

Jesuit Presence in Safavid Persia (1501–1736) and at the Court of جلال الدين أكبر Jalāl Al-Dīn, Akbar, the Great (r. 1556–1605): (Failed) Dialogs and Conversions Centered on Knowledge

Dr. Joseph Abraham Levi 雷祖善博士

George Washington University, Washington, DC, USA¹
University of Macau, Macau, MSAR, China²

Abstract: Using as a springboard the networks of knowledge propelled and stimulated by the Society of Jesus during the 16th-18th centuries, either under (or following along the footsteps of) the Iberian Crowns or following the directives of the Church, in this work I will explore some of the attempts at establishing a dialog and an exchange of ideals/ideologies aimed at converting the “other” in Safavid Persia and on Mughal soil during and beyond the reign of جلال الدين أكبر Jalāl al-Dīn Akbar the Great (r. 1556-1605).

In other words, I will analyze how Jesuit missionaries, on the one hand, and Safavids/Mughals (be they members of the clergy or lay members of society), on the other hand, were able to establish, or perhaps failed at establishing a dialog and converse mainly about scientific and philosophical matters, thus being able to persuade the listeners of the superiority of their own (religious and cultural) message. Accomodatio (Accommodation), arrogance, humbleness, perseverance, and nobility were some of the themes that at times motivated both sides in order to persuade the “other,” i.e., the adversary.

Keywords: Accomodatio, Jesuits, knowledge, missionaries, Mughal, Safavid, Truth

Seek knowledge even if you have to go to China³

طلب العلم حتى إذا كان لديك للذهاب إلى الصين

I

In 1517, Franciscans friars founded a convent in Goa. Twenty-one years later, in 1538, the Archbishopric of Goa was created. Yet, until the arrival of Francisco Xavier, S.J. (1506-1552) and other Jesuits who accompanied him in 1542, the Franciscans stationed in Goa mainly took care of the spiritual needs of the

¹ Visiting Scholar, Language Center, George Washington University, Washington, DC, USA.

² Collegiate Visiting Scholar in Residence, Moon Chun Memorial College, University of Macau, Macao Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China (MSAR).

³ حديث *Hadīth* attributed to Prophet Muhammad. Even though its authenticity has been questioned by many scholars, this *hadīth* (tradition, narrative, and guide) has always been used to encourage believers to seek knowledge and wisdom, at all costs; hence, the metaphor of going to China in order to obtain this goal. Joseph Abraham Levi. “Beyond Invasion: the Bāb باب in the Dār دار, or rather, the Door in the Land. Islam as the Door to the Portuguese Age of Discoveries.” *International Journal of Arts and Social Science* 3 4 (July-August 2020): 403-430. 414.

Europeans living in Portuguese India (1505-1961). In other words, converting the local population was not a priority.

The Archbishopric of Goa had two suffragan⁴ sees, namely, one in Kochi and one in Malacca. Two years later, in 1560, the Portuguese Inquisition was established in Goa (1560-1774; 1777-1812).

Unlike the Franciscans, the Jesuits were deeply committed to converting the indigenous populations living in the Portuguese and Spanish empires. Learning and mastering fluency in the major languages spoken in these lands was instrumental for understanding the “other” and, eventually, begin the conversion process to Catholicism and, whenever possible, Europeanize the autochthonous population.

The approach to evangelization used by the Jesuits in the Americas, India, China, and Japan was known as *accommodatio*. In other words, their aim was to accommodate (on the surface and not dogmatically) Christianity (i.e., Catholicism) to the cultural, political, and social values of the local, autochthonous population so that the latter could better understand their message and eventually convert to Catholicism. This approach was later adopted by other religious orders operating in the Portuguese and Spanish empires. *Accommodatio* meant cultural syncretism, provided that the latter did not compromise the Catholic dogma. Hence, *accommodatio* did not mean religious syncretism.

Indeed, this approach was used by the Jesuits in the Americas and in Portuguese India: from the Cape of Good Hope to Nagasaki, including Hormuz, India, the Moluccas, and Macau. Verily, the ultimate goal was to convert the local ruler since by doing so his subjects more likely would be prone to listen to the “good news” brought by the missionaries and eventually convert to Catholicism. However, this approach did not work on Muslim soil. Alas, in this case the Jesuits chose a harsher, a more belligerent, and oftentimes a more aggressive method.

The study of the indigenous languages, the publication of dictionaries, word lists, and grammars of the local languages—as in the case of Francisco Xavier, S.J., Matteo Ricci, S.J., (1552-1610), Michele Ruggieri, S.J., (1543-1607), Alessandro Valignano, S.J., (1539-1606), Roberto De Nobili, S.J., (1577-1656), and Francisco Varo, O.P., (1627-1687),⁵—contributed to an exponential increase of converts to Catholicism in Asia:

Before 1542 few Portuguese priest in Asia showed much interest in their surroundings, but the Jesuits and other religious now learned Asian languages and made some study of Asian beliefs and doctrines. In some places, they tried to convert the ruler, thinking if he were won his subjects

⁴ In the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England, a suffragan see is subordinate to a metropolitan or an archiepiscopal see.

⁵ Joseph Abraham Levi. “The Ricci-Ruggieri *Dicionário Europeu-Chinês*: Linguistic and Philological Notes on Some Portuguese and Italian Entries,” in *Studies in Chinese and Sino-Tibetan Linguistics: Dialect, Phonology, Transcription and Text* 漢語與漢藏語研究：方言、音韻與文獻. Eds. Richard VanNess Simmons, and Newell Ann Van Auken. Taipei: Academia Sinica, 2014. 343-366; Joseph Abraham Levi. “Métodos Missionários a Confronto: Os sucessos do Padre António Vieira, S.J., (1608-1697) e do Padre Roberto De Nobili, S.J., (1577-1656). Afinidades/Divergências Continentais,” in *Pescadores de Almas. Jesuítas no Ocidente e Oriente*. Eds. Maria Cristina Bohn Martins, and Leny Caselli Anzai. São Leopoldo, RS: Editora Unionsions, 2012. [2013]. 227-242; Joseph Abraham Levi. “Visione storica della popolazione indù al tempo di Roberto De Nobili, S. J., (1577-1656), sulla Costa del Malabar e sulla Costa dei Pescatori,” in *Il bramino romano. Una storia di straordinaria fede ed abnegazione nell’India del milleseicento. Quadro storico, culturale e religioso a cura di Maria de Deus Beites Manso, Ph.D. e Joseph Abraham Levi, Ph.D.* Giovanni Battista Crispolti, Joseph Abraham Levi, and Maria de Deus Beites Manso. Terni: Kion, 2011. 161-248; Joseph Abraham Levi. “Padre António Vieira,” in *Dictionary of Literary Biography. Portuguese and Brazilian Literature*. Monica Rector, and Fred Clark, eds. 2 vols. Brucoli Clark Layman. Detroit: Gale Thomson, 2004. volume 2. *Brazilian Literature*. 2: 385-396; Joseph Abraham Levi. “Sino-Lusitanian Religious Contacts and Scholarly Rewards: Father Matteo Ricci, S.J., (1552-1610), and the *Dicionário Português-Chinês*, (c. 1583-1588). The First European-Chinese Dictionary.” *Portuguese Studies Review* 9 1-2 (2001): 334-371; Joseph Abraham Levi. *O Dicionário Português-Chinês de Padre Matteo Ricci, S.J. (1552-1610). Uma abordagem histórico-linguística*. New Orleans: UP of the South, 1998.

would follow him, or concentrated on members of the influential Hindu priestly caste [as in the case of India]. Elsewhere they laboured among humble people.⁶

II

In 1528, from Goa, the Portuguese settled in Saptagram (West Bengal, India) and surrounding areas (today Chittagong, Bangladesh), in the Bay of Bengal, in order to expand their trade in the area and beyond. Indeed, it did not take long for the Portuguese to create in this area a thriving trading post that was connected to the rest of the Portuguese Empire, then still in-the-making. The first European enclave in this part of the world had a customs house and a trading post called *Porto Grande de Bengala* (Big Port of Bengal). In just a few years, this trading post became a very profitable center attracting people and trade, including the Jesuits who founded two churches and one mission center.

Yet, the Portuguese *capitão-mor* (head chief) of Saptagram, Pedro⁷ Tavares, had his eyes set on Hugli, by the River Hogli, not far from Kolkata. During this time, Hugli was the major port of the Mughal Empire (1526-1857).

Hence, negotiations began between Pedro Tavares⁸ and Akbar the Great (r. 1556-1605) so that the latter could allow the Portuguese to settle and trade with the local population as well as the merchants hailing from Southeast Asia and beyond:

Na altura em que Aquebar conquistou Bengala, eram os portugueses desta costa comandados por Pero Tavares. Tão bem se insinuou no ânimo do Mogor que chegou a visitar a própria corte imperial, acompanhado da sua mulher. Foi bem sucedido, ao expor os seus desejos. Ambicionavam os portugueses um porto livre, na costa de Bengala, onde pudessem residir e reger-se pelas suas leis. Ouviu Aquebar, condescendentemente, Pero Tavares e deu-lhe a necessária licença. E assim nasceu Ugulim, cidade portuguesa que, amontoando riquezas sobre riquezas, deveria mais tarde atrair a inveja dos descendentes do mesmo Aquebar.⁹

In 1576, most of this area was under the control of Akbar the Great. Using as a springboard the friendly relationship that he had with Akbar, Pedro Tavares was able to receive from him the following favorable conditions for the Portuguese merchants residing in the area, namely:

[...] a fundação duma cidade em Bengala em sítio à escolha, com porto franco, com possibilidade de praticarem a sua religião em plena liberdade,

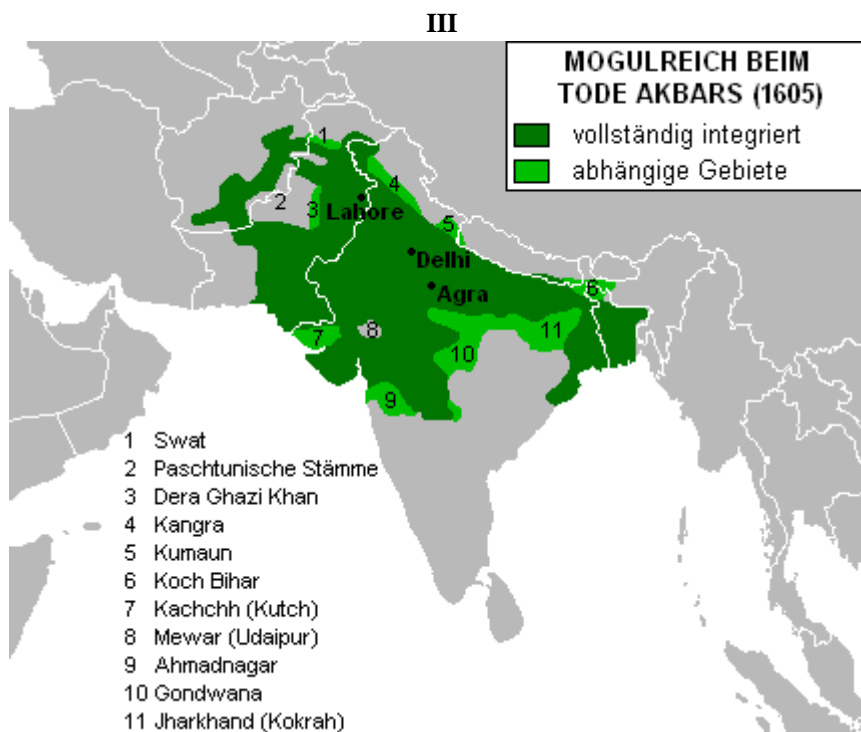
⁶ I. A. Macgregor. "Europe and the East," ed. G.V. Scammell, in *The New Cambridge Modern History*. Ed. G. R. Elton, 2nd ed. vol. 2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. 2: 656–682. 2: 676.

⁷ Pêro in the original documents.

⁸ "Cópia de um capítulo de uma carta do Pedro Tavares, Capitão-mor de Satagão nos Reinos de Bengala, que escreveu da Corte do Grão-Mogor ao Padre Provincial da Companhia de Jesus da Índia," in *Livro em que se escrevem as coisas notáveis que nas cartas da Índia, Japão e China. 1570/1582*. Lisbon: Armário Jesuítico e Cartório dos Jesuítas. Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo.

