On 23 August 1514, after a long march across Turkey, the Ottoman army of Selim I finally encountered the Persian troops of Shah Ismail on the plain of Chaldiran, north-east of Lake Van, in present day northwestern Iran. It was the culmination of a great military campaign, successfully conducted by Selim: in Chaldiran, with the decisive support of the artillery, the Ottomans were able to defeat their enemy, opening their way to Tabriz.¹

Selim took Tabriz, though he later left the city and did not pursue his conquest of the Persian territories further; nevertheless, he prostrated Ismail’s military power and established a border between Turkey and Iran that remains almost unchanged to this day.² The celebration of this triumph stands out in the copious poems on the life and deeds of Selim, yet the significance of Chaldiran was not so clear and simple to western observers in 1514.³ For a couple of months nothing was known in the West of what had happened, until, at the end of October, the news began to spread, initially in Venice and Rome, and then across Europe. Reconstructing the complex transit of information (and sometimes misinformation) regarding these events, what was said and unsaid, guessed or invented, divulged or covered up, allows us to investigate


² The harsh condition of the region and the rebellion of the Janissaries forced Selim to come back. But, as McCaffrey points out, ‘the campaign ... was a success in that it curtailed for the moment the Safavid role in Anatolia and resulted in the Ottoman occupation of Diyarbakır and the subjugation of the Du’l–Qadr principality’. McCaffrey, ‘Čālderān’.


© CHIARA PALAZZO, 2016 | DOI 10.1163/9789004277199_038
This is an open access chapter distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-NoDerivatives 3.0 Unported (CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0) License.
the workings of the Venetian news network: one of the most complex and sophisticated European networks in the early sixteenth century.

In Rome the pope was certainly concerned about a possible Ottoman victory over Persia; the kingdom of Hungary was an interested observer too, owing to the closeness of its borders to the Turkish territories. But the Republic of Venice, because of its role in the early modern period as a bridge between East and proves to be the most useful observation point when investigating the circulation of this kind of news in the West: in the sixteenth century, information from the Levant coming through Venetian channels was highly regarded and requested by ambassadors and merchants all over Europe, and the diplomats of many courts, in spite of access to their own networks, often turned to Venice to validate news from the East before judging it reliable.4

Therefore, looking towards the Levant from the lagoon and starting from the battle of Chaldiran, we can reconstruct how foreign news moved through the Venetian Mediterranean network, how it travelled from the East through alternative routes, and how the information collected was then disseminated within Europe. Moreover, operations within the Venetian network at this time reveal a system where the communications infrastructure was in transit—thanks to the development of the postal network—and the language and practice of diplomacy in all the principal European courts was becoming standardised.5

This dynamic leads to further considerations: the circulation of news implies contacts, awareness of different realities, geographical and cultural reference points, the development of the collective imagination. One may wonder what kind of perception the Venetian public had of distant geographical and political realities such as Ismail’s Persia, an East that was even more remote than Constantinople, and perceived as even further away than it actually was, due to lack of information. Where and how could news be gathered

---
