

# SPAIN: RELATIONS WITH PERSIA IN THE 16TH AND 17TH CENTURIES

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Despite Spain's remoteness from Persia, Spanish-Persian relations trace back to al-Andalus (a geographical term used in Islamic sources in reference to the area of Spain and Portugal), when the presence of people and cultural materials from Persia reached its highest level. From the age of al-Andalus (711) to the Nasrid kingdom of Granada (1492), informal and cultural contacts with Persia were possible not only for Andalusian traders, travelers, and those who made the pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*), but also for Persians who, under various circumstances, traveled to the Islamic West (Shafa, pp. 143-190). That presence in the last Muslim kingdom of Granada in 1351 is referred to by the traveler [Ebn Battūta](#) (1304-69), who, in his *Rehla* mentions a group of Persians, all of them *faqir*, who had settled in Granada due to its similarity with their homeland. He also mentions their names and their origin in Khorasan, Tabriz, Samarkand, and India (Ebn Battūta, p. 944). In the Christian kingdoms, news about the king James II of Aragon (r. 1291-1327) and the Il-Khanid Ġāzān Khan (r. 1295-1304; see [IL-KHANIDS](#)), gives an idea of Spanish-Persian relations, as the letter of James II to Ġāzān Khan, offering his aid to conquer Jerusalem, sought to connect Il-Khanid Persia and the peninsular kingdoms in 1300 (Cutillas, 2013). A century later, in the late 14th century, Henry III of Castile (r. 1390-1406) sent a mission to Timur (Tamerlane, r. 1370-1405) with two ambassadors, Payo Gómez de Sotomayor and Hernán Sánchez Palazuelos, knights of his house. Both were received by Timur, who replied with a letter to Henry III (Argote, pp. 1-4). Then, in response, Henry III sent [Ruy González de Clavijo](#) to the court of Timur in Samarkand (1404). Clavijo has left a description of his journey through Persia in *Embajada a Tamorlán*. In short, Spanish-Persian relations after the fall of the Nasrid kingdom of Granada in 1492 can be defined as a search for an ally against the Ottomans. Contacts with Persia acquired another dimension.

The 15th century is characterized by changes in Spanish kingdoms and the Mediterranean with consequences for future Spanish-Persian relations. The conquest of Constantinople by the Ottomans in 1453 and the subsequent loss of Venetian territories in the Aegean and Adriatic Sea (Island of Negroponte, 1470) would force a diplomatic effort to counteract the Ottoman progress. On the other hand, the fall of the Nasrid kingdom of Granada, the last Muslim kingdom in the Iberian Peninsula, brought about a change in the status of the Islamic presence and relations with Persia.

In the 15th century, more intensive contact with Persia started with the Republic of Venice and the Persian kingdom of the Āq Qoyunlu Uzun Ḥasan (r. 1453-78; see [AQ QOYUNLŪ](#)) attempting to create an alliance against the Ottomans (Rota, pp. 149-60). Venice, with important economic interests in the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, and Asia Minor, sent several ambassadors to Uzun Ḥasan's court, including Lazaro Querini twice since 1463, and in 1471 Caterino Zeno (see [ITALY iv. TRAVEL ACCOUNTS](#)). After the mission of Ḥājji Moḥammad in Venice, with a urgent call for arms and ammunition, the Republic of Venice sent [Giosafat Barbaro](#) (1413-94) and [Ambrogio Contarini](#) (1429-99), who came to Persia in 1473. A stream of reports on Persia was provided in the last years of the 15th century as a consequence of the Ottoman military intrusion into Venice's territorial bases.

*Shah Esmā'īl I.* At the beginning of the 16th century, news in the Spanish court about [Shah Esmā'īl I](#) (r. 1501-24) came from the Italian Pietro Martire d'Anghiera (1457-1526). Pietro Martire, in a letter to his friend Pedro Fajardo and Chacón (ca. 1478-1546), first Marquis of Los Vélez, dated 4 July 1501, gave the first news about certain unknown youth called Sofio (i.e., Shah Esmā'īl) "king of all Persia willing to challenge all princes of the world." Afterward, Pietro Martire was sent as ambassador to Mamluk Egypt in

the same year, 1501, in an attempt to find out everything regarding Shah Esmā'il and [Safavid](#) Persia (See [SAFAVID DYNASTY](#)). His letters contained in *Opus Epistolarum* reflect the news about “Sofi” that came from Persia to Egypt (Martir d’Anghiera, I, p. 430). In the Spanish court, he spread an almost renewed idea of a Persian monarch converted to Christianity, and the notion of Prester John appeared again. Pietro Martire wrote in 1509 that the pope had written to the Grand Master of Rhodes assuring him that the shah would become a Christian (García Hernán, 2016, p. 64). The idea of a Persian Christian king became a recurring theme in the Spanish court during the first quarter of the 16th century (García Hernán, 2016, pp. 63-66). This idea became entrenched in Spain, where, in 1682, the *Descripción de la Sinapia* presents the utopia of Sinapia, whose inhabitants were Persian Christians (García Hernán, 2016, p. 65; Stelio Cro, p. 146; Foust, p. 218).

