Il viaggio in Armenia
Dall'antichità ai nostri giorni
a cura di Aldo Ferrari, Sona Haroutyunian, Paolo Lucca

Cleansing the Christian Vineyard

Dominican Missions to the Armenian Catholic Diocese of Naxiǰewan in the 1610s-1630s

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Abstract The article deals with the history of western missions to the Armenian archdiocese of Naxiǰewan in the first decades of the seventeenth century. In the 1610s-1630s, the archdiocese of Naxiǰewan was the destination of a series of Dominican missions. The article focuses on the relations between the missionaries and the local Armenian Catholic hierarchy and on how Propaganda Fide dealt with the contentious doctrinal and authority issues at stake.

Keywords Early modern missions. Armenia. Naxiiǰewan. Paolo Maria Cittadini. Paolo Piromalli. Ōgostinos Baǰenc'. Dominican Order. Propaganda Fide.

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1 The Origins of the Armenian Catholic Diocese of Naxiǰewan and Its State at the Beginning of the Seventeenth Century

The establishment of a Catholic diocese in the territory of historical Armenia dates back to 1318, when the See of Maragha, in Persia, was entrusted to the Italian Dominican friar Bartolomeo de Podio. Tradition goes that a group of Armenian Apostolic monks from the K'ṙnay monastery – nowadays in the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic – reached out to Bartolomeo, who successfully convinced them to unite with Rome, establishing an Armenian Catholic diocese in Naxiǰewan. Between 1337 and 1344, the monks that had reached out to Bartholomeo founded a new order, which was approved by Pope Innocent VI in 1356 and was given the name of *Ordo Fratrum unitorum S. Gregorii Illuminatoris*. These "unifying friars" accepted to give up the Armenian liturgic tradition for the Latin one, though continuing to use the Armenian language in the liturgy. They were subjected to the authority of the Dominican master general; still, they would remain an almost independent branch of the Dominican *Societas Fratrum peregrinantium* for more than two centuries. Even if their diocese was "missionary", at least nominally, they engaged themselves in missionary activities only during their first two generations. That was also the time when their number reached its peak. Later sources would list about seven hundred unifying friars and some fifty convents in the mid-fourteenth century. Then, once the initial momentum and missionary fervour ran out, the *Fratres unitores* started occupying themselves mostly with administering their monasteries and parishioners, writing polemical works, and translating theological, philosophical, devotional, and liturgical works from Latin into Armenian. By the last quarter of the fourteenth century, their number was already reduced to less than a hundred friars: both the opposition of the Armenian Apostolic Church in the 1370s-1380s and Tamerlane's campaigns at the end of the same century had a lot to do with such an abrupt decline. In 1583, as one of the results of the centralising tendencies of Counter-Reformation, the Dominican general council decreed the suppression of the *Fratres unitores* as an independent branch and its full absorption into the Dominican Order, and the Archdiocese of Naxiǰewan became a Dominican province for all practical purposes. By that time, only twelve Catholic convents were left in the newly established *Provincia Nesciovaniensis Armenorum*.[1]

Some paragraphs of this paper are a reworked version of Lucca (forthcoming). I am indebted to Cesare Santus and Flavio Belluomini for checking some documents in the Historical Archives of Propaganda Fide in Rome

1 On the history of the *Fratres Unitores* and the (arch)diocese of Naxiǰewan, see Tournebize 1921-22; van den Oudenrijn 1936; 1951; 1956; 1958; 1959; 1960; 1961; 1962;

In subsequent years, after that in 1603 Shah ʿAbbas I liberated Tabriz and reconquered Naxiǰewan back from the Ottomans, the region came under Safavid rule. To discourage the Ottomans from invading and trying to win back the Safavid territories in the Caucasus and Persian Azerbaijan, in 1606-07 the shah implemented a scorched-earth campaign that left the entire region between Tabriz and Erzurum laid waste and depopulated.[2] Persian and Turkish campaigns through Armenia continued, though to a lesser extent, during the 1620s-1630s, impoverishing and dispersing still further the population (Herzig, Zekiyan 2005, 47). As far as the Catholic population of the diocese of Naxiǰewan was concerned, the number of Catholic households dropped from 1830 in 1604 to 305 in 1616; that of clergymen went from 117 to 21 during the same period of time.[3]

As there is no evidence that the *Fratres unitores* ever received other people than Armenians in their Order (van den Oudenrijn 1936, 168), what western missionaries found when they first arrived in the Archdiocese of Naxiǰewan at the beginning of the seventeenth century was basically an ethnically Armenian Catholic Church, with its own more-than-two-century-old traditions and customs, including, but not limited to, the use of the national language in the divine liturgy. Insofar as Near East – Persia, in this case – was seemingly becoming more and more accessible to western travellers, merchants, and missionaries, and as the first missionary accounts and reports found their way to a wider public,[4] those customs started being frowned upon as strange and suspicious, if not "deviant", and perceived as less tolerable (Atamian 1984, 124, 151).

