



# Between confusion and connivance, the notion of “Armenian”, “Aramean” or “Syriac” on reading Portuguese sources

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**Between confusion and connivance,  
the notion of “Armenian”, “Aramean” or  
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on reading Portuguese sources**

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Sources from the modern age concerning non-Indian Christians and Christians who came to India demonstrate an evident confusion between “Armenians” and “Arameans”. This is regrettable as this lack of conceptual clarity makes the link between “Aramean” and “Syriac” vagueness, which has even more problematic consequences.

A simple way of presenting the problem is to quote one of the most ancient testimonies by an Indian Christian, Joseph the Indian, in around 1505-1510:

*“From there he travelled on land for three months together with the said Bishop and arrived in Armenia to meet his Pontiff by whom the said Bishop was consecrated and said priest. All the Christians of India and China do the same way. This Pontiff of theirs is called Catholica and he has his head shaven in the likeness of a cross. He appoints his Patriarchs as said above, namely one in India and one in China<sup>1</sup>.”*

This, of course, refers to the Chaldean Patriarch, the Patriarch of the Church of the East, who resided not far from Armenia, and not the Catholicos of the Armenian Church who returned to Etchmiadzin in 1441.

## **I- An essential contextualisation**

### *The context of the modern Middle East*

This text mentions the Armenian cultural space, historic Armenia, which had not been a state for centuries (the last Armenian states were annexed to the Byzantine Empire between the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century and the first part of the 11<sup>th</sup> century<sup>2</sup>). On the contrary, this region had been shared among the heirs of the Mongols, the Aq Koyunlu (White Sheep), the Kara Koyunlu (Black Sheep), the Dhokadirids and the Timurids, before being the battlefield of the Safavid and Ottoman Empires until the signing of the Treaty of Zuhab in 1639<sup>3</sup>.

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Thank you to Agnès de Tristant for this corrections and suggestions.

<sup>1</sup> Joseph, éd.-tr. Vallavantha, 1984, p. 168 for the translation of the Italian text. The Latin is close. The Dutch version is used here, p. 231.

<sup>2</sup> On the medieval Armenian kingdoms, the most interesting source is undoubtedly Yovhannēs Drasxanakertc'i, tr. Boisson-Chenorhokian, 2004, to be completed by Yovhannēs Drasxanakertc'i, tr. Maksoudian, 1999 for the beginning of the period and Uxtanēs from Edessa in Uxtanēs, tr. Brosset, 1870; ed. Etchmiadzin, 1871; tr. Arzoumanian, 1985 for the end of the period. The religious history of these kingdoms is partly analysed by Igor Dorfmann-Lazarev in Dorfmann-Lazarev, 2004, to be completed for the political framework by Grousset, 1995, pp. 341-584; Dédéyan, 2007, pp. 243-296.

<sup>3</sup> For a historical overview, see Yevadian 2018, pp. 32-35, the bibliography cited in note for further discussion.

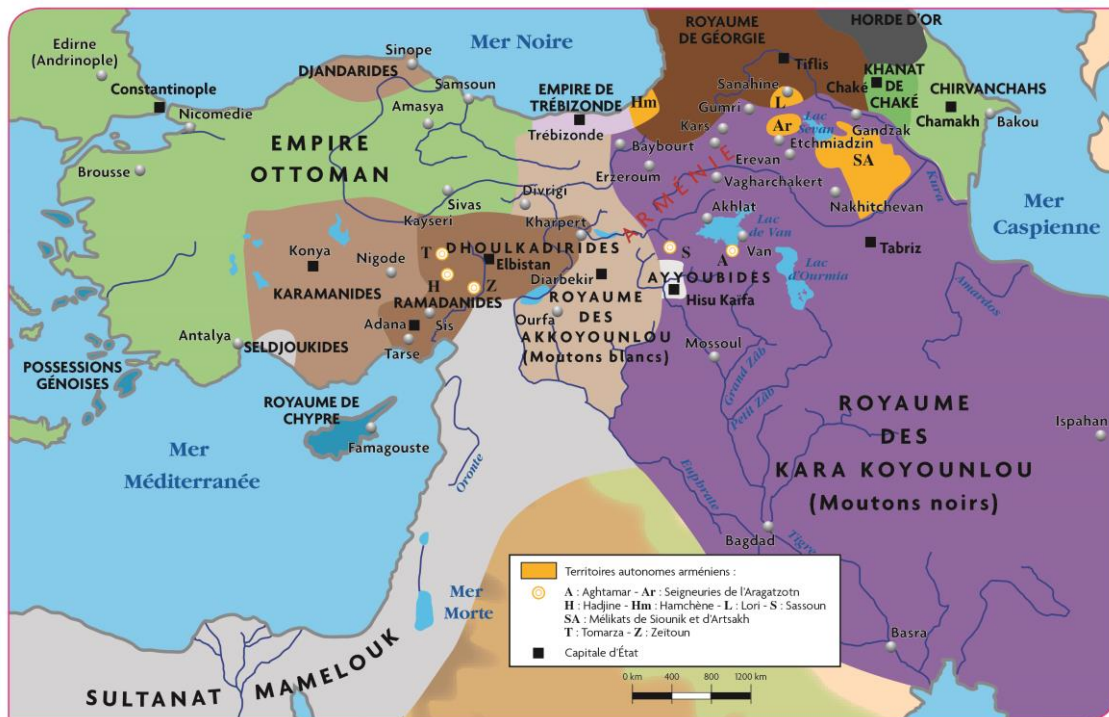
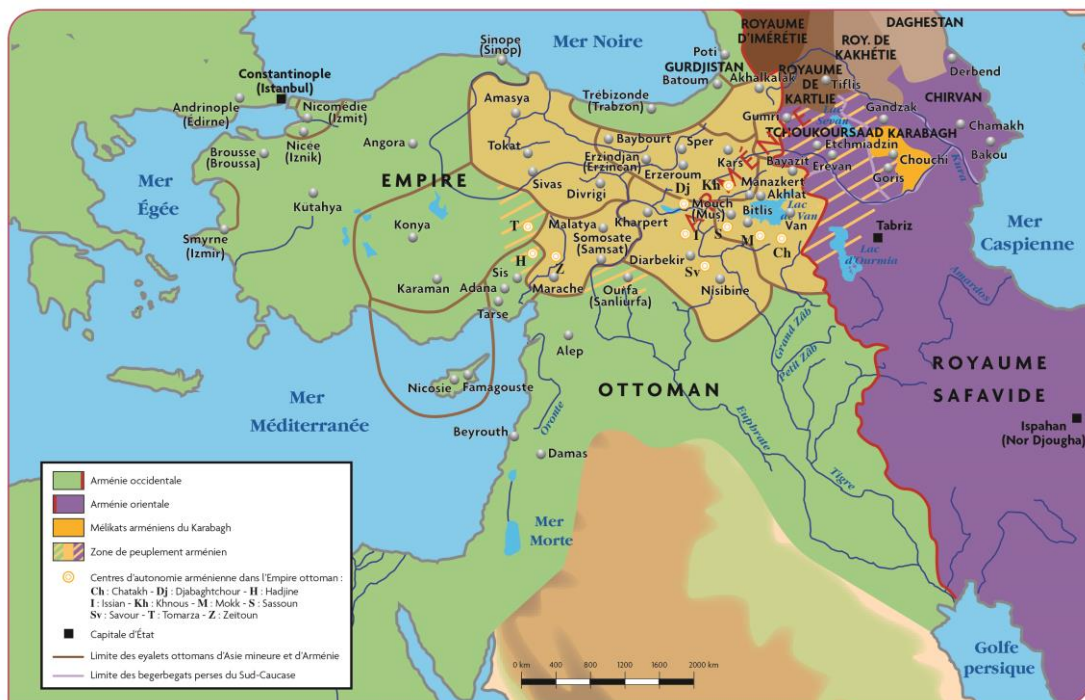


Fig. 1: the Middle East at the fall of Constantinople in 1453<sup>4</sup>

This situation of permanent conflict between the collapse of the Mongol Empire, at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and the stabilization of the frontier was a period of desolation and high pressure, particularly for Christians. The situation for Christians after 1639 was far from being one of peace, quite the opposite. In practice, the sovereigns of the Safavid and Ottoman Empires made their shared border almost impenetrable, producing the terrible conditions for the Christians that we are going to consider.

