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## The Papacy's Concerns over Robert Sherley's Visit to England: Cardinal Scipione Borghese's Letters to the Papal Nuncio in Madrid, 1610-1611

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In 1598, at the age of around eighteen, Robert Sherley (Shirley) accompanied his elder brother Anthony to Persia along with other Englishmen. The original reason for the Sherley brothers' journey to Persia is unclear, but they would have been seeking their fortune, enticed by the wealth of the Safavid court; it is also possible that these adventurers were induced by the Venetians to resume their overland trade in order to rival Portugal's sea route.<sup>i</sup> Ten years later, Robert Sherley left Persia for Europe as the ambassador of Shah 'Abbās I to propose an alliance against the Ottomans. After arriving in Rome in September 1609, Sherley traveled to Madrid, where he remained between January 1610 and June 1611, and then journeyed to England before his return to Isfahan in March 1615. While Sherley was staying in Madrid, Pope Paul V's cardinal nephew Scipione Borghese repeatedly asked the papal nuncio in Spain, Archbishop Decio Carafa, to intervene with the Spanish government in a failed attempt to prevent Robert Sherley's visit to England. The papacy even called on Anthony Sherley to impede his brother's return to their home country. Modern scholarship has already published and discussed some of the letters exchanged between the cardinal and the nuncio in order to analyze Robert Sherley's negotiations with the Spanish court and his relationship with another Persian ambassador, Dengiz Beg, who reached the Iberian Peninsula around the same time.<sup>ii</sup> This study presents Cardinal Borghese's other letters to Archbishop Carafa in order to provide a fuller picture of Sherley's embassy from the papacy's perspective. These documents reveal the pope's candid opinions of the war between the two Muslim states and a strong papal concern over Persia's possible union with the Protestants.

On October 13, 1609, two days before Robert Sherley's departure from Rome, Scipione Borghese dispatched a letter to Decio Carafa, notifying him of the ambassador's journey to Spain.<sup>iii</sup> Cardinal Borghese noted that Paul V had gladly met Sherley and had treated him well in order to indicate the political importance of his embassy for the papacy. The pope wanted the nuncio to assist Sherley so that 'Abbās would maintain his friendship with Catholics and, encouraged by their support, continue the war against the Ottomans. According to Scipione Borghese's letter dated March 25, 1610, Paul V considered it "a great service to the Catholic [community] that they do not lay down their arms between them" (Doc.1).

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Thus, the pope wished to weaken the power of one Muslim empire by utilizing the army of another Muslim state. Cardinal Borghese reiterated that since the Ottomans were certainly preparing a fleet of ships to invade Christian lands, this mission was very important “for the security of our coasts” and Archbishop Carafa should help Sherley gain “every satisfaction.”

Carafa’s diplomatic smoothing was needed, since Robert Sherley had been dissatisfied with the Spanish court and, by January 18, 1610, he was considering leaving for England. In spite of the shah’s offer to ship export products to Lisbon if Spain attacked the Ottomans, Sherley was unable to obtain a reply from the court and hence was planning to propose the same covenant to England.<sup>iv</sup> Sherley also requested that Spain send its armada to Cyprus and block the Red Sea in order to hinder Ottoman commerce, but the Spaniards, financially exhausted from the Dutch Revolt and deeply involved in the domestic issue of the Moriscos, were reluctant to take on remote expeditions.<sup>v</sup>

As Sherley wrote about the idea of visiting England to the pope and cardinal, the latter warned Archbishop Carafa on April 26 not to make a mistake in this matter (Doc. 2). The nuncio was advised to do everything possible in order to prevent the detour since it would lead to an alliance between Persia and England, as previously cautioned by Paolo Simone di Gesù Maria. This Carmelite father had returned to Rome from Persia in 1608 and then visited Madrid, where he reported to the Spanish ministers the visit of the English king’s agent at ‘Abbās’ court and their “secret and long audience.”<sup>vi</sup> Paolo Simone added that the agent had also obtained permission from a Mughal ruler to use two ports for English and Dutch ships. The Carmelite warned that if the Persians made peace with the Ottomans and formed a league with the English and Dutch, Catholic Europe would be at risk of losing the East Indies and, eventually, even the West Indies.