At the beginning of the 16th century, several embassies to Persia had great impact. One of them was the embassy of Ludovico de Varthema (ca. 1470-1517 or 1525), who traveled to Persia in 1504 and whose memoirs (*Itinerario*), published first in Rome in 1510 and in Spain in 1520, achieved several reprints (García Hernán, 2016, p. 66). Alongside with this work, Martín Fernández de Figueroa's book *Tratado de la conquista de las Islas de Persia y Arabia* (1512) jointly edited by Juan Agüero de Trasmiera, helped to attract interest in Persia. Martín Fernández relates all he had witnessed in the Persian Gulf and India with the army sent by King Manuel I of Portugal (see [PORTUGAL I. RELATIONS WITH PERSIA IN THE EARLY MODERN AGE 1500-1750](#)). In 1524 Fernando Colón wrote a surprising report dedicated to Charles V on Spanish rights to the conquest of Persia (Colón, pp. 382-420).

Whether it was because of the Venetian and papal embassies to Persia, the Portuguese expansion to the East, or Shah Esmā'il's victories over the Ottomans, the fact is interest about Persia increased in the Spanish court. Every piece of news concerning Persia and the Ottomans quickly reached Spain, notably the news about the Ottoman victories of Sultan Selim I (r. 1512-20) in Persia, Egypt, and Syria in 1514, 1516, and 1517, as well as about the Persian victories and their defeat at [Čālderān](#) in 1514.

Čālderān was a watershed moment in Spanish-Persian relation, which triggered a call for solidarity in European courts. Pope Leo X (1513-21) called the Catholic King Ferdinand (king of Castile, 1474-1504, and Aragon 1479-1516) to enter into alliance with Shah Esmā'il against the Ottomans (AGS, PR. 60. 77). But the appeal did not have much echo in the courts. Shah Esmā'il also wrote to the kings of Portugal and Hungary but received no response from either one. Following the decisive Safavid defeat at Čālderān, Shah Esmā'il tried to make a pact with Sultan Selim I (Bacquè-Grammont, pp. 73-127).

In 16th century, the change of correlation of forces between the European powers, the rapprochement of interests and diplomatic initiatives between Francis I (r. 1515-47), king of France, and Sultan Solaymān (Süleyman) II the Magnificent (r. 1520-66) was an early reality that would not materialize officially until 1536. This alliance would force Charles V, king of Spain (1516-56) and Holy Roman emperor (1519-56), to propose a rapprochement with Safavid Persia. The idea was nothing new. This project of alliance with Safavid Persia was an idea conceived in the court of Louis II of Hungary (r. 1516-26), pressured by the Ottomans. Louis II, aware of Ottoman expansion, sent Friar Petrus of Monte Libano with a letter in 1516 to Shah Esmā'il I, as did Charles V, for the purposes of signing an alliance against the Ottomans. These letters met with no response until the end of summer 1523, when Shah Esmā'il I sent a letter in Latin to the Emperor Charles V, using Petrus of Monte Libano as his return emissary. The message expressed the shah's concern about the strife between European states and the need to set up a single front to attack the common enemy. This letter did not reach Charles V until 1524, after Shah Esmā'il's death. News of Shah Esmā'il's death and Shah Ṭahmāsp I's accession had not reached Charles V by February 1529 (Lockhart, pp. 381-82; Lanz, I, pp. 52-53; Pārsādust, 1996, pp. 652-56).

In general, despite a certain amount of interest, very little was known in Spain of what was happening in Persia. Proof of this lack of knowledge is evident in the narration of Friar García de Loaisa, Charles V's confessor, when he mentions while writing to the emperor that the queen Joanna I of Castile knew nothing of the marriage of the Marquis of Brandenburg, and does so by comparing it to the existing ignorance regarding Persia: “She knew as much about this marriage as she did about the things that happen in

Persia” (García Hernán, p. 67).

*Shah Tahmāsp I* (r. 1524-76). In the 1520s several events led to an exchange of ambassadors. The surrender of Belgrade to Solaymān’s forces in 1521 and the increasingly overwhelming expansion of the Ottomans on all fronts were seen as a propitious moment for an alliance with Shah Esmā‘il. In 1523, Joan III (r. 1521-57), the king of Portugal, sent Baltasar of Pessoa to Shah Esmā‘il, but he arrived in 1524, when Shah Esmā‘il had already died. The new shah, [Tahmāsp I](#) (r. 1524-1576), failed to establish a solid relationship with the European princes, especially after 1555 (Matthee, 2011, pp. 22-47).

On 16 July 16 1524, Martín de Salinas, the ambassador of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria, records the arrival and reception of a Persian emissary from the Sofi (Shah Esmā‘il) to the court of Emperor Charles V in Burgos. Shah Esmā‘il sent this ambassador with the desire, as Ferdinand had proposed to him, to sign an alliance against the Ottomans (Antonio Rodríguez, p. 200; Pārsādust, 1996, pp. 837-38). The English ambassador to Charles V, Richard Sampson (d. 1554), wrote from Valladolid on 16 August 1524, confirming this embassy and the ambassador’s proposal of a joint action against the Ottomans. Sampson relates some of the details brought to Burgos by the ambassador, and says that the shah was “christened” because he “lived for twelve years in an Armenian monastery ... when his father and brethren were killed by the king of Persia” (Brewer, p. 254). Charles V responded with an ambassador and a message that, because of a confrontation with France at that time, it was not possible for him to engage in war in 1525 (Lanz, I, pp. 168-69). The death of Louis of Hungary in the battle of Mohács against the Ottomans in 1526 ushered in major changes. Charles changed his strategy and became more interested in seeking a Persian alliance.

