TRAVELERS' ACCOUNTS AS A SOURCE FOR THE
STUDY OF RELIGION IN SAFAVID IRAN

by

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STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. AMBASSADORS, MERCHANTS AND CLERGYMEN</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. CHRISTIAN VIEWS OF ISLAM AND EUROPE'S DESIRE FOR PEACEFUL RELATIONS WITH SAFAVID IRAN</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. SHAH ISMA'IL I'S DIVINITY</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. TRAVELERS' PERCEPTIONS OF SHI'ITE-SUNNI DIFFERENCES</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. THE SAFAVID STATE AND THE NON-MUSLIM ELEMENT</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

The Safavid period is one of obscurity, particularly concerning the inception and development of Shi'ism as the state religion. Before we can discuss the development of events in such a period, we must evaluate the sources of information available. This thesis is an investigation of one source of data, European travelers' accounts of Safavid religion. Travel accounts provide an interesting record of religion from an outsider's perspective. Although such accounts must be used with contemporary indigenous sources of the period under review, in many cases these indigenous sources either do not exist or have not been discovered or translated. This thesis shows that travelers' accounts are significant to the study of Safavid history and state religion.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Safavid period embraces the period from 1501, when Isma'il crowned himself the first Shah of the newly established Safavid dynasty, to 1722, when Afghan invaders conquered Isfahan and dethroned Shah Sultan Husayn, thereby ending effective Safavid leadership. The concern of the present study is with accounts of religion in Iran provided by contemporary European travelers of the Safavid period. The objective of this study, therefore, is to examine the European travelers' accessibility to and their accuracy in documenting religion in Safavid Iran.

Safavid religion is of extreme importance to Iranian history in three ways. First, Shah Isma'il I's declaration of Shi'ite Islam as the state religion clearly differentiated the Safavid state from the Sunni Ottoman Empire, which was attempting to incorporate Iran into its dominions. Second, this declaration accordingly provided the Iranian people with a potential source for self-identity securely grounded in religious foundations. Third, the imposition of Shi'ism on the Iranian people who previously had been Sunni, at least officially, resulted in persecution of those who refused to conform. One possible source for examining the repercussions of Iran's transformation from Sunnism to Shi'ism, on a domestic as well as an international level, is the accounts of European travelers to Safavid Iran who, as visitors not
completely embroiled in the every day affairs of Safavid politics, may have observed the situation accurately and objectively.

Each of the Europeans who went to Iran during the Safavid period had an indisputable right to the name of traveler. Some of these men spent several years in the country, lived among the people, and even achieved fluency in the Persian language. Yet, none of these Europeans was ever considered by the Iranians to be anything more than a visitor. For their part, the travelers too never considered themselves anything but travelers and visitors. None of these travelers ever intended to remain in Iran longer than his business or curiosity kept him there. All of these travelers journeyed to other Asian countries and, in most cases, Iran was an exciting stop-over rather than a potential long term residence.

The Safavid period represents in many ways an obscure period in Iranian history. In spite of the remarkable efforts made by several scholars to whom we are greatly indebted, such as A. K. S. Lambton, V. Minorsky and R. Savory, to name but a few, there is still a great deal to be uncovered regarding Safavid history. There are few indigenous Iranian sources from the Safavid period and even fewer that have been translated and fully analyzed. These works include not only official state documents and contemporary histories written by Muslims, but also histories written by minority religious groups in Safavid Iran as well. There are also external sources on Safavid Iran which have not yet been fully examined. One source which could shed some light on Safavid social history is English factory reports. However, it is unlikely that these reports could shed any light on religion. The most important external
source is the accounts provided by contemporary European travelers of the Safavid period which, in some instances, contain detailed descriptions of religion in Safavid Iran. The significance of the present study, therefore, lies in the fact that heretofore, no systematic examination of European travelers' accounts as a source for the study of religion in Safavid Iran has ever been conducted.

Note on the Transliteration and the Sources:

In this thesis a simplified system of romanization omitting diacritical marks and long vowel symbols has been utilized in transliterating Arabic and Persian words. The 'eyn sound, because it is a letter, has been retained and is represented by an apostrophe.

In dealing with the European travel accounts, particularly those accounts by English travelers, I have modernized the spelling. My contention is that their interest lies more in what they express than in their antiquarian style. Also, the quaint spellings and rash of capitals sometimes render their meaning almost unintelligible. I have, however, in no way altered the word order or the punctuation from the original texts.
Before the Safavid period (1501-1722), few Europeans visited Iran. With the rise of Safavid power, an awareness developed in Europe of the potential benefits that could be derived from consistent political and economic relations with Iran. Europe once again, like in the Mongol period, sought an ally capable of distracting the Ottoman forces on the Empire's eastern front, thereby hindering the Ottoman advance into Europe. On a mercantile level, European merchants, both as government representatives and as individual entrepreneurs, coveted the profits from trade in Iran's exotic markets. To these ends, political and commercial envoys were sent from Europe to Iran throughout the entire Safavid period.

There was also a third group of travelers, fewer in number, but no less significant in the history of European travelers to Safavid Iran. This group was the clergymen sent to Iran by their various Christian orders both as missionaries in search of new converts and as diplomats urging the Papacy's desire for a military alliance with the Safavids against the Ottomans. Finally, there were the soldiers of fortune. These men went as private individuals, often at their own expense, and were relatively few in number, conditions in Iran being too rough and hazardous to attract any but the most daring.

Most contemporary European travelers of the Safavid period devoted little attention to religion in Iran. Some wrote a few pages on
the subject, others wrote no more than a paragraph or two, and still others made their remarks in one short sentence. Yet, when we combine the accounts of all the travelers, we can create an accurate report representative of both how much and how little these travelers actually knew about religion in Iran. My objectives in this chapter are to introduce the travelers and their accounts, to describe briefly what subjects occupied their attention most while in Iran and, finally, to point out their varying degrees of interest and objectivity in treating of Iranian religion. Specific details from the travelers' accounts vis-à-vis certain aspects of Iranian religion will occupy the substance of the successive chapters.

The Venetian envoys of the fifteenth century sent to Aq-Qoyunlu Iran concern us in the present study only insofar as they provide the starting point for later Safavid-European diplomatic relations. In 1470 a Venetian envoy, Caterino Zeno, arrived at Uzun Hassan's court and presented the Aq-Qoyunlu monarch with the Papacy's desires for a European-Iranian military alliance against the Ottomans. Uzun Hassan was receptive to the idea and in 1472 he led his forces in a successful battle against the Ottomans. Uncertain as to why Europe failed to react with a simultaneous invasion of the Ottoman Empire's western front, the Aq-Qoyunlu monarch sent Zeno back to Europe to encourage the Christian kings to take up arms against the Ottomans.

M. Josafat Barbaro and Ambrosio Contarini were sent from Venice to take Zeno's place at Uzun Hassan's court. However, Uzun Hassan had already lost his patience with Europeans. Because Christian Europe, by not launching an invasion against the Ottomans, failed to react in
a positive manner, Uzun Hassan questioned their sincerity. As a result, Barbaro and Contarini's arguments to induce the Aq-Qoyunlu monarch to again to meet the Ottomans on the battlefield ended in futility.

There is a long gap between these early Venetian ambassadors and Vincentio d'Alessandri, a diplomatic envoy sent from Venice in 1571 to the court of the Safavid Shah Tahmasb. Although Tahmasb cordially received the Venetian, d'Alessandri's mission to achieve a Safavid-European alliance against the Ottomans produced negligible results. In his account, d'Alessandri provided a vivid description of Shah Isma'il's reign, the character of his son and successor, Shah Tahmasb, Tahmasb's palace, and the reverence demanded by the Shah of his subjects. The traveler also included brief descriptions of agriculture, various cities, and Iranian life and customs. Yet, beyond his report that the Safavid kings claim descent from 'Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad, he neglected entirely a discussion of religion in Iran.

In 1598 Sir Anthony Sherley, with his youngest brother Robert, set out for Iran. Although Sherley was but a mere adventurer, he was able to give his visit the semblance of an official mission. Anthony's objectives were to promote English-Iranian trade relations and to persuade the Safavid Shah Abbas I to commit himself to a military alliance with Christian Europe against the Ottomans. Shah Abbas was receptive to Sherley's terms for such an alliance, and in 1599 he sent Anthony to Europe as his ambassador to the Christian kings. Robert Sherley remained behind as a hostage but, thanks to his military knowledge, he soon gained great favor with the Shah who used his services to reorganize the Iranian army.
In his narrative, Anthony Sherley gave greater importance to describing the political conditions he found in Iran at the time of his arrival rather than recounting his personal adventures. As a result, the major portion of the text contains Anthony's praise for and history of Shah Abbas I and a lengthy explanation of why the Shah was in favor of an alliance with Christian Europe against the Ottomans. Sherley claimed that he derived all his historical information from Shah Abbas himself.  

This is probably true, yet two major problems arise in Sherley's account of Iranian history. First, the dates of the events he discussed are inaccurate. This could be attributed to either Anthony's own careless notetaking or the fact that he did not know Persian and, therefore, because he relied entirely on an interpreter, the interpreter also could have made mistakes and interpolations in his translation. Second, if Shah Abbas I was Anthony's sole source for his history of Iran, then we may accurately assume that Anthony's history represents the history of the period as the leading protagonist felt it should be told rather than as it actually was.

Of major importance to the present study is Anthony Sherley's neglect of discussion of religion. Except for brief general statements that the Iranians and Turks were at war due to religious disagreements, Sherley mentioned nothing further about religion in Iran or his own personal attitudes towards Islam. There is nothing in his account that might indicate why he neglected religion, yet we may assume that he was both uninterested in religion and feared jeopardizing his position by

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making personal assessments of Islam that could be taken the wrong way by his patron.

The first merchant to travel to Iran during the Safavid period was the anonymous author of *The Travels of a Merchant in Persia*. The Venetian merchant traded between Damascus, Aleppo and Iran. Because he lived in Iran from 1511 to 1520 he was an eyewitness to Shah Isma'il I's reign and, from this account, we have the best treatment of Shah Isma'il's alleged divinity. Yet, beyond his discussion of Shah Isma'il's alleged divinity, his work is more important for geographic details than aspects of Iranian religion. It is only natural that a merchant would be interested in the geography of trade routes and of the cities and countries to which he traveled. As a result, a great deal of his narrative is spent describing, in minute detail, the route he took from Aleppo to Tabriz.

After forty years, another merchant, Anthony Jenkinson, came to Iran. As Queen Elizabeth's ambassador and an agent of the English Muscovy Company, Jenkinson met Shah Tahmasb at Qazvin in August 1562. Jenkinson's mission was to secure stable commercial relations between England and Iran across Russia. Shah Tahmasb received him well and at first seemed favorable to a trade agreement. Yet, when the Shah discovered that Jenkinson was a Christian, he bade Jenkinson to depart. His mission unaccomplished, Jenkinson left Iran for Russia in 1563.

Jenkinson's most significant contributions to the West were his accurate maps and geographic descriptions of the places to which he journeyed. Jenkinson was the first to describe from personal observation the Volga basin, the first Englishman to navigate the Caspian Sea and prove that it was landlocked, and the first to describe accurately
the various countries bordering on its coasts. Unfortunately, however, Jenkinson treated a great deal more of Russian trade routes and his negotiations with the Russian Tsar rather than of Iran. His discussion of religion in Iran is particularly limited in scope only to include Shah Tahmasb's dislike for Christians and his own denunciation of Islam. Because of Jenkinson's brief stay in Iran, his ignorance of Persian, and his abrupt encounter with Shah Tahmasb, his account of religion in Iran is brief and biased and provides little factual information.

The next English attempt at trade negotiations with Iran was in 1627 when King Charles of England sent Sir Dodmore Cotton as a commercial envoy to Shah Abbas I. Cotton's objective was to arrange for the diversion of the silk route from its ancient channel through Ottoman territory to a new route by sea from Bandar Abbas, formerly Gombroon, on the Persian Gulf. Sir Thomas Herbert joined Cotton's envoy in an unofficial capacity which he felt would enable him to see Iran under Cotton's protection and at a small cost. The embassy arrived at Bandar Abbas in January 1628 and Herbert immediately began recording all that he saw. By mid-summer, Cotton's embassy met Shah Abbas I in Qazvin, but the Shah was unfriendly towards them. Within a few days Cotton died of dysentery. With their mission unaccomplished and the ambassador dead, nothing more remained for Herbert and his companions but to return home.

Herbert's narrative is of significant interest from an historical point of view in that it provides the only detailed account of Cotton's

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embassy to Iran. Herbert spent over thirteen months in Iran, during which period he traveled from southern Iran to northern Iran and back again. During this time, however, Herbert learned no more than a few words of Persian. His account of the cities he traveled through -- Qazvin, Qum, Kashan, Isfahan, and Shiraz -- provides a valuable graphic picture of Iran. Although Herbert, a Protestant, apparently liked Iran and its people, in his brief one paragraph discussion of Iranian religion he demonstrated his lack of knowledge of and prejudice against Islam. 3

Another problem with Herbert's work is that he gives few dates.

Our next traveler is Jean Baptiste Tavernier, a French Protestant jewel merchant and inveterate traveler who made nine trips to or through Iran on his six voyages from Europe to Asia between 1632 and 1668. He was on his way to Iran for a tenth trip when he died in Moscow at the age of eighty-four. The purpose of his six journeys to Asia, mainly to Iran and India, was to buy uncut gems in Asia, cut and set them in Europe, and return to Asia and sell the finished products at handsome profits.

Tavernier's account is a valuable treatment of Safavid Iran. He described, in minute detail, the various routes he traveled and provides interesting descriptions of caravanseris, camels and camel breeding, and Iranian currency. The text is of significant historical interest in that Tavernier, in his final chapter, provided an elaborate discussion of Portuguese, Dutch, English, and Iranian commercial affairs. His historical sketches of Shah Abbas II and Sulayman are also interesting and accurate. For our purposes, Tavernier's account is most valuable for his

treatment of religion in Iran. Tavernier provided a lengthy discussion of Islam, Shi'ite-Sunni variances, and the Shi'ite Muharram festival in commemoration of Imam Husayn's death. This discussion of Muslim religion is followed up with a detailed treatment of Zoroastrians, Jews, and Armenians. Tavernier was a careful observer and seemingly one more interested in conveying the truth of what he saw rather than imposing his own cultural biases.

In 1637 Frederick II, Duke of Holstein, sent a delegation of one hundred men to the court of Shah Safi in Isfahan. The official mission of the envoy, led by Philip Crusius and Otto Bergman, was to secure silk trade relations with Iran across Russia. Adam Olearius accompanied the embassy in the capacity of secretary and, during his nine month stay in Iran, he produced an account of the embassy's travels. Unfortunately, I was unable to procure a copy of Olearius' work and, as a result, I know nothing of its contents.

