, according to Ralph Kauz, the 16th century Persian-language *Khataynameh* differs from conventional travel accounts like Ghiyas ad-Din's early 15th century Timurid mission narrative. Rather than a firsthand report, it offers a systematic overview of China itself structured into twenty chapters delving into Ming society and governance across domains like transportation routes, cities, military, trade, social customs, bureaucracy, laws, agriculture and more. Hence, the text served as an informational profile of potential value to Ottoman merchants, though its Istanbul origins indicate it was likely produced for armchair consumption rather than a practical manual for Silk Road travelers who acquired local knowledge directly. For 16th century Ottoman literary circles, the *Khataynameh* provided an impressively comprehensive examination of Ming institutions, norms and daily life at the height of China's global centrality and dynastic power. While not strictly a guidebook, the breadth of topics effectively conveyed major Chinese cities, markets, conventions and political functions under the Ming. Thus, the value of the *Khataynameh* lies more in furnishing late medieval Persian and Ottoman society an unusually lucid window into inner Ming China amid expanding trade and cross-cultural interest, filtered through an Islamic perspective. Rather than a personal narrative, the text was an authoritative cultural profile and critical medium for transmitting knowledge of Ming China westward. In this sense, the *Khataynameh* represents a remarkable early attempt at systematic cross-cultural analysis, betraying both Ottoman stereotypes and perceptive observations. As a prominent early example of the *Seyahatnâme* (travelogue) tradition, the text holds significance for scholars tracing evolving intercultural representations and knowledge exchange between civilizations prior to European colonialism (Kauz, 2005).

The original Persian language of the *Khataynameh* has led to some misconceptions about its cultural origins. As the text was written in Persian, scholars have often categorized it as a Persian work. However, in the Near Eastern milieu, Persian frequently operated as a courtly lingua franca, including within the Ottoman bureaucratic apparatus, analogous to the enduring scholarly use of Latin in Europe long after the Roman era. For instance, despite using Latin, Isaac Newton's 17th century scientific masterpiece *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica* is not considered a Roman treatise, since Latin persisted as the language of erudition and science. Similarly, just because the *Khataynameh* was composed in Persian does not definitively render it a Persian work. Rather, Persian had become the administrative vernacular of the Ottoman court. The *Khataynameh*'s origins within Ottoman imperial institutions further affirm its status as principally an Ottoman Turkish product, not a Persian one. As with Newton's Latin, the *Khataynameh*'s Persian language reflects stylistic conventions and literary traditions of educated Ottomans, not necessarily the ethnicity of the author(s). Characterizing such texts linguistically risks imposing modern conceptions of national identity. Situating works in their sociolinguistic contexts is crucial for understanding premodern intercultural exchange. Languages like Latin and Persian transcended specific cultures as vehicles of cosmopolitan high culture. Rather than denoting singular national affiliation, the *Khataynameh*'s Persian usage reinforces its position at the crossroads of Turko-Persianate, Islamicate civilization. In essence, the Persian language does not negate the *Khataynameh*'s fundamental Ottoman nature. The practice of Persian courtly writing by Ottoman officials means linguistic identity alone cannot determine a text's cultural origins. As with the endurance of Latin in early modern Europe, Persian's longevity as a courtly idiom in the Near East reminds us that language and ethnicity do not perfectly correlate. The *Khataynameh* must be understood within its Ottoman setting to appreciate the fluid, cosmopolitan quality of cultural production in the early modern Islamicate world.

Understanding the linguistic context is crucial when examining the *Khataynameh*. The Ottoman Empire descended from the Seljuk Empire, which exclusively utilized Persian as the administrative and court language. Persian predominance in Anatolia stemmed from various factors, serving as the bureaucratic vernacular for nearly five centuries in the region. A significant aspect of Iran's cultural relationship with Anatolia was thus the diffusion and flourishing of Persian language and literature. This initial phase began with the 11th century Seljuk conquest of Byzantine territories, continuing until the Great Seljuk period's end in the 12th century. This represented Persian's foundational era in Anatolia before other influential dynamics shaped its trajectory. The Seljuk triumph over Byzantium was partly enabled by the sultans' exposure to Iranian political and cultural traditions, with the Iranian bureaucratic class playing a special role. The Seljuk dynasty itself originated among Oghuz tribes north of the Jaxartes River, migrating to Transoxania and Khorasan by the late 4th century AH. Before 1040 CE, the