Towards the end of 1528, another Persian envoy arrived at the Spanish court. In November of that year, Ferdinand’s ambassador, Gabriel Sánchez, pleaded with King Charles to accelerate an agreement with the Persians to fight the Ottomans. The emperor had received news that the shah had defeated the Ottomans and consequently the Turks would not support Voivoda John Zápolya (r. 1526-40) in Hungary, leaving Ferdinand free to capture Budapest (Rodríguez, p. 384). Charles responded favorably to Ferdinand’s request and ordered him to look for a suitable ambassador who could leave “via Portugal or Calicut or by the route that seemed best” (Bauer and Lacroix, p. 325). In January 1529, Gabriel Sánchez reminded Charles V to bear in mind the possibility of an alliance with the Persians (AGS, E. 1553.297). But the Treaty of Cambrai (August 1529) with Francis I and the Ottoman progression towards Vienna and its victory at the battle of Mohács (August 1526) in southern Hungary would accentuate the need for a counterweight to the Franco-Ottoman agreements. Then the king decided to dispatch to Persia a knight of Saint John of Jerusalem called Jean de Balbi, a Savoyard of the royal house. According to his instructions, he was to give an account of the peace with France and the pressure of the Ottomans on Hungary; in other words, of the Treaty of Madrid (January 1526) and of the League of Cognac, as well as the 1526 battle of Mohács. The aim was to inform the shah and ask him for a demonstration of unity with the anti-Ottoman cause on the western border of his kingdom (AGS, E. 1555.18).

Robert Bransetur, an English nobleman and a merchant, offered to accompany Balbi to Persia. From Baghdad, they carried the letters to the Shah Tahmāsp in Khorasan, where the shah was fighting the Uzbek army. Balbi and Bransetur were received by the shah in 1530 and started the journey back to Spain. Balbi died in an ambush on his way to India in 1531. Bransetur decided to return by way of Anatolia as a trader, but finally left Goa on his way to Portugal. He arrived in Lisbon in 1532 and delivered the shah’s letter to Charles V (Aubin, pp. 391-96).

Although no alliance was concluded, the general opinion in the Spanish court was that it should be done. The general idea was that, without the Persians, the Ottomans would focus on military expansion across Europe and the Mediterranean. Two documents show rumors of a possible intervention by Charles V in the Persian Gulf. The origin of this rumor is in the writings of Aloigi di Giovanni Venetiano (Roncinotto Luigi). Aloigi states in his *Viaggio di Colocut*, which describes a mission carried out in 1529, that 1,500 soldiers with artillery arrived in the Persian Gulf with an ambassador to aid the shah in his fight against the Turks (Aloigi di Giovanni, fol. 114v). However, there is no documentary evidence to support such



claims. Decades later, Marino Sanuto reported the news received from Donado da Leze in September 1525 that, according to two Armenians who had left Tabriz in the first period of Shah Ṭahmāsp's reign, the Safavid troops had received [firearms](#) from the Spaniards (Portuguese) "who conquered the Hormuz Island (see [HORMUZ ii. ISLAMIC PERIOD](#)) and came to Tabriz" (Sanuto, 40, p. 200; Mazzaoui, p. 430).

The decade of the 1530s is a special period concerning how the game of alliances developed. In 1533, Charles V received the news of Shah Ṭahmāsp's victory over the Ottomans (A. Rodríguez, pp. 552-58). However, the situation turned during the next few years as the Ottomans conquered Baghdad and the holy places of the Shi'ites, including [Najaf](#) and [Karbala](#) in 1534. This had an important impact on the course of events concerning Safavid Persia and Spain. The importance of Safavid Persia in the diplomatic and military context of the confrontation between the Habsburg Empire and the Ottoman Empire is evidenced in the chronicle of the Marquis of Santa Cruz. Marquis, in his writings evidences the doubt of Süleyman I in 1534 to continue the Ottoman expansion in the western Mediterranean, an idea supported by the Ottoman grand admiral, K̄ayr-al-Din Barbarossa (d. 1546), instead of the eastern option towards the Safavid Empire, which was supported by the governor (*beglerbeg*) of Karaman. Finally, Barbarossa's case for expansion towards Europe and the Mediterranean triumphed (Santa Cruz, pp. 410-19). The Ottomans knew they couldn't keep two fronts open.

Once again, news that would indicate a possible participation of the Spanish military forces in Shah Ṭahmāsp's army appears in Spanish chronicles. In 1534, Francisco López de Gómara said (p. 230) that Shah Ṭahmāsp already had Spaniards and artillery. In the meantime, for the Habsburgs, the situation in Europe and the Mediterranean would get more complicated. At this juncture, in the 1540s and onwards, with the Ottoman Empire expanding on all fronts (Battle of Preveza, 1538; Charles V expedition to Algiers in 1541; Ottoman conquest of Hungary in 1543; Ottoman capture of Tripoli in 1551 and Menorca in 1558; Ottoman support to King Francis I against the Habsburgs in the Italian War of 1551-59; Battle of Jerba in 1560), the question emerged as to whether it was legitimate to sign alliances with Islamic countries. The French political philosopher, Juan Bodino, defended Francis I and his pact with the Ottomans, alleging that Charles V had done the same with the Persians through Robert Bransetur. However, Juan Antonio de Vera y Figueroa, in his biography of Charles V in 1656, defended the emperor, claiming that the two pacts differed because the alliance made with the Persians did not go against the pope nor against a Catholic prince, but against the Ottoman house, the greatest enemy of the Church (Vera, p. 179).

