

## Armenians Before the Philippine Inquisition

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My first encounter with the Armenians, albeit spiritual rather than physical, was in 1952 in a graduate course on the modern Near East at the University of Florida. My second encounter was in 1965 when a young Armenian boy helped a weary and bewildered Filipino traveler at the Beirut International Airport. Subsequently, through contacts at the American University of Beirut, I felt the spiritual presence of the community of Armenian Christians in Lebanon and learned more about their sufferings. In 1969, in a third encounter, I learned how some Armenian refugees had settled in Singapore and established a church, but that their community there was dying.

My fourth encounter occurred this way. In 1975 I went into an office at the Universidad de las Americas in Cholula, Puebla, Mexico to meet a "Philippine" girl surnamed Kayarian, and found an Armenian-American instead. I told Miss Kayarian that her name means "construction" or "makeup" in Tagalog. She said that in the Armenian language her name means "bricklayer."

Subsequent reference to an Armenian dictionary failed to turn up *kayarian* and produced other words for "bricklayer." But the ending, *-an*, of this and other Armenian words was intriguing. This similarity with Tagalog, also found in Nahuatl (e.g., Mazatlan), could, though, be mere linguistic accident. My non-professional inquiry into the Armenian language ended, as I suspected it would, in the failure to find evidence of ancient contacts between the Armenian nation and Malayo-Polynesians. The following comparative table of terms is reproduced for whatever value it may offer.<sup>1</sup>

### ARMENIAN

### TAGALOG

<i>apel'</i> (tinder)	<i>apoy</i> (fire)
<i>a'r</i> (day)	<i>araw</i> (day)
<i>arev</i> (sun)	<i>araw</i> (sun)
<i>ardako</i> (out, beyond)	<i>dako</i> (place or whereabouts)
<i>ayo</i> (yes)	<i>oo</i> (yes)
<i>bachig</i> (kiss)	<i>halik</i> (kiss)
<i>manug</i> (child)	<i>manok</i> (chicken)

The Armenian word for sugar, *shakar*, is close to the Tagalog, *asukal*, but both are loan words traceable ultimately to either Persian or Arabic.

The Armenian language, of course, is not Asiatic but Indo-European. An Armenian professor, Dr. Siranpie Der Nersessian, gives us this classification of her native tongue: "Armenian is an independent branch of the family of Indo-European languages, as independent as Greek or Albanian; also like these two languages it has no descendants."<sup>2</sup>

Filipinos, however, despite the racial and philological differences, should take more than cursory interest in Armenians. Both are Christian communities faced by questions of survival within an area of unsympathetic Muslim rivals. Both, particularly Armenians, have suffered from violent Muslim-Christian conflicts. Indeed, the fact that the honorary consul in 1966 of the Republic of the Philippines in East Jerusalem was an Armenian underscores symbolically the spiritual kinship and similar historical experiences of the Armenian and Filipino peoples.

#### Armenia: Land and People

There are nearly five million Armenians at present. Three million live in Soviet Armenia and another million in other parts of the U.S.S.R., particularly Georgia and Azerbaijan. Outside the U.S.S.R., a half million Armenians live in the United States, mostly in Massachusetts and California, and one-fourth of a million in Syria and Lebanon. A smaller number reside in Iran, and there are scores of Armenian communities scattered between Buenos Aires and Singapore.

The original homeland of the Armenian people is a plateau of approximately 300,000 square kilometers lying roughly between 37° and 49° east longitude and 37.5° and 41.5° north latitude. Part of a continuous range stretching from Iran to the Levantine coast, the Armenian mesa dominates its area, with heights hovering between 800 and 2000 meters. One of these peaks, the Mount Ararat of Noah, should attract the attention of Bible-reading Filipinos.

Today this homeland, which the Armenians have lost, corresponds to the eastern portion of Muslim Turkey. There should be at least some Armenian communities, particularly in western Turkey, which survived the *espiurk* or diaspora of 1915, but it is curious that a source for current population statistics on Armenians does not give figures for Turkey. Indeed, one section in this source, a well-researched work, is grimly entitled "The Death of Turkish Armenia."<sup>3</sup>

The forming of the Armenian nation on the Ararat plain surely took an immensely long period; in 522 B.C. records began to mention an

"Armina" among the satrapies of Darius the Great. Successively, the area became one of the dominions of Alexander the Great and of Rome. As part of the Roman empire and close to the haunts of Christ, Armenia was early exposed to evangelization. Tradition holds that Bartholomew and Thaddeus took the gospel to the Armenians. But it was during the time of St. Gregory the Illuminator and King Tiridates III (286-314) that Christianity took root in the area and eventually became the official religion.

