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WHY DID THE CATHOLIC MISSIONARIES FAIL TO CONVERT THE ARMENIAN AND GEORGIAN COMMUNITY OF THE SAFAVID EMPIRE IN THE 17th CENTURY?

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Abstract

In the early modern period the Protestant Reformation weakened the Roman Catholic Church and it lost its influence over Europe. The Church turned its policy to the East to propagate the faith. For nearly a century, the missionaries were represented in the Safavid provinces and attempted to win the Eastern Christian Population for the Catholic Church. On the other hand, with the flow of Catholic missionaries caused the increase of intercultural and interreligious exchanges. This paper examines the Catholic missionaries' motives to bring the Safavids' Eastern Christian Community under papal jurisdiction as well as the reception that the Safavid rulers, Armenian Church and Georgian Church offered vis-a-vis this group. The aim of the study is to investigate the missionaries' attempts to create a 'fifth column' by proselytizing the Eastern Christian Community in the Safavid territories.

Keywords

Catholic Church, Safavids Empire, Eastern Christian Community, Armenian Church, Georgian Church

1. Introduction

1.1 A Religious Policy of Popes and the Safavid Empire

Close relations between the European countries and the Safavid Empire during the early 17th century gave an opportunity for the catholic missionaries to penetrate into the Safavid lands. A considerable number of friars from the major Catholic Orders, such as the Augustinians, Carmelites, Jesuits, and Capuchins served to disseminate Catholic belief among the Eastern Christian community of the Safavids Empire. (Shaked & Moreen, 1986, p.247). This paper attempts to address the following questions from a historical perspective: Why did the missionaries want to penetrate to the Eastern Christian Community? Why were they frustrated in converting the Eastern Christians?

Before discussing the missionary activities in the Safavids Empire, let's clarify what are missionaries? Missionaries are sent by the Catholic Church for spreading the faith or proclaiming the Gospel in non-christian countries. According the Church, at the core of all missionary work is the order, which Jesus gave them in Matthew 28:19, when he said, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."(United Church of God. Does Matthew 28 verse 19 Prove the Trinity?, 2011) Some scholars identify missions with the notion of "tablig" (propaganda) in the Quran. In responding to this approach, it is important to note that propaganda is merely to proclaim the message of Islam. This targeted audience can be both Muslim and non-Muslim. The verse of the Quran, An-Nur is instance of it: "Obey Allah and obey the Messenger; but if you turn away - then upon him is only that [duty] with which he has been charged, and upon you is that with which you have been charged. And if you obey him, you will be [rightly] guided. And there is not upon the Messenger except the [responsibility for] clear notification." (The Holy Qur'an, 2015, p.402) No violent methods or compulsion are allowed in this propaganda. However, during the Age of Exploration, missionary activities became inseparable with colonial policy. There are many bullas and briefs which were published by the popes supporting colonial activities. (Mahmudov, 2006, p.45).In 1453, in the brief *Dum Diversas* Pope V Nicholas granted Alonso V of Portugal the right "to invade, conquer, take by force and bring about the submissions of Saracens and pagans, as well as other infidels and enemies of Christ, whoever and wherever they may be.." (Housley, 2010, p. 56) Moreover, the bull *Romanus Pontifex* of 1455 granted to Alfonso and his successors the right to "found, establish and build all the churches, monasteries and other holy places in the provinces, islands and other places already acquired by him, or those to be acquired and to send all willing ecclesiastical persons, secular or regular, of all Orders, including even the mendicants, always under license of their superiors." (Housley, 2010, p.62) Consequently, Estado da Índia, or Portuguese Índia, played a crucial role in the dissemination of Christianity. According to J. Flannery, approximately twenty-six missions were established from Goa,

the capital of Estado da India to different countries, including the Safavid Empire, during the period of 1515 to 1695. (Flannery, 2013, p.45)

Shah I Abbas (1587-1629) devoted the first ten years of his reign to strengthening domestic and foreign policy in order to regain Safavid territories taken by the Ottoman Empire. This included a series of ambassadorial visits to the European courts during his reign. Two main issues dominated the messages that diplomats conveyed: 1) the desire to establish an alliance with the European countries 2) to divert the silk trade from an overland east-west route that went through Ottoman territory to a north-south route that went by sea. (Quinn, 2015, p.104) The second part of his offer contained not only trade concessions for European enterprises, but also privileges for Christian missionaries. The Safavid shah gave them a permit to construct convents in various provinces and became residents. Furthermore, the Catholic Church endeavored to gain special privileges for the missionaries that supported their activities in Safavid Empire, including:

1. Freedom of residence and ownership;
2. Immunity from taxation;
3. Freedom of trade;
4. The right of movement throughout the Empire;
5. Political protection
6. Respectful treatment by Safavid officials
7. The right of an audience with the Shah anytime
8. Permission to set up convents in various places, became residents, and open ecclesiastical, educational, and other institutions; (Matthee, 2009, p.154)

1.2 The Armenian and Georgian Community of the Safavid Empire and Catholicism-Related Activities of Catholic Missionaries

Armenians and Georgians had great privileges during the reign of Shah Abbas I. They were significant silk traders. Some part of the Georgian and Armenian population accepted Islam and acted as “ghulams” (slave soldiers) in the army, even some of them were promoted to state positions. The Safavid Empire had not violated the faith of the Armenian and Georgian population and gave a free hand to them, thus, caused concerns to some countries in Europe that were religious initiators. Since this tolerance could undermine the reign of the Rome over the Christians. Created in Rome in 1622, the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (Propaganda Fide) concentrated its efforts on all missionaries and strengthened its supervision. Schools educating in many languages had been opened and publishing houses had been established in Rome since 1627. The school provided education to students from other countries. Religious books in different languages, including Armenian and Georgian,

were published at the publishing house and delivered to missionaries. During the next two decades, new groups of missionaries armed with these publications began to arrive in the Safavid lands. Shah Abbas II's vizier Mirza Muhammad Tagi beg was known as an organizer of scientific discussions. This vizier's successor, Muhammad Mirza Mehdi studied engineering and mathematics. (Matthee, 1991, p.19) R. Matthee emphasizes that (1998) the Jesuit missionary Pier Abroise was invited to the court to teach mathematics and astrology. (Matthee, 1991, p.25). Blaise de Nautes gave French lessons to the Safavid officials. In the middle of the 17th century the Muslim clerics assembled in Isfahan, on the maydan to debate theological issues with the missionaries. (Ferrier & Chardin, 1996, p.195). In a result of such disputes, the both sides, the Catholic missionaries and Shiite clerics created various works relating with Christianity and Islam. According to J. Chardin (1996, p.190), the Safavid shahs and governors asked send them books on Latin, inventions, mathematics and Christianity. He describes that Mirza Tahir, "son of the governor of Azerbaijan" had learned the art and the science from missionaries. (Griffith, 2010, p.88).

The first section of the research paper examines the events in the context of political and religious concerns and interests of the Safavid rulers-Shah Abbas I and Shah Safi. During this period Armenians maintained a close relationship with the Catholic missionaries in order to gain more privileges and support. It then goes on to divisive issues arisen between the Eastern Christian community and the Catholic missionaries and the Safavid Shahs' decrees regarding it.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Primary Sources

The Sources describing the activities of the missionaries in the Safavid lands include travel accounts, diplomatic letters, reports, and treatises.

Documents from Digital Persian Archive of the University of Marburg hold correspondences between the Safavid rulers and the Roman pontiffs. This database includes both published and unpublished documents: royal letters, decrees and official contracts. For example, "Letter by Shah Abbas I to the Doge of Venice", "Safavid decree by Shah Abbas I" (the permission to the Armenian community to build a church in Isfahan) "Letter by Shah Abbas I to Pope Clement VIII", "Safavid farman by Shah Abbas II" (the governors and tax-gatherers are required to treat the Catholic missionaries with respect), "Petition by the Armenian patriarch to Shah Abbas II", "Safavid farman by Shah Sultan Husayn"(the representatives of several christian communities including the Armenians and the Catholic friars are allowed to construct churches and to carry out their religious ceremonies) are valuable documents for the Safavid period (Werner, 2008)

The most essential collection of archival materials belongs to the Modena Archives. Modena was one of the major trade city-states of Italy, and it had extensive contacts with the Safavid Empire. The majority of documents in this archive describe the relationship between Venice and the Eastern countries. In 2004, relevant documents kept in the archives of Modena were published by N. Ozkan, a professor of Ankara University. (Özkan, 2004) She gave original versions of the documents in Italian, and also translated portions of these documents into Turkish. She also investigated the reliability of these documents in comparison other available sources.