In the 1540s, a Persian emissary came to Charles V; yet precise information regarding it is lacking. A. H. Morton refers to an undercover mission to Spain, possibly carried out by the Venetian Michele Membré (Membré, tr., pp. xxi-xxiii). The military initiative of Sultan Süleyman I, conquering territories in Europe, the Mediterranean, Africa, Southeast Asia, and large areas of the Safavid territories provoked a change in the balance of power. Regarding the Safavids, Shah Ṭahmāsp, after three decades of wars, was forced to sign the [Peace of Amasya](#) with the Ottomans in 1555, which meant significant losses for the Safavids and a change in Spanish-Persian relations.

In March 1558, both Philip II (r. 1556-98), king of Spain, and Pope Pius IV (1559-65) decided to prepare and send an emissary to Persia through Michel Cernovic, the dragoman chief of the Venetians and agent of Ferdinand I and Spain in Constantinople (García Hernán, 2016, p. 72; Cutillas, 2016, pp. 29-40). The choice fell on the Flemish Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq (1522-92), ambassador of Ferdinand I at the Ottoman court of Sultan Süleyman I and the author of *Legationis turcicae ...*, written during his stay in Constantinople (1554; 1556-62). For much of the time he spent in Istanbul he was engaged in negotiating a border treaty with Sultan Süleyman over the disputed territory of Transylvania and did not travel to Persia. During this time, Süleyman's rebel son, Bāyazid had taken refuge in Persia fleeing the failed attempt to remove his father and brother, the crown prince Selim from the throne. This provoked to reproach Shah Ṭahmāsp for having given refuge to his rebel son Bāyazid. Finally, Shah Ṭahmāsp, in order not to provoke a major incident, ordered Bāyazid and his family to be executed in 1561 (AGS, E. 486, doc. 65; AGS, CC. 377; Mitchell, pp. 41-52; Morgan and Coote, p. 142; Busbecq, tr., pp. 301-14;

Parsādust, 1998, pp. 293-358). In 1561, the treaty signed between the Ottomans and Ferdinand I was broken, and the Ottomans continued their military incursions across the Hungarian frontier. Furthermore, the Peace of Amasya (1555), which had been recently signed, did not allow to augur well for an alliance with Shah Ṭahmāsp.

After Süleyman's death in 1566, Philip II ordered Alonso de Tovar, his ambassador in Lisbon, to prepare another embassy to Persia (AGS, E. 385, fols. 56-57; AGS, E. 384, fols. 90-91), in order to find out if Shah Ṭahmāsp would break the Treaty of Amasya with the Ottomans, thus blunting the Ottoman military initiative towards the West. But this mission never made it to Persia. The new Ottoman ruler, Sultan Selim II (r. 1566-74) embarked on the conquest of Cyprus in 1570, but a year later his naval force was defeated at the battle of Lepanto on 7 October 1571. After the victory at Lepanto, all participants in the Holy League prepared in 1572 an embassy to inform Shah Ṭahmāsp about the defeat of the Ottoman army and to renew the alliance to fight the Ottomans (García Hernán, 2010, pp. 224-26; Gil Fernández, 1, 2006-9, pp. 61-62, n. 7, p. 65). However, as a result of Shah Ṭahmāsp's death in 1576, and the tumultuous aftermath of the coronation of Shah Esmā'il II (r. 1576-78) the Ottomans invaded Safavid territory, annexing important regions. Consequently, Ottoman pressure in Europe and the Mediterranean decreased, and Philip II initiated a process of rapprochement with the Ottomans to sign a truce with Morād III (r. 1574-95). In the early 1580s, there was an urgent need to reach a peace agreement with the Ottomans. Philip II wanted to end the war of attrition in the Mediterranean. Other royal territories required greater attention from the king in his planning of international politics. On the one hand, there was the annexation of the crown of Portugal in 1580, the crisis created in 1581 by the signature in the northern provinces of Flanders of the Union of Utrecht, and the possible intervention of France and England in Flanders and Portugal. Philip II was forced by the situation to seek a truce with the Ottomans. An unofficial ambassador to Constantinople, Giovanni Margliani, was in charge of conducting the negotiations (Rodríguez Salgado, p. 12).

With the crowning of Philip as king Philip I of Portugal (1581), Philip entered into contact with Hormuz and Safavid Persia (García Hernán, 2016, p. 74; Matthee, 2012). The intensification of Ottoman military actions, despite the Lepanto defeat (1571), was felt on a triple front: through the Mediterranean Sea over Italy and Spain, through the Red Sea over the Portuguese possessions of East Africa, and through the Persian Gulf over Hormuz, Muscat, and the Portuguese establishments in India.

The lengthy accounts and propaganda that spread around Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries shaped an image of Persia much closer in values and more sophisticated than the denigrated Ottoman dynasty (Matthee, 2013, p. 10). Due to strategic and religious reasons the Safavid dynasty aroused great interest in Spain and Portugal in the 16th and 17th centuries. As a result, the number of publications on Persia increased (see Floor). Spanish literature embodied in the Safavid dynasty the image of the heroic champion in the wars against the Ottomans (García Hernán, 2010, pp. 227-28). Together with this magnified and distorted image a link emerged between the heroic image of ancient Persia and the virtues depicted in the Safavid period. Analyzing *Viaje de Turquía*, Sánchez García highlights this link between the great heroes of ancient Persia and the values that Safavid Persia represented in 16th century Spanish literature (Sánchez García, pp. 1591 ff.). This distorted idea of Persia in the Spanish literature was magnified when Shah 'Abbās I (r. 1588-1629) came to power and their clashes with the Ottomans began to spread (Gouvea, pp. 78-134).