⁹ António da Silva Rego. "A primeira missão religiosa ao Grão-Mogol." *Lusitania Sacra* 4 (1959): 155-185. 160. [When Akbar conquered Bengal, the Portuguese who were stationed along this coast were under the leadership of Pero Tavares. The latter was so successful at captivating Akbar that he was able to visit Akbar's imperial court. Akbar was accompanied by his wife. Pero Tavares was very successful at explaining his wishes. Indeed, the Portuguese longed for a port along the Bengal coast, where they could trade freely as well as live and be governed by their own laws. Akbar listened carefully to Pero Tavares and gave him permission to do as he had asked. This is how Hugli was born: it was a Portuguese town which, by becoming so wealthy, was later envied by Akbar's descendants]. [translated by the author of this article].

podendo até converter os que desejassem abraçá-la [...] A nova cidade pagaria um pequeno tributo ao império mogol. Foi esta a origem de Ugulim, em 1579-1580 que durou até 1632, ano em que foi arrasada por ordem do imperador mogol Kurrão [Khurram, r. 1592-1666], filho de Jehanguir [Jahangir, r. 1569-1627] e neto de Aquebar.¹⁰



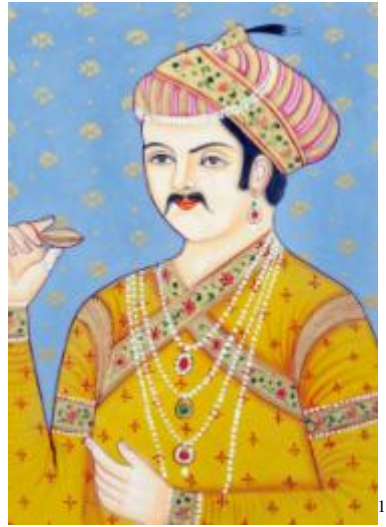
The Mughal Empire at the death of Akbar in 1605¹¹

Jesuit presence in the Mughal Empire was the result of a direct invitation from Akbar, the Great, or rather, جلال الدين محمد أكبر Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Akbar (r. 1556-1605), sent on September 1579 to the Jesuits stationed in Goa.¹² Indeed, Akbar was truly interested in learning more about this new religion that the Jesuits were bringing to his empire.

¹⁰ António da Silva Rego. “A primeira missão religiosa ao Grão-Mogol.” *Lusitania Sacra* 4 (1959): 155-185. 164. [...] [the foundation of a city in Bengal in a place of your choice, with a port where you can establish free trade, with the authorization to practice your religion in complete freedom, including [the right] to convert to your religion whomever wished do so [...] This new city would pay a small tribute to the Mughal Empire. This was the origin of Hugli, in 1579-1580, that lasted until 1632, year in which it was destroyed by order of the Mughal emperor Khurram [r. 1592-1666], son of Jehangir [r. 1569-1627] and grandson of Akbar]. [translated by the author of this article].

¹¹ Jungpionier. “Ausdehnung des Mogulreiches beim Tode Akbars (1605).” Kartenvorlage: Image:BlankMap-World-large.png. Grenzen eingezeichnet nach der Karte Indien unter dem Mogulkaiser Akbar in Johnson, Gordon: Weltatlas der alten Kulturen. Indien. Monaco: Christian Verlag, 1995 April 17, 2017. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Mogulreich_Akbar.png>. [image in the public domain].

¹² “Akbar’s Letter of Invitation,” in John Correia-Afonso. *Letters from the Mughal Court*. Mumbai: Heras Institute of Indian History and Culture, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, Anand, 1980.



جلال الدين اكبر Akbar, The Great

Besides being illiterate (due to an acute case of dyslexia), Akbar was by nature a “very curious” person and was always “surrounded by learned men whom” he asked that they talked “about different topics and that they tell him different stories.”¹⁴

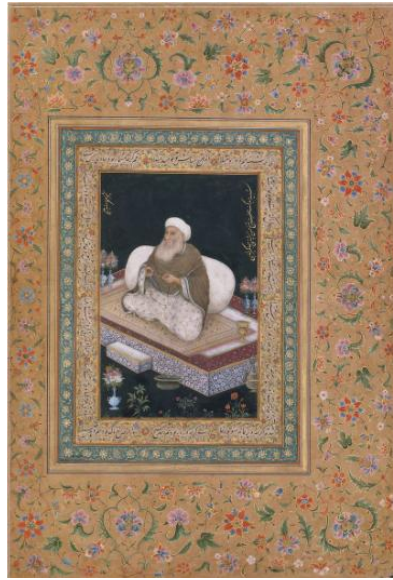
But who were these learned men? They were Sunnis, Shi‘iis, Sufis, Jews, heterodox Christians, Hindus, and Zoroastrians who would periodically answer to the many questions about philosophy and religion that Akbar posed during their daily conversations. Indeed, Akbar was an avid seeker of knowledge, truth, and science. It is no surprise then that the libraries in his empire contained almost twenty-five thousand volumes written in Arabic, Farsi, Greek, Hindi, Kashmiri, Latin, Pahlavi, Sanskrit, and Urdu.

For instance, since his early teens, Akbar showed a great interest in Shaikh Chishtī Mu‘īn al-Dīn Ḥasan Sijzī, known in Urdu as مُعِينُ الدِّينِ چِشْتِي Mu‘īn-al-Dīn Chishtī (1143-1236)—a famous ascetic, mystic, and Sufi philosopher of the چِشْتِي Chishtī Sufi Order—who was very revered in India, in present-day Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan.¹⁵ چِشْتِي Chishtī is a small town not very far from Herat, in present-day Afghanistan, where, given its geographical position, people hailing from present-day Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan met and interacted with one another in complete harmony and respect.

¹³ “Miniature painting of Mughul Emperor Akbar, India, Asia.” *Getty Images*. <<https://www.gettyimages.pt/detail/foto/miniature-painting-of-mughul-emperor-akbar-india-imagem-royalty-free/520894968?adppopup=true>>. [image in the public domain].

¹⁴ Joseph Wicki. *Documenta Indica*. Vol. 12 (1580-1583). Rome: Monumenta Historica Societatis Jesu, 1972. 666-667.

¹⁵ K. A. Nizami. “Čištī,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam. Second Edition. Online*. Eds. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs. Amsterdam: Brill, 2021. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_1623>.



معين الدين چشتی Chishtī Mu‘īn al-Dīn Ḥasan Sijzī (1143-1236) ¹⁶

Akbar’s Sufi-like take on spiritual life and, more so, on how Sufis looked at human behavior here on Earth also worked as the foundation of his political stance, commonly referred to *صلح کُل Sulḥ-i-Kul*, or rather, “peace for all.” In other words, tolerance and living together in peace were Akbar’s pillars when it came to cultures and civilizations of the people living in his vast empire. This included visitors and traders hailing from different parts of the then-known world who either lived there or who were there temporarily, regardless of their faith, as in the case of the Jesuits.

IV

The Portuguese, who came initially for trade, did not focus much on conversion till 1540s and the few missionaries who accompanied the Portuguese sailors and mariners confined their activities mostly to the spiritual care of the Lusitanians.¹⁷

Even before he concluded his degree in Philosophy at the *Collegio Romano* in Rome and received a degree in Theology from the *Collegium Germanicum et Hunagaricum* in Rome, Father Rodolfo Acquaviva, S.J., (1550-1583), hailing from the Abruzzi, present-day Italy, decided that he wanted to serve as a Jesuit missionary overseas. Indeed, he was sent to Lisbon where he was ordained. Father Acquaviva was accompanied by Father Nicola Spinola S.J.,¹⁸ from Genoa, Father Pietro Berno, S.J., (1552-1583), from Switzerland,¹⁹ and Father Michele Ruggieri, S.J., (1543-1607), from Puglia, present-day Italy. On March 12, 1578, Father Acquaviva finally left for Goa where he taught Philosophy at the College of São Paulo while also studying Farsi.

On December 13, 1579, Father Antoni de Montserrat, S.J., (1536-1600), from Catalonia, and the lay brother Francisco Henriques—“a Persian convert,” who learned Portuguese in Hormuz and “who was an

¹⁶ ““Portrait of Shaikh Mu ‘in al-Din Hasan Chishti,” Folio from Shah Jahan Album.” *Met Museum*. <<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/451272>>. [image in the public domain].

¹⁷ Pius Malekandathil, “Akbar, the Portuguese, and the Politics of Religious Dialogue,” in *The Mughals, the Portuguese, and the Indian Ocean: Changing Imageries of Maritime India*. New Delhi: Primus Books, 2013. 13-38. 14.

¹⁸ Joseph Wicki. *Documenta Indica*. Vol. 12 (1580-1583). Rome: Monumenta Historica Societatis Jesu, 1972. 14; Joseph Wicki. *Documenta Indica*. Vol. 13 (1583-1585). Rome: Monumenta Historica Societatis Jesu, 1975. 517-525.

¹⁹ J. Velinkar. “Berno, Pietro,” in *Diccionario histórico de la Compañía de Jesús. I . AA – Costa Rica*. Rome: Institutum Historicum S.J., 2001. 1. 421.

interpreter”²⁰ left for Fatehpur Sikri, capital of the Mughal Empire between 1571-1585, in order to meet with the Ambassador sent by Akbar as well as many learned men, philosophers, jurists, Tibetan tantric Buddhists, heterodox Christians, Orthodox Christians, Hindus, Jainists, and Muslims (Sunnis, Shi’iis, and Sufis).

Born in Barcelona, Father Antoni de Montserrat studied in Barcelona and Portugal (Coimbra and Lisbon). In 1558, Father Montserrat joined the Society of Jesus and in 1574 he was sent to Goa. From Goa Father Montserrat was then sent to other parts of Asia, as in the case of the Arabian Peninsula (including present-day Yemen) and Central Asia. In 1579, he was asked to join the Jesuits at the court of Akbar the Great.

V

As the famous Portuguese historian António da Silva Rego (1905-1986) keenly observed, historically and culturally the first Catholic mission to the court of Akbar the Great was extremely important:

[...] pois permitiu ao Cristianismo [entenda-se, o Catolicismo] instalar-se na corte do maior potentado da Ásia, rasgando novas rotas ao intercâmbio cultural entre os povos. É curioso salientar-se que a ideia não partiu de qualquer entidade cristã [entenda-se, católica], de Lisboa ou de Roma, por exemplo, mas sim do próprio Aquebar — o Grão-Mogol. E, o que mais intriga, é que o seu convite foi recebido em Goa com alguma suspeita [...].²¹

On February 18, 1580, Father Rodolfo Acquaviva, S.J., Father Antoni de Montserrat, S.J.,²² and the lay brother Francisco Henriques arrived at the capital of the Mughal Empire. As in the rest of the Catholic missions in Asia—which boasted highly hierarchical societies—in the Mughal Empire the Jesuits had as their main goal the conversion of the local leaders, including the emperor. Indeed, the Jesuits believed that by doing so they would have easy access to the masses since the commoners followed along the footsteps of their leaders, usually for selfish reasons.

Akbar readily allowed the construction of a church and mission station in Agra. Interestingly enough, this church was the first Catholic church on Mughal soil. Indeed, Akbar had a strong desire to learn more about the religious message that the Jesuits were spreading in Asia. The interest in sacred icons was the springboard to show Akbar a seven-volume, polyglot edition of the Bible, with many illustrations,²³ printed in Antwerp:

A 3 de Março [de 1580], véspera da chegada do P.^o Monserrate, foram os padres oferecer a Aquebar uma magnífica bíblia quadrilíngue, em 7 tomos. Estimou o presente, colocando cada volume em cima da cabeça, em sinal de respeito. Perguntou em qual deles se encontravam os Evangelhos e a ele mostrou mais amor e veneração.²⁴

²⁰ “Antonio de Montserrat, SJ.” *Jesuitas México*. November 5, 2018. <<https://jesuitasmexico.org/blog/2018/11/05/antonio-de-montserrat-sj/>>.

