

The Indian journeys of a Spanish ambassador: Don García de Silva y Figueroa and his *Comentarios* (1614-1624)

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The main purpose of my paper is to present and to explore briefly a travel account written in the early decades of the 17th century by Don García de Silva y Figueroa, Spanish ambassador sent to Persia by King Felipe III of Spain (and also Portugal, where he is styled Felipe II). The topics that I will try to address will be (and not necessarily in this order): Who was this man? Why did he travel all the way to India and then to Persia when he was more than 60 years old? What kind of travel account did he write? Why this text is scarcely known among historians of European interactions with Asia, despite its enormous relevance? What sort of information may we gather from this source?

The biography of Don García de Silva y Figueroa

Although two Spanish researchers, in recent years, have been carefully looking into the biography of Don García de Silva (and I allude here to Carlos Alonso and Luis Gil)¹, not much is known about this Spanish fidalgo. He was born in 1550, in Zafra, within a lesser noble family. He studied at the University of Salamanca and served as administrative magistrate in several Spanish regions, namely in Jaén

¹ Alonso, Carlos, *D. García de Silva y Figueroa, Embajador en Persia*, Badajoz. Diputación Provincial, 1993; Gil, Luis, *El Império Luso-Español y la Persia Safávida*, 2 vols., Madrid, Fundación Universitaria Española, 2006-2009.

and Badajoz. He probably also visited Italy, in some period of his life. The Italian traveller Pietro della Valle, who came across our man in Kazvin, describes him as «rather old, not only with a white beard, but also toothless [...]. But he is very well dressed, Spanish fashion».²

Some of Figueroa's cousins are relatively well known, since they held important offices in the Spanish overseas civil service: Don Juan de Silva was governor of the Philippines and Don Jerónimo da Silva was captain of Ternate, in the Maluku islands. Pietro della Valle, when asked at the Persian court if Don García was Portuguese or Spanish, gave a perfect answer, saying that he had relatives in both kingdoms, but «by inclination and profession he was a Spaniard»³. Otherwise, not much is known about him, until the moment when King Felipe III, in 1612, appointed him as ambassador to Persia. We have to bear in mind, here, that since the early 1580's the kingdom of Portugal, for better or for worse, was under the rule of Spain, in what the Portuguese historians call the Iberian Union.

Reasons for the Indian journey

The complicated plot that took this Spanish nobleman to embark in Lisbon in April 1614, when he was 64 years old, in one of the Portuguese ships bound for India, began many years before, in Persia, when a young man named 'Abbas seized the reins of power, in 1588, after the murder of his older brother. The rise to power of Shah 'Abbas I signalled a turning point in Safavid geopolitics, since the young ruler immediately showed the necessary leadership qualities to deal with the complex demands of Persia's situation.⁴

² Pietro della Valle, *Viaggi di Pietro della Valle il Pellegrino* (2 vols.), Brighton, G. Gancia, 1843, vol. 1, p. 719: « È vecchio assai, non solo con barba bianca, ma anchi senza denti: è robusto con tutto chio [...]. Venne molto ben vestito [...], alla Spagnuola.»

³ Pietro della Valle, *Viaggi*, vol. 1, pp. 250-251: « ma che d'inclinazione e professione era Spagnuolo.»

⁴ See Blow, David, *Shah Abbas: The Ruthless King Who Became an Iranian Legend*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2009.

There was not a solid central state, since the power of the shah depended on the military cooperation he was able to obtain from the several Qizilbash factions. These tribal groups of Turkman origin (whom the Portuguese sources style as *gazeisbaixos*) had until then maintained the Safavid polity. But the conflicts and conspiracies were too frequent among them. On the other hand, while the western provinces of Persia were under Ottoman rule, large areas of Khorassan, on the east, were controlled by the Uzbeks. After ascending to the throne, Shah 'Abbas began to establish his own army, independent from the Qizilbash, slowly controlling internal oppositions; at the same time, state administration was centralized and reorganized. Once his political position was solid, the Persian ruler, through a skilful combination of military campaigns and diplomatic initiatives, faced his external opponents, winning successive battles against the Ottomans and the Uzbeks, thus consolidating and even enlarging the frontiers of his empire. Portuguese contemporary writers frequently mention Shah 'Abbas. António Bocarro presents him as a «great man of war, in spirit and in ruses, able to achieve his goals by any means available», in short, a sort of Iranian Machiavelli.⁵