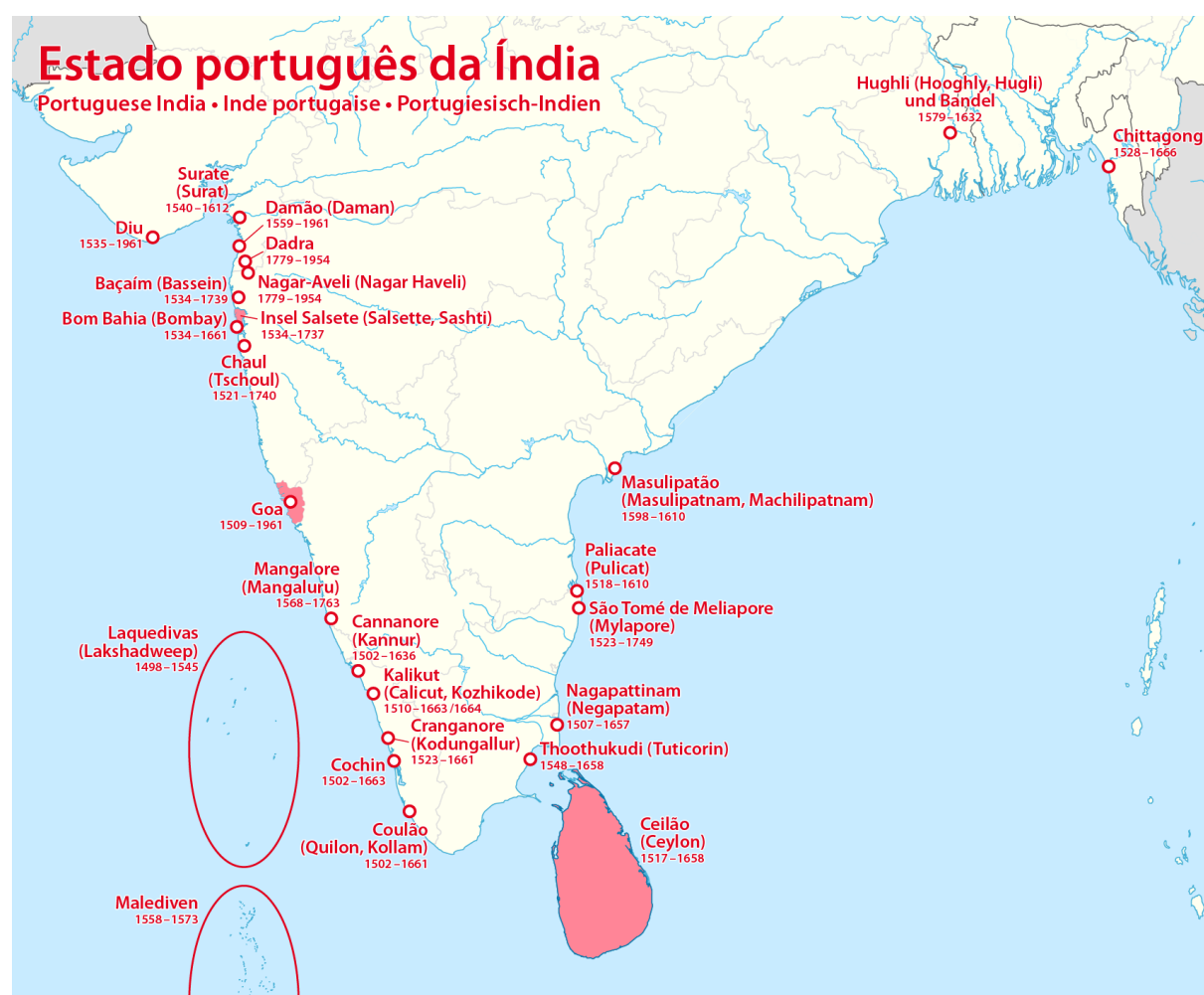


<sup>4</sup> After Yevadian, 2018, p. 33.

*Fig. 2 : the Middle East at the signing of the Zehab Treaty in 1639<sup>5</sup>*

*The Portuguese presence in the Middle East from the 16<sup>th</sup> to mid-17<sup>th</sup> century*

Far from the chaos of the Near East, the Portuguese gained a foothold in Kerala following the landing of Vasco da Gama, in 1498, in “Calicut” (now Kozhikode) and the receipt of an ambiguous letter of concession from the local sovereign. When he left, Vasco da Gama ordered those Portuguese he left behind, under the leadership of Admiral Afonso de Albuquerque, to build an initial trading post. Afonso de Albuquerque, after standing up against the Sultan of Bijapur, founded the Goa trading post, after which the Portuguese took possession of the ports of Mangalore, Cannanore, Calicut, Kochi and Kollam.



*Fig. 3 : Portuguese presence in India<sup>6</sup>*

In addition to taking possession of these lands in India, Afonso de Albuquerque sought to gain a foothold in Socotra and especially Ormuz, where he had a Portuguese fortress built between 1507 and 1515.

His objective was to take possession of the Muslims’ maritime trade routes between the Persian Gulf, the Horn of Africa and the Indian coast.

<sup>5</sup> After Yevadian, 2018, p. 35.

<sup>6</sup> Source: Maximilian Dörrbecker (Chumwa)



The Portuguese presence in Ormuz resisted the Ottoman Empire's attempted conquest, led from the Port of Suez by "the admiral of the Egyptian fleet", Piri Reis (1465-1554), in September 1552. After a siege lasting one month, the latter had to leave due to a lack of powder and ammunition<sup>7</sup>.



*Fig. 4: Piri Reis' campaign against the Portuguese fortress of Hormuz<sup>8</sup>*

During this period, in which Philip II (1556-1598) also reigned, the kingdom of Portugal, following the death of its king Henry I (1512-1580), was integrated into the Spain of Philip II, who founded the Iberian Union which would last until 1640.

The Portuguese domination of Ormuz lasted until 1622, when the troops of Abbas I of Persia (1588-1629), helped by six English ships from the English East India Company, set siege in front of the fortress between the 19<sup>th</sup> of February and the 22<sup>th</sup> of April, date of the Portuguese capitulation<sup>9</sup>.

During these decades, Goa was the capital of the Portuguese empire in Asia, established by Afonso de Albuquerque, and it benefited from the same civic privileges as Lisbon. Goa rapidly developed and became the interface between goods from China, the Indies, Africa, the Middle East and the European markets. The wealth was so vast that a Portuguese proverb said "If you have seen Goa, you don't need to see Lisbon". After obtaining independence from Spanish in 1648, the Dutch became a leading maritime power. Their arrival in Asia in the

<sup>7</sup> Soucek, 2008, p. 89.

<sup>8</sup> Map background: Arabian\_Peninsula\_blank.svg (based on a CIA map) completed with Asie.svg (CIA World Factbook) Data about the campaign of Piri Reis, cf. Özbaran, 1994, p.108-114.

<sup>9</sup> Soucek 2008, p. 89.

middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and their opposition to the Portuguese led to the rapid decline of Goa.

