

# Stories Never Told: The First Arabic History of the New World

John-Paul A. Ghobrial\*

*Hiç anlatılmamış hikayeler: Yeni Dünya'nın ilk Arapça tarihi*

Öz ■ 1668'de İlyās ibn Hānna al-Mawşilī adında bir papaz Bağdat'dan ayrılıp onu önce Avrupa'ya, sonra da Amerika'ya kadar götürecek bir yolculuğa çıktı. 1680'de Peru'dayken, İlyās, *Seyahatnâme* adını verdiği kitabını ve Amerika ile ilgili Arapça'da bilinen en eski eser olan *Tarih-i Yeni Dünya'yı* yazmaya başladı. Bu *Tarih* yirminci yüzyılda ilk olarak 1905'de bulunmuşsa da daha çok İlyās'ın *Seyahatnâme*'sine odaklanan modern araştırmacılar tarafından ihmal edildi. Bu makale, *Tarih*'i başlı başına ele alan ilk çalışmadır. Eserin günümüze ulaşabilmiş olan el yazmalarının tanımlamasını, eserin on yedi bölümünün her birinin özetini ve özellikle dikkat çeken bazı parçalarından örnekleri içerir. Ayrıca İlyās'ın *Tarih*'inin bazı özellikleri ile *Tarih-i Hind-i garbi*'nin karşılaştırılmasına yönelik bazı gözlemleri de haizdir. Makale, İlyās'ın, mesajını, özellikle Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ile İran arasındaki sınır bölgesinde yaşayan Doğu Hristiyanları'ndan oluşan hedef kitlesine ulaştırabilmek için ne tür yollar izlediğinin üzerinde düşünülmesiyle son bulur. Böylece bu makale, Doğu Hristiyan seyyahlarının çeşitli yerlere dağılmış eserleri üzerindeki çalışmaların, Osmanlılar'ın etraflarındaki daha geniş dünya ile giriştikleri ilişkiler üzerindeki çalışmalarla bütünleştirilmesinin önemini ortaya koymayı hedeflemektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Keldaniler, Irak, onyedinci yüzyıl, İlyās ibn Hānna al-Mawşilī, seyahat, Doğu Hristiyanlığı.

How do you write the history of a new world? How do you describe a world that your readers will never encounter for themselves, a world that is beyond all imagination? This was the challenge that faced a priest from Mosul in the seventeenth century when he set out to write what appears to be the first Arabic account of the New World. His name was Ilyās ibn Hānna al-Mawşilī, and when

\* Balliol College, University of Oxford.

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he put pen to paper, he joined a pantheon of European writers who were still reeling from the “shock of discovery” of the Americas. In 1552, the Spanish historian Francisco López de Gómara ranked the conquest of the Americas as the third most important event in history, coming only after the creation of the world itself and the birth of Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> By the seventeenth century, “histories of the Indies” had become an entire genre to themselves. In such works, European writers struggled with a basic set of problems: how to make sense of a world not mentioned in the Bible, and what to do with this world now that it had been discovered. The same could be said for Ilyās, who also offered his own answers to these questions. For when he began writing *his* “history of the Indies,” he did so not from the confines of a library in Istanbul or Rome, but rather from Magdalena del Mar, a small coastal village near Lima in Peru, sometime around 1680.

Ilyās had arrived in South America in 1675 after a journey of seven years that began when he left Baghdad in 1668 and travelled first to Jerusalem, Damascus, and Alexandretta and from there to Italy, France, Portugal, and Spain. In February 1675, Ilyās boarded a ship in Cadiz, and he crossed the Atlantic and arrived in Cartagena in May. Ilyās would remain in the Americas for over a decade, one of a handful of Eastern Christians who travelled to the New World in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These men went to the Americas ostensibly as alms-collectors seeking to raise money for their church. Ilyās made similar claims, although a full account of his actual activities in the New World is outside the scope of this article. Suffice it to say that from his arrival in Cartagena in 1675 until his departure from Mexico City in 1684, Ilyās spent much of his time travelling from one town, village, and city to another. On a few occasions, he took up more permanent residences, for example in Lima from 1680 to 1681 and Mexico City from 1682 to 1684. It was during this first sojourn in Lima that Ilyās began to write an Arabic history of the New World.

Where do the stories of such travelers fit into narratives of Ottoman contacts with the wider world? In some ways, ordinary people such as Ilyās ibn Ḥanna rarely appear in a historiography that has traditionally emphasized geographic, cartographic, or scholarly knowledge, in the form of *written* texts—usually Ottoman Turkish—by Ottoman officials or officials located very close to, if not in, the Ottoman capital.<sup>2</sup> And yet, an entire spectrum of Eastern Christians travelled far

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1 Francisco López de Gómara, *Historia general de las Indias y conquista de México* (Sargossa, 1552).

2 See, for example, Giancarlo Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Gottfried Hagen, “Ottoman Understandings of the World in the Seventeenth Century,” in Robert Dankoff, *An Ottoman Mentality: The World of Evliya*

beyond the frontiers of the Ottoman Empire to distant worlds from Russia to India, Europe to the Americas. Many of these travelers left few, if any, accounts of their journeys in their own words. That we know anything about them at all owes something to the descriptions of them kept by people who they encountered during their travels. As for the handful of Eastern Christians who did leave accounts of their voyages, they have not been adequately integrated into larger narratives of Ottoman interactions with the wider world. Instead, the study of such texts has too often been left to scholars of Christian Arabic, Karshuni, and Syriac who sometimes forget that these Eastern Christians were first and foremost *Ottoman* subjects with connections, relationships, and roots in local, social, and political networks across the Ottoman Empire. Their imaginations—and the ways they sought to make sense of the new worlds they encountered—are best understood in an Ottoman context. This article seeks, then, to integrate the stories of these men into the wider context of the Ottoman world they inhabited, not least because when they returned many of them shared stories of what they had seen abroad with their friends and neighbors. These stories functioned as important mechanisms for the circulation of information about distant, foreign lands.

In 1990, Thomas Goodrich published *The Ottoman Turks and the New World*, an English translation of the *Tarih-i Hind-i garbi*—the earliest known Ottoman treatment of the discovery of the Americas.<sup>3</sup> In the spirit of Goodrich’s study, this article tells the story of another Ottoman account of the New World, “Ottoman” in as much as it was written by an Ottoman subject, albeit one who lived far from the Ottoman capital in the eastern borderlands of the empire. Although several copies of the *Tarih-i Hind-i garbi* were already in circulation by the time Ilyās began writing his account of the New World, he was never exposed to the work and it had no influence on him. Yet, as we shall see, in Ilyās’ treatment of the history of the Americas, we find many parallels with the *Tarih-i Hind-i garbi*, for example, his reliance on European sources, his interest in flora and fauna, and the extent to which Ilyās’ status as an Ottoman subject informed his ideas about the New World. Unlike the author of the *Tarih-i Hind-i garbi*, however, Ilyās ibn Ḥanna was a Christian and this too meant that he brought a set of particular interests, approaches, and perspectives to his writing of the history of the New

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*Çelebi* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 215-256; and J.B. Harley and David Woodward, eds., *The History of Cartography, Volume II, Book 1: Cartography in the Traditional Islamic and South Asian Societies* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992), especially chapters 10-12 and 14.

3 The work received a second life among a wider audience when it was the basis of a recent essay by Serge Gruzinski in *Quelle heure est-il là-bas?: Amérique et islam à l’orée des temps modernes* (Paris: Seuil, 2008) and later, in English, *What time is it there?: America and Islam at the Dawn of Modern Times* (London: Polity, 2011).

