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## HISTORICAL FIGURES OF ARMENIAN DESCENT IN THE MUGHAL [INDO-TURKIC ISLAMIC EMPIRE] PALACE

Yalçın KAYALI\*

### Abstract

Some sources date back to the first contact of Armenians with Indian geography until the Indian expedition of Alexander. In the history of the Middle Ages, it is known that the first mass arrival of Armenians, who had become famous for their mercantile skills, to the Indian subcontinent took place around the XVII century, i.e., during the Mughal era. This study provides a descriptive analysis of the emergence of bilateral relations with a deep-rooted history in the era of the Mughal (Indo-Turkic Islamic) Empire. In this context, historical figures of Armenian descent who served in high positions in the Mughal court or were even honored with imperial titles are discussed. These historical figures are Prince John Philip Bourbon, Captain William Hawkins, interpreter Domingo Pires, Mirza Zulkarneyn, and Mariam (Maryam) Zamani Begum. Prince John Philip Bourbon, a member of the French royal family of Armenian descent who had been exiled to India, served the Mughal dynasty in high positions at Akbar's court. William Hawkins was an agent of the British East India Company and captain of the first ship to dock in Surat, India. Domingo Pires, who had served as a translator and interpreter at the Mughal court, was personally appointed by Akbar to attend the negotiations with the Portuguese in Goa. Mirza Zulkarneyn and Mariam Zamani Begum held higher positions in the Mughal court than the others. While Zulkarneyn, as a member of the divan raised in the harem, served as faujdar and governor, Mariam Zamani Begum is known as the chief queen of Akbar. Although claims about her descent and religion differ, for this study the views in the literature that she was of Armenian descent will be emphasized. Thus, with this study, in which we present a cross-section of the Mughal era, we have attempted to provide a historical

### Keywords

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background to Indo-Armenian relations from the perspective of the discipline of Area Studies, as it reflects the development of present-day India-Armenia bilateral relations in the historical process.

## BABÜR [HİNT-TÜRK İSLAM İMPARATORLUĞU] SARAYINDAKİ ERMENİ ASILLI TARİHİ ŞAHSİYETLER

### Öz

Ermenistanlıların Hint coğrafyasıyla ilk temaslarının, İskender'in Hindistan seferine kadar geriye gittiğini ileri süren kaynaklar mevcuttur. Orta Çağ tarihinde ise tüccarlık meziyetleriyle tanınır hale gelmiş olan Ermenilerin, topluluklar halinde Hint alt kıtasına gelişlerinin yaklaşık olarak XVII. yüzyıl yani Babürlüler çağında gerçekleşmiş olduğu bilinmektedir. Bu çalışmada köklü bir geçmişe sahip ikili münasebetlerin Babür (Hint-Türk İslam) İmparatorluğu çağındaki görünümü deskriptif bir yöntemle ele alınmaya çalışılmıştır. Bu bağlamda, Babür sarayında üst düzey makamlarda görev yapmış ya da hatta imparatorluk unvanlarına layık görülmüş olan Ermeni asıllı tarihî şahsiyetler konu edilmiştir. Bu tarihî kişilikler Prens John Philip Bourbon, Kaptan William Hawkins, Tercüman Domingo Pires, Mirza Zulkarneyn ve Mariam (Meryem) Zamani Begum'dür. Hindistan'a sürgün edilmiş olan Ermeni asıllı Fransız kraliyet ailesi mensubu Prens John Philip Bourbon, Ekber'in sarayında üst düzey mevkilerde Babür hanedanlığına hizmet etmiştir. William Hawkins, İngiliz Doğu Hindistan Şirketi'nin bir temsilcisi ve Hindistan'ın Surat şehrine demirleyen ilk geminin kaptanıdır. Babür sarayında tercüman olarak görev yapmış olan Domingo Pires, Ekber tarafından Goa'daki Portekizlilerle yapılacak olan görüşmelere katılmak üzere görevlendirilmiştir. Mirza Zulkarneyn ve Meryem (Mariam) Zamani Begum'un Babür sarayındaki makamları ise diğerlerine göre daha üst düzeydedir. Zulkarneyn, haremde yetişmiş bir divan üyesi olarak faujdar ve valilik görevlerinde bulunmuşken Meryem Zamani Begum ise Ekber'in baş kraliçesi olarak bilinmektedir. Soyu ve dini hususundaki iddialar birbirinden farklı olsa da çalışmamız kapsamında, literatürdeki Ermeni soylu olduğu yönündeki görüşler üzerinde durulmuştur. Sonuç olarak günümüz Hindistan-Ermenistan ikili ilişkilerinin tarihsel süreçteki gelişimini yansıtmaya sebebiyle, Babürlüler çağındaki boyutundan bir kesit sunduğumuz bu çalışmayla; Alan Çalışmaları disiplini perspektifinden Hint-Ermeni münasebetlerine tarihsel bir arka plan oluşturulmaya çalışılmıştır.