Jean Chardin, a French Huguenot jewel merchant, based his famous travel account on the observations he made during an eleven year residence in Iran from 1664 to 1670 and from 1671 to 1677. During his first visit he began his study of Persian and Turkish and rapidly attained fluency in both languages. Throughout his residence in Iran, Chardin studied Iran's politics, literature, history, customs and resources with minute thoroughness. Chardin came to know Iran so well that he proudly tells us "that I knew Isfahan better than Paris, though I was bred and


5Ibid., pp. 89-115.
born there, and the Persian language was as easy to me as French, and I
could currently read and write it."\(^6\)

Chardin's profound knowledge and understanding of Iran and its
people provided the foundations for his ten volume account published by
Langlès in Paris in 1811. Chardin's work, beyond doubt, is the most exact,
complete and vivid account of Safavid Iran.\(^7\) Unfortunately, I was unable
to procure a copy of Chardin's original account. Instead, I was forced
to rely on an abridged translation of Chardin's travels by N. M. Penzer.
Although the abridged version necessarily omits lengthy detailed descrip-
tions and contains only an outline of the core of Chardin's full account,
it still provides an accurate estimate of this traveler's thoroughness
and exactness in describing almost every imaginable aspect of Iran and
its people. Although much of Chardin's treatment of religion in Iran
has been omitted in the abridged version, what has remained is valuable.
Naturally the omissions might have added greater insights to the present
study, yet there is nothing in Chardin's original account that could
alter significantly the arguments raised in this thesis.

Another travel account which I was unable to procure is that of
Jan Struys, a Dutchman who spent one month in Isfahan in 1672. Struys
unsuccessfully attempted to divert the Iranian silk trade through Russia.

John Fryer, a surgeon in the service of the English East India
Company, arrived in Iran in 1677. Fryer never tells us what his official

\(^6\) N. M. Penzer, ed., Sir John Chardin's Travels in Persia (New

\(^7\) V. Minorsky, trans. and ed., Tadhkirat Al-Muluk: A Manual of
duties were during his eighteen month stay in Isfahan, yet he probably worked as a physician for the small European community there. While in Isfahan, he frequently visited the Armenians of Julfa and perhaps also rendered them his medical services.

Fryer's account of Iran reflects numerous inaccuracies and cultural and religious biases. His discussion of the caravan route from Bandar Abbas through Lar and Shiraz to Isfahan is both interesting and geographically accurate. Fryer was, however, hardly objective in his treatment of the Iranian people; on numerous occasions his reports reflect contempt for the religion and customs of people whom he regarded as semi-savages and idolaters. Fryer, who knew no Persian, took every occasion to denounce Islam and to commend Christianity. In his preface he mentions that one of his objectives is to reclaim the atheist and inculcate a purer form of faith. Fryer continually attacks Islam with claims that Muhammad was an imposter and that the Qur'an is a "Legend of Lies". Furthermore, not only does Fryer express his personal prejudices against Islam, but also what he does record of the doctrines and history of Islam is solidly inaccurate.

With his terms for a European-Iranian military alliance against the Ottomans, Shah Abbas I also expressed an invitation to European Christians to enter Iran. Immediately, numerous Christian orders sent their representatives to Iran. The first clergymen, en masse, to arrive

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in Safavid Iran were the Portuguese Augustinians. A few years after their arrival, in 1607, came the Carmelite priests. Thanks to the anonymous author of *A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia*, we have a compilation of the numerous letters and reports written by these missionaries in Iran to their superiors in Rome and elsewhere over a 170 year period. Naturally, such a source provides a continuity of knowledge that short term accounts often lack. Yet, as Catholic missionaries frustrated in their attempts to convert Muslims to Catholicism, their accounts are heavily prejudiced against Islam and the Safavid government. Because the Carmelite chronicles apply to the present study only in our examination of Safavid state attitude and policy towards non-Muslims, a complete discussion of this source has been reserved for Chapter 5.

Turning now to individual clergymen who journeyed to Safavid Iran, the first was John Cartwright, an Anglican parson who covered a sizable portion of the Middle East between 1600 and 1601 purely for his own amusement. Cartwright spent several months in Iran in 1600 touring such cities as Tabriz, Kashan, Qazvin, Isfahan and Shiraz. Unfortunately, I was unable to obtain a copy of Cartwright's account, entitled *The Preacher's Travels*.

Father Raphael du Mans, a French Capuchin, spent fifty-one years in Iran beginning in 1645. His *Estat de la Perse en 1660*, which I could not acquire, sums up the observations he made during the first fourteen years of his residence in Isfahan. I regret, on the basis of Minorsky's evaluation of du Mans, not having been able to obtain a copy of du Mans' work. "The author was one of the best Persian scholars of
the time," wrote Minorsky, "and was employed by the Shah as an interpreter in the more important negotiations. His book is remarkable as a first-hand account of the situation, covering as it does a whole range of Persian topics and using an exact terminology. Many travelers enjoyed Father Raphael's hospitality and utilized his notes."

Another account which was unavailable was that of Father P. Sanson entitled, *Etat present de la Perse*. Sanson went to Iran as an Apostolic missionary in 1683 and remained in that country, three years in Isfahan, until 1691. His book of 264 pages was published in Paris in 1695.

The last of the accounts by individual clergymen in our study is that of Father Jude Krusinski, a Polish Jesuit who lived in Isfahan for twenty years from 1702 to 1722 when that city fell to Afghan invaders. As procurator of the Jesuits in Isfahan, Father Krusinski had frequent opportunities to negotiate with Shah Sultan Husayn and his ministers. In the preface to his *Memoirs*, we are told that the Shah and his chief ministers respected Father Krusinski's wisdom and integrity and held him in a special friendship that entitled him to participate in official audiences and conversation.

Father Krusinski's account is especially valuable for two important reasons. First, he had the accessibility necessary to document various aspects of the Shah's character and the domestic affairs of the

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Safavid state. Second, he was an eyewitness of the downfall of the Safavid monarchy and the Afghan occupation of Isfahan. Throughout his account, Father Krusinski demonstrates his exactness in recording events as they happened from an objective point of view. This is in particular contrast to the Carmelite priests who, of similar Catholic background, continually denounced Islam and prejudicially accused the Safavid state of religious oppression.

The last category of European travelers to Safavid Iran is the soldiers of fortune. Giovan Maria Angiolello, a Venetian, fits this category in that we know nothing of his reasons for travel in the Middle East. Angiolello was in the service of the Ottomans, yet we do not know in what capacity. Since he was present at several Ottoman campaigns against the Iranians, both Aq-Qoyunlu and Safavid, Angiolello may have been a mercenary soldier or a military advisor. In the account of his travels he described briefly the rise of Aq-Qoyunlu Uzun Hassan and gave a full description of the battle of Baskent. Concerning religion in Iran, Angiolello's account is especially valuable for two reasons. First, his claim that Shah Isma'il I brutally attacked Sunnis in the cities he conquered was one of the earliest statements by European travelers pertaining to Shi'ite persecution of Sunnis in Safavid Iran. Second, his treatment of Shah Isma'il I's alleged divinity is, with the exception of the anonymous account entitled The Travels of a Merchant in Persia,

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the only other travel account to mention this subject. However, beyond these two observations, Angiolello treated nothing else of religion in Iran.

The next soldier of fortune to enter Safavid Iran was Pedro Teixeira, a Portuguese Jew who made several trips between Europe and Asia during the period 1586 to 1605. Throughout his narrative Teixeira displays a notable reticence regarding his trade or profession. As a result, we know nothing of his occupation or the reasons why he undertook his travels. However, judging from his frequent references to drugs and his interest in Iranian medical practices, he might have been a physician; yet this is mere conjecture.

Teixeira spent four years in Hormuz beginning in 1593. During this period he learned Persian and translated the chronicles of Mir Khwand and Turan Shah. In 1597 he went to Mazanderan and, after a brief stay, returned to Hormuz and then went to India. After a brief residence in India and a lengthy trip around the world, he returned to Hormuz in 1604. Tired of seafaring, Teixeira decided to make a land journey to Europe by way of the Euphrates valley. The major portion of Teixeira's narrative consists of a description of the route he took through Basara, Kerbala and Baghdad to Aleppo. He was a careful observer and, in spite of his lengthy digressions, he brought together a mass of information on Asian geography, history, customs and pharmacology. Unfortunately, he devoted minimum attention to religion. Except for his self-devised dichotomy of Sunni-Shi'ite variances, Teixeira neglects entirely a discussion of Islam.

13Ibid., p. 115.
Pietro della Valle, a Roman Patrician, traveled throughout the Middle East apparently for pleasure and amusement. He came to Iran in 1617 merely because he had heard of Shah Abbas I's fame and wanted to pay his respects to him. Shah Abbas's wit and majestic splendor kept Pietro in Isfahan for five years; his remaining two years in Iran were spent sightseeing. Pietro's narrative of his journeys to Asia filled seven volumes. This work, entitled Viaggio, was condensed by Wilfred Blunt, whose abridgement of Pietro's travels was the only source that I was able to procure on Pietro della Valle. In spite of the drawbacks in dealing with an abridged version, in that the editor necessarily deleted parts of the text which he himself found uninteresting or unimportant, Blunt's work still provides an accurate and valuable account of Iran as Pietro himself saw it.

The most fascinating sections of della Valle's account are his vivid descriptions of both Shah Abbas I and Isfahan. Shah Abbas I and Pietro were close friends and, during Pietro's five year residence in Isfahan, the two spent a great deal of time in one another's company. As a result, Pietro's treatment of Shah Abbas I is an excellent eyewitness account of that Shah's character and personality. Pietro's treatment of Isfahan, however, gave the impression that he was uninterested in and even bored with the majestic capital of the Safavids. Concerning religion in Iran, Pietro almost neglected the subject entirely, providing only a brief discussion of the Shi'ite Muharram festival.\(^{14}\) We may speculate that the reasons for della Valle's neglect of the history and doctrines of Shi'ism

stem either from omissions made by Blunt in his abridgement of Pietro's work or from Pietro's uninterest in religion in general and his ignorance of Shi'ism in particular.

Another pleasure-seeking traveler was Jean de Thevenot. Thevenot, a Frenchman, spent three years in Iran between 1664 and 1667 just to satisfy his own curiosity; his interest in Iran was stimulated by a learned Frenchman he met during a visit to Rome. Thevenot is described in the preface to his account as a man of exceptional attainment in Natural Philosophy, Geometry, Astronomy, Botany and Mathematics. He also had an aptitude for languages -- in addition to several European languages, he was fluent also in Turkish, Persian and Arabic. On the whole, Thevenot's narrative of his travels to Turkey, Iran and India reflects his keen scientific eye and his dedication to providing an honest description of the varied topics he treated. These topics cover almost every aspect of Iran and its people.

Of significant importance to the present study is his lengthy discussion of religion in Iran. Not only did Thevenot provide an accurate description of minority religions in Safavid Iran but he also treated Sunni-Shi'ite variances, Shi'ite religious practices, especially the Muharram festival and a brief history of 'Ali and Shi'ism. Because Thevenot covered religion in Iran to a greater extent than most other contemporary travelers of the period, and with greater accuracy, his


16Ibid., p. 8.
account is one of our more valuable sources. His discussion of Shah Abbas II and the royal palace, however, suffers from his inaccessibility to the Shah. This stems undoubtedly from the fact that he had few contacts and no official business in Iran.

The last soldier of fortune who journeyed to Iran in 1703-1704 was a Dutchman named Cornelius Le Bruyn. Le Bruyn was a clever and observant man and, as a result, he provided some interesting details on Shah Sultan Husayn and his rearing in the royal harem. His treatment of religion in Iran, however, lacked the insight with which he treated other aspects of Iranian society. Beyond his one paragraph discussion of Sunni-Shi'ite variances, which is basically a dichotomy of Turk and Iranian, and his treatment of the Shi'ite Muharram festival, he devoted no other attention to religion in Iran.

With the exception of Chardin, Tavernier and Thevenot, contemporary travelers of the period treated little of religion in Iran. Yet, what they recorded is of significant value. The early Venetian travelers, although they treated little of religion in Iran, are the only travelers accounts that deal with Shah Isma'il I's alleged divinity. In examining European travelers' perceptions of Sunni-Shi'ite variances, all the travelers accounts combined provide an accurate assessment of how much and how little European travelers actually knew about the differences between these two Islamic sects. The chapter dealing with Sunni-Shi'ite variances also reflects European travelers' sympathies and prejudices towards Islam. The chronicle of the Carmelite priests, although a biased Catholic source,

serves as the core for much of the discussion on the relationship between the Safavid state and the non-Muslim element. When and where applicable, other accounts are used to prove both the accuracy and the bias of the Carmelite chronicle.

I must apologize for the number of the above mentioned sources which I was unable to procure. Indeed, these sources would have made the present study all the more complete. But until these rare sources are made more readily available this lacuna will remain in the study of travelers' accounts of religion in Safavid Iran. If one of the omitted sources contains a description of religion in Safavid Iran superior to any of the sources that I have used, then that account merely reflects the unequalled perceptions of that particular traveler and could in no way significantly alter the arguments raised in the present study.
CHAPTER 3

CHRISTIAN VIEWS OF ISLAM AND EUROPE'S DESIRE FOR PEACEFUL RELATIONS WITH SAFAVID IRAN

Contemporary travelers of the period of course had their own preconceptions about Islam. Mainstream Christian thought provided the roots for these preconceived notions. My objective at this juncture is twofold: first, to describe briefly the extent to which travelers of the period were affected by Christianity's negative view of Islam; second, to discover Christian Europe's need for diplomatic relations with Safavid Iran.

Christians viewed the mere existence of Islam as a direct threat to its own foundations. The Christian view of Islam as an enemy determined to destroy the true faith has deeply penetrated the Christian mind. This attitude has continued for centuries. Almost without exception, Christians' reaction towards Islam has been strong and hostile. On a political and military level Christian Europe sought to destroy Islam. The most substantial evidence for this is the Crusades. On a theological level, Christians denounced Islam and attacked it with the claim that Islam was either heresy or not even a religion at all.

Religiously, Islam and Christianity are concerned with many of the same themes: both are monotheist religions and both teach many of the same principles of morality in the route to divine Paradise. They differ however, about the means God used to reveal himself, about the nature of the revelation they contend was made by Christ and about the
nature of revelation which only Muslims believe was made through Muhammad. The field of disagreement further involves such important questions as the character of prophethood, the Trinity of Persons in the Godhead, and of Incarnation.¹

Due to Europeans' ignorance and intolerance of Islam, Islam is often misrepresented in Christian sources. Christians were often content to represent Islam and the Prophet Muhammad (commonly represented as an Imposter) with the Beast of the Book of Revelation, or with the Anti-Christ.² This sustained negative view of Islam was, in most instances, attributed to the passage of ideas from one author to the next.³ Thus, although Christian scholars were providing their fellows with information about Islam and Muslims they, at the same time, created a distorted image of Islam which enabled Christians to believe in their own superiority.

From the fall of the Mamluk Sultanate in 1516-1517 to the rise of Arab nationalism, as the Arabs sought independence from the Ottoman Turks at the dawn of the twentieth century, there was virtually no Muslim state in the Arab world capable of arousing a continual and separate attention of Christian Europe. For the most part, from 1517 to the twentieth century Arabs were virtually excluded from European study of the


Middle East while the Ottoman Turks absorbed nearly all western attention. Likewise, until European travelers entered Safavid Iran en masse, Iranians also went almost completely unnoticed in European sources. As V. J. Parry pointed out,

Information about the earlier centuries of Muslim rule in the Arab lands or in Iran could be attained at the fifteenth century only from the Byzantine historians and the Latin chronicles of the Crusades, i.e., from sources inadequate in their data and often difficult of access, most of them remaining as yet in manuscript form.4

Iran, it is true, continued to be a strong and independent state. Yet, with the exception of a few isolated friars and merchants who traveled to or in Iran before the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, Europeans knew little of Iran except that it, like the Ottoman Empire, was a Muslim State and its markets offered an abundance of exotic products from Asia not found in Europe.