²¹ António da Silva Rego. “A primeira missão religiosa ao Grão-Mogol.” *Lusitania Sacra* 4 (1959): 155-185. 156. [...] [indeed, it made it possible for Christianity [i.e., Catholicism] to be at the court of the most powerful person in Asia, thus opening new roads for the cultural interchange among people. It is strange to point out that the idea did not originate from a Christian [i.e., Catholic] from Lisbon or Rome, for instance, but rather, it came from Akbar himself—The Great Mughal. And, what it is even more puzzling is the fact that Akbar’s invitation was received in Goa with some suspicion [...]. [translated by the author of this article].

²² Antonio de Montserrat. *Embajador en la corte del Gran Mogol. Viajes de un jesuita catalán del siglo XVI por la India, Pakistán, Afganistán y el Himalaya (primera edición)*. Ed. and Trans. Josep Lluís Alay. Leiden: Milenio Publicaciones, 2006.

²³ Myron J. Pereira. “When Emperor Akbar Encouraged Christian Art.” *Union of Catholic Asian News* August 22, 2020. <<https://www.ucanews.com/news/when-emperor-akbar-encouraged-christian-art/89234#>>.

²⁴ António da Silva Rego. “A primeira missão religiosa ao Grão-Mogol.” *Lusitania Sacra* 4 (1959): 155-185. 169; António da Silva Rego. *Documentação para a História das Missões do Padroado Português no Oriente*. 12

Furthermore, among the presents there were: (i.) a Byzantine image of Mary “[...] commonly known as [Mary of] St. Lucas, painted by Brother Manuel Godinho,” (ii.) as well as another image of Our Lady, “brought from Rome by Father Martim da Silva,”²⁵ (iii.) and an image of Jesus Christ.

These sacred images whet Akbar’s spiritual appetite since he was very attracted by Shiite religious images. Indeed, contrary to the Sunnis, Shi’a Islam does not ban images of the Prophet as well as visual renderings of pious men and women, provided that their faces are obfuscated or completely covered by a white veil.²⁶

VI

Interestingly enough, Akbar’s positive predisposition gave hope to the Jesuits. Indeed, Akbar “was particularly fond of religious disputes; hence, right from the start he encouraged the Jesuits to engage in religious debates with the Muslim علماء ‘ulamā’.”²⁷

Soon after this, Akbar readily appointed a multiethnic and multi-religious team of scribes to translate the New Testament and, once again, renewed his authorization to the Jesuits to evangelize in his kingdom.²⁸

Additionally, one of his sons, Prince مُراد میرزا Murād Mirza (1570-1599), was entrusted to Father Antoni de Montserrat, S.J., and Father Rodolfo Acquaviva, S.J. so that they could teach him the tenets of Christianity (i.e., Catholicism).²⁹

In fact, French missionary Pierre de Jarric, S.J., (1566-1617) stated that Akbar was ready to abandon Islam.³⁰

As for Prince Murād Mirza, he was already taking classes from Muslim scholars (Sunnis, Shi’ii, and Sufis), Hindus, and the Third Dalai Lama, the Tibetan Sönam Gyatso (1543-1588), the future 朵儿只唱 Duō Er Zhǐ Chàng.³¹

VII

vols. Lisbon: Agência Geral do Ultramar, 1958. 657; 680. [...] [On March 3 [1580], the day before the arrival of Father Montserrat, the Jesuit fathers offered Akbar a magnificent, seven-volume, four-language Bible. Akbar really enjoyed the gift. Indeed, he placed each volume on his head, as a sign of respect. He asked which of the volumes contained the Gospels and [once he knew which one contained the Gospels] he showed more love and adoration]. [translated by the author of this article].

²⁵ António da Silva Rego. “A primeira missão religiosa ao Grão-Mogol.” *Lusitania Sacra* 4 (1959): 155-185. 169. [translated from the original Portuguese by the author of this article].

²⁶ Joseph Abraham Levi. “Imagens da Arte Caligráfica Islâmica do Magreb ao Brasil. Da Tristeza à Esperança do Paraíso,” in *Difusão da Fé por entre povos e lugares: Instituições, religião e religiosidade no Império Português (século XVI-XIX)*. Eds. Grayce Mayre Bonfim Souza, and Maria de Deus Beites Manso. Bahia: Ed. UESB, 2020. 107-137.

²⁷ “Acquaviva [sic], Rodolfo.” *Dicionário dos Italianos estantes em Portugal*. Lisbon: Cátedras de Estudos Sefarditas. Universidade de Lisboa. <<https://www.catedra-alberto-benveniste.org/dic-italianos.asp?id=378>>. [translated from the original Portuguese by the author of this article].

²⁸ Óscar Rodolfo Gómez Martínez. *Tantrism in the Society of Jesus – From Tibet to the Vatican [sic] Today*. Buenos Aires: Editorial MenteClara, 2013. 58.

²⁹ Pierre Du Jarric. *Akbar and the Jesuits*. Trans. Christopher Harrison Payne. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1926; Will Durant e Ariel Durant. *Our Oriental Heritage: The Story of Civilization*. Riverside: Simon and Schuster, 2011: “Antoni de Montserrat: En la última frontera.” *Sociedad Geográfica Española*. <<https://web.archive.org/web/20151126074311/http://www.sge.org/sociedad-geografica-espanola/publicaciones/boletines/numeros-publicados/boletin-no43/antoni-de-montserrat-en-la-ultima-frontera.html>>.

³⁰ Pierre de Jarric. *Histoire des choses plus mémorable advenues tant ez Indes Orientales, que autres païs de la descouuerte des Portugais*. 3 vols. Bordeaux: Millanges, 1608-1614.

³¹ Sönam Gyatsho. *Essence of Refined Gold: By the Third Dalai Lama; with Related Texts by the Second and Seventh Dalai Lamas*. Trans. Glenn H. Mullin. Dharamsala: Tushita Books, 1978.

Gil Eanes Pereira, also known as Julião Pereira, Chaplin in Kochi, was the “first Christian who had a private conversation with the Mughal emperor in Fathpur Sikri.”³² Indeed, it is known that:

Gil Eanes Pereira fora chamado à corte de Akbar por Isma‘il Quli Khan («Ismael Colicão»), irmão do governador da província, Husain Quli Beg (ou Husain Quli Khann, o «Canaião» de Gil, corruptela do título *Khan-i Jahan*). Para obsequiar o imperador, foi-lhe pedido que levasse «algum livro nosso». O padre escolheu «hum *Vita Christi*, do tamanho de hum missal, com todos os paços, desde a encarnação ate a ascensão, iluminados, que lhe [a Isma‘il Quli Khan] amostrei com muito acatamento, e em todos os paços pos a mão e beijou, e pos na cabeça». Iniciava-se aqui a complexa relação de Akbar com o cristianismo, os seus símbolos, os seus textos e as suas imagens.³³

Using as a springboard Akbar’s dislike for corrupt Muslim clerics whom he considered devoid of any spirituality and who only followed a ritual, Father Gil Eanes Pereira, whose church and mission were in Bengal, exposed all the:

[...] falsidades do Islamismo e falou ao imperador sobre os missionários jesuítas do Colégio de S. Paulo em Goa.” Isto, juntamente com o sempre crescente desejo do monarca de encontrar uma religião mais espiritual, “deverá ter motivado o interesse do imperador sobre o Cristianismo.”³⁴

However, Akbar’s questions were too complex for a poorly trained priest to answer. Hence, since Father Gil Eanes Pereira was not able to address all the philosophical and dogmatic questions that Akbar had posed, he suggested that the Emperor invite the Jesuits of “São Paulo” since in his opinion they would have the intellectual capacity as well as the philosophical and religious training to answer to all the questions and doubts about Catholicism and Catholic dogma.³⁵

Consequently, Akbar’s ambassador, عبد الله Abd Allāh, asked the Viceroy of Portuguese India, Luís de Ataíde (r. 1568-1571; r. 1578-1580)—3rd Count of Atouguia and Marquee of Santarém, (1516-1581)—permission to send the Jesuits so that they could meet with him and talk about religion and Christian tenets.

VIII

³² Jorge Flores. *Nas Margens do Hindustão. O Estado da Índia e a expansão mogul ca. 1570-1640*. Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade de Coimbra, 2015. 117. [translated from the original Portuguese by the author of this article].

³³ Jorge Flores. *Nas Margens do Hindustão. O Estado da Índia e a expansão mogul ca. 1570-1640*. Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade de Coimbra, 2015. 118. [Gil Eanes Pereira was called at the court of Akbar by Isma‘il Quli Khan, brother of the governor of the province, Husain Quli Beg (or Husain Quli Khann, “Gil’s “Canaião,” Portuguese rendering of the title Khan-i Jahan). In order to please the emperor, they asked him to bring “some of our books.” The father chose “the Life of Christ,” the size of a mass book, with all the passages, from incarnation to the ascension of Christ, illuminated, that I showed him [to Isma‘il Quli Khan] with reverence. And on all the passages he put his hand over them, he kissed them, and put them on his head.” Thus began the complex relationship between Akbar and Christianity, its symbols, its texts, and its images]. [translated by the author of this article].

³⁴ Rui Oliveira Lopes. “Arte e Alteridade. Confluências da Arte Cristã na Índia, na China e no Japão, séc. XVI a XVIII.” PhD. Diss. Lisbon: Universidade de Lisboa, 2011. 220. [...] [lies of Islam and talked to the Emperor about the Jesuit missionaries at the College of Saint Paul in Goa. This, coupled with the emperor’s ever-growing desire to find a religion that was more spiritual, “must have motivated the Emperor’s interest in Christianity”]. [translated by the author of this article].

³⁵ António da Silva Rego. “A primeira missão religiosa ao Grão-Mogol.” *Lusitania Sacra* 4 (1959): 155-185. 164-165.

Akbar's invitation was the first step towards establishing Jesuit missions in the Mughal Empire. The Jesuits' approach at evangelization included the Christian theology of the Church Fathers (1st-mid-7th centuries)³⁶ since they believed that the exegesis of the Holy Scripture and Christian doctrine were the key to counterattacking covertly or overtly, softly or firmly, the multiple heresies³⁷ on the values and the messages of Christianity that circulated in Asia:

With the advent of Akbar the Great's reign, the Jesuits who preached [the dogma of] the Catholic Church started their dominance in Iran, India, and [the] Ottoman Empire. What started the religious dialogues in India was Jalal ud-din Muhammad Akbar's invitation of the Portuguese Jesuit preaching groups to India. After such invitation, in order to spread their religious sect, willingly, the Jesuits started travelling and sent some thinkers to [the] Indian Mughal Empire.³⁸

Exegesis ≠ Eisegesis of Religious and Juridical Texts

- **Exegesis:** ἐξήγησις: critical and impartial interpretation of a religious or juridical text performed by an exegete (the person who interprets the text); the exegete extracts from the text the truth as it was written by the original author(s) of the text.
- **Eisegesis:** interpretation of a text, usually a religious or juridical text, whereby the points of view of the person who is interpreting the text (the exegete) are weaved into the interpretation of the text; the exegete applies his/her/their own religious/political view(s). It is a deductive method/dogmatic approach.

Exegesis vs. Eisegesis of Religious and Juridical Texts. Joseph Abraham Levi © 2023

³⁶ The Catholic Church divides the eight Church Fathers into two groups, those who belong to the Western Church—Ambrose (340-397), Jerome (347-420), Augustine of Hippo (354-430), and Pope Gregory I (540-604; r. 590-604)—and those who belong to the Eastern Church, namely: Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 296-373), Gregory of Nazianzus (329-c. 390), Basil of Caesaria (c. 330-379), and John Chrysostom (347-407).

³⁷ Michael Pomazansky. *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology: A Concise Exposition*. 1963. Trans. Seraphim Rose. Platina, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1984. 37.

³⁸ Mp[o]hammad Javad Rahmati. "Akbar the Great's Narcissism in His Interaction with the Jesuits and Divine Religion (*Din-i-llahi*)."
JRR Journal of Religious Research 4.7 (Summer and Autumn, 2016): 119-142. [translated from the original Farsi by the author of this article].