### Anahtar Kelimeler

Alan Çalışmaları  
Babürlüler Çağında  
Hindistan  
Mirza Zulkarneyn  
Mariam (Meryem)  
Zamani Begum

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### Introduction

According to historical accounts, India was one of the countries with which Armenians had contact long before they migrated and settled there. "It is believed that the first Armenians came with their Assyrian allies as part of Queen Semiramis' expedition to India a few centuries before Christ. Some Armenians certainly came with

Alexander [the Great]" (Sircar, 1983:2). The general opinion about the beginning of direct relations with India points to the 8th century. As foreign traders, the Armenians were known to large sections of the Indian population. They entered India by land via Iran and Afghanistan. In addition, Armenians played an important role in the commercial, political, social and cultural life of India in three different periods of its history: ancient, medieval and modern (Çoruk, 2023a: 88).

This study focuses on the influence of historical figures of Armenian origin on the Mughal dynasty during the Mughal (Indo-Turkic Islamic) Empire. The methodology of the study is based on Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) and claims to provide a historical background to the period in question. In this way, a literature review prepared with a holistic perspective will be presented to future studies and researches focusing on the bilateral relations between India and Armenia today.

### **1. First Contacts: The Arrival Of Armenians In The Indian Subcontinent**

Although the people of Armenia "did not have an independent state after 1375, their talents enabled them to gain an enviable place in the commercial world of the Middle Ages" (Hussain, 2005: 79). In particular, the city of Julfa under Safavid rule stood out as an important commercial centre of its time. This city served as a trading centre for various parts of the world as well as within the country. Armenians, who had already been in contact with India as traders, gradually began to settle there for various reasons. The first of these reasons came during the reign of the Safavid emperor Shah Abbas (1571-1629). The Armenian population was transferred to Isfahan. Shah Abbas gave control of his country's silk trade to the Armenians, whom he had who had been forcibly settled in New Julfa. The Armenian merchants in New Julfa sold not only silk but all kinds of goods such as rose water, carpets, Indian and Far Eastern textiles, tea, spices, jewellery; and mirrors, glass, clocks, woolen clothes, gold and silver coins from Europe.

The second reason that accelerated the settlement of Armenians in India was the trade policy of the Mughal Shah Akbar (1542-1605). In fact, the permanent settlement of Armenian merchants was made possible by the encouragement of the Mughal Emperor Akbar (Bournoutian, 2006: 219). Shah Akbar invited Armenian merchants to settle in his country in order to and contribute to the country's economy. The Mughals tried to create an opposing group of foreign merchants, made up of Gujaratis, Arabs, Persians, etc., against them. Shah Akbar also wanted to use rich Armenian merchants for this purpose (Çoruk, 2023a: 91). Although there was an

increase in the Armenian population, especially in the coastal regions, the community continued its development by taking shape in the 17th and 18th centuries. It should also be noted that the trade agreement with the British East India Company in 1688 had an accelerating effect on the Armenian population growth. The Armenians established a stable community life in India. They remained close to the Mughals and often acted as intermediaries and interpreters between local rulers and European representatives. As a result, trade centred in India replaced New Julfa as the leading centre of world trade in the second half of the 18th century (Panossian, 2006 akt. Çoruk, 2023b: 110).

