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Globalising the Art of the Periphery: Poland-Lithuania under the Vasas and its Artistic Exchange with the World (1587-1668).

My PhD dissertation examines the Polish-Lithuanian mediations and re-mediations of Persian, Ottoman, Muscovite and Chinese visual cultures, which, as I propose, tacitly influenced the cultural landscapes of the Low Countries, France, England and Italy. The core argument here is that material objects, such as clothes, carpets, fur hats and amber, as well as visual representations thereof, including imagery in costume books and natural histories, enabled and mediated the flow of non-Western forms, materials, ideas and technologies in early modern Europe.

The key aspect of this argument hinges on the recognition and misrecognition of local and foreign elements in the processes of cultural translation. The resonance of Polish-Lithuanian visual culture often passed unnoticed in the artistic centres of western Europe. In many cases, western European beholders did not recognise the Polish-Lithuanian derivation of particular cultural forms, but rather considered them as purely Persian, Ottoman, Muscovite or Chinese. As a case in point, carpets made to Persian and Ottoman designs in Poland-Lithuania were identified as intrinsically 'Persian' or 'Turkish' in the French and German inventories I have consulted. On the other end of this spectrum are the objects that were seen as Polish-Lithuanian regardless of their non-Western origin. An example of such cultural misunderstanding is provided by John Evelyn's 'Polish' attribution of the fur hats worn by Charles II's grenadiers, despite the Muscovite extraction of these garments. Symptomatically, in both cases the geographic provenance of such artistic fusions was overlooked by the receiving culture. By pointing to the construction of haphazard causalities between objects, representations, events, and discourses in early modernity, I intend to demonstrate that Europeans did not fully understand where cultural conventions derived from, often assuming that cross-cultural transfers were more foreign than they actually were. As I argue, our contemporary art-historical discourses are still falling prey to the old historical and theoretical imaginations of peripheral European regions as the passive recipients of cultural influences from the continent's western regions. While spatial, temporal and semiotic instabilities of early modern images have been observed for Germany and Italy (Wood 2008; Nagel and Wood 2010), the similar methodological infrastructure is yet to be re-imagined for the more peripheral European locales. This is the purpose of my dissertation.

If I am selected to participate in the Berlin symposium, I would like to present research for the second chapter of my PhD dissertation, which I consider shifts in attitude to Oriental rugs as they travelled between the Middle East, Poland-Lithuania and western Europe. European beholders often confused the origins of Polish-Lithuanian artefacts. For example, in Poland-Lithuanian, Persian and Turkish carpets were not seen as exotic, but rather as having affinity with the local culture appropriation was based on the effective espousal of the myth of alleged Middle Eastern ancestry of the Polish-Lithuanian nobility. However, when carpets from Polish-Lithuanian collections appear in western European inventories, their ethnic descriptor suggests Persian or Ottoman provenance, even though many of these rugs were actually woven on Polish-Lithuanian looms.

My main sources are inventories, poetry, conduct books, pamphlets, and historical accounts that touch upon carpets as a conduit to communicate cultural affiliations and social mores.

Moreover, I trace the circulation of specific carpets between Persia, Poland-Lithuania and western Europe. As such, this chapter seeks to map the historical processes that were destabilising the relations between objects, ethnic descriptors thereof, and the actual specificities of the cultural milieus, which gave birth to these objects in the first place.