Atamian 1984; Čemčemean 1990a; 1990b; 1991a; 1991b; 1992; 1993; 1995; 1996; 2000; Delacroix-Besnier 1996-97; Longo 1997; 2007, especially 35-44; Karapetean 1999, 2000; Lucca 2016; Aral 2017, 227-44.

2 See Farrokh 2015, especially 84-93. For a contemporary witness, see Cittadini 1617 (transcribed in Alonso 1970, 216): "Qui Re Abbas ha in buona parte dishabitata questa provincia perché non vuole che, venendovi l'inimico, trovi di che molto arricchirsi".

3 See Friton 1604; Cittadini 1616a.

4 For example, in 1605 the Italian Dominican Domenico Gravina extensively drew on the report that the Armenian Catholic archbishop of Naxiǰewan Azaria Friton had addressed to Pope Clement VIII in 1604 (Friton 1604; Gravina 1605). On Azaria Friton, see van den Oudenrijn 1936, 172-3; di S. Teresa 1960; Floristán 2010, 174-9. In 1609 the Portuguese Dominican Joam (João) dos Santos published the text of the *Relação* of the Augustinian Belchior dos Anjos in his *Varia história* (Belchior dos Anjos 1605; João dos Santos 1609); the same text was published in the same year in Lisbon in the anonymous *Breve relaçam* (1609; see also Gulbenkian 1975, 1995b, 40-172, especially 161-72). On papal diplomacy and missionary activity in the Safavid Empire in the first decades of the seventeenth century, see also Windler 2013; 2015; 2018a; 2018b; Matthee 2010; 2020.

2 The Mission of Paolo Maria Cittadini (1614-17)

During the first and second decade of the seventeenth century, attempts were made to discuss the union of the Armenian Apostolic Church with the Church of Rome. Between 1607 and 1613 Catholicos Dawitʿ IV and his co-adjutor Melkʿisēdʿ Gaṙnecʿi addressed a series of professions of Catholic faith to Pope Paul V and King Philip III of Spain.[5] In 1613 two Carmelites, Frs. Redento de la Cruz and Bartolomeo Maria di S. Francesco, travelled from Isfahan to Ējmiacin to discuss the matter of the union with Melkʿisēdʿ, who seemingly showed himself willing to profess obedience to the pope. However, their mission led to nowhere, in part due to the opposition of the Armenian Apostolic clergy in Isfahan and the tensions between Dawitʿ IV and Melkʿisēdʿ (Chick [1939] 2012, 1: 210; 2: 805, 1000-3). In their reports the two Carmelites also described in worrying terms the indigence of the Armenian Catholics who lived in the province of Naxiǰewan.[6] As a consequence, in 1614, the Dominican Paolo Maria Cittadini was posted by his Order's master general as provisor, commissary, and visitor to the said province.[7] For the first time in history, the province of Naxiǰewan was overseen by a non-Armenian. From then on, as far as the positions of provincial and archbishop of Naxiǰewan were concerned, a minuet started in which these offices were alternately assigned to European and Armenian clergy. As a result, after almost three centuries of autarchy, during the seventeenth and the early eighteenth century, seven out of thirteen archbishops of Naxiǰewan were non-Armenians (van den Oudenrijn 1936, 171-85), as well as fifteen out of thirty-two provincials (van den Oudenrijn 1951, 310-9). It should be added that, theoretically speaking, both the archdiocese and the province had enjoyed in the past the right to choose their

5 Ōrmanean 1914, 2315-7; Floristán, Gil 1986; Gulbenkian 1995a; Floristán 1999, 58-9; Alonso 2001; Aral 2017, 245-6.

6 See Redento de la Cruz, Bartolomeo Maria di S. Francesco 1614, especially ff. 229*rv*-230v, where such expressions occur as "povertà e miseria indicibile", "miserabile povertà", and "estrema necessità"; see also Redento de la Cruz, Bartolomeo Maria di S. Francesco 1613.