Seljuks vanquished Gaznavid armies to begin ruling Khorasan, unfamiliar with governing settled lands. Hence they allied with the Persian bureaucracy. Iranian officials resentful of the Gaznavid court further strengthened ties between Persians and Seljuks. Through this formidable alliance, Persian proliferated widely under Seljuk rule. The partnership between Iranian bureaucrats and Seljuk Turcomans was instrumental in propagating Perso-Islamic language and culture in Seljuk domains. Persian became the chief bureaucratic tongue, remaining widely used even after the dynasty's decline. The second phase lasted from the Seljuk collapse to the 14th century Ottoman emergence. During this period, Persian gained further prestige in Anatolia through masterpieces like those by Nizami, Saadi and Rumi. Anatolian Turkish principalities succeeding the Seljuks saw Persian language and literature reach new heights. However, Turkish vernacular literary traditions like 13th century poet Yunus Emre also developed independently from Persian. Under the Ottomans, Turkish assumed parallel stature while Persian remained the bureaucratic language. The Ottoman court patronized both Turkish and Persian literatures. Persian usage in Anatolia must be situated within centuries of Persianate legacy stemming from Seljuk and post-Seljuk Iranian cultural infusion. The *Khataynameh's* Persian language reflects its Ottoman bureaucratic origins, not solely Iranian identity. Positioning works based on linguistic identity alone overlooks the cosmopolitan, multilingual nature of premodern Islamicate cultural production (Rahmati, 2019).

The Ottoman Empire emerged as an imperial power following the Seljuk Sultanate's disintegration. While widely used by the Ottomans until the 14th century, Ottoman Turkish later became the courtly and official language, although Persian continued to be employed in historical writing. The practice of composing histories in Persian at the Ottoman court indicates the sponsorship of Persian historiography by sultans and elites aimed to develop Ottoman imperial discourse by tapping the lofty imperial traditions of the Persianate world. Through patronizing Persian historical accounts, Ottoman patrons sought to mold the Persian tradition to serve their own cultural-political ambitions within the broader Turko-Iranian Islamic milieu. This represented an appropriation of Persian "transregional culture-power" to recast Persianate-Islamic culture and imperial legacies in an Ottoman context. Using Persian in Ottoman historiography linked Ottoman rulers to mythic and historical exemplars, embedding Persianate imperial concepts in an Ottoman setting. Persian historical writing was a royal prerogative of the sultan and inner circle, while Persian epistolary prose, characterized by poetic and religious motifs, was similarly esteemed. 15th-16th century writers like Mo'ali and courtly *Shahname* redactors, by applying the *Shahname's* title to the sultan, demonstrated Ottoman adoption of Persian royal vocabulary. Ottoman imperial ideology was firmly grounded in Iranian traditions, notably the canonical *Shahname*, even in bureaucratic documentation. In the late 16th century, preferences for Turkish increased markedly, alongside Köprülü Mehmed Pasha's large-scale project to translate Persian and Arabic works into Ottoman Turkish, reflecting the transition from "classical" to new 17th century Ottoman court conventions. Yet Persian endured as a prominent courtly idiom until the empire's dissolution. While foundational to statecraft and elite culture during the Ottoman centuries, Turkish rose as the primary literary language under Ottoman patronage. The use of Persian for court histories represents Persianate imperial discourses' deliberate assimilation by the Ottoman elite to articulate their imperial identity, until gradually supplanted by emerging Turkish literature (Yıldız, 2012: 436-502).