#### *Lusitanian-Iranian relations*

This period, 1502-1622, is marked in Portuguese history by a series of reconciliations with the sovereigns of the Iranian dynasty of the Safavids (1502-1786), one of whose main characteristics was to have adopted the Twelver branch of Shia Islam, driven by the dynasty's founder Ismail I (1487-1524). This religious choice led them to strengthen their opposition to the Ottoman Empire (1299-1923), which supported Sunni Islam. This multifactorial opposition (confessional, ethnic, linguistic, etc.) explains why the Safavid sovereigns sought an alliance with the Christian princes of Europe, in particular the most powerful, the Spanish kin, in order to push back the Ottomans<sup>10</sup>. Thus, the main line of foreign policy of the sovereigns of this dynasty, particularly after the victory of Lepanto (1571) which broke the Ottoman advance in the Mediterranean, was to form an alliance with European sovereigns. This project came from the king of Portugal himself, Dom Sebastian, who wrote to Shah Tahmasp I (1524-1576) in 1572 to invite him to join the league of Christian sovereigns against the Turk<sup>11</sup>. His successor, Shah Mohammad Khodabanda (1578-1588), sent an ambassador to Europe in 1579 to ask for the fulfilled of this project<sup>12</sup>. Then, under the reign of Abbas I (1588-1629), the Safavid sovereign sought by all means to instigate a Christian crusade against the Ottomans. Roberto Gulbenkian sums up this policy as follows:

*"This much discussed policy, which turned out to be purely platonic between on the one hand Portugal and then from 1580 Spain and the Holy See, and on the other hand the successive kings of Persia, in particular Abbas I, remained a constant element of every respective embassy until the capture of Ormuz in 1622<sup>13</sup>."*

This pro-western policy reached its peak under the reign of Abbas I, who led his kingdom to its climax. The Shah considered the Christians mostly as a bargaining factor in the striking of an alliance with the Christian sovereigns of Europe; his attitude was in direct correlation with this pro-western policy. It is this context that which the installation of the Safavid capital, Isfahan, and the installation of Latin convents should be understood, which we shall return.

#### *Closing of the Turkish-Iranian front and its consequences - The Armenians*

This period, 1603-1605, is also the one which, within the context of the confrontation between the Ottomans and the Safavids, witnessed a scorched earth policy, unrivalled in its magnitude. Following the recapture of the fort of Tabriz and the surrounding regions in November 1604, and in view of the arrival of a vast Turkish army along the Arax valley, Shah Abbas I made the decision, in the thick of winter, to deport the Armenians from the western part of his States in order to hinder any attempt at an invasion from the Ottomans. The Armenians had to leave their ancestral lands in the space of two days. The Armenians who were living in the bordering areas the Ottoman Empire were deported: inhabitants from the plain of Ararat with Erevan, from Nakhchivan, from Salmas, from the region of Khoy and Urmia, from the region to the east of Erzurum (Karin), from Basen, from the Garni plains, from Uuc, from Malazkerd and from Van, as well as refugees from Tabriz<sup>14</sup>. António de

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<sup>10</sup> Gulbenkian, 1995, II, p. 12-29.

<sup>11</sup> Gulbenkian, 1995, I, p. 307.

<sup>12</sup> *Carmelites in Persia*, 1939, p. 23.

<sup>13</sup> Gulbenkian, 1995, I, p. 307.

<sup>14</sup> Arakel of Tabriz, *Histoires*, chapter 4-5.

Gouvea provides a dramatic description of this forced exile. This deportation in terrible conditions of more than three hundred thousand people was a humanitarian disaster, because at least one third of these Christians died during the journey<sup>15</sup>. The inhabitants of Julfa, recognised by the Safavids as skilled merchants, were installed in a suburb of the capital and authorised to set up an Armenian village: the New Julfa (Նոր Ջուղա – Nor Jugha)<sup>16</sup>. Gouvea notes that the Catholicos David IV of Vagharshapat (Դավիթ Դ Վաղարշապատցի; 1587 - 1629) followed his flocks and travelled “with eight priests and over one hundred pastors” and “around five hundred thousand Armenian souls... of which one hundred thousand perished on the journey from hunger and discomfort<sup>17</sup>”. He had left, Melchizedek I of Garni (1593-1628), his former coadjutor bishop, in whose favour he had abdicated in 1593. David IV was appointed by Melchizedek I in Etchmiadzin as his vicar in New Julfa with the mission of watching over the Armenian populations. Then, David IV acted as and was recognised by the Shah as Catholicos<sup>18</sup>, which led to a schism<sup>19</sup>. David IV, touched by the help from the Augustinians upon the arrival of his people in Isfahan and caught up in this conflict with Melchizedek I, made a declaration of obedience to Pope Paul V the 12<sup>th</sup> May 1607. He undoubtedly hoped to reinforce his power, at least locally, with this act. But the opposite actually happened, because the notables of New Julfa and its clergy refused this obedience. They asked the Shah to settle this dispute in their favour, while the prior, Diogo de Santa Ana, requested the opposite decision<sup>20</sup>. Shah Abbas, holding on to his alliance with the Christian princes, declared:

*“the Armenians could not be good Christians without submitting to this obedience because, just as to be a good vassal requires obedience to one’s king, to be a good Christian requires obedience to the Vicar and the Viceroy of Christ<sup>21</sup>.”*

But shortly after this, learning that the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Rudolf II (1576-1612), had just made a treaty with the Sultan Ahmed I (1603-1617), he became violently angry and solemnly forbade the Armenians to “become Latin<sup>22</sup>”. This setback occurred just before the year in which the Irano-European alliance was at its closest to being realised, in 1608, although the king of Spain, Philip III (1598-1621), had never really intended to make it happen in military terms<sup>23</sup>.

Regardless of this complex religious situation, Shah Abbas I granted Armenian traders a monopoly on the export of Iranian silk production, which enabled them to develop their international trade network. In this context, Armenians became privileged interlocutors for Christian communities of all faiths throughout the East<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> Belchior dos Anjos, tr. Gulbenkian, 1995, t. II, p. 135-136.

<sup>16</sup> Gouvea, 1611, fol. 139 = tr. Gulbenkian, 1995, II, p. 136.

<sup>17</sup> Gouvea, 1611, fol. 139 = tr. Gulbenkian, 1995, II, p. 135.

<sup>18</sup> Gouvea, 1611, fol. 145 = tr. Gulbenkian, 1995, II, p. 135.

<sup>19</sup> Arakel of Tabriz, tr. Bournoutian, 2006, p. 332.

<sup>20</sup> Translation of the text (from 3 December 1607) quoted in Gulbenkian, 1995, I, p. 315.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125-126.

<sup>22</sup> Gouvea, 1611, fol. 168 and Gulbenkian, 1995, I, p. 311-317.

<sup>23</sup> Around the efforts of Father Paul Simon, Gulbenkian, 1995, I, p. 316-323.

<sup>24</sup> See lastly, with the abundant bibliography cited, Aslanian, 2011.



*International Network of Armenian Merchants of Nor Djoulfa, circa 1700<sup>25</sup>*

### *Latin clerics*

From 1602 until 1747, the Portuguese fathers of the order of Saint Augustine settled in Isfahan, even before the Discalced Carmelites (1609), the Capuchins (1630) and the Jesuits (1656)<sup>26</sup>. This settlement took place from Goa, where the archbishop Aleixo de Menezes (1595-1609) was himself a hermit of Saint Augustine. He convinced the viceroy to send clerics with a letter from their king to the Shah of Iran. So, Fathers Jeronimo da Cruz, António de Gouvea and Christovão de Espirito Santo left Goa the 15<sup>th</sup> February 1602, arrived in Isfahan on 10 November and quickly received permission to settle in the capital. Philip III<sup>27</sup> clearly showed his interest in having Latin clerics in the Safavid capital:

*“For the moment, it will be enough to have three or four clerics from Saint Augustine in Isfahan on the grounds of encouraging and indoctrinating these Christians [the Armenians], so that they can send reports on the acts of the Shah and his successes against the Turks, inciting him to continue the war<sup>28</sup>.”*

The sovereign stated that in parallel, the captain of Ormuz and the viceroy of the Indies should be informed “because as the latter is nearer, he will be able to help with what is necessary until the letters reach me<sup>29</sup>”.