Eventually, Safavid power started spreading to the margins of the Persian Gulf, that until then had lived with relative autonomy. With the conquest of Bahrain in 1602, 'Abbas had decided to oppose the traditional Portuguese maritime hegemony over those regions. And in the following decades the Persian Shah set in motion a progressive assault on Portuguese positions, some of which dated from the early years of the 16th century, and had its epicentre at the island and fortress of Hormuz. This process, eventually, would bring about the conquest of this island by an Anglo-Persian coalition in 1622.⁶

⁵ António Bocarro, *Década 13 da História da Índia*, ed. R.J. de Lima Felner (2 vols.), Lisbon, Academia Real das Ciências, 1876, vol. I, p. 34: « grande homem de guerra, assi no espírito como de invenções e traças para poder conseguir o que pretendia, fosse por quaesquer meios que pudesse.»

⁶ See Couto, Dejanirah ; Loureiro, Rui Manuel, *Ormuz: 1507 e 1622, Conquista e Perda*, Lisbon, Tribuna da História, 2007, and Floor, Willem, *The Persian Gulf: A Political and Economic History of Five Port Cities, 1500-1730*, Washington DC, Mage Publishers, 2006.

The fortress of Hormuz was one of the most profitable within the Portuguese overseas empire, profits coming from taxes collected at its custom's house, from the extremely intense commercial traffic that crossed the Strait of Hormuz, coming or going to Basrah, Bandar Gombroon, Masqat, Tatta, Diu, and many other ports in the African and Indian coasts. The "pearl in the ring", the metaphorical designation for the barren island of Hormuz, was a most strategic place within the dense network of territories, fortresses and factories that formed the so-called *Estado da Índia*, or Portuguese State of India. That's why the Spanish crown, for two decades, since the 1600's, tried to maintain a diplomatic dialogue with Shah 'Abbas, through the regular exchange of emissaries and ambassadors. Although in the horizon there was always talk of an anti-Ottoman alliance between the Habsburgs and the Safavids, the Iberians wanted at all cost to maintain a Portuguese solid presence in the Persian Gulf area.

Several diplomatic missions were entrusted to Portuguese friars, and namely to the Augustinian António de Gouveia⁷, but with no practical results, for the Safavid tentacles were slowly closing on Hormuz. Shah 'Abbas, who enjoyed to discuss political matters in his campaign tent, or in one of his palaces, eating and drinking, on a given moment, requested from the Iberian authorities the dispatch of a non-religious ambassador of high social status, because, in the words of a Portuguese chronicler, «he was fed up of having to deal with friars».⁸ After many debates between Madrid and Lisbon, Don García de Silva y Figueroa was finally chosen in 1612 for the Persian mission.

As it turned out, he was not the perfect choice. Apparently, he was a rather supercilious man, not easy to make friends with. But above all, while in Lisbon, Goa or Hormuz, he was a Spaniard and a representative of the Spanish crown in a Portuguese environment, faced everywhere,

⁷ See Alonso, Carlos, *Antonio de Gouvea, O.S.A, Diplomático y Visitador Apostólico en Persia*, Valladolid, Estudio Agustiniiano, 2000.

⁸ António Bocarro, *Década 13 da História da Índia*, p. 370: «por meio de frades, com que, dizia o Xá, estava já cansado de tractar.»

and especially among Portuguese overseas authorities, with suspicion and mistrust. He notes in his writings that the Portuguese «not only dislike the union with the Spanish monarchy, but in no case whatsoever want to be called or seen as Spaniards»⁹. During his mission to Persia, that extended for a decade, from 1614 to 1624, he travelled a road full of difficulties and hardships. As a sign of the total failure of his mission, Don García was in Portuguese India when the fall of Hormuz took place, with the expulsion of the Portuguese from that island at the mouth of the Persian Gulf.¹⁰

Reasons to write a travel account

Don García de Silva was a most cultivated man, who had studied at Salamanca, but who had certainly continued to read throughout his life. A Portuguese 17th century chronicler, António Bocarro, who probably met him in Goa, claims that the ambassador was a man «of sound judgement and subtle understanding, who had travelled and read a lot, and who was conversant in both the Latin and the Italian languages».¹¹ Besides being fluent in Latin and Italian, he also knew well the western classical literature. Rather as a modern traveller, he carefully prepared for his journey to Persia, reading widely and collecting a selection of books (and perhaps collections of manuscript extracts) to carry along. In his writings, he claimed that «the lesson of Antiquity is the true light and knowledge of what there is to know in the world».¹² And, above all, he was a compulsive diarist that during his extensive oriental travels, besides penning many dozens of letters, wrote a voluminous

⁹ Don García de Silva y Figueroa, *Comentarios de D. Garcia de Silva y Figueroa de la embajada que de parte del rey de España don Filipe III hizo al rey Xa Abas de Persia*, ed. Manuel Serrano y Sanz (2 vols.), Madrid, Sociedad de Bibliófilos, 1903-1905, vol. 2, pp. 360-361: «no sólo aborrecen la unión con la monarchia de España, pero por ningún caso quieren nombrarse ni ser tenidos por españoles.»