Little is known about Ali Akbar Hatayi, the *Khataynameh's* author. Based on naming conventions where surnames often indicate one's residence, birthplace or profession, "Hatayi" literally means "Khitani", potentially referring to China or Central Asia. Since the Khitans established the Western Liao regime in Central Asia, the identity and origin of the author remains ambiguous. Scholars generally believe that, given his surname, he was likely a merchant from Central Asia. During the Zhengde reign under Ming Emperor Wuzong, he supposedly came to China posing as a tributary envoy. *Khataynameh* consists of twenty-one chapters comprehensively profiling Chinese society at that time, spanning provinces, military, law, economics, urban planning, heritage, geography, culture, court rituals, religion and social customs. In 1582, during the reign of Ottoman Sultan Murad III, the book was translated into Ottoman Turkish as *Lawbook of China and Cathay* and subsequently circulated at court, gaining popularity. By the 17th century, the Ottoman geographical text *World Survey* directly cited two-thirds of the *Lawbook's* section on China. Perhaps owing to this Ottoman Turkish version, *Khataynameh* faded from prominence. It was rediscovered in the 19th century, garnering global scholarly attention for a time as a key work on East-West exchange. The main section depicts Ming China, highlighting

Emperor Wuzong's reign (1491-1521), leading some to regard it as a Marco Polo-esque travelogue with value as historical material. However, some scholars speculate the author never visited China, given obvious contradictions with actual Ming conditions, potentially compiling the work solely from old texts and hearsay. In-depth research has revealed major discrepancies, diminishing the book's credibility and value. Combined with understanding West Asian cultural traditions, *Khataynameh* cannot be simply classified as a travelogue. Unlike contemporary travelogues arranged chronologically, *Khataynameh* thematically summarizes Chinese society, with detailed accounts of specific themes in each chapter. Moreover, it contains allegories echoing contemporary Ottoman domestic politics. Thus, the portrayed "China" represents an "ideal" model crafted by the author, mapping Ottoman problems and offering solutions amidst imperial crisis. Hence, "law" is emphasized prominently, consistent with other Ottoman political texts then (Lin, 1967; Wang, 2021: 2-3).

Previous scholars have generally acknowledged the informative value and engaging qualities of *Khataynameh*, despite identifiable inadequacies in writing style and repetitive passages. Numerous incorporated poems seem doctrinal or tangential. Some accounts appear exaggerated, unrealistic or erroneous. Nevertheless, such flaws do not negate the work's significance as an important historical text, especially when viewed in its 16th century context of intense political, economic and cultural exchange between the Ottoman Empire and Ming China as prominent powers facing internal crises. Although author Ali Akbar likely never visited China, he managed to compile a relatively comprehensive overview of Ming social conditions from available sources. His detailed portrayals of China's administrative systems, military, infrastructure, economy, education, cities and climate offered Ottoman readers uniquely direct access to contemporary Chinese society. More crucially, *Khataynameh* presented China as an ideal socio-political model for the Ottomans through creative techniques, accentuating China's orderly bureaucracy, strict law enforcement and ethnic harmony as contrasts to Ottoman deficiencies. Exaggerations and fabrications further magnified China's exemplary image to critique the Ottoman regime. *Khataynameh* essentially functioned as political advice, encouraging Ottoman reforms to strengthen centralized authority, codify laws, restrain religious institutions, respect local traditions and promote ethnic integration. Its literary form made weighty statecraft theories palatable while avoiding potential censorship. Much of its views coincided with those of 16th century Ottoman statesmen, indicating widespread calls for imperial rejuvenation. Therefore, despite factual errors, redundancies and artistic flaws, *Khataynameh* constitutes an invaluable 16th century relic. It provided the Islamic world a window into Chinese socio-political models shaping their Far East policies, while illuminating the Ottoman Empire's solutions to its legitimacy crisis at a pivotal transitional juncture. For modern researchers, the book offers an important source for studying early modern East-West cross-cultural interactions and transformations, as well as a fascinating example of political literature in its own right (Ali Akbar & Wang Zhishan, 2016: 8-21).