These elements systematically refer to a man of the utmost importance, the archbishop of Goa A. de Mendes. However, before analyzing part of his action in relation with his subject, we need to briefly analyze the case of Azarias Fridon.

<sup>25</sup> After Yevadian, 2018, p. 37.

<sup>26</sup> Gulbenkian, 1995, II, p. 30.

<sup>27</sup> Gouvea, 1623, p. 78 and Gulbenkian, 1995, II, p. 31-33.

<sup>28</sup> *Documents Remetidos da India* (= DRI), I, doc. 24, p. 84 (false ref), quoted in Alonso, 1987, p. 80-81.

<sup>29</sup> Alonso, 1987, p. 81.

### *Azarias Fridon's journey to Rome*

The Armenian Dominican friar, Azarias Fridon, travelled from his diocese of Nakhchivan (Greater Armenia) to Rome in 1601-1604 to report on his monastery's activity to the Pope. Pope Clement VIII consecrated him archbishop of Nakhchivan the 9<sup>th</sup> May 1604; he received the *pallium* the 4<sup>th</sup> July<sup>30</sup>. Unable to return by the same route because it was now completely cut off due to the conflict between Ottomans and Safavids, he decided to go to Madrid to collect alms and, from there to Portugal to embark for Goa, Ormuz and then Nakhchivan. In 1606, the Friar preacher João dos Santos met this Armenian cleric while he was staying in the priory of Saint Dominic in Lisbon, waiting to be able to set sail. He relates the discussions he had with him in a book published in 1609<sup>31</sup>. Unable to embark because of the Dutch embargo of the Portuguese ports, he returned to Rome, where he died the 7<sup>th</sup> January 1607. He was buried in the church of Mary of Egypt (Temple of Portunus), at that time reserved only for Armenians<sup>32</sup>. The book by Friar João dos Santos includes an extremely valuable document on the relation of two Portuguese Augustinian clerics, written in 1604 and published five years later. The introduction of this document is written as follows by dos Santos:

*"In the year 1604 by order of Pope Clement VIII, Father Francisco da Costa was made ambassador beside the Grand Sophy of Persia, accompanied by two clerics of the glorious Father Augustine. They stayed and were treated very favourably by the king. They founded a house in Isfahan, the main town and residence of the Court, where they said Mass, and unimpeded, they made Christians. These clerics reported on their journey and the successful wars of Sophy with the Turks in the years 1603 and 1604 by writing jointly about what they had seen of Armenian Christianity. They sent the account of everything to the archbishop of Goa, Dom Fr. Aleixo de Meneses, the transcription of which is as follows concerning what refers to the Christianity of the clerics of Saint Dominic<sup>33</sup>."*

Here, we see again the influence of Aleixo de Menezes (1559-1617), who, as we can see, led the missionary movement in the Safavid kingdom. The two clerics in question have been identified by Roberto Gulbenkian. They are Belchior dos Anjos and Guilherme de Santo Agostinho, and they did not accompany Father Francisco da Costa, but the ambassador Luis Pereira de Lacerda<sup>34</sup>. Having recently settled in Isfahan, these clerics were therefore present at the time of the dramatic arrival of the Armenians and their Catholicos in the spring of 1605. They tried to give these "miserable Christians not only the moral and spiritual comfort they needed to endure such a cruel ordeal, but they also distributed all the funds they possessed in order to relieve the huge distress of the most impoverished<sup>35</sup>." The Augustinians were also immensely interested in the Catholic Armenians from Nakhchivan and Erentchag. The fact is that from Europe (Rome), a sure way of getting to Safavid-ruled Iran in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century was by sea via Goa, where Aleixo de Menezes reigned and whom we now need to talk about.

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<sup>30</sup> Gravina, 1605, chap. VII and VIII according to the information received from Azarias Fridon himself.

<sup>31</sup> Dos Santos, 1609, II, chap. II, to IV.

<sup>32</sup> Van den Oudenrijn, 1936, 172 and 191 and Van den Oudenrijn, 1960.

<sup>33</sup> Dos Santos, 1609, II, chap. IV, fol. 7r, the text of the relationship is edited and meticulously annotated in Gulbenkian, 1995, II, p. 151-159.

<sup>34</sup> Gulbenkian, 1995, II, p. 139-140.

<sup>35</sup> Gulbenkian, 1995, II, p. 144-145 according to Gouvea, 1611, fol. 147-150.

### *The archbishop of Goa, Aleixo de Menezes*

The actions of Menezes should be read in view of the mandate given by Clement VIII (1592-1605)<sup>36</sup>, who was a pontiff with a huge capacity for work and who paid particular attention to details. When he arrived in Rome, Menezes received a brief from the pontiff on the situation in India, dated 25 January 1595. It reported grievances against Mar Abraham, archbishop of Angamaly, who, having submitted to the pope by accepting the Catholic faith, had then returned to “Nestorianism” and refused the Syriac books in circulation in his diocese to be corrected according to the Roman doctrine. The pontiff also ordered Menezes to closely examine the errors and the conduct of this prelate<sup>37</sup>. Once he arrived in Goa, he found out that Mar Abraham had died in 1594 and that a successor had been requested from the patriarch of “Babylon” by the Syro-Malabars. Upon his arrival, Menezes thus sent instructions to Ormuz to prevent the arrival in India of a “Chaldean, Persian or Armenian” cleric in order to break the apostolic succession between India and the Church of the East, and transformed the bishopric of Angamaly, the seat of the Syro-Chaldean church, into a Latin Catholic bishopric<sup>38</sup>. These instructions arrived just in time in Ormuz to prevent a cleric, who had the title of ‘Archbishop of the Serra’ and who had just set sail for India. He was sent back to his patriarch<sup>39</sup>. In 1600, Aleixo de Menezes decided that the archbishops of Goa would take the title of “Patriarchs of the Church of the East”. After four provincial councils (1567, 1575, 1585, 1592, and then the one in 1606) insisted on the necessity to Latinise the Syro-Malabars, confident of the Pope’s support, Aleixo de Menezes decided to impose his will. He held a diocesan synod the 25<sup>th</sup> June 1599 in Diamper (Udayamperoor) in order to rule on all of the pending issues, be they liturgical, sacramental, legal or other<sup>40</sup>.

A list of suspicious publications was drawn up; the decision was made to burn them within a month<sup>41</sup>. The direct consequence of this synod was that it enforced the total destruction of all the liturgical, pastoral, theological and other writings in Syriac in order to be certain that no errors could remain attached to them. A first auto-da-fé had already taken place in 1563 before his arrival, due to the Goa Inquisition, founded in 1561, and many others took place after 1600<sup>42</sup>. In addition, he wanted the “indigenous” hierarchy to be restricted to a single bishop who would be the suffragan of his seat. From 1600, he installed his suffragan in Cranganore. It was a Latin bishop, the Jesuit Father Francis Ros. He was not indigenous, but he could speak Syriac<sup>43</sup>. Naturally, in these conditions, the archdeacon, Georges de Christo, and many bishops seceded, and that opened a period of instability and division among the Christians of Kerala. In parallel, Shah Abbas, when receiving the Augustine monk, Nicolau de Melo, in 1599, had requested that Latin priests from the Indies be sent to Isfahan<sup>44</sup>. Aleixo de Menezes took advantage of this request to send the Augustine monks, the Fathers Jeronimo da Cruz, António de Gouvea and Christovão de Espirito Santo, whom we have already mentioned; they arrived in the Safavid capital in 1602. In the same movement, the viceroy of the Indies sent a letter to the Shah via an Armenian emissary<sup>45</sup>. Then, in the following years, he stayed in contact with his brothers from Isfahan, managing some important issues from a distance.