¹⁰ See Gil, Luis, *El Imperio Luso-Español*, vol. 2, pp. 241-358.

¹¹ António Bocarro, *Década 13 da História da Índia*, p. 370: «bom juízo e subtil entendimento, visto e lido e muito versado na língua latina e italiana.»

¹² Don García de Silva y Figueroa, *Comentarios*, vol. 2, p. 155: «la lección de la antigüedad, que es la que da verdadera lumbre y conocimiento de todo lo que se deve saber del mundo.»

travel account. The *Comentarios* (cf. **plate 1**), the title under which his manuscript of about 1000 pages became known, describe in minute detail his long journey from Lisbon to Persia, as well as the sea journey back to Europe, during which he died of the “Luanda sickness”, one of the designations of scurvy.¹³

Has it might be imagined, a cultivated traveller, prone to classical letters, gifted with insatiable curiosity and with acute powers of observation, had to produce a travel account well worth of our attention. Through the pages of the *Comentarios*, Don García de Silva alternately acts as geographer, naturalist, ethnographer, historian and antiquarian, jotting down his day-to-day observations in a systematic fashion. Certainly it was a form of occupying his long hours of leisure, but perhaps he was also preparing a final report of his embassy, for publication upon his return to Europe.

Editorial history of the *Comentarios*

The *Comentarios* have a rather unusual editorial history. The autograph manuscript, concluded in 1624, is kept today at the Biblioteca Nacional, in Madrid. In 1668 a partial French translation was published in Paris, *L'ambassade de D. Garcias de Silva y Figueroa en Perse*, by Abraham de Wicquefort (cf. **plate 2**), who is well-known for his works on diplomatic theory, and who certainly had a special interest on Persia, since he also translated the travel accounts of Adam Olearius (1656) and Thomas Herbert (1663). I will allude later on to an 18th century edition of a small part of Don García's account. But the first and only complete edition of the *Comentarios* appeared in Madrid, in two volumes, in 1903-1905, under the responsibility of Manuel Serrano y Sanz, with the title *Comentarios de D. Garcia de Silva y Figueroa de la embajada que de parte del rey de España don Filipe III hizo al rey Xa Abas de Persia*, with a short introduction, but no annotations.

¹³ Cf. Don García de Silva y Figueroa, *Comentarios*, *passim*.

This was a book-club edition, in 150 copies, published by the Sociedad de Bibliófilos Españoles, which is today quite rare.

Since then, and until recently, Don García's travel account fell into oblivion, completely ignored by Portuguese modern historiography, despite being a first rate source for the history of the *Estado da Índia* during the Iberian Union. But things are about to change.

Structure of Don García's *Comentarios*

The title of the *Comentarios* is certainly inspired by the homonymous work of Julius Caesar. In fact, such a title was quite popular, and two other examples come to mind, regarding Portuguese accounts related with the Persian Gulf: the *Comentários de Afonso de Albuquerque* (Lisbon, 1557, with a second edition in Lisbon, 1576) and the *Comentários de Rui Freire de Andrade*, compiled by Pedro Craesbeck (Lisbon, 1647). Don García writes in the third person, but the manuscript is autograph, as a comparison with his many letters clearly shows. The *Comentarios* include a long travel account, that begins in Lisbon in April 1614 and finishes somewhere in the Atlantic ten years later, after an extensive itinerary, real and textual, that accompanies its author first to Goa, then to Masqat and Hormuz, from there to the Persian mainland, back to India, and again on a sea voyage to Europe.