In 1581, Philip II commissioned Dom Francisco de Mascarenhas (1581-84), who was being sent as Viceroy to India, to contact Shah Ṭahmāsp to reiterate the offerings of alliance against the Ottomans. The news of the succession crisis in the Safavid court (1576-78) was not yet known in Spain and Portugal. Furthermore, the viceroy of Naples, Íñigo López de Mendoza (1575-79), by means of an Armenian courier called Joan Baptista, sent a present to the Persian sovereign in the name of the king of Spain, with an offer of friendship. The shah replied positively and sent Joan Baptista himself and a Persian emissary with his response and a gift for Philip II. The Armenian Joan Baptista returned via Goa and the viceroy took advantage of the presence of Friar Simón de Morais, who had just returned from Hormuz and was an expert on the Persian language. Francisco de Mascarenhas commissioned him to go to Persia,

accompanied by the Armenian Joan Baptista and the Persian emissary, to deliver to the shah the letter of Philip II and a gift from him (Gil Fernández, I, 2006-9, pp. 74-75).

*Shah 'Abbās I.* The accession of Shah 'Abbās I (r. 1588-1629) and the Treaty of Constantinople, or Treaty of Farhād Pasha, signed with the Ottomans in 1590 meant that once again the demands for the shah to continue fighting the Ottomans would be intensified with the excuse of an alliance against the common enemy. In a letter dated in Lisbon on 15 February 1594, Philip II ordered the viceroy of India, Matías de Albuquerque (1591-97), to send an embassy to the king of Persia agreeing to the desire expressed by Shah 'Abbās to keep friendly correspondence with the Portuguese. On March 1596, Philip II expressed the same wish to the new viceroy, the admiral Francisco de Gama (1597-1600), count of Vidigueira, informing him of the convenience of sending as ambassador a person of high rank (a *fidalgo*), like the one that had been sent during the reign of King Dom Sebastião (r. 1557-78). But Philip II died a few years later. Philip II, in spite of the distance and the difficulty of carrying out a policy of common actions consistently, maintained until his death the need to preserve friendship with the shah (Gil Fernández, I, 2006-9, pp. 74-78). A new phase in relations between Spain and Safavid Persia began with the start of the reign of Shah 'Abbās I (1588) and the death of Philip II (1598).

Rome mainly had a military and diplomatic role in the alliance with Persia against the Ottomans, but the goal of carrying out an evangelizing mission in Persia also materialized during the reign of Shah 'Abbās. The objective was to work for the union of the Armenian Christians with the Roman Catholic Church (Flannery, pp. 111-47) and to try to convert Muslims. In 1600, Asad Beg, who under the guise of a merchant in Venice had a meeting with Don Diego de Miranda and the Bishop of Pistoia, Abbiosi, really was an emissary sent by the shah to get information about the reception of the embassy of Ḥosayn-'Ali Beg and Anthony Sherley. In this meeting Asad Beg revealed his mission and, more significantly, that Shah 'Abbās had not only manifested his pro-Christian sympathies but also desired to receive Catholic priests to preach and plant churches in Persia. Asad Beg even added that the shah was close to conversion (Gil Fernández, I, 2006-9, pp. 107-08). This surprising news reached Pope Clement VIII (1592-1605; Chick, I, pp. 81-89). In February 1601, an embassy was sent to Shah 'Abbās to allow evangelical preaching as the Ottoman sultan allowed. Despite all this, the embassy had a disastrous end (Gil Fernández, I, 2006-9, pp. 110-15).

At the beginning of the 17th century, missions in Persia were additional factors in understanding Spanish-Persian relations (see Matthee, 2005, pp. 3-43). Pope Clement VIII's decision to establish convents anywhere across the world turned the East, particularly Persia, into a desirable territory for new foundations (Friar Florencio del Niño Jesús, pp. 11-16). Augustinians and Jesuits had bases in Goa acting within the framework of Portuguese patronage (*Padroado*). Hormuz was used also by Augustinians and Jesuits aiming to establish their orders near Safavid Persia. In 1602, the Augustinian [Antonio de Gouvea](#) (1575-29) traveled to Persia from Goa with a political mission. During his travel to Mashhad to visit the court of Shah 'Abbās, he wrote *Relaçam*, in which he describes Shah Abbas's war against the Ottomans, Armenian Christian communities, Shi'a devotional rites, and everything that happened to the mission on its way from Goa up to Khorasan. He traveled to Spain with the ambassador Dengiz Beg Rumlu, arrived in Lisbon in 1611, and was nominated by Paul V (1605-21) as Apostolic Visitor in Persia and bishop of Cyrene in Africa, not as patriarch of Armenia as Shah 'Abbās I had demanded (Alonso, 2000, p. 115; Falsafi, IV, pp. 168-79). He returned to Persia with the ambassador Dengiz Beg in 1612. In 1604, another embassy arrived in Persia with Augustinian Missionaries. The ambassador Luis Pereira Lacerda with the Augustinian friars Belchior dos Anjos (Melchor de los Ángeles in Spanish sources), Guilherme de Santo Agostinho, and Diogo de Santa Anna (latter, prior for the convent of Isfahan) arrived in Isfahan (see Gulbenkian, p. 43; Gil Fernández, 2006-9, I, pp. 288-95).