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<sup>36</sup> For a self presentation of this action, see Gouvea, tr. Malekandathil, 2004.

<sup>37</sup> Hough, 1839, I, p. 292.

<sup>38</sup> *Pro excellenti praeminentia*, 4 February 1597, *Bull. Patr. Portug.*, I, p. 260-261, and *HistChrist*, VIII, p. 811.

<sup>39</sup> Hough, 1839, I, p. 293.

<sup>40</sup> Sur le concile dans son ensemble Thaliath, 1958 and *HistChrist*, VIII, p. 812-813.

<sup>41</sup> *De Synodis*, session III, decree, 14; see Chabot, 1909, p. 616.

<sup>42</sup> Baião, 1930.

<sup>43</sup> *HistChrist*, VIII, p. 813.

<sup>44</sup> Hartmann, 1959 and Alonso, 1958.

<sup>45</sup> Gouvea, 1611, fol. 47 and Freitas, 1890, III, p. 59.

Towards the end of his Indian period, Diogo de Santa Ana wrote a letter to the Pope from Isfahan the 3<sup>th</sup> December 1607, suggesting that the presence of Mendes in Persia would allow for the creation of a school for boys and girls in the Armenian village of New Julfa<sup>46</sup>. This prelate, due to his character and strong will, embodied an undeniable break in the history of Indian Christianity, the consequences of which still persist.

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<sup>46</sup> Gouvea, 1611, fol. 47. ( ?)

## **II- Reflections on the confusion between Armenian and Aramean / Chaldean**

From all of the above, it clearly appears that throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> century and in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Portuguese were the best informed Europeans regarding the situation of Christians in the Ottoman and Safavid empires. However, did this confusion between Armenians and Arameans (Syriacs) arise during their era?

The answer to this question is not simple, and it is necessary to suggest a set of reasons to attempt to get close to the actual cause. Before this, there is something important to note. When we examine the acts of the practice, letters or different reports to the viceroy of Goa, as published in the ten volumes of the *Documentos remetidos da India* or *Livros das Monções* published under the direction of António da Silva Rego by the Academia das Ciências de Lisboa, there is one thing that cannot fail to strike the attentive reader. In fact the terminology is precise and labels both Syriacs, and especially Armenians, and the “real” Armenians<sup>47</sup>. For the latter, the specific terminology of “Chofllins” concerning the merchants from New Julfa, at a surprisingly early date (1608), even made its way into Portuguese documentation<sup>48</sup>, which confirms their precise identification.

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<sup>47</sup> Thus the reading of Volume I: Armenians are cited three times on pages 131, documents 43 of 1607; 170, document 59 of 1608; and 220 document 73 of 1608 concerning the Armenian traders of Nor Djoulfa the Chofllins. The Syriacs are not mentioned. All the documents mentioned are letters to the viceroy.

Volume II: Syria is mentioned on p. 447. The Armenians are cited on pages 79-80, in document No. 195 of 1611, which relates the interesting attempt of the Chaldean patriarch to return a primate for the Church of India, who was an Armenian, travelling in lay clothes (« *O bispo de Cranganor me escreveu, pelas naus que o anno passado vieram d'essas parles, que o seu arcediogo se contratou com huns judeus de Cochim de cima, que lhe mandaram hum arménio nesloriano leigo, a quem elle fez chamar e cuidar que seria arcebispo, dos que vinham de Babilónia, e que o rey de Manguate o tivesse em seu poder alguns mezes ; o qual arménio ensinava não ser o papa cabeça da egreja, nem a confissão sacramental necessária, nem se haverem de adorar as imagens sagradas, e poderem os sacerdotes casar ; sobre que diz fez diligencias e o declarou por excommungado, e achou culpados com o arcediogo quatro clérigos e quatro leigos ; e que o arménio era fugido, sem se saber para onde ; e o arcediogo estava no Manguate com força do rey da terra, com o qual estava tratando e peilando-o para que abrisse mão d'elle, posloque estava d'isso desenganado, por haver dias que o fazia esperar no Diamper. ») and mentioned on page 404, document No. 359 of 1613. These two documents are letters to the viceroy.*

Volume III: Syrians are not mentioned and Armenians are mentioned on page 173, document 5, dated 1545; 395, ? and 550, document 112, around 1545 (reference to Greater Armenia).

Volume IV et V: no mention.

Volume VI: p. 380, document 45, *Letter from Father Fr. Perez to Father M. Torres*, 1558, about a bishop sent by the Chaldean patriarch to the Christians of Saint Thomas (Cochin region) and who had to be fought (« *Sospeitou o padre que por ventura lhe tirarão alguns christãos da terra dos que qua chamamos de São Thome, porque avia entrado em estas partes hum bispo arménio, mandado por hum patriarcha de Arménia, que não obedecia a Igreja Romana. E o padre Belchior Carneiro avia andado la alguns meses pola terra dentro, dissuadindo aos christãos que não quisessem seguir aquelle bispo. Alguns obedescerão outros não e derão-lhe seus filhos para que os ordenasse, demaneira que aquelles que se abraçarão com o bispo arménio estão mal comnosco e, por esta causa, cuidava que seria algum destes christãos o que tirou aquella frecha, porem, a mim nunca se me persuadiu tal, mas cuidei que por causa da prisão do christão novo veo a frecha, porem nenhuma cousa destas se sabe certo, nem eu em nada me certifico. »).*

Volume VII: no mention.

Volume VIII: no mention.

Volume IX: reference to page 438, which is clearly an error.

Volume X: no mention.

<sup>48</sup> *Documentos remetidos da India ou Livros das Monções*, I, p. 220, doc. 73 (1608).



The other element that emerges from examining the acts of practice is that, due to the difficulty in precisely situating the seat of the patriarch of the Church of the East, it is referred to as the “Patriarch of Armenia”, while its followers, by strange antonomasia, are defined as “Armenians”. There are therefore two types of Armenians in Portuguese sources, the “real” Armenians and those linked to the “Patriarch of Armenia”.

### *1- Weakness of the patriarchs of the Church of the East.*

This is an essential element in the understanding of the Christian history of India. At this time, on the one hand, the Catholicos of the Church of the East had immense difficulty in maintaining relations with the Churches of China and India at a time when these Churches had been tested by persecutions. Their seat was in the Ottoman Empire, so virtually inaccessible from India via Safavid Iran<sup>49</sup>. We have seen that the Catholicos tried to re-establish relations with the Church of Malabar as frequently as possible, despite the Portuguese guardianship<sup>50</sup>.

This was particularly true in China, where the end of the dynasty of Mongol origin, the Yuan (1279 - 1368), which supported Christianity, had been marked by anti-Christian persecution under the first Ming dynasty (1368-1644). This is why the two metropolitanates of China and India were merged into one: ‘*Metropolitan for India and China*<sup>51</sup>’ of which the first known incumbent was the Armenian Yacob Abuna<sup>52</sup>.

### *2- Division of the Middle East between Ottomans and Safavids*

Moreover, the division in two of the Armenian plateau divided the dioceses of the Armenian Apostolic Church, whence the Catholicos was once again isolated from his western dioceses. This isolation and the associated weakening did not allow the Armenian Church to play its traditional role of support to the Churches of the East<sup>53</sup>. As such, any link with the Middle East from the Persian Gulf was very difficult, or even impossible. It is therefore not surprising that the Indian Christians turned to the patriarchate of Antioch, an ancient and extremely important Christian metropolis, more accessible from the sea than the Chaldean Catholicos, isolated in the Taurus mountains. What is even more surprising, and new, is that the patriarchs of Antioch set up a new hierarchy, removing the traditional links with the Church of the East. The terms of the implementation of these hierarchies with the Syro-Malabars and the Christians of Thomas Cana still need to be specified, but the general framework is now clear.