A summary of some of the contents of the *Comentarios* will show their extraordinary relevance as a source for the study of early modern interactions between Europe and Asia. Instead of following the successive books in chronological order, and do it in a thorough fashion, I will draw attention to some topics dealt with in the *Comentarios* and to a selected set of problems worthy of exploration. It is possible to organize the ambassador's account in four different areas:

- 1.** First, there is the sea voyage in the *carreira da Índia* (books I, VII and VIII, nearly 200 pages). This is one of the best descriptions we have of the long maritime route between Lisbon and Goa, since Don García, with a clear knowledge of mathematics and astronomy,

registers everything that happens on board the Portuguese ships: the position of the ship, the measurements of latitude, the direction of the winds, the state of the weather, the reckoning of distances, and also the daily events, the diseases, the human losses, and so on. With an astrolabe in hand, the ambassador takes his own measurements, frequently disagreeing with the pilot of his ship, the celebrated Gaspar Ferreira Reimão. One may judge the total neglect of the *Comentarios* by the fact that dozens of studies have been dedicated in Portugal to this pilot, who had been travelling to India since the late 1580's, and not one of them uses the crucial information included in this important source¹⁴. It will be worth mentioning that many of Don García's comments on navigation present obvious similarities with the contents of *Roteiro da navegação da carreira da Índia*, published by Gaspar Reimão in Lisbon in 1612.

2. A second geographical area described by the ambassador is the Persian Gulf entrance, with the Portuguese controlled ports of Masqat and Hormuz, which he visited on his way to Persia, and again on the return journey to India (book III, about 50 pages). He pays attention to the fortifications, to the religious buildings, to the different human groups who lived in both cities, and to their social and cultural practices. Even being the shortest section of his account, Don García includes a wealth of relevant information, namely about the topography of both cities, and the daily life of its inhabitants.

3. The main body of the *Comentarios* include, as it would be expected, the Persian ventures of Don García de Silva (books IV, V, VI and part of VII, about 600 pages). For two and a half years, the ambassador travelled through the Safavid realm, in order to meet Shah 'Abbas and to deliver his embassy, accompanied by one hundred men, who travelled in a caravan of 400 hundred camels. The daily events of his journeys are registered; the caravanserais where they lodge are noted;

¹⁴ See Jana, Ernesto, "Reimão, Gaspar Ferreira" in *Dicionário de História dos Descobrimientos Portugueses*, ed. Luís de Albuquerque; Francisco Contento Domingues, 2 vols., Lisbon, Caminho, 1994, pp. 938-940.

the landscapes are carefully sketched; the main Persian cities (such as Lar, Shiraz, Isfahan, Kazvin) are described in detail, with their palaces, mosques, bazaars, public squares, gardens and bridges, celebrated tombs; the social, cultural and military practices of the Persians are explained; many characteristics of Shia Islam are duly stressed; the main political and military actions of the Shah are annotated; the contours of the silk trade affair are highlighted; and all the interactions with civil, military and religious authorities are recorded, as well as those with other European travellers or residents. By the way, one European who seems to have captured Silva y Figueroa's attention, obviously, is Robert Shirley, the English adventurer, who was then extremely active between Persia, the *Estado da Índia* and the Iberian Peninsula¹⁵. One characteristic of Don García's description is worthy of attention: he travels with his library in hand, be it the Old Testament, Greek and Latin authorities, or modern chronicles or travelogues, which he uses frequently to find references to the geography and history of ancient or modern Persia. This part of the *Comentarios*, in fact, sometimes reads like an historical geography of Western Asia.

Concerning the Persian section of the *Comentarios*, among many other topics, three are especially noteworthy, for their novelty in the context of contemporary European travel literature. On the one hand, the ambassador's visit to, and comments on, "Chilminara", or Čehel Menara, the ruins of Persepolis, which, as a true antiquarian, he describes in detail, even including in his manuscript several drawings made by his painter (**plate 3**, **plate 4** and **plate 5**). It is possible that his attention was drawn to Persepolis by António de Gouveia, a Portuguese Augustinian who travelled extensively in Persia, also as an ambassador, and published in 1611, in Lisbon, an account of his journeys.¹⁶ But Don

¹⁵ See Davies, D.W., *Elizabethans Errant: The Strange Fortunes of Sir Thomas Shirley and His Three Sons*, Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1967.

¹⁶ António de Gouveia, *Relaçam em que se tratam as guerras e grandes victorias que alcançou o grãde Rey da Persia Xá Abbas do grão Turco Mahometto, & seu filho Amethe*, Lisboa, Pedro Craesbeck, 1611, fls. 30v-32. See Carreira, José Nunes, *Do Preste João às Ruínas da Babilónia*, Lisbon, Editorial Comunicação, 1990, pp. 85-98.

