



JULFA V. ARMENIANS IN INDIA

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New Julfa was important for the Armenian communities in India, although the presence of Armenians on the subcontinent predates the foundation of New Julfa in 1605. In the 17th century, Julfan merchants expanded their trade network in South Asia, and at the beginning of the 18th century the Primate of New Julfa had jurisdiction over the Armenian congregations in India and Java.

There is little evidence to indicate Armenian settlements on the subcontinent prior to the 16th century. The earliest extant source for Armenian travelers is an itinerary (Kévonian) which suggests that Armenians were already in the first quarter of the 12th century familiar with the distant lands of India, the neighboring islands of the Malay Archipelago, and the Indian Ocean. By the early 16th century, Armenian merchants begin to figure in European sources as those who used the island of [Hormuz](#) in the mouth of the Persian Gulf for their transit trade with Cambay and Diu, located on the western coast in Gujarat, and further south to Goa (for the ambiguous use of the term “Armenian,” see Bhattacharya, p. 291, n. 56). The first reliable references are found in Portuguese sources from the first quarter of the 16th century (Gulbenkian). Armenian merchants who lived in Pulikat, in the kingdom of Vijayanagar in south India, were the first to lead Portuguese traders to a church with the tomb of the apostle St. Thomas, in the small town of Mylapur, later renamed San Thomé, on the outskirts of Madras (Chinapatam). François



Martin (1636-1706), who in 1674 founded Pondichéry (Puducherry), the future capital of the French colony in west Bengal, mentioned in his memoirs that Armenians had built this church because they visited the town on account of both trade and their pious devotion to the saint (Martin, 1931, I, pp. 335-36; for French India, see Manning).

The Mughal emperor [Akbar I](#) (r. 1556-1605) invited Armenian merchants to settle in his capital city [Agra](#), where the first Armenian church was built in 1562 (Khojamalyan, fols. 89b-90b; cf. Seth, p. 2; Poladian). In the *Ā'in-e Akbari*, the concluding section of the *Akbar-nāma* by [Abu'l-Faẓl 'Allāmi](#) (1551-1602), and in the *Jahāngir-nāma* by Akbar's son and successor [Jahāngir](#) (r. 1605-27), prominent Armenians at Akbar's court are mentioned by name, in particular 'Abd-al-Ḥayy and Eskandar (Bhattacharya, p. 293, nn. 66-67). Mirzā Du'l-Qarnayn, a son of Eskandar, was raised in Akbar's harem and became a high-ranking Mughal official (*manṣabdār/mansabdār*), who was appointed governor of [Bengal](#) and overseer of the salt works at Sambhar Lake (Hosten; cf. Bhattacharya, pp. 291-93). The important commercial port of Surat, located in Gujarat, the northern part of India's western coast, also attracted Armenian merchants since the late 16th century (Seth, pp. 225-26), as did Lahore, where Akbar had moved his capital in 1585.

The Armenian migration accelerated after the foundation of New Julfa in 1605 (see i, above). By mid-century, Julfan merchants were visiting and residing in Hugli (Hooghly), Patna (see ['AẒIMĀBĀD](#)), and Calcutta in northern India, as well as in [Hyderabad](#), Golconda, and Masulipatam (Machili Bandar) in the south. In Calcutta's Holy Church of Nazareth, which was erected in 1724 on an Armenian cemetery, the oldest tombstone is dated 1630. This evidence suggests that Armenians had settled near Calcutta at least 50 years before the British East India Company established its first factory (that is, fortified trading station) in 1690 (for a dissenting view, see Bhattacharya, p. 292, n. 62). The most notable Julfan settlement in Bengal was Chinsura (Chuncura; in Julfan documents as Chichra), a small town north of Calcutta, near the thriving port of Hugli. Its Armenian presence dates from the 1640s (Seth, p. 304; cf. Aslanian, p. 389, n. 28), and in 1695 a Julfan merchant generously financed the construction of the Church of Saint John the Baptist (Aslanian, 2008, p. 389). Chinsura declined after 1720, when most of the important merchants moved to Calcutta (*ibid.*, p. 403).

In the course of the 17th century, the See of New Julfa established its jurisdiction over the Armenian congregations in India (see i, above). The



primate systematically appointed Julfan priests to the diocese's churches in India to maintain the ethno-religious identity of these communities and to collect taxes and donations from wealthy merchants more effectively. Primate Movsēs ĵulayec'i (1706-1725) officially brought the Armenian congregations in India and Java under the jurisdiction of the diocese of New Julfa (Ghougassian, 1998, p. 122). After 1724, the senior priest of the Holy Church of Nazareth in Calcutta had jurisdiction over the churches of Chinsura, Saidabad (Sa'idābād), and Jahangir Nagar (Dhaka; see Tēr-Yovhaneanc', I, p. 419; Khach'ikyan, 1988, p. 53). By 1793, the senior priest of the church of Surat was responsible for the Armenian priests in Bombay, Shahjahanabad (Old Dehli), Awrangabad, and Hyderabad, while the senior priest in Madras had authority over the priests in Masulipatam in Andhra Pradesh, Negapatam (Nagapattinam) in Tamil Nadu, Pegu in Myanmar, and Batavia.

An additional incentive for Armenian settlements in India was an Armenian agreement with the British East India Company (Aslanian, 2004, p. 50; Bhattacharya, pp. 300-301; for the agreement's full text, see Ferrier, 1971). The agreement was signed in London, on 22 June 1688, and a Julfan merchant, resident in London at the time, signed the treaty on behalf of the "Armenian Nation." Competing with the Portuguese and the French, the British wanted to boost the Armenian presence in India, and the agreement accorded special trading privileges to the Armenians, as well as equal rights with British subjects regarding the freedom of residence, travel, religion, and unrestricted access to civil offices.

There were Julfan communities in Bombay, Shahjahanabad, Awrangabad, and Lahore. But Armenians also lived in Portuguese Goa and French Pondichéry near Madras and French Chandernagor (Chandannagar) near Calcutta. The most important Armenian settlement was in Madras, where in the first half of the 18th century the Armenians were well integrated into the British colonial administration. Julfan merchants had settled in Madras as early as in 1666 (see ii, above). Its Armenian church dates from 1712, and in 1772 the first building was replaced by another building (Seth, p. 580). The first Armenian press in India was opened in Madras, and *Nor tetrak or koč'i yordorak* (1772), a legal treatise drafting a republican constitution for a future Armenian state, was its first publication. Between 1794 and 1796, the press also published *Azadarar*, the first Armenian journal.



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