As for the [Carmelites in Persia](#), the new Congregation in Italy, after its separation from the Spanish congregation in 1597, in 1605 chose to join any Mission to convert heretics, which allowed them to begin the settlement process in Persia (Chick, I, pp. 7-10; Friar Florencio del Niño Jesús, pp. 9-16). The first Carmelite papal mission arrived in Isfahan on December 2, 1607. The mission was composed of the friars Vicente de San Francisco, Pablo Simón de Jesús María (1576-1642), and Juan Tadeo de San Eliseo (John



Thaddeus of St. Elisaeus; 1574-1633), the first Bishop of Isfahan. They played an outstanding role in evangelization, using Persian as the evangelizing language. The last Carmelite living at Isfahan was the Carmelite Lay Ferdinand of St. Teresa, who succeeded the bishop of Isfahan, Philippe-Marie de St.-Agustin, after his death in 1749 (Chick, II, p. 1037).

Of other Catholic orders, the French [Capuchins](#) established themselves in Isfahan with the arrival of two French monks in 1628, lasting until the middle of the 18th century. The Jesuit Gaspar Barzaeus, sent by Franciscus Xavier (1506-52), the founder of the Jesuit mission in Goa, was the first Jesuit in Hormuz, where he arrived in 1549. The Jesuits left Hormuz in 1568 due to the harsh climatic conditions and lack of receptiveness of the population (Matthee, 2008, p. 634). Eventually in 1642, the Jesuits made preparations to settle in Persia. In 1646, the Frenchman François Rigordi came to Isfahan with Father Chézaud in order to buy a parcel of land to build a house for the order. He eventually received permission to establish a Jesuit mission in Isfahan. The Jesuit order was maintained in Persia until the 18th century. The Polish Jesuit Father Judasz Thaddeus Krusiński (1675-1756) related the last period of the Safavid dynasty. He lived in Persia between 1707 and 1728, and was a first-hand witness to the conquest of Isfahan by the Afghans in 1722. Little is known about the Jesuit activities in Persia after the fall of the Safavid dynasty in 1722. Around 1760, the last Jesuit left [Gilan](#). (Matthee, 2008, p. 638).

There were also Dominican and Franciscan missions in Isfahan. The former was linked to the Dominicans in Armenia. The archbishop of Armenia in Nakhchivan (Nakjavān), Paul Piromalli (1655-64), traveled to Isfahan to establish a “House of the Dominicans,” possibly in [Julfa](#) (Chick, 1, p. 381), besides the one they had in Nakhichevan near the house of the archbishop of Armenia (Chick, 1, p. 386).

The international situation at the end of the 16th century accelerated contacts between King Philip III of Spain (r. 1598-1621) and Shah ‘Abbās I. The English and Dutch had long been interested in the spice trade with Asia. They needed ports to trade and enclaves on the westbound route from Southeast Asia (See [ANGLO-IRANIAN RELATIONS i. Safavid to Zand Periods](#)). John of Medin Dilen, an Englishman, who had been in the service of the shah, received authorization to trade freely in Persian territory. Around 1600, he had also been sent as ambassador to the court of the Mughal emperor, Jalāl-al-Din Akbar I (r. 1556-1605), with the aim of getting authorization for the English and Dutch to enter his territory. However, this mission was cut short when the ambassador was captured by the Portuguese before reaching the Mughal court, halting the advance of the English East India Company (García Hernán, 2016, p. 76). The English and Dutch expansions became a serious obstacle to trade from India. The problem was not related so much to the Safavid court, but was due to the decisions made at the court of Madrid after the Twelve Years’ Truce in 1609 (between the Habsburg rulers of Spain and Dutch Republic) regarding trade of Dutch East India Company ([V.O.C.](#)) in India and the Persian Gulf (See [DUTCH-PERSIAN RELATIONS](#)). The truce banned the loading of passengers or goods in Spanish ports on vessels other than those of the king of Spain, leaving the Southeast Asian gate open to the Dutch and English. The problem was intensified by Shah ‘Abbās’s conquest of the Portuguese holdings in the Persian Gulf (see [HORMUZ ii](#)).

In 1604, great concern arose when Shah ‘Abbās recovered Tabriz and took over the entire Persian Gulf littoral, leaving only the tiny isle of Hormuz in the hands of Philip III. Almost eight years later, the Carmelite friar Pablo Simon, who remained at the Safavid court over four months between 1608 and 1609, proposed an alliance with the shah against the Ottomans, to allow trade with Persia via Moscow and not by way of India, which was the route followed by the English, Dutch, and French traders. However, the Council of State overruled this proposal in order to maintain the existing agreements with Persia via India (García Hernán, 2016, p. 76).

Around the beginning of the 17th century, a number of significant embassies were sent to Spain and Persia, including the embassy of 1599 to Spain, which led to several events: The embassy of King Simon I of [Kartli](#) (r. 1556-69; 1578-1599) to the pope and the king of Spain requesting an alliance (Gil Fernández, I, 2006-9, p. 79), his uprising against the Ottomans in 1598, and the arrival of the English brothers Anthony and Robert Sherley in Isfahan. What is more, the Augustinian Portuguese friar Nicolas

de Melo, who was on his way to Rome, was decisive in convincing the shah to send an embassy to Europe. Anthony Sherley, who pretended to be an ambassador of Christian princes of the West, convinced Friar Nicolas de Melo to represent the role of delegate of the pope and the king of Spain for the benefit of Christianity. They both managed to persuade Shah ‘Abbās of the advantageous benefits that a military alliance against the Ottomans and a change of the silk sale route through Hormuz would bring to him and Philip III. This led to Shah ‘Abbās’s initiative to send a first embassy to the Christian princes, led by a Persian nobleman, Ḥosayn-‘Ali Beg Bayāt and Anthony Sherley, while his brother Robert was held hostage in Persia (Bunes, pp. 47-69; Ross, p. 13; Falsafi, IV, pp. 155 ff.).