García was the first European to prepare such a minute description of these famous ruins and to mention «the completely unknown letters» that could be found there, which he also reproduces. His description of Persepolis is quite illustrative of his method of combining experimental observation with bookish information, since he tries to interpret the ancient ruins using classic texts of Homer, Diodorus Siculus, Harrian, Plutarcus, Quintus Curtius, and also the works of Sebastiano Serlio, a contemporary theorist of architecture.

On the other hand, the ambassador's references to Central Asian history and geography, and especially to the famous Tamerlane (or Timur Gurgan), are extremely interesting. Don García used as a source the account of Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo's 15th century embassy to Samarkand, which was first published in Seville in 1588 by Gonzalo Argote de Molina¹⁷, and which he probably carried with him. But he also had access to three different Persian chronicles, which are quoted extensively in the *Comentarios*, and which he probably got in Portuguese or Spanish translation, either from Augustinian or Carmelite missionaries he met in Isfahan, or from the *Relaciones* of the Portuguese traveller Pedro Teixeira, published in Antwerp in 1610, and which were also part of his traveller's library¹⁸. The Persian chronicles were the works of Khvandamir, Mirkvand, and one "Calif Emir Alixir", whom, according to Silva y Figueroa, described the history of Tamerlane «with so much elegance and propriety, that he owes no debt to the ancient Latin or Greeks»¹⁹. The importance of this part of the *Comentarios* was duly acknowledged by the eighteenth century editors of the *Historia del Gran Tamorlan*, reissued in Madrid in 1782.

The third topic in the Persian section I want to point is Don García's polemic with the Jesuits about the existence of Cathay, and specifically

¹⁷ See a recent edition in López Guzmán, Rafael (ed.), *Viaje a Samarkanda: Relació de la Embajada de Ruy González de Clavijo ante Tamerlán (1403-1406)*, Granada, Fundación El Legado Andalusi, 2009, pp. 115-321.

¹⁸ See Loureiro, Rui Manuel, "Drogas asiáticas e práticas médicas nas *Relaciones* de Pedro Teixeira (Antuérpia, 1610)", *Revista de Cultura / Review of Culture* (Macau) 32 (2009), pp. 24-40.

¹⁹ Don García de Silva y Figueroa, *Comentarios*, vol. 2, p. 171: « con tanta elegância y propiedad que no tiene que enbidiar á ninguno de los antiguos latinos, ni gregos.»

with Jerónimo Xavier and Manuel Pinheiro, who had lived in Agra. This fabled land, popularised in medieval European travel accounts, had been identified by the Jesuits with China, on the basis of Bento de Góis's travels in Central Asia in the early years of the 17th century²⁰. But the ambassador, based on his readings of the accounts of Marco Polo and Hayton of Armenia published in volume II of Ramusio's *Navigazioni et Viaggi* (Venice, 1559)²¹, which he probably carried with him, and on information collected during his travels through Persia, claimed that there was in Central Asia a land called Cathay, which was totally distinct from China.

4. Finally, within the *Comentarios*, there is a fourth set of annotations, concerning Don García's long residence in Goa, where he lived for several years, first between 1614 and 1617, on the way to Persia, and then on his return, from 1620 to 1624 (books II and VII, again nearly 200 pages). Portuguese writers, as a rule, did not elaborate on the topographical details of the capital of the *Estado da Índia*, which was assumed to be well known. Non-Portuguese authors, on the contrary, were attentive to Goan topography. Such was the case of Dutch traveller Jan Huygen van Linschoten, who included descriptions, drawings and maps of Goa in his *Itinerario*, published in Amsterdam in 1596²². But the ambassador's description of the territory and of the city of Goa is undoubtedly the most minute and accurate which had been produced until then. After a tour of the island, including rivers, canals, urban settlements, fortifications, harbours, exotic natural productions and animals, the ambassador then turns to the city proper, which he describes as if with map in hand, following different streets and calling attention to the main urban features. Curiously enough, the only

²⁰ See Didier, Hugues, *Fantômes d'Islam et de la Chine: Le voyage de Bento de Góis s.j. (1603-1697)*, Paris, Chandeigne & Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2003.

²¹ Cf. Parks, George B., "The Contents and Sources of Ramusio's *Navigazioni*" in R.A. Skelton; George B. Parks (eds.), Giovanni Battista Ramusio, *Navigazioni et Viaggi: Venice 1563-1606* (3 vols.), Amsterdam, Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1967-1979, vol. 3, pp. 1-39.

