



OLEARIUS, ADAM

OLEARIUS, ADAM (b. Aschersleben, 1599; d. Gottorp, 23 February 1671), German author, secretary to the Holstein mission to Persia (1635-39), court mathematician and librarian at Holstein-Gottorp; noted for the detailed account of his travels in Russia and Persia during the reign of the Safavid Shah Šafi (r. 1629-1642), his contributions to the cartography of Persia, and the first unmediated translation of Sa'di's *Golestān* into German.

Life. Born in 1599 (with the German name *Öhlschlegel*, later *Ölschläger*), Olearius studied theology, mathematics, astronomy, and geography at the University of Leipzig. After various teaching assignments, in 1633 he entered the service of Frederick III (1597-1659), ruler of the Duchy of Schleswig-Holstein-Gottorp. As secretary and counselor, he took part in the diplomatic missions to Russia and Persia that were aimed at negotiating a new direct trade route for Persian silk. After the initial consent of the Tsar, the embassy set out for Persia in 1635. Taking the route through Moscow and following the Volga to Astrakhan, they entered Persia after crossing the Caspian Sea at Šamāk-i. There, the delegation had to wait for three months before they were allowed to proceed. Olearius used the time to acquire a basic knowledge of Persian and Arabic. Their route then took them from Ardabil, Qazvin, and Kāšān to Isfahan, the capital. After a stay of several months, the mission returned without concrete results by a similar route, this time passing through Rašt. Olearius continued his service in Gottorp as court mathematician and principal of the extensive court library and collections (*Kunstammer*). He was deeply engaged in the baroque literary scene of his time and achieved wide



international recognition. He died in 1671 and was buried in Schleswig (Lohmeier).

Works. The first edition of Olearius' account of his travels was published in 1647 in Schleswig under the title *Offt begehrte Beschreibung der neuen orientalischen Rejse, so durch Gelegenheit einer Holsteinischen Legation an d. König in Persien geschehen*. An extended and restructured edition appeared in 1656: *Vermehrte Neue Beschreibung der Muscowitischen und Persischen Reyse, so durch gelegenheit einer Holsteinischern Gesandschafft an den russischen Zaar und König in Persien geschehen* (reprint with a commentary by D. Lohmeier, Tübingen, 1971). The *Vermehrte Neue Beschreibung* is divided into six "books" of which the fourth treats the mission's route up to Isfahan, with detailed descriptions of Ardabil, Qazvin, Qom, Kāšān, and their stay at the Safavid court. Book five is an encyclopedic description of Persia, covering aspects such as geography, fauna and flora, political institutions, manners, customs and clothing, Safavid history, education, language and script, trade, and religion. The return journey from Isfahan is the subject of book six. Amongst the numerous ethnographic observations, mention should be made of Olearius' depiction of the 'Āšurā ceremonies and other Shi'ite rituals, including the recitation of a "*Machtelname*" and the celebration of 'Ali's designation as the Prophet's successor ("*Chummekater*;" p. 435ff., 456ff.). Of interest for the history of printing is the regular insertion of Persian and Turkish quotations in the original script, serving as a model for the later account by Engelbert Kaempfer. The copper plate illustrations are of particular value, especially his detailed city views and the portrait of Shah Šafi. Modern scholars such as Strack, Emerson, and Brancaforte have presented different views on the question of Olearius' objectivity and the extent to which he was affected by contemporary assumptions (Strack; Brancaforte; Emerson). "Olearius provided the first comprehensive description of Persia since antiquity, but his achievements appear less significant when compared with the far broader range and experience of later travelers who wrote after him in the course of the 17 century" (Lohmeier, p. 59). Still, all later travelogues are heavily indebted to him and his work can be studied as a starting point for the genre. His outstanding contribution to the cartography of Persia is his *Nova Delineatio Persiae et Confiniorvm veteri longe accuratior edita Anno 1655*, the first realistic map of Iran that, in particular, corrects the location and form of the Caspian Sea.

Several later editions and translations into other European languages exist



from the 17th century, notably the supplemented French edition by A. de Wicquefort, *Relation du Voyage d'Adam Olearius en Moscovie, Tartarie et Perse* (1666, Paris). Unfortunately, there is no modern critical edition of Olearius' travelogue, nor is there a reliable modern translation of the sections dealing with Persia (for the sections on Russia see Baron). Popular versions in modernized style (e.g. Haberland) concentrate on the adventurous side of the travels and tend to omit the author's scholarly depictions. They form the basis for a partial Persian translation (Kordbačča). Specialists familiar with the cultural background of 17th century Germany are not usually those interested in Safavid history or grounded in Iranian studies, and vice versa (Emerson, pp. 37, 54f.).

With the help of ḤOaqqverdi, a member of the Persian counter-delegation who stayed on at Gottorp, Olearius prepared the first direct translation of Sa'di's *Golestān* into German: *Persianischer Rosenthal. In welchem viel lustige Historien, scharffsinnige Reden und nützliche Regeln. Vor 400 Jahren von einem sinnreichen Poeten Schich Saadi in Persischer sprach beschrieben. Jetzo aber von Adamo Oleario in hochdeutscher Sprache heraus gegeben*, Schleswig, 1654. The remarkably faithful translation places Sa'di's work in the context of baroque aphorisms or "apophthegma," but almost entirely ignores the mystical dimension of Persian poetry (Behzad; Brancaforte; see [GOLESTĀN-E SA'DI](#)).

The importance of Olearius is not limited to his own works. He also acted as editor of books composed by other members of the Holstein-mission or travelers associated with the Duchy of Gottorp. In this capacity he edited Johann Albrecht von Mandelslo's *Morgenländische Reyse-Beschreibung. Worinnen zugleich der Zustand der fürnehmsten Ost-Indianischen Länder, Städte und der Einwohner Leben, Sitten, Handthierung und Glauben; wie auch die gefährliche Schiffahrt über das Oceanische Meer berichtet wird ...*, Schleswig, 1658 (with the simultaneous Dutch version *Beschryvingh van de gedenkwardige Zee- en Landt-Reyze deur Persien naar Oost-Indien*, Amsterdam, 1658), and the non-scholarly travelogues by Jürgen Andersen and Volquard Iversen, *Orientalische Reise-Beschreibunge* (Schleswig 1669; repr. Tübingen, 1980). The travel account by Andersen, who was employed as an artillery expert by Shah 'Abbās II during the campaigns against Kandahar in 1649, is the only depiction of the route through Central Asia to Mashad available for the 17th century. Another member of the mission was the poet Paul Fleming (1609-1640), some of whose odes also take the vicissitudes of the journey to Iran as a theme: *Teutsche Poemata*, Lübeck, 1646 (Müller). A full bibliography



of Olearius' works can be found in Lohmeier (pp. 63-76).

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