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World. If Ilyās' work is to be thought of as an Ottoman account of the New World, then it is informed mainly by a local, provincial perspective, that is to say it is a vision of the New World that resonates most with the life of Ottoman Christians living in the borderlands between Iraq and Persia.<sup>4</sup>

That we can know anything about Ilyās today owes to the survival of a handful of manuscripts containing the only known writings that he left behind. These writings consist of a single work comprising a *Book of Travels* (“*kitāb siyāḥat*”), an account of his journey from Baghdad to Europe and the New World, and a *History of the New World*.<sup>5</sup> Although the *Book of Travels* has been the subject of scholarly interest since an edition of it was first published in 1905, the *History* has never been the focus of any critical study. In what follows, therefore, I offer the first detailed account of the *History*. In the first part of the article, I say something about the modern “discovery” of Ilyās' writings in the early twentieth century. Next, I offer a description of the extant manuscripts of the work, in part as a way of revealing something about the circulation of the work in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the second part of the article, I look in closer detail at the *History* itself, presenting a summary of the contents of each of the seventeen chapters as well as a brief account of the types of sources that Ilyās drew on while writing his work. While my goal here is simply to offer a sketch of the work in its entirety, I also consider a few elements of the work, in particular the way in which Ilyās tailored his message specifically to an audience of Eastern Christians. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate here the importance of integrating the scattered writings of Eastern Christian travelers like Ilyās into the study of larger questions related to what I have called, elsewhere, matters of “cognition,” that is to say, how

- 4 Here is not the place to engage in a detailed account of the Church of the East, a community of Christians scattered across southeast Turkey and modern-day Iraq who are referred to variously in the literature as “Nestorians,” the “East Syrian” church, or the “Chaldeans” (usually in specific reference to its Uniate strand). The literature on the Church of the East is immense, but a good starting place is Wilhelm Baum and Dietmar W. Winkler, *The Church of the East: A Concise History* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003). Where using “Church of the East” seemed clumsy, I have opted for “East Syrians” or “Nestorians,” mindful always of Sebastian P. Brock, “The ‘Nestorian’ Church: A Lamentable Misnomer,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 78 (1996), 23-35.
- 5 Admittedly, the second half of the work lacks any explicit title unlike the *Book of Travels*, which is clearly referred to as the “*kitāb siyāḥat*” in the opening lines of the manuscript. Nonetheless, I have chosen to refer to it here as “the *History*” because this portion of the text represents a clear break from the earlier *Book of Travels*, both in content and structure. At any rate, the *History* is included as a section of its own in a general division of the work found in a table of contents in the back of one of the extant manuscripts of the work.

Ottoman subjects knew what they knew about the wider world.<sup>6</sup> As this article is part of a larger book-in-progress, my comments here should be considered merely as postcards from a journey in progress written by a traveler who has yet to realize the final destination of his journey.

## I

It was in 1905 that Ilyās ibn Ḥanna al-Mawṣilī first came to the attention of modern scholars. Writing in the Catholic journal *al-Machriq*, the Jesuit scholar Antoine Rabbath described how he had stumbled upon a curious manuscript in the Syrian Catholic Archbishopric of Aleppo entitled “the travels of the priest Ilyās al-Mawṣilī.” Rabbath described the author as the “first Eastern (lit. “sharqī”) traveler to America,” although he was unable to turn up any further information about the man beyond his name. Rabbath’s enthusiasm for the work may have had something to do with the possibility that an Eastern Christian had contributed to the success of the Catholic missions to the New World. As for the manuscript, Rabbath described its physical characteristics in great detail, noting that it consisted of some 269 pages, of which the account of Ilyās’ *Book of Travels* took up the first hundred pages. The subsequent 114 pages were organized into seventeen chapters, which included a *History* of the discovery and conquest of the Americas by the Spanish. The manuscript concluded with a third section of some 55 pages comprising an Arabic translation of what Rabbath believed to be an account of a journey to France made by the Ottoman envoy “Sa’id Pasha in 1719.”<sup>7</sup> From a note on the first page of the manuscript, it seems that the manuscript once belonged to Ḥanna Dīyāb, a Maronite from Aleppo who travelled to France in the early eighteenth century.<sup>8</sup> If so, the manuscript can be dated to some time

6 John-Paul Ghobrial, *Everyday Words: Information Flows in Seventeenth-century Istanbul and Beyond* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

7 This must be a reference to the mission of the Ottoman envoy Yirmisekiz Çelebi Mehmed Efendi to France in 1720 in which his son Sa’id (later Sa’id Pasha) had accompanied him. While I have not yet compared the Arabic version to its original in any great detail, it would seem that the Arabic version is indeed a unique translation of the Ottoman original. Little is known about the circulation of *sefaretnames* in translation, making this portion of the manuscript an interesting subject for further study in its own right.

8 The name of the first owner has been inked out, presumably at the time the manuscript was purchased by Jibrā’īl ibn Yūsuf Qirmiz in 1817. When the manuscript was discovered in 1905, Rabbath read the original name below the smudge as “Ḥanna bin Dīyāb al-marūnī fī Ḥalab” (see, Rabbath, *al-Machriq* [1905], p. 823). I suspect that the Aleppo MS may even have been copied by Dīyāb himself, after having compared the handwriting in the Aleppo MS with that of the only known specimen of Dīyāb’s

between 1720 and Diyāb's death in the 1760s. The same note indicates that the manuscript was acquired on 5 Kānūn II, 1817, by Jibrā'il ibn Yūsuf Qirmiz. At the time, Rabbath believed it to be the only extant copy of the work.

This manuscript, which I will refer to hereafter as the Aleppo MS, was the basis for the edition of the text published by Rabbath in five installments in the pages of *al-Machbriq* from September to December 1905.<sup>9</sup> He republished it in a single volume in Beirut in 1906.<sup>10</sup> On both occasions, Rabbath only included the first section of the manuscript, namely Ilyās' *Book of Travels* and not his *History*. Rabbath's edition was in turn the basis for most subsequent translations of the work into Dutch, Italian, English, and most recently French.<sup>11</sup> At some point after Rabbath had consulted the manuscript in 1905, it was eventually acquired by the collector Paul Sbath. At Sbath's death, half of his collection was

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writing, Vatican MS Sbath 254. This manuscript contains Ḥanna Diyāb's own account of his journey to France in 1709, and a French translation of this fascinating work is currently being prepared under the direction of Bernard Heyberger, Paule Fahmé, and Jérôme Lentin. Whether Diyāb in fact modeled his own travelogue on Ilyās ibn Ḥanna's *Book of Travels*, therefore, is a question that deserves further exploration. At any rate, it suggests some intriguing connections between the afterlives of Ilyās' *Book of Travels*, the Ottoman sefaretnama of 1719, and Diyāb's writings.

- 9 Antoine Rabbath, ed., "Riḥlat awwal sharqī ilā Amrīkā," *al-Machbriq* (September-December 1905), pp. 821-834, 875-886, 974-983, 1022-1033, and 1118-1129. For his description of the manuscript, see, especially, pp. 821-823.
- 10 The second edition was still in Arabic but carried a French title, *Le plus ancien voyage d'un Oriental en Amérique (1668-1683): voyage du curé chaldéen Ilyās fils du prêtre Jean de Mossoul* (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1906).
- 11 The best translation remains that of Marina Montanaro, *Il primo orientale nelle Americhe* (Palermo: Liceo Ginnasio 'Gian Giacomo Adria', 1992), which is based on a close reading and comparison of the two extant manuscripts. The Dutch version only replicates Rabbath's 1905 edition, Richard van Leeuwen, *Iljaas al-Mausili: een Arabier in Zuid-Amerika (1675-1683)* (Amsterdam: Middle East Research Associates, 1992). A reprint of Rabbath's edition was republished by Nuri al-Jarrah as *al-Dhabab wa-al-'āṣifah: riḥlat Ilyās al-Mawṣilī ilā Amrīkā – awwal riḥlah 'Arabīyah ilā al-Ālam al-Jadīd* (Beirut, 2001). In English, see Nabil Matar, *In the Lands of the Christians: Arabic Travel Writing in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 45-111, and Caesar Farah, ed., *An Arab's Journey to Colonial Spanish America: The Travels of Ilyās al-Mūsili in the Seventeenth Century* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003), of whom only Matar appears to have consulted the actual manuscripts. The most recent translation of the text is a French one by Nuri al-Jarrah, ed., and Jean-Jacques Schmidt, trans., *Un Irakien en Amérique au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Sindbad, 2011), where al-Jarrah mentions on p. 20 that he plans to publish a new Arabic edition, presumably of the entire manuscript.

deposited at the Vatican, where the Aleppo MS is preserved today as Vatican Sbath MS 108.