In this case, the Jesuits' *accomodatio* not only aimed at accommodating the Catholic messages to the local mores, but it also used the Persian-Shi'ii culture to pique Akbar's interest in knowing more about the sacred images. Indeed, the Jesuits hoped that through these images they could start a dialog where Catholicism could show its superiority (sic) in the fine arts and, of course, in religious (i.e., Catholic) dogma:

Da presença jesuíta na corte Mogol surge a produção de pintura cristã que era oferecida a Akbar como resultado de uma história comparada das religiões resultante das discussões no palácio imperial em Fatehpur Sikri. O contacto dos missionários jesuítas com a tradição pictórica islâmica, com uma produção artística secular e fortemente concentrada na figura do imperador, associado a uma acomodação característica dos métodos de missão jesuíta, teve implicações profundas na arte cristã no Norte da Índia. Um conjunto vasto de artistas de corte reproduzem os temas cristãos e aplicam técnicas da arte europeia como a pintura de retrato e a pintura alegórica numa estreita relação com os esquemas de representação da pintura de miniatura mogol, resultando, em larga escala, numa reprodução de princípios fundamentais que servem o próprio imperador e não propriamente a acção missionária na conversão das massas.³⁹

IX

Yet, given the high knowledge of philosophy and theology that Muslim scholars possessed at the Mughal court, the Jesuit message had to contain more than pure exegesis. In other words, in their approach to conversion, the Jesuits had to include religious and philosophical principals that could persuade and convince rational and skeptic people, as in the case of *مفتي* *muftī* (Islamic scholar) *قاضی* *qādī* (plural: *قَوَاد* *quwwād*, Muslim judges), *فقهَاء* *fuqahā* (Muslim jurists, singular: *فقيه* *faqīh*), *ملا* *mullah* (Muslim clerics), *علماء* '*ulamā*' (Islamic scholars, singular: *عالم* '*ālim*), and *آية الله* *āyatollah* (Arabic) / (Farsi): *آيت الله* (high Shi'ii dignitaries).

Furthermore, the Jesuits had to use tact and discretion when touching upon religious and dogmatic topics that challenged the authenticity of Prophet Muhammad as a divine messenger as well as the historical and religious veracity of the Qur'ān. Unfortunately, though, most of the times the invectives and insults of the Jesuits were interpreted as true attacks against Islam. Hence, the response was brutal.

The discussions and dialogs among religious men of all denominations opened the door to debates on topics like the sacred books of the Abrahamic religions (i.e., the Bible and the Qur'ān), God, Jesus, the Prophets (including Prophet Muhammad), the human soul, the resurrection of human bodies, the Apocalypse, and the Final Judgment, among others.

³⁹ Rui Oliveira Lopes. "Arte e Alteridade. Confluências da Arte Cristã na Índia, na China e no Japão, séc. XVI a XVIII." Ph.D. Diss. Lisbon: Universidade de Lisboa, 2011. 39. [At the imperial Mughal court in Fatehpur Sikri, upon concluding a presentation comparing and contrasting the two religions [Catholicism and Islam], the Jesuits showed and offered Christian paintings to Akbar. The contact of the Jesuit missionaries with the Islamic traditions, with a centuries-old history producing art highlighting the image of the emperor [in power], also shifted the accommodation method to the fine arts. Indeed, Christian art produced in northern India was deeply influenced by this contact with the Jesuits. There were many artists at the Mughal court who used Christian themes and applied European artistic techniques in their paintings, portraits, and allegorical paintings that were weaved into the well-established miniature Mughal painting techniques. Alas, the result was not what the Jesuits had desired, since in the end the ultimate goal was the glorification of the emperor and not the missionary activities of the Jesuits and their conversion of the masses]. [translated from the author of this article].

Exegesis ≠ Eisegesis of Islamic Texts

- **Eisegesis: Danger:** the deductive method and dogmatic approach of the exegete are used for political, social, economic, and religious purposes (hatred vs. someone/something is the driving source).
- **Eisegesis of Islamic texts:** imams, muftī مُفْتِي, qādī قَاضِي, fuqahā فُقَهَاء, mullah مُلَا, and āyatollāh آيَة الله interpret the holy texts of Islam (the الْقُرْآن Qur'ān, the Ahādīth أَحَادِيث of Prophet Muhammad, the Aqīdah عَقِيدَة, and other Sunni and Shi'ii texts) by extrapolating passages from their historical and social context in order to validate their ideologies and instigate the faithful against a specific group of people.
- **Tasfīr تَفْسِير:** exegesis of sacred Islamic texts
- **Fatwa فَتْوَى:** the response of a qādī قَاضِي or faqīh فَقِيه when they are asked to give their opinion on a given legal matter.

Exegesis vs. Eisegesis of Islamic Texts. Joseph Abraham Levi © 2023

Unfortunately, though, the posture of the Jesuits was very confrontational. Alas, this worsened the already negative attitude of Muslim clerics at the Mughal court. Indeed, they had always been against any type of dialog with the Jesuits. This is because, instead of performing exegesis the Jesuits performed eisegesis, or rather, they applied a deductive method with a dogmatic approach that extrapolated religious excerpts hailing from the Judeo-Christian tradition from their historical and social context in order to validate their ideologies. The second step, then, was to prove the falseness of the Islamic tradition and show, without a shadow of a doubt that Islam is diabolical, fake, and devoid of any ties with the centuries-old Judeo-Christian tradition (sic). Indeed, it should be remembered that during the High Middle Ages (476-1000) and the Low Middle Ages (11th-15th centuries), Islam was thought to be a heterodox Christian heresy and Prophet Muhammad was considered a heterodox heresiarch (sic). This would explain why Dante placed Prophet Muhammad in the Inferno. Alas, Muhammad was considered a heterodox, Christian schismatic⁴⁰ who sewed discord among humans (sic).⁴¹

⁴⁰ Dante Alighieri. *A Divina Comédia*. Trans. Vasco Graça Moura. Venda Nova: Bertrand, 1996. Canto XXVIII: 22-31.

⁴¹ Joseph Abraham Levi. "Inferno, Canto XXVIII: 30-31. The Prophet Muhammad and the Caliph 'Alī: (Mis)Representing the Body." *International Journal of Arts and Social Science* 5 6 (June 2022): 98-132. 98; 103.

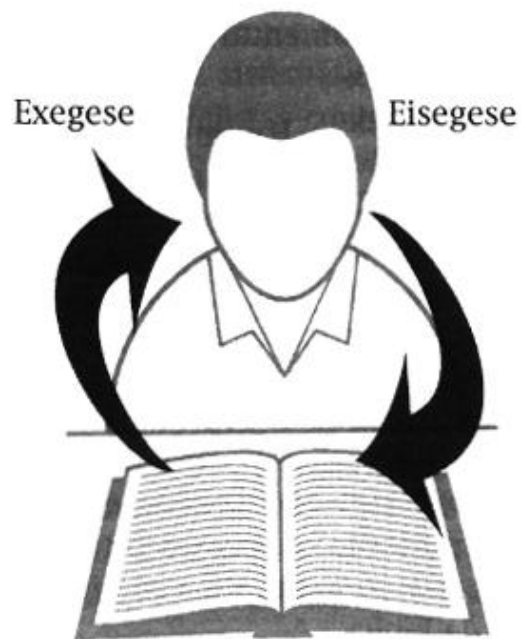


Virgil, Dante, and Muhammad (Inferno, Canto XXVIII: 22-31)

X

Exegesis ≠ Eisegesis of Religious and Juridical Texts

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Text written by the author of this article

Hence, the Jesuits did not hold back in attacking Islam and Prophet Muhammad. This insult triggered the ire of the Muslims at the Mughal court, particularly Muslim clerics and jurists. Indeed, even though Akbar had an open mind when it came to religion, spirituality, and mysticism—particularly Sufi mysticism—at the same time he also did not wish to lose the support of the Muslims since they were the key to appeasing the political and religious uprisings in his vast empire.

⁴² “Ravennanotizie per il Settimo Centenario di Dante Alighieri: La Divina Commedia. Inferno, Canto XXVIII.” *Ravennanotizie*. October 2, 2020. <<https://www.ravennanotizie.it/cultura-spettacolo/2020/10/02/ravennanotizie-per-il-settimo-centenario-di-dante-alighieri-la-divina-commedia-inferno-canto-xxviii/>>. [image in the public domain].

⁴³ Image: “Exegese X Eisegese.” *Expositivo.com. Estudos Teológicos*. <<https://sites.google.com/site/teologiatextos/exegese-x-eisegese>>. [image in the public domain].

Case in point, in 1581, the chief qādi of Bengal, Muiz-ul-Mulk, and the Mullah Muḥammad Yazī instigated an insurrection aiming at deposing Akbar and replace him with his brother, محمد حكيم مرزا Mirza Muḥammad Ḥakīm (1553-1585), chief of Cabul.

The insurrection was readily repressed. Nevertheless, this was yet again another warning sign that Akbar needed the unconditional support of Muslim clerics and jurists.⁴⁴ Even though Akbar had advisers hailing from all walks of life, Muslims constituted the great majority of his counselors; hence, they exercised great influence on all political and religious matters.

Furthermore, either for political reasons or for personal choice, Akbar always believed that all religions should be respected—as dictated by Islamic Jurisprudence, *fiqh* فقه—and protected, no matter the consequences.⁴⁵

It is also important to highlight that the Mughal Empire covered an immense geographical area. Indeed, Islam was not the only religion practiced in his empire. Not all his subjects were Muslims or at least Islamic/Islamized. Hence, going against Muslim leaders at court—religious men as well as jurists—and the non-Muslim population with a hostile attitude towards their religion and mores would have created court conspiracies and revolts of the masses.

For instance, the *جزية* *jizyah*—tax paid by non-Muslims *ذمي* *dhimmi* (protected monotheists) who reside in Muslim lands—was suspended during the reign of Akbar. Historically, the *أهل الذمة* *ahl al-Dhimmah* (people of the pact), covered the *أهل الكتاب* *ahl al-kitāb*, “people of the book” (i.e., that have a sacred book), namely, Christians, Jews, and Sabeans (*أصابنة* *al-Ṣabi’ah*). Later, this category was changed in order to include Buddhists, Hindus, Jainists, Sikhs, and Zoroastrians:

[...] the Mughal ruler Jalal al-Din Muhammad Akbar began quizzing the Portuguese [sic] Jesuit Antonio Monserrate [sic] (then on a mission to his court) on matters pertaining to the millennium, that is about 'the Last Judgement, whether Christ would be the Judge, and when it would occur'. The underlying purpose was complex, and surely lay in part in Akbar's desire to tease out both the theological differences and the commonalities between his own heterodox brand of Islam and the Jesuit version of Christianity.⁴⁶

Indeed, Akbar had a great interest in discovering *حَقّ* *ḥaqq*, Knowledge, or rather, (Universal) Truth, regardless of its source. In fact, on many occasions Akbar behaved more like a Catholic or a Sufi in order to reach Divine Knowledge than a Muslim (Sunni or Shi‘ii).

To Akbar’s eschatological question about the Final Judgment, Father Antoni de Montserrat, S.J., responded:

[...] the Day of Judgment was a divine mystery, which would, however, be known by certain signs, namely 'wars and rebellions, the fall of kingdoms and nations, the invasion, devastation and conquest of nation by nation and

⁴⁴ Frances Pritchett. “XII. Religion at Akbar’s Court.” *Columbia.edu*. 2014. <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00islamlinks/ikram/part2_12.html>.

⁴⁵ Joseph Abraham Levi. “Reconstructing the Abrogated. Exegesis of Qur’ān 53: 21-22.” *International Journal of Arts and Social Science* 4 2 (March-April 2021): 6-23; Joseph Abraham Levi. “Beyond Invasion: the *Bāb* باب in the *Dār* دار, or rather, the Door in the Land. Islam as the Door to the Portuguese Age of Discoveries.” *International Journal of Arts and Social Science* 3 4 (July-August 2020): 403-430. 99.