Most Armenians today are members of the Armenian Apostolic Church. A minority belong to the Armenian Catholic Church, which is in communion with Rome. Followers of the latter church have suffered at the hands of Muslim Turks like their Orthodox brethren: the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* notes that during World War I "great numbers" of Armenian Catholics were "put to death for the faith" by the Turks.<sup>4</sup>

The chief difference between the Armenian Apostolic Church (Orthodox) and the Roman Catholic Church is generally considered to be in their view of the nature or natures of Christ. Catholic theologians regard the former as Monophysite. This is a position seemingly born out by a declaration in the Armenian Confession of faith that the Godhead and Man in Jesus are united in one nature.<sup>5</sup> A second significant difference is in church government. The Gregorian or Orthodox Armenians hold that the head of the Church, called the *Catholicos*, has primacy of honor only, not jurisdiction, relative to the patriarchates. The result is a decentralized church organization. The Gregorian Armenians also deny purgatory, but oddly, pray for the dead. The Armenian Church has continued to use the Armenian language in its services, and is thus one of the chief bastions of Armenian nationalism.<sup>6</sup>

### Persecution and Diaspora

As already noted, Armenian Christians have a long history of persecution, which resulted in their diaspora, a movement which brought them, as this paper will show, into contact with the Philippine Inquisition. In 451 A.D., the Persians tried to impose Zoroastrianism upon them. In the middle of the seventh century, Islamic armies overran Armenia; the Arabs were tolerant, but this did not prevent the massacre of Armenian families. In 1064 the Seljuk Turks attacked and destroyed the Armenian capital, Ani. Invasion by the "semi-barbarian" Mongols, who became Muslims, followed next. Then, in 1502, Ismail, the Safavid Shah of Persia, conquered much of Armenia from the Turkomans; for 150 years thereafter, Turkish

and Persian armies moved back and forth over the Armenian homeland, the frontier shifting accordingly.

In 1828-29 Russia challenged Turkey for the title to the Ararat mesa, and in the Treaty of Adrianople which ended the war got most of eastern Armenia. Thus modern Soviet Armenia began, with Armenians flocking to Russia from Persia and Turkey. The entrance of Russia into the political arena worsened the situation of Armenians remaining in Turkey; suspicion on the part of the Turkish rulers produced more pressure. Agitation for justice by the persecuted resulted instead in massacre; one source estimates 600,000 Armenians killed in Turkey between 1894 and 1904.<sup>7</sup>

The end of this chapter in persecution was the hideous massacre in 1915 of 1.5 million Armenians by the Turks and Muslim Kurds.<sup>8</sup> The insane cruelty and bizarre barbarity, the torture, robbery, kidnapping, and mass rapes which the Armenian people suffered during their expulsion from Turkish Armenia in that year far surpass the horrible experience of Filipinos during the Japanese occupation in World War II. The cruelty and religious hatred encompassing the Armenian genocide is expressed well in a remark of a Kurdish gendarme (in the Turkish service). Cries of "Christ!" and "Mary!" from the victims led him to say that he would also smash the skull of Christ if possible, and "I would subject the Mother of God to the same fate the Armenian women and girls were subjected to."<sup>9</sup>

### **Armenian Diaspora to the Philippines**

Armenians came to the Philippines in two or three of the stages of their diaspora. The route these refugees took was Isfahan-to-India-to-Manila, sometimes with a detour to Batavia in the Dutch East Indies before final settlement in the Philippines. Isfahan was the capital of Persia in the time of the Shah Abbas the Great (1587-1629), who made it one of the largest and most beautiful cities in the seventeenth century. For strategic reasons in his wars with the Turks, Abbas moved thousands of Armenians in 1605 from eastern Armenia to the suburbs of Isfahan. The kindness of Shah Abbas to Armenian Christians was an exception in the long history of intolerance and killings; the Armenians thrived under him.

