

Shah Abbas' European spies: The Spanish Embassy and Conversions to Christianity

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In the last six articles, I discussed Shah Abbas' espionage and diplomatic activities in Europe.^[1] In this article, I will detail Huseyn Ali's departure from Rome for Spain and the conversion of certain members of his embassy to Christianity, a unique event in the history of Azerbaijan.

Rome

According to the report of the French Cardinal d'Ossat, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Fabio Biondi, came to see Huseyn Ali on 2 June 1601, and told him that the pope had advised the latter to travel to Spain by land instead of by sea. Since the route of such a journey would partly pass through France, the pope asked the cardinal to mediate with France and provide passports and documents for the ambassadors.^[2] The cardinal wrote to Charles de Lorraine,^[3] the governor of Provence, and Anne de Lévis, the governor of Languedoc,^[4] to say that he would convey the news of the arrival of the ambassadors. He also sent the requested documents to the Vatican on the same day.



Charles de Lorraine (1571-1640)



Anne de Lévis (1569-1622)



Pedro Franqueza (1547-1614)

According to both the account of Oruj bey Bayat^[5] and the Vatican archives,^[6] a Barcelonan canon^[7] named Francesco Vasco^[8] would guide the embassy. The embassy would be directed

to Barcelona and from there to the Valladolid court. Just like for France, the embassy also needed a letter from the Spanish ambassador and a passport – they obtained three letters of recommendation from the Duke of Sessa on 4 June. One of them was addressed to the viceroy of Catalonia, Lorenzo Suárez,^[9] one to the viceroy of Aragon, Beltrán de Cueva,^[10] and the third to the secretary of state, Pedro Franqueza.^[11] In the letter addressed to the viceroy of Catalonia, he stated that the embassy had run out of money because it had been on the road for several months and was detained in Moscow for a time. He asked the viceroy to provide financial resources for Huseyn Ali bey.^[12]

The next day, Huseyn Ali bey sent an official letter to the French king through the cardinal. The letter revealed that the papacy had spent 6000 scudi on the embassy since its arrival at the Vatican.

Venice's ambassadors in Rome, Marco Venier and Giovanni Mocenigo, in their reports dated 9 June 1601, noted that Shirley had left Rome, and Huseyn Ali bey had met the pope for the third time:

The Persian Ambassador after the departure of the Englishman, has had another audience his Holiness; who has given him a thousand crowns in addition to the thousand he has already received, and has displayed a friendly attitude very different from that which he adopted towards the Englishman. The Persian has left, and gone towards Genoa. Three of his suite have remained behind and become Christians, the secretary, the butler, and the barber.^[13]

We do not receive information from Oruj bey Bayat about when this event took place or who the servants were. According to Oruj bey, when the embassy was leaving, they saw that three people were missing and returned to look for them. According to the information that the ambassador received from the pope,

these three people became Christians freely without any pressure. According to Cardinal d'Ossat's report, the embassy received the message at the Ponte Milvio, a Roman-era bridge over the Tiber, as it was leaving the city. According to a letter from the Pope to Shah Abbas kept in the Vatican archives, we can say that this event took place on 6 June. So, in the letter of that date, we can see that the servants Scia Ossein, Riza and Alli (likely Shahhusein, Rza and Ali) stayed behind and became Christians, and they made this decision of their free will. In the end, this letter was written so that Shah Abbas wouldn't worry when he saw that three people were missing from the embassy. The letter also expressed this event as a happy occurrence that would improve relations between the Vatican and the Safavid state.^[14]

