



## FRANCE II. RELATIONS WITH PERSIA TO 1789

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*The Pre-Safavid period.* In the early Middle Ages, Persia was perceived by the French mostly through biblical, Greek, and Latin sources. During the Crusades (q.v.), which were sanctioned by the papacy and launched by the Franks, all Muslim countries, including Persia, were considered enemies of Christianity. The Mongol invasions, despite their calamitous effects, permitted the renewal of contacts between East and West, with France playing a leading part. Europe's foremost motivation was to Christianize the Mongols, as it had earlier barbarian invaders. Dominican and Franciscan missionaries were sent to Ilkhanid Persia. Missions and ecclesiastical sees were established at Solţānīya, Marāġa, Tabrīz, and Tiflis. The decline of Solţānīya was followed by the rise of Naġjavān, which remained an archbishopric until 1745. France also hoped to create an alliance with the Mongols to the rear and flank of the Turkish and Mamluk Muslim powers.

The majority of the letters exchanged between the Mongols and the Papacy, and with Western Christian sovereigns, contained demands for submission. Eljigidei (q.v.), a Mongol chief in Armenia and Persia, initiated diplomatic overtures in 1248 which were wrongly interpreted as an offer of alliance by



Louis IX (Saint Louis). As a result, the Dominican André de Longjumeau, who had already brought a letter by Pope Innocent IV to Tabrīz in 1246, was sent by the French king to the Great Khan Güyük (q.v.), but he died before André and his companions reached the Mongol court. The regent, Güyük's widow, dismissed André with gifts and a presumptuous letter to Saint Louis, who nonetheless dispatched the Franciscan William of Rubruck on a proselytizing mission to Sartāq b. Batū Khan in Crimea. William and his companions were sent to Batū Khan and to the Great Khan Möngke in Mongolia. Möngke's letter, remitted to William (1254), again insisted upon submission (J. Richard, 1970, p. 202).

The contacts between the Mongols and the Christian world continued, notably through the Franks and the king of Armenia, Het'um I. Although the Franks of Acre favored a rapprochement with the Mamluks, they sent the Dominican David d'Ashby to the Il-khan Hūlāgū in 1260. Hūlāgū's letter to Saint Louis (Marāḡa, 10 April 1262) combined the usual ultimatum with a proposed alliance (Meyvaert, pp. 249-50). It recalled the Il-khan's intention to restore Jerusalem to the Pope, and asked Saint Louis to cooperate with his fleet against Egypt. The letter was conveyed by John the Hungarian with credentials to Saint Louis and not to Pope Urban IV. Saint Louis cautiously disregarded Hūlāgū's proposals and sent John the Hungarian to the Pope, who encouraged Hūlāgū to become a Christian (J. Richard, 1979, p. 299). Hūlāgū proposed a perpetua confederacio to the Pope and the European kings. His successor, Abaqa (q.v.), sent a letter in Mongolian to Rome that could not be translated (1266-67). In another letter of 1268 (Tisserand, pp. 547-56), he proposed cooperation with the Crusaders but this was not put into effect for several distinct reasons as well the fact that he was then attacked in Khorasan (J. Richard, 1997, p. 63; Jackson, p. 62). Abaqa's son, Arḡūn Khan (q.v.) sent an embassy to Pope Honorius IV in 1285 and a second one in 1287. The latter embassy was headed by the Nestorian prelate Rabbān Ṣawma, who returned the next year with letters from Pope Nicholas IV, Edward I of England, and Philip IV the Fair (Philippe le Bel) of France (Boyle, in *Camb. Hist. Iran V*, pp. 370-71; Budge, pp. 165-97). This resulted in Arḡūn's plan for a concerted campaign which was brought to Philip the Fair in 1289 (Mostaert and Cleaves, p. 18) and to Edward I a year later by the Genoese merchant Buscarello de Ghizolfi (q.v.), the most active diplomatic agent of the Il-khans. The proposed date of the campaign, 1291, coincided with the fall of Acre and Arḡūn's death. While Edward I and the Pope were planning another Crusade, the Il-khanid throne was occupied by petty rulers, Gaykātū, followed by Bāydū (qq.v.).



Converted to Islam, the next Il-khan, Ġāzān (q.v.) maintained contacts with the Pope (1301) and with Edward I (1303) through diplomatic missions by Buscarello. Ġāzān kept Hūlāgū's promise to return Jerusalem to the Franks in exchange for their help against the Mamluks. But the Mamluks' victories over the Franks and Ġāzān in 1303 put an end to this tentative cooperation. Öljeitü (Ūljāytū) pursued Ġāzān's projects. In April 1305, he wrote letters to Philip the Fair (Mostaert and Cleaves, pp. 56-57), the Pope, and Edward I. His proposals for a joint campaign against the Mamluks were taken seriously by European powers. While the preparations for a Crusade dragged on, he launched the last unsuccessful Il-khanid campaign against the Mamluks (1312-13). This policy was at last reversed when his son and successor, Abū Sa'īd (q.v.) signed the Treaty of Aleppo (1322) with the Mamluks.