Then, for some unknown reason, a number of Armenians moved from the Isfahan area to India, most of them settling in Madras. This movement began in the reign of the Mogul emperor Akbar (1542-1602) and continued afterwards, as the records of the Philippine Inquisition suggest. In India the refugees, who engaged in trade, prospered. A printing press was

founded which produced works on Armenian history and political philosophy. Notable was a book by Hakab Shahamirian, published in 1773, entitled *Vorogait Parats* (Trap of Glory), which dealt with the liberation of the homeland and the re-establishment of the state of Armenia.<sup>10</sup>

### Inquisition Lists of Armenians

The records of the Philippine Inquisition in the Mexican national archives mention a total of twenty-four Armenians who arrived in Manila between 1735 and 1809, and in the course of arranging their permanent residence with Spanish authorities settled their religious status with the inquisitorial officers. The records are incomplete and can be misleading because of clerical errors. In addition, political upheavals in post-Spanish Mexico did considerable damage to archival deposits, including Philippine manuscripts. Another problem is that in 1975-76, when the material used in this paper was collected, more than a million manuscripts still reposed unclassified and unavailable to researchers in the Archivo General de la Nación.<sup>11</sup>

These are the Armenians who settled in the Philippines: <sup>12</sup>

- |         |     |                                  |
|---------|-----|----------------------------------|
| 1734    | 1.  | Nazar de Agamar                  |
|         | 2.  | Zafra Naurer (Xavier)            |
| 1735    | 3.  | Zarat de la Cruz                 |
|         | 4.  | Miguel Xavier Fesali             |
|         | 5.  | Juan de Sinan                    |
|         | 6.  | Minas de Elias                   |
|         | 7.  | Gregorio de Zacharias            |
|         | 8.  | Santiago Barachiel               |
|         | 9.  | Gregorio de Xabrer (Xavier)      |
|         | 10. | Isaias de Martin                 |
|         | 11. | Esteban de Codidyan              |
|         | 12. | Nazar de Cayami (Coyamal)        |
| 1735-36 | 13. | Constantino de Lazaro            |
|         | 14. | Philipus Agaperi                 |
|         | 15. | Jachic de Obanes                 |
| 1746    | 16. | Gregorio de Ablejat              |
| 1754    | 17. | Juan Manuel Maroto               |
| 1755-59 | 18. | Simon Ternierser (or Ternierses) |
|         | 19. | Antonio de la Costa Malabar      |
| 1759    | 20. | Juan Salomon Daud                |

- |      |                         |
|------|-------------------------|
| 1760 | 21. Jacobo Isay         |
|      | 22. Sattur Aviet        |
| 1764 | 23. Abraham Amiryan     |
| 1809 | 24. Juan Ibrahim Shamir |

As may be observed, the Spanish notaries had a difficult time spelling the Armenian names, and they often resorted to hispanicized version. This list includes only those Armenians who appeared before the Holy Office of the Inquisition. In the text of two manuscripts dated 1754 and 1755 three additional Armenians in Manila were mentioned, two Catholic laymen, Juan de la Cruz and the unnamed father of Juan Manuel Maroto, and a Franciscan brother, Francisco de Jesus Maria Donado.<sup>13</sup>

Fray Joaquín Martínez de Zuñiga, the noted Augustinian historian, observed of the Armenians in the Philippines—and is corroborated by the inquisition records—that they were merchants and that they had moved from Persia to India before coming to the Philippines. The friar considered them shrewd traders who bought the goods of traveling merchants and resold these at high prices to Manilans. Possibly they also dealt in the Isfahan carpets for which that city was famous.<sup>14</sup>

Some were well-traveled and exceptionally active traders. Gregorio de Zacharias had shuttled among Java, Manila, China, and Madrastra. Santiago de Barachiel, who, like Zacharias, was reconciled to Catholicism in 1735, had been to Persia, Muscovy, Denmark, Turkey, Malta, Italy, Holland, Belgium, India, and Java; he spoke Dutch and Italian and could read and write Spanish.

The sole exception to this trader norm seems to be Simon Ternierser, nineteen years of age, son of an Armenian priest, who in 1757 manifested a desire to reside permanently in the Philippines, learn Spanish, and study the Catholic catechism. The inquisition commissioner of Manila, Fray Antonio Kalonge, reported enthusiastically of Ternierser "that he might enter the sacred orders" in the future.