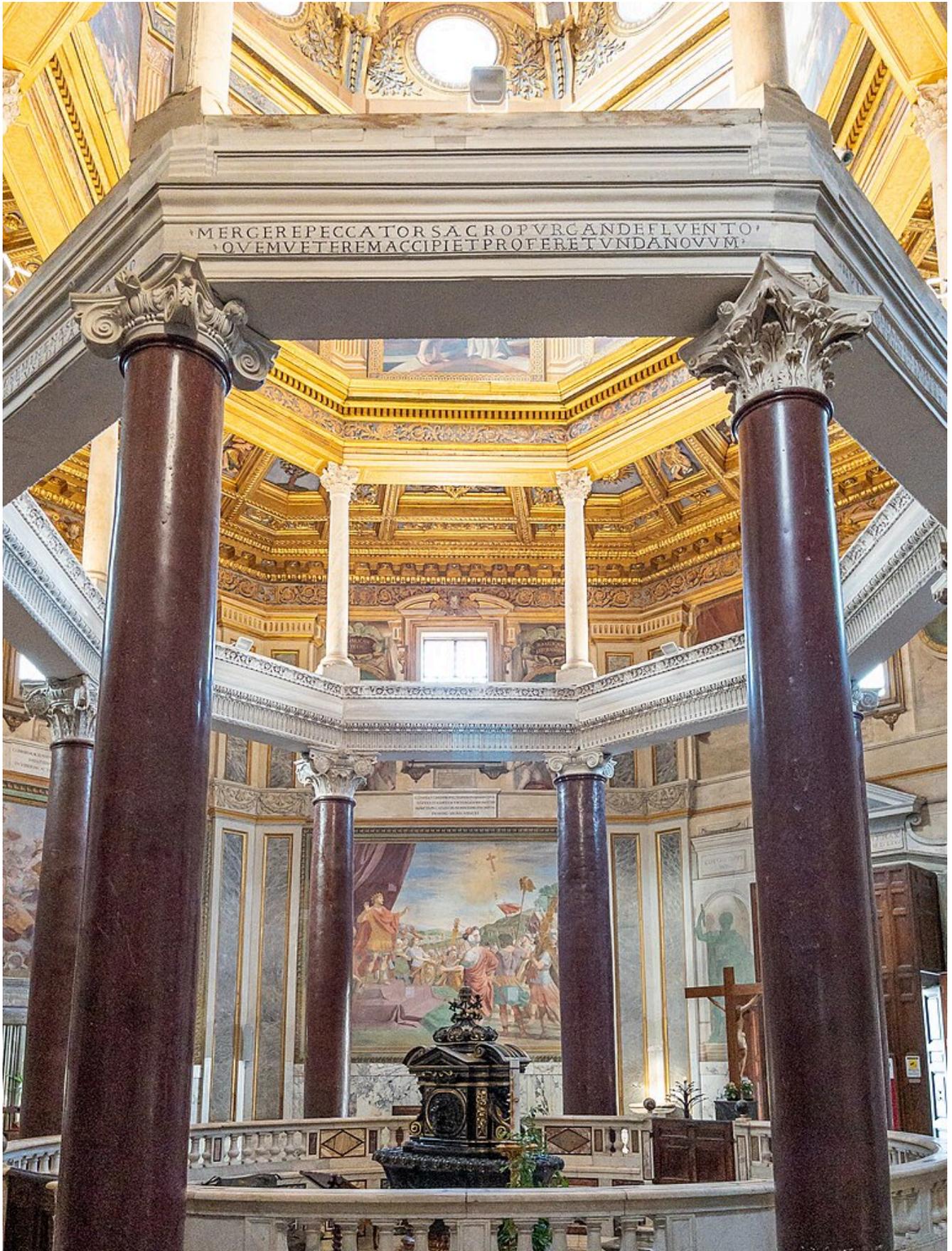
In my opinion, this letter was written probably at the request of Huseyn Ali bey, who was afraid of incurring the anger of the Shah on his return to the country. Perhaps there was a reason for this fear, because the news of three Muslims becoming Christians in Rome spread like a thunderbolt throughout Europe. This news reached the Augsburg office of the Fuggers, an influential banker and merchant family of the Holy Roman Empire, on 9 June.^[15] The letter noted that the pope had baptized the servants personally, and they were given ten scudi per day. According to Oruj bey Bayat's writings, the ambassador met with all three servants separately, confirmed for himself that their conversions were final and continued on his way.