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<sup>49</sup> On this question, see the rich and precise synthesis article by K. S. Mathew, Mathew, 2018.

<sup>50</sup> In addition to sending a new patriarch in 1595, see other attempts according to Portuguese documentation published in the *Documentos remetidos da India ou Livros das Monções*, vol. II and VI, see note 42.

<sup>51</sup> Trigault, 1615, 125-126; Moule, 1930 p. 15 and 20-21 and Bernard, 1935, p. 28, n. 61.

<sup>52</sup> On this character, see. *supra*.

<sup>53</sup> As attested since the 4th century by Constantine's letter to Tiridate III; the Church historian, Sozomene, *Church's History*, II, 8, 2; for the 6th century Zachary the Rhetor, ed. Brooks, 1919, p. 217 of the Syriac text, and so on. In addition to missionary activity, the Armenian Catholicos has consecrated bishops and even patriarchs on several occasions for various churches with which he was in communion. This was the case in 555 with the consecration of the Syrian patriarch Jacobite Abdisho or the Catholicos of the Church of the East Mar Yab Alaha III († 1317) (or Jabalaha III) (and therefore especially the Christian Mongols), who was probably Ongut. He had been sent to the West to be formed theologically in Armenia (probably Armenian-Cilicia) and had been consecrated at the age of 35, after 1280, “metropolitan of the cities of Cathay and Ong”, cf. Bernard, 1935, p. 52 after Moule, 1930, p. 99, no. 8.

### *3- The bookish legacy of Antiquity*

The clerics had a solid literary education, particularly in Latin. It was clear that, in addition to in-depth knowledge of the biblical text, of the Fathers and of Christian literature in the Latin language, they knew the ancient authors (Pliny the Elder, Tacitus, Justin) and medieval authors (including, of course, Marco Polo and John Mandeville), who had covered the East. In the confused political context of the East in the modern age, it is not surprising that the Portuguese referred to this region in the light of the geographical and ethno-cultural terminology from the Antiquity which was the terminology of their education. This explains part of their approximation, but only a part.

This bookish culture explains the representation of Armenia as an autonomous and vast mental entity, easier for European readers to grasp than the names of Muslim tribes.

The text of Joseph the Indian is a perfect illustration of this. He speaks of Greater Armenia in the terms of Strabo, Titus Livy or Pliny the Elder. The filter of classical culture is clearly present by the number of quotations from Strabo or Marco Polo, from whom he borrows their understanding of the world<sup>54</sup>. His calling the Catholicos of Ctesiphon, Catholicos of Armenia, is due to the use of an unclear general interpretative framework, more than through the geographical proximity of the century of the Catholicossate with the Armenian plateau at this time, or more broadly the Armenian cultural space.

### *4- Portuguese nationalism against Spain*

During the critical period of the growth of the Catholic mission in India, there is one important fact to be taken into account. Despite the union of the Portuguese crown with the Spanish crown between 1580 and 1640, the Portuguese clerics, in particular the Augustinians, kept a visceral attachment to their kingdom. Moreover, they were very guarded about their mission and their spiritual conquests, both in India and in Iran. To be sure of this, we just need to mention the fact that the acts of reunion of the two kingdoms mentioned that *only* the Portuguese should be present in the East Indies and that the Spanish were not allowed to get involved<sup>55</sup>. In fact, the Augustinians played a central role in the religious link between the Iberian peninsula and the Indian sub-continent.

There was nothing theoretical about this principle, quite the opposite. As a proof, we just need to observe the Iberian embassies sent to Iran after 1580. The first, in 1602, was entrusted to a Portuguese layman, Luis Pereira de Lacerda, accompanied by the two Augustinian clerics mentioned earlier. The latter played a key role in this embassy, despite not always being understood by the ambassador. However, the next embassy, in August 1613, was entrusted by Philip III to a Castilian, Don Garcia Silva y Figueroa. In this case, it appeared to the Portuguese clerics that their domination over the Eastern regions was directly questioned. The Portuguese elite rebelled against their own king's ambassador. And Figueroa, who had left Lisbon in March 1614, arrived in Goa in October in the same year and was detained by the viceroy, Jeronimo de Azevedo, until March 1617, when he could at last set sail for Ormuz. There, the ambassador suffered the inertia of the governor of the island, Louis da Gama, and it wasn't until 1618 that he could at last meet Shah Abbas I in Qazvin before returning to Isfahan, which he left in August 1619. It took him more than one year to arrive in Goa, whereas ordinarily three months would be enough. The 19<sup>th</sup> December 1620, he left Goa for Lisbon, via Mozambique. After numerous vagaries, the ambassador arrived in view of Goa... the 28<sup>th</sup> March 1621, due to an error by the helmsman. Once there, he could not set sail again

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<sup>54</sup> Joseph the Indian, tr. Vallavanthara, 1984, quote or mention Marco Polo p. 21, 45, 93, 168, 231 and 233; Ptolemy, p. 60 and Strabo, p. 93, 190-191, 200, 203, 243, 251

<sup>55</sup> Chardin, II, p. 75 and Gulbenkian, 1995, II, p. 75.

for Portugal before March 1622, but, due to the capture of Ormuz by the Safavids, his ship could not raise anchor. After several vain attempts, he finally left in February 1624, arriving in San Sebastian in Spain... in August 1624.

It therefore took Figueroa ten years to fulfill his embassy's brief role, with a virtually nil result, largely due to the nationalistic attitude of the Portuguese. He bitterly complained about it in his report to the king, but in vain<sup>56</sup>.

This patriotism lasted even after John IV of Portugal acceded to the throne in 1640.

The Augustinians thus claimed that the unrecognized governor, Dom Braz de Castro, had banned non-Portuguese clerics from living in India<sup>57</sup>. In 1720, the king of Portugal enacted an edict in virtue of which any cleric ordered by a prelate other than the archbishop of Goa would be exiled, along with his family, from all Portuguese possessions and his property confiscated. In addition, no bishop would be recognized, unless his appointment bulls were presented for registration at the chancellery of Lisbon<sup>58</sup>. We can see how jealously the clerics guarded their Indian flock. Indeed, the desire to preserve the exclusivity of the official relationship between the Portuguese and Safavid sovereigns, on the one hand, and the domination of the mission both in Iran and in India, explains - and we have already seen this - the use of methods which are not always very Catholic. It seems that these methods included the use of terminology with dual meaning, which only insiders could understand, including the term "Armenian".

To conclude this point, it is possible to observe the use of terminology from classic sources to analyze the contemporary reality of the Near East, such as the notion of "Armenia" which covers the *entire* Armenian plateau. With this all-embracing view, it was possible to evade the rapid evolutions of borders following the fight wars between Muslim powers in the region. This terminology created a curious state, which covered both the "real" Armenians and those who were in fact Chaldeans subjected to the Patriarch of the Church of the East, invariably called "Patriarch of Armenia" in Portuguese sources, or sources that depended on such (Joseph the Indian). This concept, which is only correctly understood by insiders, made it even more difficult for the Spanish to take possession of what was considered a preserve of the Portuguese.

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<sup>56</sup> Gulbenkian, 1995, II, p. 75, with the quotations from his report.

<sup>57</sup> *Carmelites*, 1939, p. 367.

<sup>58</sup> *Carmelites*, 1939, p. 368.



