



JULFA II. THE 18TH AND THE 19TH CENTURY

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The Afghan occupation of Isfahan between 1722 and 1729 struck a most devastating blow to the Armenians of New Julfa. Although New Julfa, unlike the nearby Muslim villages, was spared total destruction and massive killings of its population, the Afghans looted the town, subjugated and harassed its citizens, and imposed exorbitant taxes and fines. The Afghan leader Maḥmud Ġilzāi (see [GILZI](#)) levied an indemnity of 70,000 tomans on New Julfa. The community immediately paid 17,000 tomans and issued a promissory note for the remainder, but nonetheless four prominent Armenians, including the mayor Xač'ik, were beheaded and the outstanding balance of 53,000 tomans was collected by force (Gilanents, pp. 35-36; see [GILANENTZ CHRONICLE](#)). The community was also forced to supply the Afghan army with, among other things, 5,000 long satin coats and sufficient material for 8,000 long coats (*čukā*; cf. Yusofi, p. 858b; Gilanents, pp. 38-39). But most tragically, the Afghans abducted 62 Armenian girls (Krusiński, p. 222). After this most grievous blow to the community, hundreds of families abandoned their homes and secretly fled under the darkness of night to Iraq, India, Russia, and Europe (Tēr-Yovhaneanc', I, p. 293).



Nāder Shah Afšār was even more brutal than Maḥmud Ġilzāi (Juḷayec'i, p. 272). During the first years of his reign Nāder Shah levied on New Julfa an annual minimum tax of 10,000 tomans, the base amount of which was steadily increased, as well as arbitrary fines and other extra charges payable to tax collectors or other officials (Juḷayec'i, p. 272; *Nor tetrak*, p. 191). The Armenians repeatedly submitted costly petitions to the shah and secured favorable decrees, 19 of which have been preserved in the archives of All Savior's Monastery (*Diwan*, pp. 117-18). However, the situation hardly improved. In 1745, Nāder Shah imposed on New Julfa a fine of 60,500 tomans, collecting 23,500 tomans from the 10 merchant families who had remained in New Julfa and 37,000 tomans from the community at large (Tēr-Yovhaneanc', I, pp. 250-51). The following year eight merchants were burned at the stake in the main square of Isfahan, and among the executed men were the two prominent Julfan Armenians Āqā Emniaz Minasean and Āqā Yarut'iwn Šahrimaneanc' (Juḷayec'i, p. 269; Tēr-Yovhaneanc', I, pp. 256-57).

After the assassination of Nāder Shah in 1747, the population of Persia suffered 15 years of civil war, and the political instability was accompanied by famine. In 1758, more than 500 Armenians starved to death in New Julfa alone (Juḷayec'i, pp. 276-315; Tēr-Yovhaneanc', pp. 279-92). Isfahan turned into a battleground for the warring leaders 'Ādel Shah Afšār (d. 1747), Ebrāhim Shah Afšār (d. 1749, see [AFSHARIDS](#)), Mir Ḥasan Khan, Abu'l Faṭḥ Khan Baktiāri (d. 1750), 'Ali-Mardān Khan Baktiāri, Karim Khan Zand (1705-79), Āzād Khan Afgān (d. 1781), and Moḥammad-Ḥasan Khan Qājār (d. 1759). All of them captured the former Safavid capital at one time or another, though some managed to hold it for a few months only. New Julfa was routinely pillaged, and 'Ali-Mardān Khan, Āzād Khan and Moḥammad-Ḥasan Khan subjected the Armenian community to particularly high taxes. The primate of New Julfa, Bishop Mkrtič' (1769-87), reported how the community scrambled to meet the stipulated tax payments (Step'anos, pp. 126-61; Tēr-Yovhaneanc', I, pp. 279-92). In 1753, All Savior's Monastery was forced to sell Armenian manuscripts, printed books, and archival documents to the spice sellers and gunpowder makers of Isfahan at a price of 1 toman per 100 kg paper to help raising 6,000 tomans for Āzād Khan; the precise reconstruction of this loss is unfortunately impossible. In 1756, in order to collect 8,000 tomans for Moḥammad-Ḥasan Khan, many houses and church property were sold for a fraction of their value, and most of the sacred gold and silver vessels, chalices, crosses, candle holders, Bible covers, and other ornaments were melted down to bullion.



In 1763 Karim Khan Zand had finally succeeded in defeating his rivals and established himself as the ruler of most of Persia, while the blinded Šāhroḡ (d. 1796), one of the grandsons of Nāder Shah, formally remained in control of Khorasan. Karim Khan did not assume the title *shah*, preferring the titel *wakil* (lit. “regent, deputy”), and after more than 40 years of oppression, his rule was a fortunate respite for New Julfa. Karim Khan treated the Armenian community fairly well and tried to encourage the return of expatriate Julfan merchants to restore the Armenian trade activities in Persia. In 1771, he ordered New Julfa’s mayor Sargis to travel abroad in order to promise Julfan merchants security, protection, and civil freedom, if they were to return to their old hometown. But the Julfan merchants of Basra rebuffed Sargis, since they no longer saw any future for themselves in Persia. Having failed in his mission, Sargis returned empty-handed to the Zand court in Shiraz (Tēr-Yovhaneanc’, I, p. 312).