⁴⁶ Sanjay Subrahmanyam. “Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia.” *Modern Asian Studies* 31.3 [Special Issue: The Eurasian Context of the Early Modern History of Mainland South East Asia, 1400–1800] (1997): 735–762. 746-747.

kingdom by kingdom: and these things we see happening very frequently in our time.⁴⁷

Millennial ideas were and are very common not only in Christianity but also in the other Abrahamic religions (Judaism and Islam). In Islamic eschatology, for instance, the Last Judgment, *يوم القيامة* *Yawm al-Qiyāmah* (the Day of the Last Judgment), is one of the six Articles of Faith, namely, believing in Judgment Day and in Resurrection after the physical death of the body. Inner Faith, *إيمان* *īmān*, portrays the faith of the believers in all the metaphysical aspects of Islam contained in the six Articles of Faith, namely: (1) *توحيد* *Tawhīd*, belief in God and in the uniqueness of God; (2) belief in all the Prophets and Messengers sent by God; (3) belief in the sacred book sent by God; (4) belief in angels; (5) *يوم القيامة* *Yawm al-Qiyāmah*, belief in Judgment Day and Resurrection after the physical death of the body; (6) *قدر* *Qadar*, belief in Predestination.

As renowned Indian historian Sanjay Subrahmanyam (1961-) also noted, millennial ideas of the Persian philosopher and poet *ناصر خسرو القبادياني* *Nāsir Khusraw Qubādiyānī Balkhī*, known in Portuguese as Nāser Cosroes (1004-after 1070), circulated widely in the Islamic world, particularly in Safavid Persia.

Indeed, in his work *گشایش و رهايش* *Gushāyish va Rahāish* (Knowledge and Freedom), Khusraw talks about topics as the divine creation of human beings, of the human soul, and epistemology, among many other religious and philosophical concepts. Khusraw's other works also covered Knowledge, as in the case of the two *مثنوی* *mathnavis* (poems) and the *روشنای نامه* *Rawshanā-i-nāma* (Book of Illumination), where he explores topics like metaphysics and cosmography, and the *سعادت نامه* *Sa'datnāma* (Book of Happiness), a reflection on the Mazdeist nature of human beings, struggling between Good and Evil. The *زاد المسافرين* *Zaad al-Musāfirin* (Provisions for the Pilgrims) and the *وجه دين* *Wajh-i-Dīn* (Face of Religion), instead, show Khusraw's stance towards philosophy and religion whereby he emphasizes divine symbols. In other words, human beings have to go beyond concrete metaphors found in the sacred texts and think more in abstract, allegorical, and symbolic terms.⁴⁸

It is not a surprise then that in 1582 Akbar, eager to reach the Truth, decreed *دين الهی* *Dīn-i-Ilāhī* (the Religion of God), better known as *توحيد الهی* *Tawhīd-i-Ilāhī* (the Unity of God) as the official religion of his empire. This new religion contained all the major elements of the religions professed in his empire at the time, namely: Sunni and Shi'ii Islam, Sufism, Christianity (heterodox, Orthodox, and Catholic), Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, and Zoroastrianism.⁴⁹ Indeed, Akbar:

[...] had ambitions of founding a new religion, the *Din Ilahi* (divine faith), amalgamating the teachings of different faiths. He invited scholars and theologians to engage in discussions on religious topics.⁵⁰

In fact, Akbar's interest in listening to the opinions of Father Montserrat, S.J. on the Final Judgment highlights not only an interest in addressing personal desires to solving the intrinsic meaning of life but it also tells us that in the Mughal Empire and elsewhere, as in the Safavid Empire, there was knowledge, albeit distorted, of Christianity. Indeed, all over Asia people were in constant move, including Catholic missionaries and Buddhist monks:

⁴⁷ Sanjay Subrahmanyam. "Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia." *Modern Asian Studies* 31.3 [Special Issue: The Eurasian Context of the Early Modern History of Mainland South East Asia, 1400–1800] (1997): 735–762. 747; Henry, ed. *Mongoliceae Legationis Commentarius*, or the First Jesuit Mission to Akbar." *Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 3 (1914): 513-704; S. N. Banerjee. *The Commentary of Father Monserrate, S.J. On His Journey to the Court of Akbar*. Trans. John Somervell Holyland. London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1922.

⁴⁸ Karl Hermann Ethé. "Nāsir Khosrau," in *Encyclopaedia Britannica: A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, Literature and General Information*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911. 248.

⁴⁹ Vincent Arthur Smith. *Akbar the Great Mogul*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1917. 213.

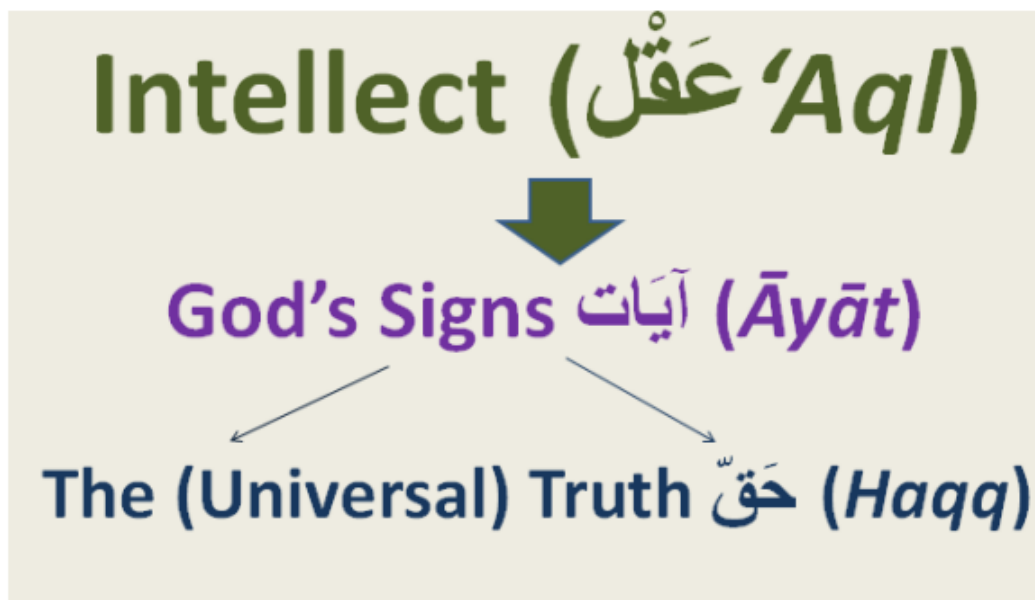
⁵⁰ Myron J. Pereira. "When Emperor Akbar Encouraged Christian Art." *Union of Catholic Asian News* August 22, 2020. <<https://www.ucanews.com/news/when-emperor-akbar-encouraged-christian-art/89234#>>.

[...] the conspicuous presence of European Catholic missionary orders, who-partly propelled by the Counter-Reformation-made their way to Asian and African courts, and thus were an element of circulation in early modern Eurasia, together with mercenaries, renegades, diplomats, Buddhist monks and Sufis. Indeed, Augustinians and Jesuits are to be found in both Burma and Cambodia at the turn of the seventeenth century, and provide valuable insights into local histories (especially elite politics) at the time.⁵¹

Akbar's intentions with the Jesuits were pure and sincere, namely: he wanted to learn all about Catholicism. Yet, even though he had (intermittent) spiritual, mystical, and exoteric tendencies—yet not esoteric—there were many factors that held him back to fully convert to any religion, namely:

- (a.) historical and political circumstances;
- (b.) the environment at Akbar's court and the Mughal Empire, completely hostile to Jesuit presence on Muslim lands;
- (c.) Akbar's extremely volatile personality;
- (d.) Akbar's distrust of abstract and blind faith vis-à-vis firm belief in human reason;
- (e.) Akbar's fondness of earthly pleasures (mainly polygamy and alcoholic beverages).

XI



52

Text and image prepared by the author of this article © 2022

In Islamic theology, عقل 'aql (human intellect) is the key to unraveling and deciphering the evidence and signs that Allāh sends to human beings who seek Him. Perhaps the most important evidence or sign is حق

⁵¹ Sanjay Subrahmanyam. "Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia." *Modern Asian Studies* 31.3 [Special Issue: The Eurasian Context of the Early Modern History of Mainland South East Asia, 1400–1800] (1997): 735–762. 748.

⁵² Joseph Abraham Levi. "Beyond Invasion: the Bāb باب in the دار Dār, or rather, the Door in the Land. Islam as the Door to the Portuguese Age of Discoveries." *International Journal of Arts and Social Science* 3 4 (July-August 2020): 403-430. 413.

ḥaqq, or rather, the (Universal) Truth. Indeed, *sūra* 41:53 of the Qur’ān, *سُورَةُ فَصَّلَاتِ Sūrah Fuṣṣilat* (The [Verses] Explained in Details), clearly states this concept:

سَنُرِيهِمْ آيَاتِنَا فِي الْأَفَاقِ وَفِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ حَتَّىٰ يَتَبَيَّنَ لَهُمْ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ أَوَلَمْ يَكْفِ بِرَبِّكَ أَنَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ

Soon will We show them
Our Signs in the (furthest)
Regions (of the earth), and
In their own souls, until
It becomes manifest to them
That this is the Truth,
Is it not enough that
Thy Lord doth witness
All things?⁵³

As the renowned Portuguese Arabist, historian, and philologist José Pedro Machado (1914-2005) stated in his Portuguese translation of the Qur’ān concerning “truth” mentioned in 41:53, the “Qur’ān is the Truth.”⁵⁴

Theoretically speaking, any human being could, or better yet, all believers in Allāh can reach Universal Truth, *حَقٌّ ḥaqq*, which, in itself, contains the evidence/the signs that Allāh has sent to us through the Qur’ān. Hence, human intellect, if it is placed in Allāh’s hands will be guided by Him so that it can reach Universal Truth, *حَقٌّ ḥaqq*. However, humans, including believers in Allāh, if they have not gone through rigorous religious training, can never understand God’s message. Hence, there is the need to seek the guidance of Muslim scholars and jurists who can then guide humans on how to interpret divine signs. On the other hand, Sufis, given that they dedicate their entire lives searching for Universal Truth, *حَقٌّ ḥaqq*, do not need intermediaries, nor do they need to be guided in order to reach this goal. Understandably, Muslim clergy and jurists (Sunni and Shi’ii alike) mistrust Sufis since they do not need nor do they seek guidance from the established canonical religious laws of Islam.

XII

Theology is one of the four pillars of Islamic Sciences, whereas the remaining three are: Grammar, Law, and Philosophy. Inner Faith, *إِيمَانٌ īman*, and Intellect/Reason, *عَقْلٌ ‘aql*, are two inseparable aspects of human nature. Indeed, they both help human beings in their search for the divine message, including God’s response, *رِسَالَةٌ risālah* and the evidence/signs, *آيَاتٌ āyāt*, that Allāh offers to Humanity, *الْبَشَرِيّ al-Bashariyyah*.