The valuable and detailed source of this study is “A Chronicle of Carmelites in Persia. Papal mission of the XVII –th and the XVIII-th centuries”, which was first published in London in 1939. (Chick & Matthee, 2012) This chronicle covers a large amount of documentary material. The Carmelite friars describe political, social and cultural life in the Safavid territories from the beginning of a permanent establishment in 1610 until its end in 1753. This source give us information about the missionaries’ endeavor to unite the Armenian Gregorian Church to the Church of Rome. One can see from the Carmelite monks’ reports that this effort creating conflict between the missionaries and the Armenian community. The majority of Armenians continued to adhere to Gregorian branch, and their compliants caused a deterioration of relations between the Catholic states and the Safavids Empire.

During Shah Abbas II’s reign (1642-1666) members of the Jesuit Order gained permission to establish a mission to the Safavid lands. They were persecuted for dissemination of Catholic belief among Armenians in New Julfa. The reports written by Jesuit friar Alexander Rhodes portray the main purpose of the missionaries. (Wilson, 1925) Alexander Rhodes had obtained proficiency in the local language for giving religious instruction. He stated that the Safavids Empire provides more religious liberty than Ottoman Empire: “Most of the inhabitants, it is true, profess Muhammadanism, which is the religion of the King and his Court. But, as they follow interpretation of the Koran different from that adhered to by the Turks, they allow liberty complete liberty for religious controversy to all who wish to indulge therein. There is no law here, forbidding it on pain of torture or death, as there is among the Turks, the extreme rigour of whose law makes it almost impossible for anyone to convert them from their false doctrine.” (Wilson, 1925, p.687)

The most valuable data can be obtained from travelers. The travel accounts by J. Tavernier (2010), J. Chardin (1963), M. Membre (2012) are significant accounts. On the other hand, the accounts written by the missionaries and the travellers can result in one-sided view of events. For avoiding it, I have used the Safavid chronicles.

2.2 Secondary Sources

Rudolph Matthee published a number of articles and books on the history of the Safavid Empire. His “Poverty and Perversance: The Jesuit Mission of Isfahan and Shamakhi in Late Safavid Iran” (Matthee, 2015) looks at the political and religious interests of the Safavid authorities and Jesuit missionaries. In R. Matthee’s perspective, the Eastern Christian community suffered from muslim pressure and sought assistance from the European missionaries. His one sided position can be explained with dependence of the Armenian and Georgian sources in his work. Rudolph Matthee’s other articles such as “The career of Mohammad Beg, grand vizier of Shah ‘Abbas II (r. 1642–1666) (1991),” “Administrative Stability and Change in Late-17th-Century Iran: The Case of Shaykh ‘Ali Khan Zanganah (1669–89)” (1994), “Between aloofness and fascination: Safavid views of the west.” (1998), “The Safavids under Western Eyes: Seventeenth-Century European Travelers to Iran” (2009) are used for our research.

John Flannery’s (2013) “The mission of the Portuguese Augustinians to Persia and beyond (1602-1747)” focuses on the status of the Christian population living in the Safavid Empire, diplomatic relations between the Portuguese and Safavid empire, the search for allies in the East, history of the Augustinian Order, the Church of Augustinian in Isfahan, the monastery of Isfahan, and the dissemination of Catholicism among the members of the Armenian and Georgian communities. “Shah Abbas: The King who Refashioned Iran”, written by Sholeh Quinn (2015), is devoted to Shah Abbas’ rise to power. She describes the debates between the Catholic missionaries and Muslim clergy, and the ambassadors’ activities in the European palaces. The following study on the topic is Mansour Opher’s (2013) “Picturing Global Conversion: Art and Diplomacy at the Court of Paul V (1605-1621)” article. This research work examines the role of the papal court in shaping the cultural profile of the Catholic missions. The author argues that Shah Abbas’ ambassador Robert Shirley offered a limited conversion of Safavid subjects, in exchange for a military alliance and economic advantages. The Shah was willing to allow the creation of a Catholic bishopric in New Julfa and the appointment of a papal nuncio over the Christian subjects. However, M. Opher has mainly utilized secondary sources and cannot substantiate his assertion in his article.