Although the Armenians were not a large community, their wealth and unique qualities gave them an important place and influence in the country. "Many Armenians rendered invaluable services to the Indian government and people, playing an important role both in India's ruling elite and in the export of Indian goods to the West prior to British colonisation. Linked to the Indian people with common interests, Armenians also actively participated in their struggles." Çoruk, 2023a: 92). Armenians fought with the Indians against the Portuguese in Malabar in 1662; they participated in the war on the side of the Indians against the British in Bengal in 1760-64; and "Armenian merchants helped by providing financial resources, Armenian gunsmiths helped by making weapons, and Armenian soldiers joined the Indian army and fought against the imperialists" (Mkrtchyan, 2005: 73-74). Armenians lived in the Indian cities of Agra, Delhi, Bengal, Bombay, Surat, Calcutta, Chinsura, Madras, etc. Instead of coming together as one community, they were scattered. Instead of gathering in these cities as one community, they were scattered and lived mainly as merchants, artisans (jewellers, tailors, embroiderers, blacksmiths, gunsmiths) and civil servants. They also included government officials, military administrators, translators and intellectuals (Çoruk, 2024: 4). These historical figures who are the subject of our research are Prince John Philip Bourbon, Captain William Hawkins, translator Domingo Pires, Mirza Zulkarneyn and Mariam (Meryem) Zamani Begüm. Prince John Philip Bourbon, a member of the French royal family of Armenian descent who had been exiled to India, served the Mughal dynasty in high positions at Akbar's court. It is claimed that his lineage continued in central India, and even that the city known today as Bhopal is the Hindi, easy-to-pronounce version of the Bourbon title or family name. William Hawkins was an agent of the British East India Company and captain of the first ship to dock in Surat, India. It is also recorded that he traveled to Agra to open a factory and met the Mughal Emperor Jahangir. Domingo Pires, who had served as a translator and interpreter at the Mughal court, was personally appointed by Akbar

to attend the negotiations with the Portuguese in Goa. Mirza Zulkarneyn and Mariam Zamani Begum held higher positions in the Mughal court than the others. While Zulkarneyn, as a member of the divan raised in the harem, served as faujdar and governor, Mariam Zamani Begum is known as the chief queen of Akbar. Although claims about her descent and religion differ, for this study the views in the literature that she was of Armenian descent was emphasized.

## 2. Prince John (Jean) Philip Bourbon

During the reign of the Akbar arrived at the Mogul Court, between the years 1557 and 1559, a French prince, John Philip Bourbon of Navarre, a scion of the royal house of France. He told the emperor that having been taken captive by Turkish pirates, during a voyage he had made in company with his family priest, who was his preceptor, he had been taken to Egypt as a prisoner. Once in Egypt, the young prince soon gained, by his affable manners, the esteem of the sovereign of the country who took him in his service and gave him a command in his army. He was again made a prisoner in a war with the Abyssinians, but he raised a high position in that Christian in the country again. By reason of his high position in that country, he succeeded to sail to India. Landing at Broach<sup>1</sup>, he heard of the splendor and the magnificence of the Court of the Great Mogul and deserting the Abyssinian fleet, he went forthwith to Agra. Akbar welcomed distinguished foreigners at his Court, was struck by his gracious manners, his noble bearing and his vivid intelligence. He immediately offered him a command in his army and a little later he appointed him master of the guns and conferred on him the title of a Mansabdar<sup>2</sup>, and being desirous of keeping the prince at his court permanently, Akbar gave him in marriage an Armenian lady, Juliana by name, who was employed at that time as a lady doctor and in medical charge of the emperor's seraglio. This lady, who according to some writers was the sister of Akbar's Christian wife, built the first Christian Church at Agra, where according to a well-

<sup>1</sup> Mughal Empire was dotted with a number of cities inhabited by multiple ethnicities and engaged in complex professions. Gujarat was not only the most urbanized suba of Mughals, but also the commercial capital of Mughal Empire in the seventeenth century. Broach, as an urban center was only next to Surat and Ahmadabad in all aspects; population, revenues, and taxes (Hassan, 2018: 94).

