

A JOURNEY TO SAFAVID PERSIA
AND PORTUGUESE INDIA
THE ANONYMOUS ACCOUNT
OF A SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY SPANISH SOLDIER

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Portuguese travel literature from the period of Portuguese expansion is an exceptional corpus of information of all kinds about the peoples and cultures in Africa and Asia. The voyage to India and Southeast Asia, known as the *Carreira da Índia*, was not only the economic and political engine that catapulted Portugal into the ranks of the great European powers, it also had great benefits for Europe in general. Among other things, the Portuguese impetus allowed Europe to develop the orientalising idea of the Other and to make known Asian peoples and cultures of which nothing was known, or only legends and distortions. This vast process produced an exceptional amount of documentation and literature. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, due to the dynastic union of the Spanish and Portuguese crowns (1580-1640), the geographical space of the Crown of Portugal was also the destination of Spanish travellers. MS 580 of the National Library of Portugal, which is the focus of this volume, is an example of a Spaniard's written legacy of his passage through the Portuguese enclaves in Africa and South Asia. The text edited in this volume is untitled in the original manuscript, but is referred to as the *Relaciones*.¹ It is considered with some certainty to have been written by Gutierre de Monroy, a member of the embassy that left Goa for the court of Shāh 'Abbās I (r. 1588-1629) accompanying the ambassador García de Silva y Figueroa. The mission of this embassy to Safavid Iran was to negotiate the transfer of territories conquered by the Safavids to the Portuguese in the Persian Gulf, a perennial issue of the military alliance with Shāh 'Abbās against the Ottomans, and the status of the Armenians in the territories of the Safavid dynasty. But the manuscript is not limited to references to Safavid Iran; it contains much more. In addition to the meetings with the Shah, it

¹ The full title, as it appears in the catalogue of the National Library of Portugal is *Relações de viagem feitas por ocasião da embaixada enviada por Filipe III de Espanha ao xá da persia, sendo embaixador D. García de Silva y Figueroa*.

offers a wealth of information that complements García de Silva y Figueroa's *Comentarios*, the Saulisante's *Relación*,² the Melchor de los Ángeles (Belchior dos Anjos) *Relación*,³ and the shorter report written by Hernando de Moraga.⁴ The *Relaciones* provides us with data, anecdotes and the interesting insights of a seventeenth-century military man, a soldier, who took notes on almost everything he saw and experienced on his long journey. We do not know why he wrote the *Relaciones*. Perhaps he was seeking a reward at court, or perhaps he simply wanted to record his journey to justify his services. In any case, he has left us an informative text to add to the wealth of travelogues to Asia.

The interest in this manuscript dates back to 2013, when, together with Luis Gil Fernández, Enrique García Hernán, Rudi Matthee, and a group of researchers, we founded the "Consejo Ibero-Safaví de Estudios Históricos". During the first meeting, I became aware of this manuscript and the partial edition that Luis Gil Fernández had produced.⁵ I felt that it was necessary to edit the manuscript completely. Over the years and at various meetings, I have presented my analysis and reflections on its contents. Finally, I decided to make it more widely known, to bring it out of the obscurity to which it had been confined for so long. This work has two significant characteristics: first, it provides historical data and anecdotes about the events surrounding the first embassy sent by the court of Madrid to the Safavid court of Shāh 'Abbās in the second decade of the seventeenth century; second, it is an extraordinary text on the people, culture and religions of Safavid Iran. Thus, in addition to

² Joan-Pau Rubiés (ed.), "'Relación de la Embajada que hizo en Persia Don García de Silva y Figueroa' (1620) by his secretary Saulisante," in Rui Manuel Loureiro (ed.), *Estudos sobre Don García de Silva y Figueroa e os "Comentarios" da embaixada à Pérsia*, Lisbon, 2011, vol. IV, pp. 135-172.

³ *Relacion de la jornada de Dom García de Sylua, Embaxador, dada por Fr. Melchor de los Angeles*, in National Library of Spain, Ms. 2348 ff. 519r-520v; *Relacion de la jornada de Don Perçia de Silva embaxador dada por fray Melchor de los Angeles*, British Library, Additional ms. 28461, ff. 153r-154v.

⁴ Fray Hernando de Moraga, *Relacion breve de la embaxada y presente que la Magestad del Rey don Felipe Tercero de las Españas, y emperador del Nuevo Mundo, hizo a Xaabay rey de Persia clarissimo*, Madrid, s.n., 1619, 8 ff.

⁵ Luis Gil Fernández, *El imperio luso-español y la Persia safávida*, vol. II, Madrid, 2009, pp. 482-508.

the curious and unusual nature of the embassy's account, the text provides information on the people and customs of Asian peoples and should therefore be included in the list of European works on the perception of and contacts with Asian peoples. Until now, the *Relaciones* have been studied mainly for the data it provides on the embassy of García de Silva y Figueroa to Shāh 'Abbās, and especially on the events following the loss of the islands of Hormuz and Qeshm and the hasty dispatch of the relief navy to retake them. Gil Fernández in his *El imperio luso-español y la Persia safávida* revealed the identity of the author of the *Relaciones*. It is more or less certain that Gutierre de Monroy was the author, but we have no direct proof of his authorship. Nevertheless, he was a military man with a cultivated background, not at the level of the ambassador García de Silva, but enough to be able to apply a certain critical eye to everything he observed. Throughout the text, his propensity to gather information and news of all kinds is evident. He collected information on ethnological peculiarities or religious manifestations that attracted his attention, the peculiarities of the people and communities he visited in Persia and India.

From the outset I have maintained that the *Relaciones* was a report commissioned by Monroy on the military and political situation of the Portuguese enclaves in India. However, with time and reflection on the general content of the manuscript, I have come to believe that the purpose of the *Relaciones* is not only to provide a report, but also to justify Monroy's position in the service of the Crown and thus his entitlement pension. However, this attempt to justify services rendered became much more than that, developing into a full-blown travelogue. When the author introduced assessments of the situation in which the *Estado da Índia* found itself, it was not with the intention of presenting a commissioned report. Rather, it was a statement by someone who knew and wanted to prove that he had been there by the information he presented. The report on the situation in India was to be presented to the king by García de Silva y Figueroa. As Monroy says, if Silva y Figueroa had lived, he would have given King Philip IV (r. 1621-1665) his personal report on the socio-political situation of the *Estado da Índia*. García de