



DU MANS, RAPHAEL

DU MANS, FATHER RAPHAEL (b. Jacques Dutertre, Le Mans, France, where he was baptized 27 August 1613 at the cathedral of St.-Julien, d. Isfahan, 1 April 1696), author of important descriptions of Persia. His father was a lawyer attached to the presidial court of Le Mans, a member of the *noblesse de robe* (a hereditary class of magistrates), and a former magistrate of the town. Young Jacques, after apparently having received a good basic education, decided to enter the Capuchin order and made his profession at the monastery of Le Mans on 16 July 1636, adopting the name Raphaël du Mans. He seems to have taken his vows in 1637 and to have been ordained a priest in 1641 or 1642.

In 1645 or 1646 he was sent on his first foreign mission. He stayed first at the Capuchin monastery in Cairo, then, in May 1647, he joined the [French Capuchins](#) at Isfahan, where they had been established since 1038/1628. They were under the supervision of the custody at Aleppo, a dependency of the ecclesiastical province of Touraine. The superior at Isfahan, Ambroise de Preuilly, and the experienced missionary Valentin d'Angers assisted Father Raphaël with their knowledge of the country and its languages and introduced him to their protectors at the Safavid court. At the end of 1649 Father Raphaël himself became superior of the hospice at Isfahan. Until 1655-57 the Capuchins primarily carried out a ministry of preaching and spiritual guidance among the Armenians of the city of Isfahan proper. After Shah 'Abbās II (1052-77/1642-66) transferred all Armenians to the suburb of New Jolfā Father Raphaël intensified his efforts to obtain permission to establish a Capuchin hospice in the heart of the new community, but he was unsuccessful.



Cultivated and gifted at languages, Father Raphaël soon made a number of friends in the literary circles of Isfahan; his library was renowned, and his knowledge of astronomy highly prized. In 1664-65, shortly before his death, Shah 'Abbās himself received him. Father Raphaël enjoyed a long friendship with the court historian Moḥammad-Tāher Waḥīd. From about 1650 until his death he was principal interpreter at the Safavid court, translating the many letters brought by ambassadors and envoys from European states. As a result he was admired, feared, and criticized by those visitors. Reports about him by diplomats and travelers are abundant, for almost all of them had had something to do with him. The pages devoted to him in the works of Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, Jean de Thévenot, Jean Chardin, Petrus Bedik, John Fryer, and Engelbert Kaempfer are well known. Because he was linked with the French religious party, which since 1660 had supported the first failed attempt to establish a company of merchants that would support missions in the east, he had a thankless role to play when envoys, including Protestant merchants, arrived in Isfahan in 1664 to establish the *Compagnie Française des Indes* (see [EAST INDIA COMPANY, THE FRENCH](#)).

The many Capuchin hospices, or convents, in the Near East, Persia, and India played a major role in providing couriers and disseminating news, particularly to India and the Far East. Father Raphaël himself seems to have written many such despatches, and the several dozen of his letters that have been preserved reveal his own immense interest in the “news of the day.” Possessing a lively intelligence, he was able to keep abreast on every topic, owing to his good relations with Armenian notables, certain members of the court, and the agents of the British [East India Company](#) and the Dutch *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (V.O.C.; see [DUTCH-PERSIAN RELATIONS](#)). People eagerly sought his advice, and he gave it generously to the numerous travelers who stayed at the Capuchin hospice in Isfahan. Some, however, received his advice with suspicion, notably during the Turkish siege of Vienna in 1683, when negotiations for an alliance among Poland, the Holy Roman Empire, and Safavid Persia were in progress; they accused him of secretly supporting Louis XIV's unacknowledged policy of pro-Ottoman neutrality.

Father Raphaël was very hostile to the Jesuits and looked with equal disfavor upon the permanent establishment of a Latin Catholic bishopric in Isfahan, an attitude that he made clear during the visit in 1682 of the appointed bishop, Monsignor François Picquet, a former consul in Aleppo. He strongly upheld



the goals of the first Capuchin missionaries in Persia: to maintain the best possible relations with the Safavid court in hopes of achieving some conversions to Roman Catholicism, while at the same time striving for the emancipation of Armenian Christians and their union with the apostolic see at Rome. Father Raphaël seems to have been esteemed by the Armenians of Isfahan and their clergy because of the austere life that he led.

Although he published nothing, he was nevertheless the author of several memoirs of the greatest importance for the history of Safavid Persia. Best known is *L'estat de la Perse en 1660*, probably prepared at the request of his superiors, preserved first in the library of Jean Baptiste Colbert and now in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. Charles Schefer published it with an introduction on the history of relations between Persia and Europe, including the text of a letter from Father Raphaël to the minister of finance, Colbert, in 1670 (Paris, 1890). Chardin had seen a copy of Father Raphaël's memoir on the establishment of the Jesuit mission at Isfahan, written in about 1662; an autograph copy is preserved in the archives of the Missions Étrangères at Paris, and there is an abridged Latin version in the archives of Propaganda Fide at Rome. In another *Estat de la Perse*, datable to about 1665, Father Raphaël described, perhaps for Nicolas de Lalain, the court of 'Abbās II and its institutions; the preserved copy, made by François Pétis de la Croix at Isfahan, is in the Bibliothèque Nationale (ms. no. Fr. 6114). *Réponse de quelques savants de Perse ... sur la magie, etc.*, mentioned by the same Pétis in about 1674, seems to have been lost. The autograph of *De Persia*, written in Latin in 1684 for two members of the Swedish embassy of Ludwich Fabritius, Kaempfer, and his companion Gotfredus Pristaf, is preserved in the Sloane collection at the British Library, London, along with other texts collected by Kaempfer. A Turkish grammar, written for Kaempfer in Father Raphaël's hand, is also preserved at the British Library, and a Turkish dictionary, copied by Balthazar de Lauzières, is in the library of the University of Uppsala. Some memoirs or reports written by Father Raphaël seem to have been incorporated into Tavernier's *Six Voyages*, though the originals are lost. No text in Persian or Turkish has been preserved in his hand, though he was renowned for his perfect knowledge of these languages.

The writings of Father Raphaël merit serious attention. He was both an attentive observer of Persian society in the Safavid capital and a critical and uncompromising moralist. He thus provided an extremely colorful description of the functioning of Safavid institutions, of great value to social historians and



linguists; in particular he transcribed the contemporary Isfahan pronunciation of a very large number of words and expressions, as well as common proverbs. His various memoirs were among the major sources of published travel accounts, notably those of Tavernier, Fryer, Kaempfer, and Chardin; as for de Thévenot, he stayed a long time in the hospice at Isfahan and was an intimate of the Capuchins.

Father Raphaël emerges from these works as an original and attractive personality; his interest in Persian institutions and customs, which impressed both Persian Muslims and European travelers, made him something of the model for the French *pādrī* (< Portuguese *padre*) in the Safavid capital.

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