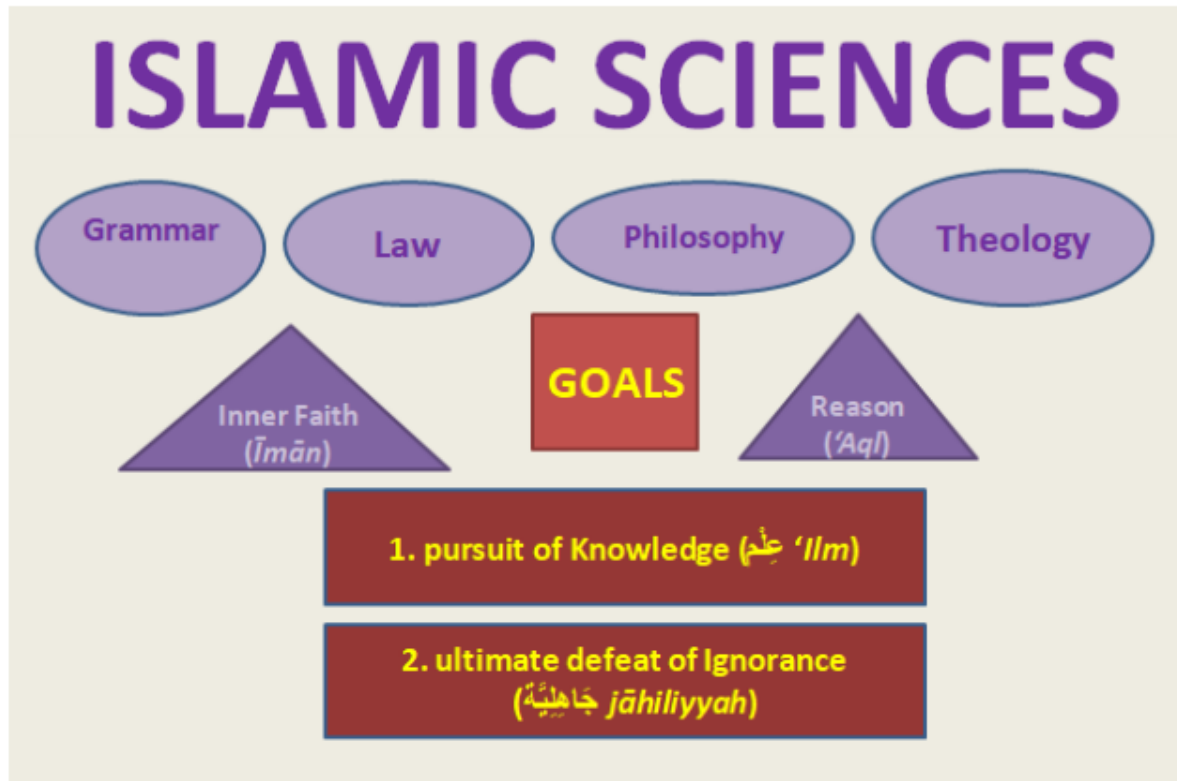
Hence, Inner Faith and Intellect in Islamic Theology are inseparable. Indeed, they are indivisible aspects of the very essence of the believer, the *مُؤْمِنٌ mu’min*, or rather, the (true/sincere) believer in Allāh.

Throughout the centuries, Muslims used different approaches in order to solve this dilemma, or rather, how to reconcile or justify Inner Faith, *إِيمَانٌ īman*, and Intellect/Reason, *عَقْلٌ ‘aql*, while, at the same time, keeping their faith in Allāh, believing in free will, *حُرِّيَّةُ الْإِرَادَةِ وَالْإِخْتِيَارِ Ḥurriyyah al-Irādah wa al-Akhtiyār*, and in the freedom to choose their own destiny.

Seeking Knowledge, *عِلْمٌ ‘ilm*, or rather, learning about all that Allāh has bestowed upon us, is essential to defeating ignorance, *جَاهِلِيَّةٌ jāhiliyyah*, and finally being in harmony with everything that Allāh has created so that we can enjoy it on Earth, and eventually knowing/reaching Universal Truth, *حَقٌّ ḥaqq*.

⁵³ Abdullah Yūsuf ‘Alī. *The Meaning of the Holy Qur’ān*. 11th ed. Beltsville, MD: Amana, 2006. 41:53: 1302.

⁵⁴ José Pedro Machado, trans. *Alcorão*. Lisbon: Junta de Investigações Científicas do Ultramar, 1980. 500.



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XIII

On May 5, 1595, Father Jerónimo de Ezpeleta y Goñi, great grandson of Francisco Xavier, better known as Jerome Xavier, S.J. (1549-1617), accompanied by two other Jesuits—Father Emanuel Pinheiro, S.J., and Father Bento de Góis, S.J. (1562-1607)—arrived at Lahore from Goa. Indeed, the Grand Mughal had asked for a third Jesuit mission to his court. Upon arrival, the Jesuits immediately began to learn Farsi with the aid of a doctor.⁵⁵ Eventually, Father Jerome Xavier, S.J., learned Farsi extremely well that he felt confident enough to compose religious texts in Farsi. As he had done with other Jesuits, the Grand Mughal enjoyed holding interesting conversations with Father Jerome Xavier, S.J., on religious topics, particularly on the human nature of Jesus. Indeed, being a Muslim, Akbar believed in Jesus; yet, as a prophet and not as a divine being.

XIV

In July 1610, the Jesuits arrived at the court of نور الدين جهانگیر Nur-ud-din Muḥammad Salīm, namely, Jahāngir (1569-1627), Akbar's son and fourth Grand Mughal (r. 1605-1627). Even though Jahāndir was not very religious—indeed, British diplomat Sir Thomas Roe (1581-1644) thought that he was an atheist or at least a not-so-orthodox Sunni Muslim⁵⁶—he let his three nephews be baptized by the Jesuits and be educated according to the Catholic precepts:⁵⁷

After three months, the good fathers declared that the princes were ready to be baptized. A glittering procession wound through the town from the fort to

⁵⁵ Arnulf Camps. *Jerome Xavier, S.J. and the Muslims of the Mogul Empire: Controversial Works and Missionary Activity*. Fribourg: St. Paul's Press, 1957. 5.

⁵⁶ Thomas Roe. *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul, 1615-1619, as Narrated in His Journal*. Ed. William Foster. 2 vols. London: Hakluyt Society, 1899. For further information, see: William Dalrymple. *The Anarchy: the Relentless Rise of the East India Company*. London: Bloomsbury, 2019.

⁵⁷ David Price, trans. *Memoirs of the Emperor Jahanguir*. London: The Oriental Translation Committee, 1829.

the church. The three young princes, dressed as Portuguese grandees, with gold crosses around their necks, rode extravagantly caparisoned elephants. As they approached Akbar's Church, the bells began to peal. The princes, holding candles, entered through clouds of frankincense, repeating after the priest the vows of baptism in Persian. They were sprinkled with baptismal [sic] water and given Portuguese names.⁵⁸

However, three years later, in 1613, these three neophytes abandoned their newly found faith and reverted to Islam. In 1615, discouraged by the low conversion rate, Father Jerome Javier, S.J., returned to Goa where he became Dean of the College of São Paulo. Father Jerome, S.J., died on June 27, 1617, before receiving the news that he had been appointed Archbishop of Kondungallur, along the Malabar Coast.⁵⁹

XV



60

Safavid Iran in the Seventeenth Century

In 1507, Hormuz was captured by the Portuguese. The Jesuits were the first missionaries serving in Safavid Iran. Father Gaspar Barzaeus,⁶¹ S.J., (1515-1553), born in Goes, Zeland, Holland, upon completing his

⁵⁸ "Catholic Mughals – Agra." *History Speaks*. December 2007. <<http://indiahistoryspeaks.blogspot.com/2007/12/catholic-mughals-agra.html>>.

⁵⁹ Edward MacLagan. *The Jesuits and the Great Mogul*. London: Burns, Oates, and Washbourne, 1932; Edward MacLagan. *Os Jesuítas e o Grão Mogol*. Porto: Civilização, 1946; Fernão Guerreiro. *Jahangir and the Jesuits*. London: Routledge Curzon, 2005; Youri Martini. *Akbar e i Gesuiti. Missionari cristiani alla corte del Gran Moghul*. Trapani: Il Pozzo di Giacobbe, 2018.

⁶⁰ Stefan Campillo. "El império persa safávida." *Word Press*. <<https://stefancampillo.wordpress.com/2014/02/05/el-imperio-persa-safavida/>>. [image in the public domain].

⁶¹ Also spelled as Bazée or Barzeu.

studies in Louvain (1535-1536), enrolled in the army of Carlos V of the Holy Roman-Germanic Empire (r. 1519-1556) to fight against Francis I of France (r. 1515-1547). Following a spiritual crisis and a retreat in the mountains of Montserrat, in Catalonia, Father Barzaeus, S.J., met Simão Rodrigues de Azevedo, S.J., (1510-1579). The encounter with the Catalan Jesuit, one of the first members of the Society of Jesus, was indeed life changing. In 1546, Father Barzaeus, S.J., went to Coimbra where he joined the Society of Jesus. In 1549, Father Francisco Xavier, S.J., sent him to Hormuz where he remained two years.⁶² Indeed, Hormuz, an ancient city on the island and Strait of Hormuz, had a very small Christian community.

In Hormuz, Father Barzaeus S.J., also found a small Jewish community composed of two hundred families, almost all refugees hailing from the Iberian Peninsula, Egypt, and Mesopotamia. These Jews of the Diaspora were well connected with the local silk trade as well as the transcontinental horse trade.

The Jewish moneylenders in Hormuz welcomed Father Barzaeus, S.J. For instance, the rabbis José and Salomão also allowed him to preach in their synagogue. Yet, no one converted. Indeed, there were many animated discussions between Father Barzaeus, S.J. and the members of the Jewish community of Hormuz.⁶³

Nevertheless, Father Barzaeus did not lose hope. In fact, he asked to be sent to different parts of the Safavid Empire. Alas, due to the risks involved, Father Francisco Xavier sent Father Barzaeus to Goa where he spent the rest of his life as Provincial Dean and Vice-Dean.

During the two years that Father Barzaeus spent in Hormuz he was in charge of the local Christian community. To the surprise of many, Father Barzaeus, was able to convert a considerable number of Muslims, including the leader of Hormuz, فخر الدين توران Fakhr al-Dīn Turān, شاه شَاه Shāh V (r. 1543-1564), high court officials, as well as the wife and the daughter of a Safavid officer in Hormuz on his way to India.⁶⁴

As it had happened at Akbar's Court, also in the Safavid Empire the religious controversies and the intransigent attitude of the Jesuits toward Islam caused the Muslim clerics and jurists to oppose the presence of the Society of Jesus in Hormuz.

Being a city where religious diversity was respected and protected, the Jesuit accusations against Islam and Judaism—not only against the religious dogma of both religions but also deliberately and openly instigating the expulsion of the Jews from Hormuz and demanding that the city mosques be converted into Catholic churches—caused the ire and indignation of the Jewish and Muslim communities.⁶⁵ Father Barzaeus, S.J., left Hormuz in 1551 while the remaining Jesuits left in 1568.

XVI

⁶² Nicolao Trigautio, and Joachim Trogneseus. *Vita Gasparis Barzaei belgae e Societatis Iesu B. Xaverii in India socij*. Antwerp: Ex Officina Ioach. Trognaesij, 1610; Nicolas Trigault. *Vita Gasparis Berzaei belgae*. Antwerp: Ex officina J. Trognaesii, 1610.

⁶³ António da Silva Rego. *Documentação para a História das Missões do Padroado Português no Oriente*. 12 vols. Lisbon: Agência Geral do Ultramar, 1958. 4: 403-405; Georg Schurhammer. "Die Trinitätspredigt Mag. Gaspars in der Synagoge von Ormuz 1549." *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu* 1 (1933). 279-309.

⁶⁴ Rudi Matthee. "Jesuits in Safavid Persia." *Encyclopædia Iranica*. vol. 14.6 (2008): 634-638. <<https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/jesuits-in-safavid-persia>>.

⁶⁵ Georg Schurhammer. *Franz Xaver, sein Leben und seine Zeit*. 3 vols. Freiburg: Herder, 1963-1973. 2: 3; 409-424; Walter Posch. *Der Fall Alkâs Mirzâ und der Persienfeldzug von 1548-1549. Ein gescheitertes osmanisches Projekt zur Niederwerfung des safavidischen Persiens*. Marburg: Tectum Verlag, 2000. 78-79; 446-448; Joseph Wicki. *Documenta Indica*. 18 vols. Rome: Monumenta Historica Societatis Jesu, 1948-1968. 2: 87-88.



66

شاه عباس کبیر Shāh 'Abbās I (r. 1587-1629)

A few decades later, in 1599, the former Jesuit Francisco da Costa (1567-1604)—one of the first professors of the “Aula da Esfera” (Class of the Sphere)⁶⁷ at the Colégio of Santo Antão in Lisbon—on his way back from India, said that شاه عباس کبیر Shāh 'Abbās I, the Great, (r. 1587-1629), the fifth Safavid Shah, was eager to embrace Catholicism. Hence, he was willing to allow the Jesuits to enter his kingdom and evangelize.

The Jesuits in the Mughal Empire were thus ready to accept the invitation to resume what they had been banned to do more than thirty years prior. Yet, given that the Augustinians already had experience in the Persian Gulf, the Vice-Roy Francisco da Gama, Fourth Count of Vidigueira (r.1597-1600; 1622-1628), sent the Augustinians rather than the Jesuits.⁶⁸

It should be remembered that the evangelization of the Safavid Empire was under the purview of the Roman Curia—the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, commonly known as *Propaganda Fide* (1622-)—and the *Société des Missions Étrangères de Paris* (1658-), the latter an association made of secular and lay priests.