Shah Hussain, Reza and Ali (hereafter the trio) in their turn were assigned to Cardinal Santoro. On 3 July 1601, the cardinal wrote to the pope about the trio studying in the College of Neophytes, noting that they needed new clothes. On 12 July, he reported that they were ready to be baptized.^[16] The following is the information that has come down to us thanks to the Vatican officials of ceremonies, Paolo Alaleone

and Giovanni Paolo Mucante,^[17] about the three who were personally baptized by the pope in the Lateran baptistery on 29 August 1601:^[18]

1. A 30-year-old man who took the name Clement, the name of the pope, after his baptism, was sponsored by Cardinal d'Ossat^[19] and approved by Cardinal Baronio.
2. A 25-year-old man became Pietro, was sponsored by Cardinal San Marcello and confirmed by Cardinal Bianchetto.
3. A 22-year-old man became Paolo, was sponsored by Cardinal Antoniani and confirmed by Cardinal Arrigoni.

Unfortunately, we do not know which of them was a cook, which a secretary and which a barber. The trio was presented by Bishop Leonardo Abel and kissed the pope's feet after the ceremony.



Lateran baptistery

Possible route of Safavid ambassadors from Rome to Valladolid

Towards Spain

According to Oruj bey's account, they arrived in Genoa 15 days after the servants' conversions (21 June 1601).^[20] According to Carlos Alonso, they most likely took the coastal route of *Via Aurelia*, heading to Genoa without stopping at Pisa.^[21] Oruj bey Bayat said that the embassy stayed in Genoa for 1 week and was well treated by the republic's administration, but Pedro de Mendoza, the Spanish envoy to Genoa, reported that Huseyn Ali bey was received coldly by the Genoan signoria and that the ambassador was angry and left early.^[22] Although Huseyn Ali bey told Mendoza that he wanted to go to Antibes or Fréjus by sea, and then to Avignon by land, it seems that he changed his mind later, because Oruj bey Bayat wrote that the embassy only went by sea from Genoa to Savona in two days.^[23] The records of Savona historian Giovanni Vincenzo Verzellino (1562-1638) also corroborate Oruj bey Bayat's account. Verzellino wrote in his chronicle that on 27 June 1601, Huseyn Ali bey had dinner at an inn called "Del Capello sulla calada" and ate it sitting on the carpet.^[24]

After that, we have to rely on the memories of Oruj bey for information about the further journey of the Safavid embassy from Savona to Spain. Oruj bey, who mentions Avignon directly after Savona, does not note the roads the embassy traveled or where they dined, despite the more than 300-kilometer distance between the two cities. I conjecture that the Safavid embassy, which traveled along the ancient Roman roads in its previous journeys, would continue along the same roads in this journey as well. The basis of this hypothesis is that Huseyn Ali bey noted the cities of Antibes and Fréjus during his conversation with ambassador Mendoza. If they had followed the *Via Julia Augusta* from Savona, they would have passed along the coast through Albenga, Ventimiglia, Nice, Antibes, Fréjus, Toulon, Marseilles and Arles. This route also corresponds to the provinces that the Vatican was seeking permission to pass

through from France. According to Oruj bey, the embassy most likely turned north from Arles and went to Avignon via *Via Alta*. It then met with the papal legate in Avignon and changed horses and mules. Oruj bey's route after Avignon also coincides with another Roman road: Nimes-Montpellier-Narbonne-Salses-Perpignan is part of the *Via Domitia*. It is interesting that Oruj bey did not describe what they did in large cities like Marseille and Nice. If future researchers examine the chronicles of these cities related to relevant period, they might obtain interesting details about the embassy.

Spain



Barcelona, 1563 by Anton van den Wyngaerde

Noting that they were welcomed in Perpignan, Oruj bey writes that the embassy went from there to Barcelona accompanied by 30 Spanish soldiers. When the embassy approached Barcelona, the viceroy of Catalonia sent them many carriages and horses. Huseyn Ali bey's entry into Barcelona on 15 July 1601 was recorded in detail in the city chronicle:

Sunday XV. – On this day, the Persian ambassador Huseyn Ali bey entered Barcelona. He came from Rome and was going to Valladolid to negotiate the league with our lord the King. Nine Persians of his company entered, accompanied by twelve light cavalries from Perpignan. They had come through France, and the governor went out to receive them with eight or ten

knights, speaking through an interpreter. The said ambassador rode a horse sent by the viceroy, wearing a crimson velvet coat lined with matras and carrying a scepter about a palm and a half long. He and all his company wore turbans on their heads made of fabric in different colors. Accompanying them was Canon Guasch of the Barcelona cathedral, who had been in Rome. The pope had entrusted them to him and provided for their expenses, giving him three thousand pounds^[25] upon leaving Rome and a brief so that whenever he needed money, he could receive it from the collectors of the Apostolic Chamber. He was to accompany them to Valladolid and hand them over to the nuncio. May our Lord God grant them good success!^[26]