The archives of All Savior’s Monastery have preserved a few letters from the 1750s, and they document the plight of the expatriate Julfans in Iraq and India. The Julfan Armenians were desperate to unite their families in safety, even resorting to the services of Baktiāri tribesmen to smuggle their loved ones out of Persia. A 1770s census, conducted by the primate of New Julfa, counted only 1,517 Armenian clergymen and laymen. According to a 1789 census, Armenians owned only 360 houses in New Julfa, while more than 150 houses had become Muslim properties and the remaining buildings were vacant or in ruins. These figures suggest that in the 1780s New Julfa had already lost more than 80 percent of its original population (Tēr-Yovhaneanc’, I, pp. 295-303, 315, 352-62).

After the death of Karim Khan Zand, various Turkmen factions engaged anew in a ferocious power struggle, and from 1779 until 1794 the population of New Julfa suffered through another period of destitution and oppression (Tēr-Yovhaneanc’, I, pp. 320-77). Moḡammad Khan Qājār finally succeeded in eliminating all his serious rivals, including the last ruler of the Zand dynasty Loft-‘Ali Khan (d. 1794) and united Persia under his rule. His reign created the foundations for the stability of Persia during the Qājār period (Fasā’i; cf. Baibourtian, 2005, pp. 397-406).

The chaotic situation of the 18th century had created a leadership vacuum in the Armenian community, which suffered an economic, a social, and a cultural crisis. All upper and middle class Armenians, such as merchants, craftsmen, or artists, had fled Persia, taking their moveable wealth with them. Only lower



class Armenians, such as stonecutters, shoemakers, candlemakers, blacksmiths, carpenters, winemakers, and poor laborers remained in New Julfa, as is documented by the epigraphic evidence of the 19th-century tombstones on the cemetery. The school in All Savior's Monastery was closed, and only a few monks lived in the monastery's religious order. With the exodus of the wealthy Armenians, the arts and crafts had lost their patrons, and book production, as well as the pursuit of painting and architecture, came to a halt. An early 1990s survey of Armenian manuscripts around the world lists 680 extant manuscripts from New Julfa's workshops: 590 manuscripts were produced during the Safavid period, and the 90 manuscripts from the 18th and 19th centuries are of poor quality and rarely illustrated (Minasean, 1991, pp. 77-121).

By the early 19th century, when the Qajars had at last succeeded in establishing relative stability and security, the larger part of the first settlement of the Julfan merchants between the right bank of the Zāyandarud and Nazar Avenue lay in ruins. From its 25 churches built in the 17th century, 12 had been destroyed (Tēr-Yovhaneanc', II, pp. 277-82). The community was dependent on the financial assistance of expatriate Julfans living in India, Java, and Russia (Goroyanc', pp. 266-67). The catholicoi of the Holy See of Ējmiacin had to rely on non-Julfan clergy to fill the See of New Julfa. According to a census conducted in 1851, the Armenian community of New Julfa comprised only 2,614 souls, residing in 371 homes in 8 quarters: Mec Mēydan, P'ok'r Mēydan, Č'arsu, Yakobjan, Łaragel, K'oč'er, Tabriz, and Erevan (Karapetian, p. 49; cf. [Figure 3](#)).

During the reign of [Fath-'Ali Shah](#) (r. 1797-1834), Moḥammad Shah (r. 1834-48), and Nāṣer-al-Din Shah (r. 1848-96), the Armenians of New Julfa were treated fairly. The annual tax burden was limited to 1,000-1,100 tomans, and the Julfan Armenians were protected against harassment by oppressive and unruly officials, as well as transgressions caused by any anti-Christian bias in the Muslim population (Tēr-Yovhaneanc', I, pp. 397, 413-23, 472-74). The Qajar court as well as the prominent Shi'ite clerics recognized the primate of New Julfa as the head of the Armenian community in religious and administrative matters (Tēr-Yovhaneanc', II, p. 92). Consequently, the office of the mayor (*kalāntar*) lost its importance, and the primate assumed many of the mayor's responsibilities. Between 1830 and 1890 five eminent archbishops served as the primate of New Julfa: Yovhannēs Bagrevandac'i (1832-36), Yovhannēs Sureneanc' (1842-48), T'adēos Begnazarean (1851-63), Movsēs Małak'eanc'



(1864-71), and Grigoris Yovhannisean (1872-88). They gradually restored the authority of the church, reorganized and revived the community, and maintained good relations with the Qajar court.