<sup>2</sup> The Mansabdar system which was evolved under the supervision of Akbar strengthened its roots within the short span of time during the reign of Akbar. Akbar had his own interests and purposes to develop such an integrated system of efficient and loyal servants on his disposal for the large expansion of his empire. The successors of Akbar tried to capture the spirit of Akbar's age and reign in all respects but without much success. The system remained intact with central authority during Akbar's days. However, after his death, the mansabdars started defying the authority of governors as well as the successors of Akbar. In this paper the performance of mansabdar system under the successors of Akbar i.e. Jahangir, Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb will be discussed and how it has declined the Mughal authority. (Bilal-Fakhar vd. 2020: 199).

founded tradition in the family records of the Bourbons in India, both Lady Juliana and her husband, John Philip Bourbon were buried (Seth, 1937: 92-93).

In regard to Prince Bourbon's place in Indian history, Colonel W. Kincaid of the Indian Political Service, in the *Asiatic Quarterly Review* for January, 1887, made the following statements:

In the second half of the sixteenth century, around the year 1560, John Philip Bourbon of Navarre, a member of the younger branch of Henry VI's family, sailed for India, having been forced to leave France, according to tradition, because he had killed a relative of high rank in a duel... John Philip Bourbon, sailing on to Bengal, went thence to Delhi and sought an interview with the Emperor Akbar. Hearing of the exile's high rank, the emperor sent for him and, interested in his story, treated him with great favour and distinction, eventually appointing him to a position at his court. The emperor offered him a marriage to Lady Juliana, the sister of the emperor's Christian wife, who was responsible for the health of the imperial ladies because of her talent and knowledge of the European medical system. This marriage earned him the title of Nawab<sup>3</sup> (Seth: 1937: 94).

The honour bestowed on Bourbon remained in the family until the sack of Delhi by Nadir Shah in 1737. The descendants of Prince John Philip Bourbon, after many vicissitudes and thrilling adventures during the decadence of the Mughal Empire, are still to be found in Bhopal. Several members of the family lived and died in Agra, where their graves can still be seen in the old Armenian cemetery there.<sup>4</sup>

### 3. Captain William Hawkins

Captain William Hawkins, who appeared before Jahangir as an envoy of King James I of England, arrived in Surat in his ship *Hector* on 24 August 1608 and left the port for Agra on 1 February 1609. Hawkins encountered many obstacles during the long and difficult voyage from Surat, which took 40 days, and arrived at Agra, the capital of the empire, the palace of Jahangir, on 16 April 1609. While in Surat, the local governor had plundered the sailors' goods. Hawkins wrote that the greedy governor "came to my house three times and swept away all that was good". These were precious gifts he had brought for Emperor Jahangir (Seth, 1937: 96).

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<sup>3</sup> Nawab a designation indicating political rank and power in the Mughal administrative hierarchy. In the British period, the term was used for a state conferred honorary title of rank without any official attachment. Nawab is the plural form of the Arabic word *naib* (a deputy) but used in singular meaning (Islam, 2012 "Nawab").

<sup>4</sup> For detailed information about the Bourbons in India, please see: John Malcolm, *A Memoir of Central India* (London, 1823), 341.; Miles L. Wortman, "9. The Indian Under the Later Bourbons" *In Government and Society in Central America, 1680–1840*, (West Sussex: Columbia University Press 1982), 172-183.

Hawkins delivered the letter under the King's (James I) seal, which the monarch examined carefully for some time. An old Portuguese Jesuit priest acted as interpreter to explain the contents of the letter to the emperor. Jahangir then invited the envoy to visit the palace every day and held long conversations with him, in the Turkish language, about England and the countries of Europe. The emperor not only asked him to stay in Agra until he could send an embassy to England himself, but also urged him to accept a wife, in addition to many other valuable gifts (Seth, 1937: 97). Hawkins gives an account of this interesting episode in his journal:

The King was very earnest with mee to take a white Maiden out of his Palace, who would give her all things necessary, with slaves, and he would promise me she should turn Christian. At which my speech, I little thought a Christian's Daughter could be found, so the King called to Mubarique Sha his daughter, who was a Christian Armenian, and of the Race of the most ancient Christians, who [Mubarique Sha] was a Captain, and in great favor with Ekbar [Akbar] Padasha, this King's Father. This captain died suddenly and, as I had promised, I married this young woman of Armenian origin (Seth, 1937: 98).