Charles Frazee (2006) also touches upon this issue in his book titled “Catholics and Sultans: The Church and the Ottoman Empire 1453-1923”. The chapter of this book (“The Golden age of the missions”) is devoted to the relationship between the Armenian community and the missionaries. (Frazee, 2006, p.107) The author claims that the missionaries played a key role in the creation of an “Armenian issue”. It is also worth noting that this chapter contains facts about the Dominican missionaries who created the bishopric in Nakhcivan.

I used Armenian sources for learning their position about the missionary activities. V. Ghougassian states that the Carmelite monks created the sharpest encounter between the Armenians and the Catholics. (Ghougassian, 1998, p.76) The Armenian clerics wrote treatises against their proselytizing activity: “All works were purely anti-Catholic in nature and were written or compiled by well-known monks at the All Saviour’s Monastery. The books were printed in a relatively large quantity, five hundred copies, at a total cost of two hundred tomans.” (Ghougassian, 1998, p.165)

R. Savory (2007), Y. Mahmudov (2006), W. Floor (2015) and some other modern historians have devoted chapters to the religious policy of the Catholic Church, but all of them demonstrate a general approach to the problem.

3. Methodology

Much of my work was based on reading of travel accounts, letters, chronicles, treatises and records. I have used secondary sources to supplement the primary sources. For avoidance of overestimating of missionary reports, and to make the research more objective I referred to contemporary sources as well. A comparative approach with textual and content analysis of sources, provided answers to the research questions.

However, I must note certain limitations. We have difficulties of some primary are difficult to access, especially latin sources, due to limited availability. Some accounts relating to our research paper are preserved in the Vatican. Similarly, we met with a lack of Georgian sources on the Catholic missionaries activities in Georgia.

Other limitation of the study emerged during our research. We examined the total number of the Christian population in the Safavid lands. For this reason, we had a look at the testimonies of eyewitnesses or travel accounts and the friars’ reports. However, there was significant disparity among the numbers which were given in these accounts. For instance, according to the Carmelite report, 400.000 Armenian lived in New Julfa, a quarter of Isfahan, although Jean Chardin states that the whole population of Isfahan was estimated at 11.000.(Chardin,1963,p.78) The Russian Orientalist, V. Barthold claims that the Safavids had 6 million people, and the population of Isfahan was 500.000. (Barthold, 1984, p.102)This overestimated figures are observed in the Armenian sources also. According to this sources, 12000 families lived in New Julfa in the 17th century.(Ina, 2005) Some Safavid scholars followed suit and use the given number without analyzing that 12.000 families were more than 70.000 men, while New Julfa was a small district, not a large town. V. Ghougassian emphasizes that the population of New Julfa consisted of 3500 families or 25000-30000 men. (Ghougassian, 1998, 88) We can conclude that there is no reliable study about the population of the Safavid Empire.

4. Results

In analysis of our primary and secondary sources some facts on our research question came into view. These facts allow us an opportunity to answer two questions: For what purpose did the Catholic missionaries concentrate on the Eastern community of the Safavid Empire? Why were they frustrated in the proselytizing process?

First of all, the missionaries had mistaken perceptions about the Safavid State. In their reports, they describe Shah Abbas as sympathetic to Catholicism due to his attitude. The Catholic missionaries had a belief that Shah gave the Eastern Christian subjects to Rome. Likewise, Safavid shahs overestimated papal power, which suffered from disagreement among the European princes. They sent envoy after envoy to the courts of Europe. (Spandounès & Nicol, 2009, p.43) But the relationship between the Ottoman sultans and the European kings caused disappointment and it impacted Safavid policy. The Safavid shahs persecuted the missionaries and gave privileges to England and Holland. During 1620 and 1622 the English East India Company provided naval assistance, and Shah Abbas realized the capture of Hurmuz. (Savory, 2006, p.132) After expelling the Portuguese from Hurmuz, Shah I Abbas did not need the Catholic missionaries, and the decree which he signed was a heavy blow to the Christians. It was said in the decree that a Christian who adopted Islam possessed the property of his relatives up to the seventh generations. By 1654, more than 50,000 Christians left the Christian faith. (Chick & Matthee, 2012, p.288)

