



FIGUEROA, GARCÍA DE SILVA Y

FIGUEROA, GARCÍA DE SILVA Y, Spanish diplomat and traveler (b. Zafra, Badajoz, December 1550; d. at sea on the return from Persia, 22 July 1624). Figueroa served Philip II during the war in Flanders and subsequently became governor of Badajoz. In 1614 he was sent as Philip III's ambassador to the court of [Shah 'Abbās I](#). However, Figueroa was detained in Goa for three years and did not arrive in Persia until 12 October 1617. He remained there until 1619, dealing with matters related to the conflict between the Safavids and Ottomans and to Portuguese control over Hormuz but without achieving the desired results from Shah 'Abbās. Figueroa then returned to Spain with a collection of rare art objects from places he had visited; their present location is unknown (a new survey of the embassy and the preliminary steps which anticipated it is in C. Alonso, D. *García de Silva y Figueroa: Embajador en Persia*, Badajoz, Spain, 1993; see also L. Gil, *García de Silva y Figueroa: Epistolario diplomático*, Cáceres, Spain, 1989).

Figueroa left an account of his mission to Persia entitled *Totius legationis suae et Indicarum rerum Persidisque commentarii*, the manuscript of which is preserved at the National Library in Madrid. This memoir, which had been written down by a secretary of the embassy, was corrected according to notes provided by the ambassador and translated into French by Abraham de Wicqfort (*L'ambassade de d. Garcias de Silva Figveroa en Perse contenant la politique de ce grand Empire les moeurs du Roy Schah Abbas, & une relation*



exacte de tous les lieux de Perse & des Indes, ou cét ambassadeur a esté l'espace de huit années qu'il y a demeuré, Paris, 1667). It was also edited by the Sociedad de Bibliófilos Españoles (*Comentarios de D. Garcia de Silva y Figueroa de la embajada que de parte del rey de España Don Felipe III hizo al Rey Xa Abas de Persia*, Madrid, 1903). This work contains a great deal of geographical, ethnographical, and historical information. Figueroa carefully described places he visited such as Lār, Shiraz, Kāšān, Qazvīn, and [Qom](#), some minor sites, and the caravansaries at which he stayed. He also gave interesting ethnographical data on the non-Muslim communities, such as the Armenians in Jolfā. In particular, he reported on the Zoroastrians, notably on their language and religion with particular reference to their funeral practices. Most important are the reports he provides concerning Shah 'Abbās and his court. He visited [Isfahan](#) during the period the Masjed-e Šāh was under construction. Figueroa also gave a very precise description of [Persepolis](#) (which he called Chilminara, i.e., Čehel Menāra) and made a copy of its cuneiform inscriptions which has unfortunately been lost. Although Antonio de Gouvea (1602) and Giambattista and Girolamo Vecchietti (1606) had already recognized cuneiform as a type of writing, Figueroa was the first person to describe the cuneiform characters as shaped like “pyramids” and “obelisks,” thus anticipating [Pietro Della Valle](#).

In addition, Figueroa wrote an account of Tīmūr (Tamerlane) which, drawing on Persian authors such as K̄vāndamīr, described in detail the battle of Ankara between Tīmūr and Bāyazīd (part. ed. as “Noticias del Gran Tamurlan sacadas del libro V de los comentarios mss. de don Garcia de Silva” in *Historia del Gran Tamorlán y enarración del Viage, y relación de la embaxada que Ruy González de Clavijo le hizo poi mandado del muy poderoso señor Henrique el Tercero de Castilla*, ed. E. Llaguno y Amirola, Madrid, 1782, pp. 221-48). The text is full of geographical references which show the author's profound understanding of this material.

Figueroa is also the author of a letter about Persia addressed to the Marquese Bedmar (*Garciae Silva Figueroa de Rebus Persarum epistola v. Kal. an. M.DC.XIX Spahani exarat ad Marchionem Bedmarii*, Antwerp, 1620, tr. as *A Letter from Don García Silva Figueroa Ambassador from Philip the Third King of Spaine, to the Persian, Written at Spahan, or Hispahan Anno 1619 to the Marquese Bedmar Touching Matters of Persia*, in S. Purchas, *Pilgrimes IX*, London, 1625, pp. 1533-35).



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