

The Role of Priests in France- Safavid Bilateral Affairs

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Abstract: This paper studies briefly the short lived bilateral affairs between sixteenth century France and the Safavid state through religious channels of diplomacy. In this pursuit, Cardinal Richelieu's, Baron L. Deverman's and Pere Pacifique de Valigny's efforts to tackle the obstacles, including the interferences of Ottoman Empire, in sustaining and nurturing this bilateral relationship are discussed. This paper will have a review of Shah Abbas' vital role in creating such a relationship and how in his time, Catholicism bloomed in Safavid State.

[Zieneb Hatamzad. **The Role of Priests in France- Safavid Bilateral Affairs**. *Life Sci J* 2013;10(8s):399-401] (ISSN: 1097-8135). <http://www.lifesciencesite.com>. 65

Keywords: Safavid, Shah Abbas, Catholicism, Cardinal Richelieu, Baron L. Deverman, Pere Pacifique de Valigny, Ottoman

Introduction

The importance of Catholic popes' religious stature among people and their political influence gave them the role of major political players in domestic and international affairs, keeping them aloof from remaining men of God.

Cardinal Richelieu, in an attempt to follow Louis XIII's policies, went to Istanbul and Palestine in 1622. After his journey to Middle East, he decided to dispatch Baron L. Deverman, the skilled politician, to visit Shah Abbas, while he went to Sweden and Denmark to talk about the political and economical affairs so that he could gain an understanding before his journey to the Safavid State.

He returned to France after his successful journey to Sweden and Denmark. Having stayed for a short time in France and gathering his wit on the findings of his last journey, he traveled to the Safavid state. Cardinal Richelieu believed if the Catholic priests had started residing in the Safavid region, people from all the Catholic states in Europe could have considered residing there too. Speculating that they would have settled in the East part of the state, he conjectured that it would have been a good opportunity for French merchants to come to Asia, resolving some of France's economic problems.

Constantinople was chosen as the first official place for both governments to have their meeting. Due to having economical interests and having hostile stand off with the Safavid State, the very idea of such a meeting between a European official and Safavid officials provoked Ottoman authorities to react. Therefore, the Ottoman government prevented Baron L. Deverman from traveling to the Safavid states.

Returning from the region empty handed, Baron L. Deverman, alongside with Cardinal Richelieu, realized that direct political pursuit is

doomed for failure in the region and the only diplomatic channel they could salvage is through dispatching missionaries to the region (Velayati 183-184). Therefore, one of the active priests from the Capuchin cult was chosen. Pere Pacifique de Valigny, being a man of God, was referred as a prudent priest by his brethren and that is why he was chosen by Baron L. Deverman so that the real nature of the apparent religious mission could be kept arcane. Having traveled to Egypt, Damascus, and Middle East in general, and founding Capuchin in Constantinople in 1622, he was familiar with the Ottoman government and their diplomatic attitudes and that was the reason he committed himself in doing this mission in the egoism.

His decision for committing himself to go to this mission brought a number of severe consequences upon himself and the members of his cult. These consequences are political and spiritual; Ottoman, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch and English governments, alongside with Catholic cardinals of different cults were not pleased with the French Capuchins' interference in what they saw as politicization of a religious cult, although Pope Paul V already had ordered Grégoire XV to send some of his men to preach Christianity in Asia on Jan 11, 1623. Pere Pacifique de Valigny in his private itinerary deducted the very fact from the conduct of the Roman Catholic Church acting against its own endorsement in 1626. Later that year Pere Pacifique de Valigny was chosen as the head of religious committee in Duperron settlement, Aleppo so that he could establish Catholic settlements in East of the Mediterranean Sea and in the Safavid region. He then sent two of his brethren to Asia.

When Pere Pacifique de Valigny got to the place where Catholic establishments were supposed to be erected, he earned Morad IV's, the Ottoman

Emperor of the time, support for the Capuchins. Morad ordered the erection of Catholic establishments in Kapar Islands and Aleppo. Observing such enthusiasm from Morad, Pere Pacifique de Valigny sent for two priests of the Capuchins cult, Pere Gabriel de Paris and Pere Juste de Beauvais, while he traveled to Baghdad, a Safavid city in that time. Having been received warmly by the city governor, he left Pere Juste de Beauvais in Baghdad to preach Catholicism, collecting strategic information at the same time. Then, with Pere Gabriel de Paris, he left for Isfahan. When he got to Isfahan, the capital of the Safavid government, the king was in Ghazvin. The quiet and non ceremonial arrival of the French priests, the political and commercial commissioners of the Netherlands and England, and the presence of two representatives of the Spanish religious sects called Carom and Augustine in the city made the religious parties angry.