Secondly, dissemination of the Catholic faith among the Armenians was part of the religious policy of Rome. From the ecclesiological perspective of Rome, the missionaries should provide “unquestioning” submission of the Eastern Christian Churches to the authority of Rome. (Aslanian, 1998, p.76) Upon investigation the relations between the Eastern Christian community and the Catholic Orders, it is clear that both sides had interests. The Catholic missionaries tried to fulfill the order given by both the Catholic Church and the European states. On the other side, the Armenians and Georgians’ purpose was to gain financial support and trading privileges in Rome. We can say that the capture of Hurmuz by the Shah, affected trade and relations between the Eastern Christians and missionaries. After this capture, the Armenians were the main exporters of Safavid silk. The lucrative silk trade caused the emergence of mercantile centers, which were able to extend their trade network to the Persian Gulf ports. (Babaie, 2017, p.100). The trade treaties with England and Holland gave the Armenians access to deliver silk to the Northern European market in London and Amsterdam. In that case, the Catholic missionaries failed in convincing them about the benefits of Catholic belief.

The missionary activities caused internal conflicts and destruction among the Eastern Christians. For instance, the Armenian community divided into a Gregorian community and Catholic community.

These two groups often fell to conflict and the Gregorian Patriarchate imprisoned whoever accepted Catholicism. It is clear from the reports that the missionaries established schools where Armenian, Georgian, and Circassian boys were taught Catholic habits. However, it was not successful due to the pressure of the Gregorian and Georgian Churches. A petition written in 1707 by Catholikos Aleksandr is one piece of evidence about it: "Now we ask your highness for an order and decree, indicating that the Armenians should remain Armenian and the Franks should remain Franks and they should not be allowed to send their children to their schools. If they do, they should be considered guilty and the local judge should punish them." (A Chronicle of the Carmelites, 1939, 1/209).

5. Discussions

The Christian population of the Safavid Empire can be broken down into Gregorian Armenians, Orthodox Georgians, representatives of the Syriac Church and members of the Assyrian Church. From an Islamic perspective, these minorities were all considered *ahl-al-kitab* (People of the Book). (Floor & Herzig, 2015, p.109) They paid the *jizya* or poll tax, in return their lives and properties were protected by the government. (Floor & Herzig, 2015, p.110) From the beginning of the 17th century the missionaries from the major Catholic Orders were established at Isfahan, and were treated tolerable by Safavid shahs. Mainly, Shah Abbas used the missionaries and their belief in his Christian subjects for his own purposes, as instruments in a strategy designed to isolate and neutralize the Ottomans. This attitude was exaggerated that Shah Abbas had a desire to convert to Christianity. J. Flannery points out that (2013,p.96) "Pope Clement VIII, misinformed by exaggerated tales of the shah's desire to convert to Christianity, sent a Brief to Philipp III of Spain in September 1600 inviting him to instruct his representatives in Goa to assist in sending missionaries of the Society of Jesus from India to Persia."

The missionaries were intermediaries between the Safavid Empire and Europe. It is important to note that without their records the appearance of the Safavid cities, negotiations between the Safavid rulers and envoys, the Shahs' character traits, non-muslim population, the Safavid food and the local celebrations would remain abstract. They had participated in different philosophical disputations with Muslim clerics.

This study has shown that the muslim population of the Safavid Empire showed no interest in conversion, because according to Islamic law both Muslim people and the missionaries could be faced with the death penalty. Sources suggest Armenian community had a close relationship with the Catholic Church in the middle of the 16th century. According to the Carmelite report, in 1562, Catholikos Sebastian Michael sent the envoys and instructed them to convince Pope Pius IV about the Armenians' desire of conversion to Catholicism. (Chick & Matthee, 2012,p.327) They also wanted help from Pope