Furthermore, there were also missions sponsored by other individuals and institutions, as the Bourbons (1589-1795) and the Polish Crown (1385-1795).⁶⁹ Indeed, Princess Marie Louise Gonzaga (1611-1667), spouse of two Polish kings, namely, Władysław IV Vasa (r. 1610-1613) and John II Casimir Vasa (r. 1648-1668), was a

⁶⁶ Stefan Campillo. “El imperio persa safávida.” *Word Press*. <<https://stefancampillo.wordpress.com/2014/02/05/el-imperio-persa-safavida/>>. [image in the public domain].

⁶⁷ Romano Gatto. “Jesuit Mathematics,” in Ines G. Županov. *The Oxford Handbook of Jesuits*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019. 637-669; Natália Cristina de Oliveira, Célio Juvenal Costa, and Sezinando Luís Menezes. “Ciência moderna em Portugal: A ‘aula da esfera’ no Colégio de Santo Antão.” *Ata Scientiarum* 39.3 (2017). <<https://www.redalyc.org/jatsRepo/3033/303351030002/html/index.html>>.

⁶⁸ Rudi Matthee. “Jesuits in Safavid Persia.” *Encyclopædia Iranica*. vol. 14.6 (2008): 634-638. <<https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/jesuits-in-safavid-persia>>.

⁶⁹ Rudi Matthee. “Jesuits in Safavid Persia.” *Encyclopædia Iranica*. vol. 14.6 (2008): 634-638. <<https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/jesuits-in-safavid-persia>>.

great believer in Catholic missions in the Middle East. In fact, she is known as being the founder of the Jesuit missions in the Safavid Empire.⁷⁰

XVII

[...] the use of Jewish and Christian scriptures as proofs of the prophecy of Islam was a genre in and of itself [...]⁷¹.

Alas, the Jesuits had their first mission in the Safavid Empire in 1646 when Father François Rigordi (1609-1679), arrived at Isfahan with the hope of establishing a Jesuit Apostolic Center. Indeed, Father Rigordi was authorized by عَبَّاس ٢ ‘Abbās II (r. 1642-1666) to purchase land and build a church and a mission in the Safavid Empire.⁷²



شاه عَبَّاس ٢ Shāh ‘Abbās II (r. 1642-1666)

⁷⁰ Francis Richard, ed. *Raphaël du Mans: missionnaire en Perse au XVIIe siècle*. 2 vols. Paris: Société de l’Histoire de l’Orient, 1995. 2: 210.

⁷¹ Alberto Tiburcio Urquiola. *Muslim-Christian Polemics in Safavid Iran*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020. <<https://dokumen.pub/muslim-christian-polemics-in-safavid-iran1nbsped-9781474440462-9781474440486-9781474440493.html>>.

⁷²Rudi Matthee.”Jesuits in Safavid Persia.” *Encyclopædia Iranica*. vol. 14.6 (2008): 634-638. <<https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/jesuits-in-safavid-persia>>; François Rigordi. *Pérégrinations du P. François Rigordi de la Cie . De Jésus : Depuis le 12 Novembre 1643 Jusqu’au 18 Mars 1646, a Travers la Méditerranée, la Syrie, l’Arabie Déserte, la Mésopotamie, la Chaldée, la Perse, le Golfe Persique, la Mer des Indes, Etc.* Marselha: Clavdivm Garcin Regis et Urbis, 1652. Paris: C. Taranne, 1874. 32-35; Bruno Zimmerl. “Vorgesichte und Gründung der Jesuitenmission in Isfahan (1642-1657).” *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 53, 1969. 7.

⁷³ “Abbas II of Persia.” <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Abbas_II_of_Persia.jpg#/media/File:Abbas_II_of_Persia.jpg>. [image in the public domain].

The political climate in the Middle East at this time was favorable to the Jesuits since the latter were able to rely on the promise made by Louis XIV of France (r. 1643-1715) to fight against the Ottomans and Dutch troops in exchange for the authorization to build churches and mission centers in the Armenian neighborhood of **نو جلفا** New Jolfā in Isfahan—one of the oldest neighborhoods of the Armenian Diaspora—as well as in Shiraz and Tabriz⁷⁴ (the Biblical Ecbatana, present-day Hamadan, capital of the Hamadan Province in Iran):⁷⁵

Peu après leur arrivée le P. Rigordi était parti à la rencontre de Shâh ‘Abbâs II, alors absent d’Ispahan. Il lui fit, ainsi qu’à son grand vizir, toutes sortes d’offres mirifiques au nom du roi de France. Le P. Raphaël les énumère avec complaisance dans son *Mémoire*: aide stratégique contre les Turcs et autres ennemis de la Perse, envoi d’artisans, opérations militaires conjointes. [...] Ses efforts sont couronnés de succès puisqu’il obtient en octobre 1653 la permission pour les Jésuites de s’installer à Jolfâ, Tabriz et Shirâz⁷⁶.

Also in this case, the evangelization did not go as planned. This time, it was not the Jesuit attacks against Judaism and Islam, but rather, it was the fear that the Jesuits were going to convert the Armenians of New Jolfā. It appears that these *diasporic* Armenians had asked the emperor to expel the Jesuits alleging that their ultimate goal was the conversion of all Muslims living in the empire. Indeed, in 1654 the Jesuits were expelled from New Jolfā. However, there was the option of readmitting them, should Father Rigordi, S.J. be able to keep his word and help in the fight against their common enemies.⁷⁷

In 1656, the Jesuits, guided by Father Alexandre de Rhodes, S.J., (1591-1660), arrived at Isfahan with the promise of founding a church and a mission station. Yet, Father Rhodes—a French lexicographer and author of the first trilingual Vietnamese-Portuguese-Latin dictionary—⁷⁸ was not able to repeat in Isfahan the

⁷⁴ Sebouh Aslanian. “The Salt in a Merchant's Letter: The Culture of Julfan Correspondence in the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean.” *Journal of World History* 19 (2008): 127-188; Sushil Chaudhury, and Gegham Gewonean. *Les Arméniens dans le Commerce Asiatique au Début de l'Ère Moderne*. Paris: Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 2008; Ina Baghdiantz McCabe. *The Shah's Silk for Europe's Silver: The Eurasian Trade of the Julfa Armenians in Safavid Iran and India (1530-1750)*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999; Vazken S. Ghougassian “The Emergence of the Armenian Diocese of New Julfa in the Seventeenth Century.” Ph.D. Diss. Columbia University, 1995; Jacques Dutertre Raphaël du Mans. “Raphaël du Mans missionnaire en Perse au XXVIIème Etat de la Perse. Publié avec Mémoire sur les Jésuites circa 1662,” in Francis Richard, ed. *Raphaël du Mans: missionnaire en Perse au XVIIe siècle*. 2 vols. Paris: Société de l'Histoire de l'Orient, 1995. 2: 201-257. 2: 211-212; Jacques Dutertre Raphaël du Mans. *Estat de la Perse en 1660*. Publications de l'École des Langues Orientales Vivantes, Charles Schefer. Vol. 20. Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1890; Bruno Zimmer. “Vorgeschichte und Gründung der Jesuitenmission in Isfahan (1642-1657).” *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 53, 1969. 5-7.

⁷⁵ Stuart C. Brown. “Ecbatana.” *Encyclopædia Iranica* 8.1 (1997): 8084. <<https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/ecbatana>>.

⁷⁶ Francis Richard. “Le Père Aimé Chézaud controversiste et ses manuscrits persans.” *International Iranian Journal for Research into Islamic Manuscripts* 6-7 1-2 (Spring-Winter 2005-2006): 474-463. 473. [Soon after arriving, Father Rigordi left in order to meet with Emperor ‘Abbâs II, who was temporarily away from Isfahan. Father Rigordi gave the Emperor and his Grand Vizier all sorts of marvelous gifts on behalf of the King of France [Louis XIV (1643-1715)]. Father Raphaël mentions them with pleasure in his *Memoirs*: strategic assistance against the Turkish [i.e., Ottomans] and other enemies of Persia, sending artisans, and conducting joint military operations. [...] His efforts were successful; indeed, in October 1653 he received word that the Jesuits were authorized to settle in Jolfā, Tabriz, and Shiraz]. [translated by the author of this article].

⁷⁷ Francis Richard, ed. *Raphaël du Mans: missionnaire en Perse au XVIIe siècle*. 2 vols. Paris: Société de l'Histoire de l'Orient, 1995. 2: 215-218.

⁷⁸ Alexandre de Rhodes. *Dictionarium Annamiticum vusitanvm, et Latinvm*. Rome: Sacrae Congregationis Missionario Apostolico, 1651.

accomplishments he was able to achieve in Vietnam where, according to his writings, he converted more than six thousand Vietnamese!⁷⁹

Father Aymé Chézaud, S.J., (1604-1664), hailing from Lyon, was one of the founders of the Jesuit convent in Isfahan. Due to the lack of conversions, Father Chézaud decided to move to New Jolfā where he opened a mission station not far from the royal palace.⁸⁰ Given that Father Chézaud already spoke Arabic, he was able to quickly learn Farsi and eventually compose important works in Farsi, as in the case of a now lost dictionary and the treatise *مشای مثقال صفای آیینہ حق نما Mash-e Meşqal-e şafā-ye Ā'ina-ye haqqnemā* (Removing the Polisher of Purity from the Mirror that Shows the Truth):⁸¹

In 1656 Chézaud contributed to the cycle of refutations with which we are concerned, through the completion of his *Mash-i misqal-i safa-yi Ā'inih-i haqq-numa* (Wiping of the Burnisher of Purity of the Truth-reflecting Mirror), which is to a certain degree an abridged Persian version of Guadagnoli's *Apologia*⁸².

In 1631, Father Filippo Guadagnoli (1596-1656), Minor Regular Cleric, published in Rome the *Apologia pro christiana religione*,⁸³ or rather, a theological dispute against the famous Safavid philosopher سید احمد بن زین العابدین العلوی (الْحُسَيْنِي) الغاملي الاصفهاني Sayyid Aḥmad b. Zayn al-Ābidin al-Ālawī (al-Ḥusaynī) al-Āmilī al-Işfahānī (d. 1644-1650), since the latter had written the *مِصْقَالِ صَفَايَ Mişqal-i şafā'*, namely, a treatise against Christianity composed in response to the anti-Islamic publication of the abovementioned Father Jerónimo Javier, S.J., (1549-1617), missionary at the Safavid Court.⁸⁴

Persian poet Abū Muḥammad Maşlah al-dīn bin 'abd Allāh Sa'adī Shīrazī أبو محمد مصلح الدين بن عبد الله سعدی شیرازی, or rather, Saadi Shirazi (1210-1291), was one of the major poets of the 13th century. Indeed, his poetry and prose (in Farsi as well as in Arabic) are unequalled in terms of style, metrics, and moral messages.

Besides his major works, *بوستان Bustān* (vegetable garden, 1257), and *گلستان Gulistān* (rose garden, 1258), his four love poems *غزل ghazals*, and his *قصيدة qaşīdas* (one-rhyme poems) written in Farsi and Arabic, Saadi Shirazi also composed aphorisms which, most of the time, were inserted in his main works, as in the case of the poem *بنی آدم Bani Adam* (Adam's sons) included at the end of the tenth story of the first chapter of the abovementioned *بوستان Būstān*.

The metaphor of the mirrors used by Father Chézaud is a direct reference to the concept used by Saadi Shirazi and those who imitated him (during his lifetime as well as well after his death). The famous aphorism

⁷⁹ Alexandre de Rhodes. *Relazione de' felici successi della Santa Fede predicata da' Padri della Compagnia di Gesu nel regno di Turchino*. Rome: Sacrae Congregationis Missionario Apostolico, 1650.

⁸⁰ Arnold T. Wilson, trad e ed. "History of the Mission of the Fathers of the Society of Jesus, Established in Persia by the Reverend Father Alexander of Rhodes." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 3 (1925): 675-706. 689-705; Bruno Zimmer. "Vorgeschichte und Gründung der Jesuitenmission in Isfahan (1642-1657)." *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 53, 1969. 22-24.

