This essay takes a fresh look at the voluminous yet understudied Western travel writing about 17th-century Iran. It argues that, after this material is properly subjected to close scrutiny for authorial bias, interest and intertextuality, it remains exceedingly valuable for the information it provides on Safavid Iran. Early modern European travelers to Iran brought remnants of past religious and cultural prejudice with them, yet the best explored the country with an open eye, an appreciation for difference, and even a critical perspective on their own culture. They also provide remarkable, at times unique information about Iran and its inhabitants, opening up aspects of Safavid left uncovered by indigenous sources.

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