Pius IV in regard of becoming free from captivity. In 1607, as a result of the Augustinian missionaries efforts, the first official document about obedience to the Catholic Church had been signed by the Armenian clerics. This official document was prepared in both Portuguese and Armenian. Antonio Gouveia, the Augustinian friar and ambassador, gives the text of this letter in his book “Relaçam”. (Flannery, 2013, p. 164). We used the translated variant of this letter: “I, David, Patriarch of all Armenia, together with those bishops and priests subject to me, who append their signatures, promises and swear by Jesus Christ Our Lord that we will never hold nor preach any belief regarding God and Our Lord Jesus Christ other than that which holy Roman Church holds teaches and which the Roman Pontiff, head of the entire Church and Vicar of the same Lord, sets forth. We further promise and swear that we will give perpetual obedience to the Holy Roman and Apostolic See, and the same Roman Pontiff, canonically elected, who presides over it.” In addition, the Armenian patriarch got 1000 crusados from Augustinians. However, this obedience caused dissatisfaction among the Armenian people. (Mansour, 2013, p.545) A number of merchants sent a letter to Shah Abbas that the patriarch betrayed them and sold their customs in return of a large sum of money. At the same time, the political situations in Europe changed. The Ottoman Sultan Ahmad I and Habsburg Emperor Rudolf II signed a peace treaty and this treaty, Zsitvatorok, caused frustration in the Safavid Court and affected to Shah’s attitude towards missionaries. (Münşi İsgändər bəy, 2009, p.77) He considered this obedience as interference to his subjects and ordered the Armenian patriarch and other non-Catholic Christians to stay away from Catholic Churches. The Augustinian friar Belchior dos Anjos’ records about their meeting with Shah Abbas I proves it:”The Christian princes break their word and lie to me.You want me to subject the Armenians to you. You want to ring bells in public. Why should I not smash your bells, destroy your churches and expel you from my kingdom.” (Flannery, 2013, p.168) We can show the Carmelite monk John Thaddeus’ report of 14.05.1609 as further evidence:” The Safavid envoy Zain –ul-Abidin Beg sent a letter to the shah. He had written that all Christian princes’ professions of friendship were false and that all they wanted was for the turks and Safavids to destroy each-other and the Muslim religion included. The shah when reading this letter said: ‘You will see what a fire I shall alight in Christendom within two years.’ (Chick & Matthee, 2012,p.143)

Our research suggests that two factors affected on the relations between the Catholic Orders and the Armenian community after the death of Shah Abbas I:

- 1) Propaganda Fide (Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith) was established in Rome in order to disseminate the faith and control missions. (Matthee, 2009, p.153) This religious congregation opened multilingual schools and publishing houses. The missionary activities were very expansionist during the following ten years.

- 2) Shah Safi I, Shah Abbas' successor, signed the peace treaty of Zuhab (Qasre-e-Shirin) with the Ottoman Empire. Furthermore, his diplomatic relations with England and Holland resulted in their domination in Persian Gulf. Therefore, the Safavid shah had no more reason to give privileges to the Catholic missionaries.

V. Ghougassian describes (1998, p.87) about the aggressive preaching method of missionaries: "After his arrival in Persia, Father Piromalli preached openly and aggressively in Isfahan and New Julfa about the "error of the Armenians" and was convinced that "outspoken methods should be employed to overcome the schism."

From the middle of the 17th century, the members of the Jesuit Order, with the support of France and Poland came to the Safavid lands. It should be noted that after the capitulations signed with the Ottoman Empire, France proclaimed itself the "Protector of Catholics" and provided financial support for the sending of missionaries to the East. (Özkan, 2004, p.114)) Jesuits gave financial aid and taught the Armenians in their schools. It is fact that as a result of their activities 30.000 Armenian were proselytized till 1691 in the Ottoman Empire. (Frazee, 2006, p. 45)

In 1652, the Jesuits obtained a permission to construct a church in Isfahan. (Matthee, 2015, p. 483) However, like other missionaries the Jesuit missionaries were not permitted to proselytize among local people. They only succeeded at baptizing the Muslims' sick children, because they had medical knowledge and they served the locals as a doctor. Jesuit friar Alexander Rhodes' records substantiates these words: "The first and most important fruits won in early days by our missionaries in this promising field was the Baptism of a number of small children on the point of death. This could be done easily, as the parents themselves often brought them, in the hope of procuring some bodily remedy for them. When however, the case was so serious that the Fathers judged that there was no hope of recovery, they secured Eternal Life for these children by means of Baptism." (Wilson, 1925, p. 675) Their proselytizing attempts among the Armenian community caused aggression, and they presented a petition to shah. In 1654, Shah II Abbas forbade the construction of a Jesuit Church. A document in the Persian Digital Archive of Marburg University stated in the royal decree that the Armenian people have concerns in regards to construction of the Church. (Werner, 2008) It can evoke division among people and create a "fifth column" obeying the French Court. In a result of this royal decree, the construction of the Church was stopped. The travel accounts give us information that some merchant Armenians were converted to the Catholic faith. The well-known traveler Jean Baptiste Tavernier claims that (2010, p.132) "nothing but money had sometimes caused them to feign the embracing of other religion."