The Ottoman advance on Europe struck panic and fear in the hearts of most European Christians. For Europeans, Turk was synonymous with Muslim, both representative of one of the greatest calamities ever to threaten Christian Europe. Naturally Europe developed a vicious hatred for its enemy. How often both sides, European and Ottoman, utilized religious differences as an instrument of propaganda capable of stimulating war and conquest towards their enemy is a topic beyond the scope of the present study, yet one which has not yet been examined conclusively. We may contend, however, that although not all of the wars fought between

4V. J. Parry, "Renaissance Historical Literature in Relation to the Near and Middle East (With Special Reference to Paolo Giovio)," in Historians of the Middle East, eds. Bernard Lewis and P. M. Holt (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 277-289.
the Europeans and Ottomans were based on religion, prejudicial views developed on both sides detrimental to Christians' better understanding of Muslims and vice versa.

With the rise of the Aq-Qoyunlus and later the Safavids, a political consciousness became ingrained in Europe when once again, like in the Mongol Period, they thought they might find a reliable military ally capable of hindering the Ottoman advance on Christian Europe. The possibility of an eastern ally against the Ottomans caused Europeans to interest themselves in the various wars fought between the Ottoman Empire and Iran during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Europeans still knew little of Iran yet they were content to write of Iranians as declared foes of the Ottomans rather than as an object of interest in themselves.

Christian Europe gradually became aware of the bitter animosity, which they regarded solely on a religious basis of Sunni vs. Shi'ite, between the Ottomans and the Safavids. Not fully understanding what the doctrinal, historical or political differences between the two Islamic sects actually were, Christian Europe sought to take advantage of the situation by sending ambassadors to the Safavid court, hoping that they would attack the Ottoman Empire from the East and thereby offer Europe some relief.

The ever onward drive of the Ottomans into the heart of Europe, at times rapid and powerful and at others rather weak, but always threatening

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illustrated the potential danger Christian Europe faced if its eastern enemy went unchecked. One of the immediate consequences of the Ottoman conquests in Europe was the painful realization in Europe that neither the Church nor any Christian nation was strong enough militarily to meet the threat posed by these fierce warriors.

A detailed history of the political conditions in Europe which rendered the Christian states unable to resist the Ottoman advance can be found in numerous sources. Although it would suffice to state simply that Europe was politically fragmented as individual states and principalities continually fought one another rather than joining in a united military campaign to check the Ottomans, a brief outline of some of the major events in Europe might better explain the situation.

In 1309 Pope Clement V established his court in Avignon, France after he was driven from Rome by the Ottomans. His successors remained in Avignon until 1377 when Pope Gregory XI returned to Rome to reside in the Vatican. Upon his death in 1378, Gregory XI was succeeded by an Italian, Pope Urban VI. The French cardinals objected and proceeded to create an anti-Pope. England, Italy, Poland, Hungary, Germany and Flanders yielded their obedience to Rome while Spain, France and Scotland obeyed only Avignon. After nearly forty years, in 1417, the schism ended when Martin V became the universally recognized Pope. However, during this

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forty year period the Papacy was in no position to command the allegiance necessary to organize a unity of resistance against the Ottomans.

By the mid-fifteenth century the only European state capable of posing some resistance to the Ottomans was Venice, and almost the whole brunt of resistance fell upon her. Spain desired to help but was entirely preoccupied with ridding itself of the Moors and accomplishing its own internal unity. Furthermore, although the Papacy had once again reached a level of authority capable of requesting unified European action against the Ottomans, the individual European states were unwilling to cooperate since they were more preoccupied than ever with internecine rivalries and totally distracted from any unified military action against the Ottomans.

On the whole, the turmoil in Europe from the fourteenth through the seventeenth century prevented it from dealing effectively with the Ottoman advance. The Papacy, whenever the opportunity offered, not only tried to stimulate forces in Europe to meet the Ottomans, but also worked diplomatically to secure support from rulers of Iran, both Aq-Qoyunlu and Safavid. As Europe gradually became aware of the almost hereditary hostility between the Iranians and Turks, it tried to take advantage of the situation by devising a plan for simultaneous military operations on the western and eastern frontiers of the Ottoman Empire. To that end negotiations were opened between Rome and Iran -- first with Venetian ambassadors to the Aq-Qoyunlu and Safavid courts and later with the Carmelite priests to the court of Shah Abbas I.

All attempts at such a military alliance, however, were futile. The Aq-Qoyunlu were too weak to pose anything more than a temporary
diversion of Ottoman forces on the empire's eastern front. The Safavids were much stronger and could have possibly accomplished the task. Yet, although Shah Isma'il I seemed favorable to the idea of such an alliance and in spite of the continual wars he waged against the Ottomans, Christian Europe was too fragmented to attack effectively the Ottoman Empire's western front. Shah Tahmasb, Isma'il I's son and successor, seemed virtually uninterested in pursuing the alliance. By the reign of Shah Abbas I (1587-1629) the notion of an alliance was again resumed, yet it was now the Safavids rather than the Europeans who sought immediate results.

In 1599 Anthony Sherley arrived in Isfahan and within a few years he became Shah Abbas I's ambassador to Rome and the Christian European kings. Sherley presented the Papacy with Abbas's terms for a well-designed military alliance against the Ottomans, but Rome as well as the rest of Europe failed to act in a positive manner. The Papacy, rather than organizing a united military campaign against the Ottomans, instead sent the Catholic Carmelite missionaries to Iran to work for the conversion of Iranians.

An effective military alliance between Iran and Europe was never achieved due to three major reasons. First, political fragmentation in Europe precluded united European action against the Ottomans. Second, Shah Abbas I gradually grew disappointed with the Papacy's sincerity and did not bother pursuing the alliance. Third, the unstable state of domestic affairs in Iran after Shah Abbas I was not conducive to renewed interest in such an alliance with Christian Europe.

In the meantime, however, Europe developed an interest in trade relations with Iran. Before the rise of Safavid power in 1501, the
Portuguese had already discovered a sea route from Europe to Asia by way of the Cape of Good Hope. Early in the sixteenth century the Portuguese, under the leadership of Alfonso d'Albuquerque, appeared in the Persian Gulf and captured the Island of Hormuz as well as part of the adjoining mainland.

The English also realized the profits to be made through consistent trade relations with Iran. In 1561 the English Merchant Anthony Jenkinson arrived at Shah Tahmasb's court in Isfahan with a letter from Queen Elizabeth in which she expressed her desire to establish trade between England and Iran across Russia. Tahmasb received Jenkinson courteously but brusquely bade him depart upon discovering that he was a Christian. Not until nearly forty years later were Englishmen again seen in Iran in search of trade relations. In 1599 the English adventurer Anthony Sherley, with his brother Robert, arrived at Shah Abbas I's court. Their objective was two-fold: first, to induce Shah Abbas to ally himself with the Christian powers against the Ottomans; second, to establish consistent commercial relations between England and Iran.

The presence of the Portuguese in southern Iran and on the Island of Hormuz, which by the mid-sixteenth century became the Portuguese trading center in the Persian Gulf, was a long time thorn in the Safavid's side. In 1602 Shah Abbas I commanded his troops to a victory which expelled the Portuguese from the mainland, yet his attempts to recapture Hormuz were futile. Twenty years later, with the assistance of the English East India company's fleet, Shah Abbas I captured Hormuz itself and finally ended Portuguese dominance in the Persian Gulf. To show his gratitude to the English East India company, Abbas granted them valuable
trading privileges at the port of Bandar Abbas, formerly Gombroon, on
the Persian Gulf.

It was during the period from Shah Abbas I (1587-1629) to the
end of the Safavid dynasty in 1722 that many merchants and adventurers
sought trade relations with Iran. Still, during Abbas I's reign there
was Thomas Herbert who traveled with Dodmore Cotton, a representative of
the English East India Company. After them came the French jewel traders
Tavernier and Chardin. After their departure from Iran came Jan Struys,
a Dutchman who unsuccessfully attempted to divert the Iranian silk trade
through Russia. Why there was a greater influx of merchants after Shah
Abbas I rather than before him is obviously due to the concessions he
promised European merchants as part of the package in his terms for a
military alliance with Europe against the Ottomans. Certainly Abbas
realized that if he desired a military alliance with Europe he would have
to act favorably to European merchants and also open Iran completely to
European economic interests. This channel remained open throughout the
Safavid period.

Now that we have examined briefly the context in which many con­
temporary travelers of the period journeyed to Iran, as political and
economic envoys, we may again return to the topic of Christian Europe's
negative perception of Islam and attempt to determine how such
a perception towards Islam influenced travelers' perceptions

For the document containing Shah Abbas I's concessions to
European merchants as part of his terms for a European-Iranian military
alliance see: A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia and Papal Missions
of the XVIIth and XVIIIth Centuries, 2 vols. (London: Eyre and
and documentation of religion in Iran. In other words, were Europeans bigoted towards all Muslims as a result of their long term animosity with the Ottomans and the resulting propaganda against Islam?

Generally, the answer is no. Some travelers were bigoted towards Muslims, yet this reflects their own personal ignorance and intolerance of Islam. Of the most bigoted and biased of the travelers of the Safavid period are the Carmelite missionaries who, as Catholic priests, served as the most immediate antithesis of Islam. Whatever they could find wrong with Islam and Muslims the Carmelite priests blew out of proportion; what they may have seen as good points in the religion they keenly overlooked.

The other group of bigoted travelers was the Englishmen: Anthony Jenkinson, Thomas Herbert and John Fryer. Anthony Jenkinson made a spectacle of Shah Tahmasb's dislike for Christians and used the Shah's dislike as an excuse to denounce Islam. Thomas Herbert claimed that Islam was not a religion but rather a mere "hotchpotch of superstition". The most bigoted of the three Englishmen was John Fryer who ignorantly denounced Islam, continually misrepresented the little he did know about the religion, and on several occasions expressed his own view that the Prophet Muhammad was an imposter and the Qur'an is nothing but a "Legend of Lies".

All other contemporary travelers of the period were not biased in their attitudes towards Islam. Although most of these travelers knew little about Islam and even less about Sunni-Shi'ite differences, a subject dealt with in a following chapter, they recorded what they saw
or heard of Islam in simple terms and never presented a prejudicial assessment of the religion they knew little about.
CHAPTER 4

SHAH ISMA'IL I'S DIVINITY

Among the important contributions made to Iranian studies by the late Vladimir Minorsky was his translation of, and commentary on, The Poetry of Shah Isma'il, published in 1942. Shah Isma'il's poetry, written under the pen name of Khata'i, is unique among the source materials available for the study of Shah Isma'il's divinity in that it contains Shah Isma'il's own claim to divinity. With the exception of Isma'il's poetry the only sources available in the West on the subject of his divinity are those accounts provided by sixteenth century Venetian travelers. Once Shah Isma'il's poetry was made available, Western scholars for the first time not only had written evidence of the Shah's own claim to divinity but valid evidence to support the Venetian accounts as well. Our concern here is not whether or not Shah Isma'il was divine but rather in what context he was considered divine, who considered him divine, why the concept of his divinity attracted the attention of the Venetian travelers and, finally, what the consistencies and contradictions between the Venetian accounts and Shah Isma'il's poetry were.

Before we may approach these questions we must first examine briefly Ghulat Shi'ism. In general terms, Ghulat refers to Shi'ite extremists and exaggerators in matters of religion. Such extremism includes speculation on the true definition of the Shi'ite Imam's person: "that the Imam was the executor of the Prophet Muhammad; that he was a prophet
himself, though secondary to Muhammad; that he was divine, perhaps as a lesser God on earth."\(^1\)

Some Shi'ites at the dawn of the sixteenth century certainly considered Shah Isma'il the Imam of the age. The Safavid Shahs based their claim to be the representatives of the Mahdi, or "Hidden Imam", on their alleged descent, in the male line, from Imam Musa al-Kazim, the seventh Imam in the Ithna'ashari line of twelve.\(^2\) As Mazzaoui has quoted, when the political theorist Dawwani asked his students the question: "Who is the Imam?" they replied "Shah Isma'il".\(^3\) Furthermore, Shah Isma'il considered himself to be the Imam.\(^4\) As the representative of the Mahdi, Shah Isma'il was closer to the source of absolute truth than were other men. By extention, the characteristic infallibility of the Imam was, in Isma'il's situation, transferred to the Shah. In its entirety, this theory led to the assumption of Shah Isma'il's infallibility. His position therefore, as far as his followers were concerned, placed him in the presence of God.

Shah Isma'il also combined the position to two leaders in one. On the one hand he was the temporal ruler, or Shah of Iran. On the other, he was the supreme spiritual leader, or murshid-i kamil, of the Safavid


Order. As Shah he controlled all; as supreme spiritual leader he was entitled to the unquestioning obedience of his Sufi disciples, the majority of whom belonged to Turkoman tribes which formed the nucleus of the Safavid military known by the general name of Ghizilbash, or "Red Hats". The combination of belief in Shah Isma'il's infallibility as representative of the Mahdi and the blind obedience afforded him by his Sufi disciples, who considered him their murshid-i kamil, led to the military's popular belief that Shah Isma'il was divine.

The ascription of divine status to the leader is Ghulat, or extremist, Shi'ism. One group famed for their Ghulat beliefs and who also considered Shah Isma'il divine was the Ahl-i Haqq, or "Men of Truth". The Ahl-i Haqq claimed that Shah Isma'il was "the Godhead who came to speech in the person of Khata'i, who became the pir of the Turks of Azerbayjan." Because the Ahl-i Haqq religion was prominent in Azerbayjan and closely adhered to by many Turkomans, Shah Isma'il's notoriety as a divine personage rapidly spread throughout the military. The military's belief in the divine status of their leader was reinforced by Isma'il's invincibility on the battlefield. Isma'il's invincibility, many soldiers believed, could come only from his special presence with God.

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5 These tribes included the Ustajlus, the Rumlus, the Shamlus, the Dhu'l-Qadars, the Takkalus, the Afshars, and the Qajars.

Besides the divine status ascribed to Shah Isma'il by the military, there is also the Shah's own claim to divinity which he expressed in his poetry.

Isma'il was proud of his descent from 'Ali and Fatima. He believed in the reincarnation of the divine substance of 'Ali. He himself used to abide with God, but now he has appeared in the world. Both the prophetic and imamite gifts are combined in his person. . . . He has come as God's light, as the Seal of the Prophets, as the Perfect Guide, as the guiding Imam. . . . His body is God's house, he commands the Sun and the Moon. . . . he is separate from what is not God. The Hallajian formula ana'1-Haqq lives in his soul, he is Absolute Truth or God.