The embassy stayed in Barcelona for ten days and then left for Zaragoza. Passing through the foothills of Montserrat and visiting the monastery of Santa Maria, the embassy then entered Aragon. Huseyn Ali bey and Oruj bey were welcomed by the viceroy of Aragon who sent them six carts. They entered the viceroy's palace and stayed there for two days amid the astonished looks of hundreds of residents. Oruj bey notes in particular his amazement at the Nuestra Señora del Pilar Basilica in the city. The embassy that came from Aragon to Olivares de Duero village had to stop in Tudela de Duero, 15 kilometers from Valladolid, sending Oruj bey Bayat and Vasco to the palace. The representatives were welcomed by the steward of the king, Gomez Davila. Oruj bey was very impressed by this meeting.^[27] Returning to Tudela, Oruj bey conveyed the words of the steward to Huseyn Ali bey: the palace required them to wait here for at least eight days.

The palace kept them waiting because of the late arrival of Duke of Sessa's report from Rome on 8 June. The royal cabinet began discussing the arrival of the Safavid ambassadors on 17 July, when the ambassadors were in Barcelona. The cabinet discussed in detail people like Asad bey, Anthony Shirley, Diego de Miranda and their stories, checked the documents sent from Rome, and advised King Philip III to establish contact

with the Safavid state through the Portuguese colony in India. The Counts of Miranda and Alba saw fit to send a Portuguese envoy, who could be chosen on the advice of the Portuguese Viceroy, Cristóvão de Moura. Father Gaspar de Córdoba, however, proposed a Spanish envoy.^[28] Finally, after long meetings, the palace agreed to receive the Safavid ambassadors. In his report dated 6 August 1601, the Venetian ambassador to Spain, Francesco Soranzo, wrote:

The Persian Ambassador, who is going round the world, has arrived near here; at present they are considering how to receive him, and lodge him. He will make his entry in two days' time.^[29]

According to the Spanish court historian Luiz Cabrera de Córdoba, the embassy made its ceremonial entry into the city on 13 August 1601:

On the 15th of this month, the Persian ambassador entered with nine or ten of his entourage. Don Luis Enriquez, the steward of His Majesty, went out to receive him with four carriages, in which were servants of the Royal House. Don Luis Enriquez took the ambassador into his own carriage, and the others into the other carriages. The lodgings were prepared with furnishings from His Majesty, and they were served by his servants, with all expenses covered by the king. Don Luis took him to the palace on the day of Our Lady^[30] to kiss His Majesty's hands, and in the evening, he took him back there to meet the Nuncio^[31] and the Venetian ambassador at the party held for the wedding of the Marquis of La Laguna^[32] with Doña María de Villena. The ambassador was seated on the bench with the other ambassadors, as the emperor's ambassador had returned to Madrid and the French ambassador had not entered the palace since his servants were apprehended. When asked how he liked the party, he replied that it was good, except he did not like that the queen danced, given that she was pregnant

with the first heir to the throne. One day that week, there was a bullfight, and he and his entourage were taken to see it. His Majesty ordered that they be lavishly entertained and treated with great care. It is said that from here he will go to France with the same embassy, to encourage war against the Turk.^[33]

The Vatican's ambassador to Spain, Ginnasi, wrote in his report that the king took off his cap as a sign of respect when he received Shah Abbas' letter.^[34] Oruj bey noted that this letter was written on golden paper over a meter long and three fingers wide. Interestingly, Huseyn Ali bey praised Cardinal Cinzio Aldobrandi and claimed that he had "sworn an oath of brotherhood" with him. The ambassador also praised the 21-year-old Cardinal Giovan Battista Detti and emphasized that he did not like Pietro Aldobrandi because the latter favored Shirley more. Pietro Aldobrandini later wrote in his reply letter that he was surprised that Huseyn Ali bey presented him like this:

"Because it seems to me that I treated him well and affectionately unless he expected that I too should have sworn brotherhood with him."^[35]

The Safavid ambassadors, now on the road for two consecutive years, stayed in the Valladolid palace until mid-autumn. In the next article, I will discuss their adventures during this period, and how the other members of the embassy, Aligulu bey Bayat and Oruj bey Bayat, converted to Christianity.