This embassy is known for the *Relaciones* that Oruj Beg Bayāt, known as Don Juan of Persia, wrote and finished in Spain (*Relaciones*, tr. Le Strange; Gil Fernández, 2003; Cutillas, 1999-2002; idem, 2017, pp. 75-82; García Hernán, 2011). The embassy departed from Isfahan in 1599 and took the route to Moscow via the port of Archangel and arrived at the Spanish court in Valladolid on 13 August 1601. In Spain, some of the agents sent by Shah ‘Abbās converted to Christianity under the patronage of King Philip III and his wife Queen Margaret of Austria (r. 1599-1611), who acted as godparents for some of them. Among them was Oruj Beg, who was baptized as Don Juan de Persia in Valladolid on January 14, 1602. These conversions resulted in a great deal of displeasure to Shah ‘Abbās (García Hernán, 2016, p. 77). Obviously, the Hispanic monarchy, in addition to seeking to strengthen diplomatic ties with the Safavids, had an interest in attracting new converts to the crown. This implied the acceptance of the conversion of distinct individuals as in the case of Don Juan de Persia and others as an example of the king’s benevolence in accepting and placing them in the service of the state or the army. Although Don Juan de Persia succeeded thanks to his work *Relaciones*, another Persian, Don Diego, reached the highest levels within the Spanish court. He even asked the king to enter him as a knight in Santiago’s order. However, their contributions in the royal court were not notably significant. The problem, as García Hernán points out, is that the court did not know how to take advantage of the great potential that this large group of Persian converts had as go-betweens. They were known as Persian Gentlemen in 17-century Spanish society, but very soon their presence was integrated and blurred. The Hispanic monarchy once again squandered the potential of its citizens (García Hernán, 2016, p. 75).

In 1611, a mission from Shah ‘Abbās arrived in Spain. It included a leading Armenian merchant, called K̄āja Şafar, who served as a trade agent for Shah ‘Abbās I (Gil Fernández, 2006-9, II, pp. 145-60; Baskins, pp. 3-28; Zekiyan, 357-67; Falsafi, IV, pp. 176-79). To clarify the mission of K̄āja Şafar in Europe, Shah ‘Abbās wrote a letter, dated January 1609, to Philip III introducing K̄āja Şafar and informing him what the mission was about. A little earlier, Shah ‘Abbās had sent some of his agents to Europe to sell the surpluses of silk and do some shopping. When they were returning to Persia in 1609, a conflict had erupted between Shah ‘Abbās and the Ottoman Sultan Aḥmad I (r. 1603-17), and the goods fell into the hands of the Ottoman governor in Aleppo. A portion of the material that was kept safe by the Venetian consul in Aleppo, Giovanni Francesco Sagredo, was transferred to Venice. When Shah ‘Abbās learned about the incident, he ordered K̄āja Şafar to travel to Venice and recover it. K̄āja Şafar arrived in Venice in January 1610 to recover the goods. He also had the diplomatic mission to deliver letters of Shah ‘Abbās to the Christians princes, proposing that they act in favor of a common front against the Ottomans (Gil Fernández, 2006-9, II, pp. 149 ff.). In the interim, in 1611, Shah ‘Abbās signed a peace treaty with the Ottomans, which generated a good deal of concern in Rome and Madrid, but K̄āja Şafar was able to convince the State Council in Madrid and Rome of the shah’s true intentions. Finally, K̄āja Şafar sailed from Lisbon to Safavid Persia via Goa on April 8, 1614, together with the ambassador [Don García de Silva y Figueroa](#) (1550-1624), the first secular ambassador sent by the Spanish monarchy to Persia (Cutillas, 2017, pp. 180-88).

Figueroa is one of the most outstanding personalities through whom one can understand Spanish-Persian relations in the 17th century. As ambassador of Felipe III to the court of Shah ‘Abbās, he wrote the *Comentarios* (ed. Loureiro et al. I, pp. 5-380, II, pp. 383-701; tr. Turley and Souza, pp. 48-861), a chronicle of his embassy, which is a valuable source of data about Safavid Persia. Details about his life are scarce but his family was known to be related to the Spanish nobility. The primary motive for sending



Figueroa was to curtail Shah ‘Abbās’s ambitions on Portuguese possessions in the Persian Gulf, as well as a silk trade deal, the missions in Safavid territories, and reviving the old objective of an alliance against the Ottomans. He lived in Persia for two years of a journey that lasted in total ten years, from 1614 to 1624.

Figueroa met with Shah ‘Abbās on 15 June 1618 in Qazvin for the first time. Then he had other meetings in Isfahan with the shah until he finally left Persia in 1619. In conclusion, the Figueroa embassy was unsuccessful. As Joan-Pau Rubies argues, the failure would have originated in Shah ‘Abbās’s change of interests (specific agendas) towards questions not so much focused on the Ottoman danger, but the recovery of the entire Persian Gulf space as a commercial enclave between the West and the East (Rubies, p. 39). Meanwhile the conquest of the Portuguese enclaves in the Persian Gulf had already begun, and Shah ‘Abbās was waiting for the opportunity to conquer Hormuz with the help of the English.