To avoid such a devastating scenario, Decio Carafa was to consider ways to prevent Sherley’s return to his homeland, as ordered by Scipione Borghese on May 22 (Doc. 3). The latter noted that if the ministers of the Spanish king did not find a satisfactory solution, they should continue to strive for one. In addition, the cardinal advised the nuncio to “take advantage of the brother of this Englishman,” if it appeared that Anthony’s intervention might dissuade him from traveling to England. Scholars have noted that Anthony Sherley, who had also served ‘Abbās as his ambassador to Rome and subsequently Philip III as his council in Naples, worked for Spanish officials to develop a plot against his brother’s travel to England.<sup>vii</sup> As can be discerned from Doc. 3, the papacy had initiated Anthony Sherley’s involvement in this stratagem.<sup>viii</sup>

Decio Carafa then delivered the good news that Robert Sherley was no longer mentioning the possibility of visiting England, which delighted Paul V (Dec. 5). The Spanish ministers had offered a “prudent” response to Sherley, which satisfied him. The prompt for their change of attitude was likely the English Jesuit Joseph Arthur Creswell’s memorandum, dated April 23, which stressed the importance of negotiating with Sherley to prevent his travel to England.<sup>ix</sup> Meanwhile, Sherley was concerned that ‘Abbās I would reprimand him if he did not go to England; to avoid punishment, he requested Paul V’s support in writing (Dec. 6). Cardinal Borghese thus forwarded a papal brief in which the pope explained

that the English king had no relationship with the Catholic Church and the Holy See.<sup>x</sup> The pope wished for Archbishop Carafa to give this brief to Sherley only when it was clear that he would depart for Persia without going to England. By October 5, Sherley had asked his Circassian wife Teresa Sampsonia to come to Lisbon from Poland, where she was waiting while he conducted his diplomatic tasks, in order that they should depart for Persia together.<sup>xi</sup>

However, Sherley became discontented as the Spanish court lingered over its decision (Doc. 8).<sup>xii</sup> On December 7, Scipione Borghese conveyed the pope's directive that the nuncio should discuss this matter with the Spanish ministers. The cardinal's letter also reveals that Sherley had already hinted at traveling to England when in Rome; Paul V had prevented this by supporting his journey to Spain. On May 7, 1611, the nuncio reported to the cardinal that he had consulted the Duke of Lerma (Francisco Gómez de Sandoval), the most powerful minister at the Spanish court, who disappointingly commented that Sherley and Dengiz Beg were "unsatisfiable," despite having received many courtesies.<sup>xiii</sup>

In June 1611, after residing in Spain for a year and a half without making much progress, Robert Sherley decided to leave for England.<sup>xiv</sup> Cardinal Borghese worried that this journey would have terrible consequences.<sup>xv</sup> Sherley secretly made a stopover at Rotterdam in early July to cement a silk trade deal with the Dutch, which failed, and he arrived in England the following month.<sup>xvi</sup> During his audience with King James I in October, Sherley offered, on behalf of his shah, two Persian ports to be used by the English.<sup>xvii</sup> Along with this diplomatic bait, Sherley proposed a military alliance to impede the Ottomans.<sup>xviii</sup> However, the Levant Company (an English chartered company) was concerned that direct trade with Persia would upset the Ottomans and jeopardize its commerce in the Mediterranean; the English also did not view the Ottoman threat to Europe as serious.<sup>xix</sup> Having been unsuccessful in establishing a Persian-English league, Sherley departed for Persia in January 1613. However, it was too early for the papacy to breathe a sigh of relief, as Persia, assisted by England, captured Hormuz in 1622, expelling the Portuguese from the trading center and changing the power dynamics of European states in the Persian Gulf and beyond.

#### **Appendix—Scipione Borghese's letters to Decio Carafa copied in the Archivio Apostolico Vaticano (AAV), Segreteria di Stato, Spagna 336**

Doc. 1: 25 March 1610 (108r-v)

All'Ambasciator Persiano si dovrebbe costì dare ogni sodisfatione, et non guardare a qualche spesa per mantenere il suo Re in guerra col Turco, giudicando Nostro Signore che sia gran servizio del Cattolico che non si depongano le armi tra loro, massime per la certezza che vi è dell'armate marittime che il Turco prepara contra i Christiani, come ho scritto a Vostra Signoria per un'altra mia sopra di che è necessario che costì si faccia la consideratione che conviene et si pensi provvedere alla securezza dei nostri liti come

le diceva in quella et Vostra Signoria lo ricordi instantemente perché è cosa di importanza grandissima et me le raccomando.

Doc. 2: 26 April 1610 (122r-v)<sup>xx</sup>

Non ci falle molto d'opinione il negoziato costì dell'Ambasciator Persiano, il quale ha nuovamente scritto a Nostro Signore et a me, dando conto della sua negotiatione et dimandando alcune gratie dele quali Sua Beatitudine l'ha gratificato volentieri, di che si risponderà a lui medesimo così l'ordinario, ma perché accenna volersi trasferire al Re d'Inghiltera li se risponderà in genere che circa i viaggi, Sua Santità si rimette a quello però che le si disse qui ma Vostra Signoria deverà fare ogni opera che non sia lasciato andare a quella parte essendosi causa di temere che non unisca quel Re col Persiano come già avvertì fra Paolo Simone Discalzo.