What Rabbath did not know was that a second copy of the work already could be found in the India Office Library in London. The catalogue entry for manuscript number 719 describes it as a “Personal narrative of the travels of ʿIlyās b. Ḥanna Mauṣilī, a Chaldean priest, in various parts of western Europe, and in Peru and Mexico, during A.D. 1668-1683.” The colophon records that it had been completed on 20 Kānūn I, 1751.<sup>12</sup> The London MS is possibly older than the Aleppo MS, if only by a few years, although this cannot be confirmed. It also contains two drawings not included in the Aleppo MS. It is unclear when the manuscript was obtained by the India Office, but it must have been before July 1872 when Otto Loth completed his catalogue of the Library’s collection of Arabic manuscripts. Nor is it clear how the manuscript came to sit in the Library of the India Office in the first place. As Loth described it in the preface to his *Catalogue*, the collection of Arabic manuscripts held by the India Office had been assembled from several libraries including those of East India Company officials like Warren Hastings and scholars like John Caspar Leyden along with manuscripts acquired from Indian libraries such as that of Tipu Sultan, the ruler of the Sultanate of Mysore.<sup>13</sup> For some manuscripts, Loth was able to provide additional information about provenance, but there was no such information available for the manuscript of ʿIlyās’ work. Looking at the collection in its entirety, however, it is striking that with the exception of only four manuscripts, all of the works in the collection were written by Muslim authors. In addition to manuscript number 719 containing ʿIlyās’ writings, the other three Christian works comprise two Karshūnī manuscripts (MSS nos. 1049 and 1050, both miscellanies consisting of a collection of Christian devotional texts), and a Christian theological treatise translated into Arabic from Syriac (MS no. 730). Based on the original accession numbers of the four manuscripts, the four Christian works appear to be related, and it is likely that they were acquired by the India Office Library at the same time (or from the same person), probably not earlier than the 1820s.<sup>14</sup> The London MS also

12 Otto Loth, *A Catalogue of the Arabic Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office* (London, 1877), p. 207. Since the publication of Loth’s catalogue, the manuscript has been given a new shelfmark, I.O. Islamic 3537.

13 See Loth’s Preface in *A Catalogue of the Arabic Manuscripts*.

14 The original accession numbers were the numbers first given to the manuscripts immediately upon their acquisition by the India Office Library. They were usually written on the flyleaf or first folio of the manuscript, and at the time of Loth’s cataloguing, they were replaced with his numbering system although he included the original numbers in his *Catalogue*. The original numbers for manuscripts 719, 1049,



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contains a mark of purchase by Hormuzd, son of the deacon 'Isa al-Rassam, dated 1786, a sign that the manuscript might have ended up at the India Office through one of his sons, Christian or Hormuzd Rassam, both of whom had close ties to British scholars, merchants and officials in the mid-to-late nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup>

The colophon of the London MS reveals something about the physical circulation of the work as well as the existence of a “lost” copy of Ilyās’ writings. The colophon identifies the copyist as a certain “Deacon Ḥanna” who copied the work for another deacon, Giwargis, for the price of 29 *baghdadis*. Although the location where the copying took place is not mentioned explicitly, given the type of coinage used for payment, it was very likely in the environs of Baghdad or Mosul. Deacon Ḥanna also noted that he had based his copy on yet another manuscript of Ilyās’ work, one that had been completed in 1699 by one “Andrawūs ibn Maqdīsī ‘Abdallah the Chaldean” in Puerto de Santa Maria, Spain. This reference to a manuscript completed in Spain in 1699 would make it the earliest known copy of Ilyās’ work, although its location remains unknown until today.

In addition to these three manuscripts—the London MS, the Aleppo MS, and the “lost” manuscript of 1699—it is clear that at least four other copies of the manuscript were in circulation in Iraq in the early twentieth century. These copies are referred to in a handful of local and bibliographical studies, although their current status, condition, and locations remain impossible to verify owing to the tragic loss and destruction of manuscripts, archives, and antiquities that took place during the 2003 invasion of Iraq.<sup>16</sup> The four manuscripts include the following:

- A. *A manuscript of unknown dating (Mosul)*. In 1906, Butrus Naṣrī published a two-volume history of the East and West Syrian churches in which he referred briefly to a manuscript copy of Ilyās’ writings in the possession

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1050, and 730 were 26A, 27A, 28A, and 29A, respectively. The colophon for MS no. 730 indicates that it was completed in 1236H/1821AD, which suggests that the four manuscripts could not have entered the India Office Library until after the 1820s. I am grateful to Ursula Sims-Williams, Curator of Iranian Collections at the British Library, for her assistance in navigating the early records of the East India Company Library.

- 15 See, for example, the entry for “Hormuzd Rassam” in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* or the account of Christian Rassam in John S. Guest, *The Yezidis: A Study in Survival* (London, 1987).
- 16 The extent of the destruction is still unclear. The fullest report remains Nabil al-Tikriti, “‘Stuff Happens’: A Brief Overview of the 2003 Destruction of Iraqi Manuscript Collections, Archives, and Libraries,” *Library Trends* 55.3 (Winter 2007): 730-45.



of one “Namān al-Ḥalabī” of Mosul. Unfortunately, Naṣrī did not offer any description of the manuscript, not even when it was completed. Years later, the Iraqi scholar Ya‘qūb Sarkīs visited Namān al-Ḥalabī’s only son, Yusuf, in an attempt to locate the manuscript only to learn that it had gone missing.<sup>17</sup>

- B. *A manuscript dated 1748.* In 1927, a copy of the work was reported to be in the possession of Dā‘ūd Chalabī, who described the manuscript as having been completed on 26 Tammūz 1748. This manuscript consisted of 122 folios, measuring approximately 16 by 22 centimeters. Like the London MS, the colophon of this manuscript indicates that it was copied directly from a manuscript made in 1699 in Puerto de Santa Maria. Chalabī also mentions the manuscript containing two drawings, although he does not describe them any further.<sup>18</sup>
- C. *A manuscript of unknown dating (Aleppo).* In 1939, Paul Sbath referred to a copy of the work in the possession of Suleymān al-Mawṣilī in Aleppo. No further details were given about the actual manuscript.<sup>19</sup>
- D. *A manuscript dated to the nineteenth century.* In 1969, the Iraqi National Archives possessed a copy of the work that had once been owned by Ya‘qūb Sarkīs. The manuscript was described by Kūrkīs ‘Awwād in rather general

17 The manuscript was first discussed in Buṭrus Naṣrī, *Kitāb dakhīrat al-adhbān fī tawārīkh al-mashāriqa wa-l-magāribā al-Suryān*, 2 vols. (Mosul: The Dominican Press, 1905-1913), vol. 2, pp. 358-360; Sarkīs’ account of his own search for it originally appeared in *Lughat al-‘Arab* in 1931 and was reprinted in *Mabāḥith ‘Irāqīyya* (Baghdad, 1948), vol. 1, pp. 331-354. Naṣrī mentions a second work supposedly written by Ilyās, which he refers to as “Bustān al-hayāt” but I have never come across any reference to any such work. More likely, Naṣrī confused this work with a prayer book prepared by Ilyās and published in Rome in 1692, the *Horae diurnae et nocturnae ad usum Orientalium* (Rome: S. Congr. de Prop. Fide, 1692). Edmond Laso also doubts the existence of any such work entitled “Bustān al-Hayāt” in his article, “Al-Rihālat al-khūrī Eliyā Abūnā,” *Banīpal* 43 (2010), p. 75. I am grateful to Dr. Saadi al-Malih for recently bringing this article to my attention.