During Shah Sulayman's reign the conflict between the Armenian community and the Catholic missionaries worsened sharply. The Catholic missionaries tried to convince the Armenian Catholics to

accept the Pope's authority for the liberation of Armenians. (Matthee, 2015, p.468) But nine hundred Armenians signed petition and gave it to Shah. Therefore, Shah Sulayman ordered the destruction of the Catholic Church completely and expulsion of the Carmelite monks. (Krusiński, Cerceau & Matthee 2018, p. 109). The missionaries returned to New Julfa during Shah Sultan Husayn's reign. The bishop of Isfahan, Elias brought a letter from Pope Innocent XII and the Shah signed a decree of privileges. He sent a letter to Pope Innocent XII and congratulated him for the restoration of mission. However, the mission suffered a lack of money, and the bishop returned to provide financial assistance for the missionaries. In 1705, the Armenian community signed a petition again. As a result of it, the Catholics were expelled from not only in New Julfa where the Armenian community were settled, but also from Tabriz, Iravan, Ganja, Shamakhi and other provinces of the Safavid Empire. (Matthee, 2015, p.86) In 1708, an ambassador of King Louis XIV signed trade treaty with Shah Sultan Husayn. As part of the agreement, an ambassador managed to include an article of protection of the missionaries. After the ambassador's departure, the Armenian Catholicos attained not only the cancellation of the privileges, but also obtained a decree forbidding the missionaries from interfering in the religious affairs of the Armenians.

It should be noted that penetration to the Georgian lands was not easy as it seems. The Georgian Church had spiritual and authoritative overlordship over Georgian kings. On the other side, in comparison with the Armenians, Eastern Georgia had been a vassal kingdom under the Safavid Empire since 1555 (The treaty of Amasya). (Rumlu, 2017, p.76) Merely the Augustinians and the Theatin Order could establish missions in the Georgian provinces. The death of Queen Ketevan in Shiraz created a favorable condition for the missionaries. I want to add that Ketevan's assassination and burial of her relics cause arguable questions between Georgian and European historians. The Augustinians and their followers claim that she converted to Catholicism, but this claim is unsubstantiated. It is clear that she got acquainted with the Catholic friars, because of existing document in Lisbon. The account, "Relação Verdadeira" was written by the Augustinian monk Ambrosio dos Anjos. The author discussed the reasons for Ketevan's presence in Shiraz and Queen's death in the beginning of the account. She was sent as an envoy to the Shah Abbas' palace by her son, Teimuraz I and was imprisoned for eleven years. (Flannery, 2013, p.199) The Shah suspected that Queen Ketevan spied on political events for her son which could be a reason for her death. In the chapter – house of the Augustinian Convento da Graca in Lisbon, there is a remarkable series of frescoes dating from the early part of the 18th century. These spectacular panels depict scenes from the history of the Augustinian mission, and include a nine meter long triptych illustrating scenes from the life and martyrdom of Queen Ketevan. (Maria Saradzhishvili, 2017).

The Queen's death gave an impetus to establish the mission to Georgia. The Augustinian friars took the relics of her body to Teimuraz I and he gave permission to set up the Church in Gori. The letter written by Teimuraz I to Pope Urban VIII proves this permission: "Being now one year since the Reverend Father Ambrosio of the Augustinians Order brought us the desiccated bones, the remains of my mother, from the town of Isfahan and the court of the Kingdom Parthians to our country, We have, for this service, given him a place and land to provide for him and on which to build a residence." (Flannery, 2013, p.207)