Finally, there are the accounts of Venetian travelers who reported that Shah Isma'il was considered divine by most Iranians, especially the military. "This Sophy is loved and reverenced by his people as a god," wrote the anonymous author of The Travels of a Merchant in Persia, and especially by his soldiers, many of whom enter into battle without armor, expecting their master Isma'il to watch over them in the fight. There are also others who go into battle without armor, being willing to die for their monarch, rushing on with naked breasts, crying "Shaykh, Shaykh". The name of God is forgotten throughout Persia and only that of Isma'il remembered; if anyone fall when riding or dismounted he appeals to no other God but Shaykh, using the name in two ways; first as god Shaykh; secondly as prophet; as the Mussulmans say "La Illaha illa Allah Muhammad resuralla," the Persians say "La Illaha illa Allah Isma'il Wely Allah;" besides this, everyone, and particularly his soldiers, consider him immortal, but I have heard that Isma'il is not pleased with being called a god or prophet.

7Ibid., p. 1026a.

A similar report in much of the same words was provided by another Venetian, Giovan Maria Angiolello.⁹

Although the Venetians failed to state whether or not they themselves believed in Isma'il's divinity, they certainly expressed a fascinated interest in the subject. The roots of their interest can be found in two closely connected reasons. First, the strength and valor displayed by the Safavid military in the presence of their leader on the battlefield demonstrated an almost superhuman charismatic quality of Shah Isma'il. Second, Shah Isma'il's divine status granted him a military strength unprecedented in Europe.

From the above mentioned quote by the Venetian traveler we conclude that Shah Isma'il's presence was the driving force of the Ghizilbash troops in battle. While fighting in the presence of their divine leader these troops not only felt protected, but also had no fear of death. They believed that if they died with Shah Isma'il on the battlefield, the gates of Paradise would be open to them. Furthermore, until Shah Isma'il was defeated by the Ottoman Sultan Selim on the plains of Chaldiran in 1514, the Safavid forces went into battle with preconceived notions of invincibility.

Shah Isma'il's divine status provided the Safavid forces with an aspect of military strength unprecedented in Europe. The closest European monarchs came to anything of a divine or sacred status, as far as Marc Bloch tells us in his study on the sacred nature of kingship in Europe,

was a power to cure certain illnesses. This power was in the cramp rings worn by European kings. The kings and those who witnessed the curing power contended that God had granted the king special healing powers to cure, most often, muscular and nervous disorders such as epilepsy. The power was then transferred to the king's ring which was handed down to successive rulers as well as sold to royalty of other European states. However, European monarchs were not considered by their people to be God nor did they personally command their troops in battle. Therefore, the effects of Isma'il's divine status on the Safavid military not only attracted the Venetians' attention but also, undoubtedly, was viewed by them as a method to be considered by Christian monarchs, or even the Papacy, in rallying united European military action against the Ottomans.

There is, however, a major contradiction between the Venetian accounts and Shah Isma'il's poetry vis-à-vis Isma'il's divine status. The Venetians contend that Shah Isma'il was called God by his people, yet he did not like it. In his poetry Shah Isma'il openly, on numerous occasions, called himself God. On this basis we have sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the Venetian travelers were totally unaware of Shah Isma'il's poetry and his own claim to divinity. This is not surprising, however, when we realize that Shah Isma'il's poetry was written in Turkish and directed mainly towards his military supporters rather than the general public. Thus, we may assume that the common people heard of Shah Isma'il's divine status from the military. The Venetian travelers
undoubtedly heard it from people who were not in the military. The travelers therefore acquired their information from a third party with the unavoidable interpolations and discrepancies normally inherent in such transfer of information.

In spite of this flaw in the Venetian accounts, we cannot deny the importance of these sources concerning Shah Isma'il's alleged divinity. The Venetian accounts were not only the first sources to introduce the notion of Shah Isma'il's divinity to the West, but they have also served as a starting point for further investigation. As a result of the Venetian accounts, discoveries into the beliefs of the Ahl-i Haqq, and Shah Isma'il's poetry, we cannot deny the early sixteenth century Iranian belief in Shah Isma'il's divinity. What scholars now need is a thorough investigation of sixteenth century Iranian sources which might reveal and elucidate further other important dimensions of Shah Isma'il's alleged divine status.
CHAPTER 5

TRAVELERS' PERCEPTIONS OF SHI'ITE-SUNNI DIFFERENCES

Before the Safavid period, European Christians not only knew little about Islam but they knew even less about Shi'ism. The major reason for this virtual ignorance of Shi'ism was due to the fact, undoubtedly, that from the fall of the Fatimids in Egypt to the rise of the Safavids in Iran there was no state professing Shi'ite beliefs to attract their attention.

For several centuries Christian Europe had what may mildly be called hostile relations with the Ottoman Empire. For this reason there was little opportunity for Europeans to travel to Islamic territory and engage themselves in intellectual observations of Islam. Furthermore, because the Ottomans and Islam were a direct threat militarily to Christian Europe, Europeans viewed both in a hostile and biased manner. When the Safavids, staunch enemies of the Ottomans, came to power in Iran at the dawn of the sixteenth century, Christian Europe found itself not only in a position to secure an eastern ally against the Ottomans, but also able to travel freely into Islamic territory and observe various aspects of the Islamic religion and culture.

All contemporary travelers of the Safavid period demonstrated some interest and insight into the Islamic religion and, more importantly, into that branch of Islam termed Shi'ism. The dominant question at this juncture is in what ways did contemporary travelers of the period
perceive Shi'ite-Sunni differences? Before we begin to answer this question, however, I must clarify from the start that although there exist three main divisions in Shi'ism, Zaydi, Isma'ili and Ithna'ashari, our present concern is with the Ithna'ashari, or twelver, form which was declared the Iranian state religion in 1501 by Shah Isma'il I and continues to exist as the majority religion in Iran to the present.

A detailed history of Shi'ism as it developed from the time of 'Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad, to the rise of the Safavid dynasty is beyond the scope of the present study, although a brief historical explanation will necessarily have to be made. Of more importance in the present study is a brief discussion of some of the basic differences between Shi'ism and Sunnism in terms of doctrine and religious practices and their implications on Shi'ite society. This should provide an adequate framework within which we may describe and evaluate the perceptions held by contemporary travelers of the Safavid period in their discussions of the differences between Shi'ism and Sunnism.

Upon the death of the Prophet Muhammad, the Islamic community immediately sought a Caliph, or "Successor". The choice fell upon Abu Bakr, who ruled from 632 to 634. Then came Umar, who was assassinated in 642, and after him Uthman. Many Muslims, dissatisfied with Uthman, favored 'Ali, whom they felt should be the rightful successor as he was of the family of the Prophet, 'Ali being Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law. In 656 Uthman was killed and 'Ali was chosen as Caliph. Yet, all the Muslims were still not content and Mu'awiya, a cousin of Uthman
and governor of Syria, refused to pledge allegiance to 'Ali. Continual battles between the two factions commenced and in 661 'Ali was killed.

After 'Ali's death, the Shi'ites, or "party of 'Ali", chose 'Ali and Fatima's eldest son Hassan as his father's successor. Mu'awiya, however, held real political power and before his death he named his son Yazid as his successor and the second Umayyad Caliph. Husayn, Hassan's younger brother, sought his rightful claim to the Caliphate and was killed on the plains of Kerbala, Iraq by Yazid's forces. Politically, the stage was set for continual hostility between the Sunni Caliphate and the Shi'ites whose leaders they felt should succeed the Prophet but were denied rightful succession and were martyred for their cause.

According to the Shi'ites, the true successors to the spiritual leadership of Islam should be of the line of 'Ali in the series known as the twelve Imams. Each of the twelve Imams was considered to possess divine infallibility, each could perform miracles, each named his own successor and each met with a violent death. The Shi'ite doctrine of the Imam as the source of divine law and the inner meaning of religion is the most significant difference between Shi'ism and Sunnism. The Imam, who is the spiritual guide and leader, according to the Shi'ites, has three functions: to rule over the Islamic community, to explain the religious sciences and the law, and to be a spiritual guide to lead men to an understanding of the inner meaning of things.¹ Such a man, therefore, cannot be elected, the Shi'ites believe, but rather, since such a spiritual guide can receive his authority only from God, he must be

designated by the previous Imam, who is inspired by Divine Will. Clearly, the Imam is viewed as the sole intermediary between man and God, the notion of an intermediary of this nature being foreign to the Sunnis. From the concept of the Imam stems the Shi'ite notion of the Mahdi, the Hidden Imam. The Shi'ites believe that the Mahdi, still alive yet away in hiding, is the supreme spiritual guide who will one day appear and establish an ideal state based on divine justice, a feat which temporal rule, with all its imperfections, could never achieve. In Ithna'ashari Shi'ism the Mahdi is Muhammad al-Muntazar, "Muhammad the awaited", he being the twelfth Imam whom they believe disappeared and is in hiding until the end of the world when he shall return and bring victory to his loyal partisans and truth and justice to the world.

The Imams, invested with a special holiness divine in nature, became the symbol of the divine cause martyred by ungrateful mankind. Just as 'Ali had been abandoned and murdered, the Shi'ites believe that each of the Imams who followed him had been persecuted and executed by the wicked and worldly political authorities, Umayyad as well as Abbasid. Above all, the Shi'ites weep for the murder of 'Ali's son, Husayn, who was betrayed by his supporters, tortured with thirst in the desert, and slain by his enemies at Kerbala. The Shi'ites, their heroes slain and martyred by the unpious worldly political authorities, felt themselves to be the righteous minority and the victims of the Sunnis. Their weeping on the anniversaries of the wrongs committed against their leaders, such as the Muharram festival in commemoration of Husayn's martyrdom, and at the tombs of their holy ones were not only demonstrative of the position in which they felt themselves as doomed victims of the worldly
Sunnis, but also acts of piety which they believed would win them forgiveness for their own sins.

The concept of the Imam also penetrates differences in religious practices between Shi'ites and Sunnis. For both Shi'ites and Sunnis the notions of fasting, pilgrimage and daily prayer are the same, yet in the last two there are minor variations. In terms of pilgrimage, because the Imams are worshipped as martyrs, the Shi'ites make pilgrimages not only to Mecca but also to the shrine of 'Ali at Nejef and of Husayn at Kerbala, both in Iraq; of 'Ali Reza, the eighth Imam, at Mashad; and of Fatima, the sister of Imam Reza, at Qum. Shi'ites also visit numerous tombs of lesser figures, the imamzadehs, who are saintly but not divine and are alleged descendents of the Imams. The notion of pilgrimage, therefore, is common to both Shi'ites and Sunnis, both holding pilgrimage to Mecca of utmost importance and duty. The Sunnis, however, not recognizing the Shi'ite Imams and imamzadehs feel no obligation to visit their tombs. The Shi'ites visit these places as often as possible to pray, to express wishes and desires for good fortune, and for forgiveness of sins.

The significance of daily prayer is the same for both Shi'ites and Sunnis, with the exception that the Ithna'asharis have added 'Ali's name to their call to prayer: "God is Great! I profess that there is no God but Allah, that Muhammad is the prophet of Allah, and that 'Ali is the wali of Allah."²

²Michel M. Mazzaoui, Safawids, p. 1.
The Shi'ites also differ from the Sunnis in the following significant points: they observe the Muharram ceremonies during which they have a passion play, or taziyya, to commemorate the deaths of Hassan and Husayn, the sons of 'Ali; they also permit mut'a, or temporary marriages. This union, which may be dissolved after a period stipulated between the parties involved, is severely condemned by the Sunnis, who consider it with adultery. Finally, the Shi'ites condone hiding one's faith (taqiya) when its manifestation would endanger one's person.

Upon Shah Isma'il I's declaration in 1501 of the Ithna'ashari Shi'ism as the Iranian state religion followed by his brutal attack of Sunnis in his realms, bitter animosity developed between the Shi'ite Safavids and the Sunni Ottomans and battles between the two states rapidly commenced. The political aspect of Shi'ism, as it differentiated the Safavid Iranians from the Ottoman Turks, was certainly one of significant interest to those who traveled from Europe to Safavid Iran. The Safavids, as the Europeans viewed them, were Muslims much like their Ottoman neighbors, yet of an opposing religious sect which inspired them to fight their western neighbor. The Europeans, aware of the bitter animosity between the Ottomans and Safavids, perceived of all their bitterness towards one another solely on the basis of religion. Yet, an ally was an ally, and even if the Safavids were Muslims, they were antagonistic toward the Ottomans and willing to create a serious military diversion on the Ottoman Empire's eastern front that would draw its attention from Christian Europe. This was the psychological framework within which Christian Europe's first ambassadors came to Safavid Iran.
Having entered Safavid territory, contemporary travelers of the period readily noticed the Iranian Shi'ites' hatred for the Ottoman Sunnis. Not only were the travelers aware of the Safavid government's position towards the Ottomans, but they also became aware of the Iranian people's attitude and habitual cursing of the Ottoman Turks and Sunnism, both terms used synonymously by European travelers as well as Iranians.

The earliest evidence available on Shi'ite hatred for Sunnis in the Safavid realms comes from the Venetian traveler and ambassador, Caterino Zeno, who tells us nothing more than that Shah Isma'il I brutally attacked and massacred those Sunnis residing in the villages and towns he conquered. After Shah Isma'il conquered Tabriz and "cut to pieces many of the opposing sect in that region," he went on to take Baghdad and Shiraz, implementing similar brutalities there. Although these are supposed to be the words of Zeno himself, it is impossible, since Zeno went to the court of Uzun Hassan, the Aq-Qoyunlu ruler, and never lived long enough to see Shah Isma'il I's rise to power. The account of Zeno's travels was prepared from Zeno's letters, since the editor of Zeno's work, Ramusio, was never able to find a copy of Zeno's book. Therefore, the supplementary sketch of Iranian history subsequent to Zeno's embassy, as contained in Zeno's narrative, had to have been taken by Ramusio from other sources. Undoubtedly Ramusio obtained his information from the account of Giovan Maria Angiolello, who wrote that Shah Isma'il used

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"great cruelty towards the opposing faction" upon his conquest of Tabriz in 1499.4 Thereafter, however, travelers were no longer content with merely recording events demonstrative of Shi'ite-Sunni animosity as they saw it, but they began to pass their own judgment and assessment of Safavid religious beliefs. In his documentation of Shah Isma'il I's subjugation of the Kurds, the anonymous Venetian author of The Travels of a Merchant in Persia tells us that the Kurds are truer Muslims than the other inhabitants of Iran, since the Iranians have embraced the "Suffavean doctrine".5 Although the merchant gave no reasons why he believed this is true or any discussion of the differences between the "Suffavean doctrine" and the Sunni Kurds, he does note that the Kurds, although they swore allegiance by putting on the red caftans, would not be converted to the Shi'ite religion, and "in their hearts they bear a deadly hatred to them."6

Anthony Jenkinson, who led a commercial envoy from England to Shah Tahmasb's court in 1562, tells us that the Turks and Iranians are all one when it comes to being Muslims, yet the Iranians honor the "false feigned 'Ali" and daily curse Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman since it was they who slew 'Ali. For this reason alone, Jenkinson tells us, the Iranians and Turks have mortal wars.7 One of Jenkinson's associates,


6Ibid., p. 157.