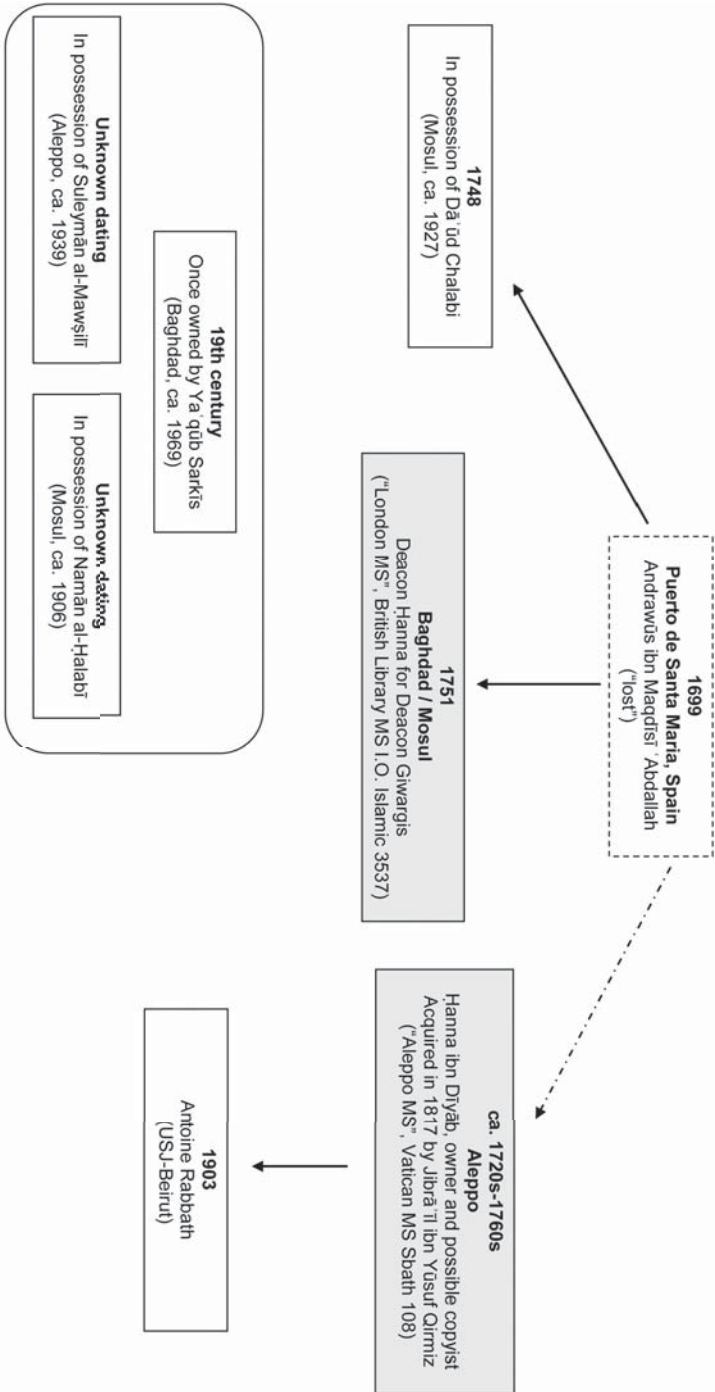
18 See Dā‘ūd Chalabī, *Kitāb makhṭūṭāt al-Mawṣil* (Baghdad: Maṭba‘at al-Furāt, 1927), p. 269-270, MS no. 23. The same manuscript was also referred to by Sālim Abd al-Razzāq Aḥmad in *Fihris makhṭūṭāt Maktabat al-Awqāf al-‘Ammah fī al-Mawṣil* (Baghdad, 1977), p. 190, MS no. 7/11, and Kūrkīs ‘Awwād, *al-Mabāḥith al-Suryānīyah fī al-majallāt al-‘Arabīyah* (Baghdad: Majma‘ al-Lughah al-Suryānīyah, 1976), part I, p. 37, MS no. 157.

19 Paul Sbath, *Al-Fihris: catalogue de manuscrits arabes* (Cairo: Imprimerie al-Chark, 1939), vol. 2-3, pp. 60-61.

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A Partial View of the Circulation of the *Book of Travels* and the *History of Ilyās ibn Hanna al-Mawsili*

Figure 1



Note: For each manuscript, I have included all available information about the year in which it was copied, where it was completed, the name of the copyist, and its most recent attested location. The shaded boxes refer to the only two manuscripts whose whereabouts can be confirmed. Evidence of the existence of the 1699 copy comes from the colophon of the London MS. A solid arrow indicates a confirmed link, whereas a dashed arrow represents a likely relationship between two manuscripts based on analysis of the text.

terms as having been written at some point in the nineteenth century and consisting of 99 folios measuring 17 by 22 centimeters.<sup>20</sup>

In all of these works, the only material included in any of the manuscripts is Ilyās' *Book of Travels* and his *History*. In this respect, the Aleppo MS is unique in its inclusion of an Arabic translation of the Ottoman *sefaretname*, an indication perhaps of the interests of the manuscript's owner or copyist, Ḥanna Diyāb. In addition to the above four manuscripts, a fifth copy exists, which represents a modern copy of the Aleppo MS made by Rabbath himself. It sits today at the Université Saint-Joseph in Beirut among Rabbath's papers.<sup>21</sup>

In total, therefore, at least eight copies of Ilyās' writings were in circulation at the start of the twentieth century, of which the existence of one, the 1699 manuscript, is only attested by a reference to it in the colophon of the London MS. Drawing on all of this evidence, Figure 1 sketches out a picture of the partial circulation of the work, from its origins in Peru where Ilyās began writing the work in 1680 to Spain where Ilyās continued to revise the work through the late 1690s and finally in its circulation to the Ottoman Empire from the eighteenth century onwards. The picture is of a work that circulated among a circle of Eastern Christians, based mainly in Aleppo, Baghdad, and Mosul. If we compare the actual texts of both the London MS and the Aleppo MS, it would seem as if both manuscripts go back to a common source, probably the 1699 copy mentioned in the colophon of the London MS. If there is an earlier copy of the work that predates this 1699 manuscript—for example, an “original” manuscript written by Ilyās himself—it has never been found.

## II

By the late seventeenth century, as Thomas Goodrich has shown, the *Tarih-i Hind-i garbi* circulated in only a handful of copies and among a small circle of Ottoman scholars. Nor is there any indication that the work was ever translated

20 See Kūrki's 'Awwād, *Fihrist makhtūṭāt khizānat Ya'qūb Sarkīs al-muḥdā'ah ilā Jāmi'at al-Ḥikmah bi-Baghdād* (Baghdad: Maṭba'at al-Ānī, 1966), p. 101. As late as 1983, the same manuscript was reported to be sitting in the Iraqi National Archives in 'Imād 'Abd al-Salām Rā'ūf, *al-Tārīkh wa-al-mu'arrikhūn al-'Irāqīyūn fī al-'aṣr al-'Uḥmānī* (Baghdad, 1983). Despite my best efforts, I have been unable to confirm its existence or current location.