While cooperation against the Turks was thus temporarily set aside, Christian missionary activity, diplomacy, commerce and travel continued. After his victory over the Ottomans at Ankara (1402), Tamerlane (Tīmūr) sent Johannes, Archbishop of Solṭānīya to Venice, Genoa, Paris, and London. In his letters to Henry IV of England and Charles VI of France, he proposed treaties granting reciprocal privileges for merchants, although the authenticity of the letter from Tamerlane, now at the Bibliothèque nationale, has recently been questioned (Soudavar, pp. 256-60). However, a genuine document may have existed and there were favorable answers from Henry IV and Charles VI, but these were not followed by any concrete action. However, Henri III of Castile and Leon sent Ruy González de Clavijo (q.v.) to Tamerlane, the only positive result of his embassy being his famous travelogue. The growing power of the Ottomans alarmed the European powers, particularly the Venetians, who tried vainly to join forces with Uzun Ḥasan of the Aq Qoyunlu (q.v.) against them. Other European powers, including France, were at the time not involved with Persia.

The Safavid period. The advent of Shah Esmā'īl (q.v.) in 1501 coincided with crucial world events that induced the Portuguese expansion in the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf. To further his aims, the shah sought, vainly as it turned out, to establish a precarious alliance against the Ottomans with the Portuguese, the Emperor Charles V, and King Ludvig II of Hungary. Whereas other European governments repeatedly insisted on their avowed desire to cooperate with Persia against the Ottomans, France remained aloof and Franco-Persian relations were hampered by the policy of capitulations, based on the treaty of 1536 between Francis I and Solaymān the Magnificent. French



alliance with Turkey was also designed to curtail Charles V's power. When Solaymān I invaded north-west Persia and took Tabrīz in 1547, he was accompanied by the French ambassador to the Porte, Gabriel de Luetz, Seigneur d'Aramon, whose advice enabled the Ottomans to force the Persians to surrender the citadel of Van (Chesneau, pp. 84-88). When the capitulations were renewed in May 1604, the French ambassador to the Porte, Savary de Brèves, wrote a memoir on how an alliance with Persia would be detrimental to Franco-Ottoman relations. Thus the Turkish alliance prevented Henri IV to respond to the overtures made towards him by Shah 'Abbās I through envoys and correspondence (La Perse et la France, document no. 8, "Lettre adressée à Henri IV par Chah Abbas I").

The first attempt to establish direct Franco-Persian relations was made under Louis XIII. A mission was solicited by the merchants of Marseille, although potential hostility from the Ottomans made them also somewhat nervous of direct transactions with Persia. Louis Deshayes de Courmenin, who had already served in missions to the Orient, was issued with instructions on 18 February 1626 to proceed to Constantinople, where the French ambassador de Césy was to inform the Porte that Louis XIII was sending a minister to Persia only in order to disrupt the friendly relations between Persia and a powerful Spain (suzerain of Portugal, 1580-1640). With the approval of de Césy and the Ottomans, Deshayes was to proceed to the Safavid court and convince Shah 'Abbās of Louis XIII's willingness to mediate between the Ottomans and Persia. The shah was to grant France exclusive rights of protecting the Catholic residents in Persia, facilities for establishing catholic missions, and privileges for French merchants, notably the monopoly of commerce through the Levant route. This difficult mission was rendered impossible by the Ottoman grand vizier and de Césy's opposition (La Perse et la France, document no. 10, summary of "Relation du sieur Deshayes en Levant," and no. 11, Letter from Deshayes reporting on the difficulties he had encountered in his mission).