²² Cf. Jan Huygen van Linschoten, *Itinerário, Viagem ou Navegação às Índias Orientais ou Portuguesas*, (eds. Arie Pos; Rui Manuel Loureiro), Lisbon, CNCDP, 1997, *passim*.

cartographic drawing included in the *Comentarios* depicts the territory of Goa, and was certainly obtained from the celebrated Portuguese cartographer and cosmographer Manuel Godinho de Erédia, who was then a Goan resident.²³

The description of the city of Goa also includes material about its inhabitants, which are divided in several groups, according to their relation with the Portuguese. The Indian Brahmins, which the ambassador styles as «the superior class of their priests and scholars»²⁴, deserves special attention, namely regarding their social and cultural practices, and also their philosophical and cosmological beliefs. Apparently, Don García was helped by two informants: one «Banyan doctor who treated his servants, named Rama» and a Franciscan friar called João de São Matias, who had been living in India for more than twenty years. The information collected included references to the «scholastic language» used by Brahmin scholars to write their treatises, clearly an allusion to Sanskrit. According to the ambassador, this language had «an alphabet of very perfect figures», which had «double vowels and three and four different types of consonants, distinguished from one another by certain dots». These letters, in his words, are «so perfect and ancient, that they may be reckoned the first in the world».²⁵

An important detail: when Don García first arrived in Goa, the *Estado da Índia* was under attack on several fronts. The relations with the Mughals were extremely tense, on account of the capture by the

²³ See Mariás, Fernando, “Don García de Silva y Figueroa y la percepción del Oriente: la ‘Descripción de Goa’”, *Anuario del Departamento de Historia e Teoría de Arte – Universidad Autónoma de Madrid* (Madrid), vol. 14, 2002, pp. 137-149; and also Loureiro, Rui Manuel, “Manuel Godinho de Erédia revisited” in Fátima da Silva Gracias; Celsa Pinto; Charles Borges (eds.), *Indo-Portuguese History: Global Trends*, Goa, n.e., 2005, pp. 411-439.

²⁴ Don García de Silva y Figueroa, *Comentarios*, vol. 1, p. 189: « La superior clase de los bramenes es la de sus sacerdotes y sabios.»

²⁵ Don García de Silva y Figueroa, *Comentarios*, vol. 1, pp. 192-193: « el alfabeto, que es de figuras muy perfectas »; « los caracteres y notas, como se a dicho, sean tan perfectas y antiguas que se pueden estimar por las primeras del mundo.»

Portuguese of a ship carrying Muslim pilgrims; the Indian ruler of Ahmadnagar, was waging war on the Portuguese controlled fortress of Chaul; Dutch and English ships were expected at Surat, another sign of the growing European competition against the Portuguese in Asia, which had started to develop since the final years of the 16th century, in the wake of the Iberian Union²⁶. And yet, nothing of these matters transpires in the description of Goa, as if the Spanish ambassador wanted to draw a positive picture of the capital of the *Estado da Índia*, irrespective of current political and military affairs. Current matters, he referred to in his correspondence with the Spanish crown.²⁷

Conclusion

My last point is that the *Comentarios*, with a handful of exceptions, have been rather neglected by modern researchers. And yet, the travelogue of Don García de Silva y Figueroa is well worth of our attention, on several different and complementary accounts. The *Comentarios* are obviously a first rate historical source in the context of early modern interactions between Europe and Asia. A wealth of geographical, historical and ethnographical information can be gathered from its pages. But the ambassador's account is also important in what it reveals about its author's personality, attitudes, cultural formation, and methods of work. Don García appears as an extremely tolerant man, when it comes to cultural and religious differences, registering information about Jews, Muslims, Hindus and heterodox Christians with perfect objectivity, apparently without prejudice. One just has to take a look at his impartial descriptions of Persian mosques, Muslim holy men, or Islamic festivities such as the Ashura celebration, which in other contemporary European pens would raise a series of negative judgements. Also, the ambassador is, at all times, a true scholar, always

²⁶ See Valladares, Rafael, *Castilla y Portugal en Asia (1580-1680): Declive imperial y adaptación*, Leuven, Leuven University Press, 2001.