Jahangir tried to persuade Hawkins to make India his home by promising to make him an officer (mansabdar) of 400 horses, with an allowance of the equivalent of £3200 a year. Permission for an English factory in Surat was first granted, then withdrawn under pressure from the Portuguese viceroy. After a four-year struggle to obtain permission from Jahangir for the English to trade in India, Hawkins was forced to return to England, his mission having proved a failure through the intrigues of the Portuguese, notwithstanding the Emperor's friendly feelings towards him, but his journey to Agra and his stay at the Mogul court may be regarded as the opening scene in the history of the British connection with India, for he was the first Englishman ever to be received by the Emperor of India as an official representative of the King of England (Seth, 1937: 99).

According to Hawkins' account in *Purchas his Pilgrims*, his wife had her mother, brother and relatives living in Agra at the time of their departure from that city on 2 November 1611. They arrived safely aboard Sir Henry Middleton's ship in January 1612 and proceeded to Bantam, from where they sailed for England. However, Hawkins died at sea on the passage from the Cape and his body was brought home and buried in Ireland. In 1614, his Armenian widow married Gabriel Towerson, who had brought home the "Hector" - the ship in which Captain William Hawkins had sailed to India in 1609. In 1617, Captain Gabriel Towerson and his Armenian wife sailed to India again and visited Agra, where the lady stayed with her relatives (Seth, 1937: 99-100).

It can be argued that Hawkins' marriage to an Armenian girl from Agra in 1609 was the first Anglo-Armenian marriage in India, where many British men of nobility and rank married Armenian women. Moreover, this Armenian lady, born and raised in Agra, was the first person in history to visit England from India during the Mughal period.

#### **4. Interpreter Domingo Pires**

Very little is known about this Armenian linguist, who played an important role at Akbar's court as a Portuguese interpreter, Portuguese being the only European language in India at the time. Domingo is not an Armenian name, nor is Pires. He must have adopted this name, which is Portuguese, when he was living in either Goa or Mylapur, then two important commercial centres in Portuguese India. But where could he have learnt this language? Probably in Goa, which was the seat of the Portuguese government in India, or in Mylapur, a Portuguese town near Madras on the Coromandel coast, since there were Armenians in both places trading during the reign of Akbar and his predecessors. He was employed by Akbar as an interpreter for the embassy he sent to Goa in September 1579, inviting Jesuits to his court for religious discussions. The caravan left Goa for Surat on 1-7 November 1579 and, after an arduous journey of over three months, reached Fatehpur Sikri, the residence of Akbar, on 28 February 1580. The fathers were immediately given an audience. And the next day the fathers were again received in the magnificent Diwan-i-Khass, which still stands amidst the ruins of the deserted capital (Fatehpur Sikri), and they brought to Akbar as a gift the new Royal Polygot Bible of Plantyn, printed for Philip II of Spain (1569-1572), magnificently bound in seven volumes. Akbar received this precious gift with great respect and, removing his turban, kissed the holy volumes and placed them on his head one by one, showing greater reverence for those containing the Gospel (Seth, 1937: 88-89).

Abdul Fazl, author of the *Ain-i-Akbari*, (The Institutes of Akbar), in the *Akbar Nama* (History of Akbar), gives the following account of the first arrival of Christian missionaries at Akbar's court:

About this time (1580) Padree Farmatiun (sic) arrived at the Imperial Court from Goa and was received with great distinction. He proved to be learned and eloquent. Some intelligent young men were placed under him for instruction, so that provision might be made for procuring translations of Greek authors, and for extending knowledge. With him came some Europeans and Armenians, who brought silks from China and other goods which were deemed worthy to see His Majesty (Seth, 1937: 89-90).