It may be observed also that all Armenians processed by the Philippine Inquisition were males. In one case, two Armenians, Nazar de Agamar and Zafias Naurer, were father and son. It has been noted that Juan Manuel Maroto had a merchant father already residing in Manila when he was processed by the Inquisition. Antonio de la Costa Malabar, reconciled in 1755, actually was an Indian slave bought (from whom it was not recorded) and raised by an Armenian priest. The inquisition records do not mention families left in Isfahan or India. After the ceremonies of reconciliation, nothing more is known of these Armenian *reconciliados*.

### Conversion

Substitute families, the inquisition records suggest, for Armenians were their fellow countrymen in Manila or elsewhere in the Islands. The newcomers were drawn together, both because they were aliens in a new land and as an emotional result of diaspora. In their testimonies they revealed an exchange of communications on the Philippines and its religious policies, as well as continuing contacts upon arrival and residence in the colony. Thus, Zacharias told the Holy Office in 1735 that through letters from his countrymen he learned that the Roman Catholic Church was "the true church." Sattur Aviet revealed in 1760 that the Armenian Franciscan, Francisco de Jesus Maria, instructed him in the Catholic faith. Also, the Armenian layman, Juan de la Cruz, served as catechical teacher of Catholic doctrine to Antonio de la Costa Malabar in 1755.<sup>15</sup>

The Holy Office commissioners, investigating the first Armenian cases in 1734-36, were obviously most interested in learning about Armenian theology and, in terms of the security of the colony, the adverse influences, if any, the newcomers might have upon Philippine Catholic society. The social background of the immigrants was of less interest. Take, for example, one of the questions that Fray Juan de Archederra, commissioner of the Inquisition, asked Armenian Nazar de Agamar on June 26, 1734: "Do you know of any schismatics in these Islands, if they have perverted some Catholics, and if they keep books and notes [of schismatic doctrines] which should be surrendered [to the Holy Office]?"<sup>16</sup>

Ecumenical interest was not to come for more than 200 years. The inquisitors in Manila believed that Armenian Christians were "schismatics," unworthy of much Catholic sympathy. But from Constantino de Lazaro the commissioner of Manila learned the following Armenian teachings: (a) the Armenian faith is the true faith; (b) the patriarch of Armenia is the vicar of Christ; (c) the Armenian concept of purgatory differs from the Catholic concept; (d) Armenian priests give confirmation together with baptism; (e) indulgences are non-existent in the Armenian church. Philipus Agaperi gave away the fundamental difference between Armenian and Catholic theology: Christ had only one nature. In addition, he revealed that an Armenian priest gave the last rites after the death of a person. Then, Simon Ternierser, the son of an Armenian priest, categorically denied that Armenians believed in purgatory. He added that in Armenia the Pope was unknown and that Christian saints were used as mediators between God and men. The common pronouncement expected of the Armenian *reconciliado* was, "I detest and abominate with

all my heart the errors of schism."<sup>17</sup> Considering that the Armenian faith was relatively close to the Roman Catholic faith, the declaration of "detestation" would probably not be difficult to make.

Jacobo Isay (1760) appears to be the only Armenian in all these cases who was not given reconciliation. He was the model of what Tagalogs call *pakikisama*, accommodation. Asked if he had observed Armenian rites in his travels: "He said: that where there was an Armenian Church he conformed with his sect, and where there were Catholics, he conformed with them, and he felt secure in his religion because of the efficient instruction of his teachers, neither needing to believe nor to conform with any other sect. . . ." The Holy Office notary wrote at this point: "y con esto se cierro esta audiencia" (and with this the hearing was closed).<sup>18</sup> But there is no record that Isay was burned at the stake or expelled from the Philippines.

As the historian progresses toward the last Armenian cases, he may note that the questions asked of the subjects by the Holy Office become fewer. Perhaps the Catholic clergy did not regard Armenians as so "perverse" or "dangerous" as Muslims, Jews, and Protestants. In any case, as the Spanish Inquisition hastened to its end, the suspicions, tensions, and hostility of former years seemed to recede.