²⁷ Cf. García de Silva y Figueroa, *Epistolario Diplomático* (ed. Luis Gil), Cáceres, Institucion Cultural "El Brocense", 1989, *passim*.

with his books close to him, permanently comparing his experiences with the writings of ancient or contemporary authorities, European or Asian. The extent and the pertinence of his readings, the contents of his travelling library, in sum, are truly amazing for a man of his day and age. These, along with the use he makes of Persian manuscripts, certainly deserve further inquiry.²⁸

²⁸ See the collection of studies gathered in Loureiro, Rui Manuel; Resende, Vasco (eds.), *Estudos sobre D. García de Silva y Figueroa e os seus «Comentarios» da embaixada à Pérsia (1614-1624)*, Lisbon, Centro de História de Além-Mar, 2011.

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7. Abril. 1613.

vez dada alguna en ella, es de la antigua Persepolis, quiso é ir
 baxador saber lo que precisa mente dista de sí, Noche y
 Tomando con mucho cuidado el Sol, halló estaua en 23. Grados
 y 58. Minutos, hacia el Polo Arctico, 14. Minutos mas apartada de
 la Aequinoctial q̄ la Ciudad de sí.

Sobrevios y antiquísimos edificios de Chelminura.

Después de aver comido y reposado el Embaxador, quiso ver este
 famoso y grande edificio, tan digno de ser mirado y notado, antes
 su antigüedad como por su estupenda y sobervia grandella: mayor
 te siendo tan varius las opiniones de los q̄ le auian antes visto, sin
 aver auido quien con propiedad o alguna bendición Viese hecho
 des, la relación merecía. Y así salí con los criados q̄ auian
 aquel día Venido con él, fuera del lugar un quarto de legua, hasta lle-
 gar al pie del Monte, en cuya primera y mas baxa falda, estava esta cam-
 machina fundada. Cuya gran techura del pie del dicho Monte, una muy
 gruesa muralla de piedras, de manera que quadras de muralla hazian
 della y demas de las piedras de alto, las cortinas della, no auian forma
 de torresones, cocian a trechos por línea recta, haciendo sus resal-
 tos y arcos de manera q̄ las mismas cortinas se defendian unas a
 otras, siendo la obra de con admirable medida y hermosa proporción:
 ayudando mucho a la perfección del edificio q̄ esta falda del Monte
 en q̄ estava fundado, salía muy a fuerza de adomas, de la manera que
 un gran baluarte sale a fuera de su muralla. En esta que se ve
 antiq̄simamente q̄ el nombre es el mismo Río de la Plata, se ven en ambas sus riberas, de todo el Río Señales
 no mas plena mente el Embaxador después ocauro buelto a Ormuz, embiando por señalamiento algunas veces
 algunos alabando de la hermosura y firmeza de plus muchas palmas y laureles ocultos a ser visto por q̄ habia
 en ella particularmente se ve de chas varas y limones q̄ se ven en el mundo, q̄ se dice q̄ se ven en el mundo
 no son mejores q̄ los de Valencia en España. Y así q̄ de lo que se ve en el mundo q̄ se ve en el mundo q̄ se ve en el mundo
 solo pasaron a México y a Persepolis propiamente, así q̄ de lo que se ve en el mundo q̄ se ve en el mundo q̄ se ve en el mundo

Plate 1

L'AMBASSADE
DE
D. GARCIAS DE SILVA
FIGVEROA
EN PERSE,
CONTENANT

*LA POLITIQUE, DE CE GRAND EMPIRE,
les mœurs du Roy Schach Abbas, & une Relation exactte de
sous les lieux de Perse & des Indes, où cét Ambassadeur a esté
l'espace de huit années qu'il y a demeuré.*

Traduite de l'Espagnol
Par Monsieur DE WICQFORT.



A PARIS,
Chez LOUIS BILLAINE, au second Pillier de la
grand' Sale du Palais, au grand Cefar.