Jeffery Duckett, reported further on the Shi'ite religion when he wrote that the key differences between the Sunnis and the Shi'ites was a question of succession, since 'Ali and not Abu Bakr was to succeed Muhammad.⁸

The Portuguese traveler, Pedro Teixeira, adds little new information to Shi'ite-Sunni differences, however, he does add a new element to the dichotomy. Teixeira perceived of the Shi'ites as solely Iranian and the Sunnis as Moors, the Turks being just one group.⁹ Teixeira clearly represents that type of misinformed traveler who tends incorrectly to designate his own groupings. In this case he misled his readers to believe that religious differences are strictly related to linguistic, cultural and national elements. According to Teixeira, all Arabs and Turks were Sunnis and all Iranians were Shi'ites.¹⁰ His mistake is obvious, yet it is uncertain as to why he made it since he traveled to Iraq where there was a large population of Arab Shi'ites. The notion of Arab Shi'ites went unrecorded because, on the basis of his nation-state categories, Teixeira assumed that Arabs were or had to be Sunnis.

Anthony Sherley added little new information to the question of Shi'ite-Sunni differences. His perception of the division in Islam was quite the same as that of his predecessors: the Iranians honor Muhammad

⁸Ibid., pp. 433-434.


¹⁰Ibid., p. 251.
and 'Ali while the Turks honor these two as well as Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman.\textsuperscript{11}

Thomas Herbert, who journeyed to Iran between 1627 and 1629 with Dodmore Cotton of the English East India Company, did not even perceive of Islam as a religion, but instead considered it "a confused hotchpotch mass of superstition" claiming that the Turks and Iranians do not differ in any aspect of the Qur'an, yet they consider one another heretics, "being no less divided in their profession than we and the Papalins."\textsuperscript{12} Herbert noted further that the irreconcilable hatred between the Safavids and Ottomans, on religious grounds, was much to Europe's good.\textsuperscript{13} Ottoman forces necessary to protect the Empire's east could not be used simultaneously against Christian Europe. For this reason, Safavid-Ottoman animosity on a military level would offer Europe some relief.

Thevenot was the first traveler to offer some insight into various levels of Shi'ite-Sunni differences. Thus far, travelers have presented simplistic explanations that the Iranians hated the Turks due to a question of who would succeed the Prophet Muhammad, and for that reason alone the two were continually at war. Thevenot naturally provided an elaborate discussion of the question of 'Ali's succession and of Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman as the usurpers. Yet, for the first time there was mention of the concept of the Imam when Thevenot told us that 'Ali was

\textsuperscript{11}Ross, \textit{Sir Anthony Sherley}, p. 121.

\textsuperscript{12}Herbert, \textit{Travels in Persia}, p. 226.

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., p. 226.
the first. Thevenot failed to define and describe the Imam and his functions, yet he did point out that the Safavid kings had legitimate title to rule over their subjects because they had descended from 'Ali through an Imam.

Besides this important aspect of doctrinal differences, Thevenot was also the first to point out two other differences in religious practice. The first is that of *taqiya* which he did not state by name but did tell that Shi'ites, as opposed to Sunnis, were not obliged to state of what sect they were if doing so might cause them bodily injury. According to Thevenot, Shi'ites and Sunnis differ also in the way they pray. The Sunnis hold their hands one over the other upon their stomach while Shi'ites lay down a small greyish brown stone before them and every time they prostrate themselves on the ground they lay their forehead on the stone, which is made of the earth of Kerbala, the place where Husayn, the second son of 'Ali, was killed by Yazid's men. Thevenot continued with a detailed discussion of Husayn's death at the hands of Yazid's men and then described the Shi'ite festival of Muharram in commemoration of the incident. A detailed discussion of Thevenot's relation of the Muharram festival as well as the reports provided by other travelers concerned with this event will be discussed at a later point.

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15Imam Musa, the seventh Imam in the Shi'ite line of twelve.


17Ibid., p. 108.
Jean Baptiste Tavernier, a French jeweler, visited Iran several times between 1632 and 1668. Tavernier provided considerably more information about Shi'ite-Sunni variances than most of his predecessors. Yet, besides his more detailed historical discussion of the problems of succession after Muhammad, the first three Caliphs seen as usurpers by the Shi'ites, and that the Iranians are Shi'ite and the Turks are Sunni, there was nothing in his account that we may consider an innovative analysis. One point where Tavernier deserves credit, however, is when he told us that there were three main Islamic empires: the Mughal Empire of India, the Ottoman Empire, and the Safavid Empire; the first two of the Sunni sect and the Safavids of the Shi'ite.¹⁸

Thus far none of the travelers has mentioned the Mughal Empire in their discussion of Shi'ite-Sunni differences. For the first time we discover that one does not necessarily have to be a Turk to be a Sunni; contrary to what other travelers have led us to believe, the reason Tavernier made this point is clearly that he traveled to India on several occasions and, therefore, wrote from a comparative perspective. However, other travelers such as Thevenot and Fryer also journeyed to India, yet they inexplicably failed to mention the Mughal Empire in their discussion of Shi'ite-Sunni differences. We may only speculate that the reason Thevenot, Fryer and others failed to mention the Mughal Empire as a Sunni state in contrast to the Shi'ite Safavid state was that the bitter animosity between the Shi'ites and Sunnis

¹⁸Tavernier, Voyages en Perse, p. 84.
caught the attention of the travelers as a major bone of contention between the Safavids and Ottomans and not the Safavids and the Mughals.

Jean Chardin, another French jeweler, in the abridged version of his *Travels in Persia*, said nothing of Shi'ite-Sunni doctrinal differences. However, Chardin did tell us that Shi'ite hatred for Sunnis deeply penetrated many aspects of Iranian society. In his dichotomy of "Persian", representative of Shi'ite, and "Turk", representative of Sunni, Chardin told us that the Persians hated the Turks to such an extent that when they practiced archery it was not uncommon to hear the Iranians say, when shooting the last arrow, "May this arrow, this last bout, enter the heart of Umar." The reason for this, Chardin explained, was to keep up the aversion and hatred the Shi'ites had for the Sunnis since Umar unrighteously denied 'Ali's succession to the Caliphate.

John Fryer, appointed to the post of surgeon in the service of the East India Company, spent one year in Iran between 1677 and 1678. Because Fryer had little or no knowledge of the Persian language and was largely dependent on an interpreter, and because he spent but a short time in Iran, he was greatly indebted to other travelers from whom he borrowed extensively. Thus, much of his discussion of the Shi'ite religion was not recorded at first hand, yet he failed to tell us from whom he acquired his information. Fryer's account of religion, therefore, is an obvious instance of a primary source actually becoming a secondary source.

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20 Ibid., p. 199.
Fryer certainly took every opportunity to denounce Islam and commend Christianity. In his preface he mentioned, as one of the objects of his book, that he desired to reclaim the atheist and inculcate a purer form of belief. Such prejudice and bias takes away from the objective observation and analysis of religion demanded by a descriptive study.

In his discussion of Shi'ite-Sunni differences, Fryer was totally off base when he described the Sunnis as an Arabian and Turkish sect whose prophet is Muhammad and whose successor is Muhammad's brother. The Shi'ites, on the other hand, according to Fryer, claim Muhammad as their prophet but place the succession to the Caliphate in Muhammad's daughter, and for this reason alone neither sect communicates with each other and both are continually at war. Fryer later related, in what was apparently taken directly from Thomas Herbert's account of Shi'ite-Sunni differences, that the difference between the two sects is similar to that dispute between the European Papists and Protestants. He then presented a general discussion of Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and 'Ali, continually inserting such phrases as "the false Prophet" and "the false apostles".

Fryer's perceptions of Shi'ite-Sunni differences is hardly informative, grossly misrepresented, and highly biased. His most obvious denunciation of Islam is apparent in his discussion of Muhammad and the Qur'an. Fryer told us that Muhammad merely knew three of four verses from the Psalms of David but because the Prophet was known to be illiterate

22 Ibid., Vol. II, p. 130.
23 Ibid., Vol. III, p. 46.
the wisemen of the age considered him divinely inspired. Fryer con-
tended that if Muslims knew of the truth and of Muhammad's trickery, "they
would not consider him the continual flowing miracle of rhetoric, but
rather an imposter and mere stammering fool and his bastard-brood the
Alcoran, sottishness." Fryer ended his discourse on Islam when he
called the Qur'an a "Legend of Lies".

Turning now to a more descriptive and unbiased account of Shi'ite-
Sunni animosity, we have the account of Father Krusinski. Krusinski, the
only professional cleric of the group, attempted to present both sides
of the Shi'ite-Sunni dispute. Although he failed to tell us where and how
he obtained his information on the Sunni position, Krusinski wrote that
the Sunnis hate the Shi'ites to such extents that the Ottoman Turks de-
clared that if a Sunni willfully kills forty Iranians it is no greater
sin than killing one Christian. And, in lawful war it is more meritorious
to kill one Iranian that it is to kill forty Christians. If we may
assume that Krusinski heard this from Iranians, which is undoubtedly true,
then in spite of the possible truth to the statement, we may also assume
that it contains an element of Iranian propaganda against the Ottomans
and the Sunnis within the Safavid realms. This would naturally help
justify Safavid persecution and hatred of Sunnis as well as reinforce
in the minds of Shi'ites the position that the Shi'ites were a threatened

\[24\] Ibid., Vol. III, p. 74.


minority and if they did not kill Sunnis then Sunnis would surely kill them.

This explanation becomes more acceptable when we note that Shah Abbas I caused his Shaikh-al-Islam to include in an excommunication of the Sunni Turks the desire that "the excrements of the Armenians might fall on the head of the Khalif Umar." Father Krusinski told us that this imprecation continued into the eighteenth century in Iran and as often as the Mallas called people from the top of Mosques to come to prayer, "they finished their invitation with that pious ejaculation."^28

The last traveler of the period, who arrived in Iran in 1703, is Cornelius le Bruyn. Unfortunately, this chronicler added little new information to the differences between Shi'ism and Sunnism. Like many of his predecessors, le Bruyn viewed the two sects in simple terms: the Iranians of the sect of 'Ali and the Turks of the sect of Umar.^29 Besides his self-devised categorization, again based on concepts of nation and state such that all Iranians are Shi'ites and all Turks are Sunnis, le Bruyn provided no explanation of the differences between the two sects in terms of history, doctrine, or religious practice.

Before we turn our attention to an analysis of the perceptions held by contemporary travelers of the period concerning the differences between Shi'ism and Sunnism, we may discuss one aspect of Shi'ite religious life which was of fascinating interest to nearly all the travelers.

29Le Bruyn, Travels into Moscovy, p. 65.
This is the Muharram festival in commemoration of Husayn's death at the hands of Yazid's forces. The festival begins on the first day of the month of Muharram and lasts ten days. During this period all Shi'ites were sad and melancholy and nothing was heard in the streets but lamentation. Black clothes were almost compulsory; no one shaved or bathed; all pleasure ceased. Many poor people were accustomed at this time to bury themselves up to the neck in the streets, covering their heads with a pot around which earth was piled. Others still more zealous, painted themselves black or red and ran naked in the streets, wailing and dancing. Everyday at noon Mulas preached in the Mosques and squares, on the subject of Husayn's death, to audiences bathed in tears, sighing or moaning "Oh, Husayn."

On the tenth day, the actual anniversary of Husayn's martyrdom at Kerbala, processions were formed. Those who were more sincere, as they joined the procession, cut and mangled their bodies in several places, even their head, so that the blood came running down on all

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32 Blunt, Pietro's Pilgrimage, p. 130.

33 Thevenot, Travels of Monsieur de Thevenot, p. 109.

34 Blunt, Pietro's Pilgrimage, p. 130.
sides. Some mutilated themselves so badly they died from it. But Muharram was a propitious moment to lose one's life, for all who died during that time, the Shi'ites believe, were assured of being directly transported to Paradise.

When we evaluate the travelers accounts themselves, it is readily apparent that all contemporary travelers of the period perceived of Shi'ite-Sunni differences in political terms of nation and state with a clearcut dichotomy of Iranian and Turk or Safavid and Ottoman rather than in religious terms of the doctrinal differences between Shi'ism and Sunnism.

The most dominant reason for this is, of course, related to the division in the Islamic world when European travelers entered Iran in search of an alliance with the Safavids against the Ottomans. Because of the prevalent bitter animosity, greatly affected by religious variances, between the Safavids and Ottomans, European travelers perceived of all conflict between the two realms as a conflict of religion. The travelers may or may not have been aware of one of Shah Isma'il's motives in declaring Ithna'ashari Shi'ism as the Iranian state religion as a measure to create a national spirit and unity among the people of Iran. With his declaration, the Shah clearly differentiated the Safavids from the Ottomans on a religious as well as political basis. Once this differentiation was established, European travelers entered Safavid territory

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36 Ross, Sir Anthony Sherley, p. 218.
37 Thevenot, Travels of Monsieur de Thevenot, p. 109.
and began to use the terms Safavid, Iranian and Shi'ite synonymously without ever fully understanding the religious aspects of Shi'ism. The Europeans only understood Shi'ism on a superficial level as it religiously differentiated the Safavids from the Ottomans and caused the two empires to fight one another.

Given this psychological framework within which Europeans perceived of the animosity between the Safavids and Ottomans, we may also add other factors as reasons why the Europeans present such a superficial picture of Shi'ite-Sunni variances. Iran was in many ways new to most European travelers who knew little of the language and culture and virtually nothing about Islam. Furthermore, as far as most Iranian Muslims were concerned, the Europeans, because they were Christians, were unbelievers who did not know the truth of God and religion. Thus, we may surmise that most Iranians would be hesitant to discuss their religion with European Christians. If we combine all these reasons together, we notice that it would have been very difficult for European travelers to inquire about Islam and Shi'ite-Sunni differences on an educated level. A great deal of what the travelers do tell us is only what they saw, often by mere chance as in the case of Muharram ceremonies, or what they heard from others whose reliability as a source is questionable. On the whole, the level at which travelers were able to penetrate matters of the Islamic religion was minimal. As a result, they often provide no more information than a simplistic analysis that all Iranians are Shi'ites and they believe in 'Ali while all Turks are Sunnis and they believe in Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman and for this reason the Safavids and Ottomans
are continually at war. The Arabs are virtually left out of the dis-
cussion entirely in spite of the fact that some of the travelers also
journeyed to the Arab lands on their way back to Europe.