Khataynameh was presented to Ottoman Sultan Selim I and translated into Ottoman Turkish during its composition, contributing to Ottoman understandings of unfamiliar aspects of Chinese civilization at the time. As a 16th century work, *Khataynameh* provides important historical information predating its writing. Its content has sparked interest among many scholars. Multiple copies exist, although they are not wholly identical, with some being abbreviated or summarized versions. Research has revealed five different copies, each with distinct titles. Scholar İlker Evşar claims to have seen all these copies. One is the Cairo copy, in Persian Nastaliq script, catalogued in Darû'l-kutub in 1273. Evşar evaluated this Persian manuscript, confirming it as a *Khataynameh* copy by Ali Akbar Khata'i. According to Evşar, one copy in the Süleymaniye Library registered as 609 was presented by Derviş Ahmed, with 55 pages in Persian script. This copy is not found in the Istanbul or Egyptian National Libraries. Another Süleymaniye copy, number 610 with unknown copyist, has 59 pages in Naskh script. This was translated into Turkish in 1967 by Lin Li-Chiang and compared to Chinese sources. Researchers have accessed and translated the Cairo and Süleymaniye 610 copies. Evşar also mentions a National Library of France copy, registered as Supplement Persan 1354, catalogue number 521. However, further research indicates this catalogue number corresponds to a different book. Orientalist Charles Schefer translated parts of *Khataynameh* into French. An Ottoman Turkish translation was also done, originally presented to Sultan Murad III. The translation by Hüseyin Efendi divided the work into *Lawbook of China and Cathay*, with multiple copies requiring comprehensive examination. The Cairo manuscript appears to be the largest copy. Differences across copies likely stem from copyists' linguistic deficiencies or omissions of unclear

sections. Random numbering without considering thematic continuity in the Cairo copy disrupted proper sequencing, with some pages duplicated. Previous research and Ali Akbar's original chapter index have helped compile a more coherent version (Ali Ekber Hitaî, 2021: i-iii).

Little biographical information exists on Ali Akbar Khata'i, considered an Ottoman scholar or traveler. As historian Ahmet Taşağıl notes, "It is speculated that Ali Akbar Khata'i was from the Transoxiana/Maveraünnehir or Khorasan/Horasan region, engaged in trade, and took part in a mission to China. However, after his native region was invaded by the Shaybanids or Safavids, he is believed to have migrated to Ottoman lands". Thus, according to Taşağıl, Ali Akbar Hatayi likely came from Central Asia, an important Persianate cultural center with extensive China trade networks. He possibly joined a diplomatic or commercial Central Asian mission to China in the late 15th or early 16th century. After the Shaybanid and Safavid conquests disrupted his native region's stability, he relocated to the Ottoman Empire and settled there. Within the Ottoman realm, he authored *Khataynameh*, portraying China as an exemplary country, possibly to indirectly advise or critique Ottoman rulers amid dynastic troubles. The exact dates of Ali Akbar's life and travels to China remain uncertain due to scarce sources. But based on his nisba "Hatayi" meaning "from Khitai", an old term for China, historians generally concur he came from Central Asia. The socio-political conditions of 16th century Central Asia likely led to his westward migration into the Ottoman heartland where he penned his seminal work on China (Taşağıl, 1998).

Seyfi Çelebi and His Book on China, 16th Century

Beyond the fact that he wrote a 15th-16th century Turkish historical-geographical work about the Mongol and Turkic rulers dominating Asia, China, and India, and likely served as *defterdar* (treasurer) under Ottoman Sultan Murad III, nothing is known of Seyfi Çelebi's life. Neither his name nor work is mentioned in Ottoman biographical and bibliographical sources. Two copies of Seyfi's work survive - at Leiden University Library (Cod. 917) and the Bibliothèque Nationale (Supplément Turc, nr. 1136). Published in 1968 by Joseph Matuz with a French translation, the work's title originates from an explanatory note added posthumously to the Leiden copy. This note appears erroneous in two respects. First, the date 990 (1582) seems a copyist's mistake for 998 (1590), the latter explicitly stated at the Leiden copy's end, and the text references two 1582 events. Second, in the work the author refers to himself only as Seyfi, with no mention of his occupation, suggesting the phrase "*defterdar Seyfi Çelebi*" conflates him with another Ottoman treasurer, Seyfullah Seyfi Çelebi (d. post-1597). Moreover, accounts depict Seyfullah as a successful prose writer, while Seyfi's work is stylistically modest. Thus, the probability of identical authorship weakens, as does the likelihood Seyfi was treasurer. Beyond a military background potentially fitting the pen name Seyfi, and the unsophisticated style indicating a less educated author, there are no biographical clues. Seyfi's work largely provides a geographical overview of contemporary rulers and predecessors across nine sections on the dynasties listed in the posthumous title, though not in the same order. Beginning with China's last rulers and ending with Iran, it relies on anecdotal sources like merchants and travelers rather than identified major direct written sources, with no indication Seyfi traveled himself. Alongside confirmed historical details, the text contains social, economic and ethnographic information. Nevertheless, it was unknown to Ottoman authors until the late 19th century, when utilized by Schefer and Barthold. No explicit reason for the work's composition is given. It represents late 16th century Ottoman courtly interest in world history writing. However, its timing likely connected to renewed Ottoman-Uzbek relations under Abdullah Khan (r.1583-1598), especially anti-Safavid efforts from 1591 onward, reinforced by exiled Gilan ruler Khan Ahmad's Istanbul arrival, and aims to build a Mughal alliance. Many works emphasizing the Ottomans' Oghuz ancestry were written in the late 16th century, providing another context for Seyfi's history (Woodhead, 2009).