References and notes

^[1] See: Javid Agha, "Shah Abbas's European Spies – First Contacts," *Baku Research Institute*, January 21, 2024, <https://bakuresearchinstitute.org/sah-abbasin-avropa-casuslari/>; Javid Agha, "Shah Abbas's European Spies – Great European Embassy," *Baku Research Institute*, February 22, 2024

<https://bakuresearchinstitute.org/sah-abbasin-avropa-casuslari-boyuk-avropa-sefirliyi/> ; Javid Agha, "Shah Abbas' European Spies – Secret Embassy," *Baku Research Institute* , March 15, 2024

<https://bakuresearchinstitute.org/sah-abbasin-avropa-casuslari-gizli-sefrilik/> ; Javid Agha, "Shah Abbas's European Spies – The Great European Embassy (Part II)," *Baku Research Institute* , April 14, 2024

<https://bakuresearchinstitute.org/sah-abbasin-avropa-casuslari-boyuk-avropa-sefirliyi-2/> ; Javid Agha, "Shah Abbas' European Spies – Polish Embassy" *Baku Research Institute* , May 25, 2024

<https://bakuresearchinstitute.org/sah-abbasin-avropa-casuslari-polsa-sefirliyi> , Javid Agha, "Shah Abbas' European Spies – Rome Embassy" *Baku Research Institute* , June 28, 2024

<https://bakuresearchinstitute.org/sah-abbasin-avropa-casuslari-roma-sefirliyi/>

^[2] *Lettres de l'illustrissime et révérendissime Cardinal d'Ossat, evesque de Bayeux au roy Henry le Grand, et à Monsieur de Villeroy depuis l'année 1594 jusques à l'année 1604* , Paris 1644, p. 616-617.

^[3] Charles de Lorraine (1571-1640), the fourth Duke of Guise of the Lorraine dynasty. He was related to the Medici family and fled to Florence in the last years of his life.

^[4] Anne de Lévis (1569–1622), the second Duke of Ventadour of the Lévy dynasty. In reality, the governor was his father-in-law, Henri de Montmorency, but King Henry IV kept him at court so he acted as de facto governor.

^[5] G. Le Strange, *Don Juan of Persia*, p. 286

^[6] His name is also noted as Francisco Guasch and Francesco Guasque elsewhere.

^[7] From the Greek word *kanonikos*, it was a title given to

clerics who lived together with other priests in churches or cathedrals and served for a long time.

[8] Vatican Archives, Confalioneri, vol. 22, p. 322: “Ricevuta del canonico Francesco Vasco delli scudi d’oro in oro dati per il viaggio fino in Spagna dell’Ambasciatore persiano” [Receipt received by Canon Francisco Vasco for gold scudos given to the Iranian ambassador for a visit to Spain]

[9] Spanish: Lorenzo IV Suárez de Figueroa y Córdoba (1559-1607) was the second Duke of Feria of the de Figueroa dynasty.

[10] Spanish: Beltrán III de la Cueva y Castilla (1551-1612) was the sixth Duke of Albuquerque from the de la Cueva dynasty.

[11] Spanish: Pedro Franqueza y Esteve (1547-1614) was a statesman from the Franqueza dynasty of Catalan origin. In 1603, he was ennobled as the first Count of Villalonga.