For the most part, we may consider contemporary travelers of the
period as marginal men when it came to understanding and recording vari-
ous aspects of Islam, especially Shi'ite-Sunni differences. The reasons
discussed above are probably the most important, although there may be
others. Whatever we may speculate as the reasons why Europeans were
marginal men when it came to Islam, the obvious is that most travelers of
the period simply understood very little of the differences between
Shi'ism and Sunnism and their accounts are only of limited value to our
understanding of the differences between the two sects. On the other
hand, their accounts are significant in that they demonstrate how ig-
norant and often biased travelers of the period were in terms of their
level of understanding Islam. If we are to assume that the accounts of
contemporary travelers of the period were one of the few sources on
Islam available to Europeans of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,
then we may safely state that Christian Europe was still in the dark as
far as concerned their understanding of Islam and the differences between
Shi'ism and Sunnism.
CHAPTER 6

THE SAFAVID STATE AND THE NON-MUSLIM ELEMENT

When Shah Isma'il I (1501-1524) made himself king of the newly established Safavid empire and formally declared the Ithna'ashari form of Shi'ism as the state religion of Iran, both non-Shi'ite Muslims as well as all non-Muslim religious groups suddenly became out groups religiously and politically. Because the Ithna'ashari branch of Shi'ism did not displace Sunni Islam completely, as evidenced particularly by the Kurds and majority of Arabs then in Iran, Sunnis faced violent opposition. Since Shi'ism provided the basis for religious and historical legitimation of the Safavid dynasty by promulgating the union of religion and state, the Safavids could not risk or tolerate any theories that might challenge any aspect of their claim to power. As Ann Lambton pointed out, "It is not surprising that they should have tried to impose doctrinal uniformity and to suppress any deviation from the new orthodoxy."¹

Unfortunately, contemporary travelers of the period tell us little if nothing about the Shi'ite persecution of Sunnis. Seemingly, most of these travelers were aware of Shi'ite-Sunni differences only as far as concerned the political dimensions between Iranian and Turk or between

Safavid and Ottoman. On the other hand, concerning Safavid policy and attitude toward the non-Muslim elements of Iran — whether European or indigenous — contemporary travelers of the period provide considerable information. In a descriptive study of this nature four important questions arise. First, and most important, what was the Safavid state's attitude towards non-Muslim religious groups and how did such attitudes affect its dealings with minority religions? Second, what caused the Papacy to find it necessary and desirable to send its representatives to Iran as an organized entity during the reign of Shah Abbas I and, for that matter, what moved this autocratic ruler in the heart of the Islamic East to allow Christian propagandists to establish themselves in his realms. Third, what was the attitude of indigenous non-Muslim groups towards European Christians? Fourth, what was the net result of Christian missionary activity in Iran during the Safavid period?

Before we answer these questions, it is perhaps necessary first to explain and justify how Christian missionaries fit into the definition of travelers and second, why the Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia is one of our most essential sources on the interaction between the Safavids and non-Muslim religious groups. Ignoring the travels of isolated friars and priests who had been to or in Iran from the thirteenth century onwards, organized Christian missionary activity in Iran had not begun until shortly after 1600 during the reign of Shah Abbas I. From this time onwards numerous Catholic orders sent to Iran their religious personnel who acted as both evangelistic missionaries in search of

2Shi'ite-Sunni differences as perceived by contemporary travelers of the period has been dealt with in depth in a previous chapter.
converts and political envoys whose aims were to create stable relations and consistent negotiations between the Papacy, or the Kings of various Christian states, and the Safavid monarch. Although the missions established in Iran by the various Catholic religious orders were in a sense institutionalized in that they became an organized hierarchical entity expressing and protecting their interests in the Safavid dominions, those affiliated with each mission were not there on a permanent basis nor were they, in most cases, there long enough to be considered anything but visitors. The anonymous author of the Carmelite chronicle has written that, "The average life lived for 138 of the 200 Carmelites who served longer or shorter periods in the East was 54.3 years; the average length of service in the mission for 150 of those Carmelites was 14.5 years. Five of them remained over forty years in the mission posts, fifteen thirty years or over." Furthermore, these statistics apply to all operations in Asia and not just Iran. The situation is similar regarding other religious orders in Safavid Iran. On this basis I contend that European missionaries are justifiably considered travelers and our range of sources must include their accounts.

A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia is one of our most important sources for this aspect of our study because the text contains a plethora of letters and reports written over a period of 170 years by Christian missionaries of various religious orders to one another and to their superiors in Rome and elsewhere. The correspondence contained in

\footnote{Chronicle of the Carmelites, Vol. I, p. XXX.}
this text provides a long range continuity of knowledge pertaining to various aspects of the non-Muslim religious element in Safavid Iran as well as contemporary evidence of state attitudes and policy directed towards minority religious groups. Yet, a discussion of this source would not be complete without mention of its major limitation; that is, due to the religious nature of these reports and the psychological framework from which these Catholic missionaries wrote, it is often difficult to disentangle truth from prejudice and bias.

Travelers' accounts of the period between Shah Isma'il I's establishment of the Safavid state in 1501 and Shah Abbas I's accession the throne in 1587 tell us little of non-Muslims. Our first account treating this subject is The Travels of a Merchant in Persia, written by an unnamed author trading from Damascus and Aleppo to Iran, where he remained upwards of eight years, from 1511 to 1520. The merchant tells us that there were many Christians and Jews in northwest Iran and that they had separate churches with their own services. Neither of these groups were molested by Muslims. Yet, throughout northwest Iran, the only area of Iran which he claims held a Christian population at that time, Christians paid a ten percent tariff on all merchandise while Muslims paid only five percent. However, apart from these two observations -- that non-Muslim groups were allowed freedom of worship as they pleased, yet the Christians were subject to unequal tariff payments -- the merchant tells us nothing of state policy during the reign of Shah Isma'il I.


5Ibid., pp. 172-173.
There is a long gap between this traveler and Anthony Jenkinson who led a commercial envoy from England in 1562 to the court of Shah Tahmasb (1524-1576). Although Jenkinson tells us nothing of state policies towards non-Muslims, he does give some insight into Shah Tahmasb's attitude towards the Christians. Jenkinson met personally with Shah Tahmasb but their conversation was brief. Shah Tahmasb, once Jenkinson told him that he was a Christian, bade the ambassador farewell and told him that he did not feel any need for friendship with non-believers. In his travel report Jenkinson made a major issue of Shah Tahmasb's intolerance of and disrespect for Christians.6

Vincentio d'Alessandri, a diplomatic envoy from Venice in 1571 to the court of Shah Tahmasb tells us something of the Shah's domestic dealings which, if not intended to do so, indeed put severe strains on Armenian Christians. "He gives up, as a favor," wrote d'Alessandri, "many kinds of tribute and taxes but for the most part it is not so in reality, since after two or three years, he generally requires all the arrears at once, as he did at the time when I was at his court, in the territory of Zutha, inhabited by Armenians, who were all exempted from tribute."7 D'Alessandri goes on to tell that the Shah's demand caused the ruin of these poor Christians and, although it is not clear exactly what he means by their ruin, religious oppression seems to be indicated. This situation becomes a recurring theme in successive reigns beginning

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6Jenkinson, Early Voyages, pp. 146-147.

noticeably with that of Shah Abbas I. Specifically, when a non-Muslim religious group was in financial debt to the state, edicts were often passed forcing conversion of non-Muslims to the Islamic faith.\(^8\)

During the reign of Shah Abbas I (1587-1629) a unique situation developed for Christians both inside and out of Iran. The new Shah's first objective was to reclaim those parts of the Safavid empire lost in previous reigns, particularly those lands on the western front which had been lost to the Ottomans in a treaty of 1570. Shah Abbas first directed his military operations towards the Uzbeks on the eastern front, who were subjugated in 1597. Open hostilities with the Ottomans recommenced in 1601, at which time the qualities of Abbas I as a military leader and conqueror began to manifest themselves: one after another he recovered the provinces on the western borders lost in preceding reigns. At this juncture Abbas I obviously realized the futility of his attempts to wage war successfully on two fronts, and it was at this time that contact between Iran and Europe was joined far more consistently than ever in the past.

Just as European Christian monarchs in the past had sought Iranian cooperation against the Ottomans, Abbas I now needed someone to create a serious diversion in Europe which would allow him to take the upper hand militarily against his western enemy. His only hope of crushing the

\(^8\)In 1613 Shah Abbas I conducted a persecution against the Armenians requiring all those Armenians in Isfahan who owed him money to become Muslim. Chronicle of the Carmelites, p. 255.
Ottomans and enlarging his empire lay in forging a reliable military alliance with Christian Europe. With that in mind, he contemplated sending envoys to the Christian monarchs. Before his plans developed, however, the Sherley brothers, Anthony and Robert, arrived on the scene as possible liaison officers to achieve the cooperation desired. Shortly after Sherley's arrival in 1599, Anthony persuaded Abbas to send him as his ambassador to the Pope and the Christian kings, promising that he would contrive with them for arms to be taken up against the Ottomans. To demonstrate his sincerity, Anthony's then 19 year old brother Robert remained behind as a hostage. Husayn 'Ali Beg, a Safavid ambassador subservient to Anthony, set off in the company of the latter for Rome in May 1599. In his possession Anthony carried a copy of the letter given him by Abbas which contained certain general terms with regard to which the king of Iran had ordered that they should be negotiated with the Pope and the Christian kings as far as was concerned the war against the Ottomans. Of the eighteen points to which Shah Abbas addressed himself in that letter, sixteen strictly concern a military alliance and proposals for joint military action against the Ottomans. The remaining two points, points fifteen and sixteen, are most interesting in terms of agreements concerning religion.

15. And to give more credit and weight to his true and genuine intentions the king opens all his country freely to all kinds of Christians, so that they may enter it, stay and remain there, and depart thence in all security and with every safeguard, giving them besides the most ample privileges both in regard to their persons and their property, trade and affairs. With this he will grant them in the matter of their religion both in public and in private, according as it may please them, without any hinderance or molestation or annoyance whatsoever.
16. And in order that this confederacy be more closely bound together, the said king orders all his Christian subjects whether in Armenia or elsewhere throughout his realm to recognize and submit to the Universal church, as do all other Christians.9

One suspects, however, that this offer for joint military action was not so much in the terms of Shah Abbas as in those of Sherley. If we carefully evaluate the wide license promised for the Christian religion and, even more so, the voluntary commitment to compel submission of all Iranian Christians to Roman obedience, it is doubtful that Abbas personally realized the implications of this agreement as communicated to the Christian kings. How much of this agreement was the creation of Anthony Sherley and how much was endorsed and intended by Shah Abbas will never be known for sure. However, I contend that this was the work of Sherley and not the words of Shah Abbas. Not only was the irresponsible and freelance Sherley a skilled politician, but he was clever and he wanted to maintain his position as Abbas I's ambassador. With this goal in mind, he had to devise a workable plan. He knew what Shah Abbas needed and he knew what the Christians, particularly the Pope, would want to hear. It was thus easy for Sherley to draft the terms of the agreement himself. This is a logical conclusion if we consider another of Sherley's letters submitted to Pope Clement VIII in 1601, the contents of which are much the same as that of the earlier letter of 1599, yet with the new addition that Abbas I supposedly granted Sherley and the Pope complete freedom in devising a plan of forcing schismatic Christians in

9Ibid., p. 73.
Iran to submit to the obedience of the Papacy. Whether or not Anthony Sherley was guilty in all respects of presenting Shah Abbas' terms in that way which would best suit Sherley himself is not to be drawn out as the main issue. What concerns us more here is the invitation Abbas gave to the Pope to send his representatives as missionaries to Iran.

Other travelers also reported of Abbas I's clement policies towards indigenous Christians. Father Emmanuel de Santos, a Portuguese friar from Goa, went to Iran and reported in 1599 that he had "seen it with his own eyes in writing, and had heard the publishing of a public proclamation which had been made in Persia by the order of the king, that all Christians who might wish to live in his dominions could do so in security, and also perform all practices of their Religion and the Sacraments. . . ." Father Francisco da Costa, another Portuguese priest, while returning from India, spent several months in Isfahan in 1599 and he made the assertion that, "What generally speaking can be said of the king is that he shows himself well disposed towards Christians, and desires extremely to have priests and Christians in his realms." Reports such as these demonstrated that Shah Abbas I's invitation, as provided by Sherley, was to a certain extent legitimate. In addition, there were at least two reports that Shah Abbas wore a little cross under his robes, giving those who saw it privately to

10Ibid., p. 78.
11Ibid., p. 80.
12Ibid., p. 80.
understand that he was a Christian in his heart, but did not yet declare himself publicly for fear of a defection in the army.\textsuperscript{13}

During the early period of Shah Abbas I's reign and his negotiations with the Papacy, we witness both his positive attitude towards Christians as well as the true beginning of European based Christian missionary activity taking root in Iran. Rome continually realized the need for an ally such as the Safavids against the Ottomans. Yet by the reign of Shah Abbas I, Europe was content fighting a defensive battle while the religious orders of the various European states sought more vigorously than ever to enter new territory in search of converts. The Papacy, perceiving a unique and opportune situation, sent missionaries to work for the conversion of the Shah.

Individually, the priests sent to Iran at that time were pious in their community life, yet they performed many non-religious functions. Often, as in the case of the Portuguese Augustinians who coupled Portugal's mercantile interest with their own missionary activity, the evangelists served as diplomats to push the interests of the Pope or the Christian kings who sent them. The Carmelite mission which entered Iran in 1607, a few years after the Augustinians, also played the dual role of evangelists and diplomats. If their intention was solely the conversion of infidels and preaching the Gospel, the Papacy was using them primarily as ambassadors to forward its diplomatic policies. The Papacy's intention was to protect Christian Europe from the Ottomans by developing friendly relations and ensuring direct and reliable negotiations with the

Safavid monarch while, at the same time, on a less important basis, hoping that the Catholic missionaries might acquire a following within the Islamic realm of Iran. This dual role as evangelists and diplomats predominated the stay of all Christian missionary orders and accordingly influenced their work and its results.

In spite of this dual role played by the missionaries, of which Shah Abbas I was well aware, his clement attitude towards Christians did not diminish until later in his reign. Shah Abbas's outward respect towards the Christian missionaries was, however, interpreted to the extreme in the positive sense, perhaps misleading some incorrectly to believe that he was a secret admirer of the Christian faith. Seemingly, such respect, or at least tolerance, towards these priests represented a civil act of diplomacy rather than an inclination that he might be a closet Christian. This is evidenced by Abbas's changing attitudes and domestic dealings with indigenous Iranian Christians. Apparently, his attitude was not only as changing as the political situation warranted, but also he, a professed Muslim, actually disliked and mistreated native Christians at whim, particularly the Armenians.

Because the Armenians occupy an important position in this thesis as the most widely documented indigenous Iranian Christian element, I must at this juncture digress for a moment to provide briefly some background to the establishment of the Armenian community in Isfahan. Before the Safavid-Ottoman wars of the sixteenth century, the Armenian community flourished in the area of Georgia and the territories constituting present day Soviet Azerbayjan. This geographic area often served as a battlefield for Ottoman and Safavid forces. Not only were these wars
themselves devastating to the Armenian population, but because neither the Ottomans nor the Safavids wished to leave any human or material resources behind for the conqueror, both sides adopted a policy of deporting the population from the area and completely destroying villages and towns as they retreated.

There were already individual Armenian merchants in Isfahan who conducted profitable businesses. Not only was the Safavid state transporting Armenians to Isfahan, but the destruction as a result of the wars in northwestern Iran caused many Armenians to migrate to the heart of Iran. Naturally they chose a city where they had friends and relatives who could help them make a living. The Armenian population of Isfahan slowly grew. Shah Abbas I's campaign of 1603, in which he violated the treaty of 1590 with the Ottomans and invaded Ottoman territory in Azerbaycan, resulted in another major deportation of Armenians from Azerbaycan to Isfahan. Shah Abbas I was continually aware of Armenian commercial activities which extended as far as India to the east and Venice to the west. From this perspective Abbas I obviously tried to replace Julfa Armenia with Isfahan as an important center of east-west trade and indeed he did so with great success. Furthermore, he had achieved two goals -- he successfully depopulated and laid waste the territories between the Ottomans and the Safavids while at the same time actually changing the old trade route and now almost bypassing Ottoman territory entirely by coming down through southern Iran and into the Persian Gulf.