Conclusion

This inquiry into pre-1585 Portuguese, Spanish and Ottoman perspectives on China represents a preliminary excavation of overlooked strands in early modern Sinology's genesis. The highlighted texts reveal fledgling engagements with China emerging through incipient global interactions among European, Ottoman and Chinese actors in the 16th century, preceding Sinology's formalization as an academic discipline in 18th-19th century Europe. The early Portuguese and Spanish travelogues and narratives offer intriguing firsthand glimpses into an unfamiliar civilization, potentially useful for

governance and merchants. Meanwhile, systematic late 16th century Spanish surveys of Chinese institutions, ethics, cities and customs, alongside Ali Akbar's authoritative cultural profile, signify maturing efforts to present multifaceted knowledge on China for European and Ottoman audiences. However, the most groundbreaking revelation is the overlooked Khataynameh within the Ottoman context, potentially the earliest example of Sinological writing produced in Europe. Ali Akbar's thematic 1516 Khataynameh, with its extensive profiling of Ming institutions, governance, society and customs, significantly predates the 1585 work of Juan González de Mendoza that is conventionally situated as the advent of early modern European Sinology. The Khataynameh's origins in Istanbul and its purpose in presenting an exemplary image of China for the Ottoman court underline its seminal nature as an unprecedented attempt at systematic Sinological analysis nearly three-quarters of a century prior to Mendoza's foundational treatise. As the first known extensive cultural overview crafted to transmit authoritative knowledge of a distant civilization to elite Ottoman readers, the neglected Khataynameh deserves recognition as a pioneering milestone in the development of early modern Sinology within Europe. The Khataynameh places the Ottoman realm at the vanguard of early modern Sinology, potentially shifting its advent on European soil back to Ali Akbar's seminal 1516 contribution, before equivalent Spanish and Portuguese developments. Mainstream historiography has relegated the early modern Ottoman sphere to a passive role in diffusing European knowledge, overlooking its creative engagements with China that at times preceded other European initiatives. The Khataynameh provides groundbreaking evidence of Ottomans engaging in systematic Sinological writing significantly earlier than hitherto assumed. This underscores the need for multidirectional perspectives attentive to diversity, rather than unidirectional center-periphery influences. There is certainly a need for further scholarly inquiry unearthing overlooked Sinological evidence buried in archives, to richly reconstruct the heterogeneous genesis of early modern European Sinology. But the preliminary cases explored, particularly the Khataynameh, illuminate the emergence of fledgling global Sinology through embryonic interactions before its efflorescence as formal study of China. The diverse Eurasian perspectives underline how early modern global connectivity stimulated cross-cultural curiosity and knowledge production across civilizations, laying foundations for future intellectual flowering. Further excavation of human experiences, texts and ideas traversing early modern webs of interaction can enrich understandings of the multidirectional, pluralistic making of the modern world. There is scope for unearthing more 'hidden' inter-regional engagements fostering global intellectual trajectories, through questioning assumed paradigms and Eurocentric occlusions. The examined cases underscore the potential for repositioning creative early modern border-crossers in spurring global intellectual histories, illuminating present-day cultural complexity. In conclusion, recognition of the Khataynameh's pioneering significance reshapes conceptualizations of early modern Sinology's emergence, reminding us that Ottomans were engaging with distant China before equivalent Spanish, Portuguese or northern European endeavors. The Khataynameh potentially constitutes the first known Sinological treatise composed on European soil. Its presence at the very epicenter of the Ottoman world underscores the need to re-situate diverse European actors - not just West European ones - at the forefront of inaugurating new global intellectual histories through their ingenious border-crossing pursuits.