Doc. 3: 22 May 1610 (133r)

Non può partorire altro che mali effetti l'andata dell'Ambasciator Persiano in Inghilterra come s'è detto per altre mie a Vostra Signoria et che però si procurasse di impedirla. I Ministri del Re, quando non sappino trovare altro rimedio oportuno, debbono cercare, et forse sarebbe il miglior partito, che si possa pigliare di dar tempo al tempo et valersi anco del fratello di questo Inglese se paresse che fosse a proposito per dissuaderlo dal viaggio. Vostra Signoria ricordi a loro il pensare a i modi et vi pensi ancor lei, acciò che se possibile è, l'andata non segua et me le raccomando.

Doc. 4: 31 May 1610 (129r-v)

Non rimanendo lo Scherlei, Ambasciator Persiano, sodisfatto della risposta datale costì per parte di Sua Maestà, è da temere che non voglia mandare ad esecuzione il concetto di trasferirsi in Inghilterra et procurare di unire gli Inglesi con i Persiani, onde si disse a Vostra Signoria con le passate che ponesse studio di impedire l'andata, perché sarebbe cagione di molti mali et l'istesso le si replica hora, et deverà anco ricordare costì che si invigili questo punto.

Doc. 5: 24 June 1610 (147r-v)

Hanno fatta prudente resolutione i Ministri Regii in operare che l'Ambasciator Persiano rimanga più sodisfatto che non era, perché troppo generali risposte datole da principi, et scrivendo Vostra Signoria per le sue de' 18 di maggio et 3 di giugno che il sudetto ambasciatore non trattava più di fare il viaggio d'Inghilterra Nostro Signore ne ha sentito molto contento perché era cosa chiarissima che l'andata non poteva partorire che danno per la parte nostra, onde se egli mai tornasse nel pensiero dell'andare si debbe impedire per ogni via.

Doc. 6: 20 July 1610 (158v-159r)<sup>xxi</sup>

L'Ambasciatore Persiano, havendo per quel che si avvisa risoluto di non passare altrimenti in Inghilterra et temendo non esserne ripreso dal suo Re, haverebbe voluto che Nostro Signore nello discolpasse per lettere sue sopra di che Sua Beatitudine si è contentata di scrivere l'alligato Breve a quel Re testimoniando che il Re di Inghilterra non ha comunione con la Chiesa Cattolica né con la Santa Sede. Però quando il negotio sia intieramente assodato con l'Ambasciatore sudetto che senza far quel viaggio se ne tornerà in Persia di che bisogna chiarirsi bene, potrà Vostra Signoria consegnarli il Breve che così è mente di Sua Beatitudine.

Doc. 7: 20 August 1610 (169r-v)

Procurandosi costì da i Ministri di Sua Maestà che si dia sodisfattione all'Ambasciator Persiano onde rimanga con quiete et deponga il pensiero di trasferirsi al Re di Inghilterra se fa quello che conviene Vostra Signoria ancora cooperi che egli se ne torni per la diritta in Persia che sarà quello che da Nostro Signore si desidera.

Doc. 8: 7 December 1610 (201v)

Dal biglietto scritto a Vostra Signoria dall'Ambasciator Persiano et del quale ella ha voluto mandar qua copia, si comprende assai aperto la sua mala sodisfattione per le lunghezze che gli si danno costì. Però Nostro Signore vuole che Vostra Signoria ne parli con li Ministri del Re et lo avisi per quanto può. Quando egli fu a Roma disse a Sua Santità che egli haveva animo di passare in Spagna et la Santità Sua approvò il pensiero, massime per divertirlo dal viaggio di Inghilterra al quale inclinava, ma non lo persuase già di proposito a venire in Spagna. Vostra Signoria ricordi che la sua andata in Inghilterra sarebbe cosa pernicioso et che si trovi però modo di levarlo da questa deliberatione.

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<sup>i</sup> Richard Raiswell, "Sherley, Anthony, Count Sherley in the Nobility of the Holy Roman Empire (1565-1636?)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 50:399; David Blow, *Shah Abbas: The Ruthless King Who Became an Iranian Legend* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009), 53-54; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Three Ways to be Alien: Travails and Encounters in the Early Modern World* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2011), 95.

<sup>ii</sup> Niels Steensgaard, *The Asian Trade Revolution of the Seventeenth Century: The East India Companies and the Decline of the Caravan Trade* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1973), 277n83, 279n90, 281n99, n102, 283n112; Carlos Alonso, "El P. Antonio de Gouvea OSA y la embajada persa de Denzíg Beg (1609-1612)," *Analecta Augustiniana* 38 (1975): 68-77; Carlos Alonso, *Antonio de Gouvea, O.S.A.: Diplomático y visitador apostólico en Persia* (Valladolid, Estudio Agustiniano, 2000), esp. 113, 119-20, 123-4. See also Angelo Michele Piemontese, "I due ambasciatori di Persia ricevuti da Papa Paolo V al Quirinale," *Miscellanea Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae* 12 (2005): 401. In addition, Luis Gil Fernández gives a detailed account of Robert Shirley's prolonged stay at the Spanish court in *El imperio luso-español y la Persia safávida* (Madrid: Fundación Universitaria Española, 2009), 2:121-69.