It is clear from this passage that there were Armenian merchants in Goa at the time, involved in the Chinese silk trade and 'goods of other countries'. In fact, Domingo Pires, the Armenian, continued to act as an interpreter for the Jesuit fathers at Akbar's court before they became proficient in the Persian language.

According to the Jesuit letters of the time, the Armenian interpreter was a great favourite with Akbar, for he actively participated in the wedding of Domingo Pires, when the marrying Armenian, breaking the barriers of the strict conservatism of his race, married an Indian woman, contrary to the then prevailing custom among Armenians. Akbar assisted at the marriage on 24 September 1582, the Emperor translating Father Rudolf Aquaviva's Persian sermon to the Indian woman. Lastly, Akbar's court records state that in 1595 Domingo Pires accompanied the Fathers of the Third Mission from Goa to Lahore. Since the fathers of the Third Mission did not speak Persian, he acted as interpreter in the presence of the king (Singh, 1988: 252-253).

### 5. Mirza Zul-Qarnain

Abdul Hai, the Chief Justice (Mir Adi) was an Armenian according to the Ain-i-Akbari. The doctor of the royal court was an Armenian, named Juliana. It was this Lady Juliana who was given in marriage by Akbar to Prince Jean Philippe de Bourbon of Navarre of the royal house of France, when this debonair adventurer appeared at the court of Akbar in 1560. A daughter of the Armenian Abdul Hai, the chief justice, was married by Akbar to an Armenian at his court in 1590. Iskandar (Alexander), who had originally come to Agra as a merchant from Aleppo and entered the service of Akbar. Iskandar had two sons. The elder, Alexander, born in 1592, was given the name Mirza Zul-Qarnain by Akbar. Zul-Qarnain means the two-horned, the title of Alexander the Great.

Mirza Zul-Qarnain rose through sheer merit to become a Grandee (Amir) of the Mughal court during the glorious reign of Jahangir and Shah Jahan, the worthy successors of the great Akbar. As a boy, Mirza Zul-Qarnain was a great favourite of Emperor Akbar and was brought up in the royal palace as the adopted son of Akbar's Armenian queen. Furthermore It may be mentioned that Mirza Zul-Qarnain had grown up with Shah Jahan in Akbar's court. They had been playmates, and Shah Jahan had to allow Mirza Zul-Qarnain many things that he would not have suffered from anyone else (Kocharian, 2008: 10).

The famous royal chronicler, Emperor Jahangir, gives the following account of Mirza Zul-Qarnain in his memoirs called Tuzaki-Jahangir:

Zul-Qarnain was allowed to go to the Faujdar-ship of Sambhar. He was the son of Iskandar the Armenian, and his father had the good fortune to be in the service of

Arshashyani [Akbar], who gave him in marriage the daughter of Abdul Hai the Armenian, who was in the service of the royal harem. By her he had two sons, one of whom was Zul-Qarnain, who was intelligent and industrious, and to whom the chief diwans during my reign had entrusted the management of the government salt works at Sambhar, a duty which he discharged efficiently. He has now been appointed the Faujdardship of that region. He is an accomplished composer of Hindī songs. His method in this art was correct and his compositions were often brought to my notice and approved. Besides being an accomplished composer of Hindī songs, Mirza Zul-Qarnain was a singer of repute and a poet of great merit, who composed verses in elegant Persian, which was then and for a long time afterwards the language of the Mughal court. It has been recorded that he came from Bengal and presented poems composed in the name of Shah Jahan on the occasion of his accession to the throne, and received a gift of four thousand rupees (Seth, 1937: 4)

It is said that it is so interesting to follow the life history of Mirza Zul-Qarnain, whose achievements and meteoric rise to fame have not been surpassed by any Armenian in India. He was the greatest and most remarkable Armenian to have lived and died in this land of his adoption. His father, Iskandar, was the Jagir<sup>5</sup> of Sambhar, where he was in charge of the government's salt monopoly at the Salt Lake. Shortly after Jahangir's accession, in late 1605, Iskandar came to Agra from Sambhar to pay his respects to the emperor and to give an account of his administration, and Jahangir urged him to become a Mahomedan. Jahangir wanted to get the same from Iskandar, "a distinguished Armenian gentleman" who had been in the late king's favour and had brought up his two sons at court with the king's own nephews. But he remained steadfast in his religion (Richardson, 1981: 67).