However, the Augustinians had not taken all relics of Queen's body to Georgia. Some parts of his body were taken to Goa, to the St. Augustine Church. In 1842, the Church collapsed. In 2004, the archeologists found the bones and DNA analysis proved Georgian identity. The scholars suggested that these relics belong to Ketevan. (Rai, et al., 2014, p.2-3)

The study shows that the Greek population from Crete and Zakhyntos persuaded Teimuraz that the Augustinians intended to convert the whole of Georgia to Catholicism and he should therefore expel them from his kingdom. Soon after plague spreaded in Gori and only Ambrosio dos Anjos survived.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Returning to the questions posed at the beginning of this research, it is now possible to conclude that the missionaries came in hopes of swaying Shah Abbas to join anti-Ottoman coalitions and bring non-Catholic subjects under papal control. (Khezri, Fooladi-Panah, & Alvandi, 2017, p.67). Their activities especially concentrated on the Armenian community. Having received permission to operate in the Safavid lands, the missionaries acquired land and built chapels. However, the realization of religious policy of the Catholic Church was impossible due to political and social situations. The position of the Catholic missionaries were deteriorated from the middle of the 17th century. The friars were subjected to persecution by the assertive Armenian and Georgian Clergy. The Eastern Christians were anxious to protect their religious identity. The missionary activities caused a split in the community. Some leading merchant families transferred their money to Italy and obtained Roman residence and citizenship. The purpose of the Armenians' in communication with the missionary was to obtain financial support and trade privileges in European countries. Armenians agreed with Carmelites in order to get financial support from Europe. They would accept Catholicism, provided that the Papacy would help them gain all the silk trade in the value of 6000000 tumens, as well as to establish points for the sale of the silk in Catholic countries. (Aslanian, 1998, p.98). The Propaganda Fide discussed these terms of the Armenians and decided to create a Latin bishop in the Safavid lands.

An analysis of the sources shows that at the end of the XVII century a large number of wealthy Armenian merchants accepted Islam. The decree on the adoption of Islam issued by Shah Abbas I close

to his death and decrees on trade and tax issued during the reign of Suleyman Shah I played a great role in this. According to the decree of Shah Abbas I, the Christian converted to Islam could possess the wealth for seven generations. Engelbert Kaempfer called the desire of Armenians to inherit the legacy of their relatives as a "shameful habit". (Kaempfer, 1981, p.43). Kaempfer shows that this case has caused hostility and conflict among families. However, the kin relations of the plaintiffs claiming heritage had to be confirmed by 50 witnesses, and the court often dismissed the most of claims. (Kaempfer, 1981, p.56). At the same time, the Jesuit priest Jean-Baptiste de la Maze indicates that six Armenian cobblers accepted Islam. (A Chronicle of the Carmelites, 1939, 1/439). The reason was that Suleyman Shah I banned Muslims from trading with Christian craftsmen. As can be seen from the sources, the Armenians used to sell their religion for the sake of profit and benefit. Aptin Khanbaghi notes that, according to a decree issued in 1671, Armenians should pay taxes to their churches. (Ghougassian, 1998, p.88). This had also made matters worse for the Armenians. Since there were 71 Armenian churches in Isfahan alone. It seems that Armenians have converted to Islam in order to avoid paying taxes to so many churches. On the other hand, after taking control over Hormuz and signing a peace treaty with the Ottoman Empire, the Safavid shahs had no need to the Papal support.

Furthermore, our results indicate that the missionary activities had positive effects. During the 17th and the 18th centuries the Carmelite missionaries imported a lot of books about linguistics, medicine, math, and history into Safavid territories and translated into Azerbaijani Turkish, Georgian and Armenian languages. They established libraries in Isfahan which currently are possessed by Roman Catholic diocese in Tehran. The debates between the missionaries and Muslim, Armenian, Georgian scholars caused creating different treatises. In addition, the emergence of an Italian printing culture in Isfahan had a great influence on the intellectual exchanges between Europe and the Safavid Empire.

The existence of documents in the European and Iran archives enable further research on this topic. Further research could examine the presence of Augustinian missionaries in Georgia. Do the Georgian archives have the documents proving their presence? Furthermore, the Mandeans were considered as Eastern Christians and they also lived in the Safavid territories. There are some records and correspondences about it in Lisbon Archive. The further study could be carried out on the Mandeans' religious identity and their relations with the Catholic missionaries.

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