## Conclusion

It seems possible here to resume and validate our partial conclusion, in other words that the implementation of deliberately vague terminology was the doing of the Portuguese. They introduced a terminology taken from classical sources, mainly Latin, or translated into Latin, to analyze the contemporary reality of the Near East, which was a permanent battlefield until the treaty of 1639, such as the notion of “Armenia”, which encompasses the *entire* Armenian plateau, but without political content, since the last Armenian kingdom fell in 1375. This all-embracing vision created a biased understanding of the actual situation, which one needed to be able to decode, as the “real” Armenians were actually present in India since the arrival of the Portuguese, along with those who were in fact Chaldeans subjected to the Patriarch of the Churches of the East, invariably called “Patriarch of Armenia” in Portuguese sources, or those depending on such sources (Joseph the Indian). This concept, which is only correctly understood by insiders, made it even more difficult for the Spanish to take possession of what was considered a preserve of the Portuguese.

Furthermore, prior to the Portuguese period, the *only* attested hierarchical relation of the Church of Kerala was with the Catholicos of Ctesiphon. The relay of the Armenian Church was occasional and *never* intended to establish a link of subordination with this church. One of the first objectives of the Portuguese prelates was to break this relationship, which was formally banned as of the time of the council of Diamper (1599) in order to impose Latinisation<sup>59</sup>, already reported and even contested as to its principle by Yacob Abuna in his second letter dated 17 December 1530<sup>60</sup>.

This Latinisation was never completed and it was in reaction to this colonial process by the Portuguese that the Syro-Malabars sought to perpetuate their liturgy by joining a Semite hierarchy of the Middle East. As analyzed at the start of this note, the vicissitudes of history resulted in the Syriac patriarch of Antioch being able to support and help them at this time. However, this relationship provides support to the other variant, western Syriac, and not eastern Syriac or Aramean. This situation has lasted until the present day and has been accentuated by the vast development of Syriac studies in the 20th century and the atrophy of Aramean studies.

There is, therefore, a deep-set problem because, in western Syriac tradition, the Christians of Saint Thomas do not have a real place.

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<sup>59</sup> Cf. Thaliath, 1958 and Nedungatt, 2001.

<sup>60</sup> Schurhammer, 1933, p. 84, n° 69.



## **Appendix:**

### **Les Arméniens dans l'Inde de l'époque moderne**

#### **mythe et réalité ?**

##### *Discussion historiographique*

Le savant jésuite, Georg Schurhammer, pionnier dans l'étude du christianisme indien de l'époque portugaise était convaincu que tous ces prélats non-latins étaient en fait des Syriques, et que les textes devaient être corrigés. Pour expliquer ces erreurs, ou confusions, ce dernier a, tout au long de son œuvre, affirmé qu'il n'y avait pas d'Arméniens en Inde<sup>61</sup>. Il a mis en évidence que plusieurs des prélats envoyés en Inde venaient de la région de Diyarbakir dans le sud du plateau arménien. De fait, venant du plateau arménien, ils pouvaient être appelés « Arméniens » tout en étant d'authentiques Syriques. Il y a eu par exemple une discussion assez longue autour de la question de savoir si Mar Jacob était Arménien ou Araméen, et, dans ce cas, Syrique. Dans un article argumenté, Georg Schurhammer tente de prouver que ce prélat était comme tous les autres : un faux Arménien et un authentique Syrique<sup>62</sup>. Une réponse lui fut donnée par Roberto Gulbenkian qui a publié une étude remarquable et tout aussi argumentée en réunissant *des dizaines* de textes sur la présence historique des Arméniens dans le sous-continent indien<sup>63</sup>.

Nous allons présenter en plus de cela quelques textes sur la présence incontestable d'Arméniens « réels » dans le sous-continent indien tout au long de l'époque moderne<sup>64</sup>.

##### *L'exemple des cimetières chrétiens de Chennai*

Nous suivons les conclusions de Roberto Gulbenkian, confirmées par nos propres recherches sur les textes et notre travail à Chennai. En effet, lors de nos deux premiers voyages, nous avons longuement étudié les pierres tombales des cimetières chrétiens de Chennai et de ses environs, ainsi que les pierres tombales de Saint Thomas' Mount et de la grotte de Saint-Thomas. Nous avons été surpris de constater que la quasi-totalité des tombes contenaient des inscriptions gravées en lettres arméniennes. Ainsi, les quatre seules pierres tombales à l'entrée et dans le sanctuaire de Saint Thomas' Mount ainsi que les deux pierres tombales devant la grotte de Thomas sont *toutes* gravées en latin et en arménien pour des chrétiens arméniens. À ce jour, nous disposons du relevé de près d'une centaine d'inscriptions alors que nous n'avons *pas pu trouver une seule* tombe écrite en syrique. Il y a là un argument factuel qui nous semble majeur et renforce la thèse de Roberto Gulbenkian.

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. Schurhammer, 1933 ; 1934 ; 1962 et entre 1972.

<sup>62</sup> Schurhammer, 1972.

<sup>63</sup> Gulbenkian, 1972 repris dans Gulbenkian, 1995.

<sup>64</sup> Une grande masse de faits est également réunie dans Seth, 1937 et Aslanian, 2001 (avec la bibliographie citée dans ces deux volumes).

### *Le périmètre du millet arménien*

Mais avant, signalons un autre fait, essentiel, nous semble-t-il. Le patriarche arménien de Constantinople était le chef du millet arménien, terme dont la définition n'était pas ethnique mais religieuse. Aux yeux des Ottomans, les Arméniens étaient tous les non Grecs, c'est à dire les non Chalcédoniens. Dans le *millet arménien* prenaient donc place toutes les Églises non chalcédoniennes de l'Empire : Coptes, Éthiopiens, Syriaques (dont les Chaldéens avant leur rattachement à Rome). Ainsi, les Syriaques, avant 1857 et la création d'un millet propre, étaient, selon la terminologie ottomane, membres de la communauté arménienne, et donc Arméniens...

### *Les Arméniens en Inde, l'exemple de Jacome Abuna*

Malgré ces confusions bien réelles, le fait est que des Arméniens « réels » étaient présents en Inde. Les raisons de leur présence furent multiples. D'une part, et surtout, il y avait dans l'Église arménienne la vénération traditionnelle pour l'apôtre Thomas, manifestation universelle au sein du monde chrétien, mais cette vénération amena à organiser des pèlerinages jusqu'à son sanctuaire de Meliapour (Chennai, anc. Madras) comme l'affirme le synaxaire arménien<sup>65</sup> et comme l'atteste dès l'époque antique celui de Grégoire de Tallard<sup>66</sup>.

D'autre part, dans cette question des pèlerinages, l'Inde fit partie depuis le Moyen Âge des pôles du commerce arménien. Un précieux témoignage, quoique peu connu, nous est fourni par l'historien musulman Ibn Hawqal dans sa *Configuration de la terre*, publiée en 988, qui note :

« On récolte une quantité considérable de garance, d'une qualité supérieure, qu'on exporte, par la mer Caspienne, Djurdjan, et qui est transportée par terre jusque dans l'Inde<sup>67</sup>. »

Cette relation commerciale augmenta tout au long de l'époque moderne pour atteindre son apogée entre le milieu du XVI<sup>e</sup> et celui du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Cette question des réseaux commerciaux des négociants arméniens issus de Nor Djoulfa est une immense question qu'il faudrait traiter *per se* car elle est également un élément de compréhension important de l'évolution du christianisme en Inde à l'époque moderne jusqu'au début de l'époque britannique<sup>68</sup>.