What conclusions might we draw out of this brief study? Professor Louis Gottschalk, in illustrating the problem of emphasis for the historian, used a story of two British soldiers who found a bottle of water in the desert. One saw the bottle as half-empty; the second saw it as half-filled with water. As with the bottle, the Spanish Inquisition in the Philippines may be looked at in two different ways. First, it was without argument a repressive institution. But also—the evidence is unmistakable—when homeless and persecuted Christians of a "schismatic" church approached the Holy Office, it did not deny them a haven in the Spanish Philippines.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Adour H. Yacoubian, *English-Armenian and Armenian-English Concise Dictionary* (Los Angeles: Armenian Archives Press, 1944).

<sup>2</sup> Sirarpie Der Nersessian, *The Armenians* (New York: Praeger, 1970), p. 79.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher J. Walker, *Armenia: the Survival of a Nation* (New York: St. Martin's, 1980), p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> J. Kaftandjian, "Armenian Rite," *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (1967), Vol. I, p. 836.

<sup>5</sup> Archdeacon Dowling, *The Armenian Church* (New York: AMS Press, 1970), p. 65.

<sup>6</sup> Der Nersessian, *The Armenians*, p. 78.



<sup>7</sup> Dowling, *The Armenian Church*, p. 150.

<sup>8</sup> The Kurds are a race of pastoral and agricultural tribesmen who inhabit an area in adjoining parts of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria and in the Armenian and Azerbaijan regions of the Soviet Caucasus.

<sup>9</sup> Garabed Kapikian, *Yeghernabadowm [Story of Genocide]* (New York: Pan-Sebastian Rehabilitation Union, 1978), p. 74.

<sup>10</sup> Walker, *Armenia*, pp. 50-51.

<sup>11</sup> F. Delor Angeles, "Bibliographical Data on the Philippine Inquisition," *Silliman Journal* 23 (1976), 256-57.

<sup>12</sup> México, Archivo General de la Nación, MS, Ramo de Inquisición, Tomo 857, Fojas 158-190, 198-236: Reconciliaciones al Gremio de Nra. Sra. Madre Iglesia de Miguel de Pablo... todos Armenios de la Secta del Cisma Armenio, Manila, 1735—Tomo 861, Expediente 24, Fojas 415-34: Reconciliaciones al Gremio de nuestra Santa Madre Iglesia de quatro Armenios Zismáticos, Manila, 1736—Tomo 940, Expediente 6, Fojas 86-135: Reconciliación al gremio de Ntra. Sta. Madre Iglesia de Simon Ternersier, armenio y del cisma de aquella nación... Antonio de la Costa Malabar, armenio...—Tomo 911, Expediente 18, Fojas 377-85: Reconciliación al gremio de Ntra. Madre Iglesia de Gregorio de Ablejat, armenio cismático, Manila, 1746—Tomo 946, Expediente 5, Fojas 79-84: Reconciliación al gremio de Ntra. Santa Madre Iglesia de Juan Manuel Maroto de nacion armenia, Manila, 1754—Tomo 991, Expediente 5, Fojas 109-17 y Expedientes 7 y 10: Cartas... al Comisario dando aviso... reconciliación... de Isaac Salomon Daud—Tomo 1035, Expediente 13, Fojas 361: Reconciliación al gremio de Ntra. Santa Madre Iglesia de Abraham Amiryán, armenio, Manila, 1765—Tomo 1095, Expediente 2 y Expediente 6: Incluye ésta las diligencias evacuadas en la reconciliación de Jacobo Isay, de nación armenia, Manila, 1760—Tomo 1446, Foja 53: Otra denuncia espontánea de Don Juan Abraham Shamir, 1809.

<sup>13</sup> México, AGN, MS, Inquisición, Tomo 940, Foja 97. A *reconciliado* was a person reconciled to the Catholic faith through the auspices of the Spanish Inquisition.

<sup>14</sup> Joaquín Martínez de Zuñiga, *Estadismo de las Islas Filipinas* (Madrid 1893), Vol. I, pp. 264-65.

<sup>15</sup> México, AGN, MS, Inquisición, Tomo 857, Foja 161—Tomo 857, Fojas 207-208—Tomo 1095, Expediente 2, Foja 205—Tomo 940, Foja 105.

<sup>16</sup> México, AGN, MS, Inquisición, Tomo 851, Foja 161.

<sup>17</sup> México, AGN, MS, Inquisición, Tomo 861, Expediente 24, Fojas 415-34.

<sup>18</sup> México, AGN, MS, Inquisición, Tomo 1095, Expediente 6, Fojas 219-23.