GIROLAMO ROCCHI, ed.
The Funeral of Sitti Maani Gioerida della Valle. Celebrated in Rome in the year 1627. And described by Girolamo Rocchi.
Printed Book, Rome, by the heirs of Bartolomeo Zannetti, 1627; frontispiece.
Courtesy of Houghton Library, Harvard University, (*IC6 R5823 627f)

Sitti Maani Gioerida, a Syrian Christian or Chaldean originally from Mardin, met the Italian traveler-scholar Pietro della Valle in Baghdad where her family had taken refuge. They married in Isfahan in 1619 but she died after a miscarriage in 1624. Della Valle had her body mummified and eventually buried in the family vault in Santa Maria in Araceoli in Rome. Girolamo Rocchi’s pamphlet records the public funeral celebration held in 1627. While we might be tempted to read the portrait as a straightforward likeness, della Valle says in a letter that his wife was only “dressing up as a Syrian” since she customarily wore Persian clothing. Note the fusion of Italian, Arabic, and Syriac scripts in her personal seal.

Scholars have coined terms such as “transculturation,” “entangled histories,” and “cultural mobility” to describe dynamic and complex intercultural exchanges in the early modern period. What does Rocchi’s pamphlet suggest about the effect of exile, diaspora, and travel on the construction of multi-ethnic identity?

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