Whereas Catholic missionaries settled in Persia were mostly Portuguese Augustinians, or Spanish or Italian Carmelites (q.v.), Richelieu and Father Joseph de Paris (F. Richard 1995, I, pp. 16-17) sent two French Capuchins (q.v.), fathers Gabriel de Paris and Pacifique de Provins to Persia where they arrived towards the end of 1628. Although the Capuchins had no official political status, Shah 'Abbās sent Father Pacifique back to France to negotiate various projects, including the purchase of a printing press, but these were abandoned after the shah's death. Pacifique's negotiations and Gabriel's activities at



Isfahan resulted, however, in the establishment of the Capuchins in Persia. Through their intimate knowledge of Persian culture, French missionaries played an important part as informants for travelers, merchants, and diplomats. The most significant of the missionaries in this period was the Capuchin Raphaël du Mans, who resided in Isfahan from 1647 until his death in 1696. The prominent role he played as an informant to Colbert, Louis XIV's famous minister, and as a translator and negotiator for the establishment of the *Compagnie Française des Indes* (see [EAST INDIA COMPANY \[THE FRENCH\]](#)) in Persia could not, however, save this mismanaged venture from failure. The creation in Paris of the *Société des Missions Étrangères*, increased missionary and related activities. A former French consul at Aleppo, François Picquet, who became a priest and the bishop of Babylon (Baghdad), was appointed to organize the bishopric of Isfahan. He submitted his credentials and Louis XIV's presents to Shah Solaymān (1682). He was joined by two young priests of the *Missions Étrangères*, Jean-Baptiste Roch and François Sanson. At a time when Turco-Persian relations were tense, Picquet and his companions settled in Hamadān and were joined by a Theatine monk (later Mgr.) Louis-Marie Pidou de Saint Olon. After Picquet's death (1685), Sanson, helped by another priest (and later Abbé) Martin Gaudereau, continued negotiations which resulted in the issue of a royal letter allowing the establishing of missions at New Julfa and Hamadān in 1692. Sanson brought the letter to Louis XIV at Versailles (1693). Msgr. Pidou, Picquet's successor as Louis XIV's representative and as Bishop of Babylon, was officially consecrated at Isfahan in May 1694. He disagreed with the daring proposals of Gaudereau who, after an attack on Bandar Kong by Arabs from Muscat (1695), continued to press for French intervention in the Persian Gulf. Other French missionaries later also believed that the seizure of Muscat by Louis XIV would ensure their security.

The War of the Spanish Succession (1701-14) and the projects to overthrow Muscat's naval power overshadowed Franco-Persian relations which were renewed through the semi-official mission of Jean Billon de Canserilles, an enterprising merchant of Marseille, to the Safavid court in 1700. Billon recommended trade to Marseille via the Levant route. He was soon followed by Jean-Baptiste Fabre, a native of Marseille, whose mission of 1705 ended abruptly with his death at Erevan on 17th August 1706. The mission was taken over for a time by his adventurous mistress Marie Petit (Lockhart, in *Camb. Hist. Iran VI*, pp. 405-6; *La Perse et la France*, documents nos. 75-77). Another native of Marseille, Pierre-Victor Michel, was then sent by the Marquis de Ferriol, the French ambassador to the Porte, as a replacement (*La Perse et la*



France, document. no. 72 “Mémoire du sieur Michel sur son voyage en Perse”). After dealing with Marie Petit’s withdrawal and in spite of opposition from the English and Dutch East India Companies, Michel managed to obtain from Shah Solṭān Ḥosayn a treaty of capitulation in 1708 (ibid, document no. 73, “Lettre de Michel,” and no. 74, “Mémoire de Chah Kouli Khan,” on the details of the negotiations). This first official treaty between France and Persia, worked out by Michel and the mostáawfi-e kāṣṣa, *granted protection rights to the Christian missions and facilities for trade. Monetary clauses and an additional letter promising the dispatch of French warships to fight the Omanis* were most advantageous for Persia. War in France and travel difficulties twice delayed the presentation of the ratified treaty at Isfahan by Mgr. Galliczon (1712) and Mgr. Pidou. Irritated by the proselytizing activities of the missionaries, the Armenian clergy had obtained the cancellation of their privileges which had to be therefore re-negotiated.

Despite renewed privileges granted to Saint-Malo merchants, no French ship appeared in the Persian Gulf and the Persian government began to doubt the authenticity of the letters remitted by missionaries in Louis XIV’s name. Moḥammad-Rezā Beg, the kalāntar (*mayor*) of Erevan, was sent on embassy to France. The French ambassador to the Porte, *des Alleurs*, assisted by his dragoman Etienne Padery, managed to send this unruly and temperamental envoy to Marseille (October 1714). He reached Paris in February 1715 after giving much trouble to his escort, François Pidou de Saint-Olon, Mgr. Pidou’s brother; and his interpreters, Padery and Gaudereau (La Perse et la France, documents nos. 89-100 describing the multifarious aspects of the envoy’s journey and reception). The Persian envoy was received with great pomp and ceremony at Versailles by Louis XIV on 19 February 1715 and negotiations began. Although Michel’s treaty of 1708 was still upheld in theory, the new treaty of 13 August 1715 modified it considerably by including more favorable provisions for French trade (Hurewitz, I, pp. 56-58). However, with the fall of the Safavid dynasty shortly afterwards in 1722, the advantages were not enforced and there was no increase in French trade with Persia (Savory, pp. 123-24). Muscat was not officially mentioned, although the envoy was much encouraged by Padery, Richard and Gaudereau’s talk of a possible French intervention. Moḥammad-Rezā’s mission was marked throughout by lavish extravagance at the expense of the French government. He was soon dispatched through Russia to Erevan, where he committed suicide (Herbette, pp. 61-113).