The real reason behind such coincidental presence of other parties alongside with French religious parties is still a mystery. What could be regarded an educated speculation is that all the parties were eager to know what the French government would have asked Shah Abbas to do for them.

The mysterious characters of French priests, the rivalry among them and their subsequent unfriendly relationship with each other were revealed in the first session of Pere Pacifique de Valigny's dispatched missionary circle in Isfahan. The severity of such a schismatism was revealed blatantly when Pere Pacifique de Valigny's followers, regardless of three existing Christian sects (Augustine, Carom and the Spanish religious sects) preferred to stay with the Armenian Caliph Vartapt Khachatur, asking his counsel in political and spiritual issues.

Of course, later Pere Pacifique and his former followers, Carom and Augustine, went to their abbeys and took part in their religious ceremony, like two old brethren, without any schismatism, since all of them claimed that whether in the East or in the West, they are devoting their efforts, under Papal decrees, for sake of God. However, the followers of Capuchin never sustained any closer relationship with Augustine and Carom other sects in general and the Pope, because of the fights and conflicts between France and Spain and the rivalry between the priests of different sects, failed to establish even a rudimentary form of fraternal relationship between Catholic priests.

As this paper mentioned earlier, Pere Pacifique de Valigny left Pere Gabriel de Paris in Isfahan. Then he went to Ghazvin to visit Shah Abbas. He gave him Anne d'Autriche's offerings, Queen consort of France, alongside with her photo

and offerings of Queen's mother Mary De Medicine. Being an official convey and arbiter of the French government, he explained the policy of France toward the Safavid state briefly in a short speech, delivered in Shah Abbas presence. Shah Abbas, considering initiatives of the French royal court behind this religious mission, provided him two mansions for him in Baghdad and Isfahan so that the Capuchin's establishments could be erected. Furthermore, he accommodated Pere Pacifique de Valigny with two royal offering for the French court so that his goodwill towards them could be materialized in Action.

After establishing the two abbeys in Baghdad and Isfahan, Pere Pacifique de Valigny left Pere Juste and Pere Gabriel in these two cities and returned to France. Ultimately, he visited the king of France so many years after his journey to Safavid State near Alesh, the city surrounded by the French forces, on 1629. At that time, while he finally delivered Shah Abbas' offerings, he was dead and Shah Abbas' son was in the throne.

After Shah Abbas' death, attempts to develop bilateral relations between France and the Safavid government were unsuccessful. French civil war and Cardinal Richelieu's death fueled such frigidity between the two nations. Of course, merchants and priests of the two countries kept traveling, trying to sustain economical and spiritual ties between the two nations and breaking the ice in the diplomatic channels between the two countries.

One of the major attempts to begin a new era in the region was the efforts of some of the French merchants in establishing the French East India Company with the support of the French government. The idea of having such a rivalry with England and the Netherlands did not materialize due to Louis XIV opposition.

Eventually they established the French East India Company in Paris on May 26th 1664. The company included high ranking politicians and merchants. Received warmly by the natives, they established their settlements on Coromandel Coast. By choosing such a place for their settlements, they could utilize land roads of the Safavid Empire as well, sustaining their indirect commercial affairs with such a wealthy and vast empire, alongside with their ties with India and its seaways. A historical evidence for such a tendency to prioritize its relationships with the Safavid Empire over anything else was Louis XIV special envoys to Shah Abbas' palace in Isfahan in 1664.

The commissioners included De la Lain and De la Boluei de Lagos, two aristocrats who had traveled already to the Safavid State alongside with other three merchants called DuPont, Baber and

Mariage. Having reached the city of Yerevan on May 20th 1664, they finally entered Isfahan on July 13th 1664.

On the first days of their arrival, disputes among the group members increased. The two aristocrats considered themselves as the representatives of the royal court of France. They considered the other three as simple mercenaries, since most of the merchants considered themselves as the representatives of French East India Company, whose objective was to have commercial affairs with the empire.

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3/18/2013