21 See MS no. 29 in Louis Cheikho, “Catalogue raisonné des manuscrits historiques de la Bibliothèque Orientale de l'Université St. Joseph: manuscrits chrétiens,” in *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* (1913), p. 228.

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into Arabic.<sup>22</sup> Whether he knew it or not, therefore, Ilyās was the first writer to tell the story of the discovery and conquest of the New World in Arabic and to an audience of readers who had probably never encountered a written text about the Americas. This is not to say that Ilyās' readers could not have encountered information about the Americas through other modes of communication. Among his own people, for example, a long tradition of ecclesiastical relations connected the Church of the East with the St Thomas Christians in south India. Both communities traced their origins back to the apostolic missions of Thomas, and they were united as well by the liturgical use of the Syriac language. The result was a constant, if understudied, trickle of bishops and priests in motion back and forth between Baghdad and Malabar.<sup>23</sup> Upon returning home, many of these men told stories of their adventures in India to their family and friends in Iraq. One such incident was reported by an American missionary, Justin Perkins, as late as the mid-nineteenth century. In 1843, Perkins had been proselytizing to the Chaldeans in Iraq and described how the Patriarch had told him of one of the locals who had recently returned from India. As Perkins reported it, the Patriarch:

... was much more interested in giving us an account of a man of his flock, who, many years ago, wandered away to India, has now just returned and is entertaining his people with marvellous narrations, as to the existence of heathens still in India—details of their pagan rites—the abolition of the burning of widows by the English government, the existence of Jacobite Christians and Catholics there, their quarrels, etc.<sup>24</sup>

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22 Private e-mail correspondence with Thomas Goodrich, 15 June 2010.

23 By the early sixteenth century, these exchanges began to attract the scorn of Catholic missionaries who were eager to break the devotion of Indian Christians away from the leaders of the Church of the East. A string of compelling articles by Istvan Perczel is completely revising our understanding of the “Syrian” (from Syriac) church in India. Drawing on a cache of recently discovered sources in India, Perczel has painted a picture of the ideological conflict between pro-Syrian and pro-Latin factions among the St Thomas Christians of India. See, for example, Istvan Perczel, “What can a Nineteenth-Century Manuscript Teach us about Indian Church History?,” *Parole de l’Orient* 33 (2008), pp. 245-265; idem, “Classical Syriac as a Modern Lingua Franca in South India between 1600 and 2006,” *ARAM* (2009) 21, pp. 289-321; idem, “Four Apologetic Church Histories from India,” *The Harp: A Review of Syriac and Oriental Ecumenical Studies* (2009), 24, pp. 189-217; and idem, “A Malayalam Church History from the Eighteenth Century, based on Original Documents,” in *Bibel, Byzanz und Christlicher Orient: Festschrift für Stephen Gerö zur 65. Geburtstag*, eds. D. Mumazhnov et al., (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), pp. 291-314.

24 Justin Perkins, *A Residence of Eight Years in Persia among the Nestorian Christians* (New York, 1843), pp. 415-16.

There are at least a few written accounts of similar journeys to India, for example that of the Maphrian Shukrallah in 1758 or Athanasius Ignatius Nūri in 1899.<sup>25</sup> In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when Portuguese merchants, priests, and officials rubbed shoulders with Indian Christians and their East Syrian bishops, there would have been many opportunities for the exchange of information about the Americas. That these stories could have circulated in networks of oral communication in Iraq is certainly possible, not least because we know that some of them left faint traces scattered in a few disparate sources.<sup>26</sup> Even so, it is fair to say that no major written work on the Americas appears to have circulated in Arabic before Ilyās began writing his *Book of Travels* and *History* in Peru in 1680.

In both the London and the Aleppo manuscripts, the *History* is divided into 17 chapters, which are organized under the following titles:<sup>27</sup>

1. On China
2. On news of the discovery of the West Indies (*bilād hind al-gharb*)
3. On the conquest of Peru
4. On the “prophecy” of Sultan Huayana Capac (lit: “testament”, *waṣīyat al-sultān*)
5. On the General Don Francisco Pizarro
6. On the conquest of Peru and the deaths of the two sultans, Cusi Huascar Inca and Atahualpa, as well as Francisco Pizarro and Diego Almagro
7. On Sultan Manco Capac, Huascar, and Atahualpa
8. On the two “companions” (*mutakhāwiyīn*), Pizarro and Almagro
9. On Gonzalo Pizarro, brother of the conqueror of this land
10. On news of the bandit (*jilālī*) called Francisco Giron

25 See, e.g., Isaac Armalet’s reference to a work held at the patriarchal monastery of Charfet entitled “Riḥlat al-mafrīyān Shukrallah ilā al-Malabār fī-l-Hind,” MS 16/10, *Catalogue des manuscrits de Charfet* (Jounieh, 1937), p. 484, as well as Athanasius Ignatius Nūri, *Riḥla ilā al-Hind, 1899-1900*, ed. Nuri al-Jarrah (Beirut, 2003).

26 See, for example, Safar al-Mardīnī’s section on the New World in a treatise on the unity of the Catholic church in BNF Paris Syriac MS no. 219, f. 18; cf. Khidr bin Hurmuzd’s description of a story about the New World (“*al-dunyā al-jadīda*”) in his diary, which is held today in the Mingana Collection of the University of Birmingham, Christian Arabic MS no. 72.

27 Although I have consulted both extant manuscripts, all of the following references are to the text as it appears in the London MS of 1751, hereafter *BL-Kitāb siyāḥat*.

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11. On the mission of the disciple of Christ, Mār Tōmā the Apostle, who travelled to the West Indies
12. On the crowning of the son of Huascar as king of the Indians in 1563
13. On the royal family of the Indians of Peru, from their rise to their fall
14. On the idolatry and customs of the Indians who lived in Peru
15. On news of the Apostle Mār Tōmā and his companion in Peru
16. On some miracles wrought by the Virgin Mary in 1612
17. On the petition presented by Padre Francisco Romero, the Augustinian missionary, to the Sultan of Spain in 1683

In general, Ilyās' *History* is mainly a political and religious one. Not surprisingly, the Christian elements of Ilyās' narrative—his account of Thomas, his interest in miracles, and his thoughts on the conversion of the natives—are nowhere to be found in the *Tarih-i Hind-i garbi*. Yet if we consider the way in which Ilyās worked, it is striking that his method of composition resembles that used by the author of the earlier Ottoman account. In the first place, like the *Tarih-i Hind-i garbi*, Ilyās' *History* relies a great deal on European chronicles of the Spanish conquest of the Americas. But unlike the *Tarih-i Hind-i garbi*, the versions that Ilyās drew on were not Italian translations but rather the original Spanish versions. It is not always possible to identify the exact work that he was using. In some cases, for example, Ilyās refers only to something reported by “the historians,” “learned historians,” or even simply “in the book of the historian.”<sup>28</sup> In other cases, he refers explicitly to specific authors or books that can easily be identified such as Francisco López de Gómara's *Historia general de las Indias*, Garcilaso de la Vega's *Royal Commentaries of Peru*, and the writings of “Padre Gregorius Garcia.” (The former was a key source for the writer of the *Tarih-i Hind-i garbi*.) Other references are less clear: Ilyās alludes, for example, to one “Valentino the astrologer,” a writer called “Clodianus,” “the historian Paolo,” and the “astrologer Marco Varun.”<sup>29</sup> In addition to these works, Ilyās incorporated information from Christian sources such as the writings of Jerome, John of Chrysostom, and Augustine. It is not clear whether he consulted these works directly or, more likely, whether he poached

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28 In *BL-Kitāb siyāhat*, see Ilyās' references to “the historians” on f. 67r, “one of the historians” on f. 69r, “another historian” on f. 90r, “some of the historians” on f. 95v, “in the book of the historian” on f. 108v, “learned historians” on f. 118v, and “the historians” on ff. 117r, 120r, and 127v.