M. DC. LXVII.
AVEC PRIVILEGE DV ROY.



Plate 3

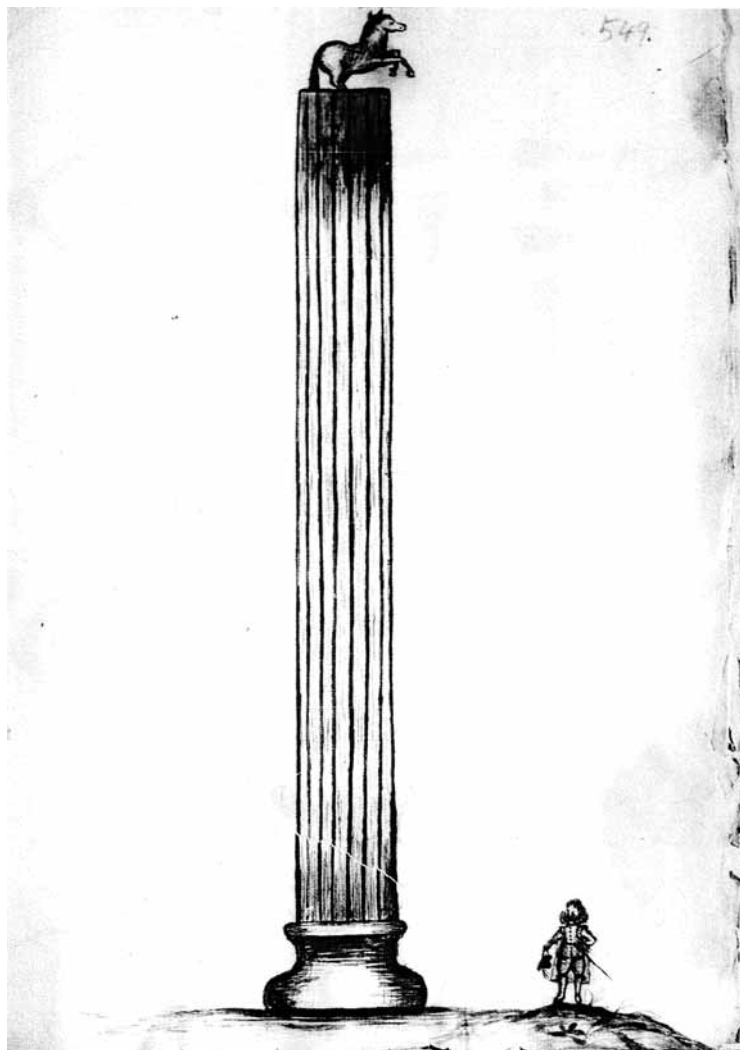


Plate 4

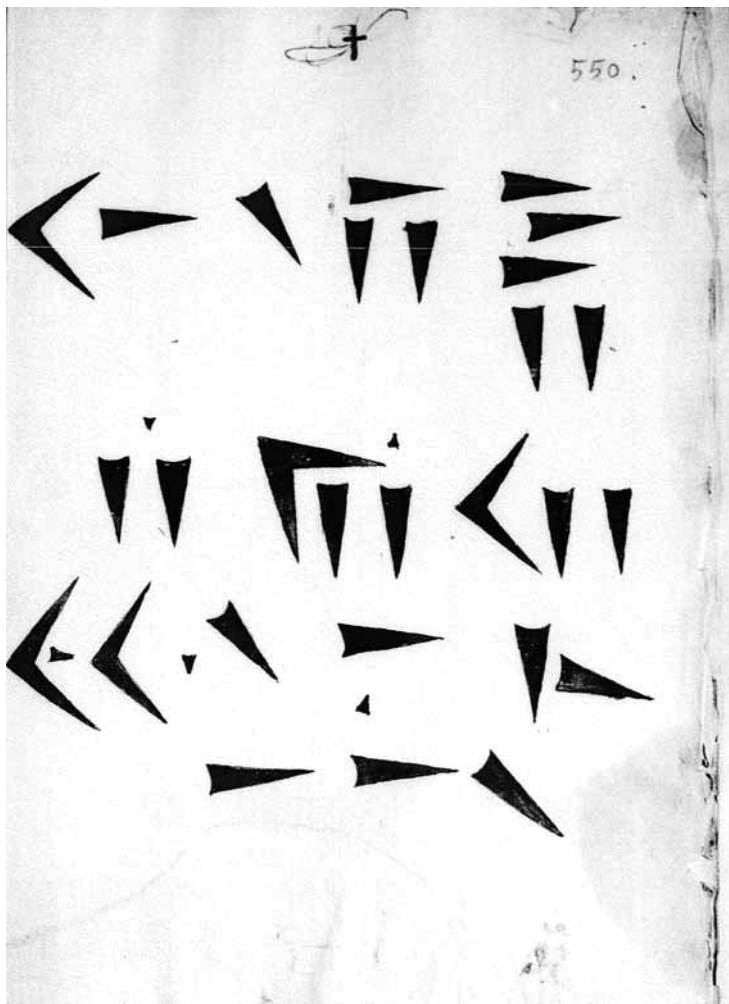


Plate 5