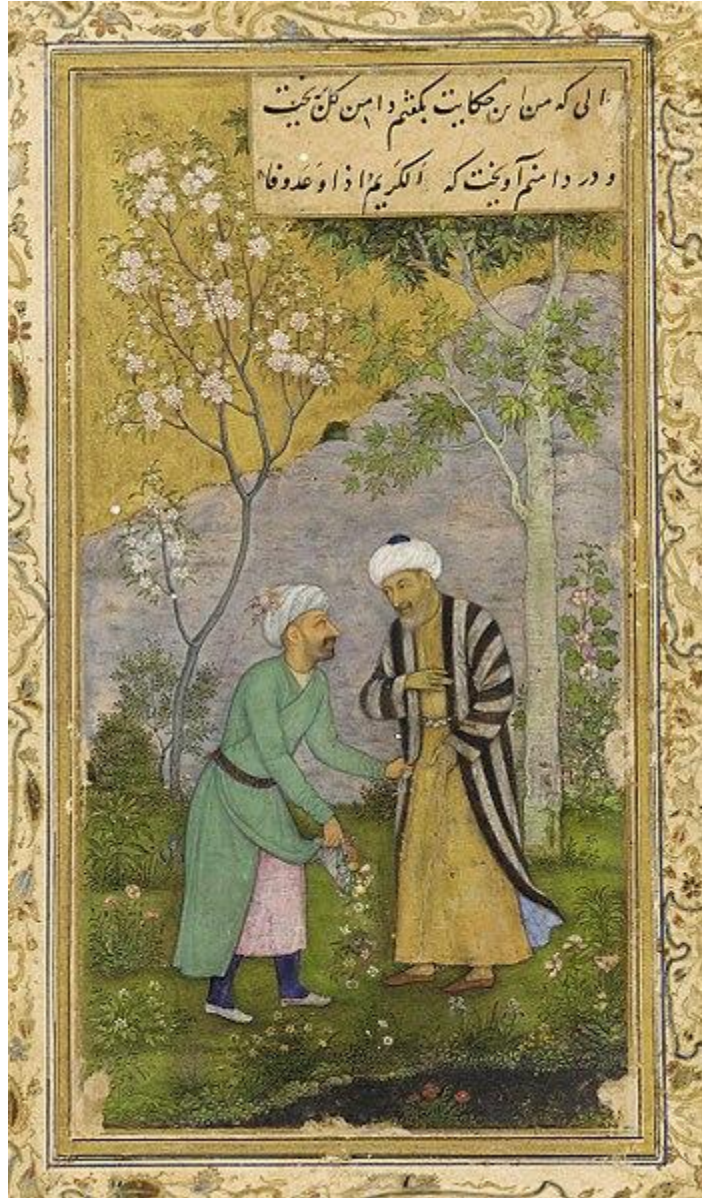
⁸¹ Alberto Tiburcio. "Mash-i mişqal-i şafā-yi ā'ina-yi haqq-numā," in *Christian-Muslim Relations 1500 – 1900*. Ed. David Thomas. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2451-9537_cmrii_COM_29202>.

⁸² Alberto Tiburcio Urquiola. *Muslim-Christian Polemics in Safavid Iran*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020. <<https://dokumen.pub/muslim-christian-polemics-in-safavid-iran1nbsped-9781474440462-9781474440486-9781474440493.html>>.

⁸³ Filippo Guadagnoli. *Apologia pro christiana religione [...] respondetur ad obiectiones Ahmed Filii Zin Alabedin, Persae Asphahensis, contentas in libro inscripto Politor Speculi*. Rome: Propaganda Fide, 1631.

⁸⁴ Rula Jurdi Abisaab. *Converting Persia: Religion and Power in the Safavid Empire*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2004; Colin P. Mitchell. *New Perspectives on Savid Iran: Empire and Society*. Hoboken: Taylor & Francis, 2011; Youri Martini. *Akbar e i Gesuiti. Missionari cristiani alla corte del Gran Moghul*. Trapani: Il Pozzo di Giacobbe, 2018.

⁸⁵آینه چون نقش تو بنمود بنمود راست راست خود شکن آینه شکستن خطاست that circulated in this area (Iran, India, and present-day Pakistan) advises us humans to be honest with ourselves as the reflection of our own image since the latter shows us as we are.



Sa'di in a Rose Garden

Father Aimé Chézaud, S.J., played a major role in the theological disputes between the Jesuits and the Persians, as in the case of the *mullah* (Muslim clerics) and the *ʿulamāʾ* (Islamic scholars). For instance, in the treatise *Mash-e Meşqal-e şafā-ye Ā'ina-ye haqqnemā*, Father Chézaud, S.J. accused the *mullah*:

⁸⁵ The mirror, because it reflects your image, is the truth; indeed, it shows your image; hence, it is the authentic reflection of truth; breaking the mirror is therefore a mistake. [translated by the author of this article].

⁸⁶ Govardhan. "Sa'di in a Rose garden, from a manuscript of the Gulistan (Rose garden) by Sa'di." Opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper. 25.4 x 33.9 cm. The Freer Gallery. Washington, DC. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sadi_in_a_Rose_garden.jpg>. [image in the public domain].

[...] Ahmad al-'Alavi of not having read the work of Jerome Xavier directly nor completely. He argued that had he read it, he would not have omitted a series of key references that were essential to Jerome Xavier's argument: It was a surprise for me [to see] that this eloquent and honourable Mulla ['Alavi], as these two books of his [show], clearly did not read the *A`inih-i haqq-numa*, but rather chose to read a summary of it. [...] If he had seen, read and understood [a series of references from Jerome Xavier's text], he would have included them in his refutation. But since he wrote two books claiming that [other] Divine religions have corrupted the *shari'a*, and continued to [claim] this after reading the Truth [revealed by] the *A`inih-i haqq-numa*, it became a duty for me to write a treatise (*risālih*) or a short piece (*maqālih*) about this Truth.⁸⁷

Despite the innumerable religious controversies surrounding Father Chézad, Shah Abbās II appreciated and truly valued his deep knowledge and rigorous training in philosophy and dogma. This gave Father Chézad the opportunity to move freely within the empire without fear of retaliations.⁸⁸

As renowned Iranian historian Rudi Matthee (1953-) rightly observed, Father Chézad, S.J., "formed a link in a long chain of participants in a Muslim-Christian polemic going back to Jerome Xavier S. J. at the court of Sultan Akbar in India at the turn of the seventeenth century."⁸⁹

CONCLUSIONS

In the wake of the death of Father Chézad, S.J., in 1664, Father Claude-Ignace Mercier, S.J., (d. 1674) was chosen to lead the mission to the Safavid Empire. He was followed by the French Jesuit Jean-Baptiste de la Maze, S.J., (1624-1709).⁹⁰

As of the 18th century, the evangelization of the Jesuits in the Safavid Empire—given their failure at winning over the Muslims to Catholicism during the 16th and 17th centuries—concentrated on providing assistance to, cooperating with, and converting the Armenian communities living in this vast kingdom. As for the Jesuit presence at the court of Akbār's descendants, the political vicissitudes of the time and their belligerent / intransigent approach were responsible for the extinction of the Society of Jesus in this part of the world.

The difference between the Jesuits' approach at evangelizing in the Safavid Empire and at the Court of Akbār the Great, from one side, and in India, China, and Japan, from the other side, resides in the fact that the Jesuits considered Islam a heterodox Christian sect; hence, they could refute it by means of an aggressive and contentious discourse aiming at exposing the falsehood of the Islamic dogma (sic).

Yet, in the East, the posture of the Jesuits was completely different. Indeed, from the onset, the local religious traditions and dogmas were considered dissimilar from the Judeo-Christian tradition but not heretical since they belonged to different religions altogether and not to the same religion (Christianity), as in the case of Islam, viewed at the time as a heterodox Christian sect (sic).

⁸⁷ Alberto Tiburcio Urquiola. *Muslim-Christian Polemics in Safavid Iran*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020. <<https://dokumen.pub/muslim-christian-polemics-in-safavid-iran-1nbsped-9781474440462-9781474440486-9781474440493.html>>.

⁸⁸ José Escalera. "Irán," in Charles E. O'Neill, S.I., and Joaquín M.^a Domínguez, S.I., eds. *Diccionario Histórico de la Compañía de Jesús. Biográfico-Temático. III. Infante de Santiago – Piatkiewicz*. Rome: Institutum Historicum, S.I., 2001. 20066-2007. 2006.

⁸⁹ Rudi Matthee. "Poverty and Perseverance: The Jesuit Mission of Isfahan and Shamakhi in Late Safavid Iran." *Al-Qantara* 36 2 (julio-diciembre 2015): 463-501. 474.

⁹⁰ Rudi Matthee. "Poverty and Perseverance: The Jesuit Mission of Isfahan and Shamakhi in Late Savadid Iran." *Al-Qantara* 35.2 (julio-diciembre 2015): 463-501.

Hence, the Jesuits performed *accomodatio* to local Indian, Chinese, and Japanese mores. In other words, they approached the “other” by learning the local language(s) and by adapting to most of the local customs so that they could eventually convert the population to Catholicism.

The same approach was used in the Americas. Indeed, mastering Quechua and Tupi, in Spanish-speaking South America and Brazil respectively, gave the Jesuits the tools to win over the autochthonous population and eventually convert the Amerindians to Catholicism.⁹¹

In the Muslim world, instead, as in the case of Akbār’s court and the Safavid Empire, the Jesuits opted for a harsh and intransigent approach where confrontation with Muslim scholars and clerics was based on intellectual disputes centered on Christian philosophy, theology, and dogma. Indeed, for the Jesuits the Church Fathers were the sole Christian theologians who facilitated the “true” and “only” interpretation of the Holy Scriptures vis-à-vis the Christian heterodox heresies, as in the case of Islam (sic).

Eventually, on the onset of the 19th century the winds of change began to blow: the Jesuits finally started a more egalitarian and respectful dialog with Islam. From now on, western scholars were more aware of and indeed valued the many contributions of Islam to world knowledge even if they did not agree with its religious tenets. Certainly, an increasing number of scholars hailing from the West, including the Jesuits, began to accept Islam as the third and final theological extension of the Abrahamic religions.

Indeed, according to Islam, Islam is a continuation of Judaism and Christianity. In other words, given human corruption, Allāh sent, and this time for the last time, one more prophet, Prophet Muhammad, and one more Book, القرآن *al-Qur’ān*, the Qur’ān, in order to perfect⁹² what had been sent previously, namely: تَوْرَاة *Tawrah*, the Torah, زَبُور *Zabūr*, the Psalms, and اِنْجِيل *Injīl* the Gospels to the Abrahamic religions, as well as the גִּינְזַת רַבָּא *Ginzā Rbā* (the Great Treasure) of the Sabaeans and the *Zend-Avesta* of Zoroastrianism.⁹³

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⁹¹ Joseph Abraham Levi. “Prefácio. Sincretismo, adaptação e metamorfose no teatro anchietano: de Maria, Mãe de Jesus e Rainha dos Céus a Maria Tupansy, Mãe de Tupã e Mãe de Jesus,” in *Maria de Tupansy O Auto da Assunção de São José de Anchieta*. Felipe de Assunção Soriano. São Paulo: Fundação Educacional Inaciana, Edições Loyola; Recife: Universidade Católica de Pernambuco, 2022. 11-16.

⁹² The penultimate paragraph of Qur’ān 5:3 is the key to understanding the Islamic concept of “perfecting” whereby Islam is Allāh’s ultimate religion sent to Humanity to “perfect” what He had sent previously and that was eventually corrupted by human beings: وَأَحْسِنُوا الْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَتَمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيْتُ لَكُمُ الْإِسْلَامَ دِينًا. “This day have I Perfected your religion My favour upon you. And have chosen for you Islam as your religion.” Abdullah Alī Yūsuf, trans. and ed. *The Holy Qur’an*. 11th ed. Brentwood, MD: Amana, 1983. 240.

⁹³ Joseph Abraham Levi. “Reconstructing the Abrogated. Exegesis of Qur’ān 53: 21-22.” *International Journal of Arts and Social Science* 4 2 (March-April 2021): 6-23. 20.

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