With the establishment of New Julfa in 1605, Isfahan not only became a major Iranian commercial center, but a religious and cultural
center for Armenians as well. The Armenians had in New Julfa their own churches, patriarchs, bishops and priests, and they were allowed to celebrate religious services in public without being harassed by Muslims. "Shah Abbas I tolerated their religion," wrote Father Krusinski, "which was freely exercised at Julfa, where are an abundance of churches, as publicly as in any of the Christian Prince's dominions in Europe."\(^{14}\)

By 1613, however, Shah Abbas I's tolerance towards Armenian Christians lessened and his policy changed as evidenced by a report by Khwajeh Virdi, an Armenian of Julfa who told a Carmelite priest of the persecution perpetrated by the Shah against Armenians in October 1613: "When the Shah made Muslims of the Christians who were owing him a certain sum of money which he had lent them, he gave orders that all the Armenians in the city of Isfahan must on the day following make profession of the creed of Muhammad, and even those who did not owe money."\(^{15}\) Fortunately for the Armenians, this order was never carried out. That night the Shah became ill and, believing his sickness was attributed to his command, the next day sent 30,000 pieces of gold to Julfa to be distributed as alms and gave orders that those Christians who did not owe him money should be allowed to continue to live in the Christian faith. Less than eight years later, however, Shah Abbas I issued a similar command to force conversion of Christians to Islam. In the persecution of 1621, the Safavids attempted forcibly to make Muslims of Christians by public beatings and tortures. This project was, at least on the surface,\

\(^{14}\) Krusinski, Late Revolutions, Vol. II, p. 41.

\(^{15}\) Chronicle of the Carmelites, p. 255.
quite effective since many Christian families publicly converted or left Isfahan. Those who did convert, however, undoubtedly continued to practice secretly their own religion.

Why Shah Abbas I suddenly changed his attitude and policies towards the Christians of Isfahan cannot be answered for certain. One possible answer, I believe, stems from the threat posed by the European missionaries in their attempts to convert Armenians to Catholicism. Shah Abbas opposed mass conversion of the Armenians to Catholicism and his response to the missionaries was that if they will change the religion of the Armenians who were his subjects, the the Armenians should accept his religion, knowing how dangerous it would be to have at least 50,000 at the devotion of the church of Rome within his dominions. Apparently, Safavid policy of forcing Christians to convert to Islam was an attempt to get to the Armenians and make them Muslims before the European missionaries could make them Catholics.

While forcible conversion lasted, the Christian missionaries did all they could to exhort the Armenians and others to stand steadfast in the Christian faith. Shah Abbas more than once showed his annoyance with the missionaries for encouraging resistance to his commands and their attempts at undermining his authority. Furthermore, as he grew older, he developed a suspicion of everyone, especially his relatives and foreigners, which resulted in mounting tyranny. Everything and everyone

16Ibid., p. 257.

had to be subordinated to the will of the King. In his *Travels*, Thomas Herbert devoted much of his attention to the arbitrary government of Shah Abbas I and how the autocratic king, not hindered by written laws or municipal courts, treated all people and property in his realms as his own and changed his policies at whim. The most striking observation Herbert makes in his discourse on the tyranny of the Iranian government is that those who professed Christ were often subject to forcible conversion and even death.\(^\text{18}\)

From 1622 onwards, when not on campaigns, Shah Abbas I spent much of his time in the palace he had made at Farrahabad and for this reason, if no other, interviews with the Christian missionaries became rare and intimate relationships diminished. Shortly before he died in 1629, Shah Abbas issued an edict which did more harm than any other single act to destroy the growth of Christianity in Iran. The edict stated that whoever of a Christian family should turn Muslim should inherit possession of the property of all his relatives, up to the seventh generation.\(^\text{19}\)

Although contemporary travelers of the period fail to tell us what system of inheritance Shah Abbas I's edict replaced, I contend that it was undoubtedly a system of father to son inheritance. With this edict Shah Abbas hoped to impose pressures severe enough to make Christian property holders convert to Islam and many did convert. This edict played a major role in successive ruler's policy towards Christians, for by 1654, in less than twenty years, it was estimated that at least 50,000


\(^{19}\)Later reduced to four.
Christians had apostatized in order to reclaim their property and escape beggary.  

The new Shah Safi (1629-1642), grandson of Shah Abbas I, seems to have been genuinely inclined to be well disposed towards Christians. Throughout his reign, there were no charges of persecutions of Christians raised against him as there had been against Shah Abbas I. "From what I understand about this new Shah of Persia," wrote Father Epiphanius on December 25, 1631, "he gives considerably greater promise than the last one, showing himself in fact very well disposed towards the Christian religion: and till now he does not exhibit himself so artificial and scheming as his predecessor. . . ." The Christian missionaries' opinion of Shah Safi did not seem to change as his reign progressed, as evidenced by Father Dinas' letter of July 14, 1637 in which he related that, "the affairs of the mission proceed prosperously. This prince is pleased to see us in his dominions: he takes account of us, and has a great opinion of His Holiness."  

Shah Safi's death in May, 1642 ended the thirty-two year old sovereign's thirteen year reign. Contemporary travelers apparently viewed him as a benevolent ruler, for in the documents available there is no evidence that he, unlike his predecessors and successors, conducted major persecutions against non-Muslims in his dominions.

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20Chronicle of the Carmelites, p. 288.
21Ibid., p. 315.
22Ibid., p. 315.
Shah Abbas II (1642-1666), at the age of nine years old, ascended the throne on May 26, 1642 and shortly thereafter we once again witness an intolerance, if not blatant hatred, for Christians and non-Muslims in general. From the reign of Shah Abbas II onwards there was no longer the intimacy nor the frequency of direct negotiation between the Shah and the Christian missionaries that had existed in the previous half century. The change of affairs and attitude was, as I see it, due to two basic causes. First, neither were the hostilities between the Ottomans and the Safavids as dominant as they were in the past nor were the European sovereigns any longer seeking a military alliance with the Safavids against the Ottomans. This general state of political affairs lessened the need for envoys between the two realms as well as the need for the consistent diplomatic ties between Iran and Christian Europe that had existed in the past. Second, the new Shah at the time of his ascendance to the throne was a mere youth, not likely to desire the conversation of Christian missionaries for enlightenment on European matters or discourses on the Christian faith. Furthermore, Abbas II was a monarch content to leave affairs of state in the hands of his vazirs who were antagonistic towards the idea of allowing religious freedom to any non-Muslims, especially Christians.23

Early in his reign, Shah Abbas II's ministers, many of whom were bigoted Muslims antagonistic towards Christianity, instituted

23From the reign of Shah Abbas II onwards the Safavid sovereigns appear to have been content with court ceremoniousness and majestic aloofness rather than with the execution of state affairs. This position rendered them less accessible to all people of the empire, not to mention Christian priests who were viewed by the upper echelons of state as a major domestic problem to begin with.
religious persecutions. Still no one knew what effect these ministers would have on the Shah's attitude towards non-Muslims. As his reign progressed, however, Shah Abbas II soon proved himself intolerant and actually vicious towards all non-Muslim elements. In 1657 he ordered that all Jews and Christians in his realms should become Muslims. Not only were these religious groups ordered to convert, but they were also not permitted to leave the country. Thus, they could not escape the persecution.

Of significant interest at this juncture is our first mention of Safavid persecutions directed towards the Jews. Up to this point, contemporary travelers of the period have spoken of Jews only in passing. The Jews, however, suffered numerous outbursts of persecutions, especially during the period 1642-1722, i.e., the reign of Shah Abbas II to Shah Sultan Husayn, inclusive. The Jews, like the Zoroastrians, were attractive targets for fanatic Shi'ites, influential at the Safavid court, who advocated their forcible conversion to Islam and maintained such anti-Jewish prejudices as the myth that Jews practiced magic. Occasionally, they were offered economic rewards in return for their

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24 Chronicle of the Carmelites, p. 353.

25 Ibid., p. 365.

conversion and at other times, there were forcible conversions.\textsuperscript{27} Thevenot confirms the religious persecution of Jews at the hand of Shah Abbas II's chief vazir who the traveler claims took violent measures to forcibly convert the Jews to Islam. Yet, Jews forcibly converted still secretly professed Judaism. Once the state became aware of this and realized they could not make good Muslims of the Jews, they allowed the Jews to practice their religion, yet they were forced to pay a yearly head tax and were obliged to wear a colored cloth on their gown in the middle of their breast to signify that they were Jews.\textsuperscript{28}

Shah Abbas II and his ministers were evidently actuated not by mere administrative motives regarding certain sections of their subjects, but by sheer intolerance. Thevenot's report of Safavid persecutions against the Jews is substantiated by the reports of Jean Baptiste Tavernier and Jean Chardin.\textsuperscript{29} In addition to persecution of Jews, Shah Abbas II attacked Christians by reactivating the law promulgated at the end of the reign of Shah Abbas I permitting any Muslim convert to claim all the property and goods of his deceased Christian relatives back to the seventh generation.


\textsuperscript{28} Thevenot, \textit{Travels of Monsieur de Thevenot}, p. 110.

The survival of the communities of Armenian Christians and Jews shows that these harsh measures, even if executed, were not completely successful. Yet, such reports bear witness to difficult times for the non-Muslim element. During the reign of Shah Sulaiman (1666-1694) the autocratic government of Shah Abbas I deteriorated completely as court officials dominated state affairs, many with the same attitudes as their recent predecessors. As a result, Muslim prejudices towards Europeans, not so obvious in the first half of the seventeenth century, almost completely dominated affairs of the second half. "The king is a supine in governing," wrote Father Anglus on April 27, 1671, "while his chief minister, 'Itimad-ud-Dawleh, is the sworn enemy of all Christians. The present government is degenerating into being a tyranny and since the king has come to the throne Persia has been a country where tyranny, opprobrium and persecution is the lot of Christians." In his discussion of the contempt and repulses annexed to the profession of Christianity within the Safavid dominions, John Chardin reported that the Grand Vazir was a bigoted Muslim who mortally hated all Christians, whom he looked upon as polluted. Other Muslims in Iran also disliked Christians, as indicated by the report that Muslims publicly called out after all Christians: "Dog! Become Muslim," and the children in the streets shouted "cursed be the Franks."

31_Penzer, Chardin's Travels_, p. 69.
Pere Sanson, who after only a few years spent in Iran, returned to France in 1693 and subsequently published in Paris in 1694, *L'état Present du Royaume de Perse*. Quoting from this text alone, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* treats "Shah Sulaiman's kindness to Christian missionaries", which I believe presents a wrong impression.\(^{33}\) Pere Sanson's brief acquaintance with Iran during the later portion of Shah Sulaiman's reign cannot be characteristic of Sulaiman's entire reign, and therefore his report fails to present the opinion in which Shah Sulaiman was really held by contemporary travelers of the period.

During the reign of the new Shah Sultan Husayn (1694-1722), the Safavid dynasty finally crumbled to destruction when Afghan invaders conquered Isfahan in 1722. Naturally, one aspect of the Safavid collapse is attributed to the personal character of the extremely incapable Shah Sultan Husayn and the breakdown of the autocratic monarchy established by Shah Abbas I.\(^{34}\) By the time that Shah Sultan Husayn had ascended the throne, harem politics dominated sovereign interests and affairs of state almost entirely fell in the hands of ministers and other court officials. The Shah's first attempt to assert authority, in obedience to the precepts of the Qur'an and the Islamic religion, was an edict prohibiting the use of wine. Court officials accustomed to drinking wine for a century or two were displeased by the edict, and they conspired with the eunuchs to have the order repealed. The champion of their cause was Miriam Beigum, the Shah's maternal grandmother, whom

\(^{33}\) *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1894 ed., s.v. "Persia."

\(^{34}\) For a full discussion of the reasons for the decline of the Safavid dynasty see Minorsky, *Tadhkirit al-Muluk*, pp. 23-24.
he always held in affection. She played sick and requested that the Shah allow her to drink a bit of wine for medicinal purposes, that being, according to her physicians, the only remedy that would relieve her. Wine was brought to the court and Shah Sultan Husayn, flattered by his grandmother's praise for him, poured the wine for her with his own hand. She then refused to drink unless he did so first. The pious king, weakened by her trickery, drank the wine and took such fancy to it, Krusinski tells us, that he completely indulged in it to the extent "that it was rare to find him sober."\(^{35}\)

Of Shah Sultan Husayn's personal attitude towards the non-Muslim element, contemporary travelers of the period tell us very little. However, in his outward appearance, he seemed not to have been as adverse to the Christian religion as many of his predecessors. Father Krusinski tells us that although Shah Sultan Husayn was devout in his religion, far more so than Shah Sulaiman, his father, he "was not thoroughly convinced in his mind that it was a whit better than the Christian religion."\(^{36}\) Krusinski also reports that the Shah once told his favorite eunuch, Giewader-Baszi, "that the Franks are better workmen than ours, I am very much afraid, that as they outdo us in the arts, they also excel us in points of religion."\(^{37}\) Assessments such as these, however, are by

\(^{35}\)Krusinski, Late Revolutions, Vol. I, pp. 72-75. I would contend that this is a gross exaggeration. Perhaps Krusinski's reason for making such a statement is that the Shah, once he began drinking wine, also began spending more time in his harem. Thus, Krusinski obviously imagined that the Shah was always drinking while enjoying the pleasure of the harem.

\(^{36}\)Ibid., p. 131.

\(^{37}\)Ibid., p. 131.
no means sufficient grounds to develop a case for Shah Sultan Husayn's pro-Christian personal attitude. He was a weak monarch who spent much of his time in his harem, thereby giving free license to court officials who controlled affairs of state. Thus, although there were persecutions against non-Muslims and a generally intolerant state attitude dominated dealings with the non-Muslim element, we cannot for certain always determine whether such action was the will of the Shah himself or that of his ministers and court influentials.

In his zeal for Islam or yielding to the intolerance of powerful influences at his court, Shah Sultan Husayn would appear to have used, in 1697 or 1698, oppressive measures against the minority creeds like those used by Shah Abbas II. About this time an edict was passed obliging all Safavid subjects to profess the Islamic religion. This task was begun by the forced circumcision of Zoroastrians and then attention was focused on Armenians over one-thousand of whom were forcefully converted to Islam.  

There exists, however, serious lacunae in the reports provided by contemporary travelers of the period concerning state attitude and policy toward the non-Muslim element during the reign of Shah Sultan Husayn. From what we can piece together of the reports provided by the Carmelite priests and Father Krusinski, persecution of non-Muslims continued, often with great fervor, during the reign of Shah Sultan Husayn, whether or not by his order. The case may be argued further if we consider contemporary indigenous sources of the period, yet this is beyond

38Chronicle of the Carmelites, pp. 473-474.
the scope of the present study. From the reports of Krusinski, concerning the Shah's personal character and attitude, we might surmise that the Shah, if left to himself, was no bigot despite the influences surrounding him. Yet, although perhaps humane and tolerant, the Shah was so weak that he could never refuse to carry out the desires of such staunch Shi'ite theologians as Muhammad Baqir or Muhammad Husayn, two very influential advisors at his court. With men of this caliber and authority dictating their desires to the Shah, it is not surprising that state persecutions of the non-Muslim element continued and that the results of such intolerance were accordingly severe.