<sup>iii</sup> Published in Piemontese, "I due ambasciatori," 401. The same letter can be found in AAV, Segreteria di Stato, Spagna 336, 23v-24v.

<sup>iv</sup> Horatio F. Brown, ed., *Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts Relating to English Affairs, Existing in the Archives and Collections of Venice and in the Other Libraries of Northern Italy* (London: Stationery Office, 1905), 12:109, doc. 163.

<sup>v</sup> AAV, Segreteria di Stato, Spagna 60A, 57r; Steensgaard, *The Asian Trade Revolution*, 276-7. Some officers of the Spanish state also did not trust 'Abbās (Spagna 60A, 40r).

- <sup>vi</sup> AAV, Fondo Borghese, serie I, n. 808, 48v-49r, 58r-v; serie III, n. 7B, 169r, 170v. On these documents, see Carlos Alonso, "Un agente de Paolo V en la corte española (1608-1609)," *Augustinianum* 7, 3 (1967): 462n56. Paolo Simone's reports to the Spanish court are published in Carlos Alonso, "Escritos presentados en la corte de Madrid por el P. Pablo Simón de Jesús María, OCD (1608-1609)," *Archivum Bibliographicum Carmeli Teresiani* 38 (2001): 465-514.
- <sup>vii</sup> Evelyn Philp Shirley, *The Sherley Brothers: An Historical Memoir of the Lives of Sir Thomas Sherley, Sir Anthony Sherley, and Sir Robert Sherley, Knights* (Chiswick: Whittingham, 1848), 75-76; Edward Denison Ross, *Sir Anthony Sherley and His Persian Adventure* (1933; repr., London: Routledge, 2005), 52; Boies Penrose, *The Sherleian Odyssey: Being of the Travels and Adventures of Three Famous Brothers During the Reigns of Elizabeth, James I, and Charles I* (London: Simpkin Marshall, 1938), 152-3; Subrahmanyam, *Three Ways*, 115; Gil Fernández, *El imperio luso-español*, 156-7.
- <sup>viii</sup> See also Alonso, "El P. Antonio de Gouvea," 70, doc. 7.
- <sup>ix</sup> On this memorandum, see Steensgaard, *The Asian Trade Revolution*, 280-1; Gil Fernández, *El imperio luso-español*, 139.
- <sup>x</sup> An English translation of this brief is published in *A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia and the Papal Mission of the XVIIth and XVIIIth Centuries* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1939), 1:154-5. The author of this book erroneously assumes that Sherley returned to Rome (Steensgaard, *The Asian Trade Revolution*, 279n90). In the end, the nuncio did not give the brief to Sherley (Alonso, "El P. Antonio de Gouvea," 75, doc. 14).
- <sup>xi</sup> AAV, Segreteria di Stato, Spagna 60A, 177r. See also Alonso, "El P. Antonio de Gouvea," 68-69, doc. 3.
- <sup>xii</sup> See a copy of Sherley's letter which shows his frustration at having lost much time and money while in Spain (AAV, Segreteria di Stato, Spagna 60A, 258r-9v).
- <sup>xiii</sup> Alonso, "El P. Antonio de Gouvea," 74, doc. 14; Alonso, *Antonio de Gouvea*, 120.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Brown, *Calendar*, 12:166, doc. 257.
- <sup>xv</sup> Alonso, "El P. Antonio de Gouvea," 77, doc. 18.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Steensgaard, *The Asian Trade Revolution*, 298; Blow, *Shah Abbas*, 94.
- <sup>xvii</sup> *A Chronicle*, 1:155.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Brown, *Calendar*, 12:226, doc. 355.
- <sup>xix</sup> Shirley, *The Sherley Brothers*, 78; Steensgaard, *The Asian Trade Revolution*, 298; Maija Jansson and Nikolai Rogozhin, eds., *England and the North: The Russian Embassy of 1613-1614* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1994), 192n128, n132; Gerald MacLean and Nabil Matar, *Britain and the Islamic World, 1558-1713* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 68.
- <sup>xx</sup> Noted in Mayu Fujikawa, "Pope Paul V's Global Design: The Fresco Cycle in the Quirinal Palace," *Renaissance Studies* 30 (2014): 213.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Part of this text is discussed in Steensgaard, *The Asian Trade Revolution*, 279n90.