Enfin, des prélats arméniens ont été envoyés en Inde depuis le Moyen Âge tant pour veiller sur les chrétiens arméniens que pour administrer les chrétiens locaux. Le meilleur exemple est sans doute celui de Jacome Abuna. Ce Jacome Abuna se présente lui-même vers 1523 comme « prêtre arménien qui gouverne ceux que l'on appelle les chrétiens Quilon en Inde [...], ordonné et envoyé par le patriarche de Babylone – *Jacome Abuna, armenian priest, who rules over the so called Quilon Christians in India* [...] *deputed and sent by the patriarch of Babylon*<sup>69</sup> ». Il semble difficile d'affirmer

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<sup>65</sup> “The holy apostle’s tomb is a pilgrimage place famous to this day, where many healings occur in the name of Christ.” in *The Armenian synaxarion of Ter Israel*: “ Եւ գերեզման սուրբ առաքելոյն է հոչակաւար ուրսաստեղի մինչեւ ցայսր ժամանակի, յորմէ բազում բժշութիւնք կատարին ի փարս Քրիստոսի. ”, éd.-trad. Bayan G., Turnhout, Brepols, *PO*, 1910, V, 3, (29) p. 421 [77].

<sup>66</sup> Yevadian, 2011, p. 104-105.

<sup>67</sup> Ibn Hawkal, trad. Kramers – Wiet, 1964, II, p. 340.

Ibn Hawkal, trad. Kramers – Wiet, 1964 = J. H. Kramers et G. Wiet, *Ibn Hawqal, Configuration de la terre : Kitab Surat al-ard*, Paris, Maisonneuve et Larose, 1964.

<sup>68</sup> Aslanian, 2011.

<sup>69</sup> Schurhammer, 1933, p. 71.



qu'il n'est pas Arménien quand il l'écrit lui-même. Cet orgueil des contemporains qui estiment comprendre les anciens mieux qu'eux-mêmes est étonnant, pourtant il est assez largement attesté<sup>70</sup>...

De plus, François Xavier, sans connaître cette lettre de Jacome Abuna, écrit lui-même dans l'une de ses lettres au roi du Portugal, Joao III, le 26 janvier 1549, à propos de ce prélat : « un évêque d'Arménie, du nom de Jacome Abuna, [qui] a servi Dieu et votre Altesse dans ces régions durant 45 ans, un homme très âgé, vertueux et saint – *A bishop from Armenia, called Jacob Abuna, [who] has been serving God and Your Highness in these parts these last 45 years, a very old, virtuous and holy man*<sup>71</sup> ». Ces deux mentions mettent hors de doute son origine arménienne.

### *Précis sur Thomas Cana*

Cet état de fait, explique, quoique leur fondateur soit très probablement un chrétien d'Arménie venu de Jérusalem, comme les plus anciens textes Portugais l'affirment, que le lien avec le plateau arménien ait été supplanté par la tradition syriaque. Ce fait est confirmé par les plus anciennes sources qui sont portugaises. La première est la lettre du Père Alvaro Penteado, écrite vers 1515 et 1518 pour le roi du Portugal (*The fact is notably attested in Portuguese sources, the two most ancient sources of which are the following ones:*

Padre Alvaro Penteado, between 1515-1518, wrote to the king in Portugal):

*"The establishment of these Christians, both from Cranganore and Coulaio when they all came following St. Thomas, was brought about in this way: leaving Coulaio, about which your Highness must have certain information, there went forth from Cranganore an Armenian merchant of advanced years who had no hope of ever returning to his homeland; he bought a piece of deserted land with its revenues from the ruler of those parts, both of the water and of the land, according to his landmarks which are still in existence; it is said that he married, and having had two sons, the first became a priest and the heir to those revenues, which upon his death he left to the church, which today bears the name St. Thomas, and likewise he bought native men and women, whom he converted and married and protected and helped. His second son became a Justice of the Peace<sup>72</sup>."*

Puis le Père Francisco de Sousa écrit :

*"This Armenian had numerous descendants, some from his legitimate wife, one Nayra Christian, others from a concubine: the legitimate descendants peopled Cranganor, Caturte, Cottete, Diamper, and other places; the bastards dispersed over other areas : and all greatly spread the Christianity of the Mountains. And inasmuch as all the other Christians, with the exception of those in Travancor and Todamala, were allied to these two families through marriage, there resulted two distinct groups, which were at such variance in matters of honour that they would not intermarry. [...]"*

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<sup>70</sup> Par exemple, dans Schurhammer, 1933.

<sup>71</sup> Schurhammer, 1933, p. 82.

<sup>72</sup> In Silva Rego, III, 1950, doc. 112, p. 547.

*Further adding that numerous Armenians who went to Malabar intermarried<sup>73</sup>.”*

Il n'est pas ici possible de faire l'étude de fond que cette question exige mais simplement d'en tracer le cadre général et de la situer dans l'ensemble de cette question<sup>74</sup>.

#### *Les Arméniens en Inde, quelques autres exemples*

Un premier fait est rapporté par l'historien portugais João de Barros (1496-1570), auteur d'une monumentale histoire des colonies portugaises en Asie, les *Decades da Asia*, publiées en quatre volumes entre 1552 et 1615. Il rapporte une enquête diligentée par le gouverneur portugais, Nuno de Cunha, en 1533 à la demande du roi du Portugal à la suite de la redécouverte de la tombe de saint Thomas à Méliapour, en 1517 :

*« Dans l'enquête que fit Nuno da Cunha, un évêque arménien témoigna aussi : il jura par ses instructions que, depuis vingt ans qu'il vivait sur cette terre et qu'il visitait à l'intérieur, sur la terre ferme, quelques chrétiens de saint Thomas qui habitaient les terres en-dessous de Coulam<sup>75</sup>, ce qu'il savait du saint Apôtre, ou ce qu'il tenait d'écrits, c'est que lorsque les Apôtres commencèrent à annoncer l'Évangile dans le monde entier, trois d'entre eux, saint Thomas, saint Barthélémy et saint Jude Thaddée partirent ensemble et parvinrent à Babylone [...]76. »*

De fait, en 1533, il y avait un évêque arménien « depuis vingt ans », et rien ne permet de douter de son origine ethnique.

Gaspar da Cruz, dominicain portugais (1520-1570), qui séjourna en Inde puis en Chine, rapporte également, dans son *Traité des choses de Chine (Tractado das cousas da China)* de 1569 :

*« Le lieu où saint Thomas a été martyrisé, les Portugais l'appellent : 'Saint Thomas' (Sam Thome). Les indigènes le nomment : « Méliapour » (Malabar). Quand j'étais là-bas, j'ai entendu : un Arménien fidèle<sup>77</sup>, pour être fidèle à cet Apôtre<sup>78</sup>, est venu d'Arménie pour faire un pèlerinage<sup>79</sup>. »*

Ce pèlerinage des chrétiens d'Arménie correspond à ce qui a été évoqué plus haut et les ouvrages mentionnés par ce pèlerin pourraient être, en première analyse, le synaxaire arménien.

Il n'est pas utile de développer ici l'âge d'or de la communauté arménienne de Madras (auj. Chennai) qui nécessiterait une copieuse note en soi, mais il suffit de signaler que le sanctuaire de Saint Thomas' Mount a été totalement reconstruit dans sa forme actuelle grâce à la générosité des négociants arméniens de la ville.

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<sup>73</sup> De Sousa, II, 1710, p. 113 and 115, several others mentions to Armenians.

<sup>74</sup> Sur la question de Thomas Cana, voir en première analyse,

<sup>75</sup> L'actuel Quilon, en Inde (N. d. T.).

<sup>76</sup> Barros, J. (de), *Decades da Asia*, 1563, 3, livre 7, ch. 11, p. 306 gauche.

<sup>77</sup> Ou : honnête (N. d. T.).

<sup>78</sup> Sous-entendu : saint Thomas (N. d. T.).

<sup>79</sup> GASPAR DA CRUZ, *Tractado das cousas da China*, Évora, 1569, p. Kiii, 3<sup>e</sup> vol., p. 195. Repris par : MENDOZA, J. G., *The history of the great and mighty kingdom of China*, traduit par Purchase de l'espagnol, 1588, livre 2d, ch. 1, p. 27-28.



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