The European Christian missionaries already, at the end of Shah Abbas I's reign, felt the growing antagonism of the Safavid state towards their presence and activities. Antagonism soon developed into open intolerance and, although the missionaries were not expelled from Iran, they often felt direct consequences of Safavid persecutions of non-Muslims. This negative attitude towards Christian missionaries apparently prevailed also throughout the remainder of the Safavid period as well as into the period of Afghan occupation. Besides the resistance the missionaries encountered from the Safavid state, they faced another major obstacle in that the Gregorian Armenian clergy fiercely resented the intrusion of Catholic missionaries into their own sphere of religious

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influence. Quite naturally, once the Catholics realized that they were unable to make any sizable number of converts from the Muslim population and, as a result, turned their attention towards the Gregorian Armenians, bitter animosity arose between the two Christian communities. The resulting persecution, not part of a Muslim or Safavid court policy, but altogether arbitrary from the side of the Gregorian Armenians, demonstrates the bitter resentment and opposition the Catholics faced. Such conditions reached unprecedented heights during the reign of Shah Abbas II and by 1650 the Armenian ecclesiastics prohibited European priests from officiating mass in the church of some poor Syrians, in Isfahan. Within a few years, Catholic priests encountered even greater opposition from the Armenian clergy and by 1654, Father Balthaz tells us, the protest of the Armenians against the intrusion of the Catholic missionaries took the form of sending one of their number to the Shah's court, to urge their demands to be allowed to eject from Julfa the Frank Fathers, who were dwelling there; i.e., the reverend Fathers of the Society of Jesus, the Capuchin Fathers and our own (Carmelites) — all of them at considerable distances the one from the others — they (the Armenians) even alleging that the Frank Fathers wanted to hedge them round ("Saying in their petitions that the Frank religious had come to pervert his subjects and make Christians of Muhammadans — a thing enough to have us ejected not from Julfa only, but from all this realm of Persia", is the version of Fr. Felix's letter of June 20, 1654).

The Armenian persecution of Catholics was so severe that in their desire to bring more force on the Armenians, in order to obtain

40Chronicle of the Carmelites, p. 376.
41Ibid., p. 377.
42Ibid., p. 379.
their conversion, several priests wrote to the sovereigns of Catholic Europe that they encouraged these monarchs to put pressure on the Armenians in Europe as one means of forcing submission to Rome of the population of Julfa. One proposed measure was that it should be prohibited for any Armenian to enter the Papal States unless he first made profession of the Catholic faith. And, if the Armenians of Iran refused Catholicism then all goods of all Armenians in Europe should be confiscated.43

Such threats, however, had little effect on the Iranian Armenians whose hatred for the Catholics had already become so ingrained by the middle of the seventeenth century that many claimed it was better to be a Turk than a Roman Catholic.44 The Armenians continued to persecute Catholics, and Armenian clergy prohibited people from going to Catholic churches "by menaces, excommunications, and uttering many blasphemies against the Roman Church."45

The intolerant attitudes of both the Safavid state and the Gregorian Armenians had a devastating effect on the Catholic missionaries' results in terms of numbers of converts to Catholicism. Clearly from our discussion of the Armenian attitude we note that conversions among them were minimal. The situation was far worse among Muslims. One priest who spent 26 years in Iran claimed that during his stay he had never heard of more than one or two Muslims and very few Armenians

43Ibid., p. 493.
44Thevenot, Travels of Monsieur de Thevenot, p. 112.
45Chronicle of the Carmelites, p. 522.
converting to Catholicism. Yet, we must note also that the Safavid state's attempts forcibly to convert non-Muslims to Islam were also futile, since it is believed that almost all of those converted did so only for public security and privately continued to practice their former religion.

During the reign of Shah Abbas II, the Christian missionaries began a campaign for baptism of moribund Shi'ite infants so that they might die Christians, at least on the record. It is clear that these children were baptised only when at the point of death and that none survived. The 'by any means necessary' policy of the missionaries in their attempts to create sizable numbers of converts on the record is even more astonishing when we realize that Rome condoned the practice.

Of course in most cases, particularly dealing with Muslim babies, these missionaries had to be sure that their intention to make a Christian of the infant by the process adopted should not be suspected by the parents or relatives. These missionaries were aided in their actions by the impression prevalent among Iranians, especially the poor, that the missionaries possessed a special knowledge of medicine unequaled by their own hakims. Furthermore, they believed that the recital of prayers over the sick child's head, the meanings of which were hidden to the parents and others, by persons respected for holy life, might

46 Ibid., p. 449.
47 Ibid., p. 1039.
48 Ibid., p. 395.
49 Lockhart, Fall of the Safavid Dynasty, p. 78.
draw God's attention to the child and perhaps lead to his cure.\textsuperscript{50} This reasoning is not illogical if we consider the large numbers of Iranian peasants and tribals to this day who believe in evil eyes and inauspicious signs. The policy of secret conversion seemingly continued for quite some time to follow, although our evidence tells us of the practice only through 1658.\textsuperscript{51}

By the nature of our discussion thus far, it is not surprising that the net result of Christian missionary activity in Iran during the Safavid period may be termed a general fiasco. Their initial purpose in being sent as diplomatic envoys to create an alliance, at one time so important, between Christian Europe and Iran against the Ottomans never produced significant results. Likewise, their attempts to gain converts among Iranians were frustrated and the results negligible. The best conclusion to the Christian missionary effort in Safavid Iran lies in the numbers of converts. By 1765 there were less than 200 Catholics in Iran and this number was to steadily decrease.\textsuperscript{52} By 1789 there was a total of seven Catholics in Iran, "all the rest ran away or died."\textsuperscript{53}

Contemporary travelers of the period provide abundant descriptions of Safavid persecution of non-Muslims, yet none of these authors ever explain the reasons, except on the superficial level, that the

\textsuperscript{50}Panzer, Chardin's Travels in Persia, p. 185. "They believe that all men's prayers are good and prevalent; therefore, in their illness, and in other wants, they admit of, and even desire the prayers of different religions: I have seen it practiced a thousand times."

\textsuperscript{51}Chronicle of the Carmelites, p. 396.

\textsuperscript{52}Ibid., p. 710.

\textsuperscript{53}Ibid., p. 699.
Safavid state disliked non-Muslims. The non-Muslim religious group which most often caught the attention of these travelers was the Armenians and then, more seldom, the Jews and Zoroastrians. Reference is seldom, if ever, made to other religious groups such as Nestorians, Assyrians, etc. The reason Armenian Christians occupy most of the travelers' attention in their accounts is obviously because of the large population of Armenians in Julfa Isfahan, Isfahan being the most widely visited city by all travelers of the period.

The Safavid period, according to the evidence provided by the travelers, is seemingly divided into two periods. The first was the period from Shah Isma'il I through Shah Abbas I, during which time there seemed to be no persecution of non-Muslims and a tolerance for Christians which reached unprecedented heights when Shah Abbas I invited European missionaries into his realms. The second period, from Shah Abbas II through the reign of Shah Sultan Husayn, seems to have been a period of severe persecution of all non-Muslim religious groups in Iran.

If the apparent trend is that Safavid persecutions of non-Muslims increased as the period went on and actually reached new heights during the final reigns of the dynasty, this notion, for several reasons, is not proven by the accounts of contemporary travelers of the period. 54

54I unsuccessfully contemplated a correlation between increased Safavid persecution of non-Muslim and the decline of the Safavid state. The three most basic problems which arose with this hypothesis were: First, no really conclusive study has yet been made on the causes of Safavid political decline. Second, we are still not really sure if Safavid persecutions of non-Muslims increased as the state declined since this is not proven by travelers' accounts of the period. And, third, until a thorough investigation of the Iranian sources reveals what
In the first place, there was only a mere handful of travelers to Iran between 1500 and 1600. Iran was completely new to them, and they understood little of the language, culture and court policy. Their missions were either to secure stable military alliances between Christian Europe and Iran against the Ottomans or to secure stable trade relations between Iran and their own country. These travelers arrived at the royal court, expressed their purpose and desire and departed, none remaining in Iran more than a few years and few traveling throughout the country. Seemingly, the notion of state persecutions of non-Muslims was far removed from their accessibility to observe state policy. Therefore, even if there were persecutions of non-Muslims, these travelers were probably unaware of it.

The second point worthy of attention is that once Shah Abbas I invited European missionaries into his realms and demonstrated an apparent tolerance of Christians, many travelers of diverse backgrounds and with different purposes came to Iran. Not only were there more travelers in Iran during the period from Shah Abbas I through the reign of Shah Sultan Husayn, but most of them stayed in Iran for longer periods and many traveled throughout the country; Isfahan of course still remained the most widely visited city by all travelers. Because of the greater number of travelers during the later period, the extended duration of their stay in Iran, and their greater familiarity with the language and culture, they were more able to observe court policy in action. For motivated Safavid persecutions of non-Muslims, we cannot assert that those responsible for instituting state persecutions were even aware of Safavid political decline and, if they were, whether or not they perceived of religious persecution as a remedy to political decline.
these reasons, even if Safavid persecutions of non-Muslims were conducted throughout the entire Safavid period, they were only noticed and recorded during the later period, i.e., from the reign of Shah Abbas II through that of Shah Sultan Husayn.

Another significant observation in terms of Safavid state persecutions, particularly of Christians, concerns the reports of the Carmelite priests whose accounts provide the longest continuity of knowledge of Safavid persecutions. As noted earlier, one of the reasons that Shah Abbas I suddenly changed his attitude towards Christians was perhaps due to the threat he perceived of Catholic missionaries potentially converting Armenians in his realms to Catholicism. Their conversion would necessarily mean European military protection and European intervention in Safavid domestic affairs. It would certainly be easier for Shah Abbas I to keep the Armenians subservient only to him. With this goal in mind, he sought to make them Muslims before they could convert to Catholicism.

Aside from the reality of increased Safavid persecutions towards Christians, we must also deal with the reliability of the Carmelite accounts. These priests took every advantage to record anything that even slightly looked like persecution. The Carmelite priests lead us to believe that state persecutions towards Christians were an everyday event and without foundation. Other travelers of the period lead us to believe that Christians were not persecuted any more so than any other non-Muslim religious group. The most significant example of the Carmelites using the least excuse to accuse the Safavids of persecuting Christians is their assessment of the reasons surrounding Shah Abbas I's
policy of relocating the Armenians of northwest Iran in Isfahan. The Carmelites viewed this measure as one of religious persecution and made a great deal of it. All other travelers of the period viewed Abbas I's policy as one of vital economic importance to Isfahan as well as to all of Iran.

The only definite conclusions that we may make on the basis of the accounts of all contemporary travelers of the period are: first, the Safavids did persecute non-Muslims and often with great fervor. The reasons why these persecutions were conducted remain unanswered based on the evidence provided by travelers of the period and cannot be answered with certainty until a more thorough investigation of the contemporary Iranian sources of the period, which is beyond the scope of the present study, is made available. Second, in spite of what the Carmelite priests would lead us to believe, Christians did not seem to be persecuted to any greater extent than any other non-Muslim religious group. On this basis, the Carmelite accounts are definitely biased. Third, religiously the Safavid period may be termed a period of non-conversion. There is sufficient evidence to prove that neither were the European missionaries able to convert Muslims or non-Muslims to Catholicism, nor were the Safavids successfully able to convert non-Muslims to Islam. In spite of the arduous attempts on both sides to gain converts, no one actually converted anyone. And, to carry this one step further, we may conclude that the European missionary effort in Safavid Iran ended in a frustrated fiasco.
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Travelers' accounts are an important source for the study of religion in Safavid Iran. Yet, their importance has somewhat decreased in recent years due to the discovery of more authoritative indigenous Iranian sources contemporary with the period under review. Sixteenth and seventeenth century travel accounts were virtually the sole source available on Safavid Iran to Europeans of that period. Many of these accounts were widely read by European intellectuals, and therefore, the accounts provided Europeans with first-hand data which described and explained the mysteries of Iran and its people. In spite of advanced academic scholarship on contemporary Iranian sources of the Safavid period, such as Shah Isma'il I's poetry for example, we cannot discredit travelers' accounts for two reasons. First, European travelers' accounts for centuries remained the sole source on various aspects of religion in Safavid Iran. Second, travelers' accounts, when and where accurate, either reinforce the material found in Iranian sources or present information that is not found in Iranian sources.

In more specific terms, we may not overstate the value of the Venetian travel accounts vis-à-vis Shah Isma'il I's alleged divine status. It is true that the Venetian travelers merely described Shah Isma'il I's divine status, as he was regarded by his people, without fully understanding the principles underlying the Iranian people's worship of their
god-like monarch or without ever having heard of Shah Isma'il's poetry. With the discovery and examination of Shah Isma'il I's poetry, western scholars not only gained new insights into Shah Isma'il I's self-claim to divinity, but also they were able to validate the Venetian accounts. The Venetian travel accounts remain of significant importance in that they describe how widespread belief in Shah Isma'il I's divinity actually was at the dawn of the sixteenth century.

In terms of European travelers' perceptions of Islam and Shi'ite-Sunni variances, the value of their accounts lies not in their exposition of Shi'ite doctrine but rather in how little these travelers actually knew of the differences between the two Islamic sects. On an equally important level, their accounts reflect both the prejudices against and the sympathies for Islam. Only a handful of European travelers were prejudiced against Islam. These travelers devoted most of their attention to finding fault with and denouncing Islam rather than describing accurately the history, doctrine, and practices of Islam from an objective point of view.

The majority of European travelers in the Safavid period were honest witnesses who sought to discover the real truth. These men did attempt to describe objectively the little they knew of Islam. This attitude alone demonstrates that most travelers were a sort of people different from most other Europeans of the period in that Christian prejudices and propaganda against Islam did not supersede their objectivity in examining Islam. Yet, beyond a superficial view of Shi'ite history and doctrine and a major focus on Shi'ism and Sunnism as a bone of contention which perpetuated continual war between the Safavids and
Ottomans, travelers tell us little of Shi'ism in the Safavid state. In view of modern scholarship on Islam, therefore, I contend that we would not discover the true answers to Shi'ite-Sunni variances in the accounts provided by European travelers to Safavid Iran.

Travelers' accounts of the Safavid state vis-à-vis non-Muslims are of extreme importance in reconstructing Safavid state intolerance of minority religious groups. Religious persecution did exist in the Safavid state, and often with great fervor. Evidence of state persecutions of non-Muslims is not found in travelers' accounts alone; there are works written by non-Muslim residents, particularly Jews, which also tell of state religious persecution. However, until contemporary state documents which elucidate the schemes for and motivation behind state persecutions are discovered, translated and analyzed, travelers' accounts are one of the only two sources available. Furthermore, although official Safavid state documents may contradict travelers' interpretations as to the reasons for state persecutions of non-Muslims, the importance of European travel accounts as evidence of the persecutions will not diminish.

Although contemporary travel accounts of the period under review remain one of the few sources available in examining religion in Safavid Iran, one may not, obviously, rely solely upon them. Travel accounts have not only misrepresented Islam and Shi'ism but have also left many questions about religion in Safavid Iran unanswered. At best, travel literature must be used hand in hand with contemporary indigenous works of the period. When such works do not exist, however, travel accounts reach their peak of significance.
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

The works I was unable to consult are indicated by an asterisk.