29 *BL-Kitāb siyāhat*, ff. 106r and 110r, 109v, 121r, and 120r, respectively. Other ambiguous references include “Hugo Karuti” on f. 81r, “the historian Marin” on f. 105r, “Marcus Cawasi” on f. 106r, and “Sarursato” on f. 125r.

references to them from the Spanish chronicles he was reading. More interesting is his reference to Caesar Baronius' history of the church, the *Annales Ecclesiastici* (1588-1607), a work that was already circulating in the Ottoman world in an Arabic translation printed in Rome in 1653.<sup>30</sup>

The context in which Ilyās began writing his *History* suggests that he, much like the author of the *Tarih-i Hind-i garbi*, probably drew on the help of an informant. In the *Book of Travels*, Ilyās writes that he began writing his work in 1680 while living in the residence of the Head of the Inquisition in Lima, a man named Juan de La Cantera.<sup>31</sup> As the main official responsible for exterminating idolatry, La Cantera almost certainly would have carried the standard histories of Peru with him to the New World, a set of books that he could use almost as a handbook of idolatrous practices. The fact that Ilyās' own *History* emphasizes Peru over other parts of the Americas also lends credence to the notion that he was working mainly from a set of books owned by La Cantera. Further research is required for a more complete sense of La Cantera's contribution to Ilyās' work, but it is possible that he guided Ilyās through the Spanish tradition, noting the most relevant passages for inclusion in the *History*. Apart from these printed sources, the *History* was also informed by oral and scribal sources that Ilyās encountered in the New World. Everything he reported about the Philippines, for example, he claims to have learned from a ship captain who lived there for seventeen years and some Jesuits who had travelled there.<sup>32</sup>

But if Ilyās' *History* drew extensively from Spanish works, this is not to say that the work is simply a string of excerpts translated into Arabic. This was presumably what persuaded Rabbath to ignore the *History* when he first published

<sup>30</sup> The *Annales Ecclesiastici* is mentioned on *BL-Kitāb siyāhat*, f. 109v. It was translated into Arabic for the first time by the Capuchin Franciscus Britius, or François Brice, who began translating it in 1644 while he was living in Damascus. Upon his return to Rome in 1650, the Propaganda Fide requested that he publish the Arabic work at their expense. The result was two volumes covering the first twelve centuries of the church. After returning to Syria in 1655, Britius began to work on a third volume comprising Sponde's continuation of the history from 1198 to 1646. For the Arabic text, see the *Annalium ecclesiasticorum Arabica epitome* (Rome, 1655-1671) and especially Britius' comments in the Preface. As proof of the popularity of the translation among Eastern Christians in this period, see the letter sent to the Propaganda Fide by Joseph I, Patriarch of the Chaldeans, in November 1674 in which the book appears among a list of titles requested from Rome in Albert Lampart, *Ein Märtyrer der Union mit Rom: Joseph I., 1681-1696, Patriarch der Chaldäer* (Einsiedeln, 1966), pp. 270-271.

<sup>31</sup> Ilyās refers to this on *BL-Kitāb siyāhat*, f. 49v.

<sup>32</sup> *BL-Kitāb siyāhat*, f. 63r.



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Ilyās' writings in 1905. Instead, from the raw materials of the Spanish tradition, Ilyās constructed an account of the New World aimed at an audience of Eastern Christians living under Ottoman rule. Throughout the work, allusions are repeatedly made to distinctly Ottoman institutions. The Spanish nobility in Peru, for example, are referred to as the "spahis of this land" and the city of Cuzco is described as the seat of the ruler of the Incas "much like Constantinople or Isfahan."<sup>33</sup> Spanish kings and officials are invariably "sultans" and "viziers." In his account of the religious customs of the Incas, Ilyās refers to Incan temples several times as "*masjids*."<sup>34</sup> The motivations behind the use of such Ottoman terms to describe New World realities is striking when one considers that there are many other instances when Ilyās uses Spanish or even indigenous terms without providing any Arabic or Turkish analogies. Rather than focus on any particular aspects of the text, however, in what follows, I offer a summary of the contents of each chapter along with a few examples of some of the more intriguing passages in the *History*.

Although Chapter One is entitled "On China," the chapter actually functions as a "bridge" linking Ilyās' *Book of Travels* with the *History* that follows. In this chapter, Ilyās writes that he had wished to travel from Mexico to the Philippines and from there to Surat and onwards "to my country," but that he was prevented from doing so because of a disagreement with an official headed to the Philippines. This is followed by a brief account of the introduction of Christianity into China by Catholic missionaries and the discovery of the Mariana Islands, named in honor of Mariana of Austria, widow of Philip IV. After this apparent digression, Ilyās resumes his narrative of the final portion of his journey, which has him returning from Mexico to Spain and, ultimately, to Rome where, Ilyās writes, "Pope Innocent XI bestowed appointments on me that I was not worthy of." This detail is the last scrap of information that Ilyās gives about his journey.

The remaining chapters deal specifically with the history of the New World, running from its discovery in the late fifteenth century to Ilyās' own day in the late seventeenth century. Chapter Two, "On the Discovery of the West Indies," tells of the voyages of Christopher Columbus, Amerigo Vespucci, Velasco Nuñez de Balboa, and Ferdinand Magellan. Ilyās presents these early conquests as a fierce struggle between the Spanish explorers and the "infidel Indians" (*hunūd kufra*) who inhabited the New World.<sup>35</sup> Yet at the same time, Ilyās seems to present an

33 *BL-Kitāb siyāḥat*, ff. 135v and 126r.

34 See, for example, in *BL-Kitāb siyāḥat*, f. 113v for "*masjidna al-'azīm*," f. 114r for "*bayt masjid al-aṣnām*," and f. 133v for "*masjid*."

35 The term is used on *BL-Kitāb siyāḥat*, f. 68r.

implicit critique of the motives of the early conquerors. When describing their behavior on the island of Darien, for example, Ilyās highlights the jealousy and infighting that developed among the Spaniards after they had been given a gift of gold by an Indian notable (*ashbrāf al-hunūd*).

When the aforementioned Indian saw that they were arguing over the gold, he said to them, “You people say that we are the misguided idolaters, and that we lack any knowledge of God. But from what I see, you are the misguided ones to be arguing and beating one another over something that is little more than the dirt of the earth and, for such a reason, to replace love and friendship with hatred and enmity. I beg you not to quarrel with each other, and I will reveal to you the places where you can obtain this yellow dirt (*al-ṭurāb al-aṣfar*).<sup>36</sup>

Such a critique crops up in other parts of the *History*, and it represents in some ways a departure from the sources that Ilyās drew upon while writing his history, as we shall see below.

Chapter Three recounts the discovery and conquest of Peru by a group of soldiers under the joint command of Francisco Pizarro and Diego Almagro. Ilyās’ version reads much like the standard account preserved in Francisco López de Gómara’s *Historia general de las Indias*. It includes a description of the origin of the name “Peru,” a detailed account of Pizarro’s travails on the island of Gorgona, and the story of Pizarro’s expeditions on the island of Puna and in the Tumbes region of Peru. Of the “Famous Thirteen,” the group of men who remained loyal to Pizarro throughout this period, Ilyās describes them in almost hagiographical terms. This was the case, for example, in Ilyās’ description of the seven months that Pizarro’s men spent on the island of Gorgona waiting for provisions.