In 1832 Fath-‘Ali Shah ordered the governor of Isfahan to protect the Armenian community, to refer their internal civil disputes to the Armenian church leaders, and to exempt the All Savior’s Monastery from taxes. Archbishop Sureneanc’ successfully petitioned the Qajar court to restore to the Armenian church the properties seized in Gask, one of New Julfa’s quarters, and in 1844 Moḥammad Shah acknowledged in a decree the Armenian church as the properties’ lawful owner. Because of the efforts of Archbishop Begnazarean, Nāṣer-al-Din Shah issued in 1858 a decree that ensured the autonomy of the Armenian community with regard to all matters of inheritance law, so that the so-called Law of Imam Ja’far (see i, above) did not pose any longer a threat to the property of Armenian families. In 1861 the primate received the Star of the Lion and the Sun (see [DECORATION](#)) from the shah. During the tenure of Archbishop Yovhannisean, Nāṣer-al-Din Shah ordered an annual subsidy of 100 tomans for St. Catherine’s Nunnery and for the newly built Central School in 1880 and 1882, respectively (*Diwan*, pp. 120-23; cf. Bournoutian, 2005, p. 56).

In the late 18th and early 19th century, the small Armenian community in India became interested in the ideas of the European Enlightenment and European nationalism (see v, below). The community was led by a group of expatriate Julfan merchants, and they began to support educational and cultural endeavors. They established several printing houses to promote literacy and the spread of knowledge, and among their publications was the first Armenian journal *Azadarar*, which appeared in 1794 in Madras. In 1821, the Armenian College and Philanthropic Academy (*Hayoc’ mardasirakan čëmaran*; see the school’s website: <http://www.armeniancollege.org/cms/index.php>) was founded in Calcutta, and generations of students, many of whom were from Armenian communities in Iran, graduated from this school. The Armenian community in India also provided the financial support for the opening of Armenian schools in Paris, Venice, and New Julfa (Seth; Irazek; cf. Ghougassian, 1999).

It was the first sign of New Julfa’s revival that in 1834 the Samean Trading house of Madras, India, financed the foundation of a school for boys at St. Stephen’s Church. Its curriculum covered Armenian grammar, arithmetic, geography, penmanship, Persian, and English. The next two schools for boys



were sponsored by the Abgarean family from India and by Margar Suk'iasean from Java in 1843 and 1853, respectively. The former was established at the Church of the Holy Mother of God (PLATE VIII), and the latter was opened at the Church of St. Minas. Admission was free, and the boys were provided with textbooks and other school supplies (Tēr-Yovhaneanc', II, pp. 255-60). Manuk Yordananean from Java was responsible for the foundation of the first school for girls, which opened in 1858 and was housed in a building next to St. Catherine's Nunnery. In 1878 Archbishop Yovhannisean visited the Armenian communities of India, Burma, and Java to raise funds for the construction of the Armenian Central School of New Julfa. The new school building opened in 1880, and the three schools for boys were united under its roof. The Central School absorbed St. Catherine's school for girls in 1892, and its name was changed to Armenian School for Boys and Girls. The widow of Gevorg Kananean from Moscow sponsored in 1903 the opening of a kindergarten and an elementary school for girls (Minasean, 1999, pp. 94-95; Martirosyan, p. 242).

In 1843 Archbishop Sureneanc' undertook the first collection of all Armenian manuscripts and imprints, scattered in the many corners of All Savior's Monastery, in order to compile a library catalogue. In 1846 the already mentioned Manuk Yordananean donated a modern printing press to All Savior's Monastery so that after a hiatus of about 150 years the Armenian press of New Julfa could resume its work. But for technical reasons this new machine could not be operated for more than 25 years, and only in 1872 did the publication of Armenian imprints begin. Over the next three decades more than 150 titles appeared, ranging from religious books, calendars, and yearbooks to reports and textbooks, and in 1880-81 the press published the monumental history of New Julfa by Yarut'iwn Tēr-Yovhaneanc' (1828-71). In 1904, The Tumanian Trading house of Baku gifted a new printing press, which remained in use until 1972. *Nor ĵulayi Lraber* (News journal of New Julfa) became in 1904 the first biweekly Armenian magazine to be published in New Julfa (Minasean, 1972, pp. 82-105). T'adēos Yarut'iwnian, the son of New Julfa's historiographer Tēr-Yovhaneanc', sponsored in 1905 the construction of a library so that All Savior's Monastery could house its collection of several hundred manuscripts and a few thousand imprints in its own building.

At the beginning of the 20th century, New Julfa's Armenian population had significantly increased to 3,367 souls, living in 711 families, and there was again a sufficiently educated generation of young Armenians (Minasean, 1999, p. 135). The community was wealthy enough to have its own schools, as well as



a vocational school, a library, a printing press, and a newspaper, and to maintain a medical center and an orphanage. The Armenians also supported various social, charitable, educational, cultural, theatrical, and athletic associations and programs.

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