Iskandar, the father of Mirza Zul-Qarnain, died in 1613 and at the time of his death was in possession of a jagir and the farm of the government salt monopoly at Sambhar Lake in Rajputana, worth five to six lakhs of rupees annually. He was succeeded by his son Mirza Zul-Qarnain, then 18 years old, who proved to be an able and skillful administrator. In 1620, Jahangir praised his administration and made him faujdar of Bahraich in Oude. When Shah Jahan, who had been Zul-Qarnain's playmate in the palace, became intolerant of non-Mahomedans, he recalled Zul-Qarnain from Bahraich and deprived him of so much money in 1633. Around 1640 he was again favoured, and in 1645 he served in Bengal with Sultan Shuja, one of Shah Jahan's sons,

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<sup>5</sup> A jagir was a type of feudal land grant in the Indian subcontinent at the foundation of its Jagirdar (Zamindar) system. It developed during the Islamic era of the Indian subcontinent, starting in the early 13th century, wherein the powers to govern and collect tax from an estate was granted to an appointee of the state. (Markovits, 2004: 567).

leaving his jagir of Sambhar to be administered by an uncle called Jani Beg. In 1649 he was back on his jagir, in 1651 in Kashmir and in 1652 in Lahore, on both occasions with the emperor Shah Jahan.

Another reference to Zul-Qarnain's Armenian origins is found in Michel Angelo Lualdi's records of 1619:

The faith was most widely propagated in a certain province of Mogor, where Mirza Zul-Qarnain, a native Armenian and a Christian by birth, had reigned since 1619 with the title of governor. As well as his many other benefactions, Mirza Zul-Qarnain gave a handsome sum of money with which the Jesuits bought land near Salsette, Bombay. A mission was also established in Tibet with funds from the Mirza, but it was destroyed in 1640 (Seth, 1937: 12-13).

In 1654, Mirza Zul-Qarnain gave up his jagir and retired to Delhi on a pension of one hundred rupees a day, where he is thought to have died in 1656. His wife Helena died in 1638 and was buried in a beautiful garden he had in Lahore. She left three sons and a daughter, Clara, who married well. The sons all had the title of Mirza and were named Observam (John the Baptist), Eres, Itij, Irich (Gasper) and Daniel (Michael). The exact date of Mirza Zul-Qarnain's death has not yet been established, but it is estimated that he died around 1656, when he would have been about 64 years old (Guenther, 2017: 237-238).

### 6. Mariam (Meryem) Zamani Begum (Jodha Bai)

M. J. Seth pointed out that it is a well-known historical fact that one of the queens of Akbar was an Armenian, known as Mariam Zamani Begum. The well-known Indian historian, Henry George Keane, in his *Sketch of the History of Hindustan*, says: "Akbar subsequently married at least two other foreign ladies, an Armenian and a princess of Marwar. These ladies, who kept their chapels and chaplains undisturbed in the palace, would necessarily do their part to promote the catholicity of the emperor's mind, and predispose him to regard Hindus and Christians with favour" (Seth, 1937: 151). Fanthome, the author of *Reminiscences of Agra*, also claims: "I have in my possession information which leads me to believe that there is a great deal of truth in the statement that Akbar had a Christian wife whose name was Mariam (Seth, 1937: 152).