[When on the island of Gorgona], the men stayed for a long time forbearing hardships, worries, hunger, nakedness, and great sickness, for they did not have houses on this land, nor [did they have] shelter or sustenance. . . . In patience, they demonstrated their masculinity (*rajūlitihim*) but more so, they persevered in their worship of God as is fitting for true Christians. Day after day, they were diligent in their prayers to the Blessed Virgin Mary and in saying the rosary and singing and glorifying the name of the Creator. They refrained from swearing and grumbling. In this way, they preserved themselves miraculously and they lived in success and appealed to the Queen of the Heavens, the Virgin Mary. From this, God’s providence was fulfilled in the return of the infidels to the light, and God

<sup>36</sup> *BL-Kitāb siyāḥat*, ff. 67–68.

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preserved the aforementioned Thirteen as a means for calling the infidels to the path of salvation.<sup>37</sup>

The chapter ends with Pizarro's return to Spain in 1528 to appeal directly to the King for his support for further expeditions in South America.

From this account of the conquerors of Peru, Ilyās turns his attention in Chapter Four to the perspective of the Incas. Here, Ilyās describes the prophecy of the coming of the Spaniards that had been reported by the Incan ruler, Huayana Capac, as well as his command to his people to submit to the Spaniards. This chapter also details the struggle for power that ensued between Huayana Capac's two sons, Huascar and Atahualpa, after their father's death.

Chapters Five through Ten resume the detailed account of the conquest of Peru by Pizarro and his followers through a narrative of political events in the region running up until the 1550s. Unlike that contained in the *Tarih-i Hind-i garbi*, the narrative in Ilyās' *History* is incredibly detailed, complete with names of specific individuals, dates of particular events, and a running account of the various conflicts that emerged between the Spaniards and the native inhabitants and, interestingly, among the Spaniards themselves. At the heart of this narrative lies the story of the growing conflict between Francisco Pizarro and Diego Almagro. Chapter Six gives an account of the capture and eventual execution of the Incan ruler Atahualpa by Pizarro's forces followed by the subsequent political instability in Peru and the rebellion led against the Spaniards by Manco Inca in 1536. That Ilyās' *History* was concerned with the morality of the conquest comes through again in Ilyās' description of Pizarro's murder, where he links Pizarro's death to the fact that he had broken his promise to Atahualpa that the Incan ruler's life would be preserved in exchange for great amounts of gold and treasure. Instead, Pizarro had Atahualpa executed as soon as his men had delivered the gold. The other events covered in these chapters include: the establishment of a neo-Incan state at Vilcabamba (chapter 7), the execution of Diego Almagro and the subsequent murder of Francisco Pizarro by Almagro's son (chapter 8), the rebellion against the King of Spain led by Gonzalo Pizarro (chapter 9), and the rise and fall of the bandit ("jilālī") Francisco Giron (chapter 10). This narrative of political developments is picked up again for the last time in Chapter Twelve, which opens with Ilyās' account of the life of Sayri Tupac, one of the last remaining rulers from the Incan royal family.

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37 *BL-Kitāb siyāḥat*, f. 74.

Given the extraordinary level of detail in Ilyās' political history, it is worth asking what exactly his readers would have walked away with as far a general picture of the conquest was concerned. To be sure, the litany of individuals, place names, and political factions would have been entirely foreign to Ilyās' readers. Indeed, his organization of events sometimes strays so wildly that there is no clear sense either of chronological order or even the link between various events. As such, it is a real challenge to isolate anything explicitly approaching a "message" or "moral" behind Ilyās' *History*. Yet, at the same time, it is clear that Ilyās sought to make the Spanish tradition of the conquest intelligible to his readers by incorporating terminology and institutions that came directly from the Ottoman world into his narrative. Perhaps the most intriguing example of this comes in Ilyās' treatment of the infamous first meeting between Atahualpa and Pizarro at Cajamarca:

When the king [Atahualpa] arrived at the centre of the square, the priest Vicente came out and greeted him through the mediation of a dragoman, saying and sermonizing to him, "The Holy Pope, head of the church, and the noble king [of Spain] have sent Pizarro as commissioner to you in order to spread love of the faith in Jesus Christ, the God that died in order to redeem mankind, and also in order to reconcile you in friendship and perfect knowledge with the Holy Pope and the Magnificent Esteemed Sultan [of Spain], and so that you will pay them the *kharāj* (*tabqātū fihim al-kharāj*)."<sup>38</sup>

When the king [Atahualpa] heard these words from the monk, he responded to him saying, "I won't give the *kharāj* to anyone (*lam idī al-kharāj ilā had*), nor will I give up the moon and the sun, which are eternal and do not die (*la yamūtūn*). How could I abandon them and worship a god who, according to your own words, has already died? And as for us becoming friends with powerful princes, we can do this without paying them the *kharāj*."

The reference to the *kharāj* here is of course the special tax paid by Christian and Jewish subjects living in the Ottoman world. In other words, Ilyās' *History* has the Emperor of the Incas refusing to pay the *kharāj* to his Spanish overlords. There are of course various ways of interpreting this anecdote, which would require a fuller study of the *History* than is possible here. One might read it as Ilyās' attempt to equate the situation of the Incas vis-à-vis the Spaniards with that of Christians living in the Ottoman Empire. More likely, Ilyās' adoption of the language of Ottoman subjecthood functions as part of a more general attempt to make the history of the New World meaningful and relevant to his Eastern Christian readers.

<sup>38</sup> *BL-Kitāb siyāḥat*, f. 84v.

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At any rate, this passage betrays a wider characteristic of Ilyās' *History*, namely his struggle to reconcile notions of empire in the Americas with the rather different structure of political organization that he knew from the Ottoman world. The idea of an empire at war with its own subjects is a recurring theme throughout Ilyās' *Book of Travels*. Over and over again, he describes the persistence of conflict between colonial officials and priests, on the one hand, and a general category of recalcitrant Indians—in his words, “pagan” or “infidel” Indians—who refuse to submit to the authority of the Spaniards. His descriptions of the Indians of Paucartambo is typical in this respect:

This town was a “covering” (*sitr*), that is to say [it marked] the border between the pagan Indians and the Spaniards. Sometimes, the infidels (*kufra*) descend on to the roads and they attack and kidnap all they can from among the Spaniards—men, women, and children—and they take them to their land and enslave them. When they have a feast or celebration, they slaughter a Spaniard and roast and eat him. Among these Indians is found a type of weed (*hashīsh*), which when chewed, makes them drunk and gives them courage and power, much like drinks and wine [do]. The weed is called “coca.” They do not have either wheat or barley or corn to use for making “boza,” drinking it, and getting drunk. These Indians are many in number and incredibly powerful. The Spaniards are unable to defeat them because they reside in the high mountains, and they have a clever prince (*amīr*) who rules over them.<sup>39</sup>

In one way, such a description might evoke images of the Kurdish tribes who reigned in the mountains near Ilyās' home in Mosul. At the same time, the notion of an enduring struggle between rulers and subjects was an idea that Ilyās might have found difficult to convey to his readers whose political imaginations were formed, in the first instance, in the particular circumstances of the Ottoman Empire. In his description of Atahualpa and Pizarro, therefore, Ilyās casts the relationship between the Incas and the Spaniards within a framework of “submission” that would have immediately made sense to an audience of Christian subjects of the sultan. But the consequence of this was that when they read about the Spanish conquest in Arabic, Ilyās' readers missed out on a central element in European stories of the conquest, namely the great violence wrought by the Spaniards.