References

- Ali Akbar and Wang Zhishan 阿里·阿克巴尔·哈泰, & 张至善. (2016). *Khataynameh* (中国纪行). 华文出版社.
- Ali Ekber Hitaî. (2021). *Hitaynâme*. Çev., C. Aslan. İksad Publishing.
- A. Cervera. (2014). "Los Intentos de los Franciscanos Para Establecerse en China, Siglos XIII-XVII. Semata". *Ciencias Sociais e Humanidades*. 26, 426-429.
- Brook, T. (2000). *Sinophiles and Sinophobes: Western Views of China*. Oxford University Press.
- Christine Woodhead. (2009). "Seyfi Çelebi". *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*. 37, 33-34.
- E. (2007). *Los Viajes a Oriente de Odorico de Pordenone*. Publisher.
- Green, N. (2019). *The Persianate World: The Frontiers of a Eurasian Lingua Franca*. University of California Press.

- Kauz, R. (2005). "One of the Last Documents of the Silk Road: The Khataynameh of Ali Akbar". *Silkroad*. 3 (6).
- Lin Yih-Min (林义民). (1967). *Ali Akbarin Hitayname Adlı Eserin Çin Kaynakları İle Mukayese ve Tenkidi*, Doktora Tezi.
- Meynard, T., SJ, & Villasante, R., SJ. (2018). *La Filosofía Moral de Confucio, por Michele Ruggieri, sj. La primera traducción de las obras de Confucio al español*. Madrid: Mensajero / Sal Terrae / Universidad Pontificia de Comillas.
- Odorico da Pordenone. (2016). *Relatio de Mirabilibus Orientalum Tatarorum*, Edizione Critica a cura di A. Marchisio.
- Özerdim, M. N. (1950). "Acaib-ül-Letaif (Hitay Sefaretnamesi) ile Çin Kaynakları Arasında İlgî". *Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih Coğrafya Fakültesi Dergisi*. 345-371.
- Rahmati, M. Khwaja. (2019). "Nizam al-Mulk and the expansion of Persian language in Anatolia". *Journal of Iranian Studies*. 18 (35), 95-120.
- "Relatos de viajes inéricos: Peregrinação y Viaje del mundo". (2015). *Límite*. 9, 367-382.
- Taşgıl, A. (1998). "Hitâyname". *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*. 17, 404-405.
- The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires and The Book of Francisco Rodrigues*. (1944). London: The Hakluyt Society.
- Vilà, L. (Year of publication not provided). *La Historia del Gran Reino de la China de Juan González de Mendoza. Hacia un estudio de las crónicas de Oriente en la España del Siglo de Oro*. Boletín Hispánico Helvético, 21, 74.
- Wang Yihan (王艺涵). (2021). *Xiangxiang Zhongguo: "Zhongguo Jixing" yu shiliu shiji aosiman diguo zhengzhi wenhua [Imagining China: Khatayname and the political culture of the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century]*, MA Thesis, Beijing Foreign Languages University 北京外国语大学.
- Yıldız, S. N. (2012). *Ottoman Historical Writing in Persian, 1400–1600*. I.B. Tauris.
- Zhang Xiping 张西平. (2011). *西方汉学十六讲 (Sixteen Lectures on Western Sinology)*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.

CONTRIBUTION LEVELS OF THE AUTHORS: First Author 40%; Second Author 30%; Third Author 30%.

ETHICS COMMISSION APPROVAL: There is no need for ethics commission approval in the study.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT: No financial support was received in the study.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST: There is no potential conflict of interest in the study.

COPYRIGHT AND SIMILARITY REPORT: The authors own the copyright of their works published in the journal; the similarity report of the study has been received.

COMPLIANCE WITH SCIENTIFIC AND ETHICAL PRINCIPLES: It has been declared that scientific and ethical principles have been followed during the preparation of this study and all studies used are stated under the heading "References".