The fall of the Safavids and its aftermath. Louis XIV's death (1715), shortly after the Persian embassy's reception, coincided with the decline of the Safavids. Once again, France tried to further its political and commercial links with Persia through the enforcement of the renewed treaty. While Billon kept trying to obtain an official mission, Richard's mission to the Persian court (1717), commissioned by the Pope, was a failure. The creation of the second *Compagnie des Indes* (1719-69) again privileged the Ocean route. Two consuls were sent as its representatives: the Chevalier Ange de Gardane, Seigneur de Sainte-Croix, accompanied by his brother François to Isfahan, and the Chevalier Padery to Shiraz. Both of them obtained vast company premises which were to prove useless. Gardane was the mainstay of French diplomacy in Persia, where he remained with his brother till 1730. Padery, theoretically Gardane's subordinate, had been instructed to negotiate directly with the shah on Muscat (*La Perse et la France*, document no. 106). He squabbled constantly with Gardane who finally managed to obtain his dismissal (August 1721). Regardless of this Padery continued the negotiations and, shortly before the Afghan invasion, obtained from the shah the ratification of the Treaty of 1715 and the promise to send a Persian ambassador to France. He also tried in vain to foster the French Company's interests at Bandar-e 'Abbās and Surat, returning to France in 1724 (*La Perse et la France*, documents nos. 105-9).

French endeavors to establish relations with Persia remained cautious and limited. However, France played an important part in post-Safavid external policies through Marquis de Bonnac, its ambassador to the Porte (Lockhart, 1938, pp. 11-12, 76-77) who was an active mediator between Russia, Turkey and Persia. The scientist Tourtehot Granger and the orientalist Jean Otter were among his informants on Nāder Shah's reign. The Capuchins, however, as Christian missionaries, were opposed to Otter's lay mission, which turned out to be a failure (Gharavi, p. 37). In 1751, the physician and naturalist Simon de Vierville was sent to Persia, with the pretext of a scientific mission, to report on the political and economical conditions there. On his way to Persia, he openly converted to Islam (as Moḥammad-Rezā Ḥakīm), although the genuineness of his conversion remains debatable. He served as a physician to the Ottoman governor at Dīārbakr, before going to Isfahan, where he became (at the end of 1754) personal physician to Āzād Khan Afġān (q.v.). He followed the latter who was defeated by Moḥammad Ḥasan Khan Qājār in Azarbaijan (1757). The last trace of him is a letter of his written near Marāġa on 1 May 1757, and his end remains mysterious (Gharavi, p. 72). He collected Oriental manuscripts, and gathered scientific and political information which he sent



to Constantinople and to France from Aleppo, Dīārbakr, Baghdad, Isfahan (Gharavi, pp. 38-73).

France had not completely relinquished her commercial involvement in the Persian Gulf. Through Claude Pyrault and his successor Jean-François-Xavier Rousseau, French consuls in Baghdad, contacts were established at Shiraz with Karīm Khan Zand who, in 1770, ceded to the French Kārg Island, which had been abandoned by the Dutch in 1766 (Perry, pp. 268-70). This cession did not, however, interest the French government. A journey to Persia by de Ferrières-Sauvebšuf in 1784 had no political result. Two eminent naturalists, Guillaume-Antoine Olivier and Jean-Guillaume Bruguières, who had been commissioned by the French republic to arrange a Turco-Persian alliance against Russia, reported and described the dire and volatile conditions of Persia during their stay in 1796 (Amini, p. 31). French observers traveling through the Middle East and the Persian Gulf at this period were carefully watched by the British (Lorimer, *Gazetteer* I/1, pp. 154-55).

Cultural links between France and Persia, although gradually developing throughout this period, suffered at times because of ruptures in diplomatic and commercial relations. In the Safavid period and its aftermath, Franco-Persian relations remained mostly under the control of the French minister to the Porte. The internal economic and religious situation in both realms and rivalry between merchants, diplomats and missionaries (variously commissioned), hampered many projects. The persistent intricate connections between diplomatic and missionary activities remained a major drawback. After the reign of Louis XIV, France's dwindling interest in Persian affairs in general (despite her presence in the Persian Gulf) was reflected in her modest role in Persia's foreign relations.

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