Until now, political history, and in particular that of Peru, has attracted most of Ilyās' attention in the *History*. But from Chapter Eleven onwards, Ilyās shifts

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39 *BL-Kitāb siyāḥat*, ff. 34-35.

his gaze to the religious and sacred history of the Americas as well as the beliefs and customs of the Incas. These two subjects are interrelated as they reveal, as far as Ilyās is concerned, proof of the apostolic mission of Saint Thomas to the New World. Given the importance of Saint Thomas within the historical traditions of the Church of the East, these chapters are especially intriguing because Ilyās would have been introducing new elements into the story of Thomas' life that were not yet present in Arabic. In Chapter Eleven, for example, Ilyās describes how the arrival of Pizarro in Peru was greeted by stories from the native inhabitants about two men who had visited their ancestors long ago: "One was blonde and tall, and the other was medium-sized. Their faces were radiant like the sun. They used to preach and in their hands they held staffs." Later in the same chapter, Ilyās relates that the Indians said "his name was Thomas, and it was he who our grandfathers told us about that had come to this country. Afterwards, he left us and headed for the East, and he did not return."<sup>40</sup> In Chapter Twelve, Ilyās develops this tradition further through a description of a rock known by the inhabitants as the "rock of the disciple" (*sakhrat al-talmīdh*), which marked the spot on which the Apostle Thomas used to preach. In the London MS of 1751, an image of this rock is included (f. 108v), and Ilyās even claims to have seen it himself during his travels. The fullest account of Thomas, however, comes in Chapter Fifteen, "On news of the apostle Mār Tōmā and his companion in Peru." Here, Ilyās cobbles together several traditions from Spanish sources in an attempt to show the presence of Christian practices and beliefs in the Americas prior to the arrival of the Spaniards. According to Ilyās, some of this proof lay in objects found at the time of the conquest. For example, he tells the following story about a group of Spaniards who stumbled across an unknown cave.

They gained their courage and entered into this cave to see what was inside. They found a cross, six spans tall and not too thick. It was standing atop three mounds of rock and fixed into it were three nails made of wood worked with pleasant ornamentation. They say that this cross was made by the hand of the Apostle Saint Thomas. . . . Meanwhile, the crowds set out for the cave, and in the cave, they found a long rock on the ground, whose length was three spans. Imprinted on this rock was one half of the body of the disciple, i.e., one of his sides, because it had been his bed. So they went in great rejoicings thanking the Savior Jesus Christ for revealing the relics of his apostle Thomas to them.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> *BL-Kitāb siyāhat*, f. 108v.

<sup>41</sup> *BL-Kitāb siyāhat*, ff. 125-126.

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Ilyās also gives several stories of the violence faced by Thomas from the native inhabitants, one of which has Thomas being rescued from a lake by the Virgin Mary. This is followed, in chapter 16, by a lengthy account of the miracles wrought by Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico.

Alongside this account of the New World missions of Thomas, Ilyās offers in chapters 13 and 14 a genealogy and ethnography of the Incas. His account of the first eleven Inca emperors owes a great deal to the histories of Gómara and Garcilaso de la Vega. In particular, his account of the spread of Incan administration, organization, and laws to the other inhabitants of the Americas echoes Garcilaso's arguments about the contributions of Incan society as an organized empire in its own right. As might be expected from a priest, Ilyās' description of Incan practices and customs pays special attention to the devotional aspects of Incan religious life.

The Evil One taught them [the Indians] to fast for two days. Their fast was such that they could not taste salt or drink *boza*, nor could they have intercourse with their women. They had a special vestment for this season. They used to go to the outskirts of the town, that is, into the open fields. There, they would put on the aforementioned clothes and without there being any strangers, animals, or dangers in this field, they would cover their heads like the Jews and walk in a line as if in a procession. They do not speak with each other and, after this is completed, they celebrate and feast and drink and dance for two days and nights.<sup>42</sup>

This chapter also includes an account of the Incans' rite of marriage, their beliefs in the power of eclipses, and Ilyās' description of the practice of human sacrifice.

The final chapter of the *History* brings Ilyās' narrative up to his own day with the summary of what Ilyās refers to as a "petition" (*arzuḥāl*) submitted to the King of Spain, Charles II, in 1683 by an Augustinian missionary named Francisco Romero. The petition contained an account of Romero's travels through the New World, as well as a critique of the treatment of the native inhabitants by some Spaniards. Although Ilyās does not indicate how or where he obtained a copy of this petition, the work he is referring to is almost certainly a rare treatise called the *Llanto sagrado de la América Meridional*, published by Romero in Milan in 1693. It is possible that Ilyās even knew the man personally in Rome.

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42 *BL-Kitāb siyāḥat*, f. 122r.



## Conclusion

The fact that Ilyās drew on Romero's *Llanto sagrado* is an important reminder that he was still revising his work as late as 1693, over a decade after he had first started writing it in Lima. Why did he spend so much time working on his *History*? Indeed, why even write an Arabic history of the New World at all? To answer such questions, we must go far beyond the *History* and consider the life and times of Ilyās ibn Ḥanna al-Mawṣilī in more detail than is possible here. What is certain is that for an Eastern Christian raised in the borderlands between the Ottoman Empire and Persia, the New World offered a canvas upon which Ilyās could sketch his impressions of the religious, political, and economic changes taking place in the world around him. As he put it himself in the last lines of his *History*:

I say that this kingdom [the New World] is more magnificent than the kingdom [*sic*] of Spain, France, Germany, i.e., the countries of Austria, as well as all the regions of Asia. The proof follows from their measurements. For the land of the Catholic kingdoms is 1,000 *farsakhs*, and the land of the Turks and the Persians is 600 *farsakhs*. The land of the aforementioned Peru has a length of 2,250 *farsakhs*, consisting of 49 parishes. The frontiers encompassing those that pay the *kharaḥ* under the rule of the Sultan of Spain stretch to the South Sea, not including the infidel Indians who live in towns and villages near the Pacific Ocean. The frontiers have no end. Glory be to God forever.<sup>43</sup>

Less clear is what Ilyās' readers made of such a claim. We shall never know. Unlike the *Tarih-i Hind-i garbi*, not a single annotation exists in any of the extant manuscripts of Ilyās' *History*. This silence, combined with the fact of the work's limited circulation, might reveal something about how Ilyās' contemporaries viewed the work. For all the marvelous tales Ilyās told in his *Book of Travels* and his *History*, these were nevertheless still the stories of a man who had left his home to wander the world. Encounters with new worlds could also mean leaving old worlds behind. What then did Ilyās' family make of such a journey, one that carried their beloved son, brother, or uncle so far away from his home? Was Ilyās running to something or, rather, was he simply running away? Here is perhaps one more reason why scholars still know so little about Ottoman travelers like Ilyās ibn Ḥanna al-Mawṣilī: as far as their friends, families, and descendants were concerned, some of these men's stories were possibly best left forgotten.

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43 *BL-Kitāb siyāḥat*, f. 137r.

STORIES NEVER TOLD:  
THE FIRST ARABIC HISTORY OF THE NEW WORLD

*Stories Never Told: Early Notes on the First Arabic History of the New World*

Abstract ■ In 1668, a priest named Ilyās ibn Ḥanna al-Mawṣilī left Baghdad on a journey that carried him to Europe and as far away as the Americas. While in Peru in 1680, Ilyās began writing what he called his *Book of Travels* as well as a *History of the New World*—the earliest known Arabic account of the Americas. Although the *History* was first discovered in 1905, the work has been neglected by modern scholars, who have tended to focus instead on the *Book of Travels*. This article offers the first critical study of the *History*. It includes a description of the extant manuscripts of the work, a summary of the contents of each of the seventeen chapters, and a few examples of particularly interesting passages. Some attention is also given to a comparison of aspects of Ilyās' *History* with the *Tarih-i Hind-i garbi*. The article ends with a consideration of the ways in which Ilyās tailored his message specifically to an audience of Eastern Christians living on the borderlands between the Ottoman Empire and Persia. In doing so, this article seeks to demonstrate the importance of integrating the scattered writings of Eastern Christian travelers into the study of Ottoman exchanges with the wider world.

Key words: Chaldeans, Iraq, seventeenth century, Ilyās ibn Ḥanna al-Mawṣilī, travel, Eastern Christianity.