To understand the failure of Figueroa’s mission, it is necessary to note the events before his arrival in Isfahan. One of the Sherley brothers, Robert Sherley, arrived in Isfahan in 1615. Robert Sherley succeeded in having a meeting with the shah and proposed an operation with the silk trade by taking the center to Jasques (See [JĀSK](#)) and blocking the silk trade in Ottoman territory. The Carmelite friar Juan Tadeo de San Eliseo intervened and managed to have the silk contracting center changed from Jāsk to Hormuz and to involve King Philip III in the silk trade towards Europe. It seems that Shah ‘Abbās was already inclined towards this idea, but it was thanks to the intercession of Juan Tadeo de San Eliseo that he decided to propose this matter to King Philip III (Gil Fernández, II, 2006-9, pp. 363-65). Shah ‘Abbās appointed Robert Sherley as ambassador and Friar Redempto de la Cruz as his companion. On 18 September 1615, they departed from Isfahan (Gil Fernández, II, 2006-9, pp. 373-78; Falsafi, IV, pp. 188-91; Pārsādust, 2009-14, II, pp. 555-60) and arrived in Lisbon on 16 September 1617. However, this embassy aroused great uncertainty, because, in Madrid, there were many doubts about Sherley’s true intentions. As expected, Shah ‘Abbās changed his plans and, instead of rethinking a route change in silk trade from Hormuz, he projected the takeover of Hormuz to control silk trade and all trades in the Persian Gulf. Shah Abbas readapted the proposal that Robert Sherley had made to him some time before for his own benefit.

Doubts in Madrid about Sherley’s embassy intensified with the arrival of Friar Melchor de los Angeles to Lisbon, who divulged the information that an English ambassador had arrived in Isfahan through Robert Sherley’s aid. The ambassador was Edward Connock, who was received by Shah ‘Abbās in July 1616 and signed a trade agreement in the port of Jāsk (Boxer, p. 58; Falsafi, IV, pp. 256-58; Pārsādust, 2009-14, II, pp. 659-63). Melchor’s letter also warned that the English wanted to build a fortress and had offered the English aid to conquer Hormuz. Finally, because of Robert Sherley’s bad reputation at the Spanish court, the Council of State, in December 1617, forbade him to come to Madrid and only allowed him to send the papers he bore from Shah ‘Abbās. Father Creswell was the one who transferred to Antonio de Aróstegui, the king’s secretary in Madrid, a copy of the letters that Robert Sherley carried for Philip III. In March 1618, the Council of Portugal sent to the king a comprehensive account of Shah ‘Abbās’s letter, summarized in the proposal to close the Red Sea to the Ottomans and sign an agreement for silk trade by placing Hormuz as a center for its commercialization. In compensation, the shah would deliver the fortress and port of “Bandel do Comorão” (the future [Bandar-e ‘Abbās](#)), taken in 1615. The mission of Robert Sherley was also to justify the war between Persians and Portuguese and the conquests of Shah ‘Abbās in the Persian Gulf (Gil Fernández, II, 2006-9, pp. 381-86).

Finally, the Council of State sent an answer, trying to keep the shah waiting and prevent the agreement on silk that the English wanted to make from succeeding. With regard to silk trade, an agreement was reached for the treatment and marketing to take place in Goa (Gil Fernández, II, 2006-9, p. 393). However, everything was happening while the shah conquered Qešm (Quéixome, in Portuguese sources) island in February 1619 (See [QESHM ISLAND](#)), and his claims regarding the commercialization of silk had changed. According to Figueroa, in March 1619, the same shah had told him that he would not return the conquered territories (i.e., [Bahrain](#)) and that he was closing the negotiations on the silk trade because he had signed peace with the Ottomans (Gil Fernández, II, 2006-9, pp. 408-9). The State Council decided

to send Friar Redempto with the utmost urgency to confirm the friendship of the king of Spain, but he died on the crossing to India in the warships sent in April 1619 to defend Hormuz (Gil Fernández, II, 2006-9, pp. 423-25). Finally, the worst omens were confirmed when it was known that Shah ‘Abbās was dealing with the English for the silk trade. In 1621, the ships that had been sent from Lisbon recovered the island of Qešm in the Persian Gulf, an island that was especially strategic due to having wells for drinking water. But, in February 1622, the English intervention enabled Shah ‘Abbās to recover the Qešm fortifications. In late February, Persian troops, commanded by the governor of Shiraz, [Emāmqoli Khan](#), and aided by the English East India Company, began landing on the island of Hormuz. Finally, on 1 May 1622, the garrison surrendered. Meanwhile, Philip III had died (31 March 1621) and no more Persian ambassadors were expected at the court of Madrid (Eskandar Beg, pp. 979-82, tr. II, pp. 1200-1204; Falsafi, IV, pp. 208-28; Pārsādust, 2009-14, II, 679-84).

After 1622, there were no further diplomatic relations between the two courts, but the presence of missionaries was maintained. The Portuguese continued their presence in the Persian Gulf, in the port city of Kong and the [Muscat](#) fortress, which was conquered by the Omanis in 1650, thus competing with the commercial and expansionist strength of the English and Dutch in the Persian Gulf itself. At last, the breakup of the Iberian Union with the process of the Portuguese Restoration began in 1640, and, until the recognition of the kingdom of Portugal by the Spanish monarchy was signed in 1668, territorial interests in the Spanish court were redefined and directed towards America and the Philippines. As a closing point in Spanish-Persian relations in the 1670s, the Jesuit Pedro Cubero (pp. 202-49) provided a description of his passage through Persia during the reign of Shah Solaymān (r. 1666-94), the latest reference in the 17th century to Persia by a Spaniard.

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