M. J. Seth has no hesitation in stating that Akbar's Christian wife was an Armenian lady from the banks of the Aras, and that her name was Mariam, which is the Armenian nomenclature for Mary. In a beautiful and highly artistic painting, in colour, Akbar and his Armenian wife were depicted in semi-Asian, semi-European costume, without any of those rich and highly gaudy ornaments on the head which

characterise the paintings of Hindu or Mahomedan queens of the time, but she has a beautiful double row pearl necklace with a plain Armenian gold cross, with a diamond in the centre, hanging from the necklace. She is wearing a plain “cross” and not a “crucifix” and this fact conclusively proves that she was an Armenian, for a crucifix is never worn by Armenians either as an ornament or as an amulet, a plain gold or silver cross being invariably worn by Orthodox Armenians as an amulet. On the other hand, Akbar’s Christian wife is seen in the painting wearing a beautiful and exquisite gold belt, an example of ancient Armenian art. But all this is not enough to prove her nationality. Professor Blochmann, in his translation of the *Ain-i-Akbari*, mentions in one of his notes that there is not the slightest doubt that “Akbar had an Armenian wife”. Mahomedan historians make several references to a “Mariam” as one of the few wives of Akbar, and her tomb can still be seen in Sekundra and is known as “Bibi Mariam ka Rowza”. However, if it can be proved that this Mariam of the Mahomedan historians is the Christian wife of Akbar, it can also be proved that she was the Armenian wife of the great Mughal, as Akbar is known to have had only one Christian wife (Seth, 1937: 159-160).

So how did an Armenian lady from far-off Armenia find her way into Akbar's court? Armenians have always been present in India as merchants. But strictly speaking, they found great favour in the eyes of Akbar and held high and responsible positions under him in the government of the country, the Chief Justice or Mir Adi of the imperial camp being an Armenian by the name of Khwaja Mir Abul-Hai. Hai was the Armenian nomenclature for a native of Armenia. On the other hand, the famous Mirza Zul-Qarnain, who was a grandee of the Mughal court during the reigns of Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan, was an Armenian (Richardson, 1981: 65).

### Conclusion

There are few who know the history of the Armenians in India, their condition, their traditions and their sphere of activity. Many are unaware of their past and the influence they exerted for good in those ancient days of turmoil and unrest. It may not be generally known that the Armenians have been connected with India as traders since the days of remote antiquity. They came to this country by the overland route through Persia, Bactria (Afghanistan) and Tibet, and were well established in all the commercial centers long before the arrival of any European traders in the country. It should be noted, however, that the early Armenian traders did not establish permanent settlements or colonies in India. It was Akbar, however, who induced them to come and settle in his dominions instead of being mere sojourners in the country. Akbar's invitation to the Armenians had the desired effect, for a thriving Armenian

colony soon sprang up at Agra, and at the emperor's express wish an Armenian church was built there in 1562.

Over time, Armenians also served in high positions at the Mughal court, and there were even historical figures of Armenian descent who were honoured with imperial titles. These historical figures are Prince John Philip Bourbon, Captain William Hawkins, interpreter Domingo Pires, Mirza Zulkarneyn, and Mariam (Maryam) Zamani Begum. Prince John Philip Bourbon, a member of the French royal family of Armenian descent who had been exiled to India, served the Mughal dynasty in high positions at Akbar's court. It is claimed that his lineage continued in central India, and even that the city known today as Bhopal is the Hindi, easy-to-pronounce version of the Bourbon title or family name. William Hawkins was an agent of the British East India Company and captain of the first ship to dock in Surat, India. It is also recorded that he traveled to Agra to open a factory and met the Mughal Emperor Jahangir. Domingo Pires, who had served as a translator and interpreter at the Mughal court, was personally appointed by Akbar to attend the negotiations with the Portuguese in Goa. Mirza Zulkarneyn and Mariam Zamani Begum held higher positions in the Mughal court than the others. While Zulkarneyn, as a member of the divan raised in the harem, served as faujdar and governor, Mariam Zamani Begum is known as the chief queen of Akbar. Although claims about her descent and religion differ, for this study the views in the literature that she was of Armenian descent will be emphasized. Thus, with this study, in which we present a cross-section of the Mughal era, we have attempted to provide a historical background to Indo-Armenian relations from the perspective of the discipline of Area Studies, as it reflects the development of present-day India-Armenia bilateral relations in the historical process.

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