[12] Simancas State Archives (hereafter AGS), EST, K. 1630, document 111: “Del duque de Sessa al duque de Feria, virrey de Catalu ñ a; Rome, 4 de junio de 1601” [Duke of Sessa to Duke of Feria, Rome, 4 June 1601]

[13] “Venice: June 1601”, Calendar of State Papers Relating To English Affairs in the Archives of Venice, Volume 9, 1592-1603, (London, 1897). 462-463. British History Online. Web,
<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/venice/vol9/pp462-463>

[14] Vatican Archives, Arm. XLIV, vol. 45, p. 216 (225), document. 224; for the full text in Latin, see *A Chronical of the Carmelites in Persia and the Papal Mission of the 17th and 18th centuries*, vol. 2, Eyre & Spottiswood, London 1939, p. 1279-1280

[15] Victor Clarwill, *Fugger-Zeitungen – Ungreduckte Briefe an das Haus Fugger, aus den Jahren 1568-1605* [Unpublished letters concerning the Fugger family 1568-1605], Vienna-Leipzig-Munich, 1922, p. 265. (Digital: <https://archive.org/details/fuggerzeitungenu00klaruoft/page/236/mode/1up>)

[16] Vatican Archives, Arm. LII, vol. 22, p. 262

[17] Vatican Archives, Fondo Borghese, I, vol. 801, p. 689r-695v.

[18] Vatican Library, Vat. Lat. 12319, p. 210r-v. Digital version: https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.lat.12319

[19] The Catholic Church requires that those undergoing baptism have at least one “sponsor.”

[20] G. Le Strange, *Don Juan of Persia*, p. 287

[21] Carlos Alonso, *Embajadores de Persia en las cortes de Praga, Roma y Valladolid (1600-1601)*: *Anthologica Annua* 36 (1989) p. 119

[22] AGS, EST, K 1630, document 42: “*De D. Pedro de Mendoza, embajador espanol en Genova a Felipe III; Genova, 3 de julio de 1601*” [From Pedro de Mendoza, Spanish ambassador in Genoa, to Philip III, Genoa, 3 July 1601]

[23] G. Le Strange, *Don Juan of Persia*, p. 287

[24] Giovanni Vincenzo Verzellino, *Delle memorie particolar e specialmente degli uomini illustri della città di Savona* [Special memories and especially famous men of the city of Savona], vol. 2, Savona, 1891, p. 146 (Digital: <https://books.google.az/books?id=lcdWAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA146>)
Verzellino mistakenly mentions Anthony Shirley as his

translator. Most likely, he mistook him for his translator, Tommaso Angelo during a conversation with the ambassador.

[25] Lliura – A currency also known as the Spanish pound. 1 pound was equal to 460 grams.

[26] Federico Schwartz y Luna, Francesch Carreras y Candi, *Manual de Novells Ardits Vulgarment Apellat Dietari del Antich Consell Bacceloní (1597-1602)* [Diary of the Council of Ancient Barcelona], vol. VII, Henrich y Companyía, en Comandita, Barcelona 1898, p. 364. (Digital: <https://archive.org/details/manualdenovellsa07barc/page/364/mode/2up>)

[27] Gómez Dávila y Toledo (1541-1616) – 2nd marquis of Velada from the Dávila dynasty. He had been the tutor of King Philip III.

[28] AGS, EST, leg. 263 and leg. 493.

[29] “Venice: August 1601”. *Calendar of State Papers Relating to English Affairs in the Archives of Venice, Volume 9, 1592-1603* . Ed. Horatio F Brown (London, 1897), 467-472, British History Online. Web. <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/venice/vol9/pp467-472>

[30] 15 August is the day the apparition of the Holy Mary is celebrated in the Catholic Church.

[31] Italian: Domenico Ginnasi (1550-1639) – Bolognese cardinal. Ambassador of the Vatican to Spain.

[32] Spanish: Sancho de la Cerda (1550-1626) – 1st Marquis of La Laguna de Camero of the de la Cerda dynasty.

[33] Don Luis Cabrera de Cordoba, *Relaciones de las Cosas*

Sucedidas en la Córte de España desde 1599 hasta 1644
[Relations of Things that Happened in the Court of Spain from
1599 to 1644], Publicadas de Real Orden, Madrid 1857, p.
110-111 (Digital:
<https://archive.org/details/relacionesdelasc00cabr/page/110/mode/2up>)

^[34] Vatican Archives, Spagna, vol. 54, p. 228r-229v, which is confirmed by Oruj bey Bayat: G. Le Strange, *Don Juan of Persia*, p. 291

^[35] Vatican Archives, Spagna, vol. 329, p. 117 r

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