Article Abstract – Mediterranean Seminar, "Intermediaries, Middle Grounds, Middle Sea" (UCLA, February 9-10, 2024)

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Roundtable Working Title: **"How Ming Dynasty China Came to the Mediterranean: New Discoveries from the Surviving Manuscripts of the *Khataynameh*"**

Note: I can see this fitting into either the first or second roundtable, depending on what the organizers see fit to do.

During the second decade of the sixteenth century, a Central Asian merchant named `Ali Akbar Khatayi departed from the Ming Dynasty capital of Beijing to return to his home city of Samarqand after a six-year stay in China. Finding that the former Timurid Empire had collapsed at the hands of the messianic Safavid movement led by Shah Isma`il, he continued his journey westward until he arrived in the Ottoman capital of Constantinople. Exhausted, and facing bankruptcy, he approached the Ottoman court with a draft manuscript aimed at informing the Ottoman sultan Selim about his imperial counterpart on the other side of Asia, in the hope of receiving some kind of patronage and relief from his situation.

This manuscript became the *Khataynameh*, or "Book of China." First composed in the author's native language of Persian, it was later translated into Ottoman Turkish, and at least fifteen copies of the work have survived. The recent completion of a National Endowment for the Humanities project on the surviving manuscript corpus, in order to provide a critical edition of this important text, has made some discoveries about its evolution and transmission. We now know that Khatayi himself was the first to translate the manuscript into Turkish for Sultan Süleyman in 1520. Moreover, additional surviving copies illustrate how the manuscript found its way from the Ottoman court to other parts of the Mediterranean, including Cairo in Egypt, and even European archives later. In so doing, Mediterranean audiences received one of the most detailed accounts of their Chinese counterparts to date.