7 The Armenian Dominican friar and future archbishop of the diocese of Naxiǰewan Ōgostinos Baǰencʿ (Baǰencʿi), who at that time was in Rome for his priestly ordination, might also have had a role in soliciting Rome's intervention. In his *Itinerary*, he wrote that, on the occasion of his audience with Pope Paul V, the pope, "seeing his longing" (որ մեր հալն տեսնու), entrusted him with a letter to hand it over to his Order's master general. In such letter, Paul V asked the master general to post a "doctor in theology" (վարդապետ) to the diocese. The master general "chose a good doctor in theology (լավ վարդապետ) named Połos (i.e. Paolo Maria Cittadini) and gave him the authority of being provisor over our land. Having received the general's blessing, we set out on our journey" (Baǰencʿ s.d., f. 74*rv*; see also Brosset 1837). On Cittadini, see Eszer 1969; Alonso 1970. On Baǰencʿ, see van den Oudenrijn 1936, 175-6; 1960, 55-6; Eszer 1977; Čemčemean 1990a; Karapetean 2001.

bishops and provincials, who, at least in the case of bishops, were to be Armenian and elected by a council formed by eight members of the clergy, eight religious, and eight laymen.[8] However, even if, for practical reasons, the Congregation de Propaganda Fide would later tend to accept the candidates expressed by this council, there were cases over the course of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century where either Rome questioned or revoked an election,[9] or the local Armenian Catholic clergy tried to send back an imposed outsider.[10]

Unsurprisingly, probably also because of the failure of the recent attempts at the union with the Armenian Apostolic Church, Cittadini and his companions were expressly requested not to actively engage in theological debate with the Armenian Apostolics.[11] Obeying his orders, the Dominican began his work among the Armenian Catholics. In 1616, less than one year after his arrival, he wrote that he had found the Armenian friars and their parishioners in a "calamitous state":

> The whole people were given over to drunkenness, they hardly went to mass on holy days, the churches were always closed. […] Friars never recited the divine office in church and they scarcely said mass.[12]

In line with the previous reports by Redento de la Cruz and Bartolomeo Maria di S. Francesco, Cittadini too acknowledged that the "extreme poverty" of local Catholics was mostly caused by the Muslim rulers.[13] Indeed, as it has been said above, Naxiǰewan was an impoverished region at that time, and many converted to Islam to lighten

8 van den Oudenrijn 1936, 185; Alonso 1970, 19-20; Atamian 1984, 148-9.

9 As it was the case, for example, with the election of Tʿomas Tʿadumean, who was nominated archbishop but not consecrated, until François Picquet, the Latin bishop of Cesaropolis in Macedonia, persuaded the clergy of Naxiǰewan to elect instead the Bavarian Dominican Sebastian Knab (van den Oudenrijn 1936, 181-2; see also Atamian 1984, 149-50; Čemčemean 1996. On Knab, see Eszer 1973).

10 As it happened, for instance, to Archbishop Paolo Piromalli in 1655 (on whom see below) and to Provincial Angelo (Anioł) Smoliński in 1712 (see *Liber Consiliorum Provincialium* s.d, 36; Lucca 2016, 146-7).

11 "Non introduranno dispute né discorsi sopra gl'articoli, de' quali altre volte gl'Armeni erano sospetti […]. Dovranno astenersi dall'introdurre controversie, o questioni di theologia scholastica, ma solamente servirsi della dottrina dei Santi Padri antichi, et massime di quella registrata nelli tre primi Concilii Generali da loro accettata, mediante la quale poi devono procurare di tirarli a prestar fede a quanto si contiene nel Concilio Calcedonense" (*Instruttione per li frati di S. Domenico* 1614, f. 198*r*).

12 "Erano tutti i populi dati all'ubbriachezza, a pena venivano a Messa le feste, le chiese erano sempre chiuse. […] Li Frati non diceano l'officio mai in chiesa, né Messa se non poche volte" (Cittadini 1616a; see Alonso 1970, 209).

13 Cittadini 1616a; 1617 (see Alonso 1970, 214, 217-8).

the burden of taxation and avoid other vexations.[14] During the seventeenth and eighteenth century, both members of the local clergy and some western missionary would often travel Europe and the Spanish and Portuguese colonies – both in the East and the West – to collect alms for the diocese, starting with Archbishop Azaria Friton, who died in Rome in 1607 after travelling in Spain.[15]

Nevertheless, according to Cittadini, the appalling spiritual conditions of the diocese were to be blamed first and foremost to its archbishop Matt'ēos Miranšah (Matteo Erasmo), whom he described as an ignorant man and a drunkard that did not consider preaching to the people to be worthy of his own status and had ordered the friars not to preach as long as he lived. As a result, for the previous seven years, the Catholic population had not been preached to and many had abandoned their faith.[16] Redento de la Cruz and Bartolomeo Maria di S. Francesco had shown sympathy and compassion for "el pobre arçobispo" Matt'ēos Miranšah, who had no income and was forced to stay at home and prevented from carrying out his pastoral duties by the Moors.[17] However, Cittadini claimed that this was untrue:

> That the bishop is harassed by the Moors and forced to stay at home most of the time because he is prevented from going out and perform his duties is a sheer and patent lie. For the bishop is not forced to do anything by the Moors […] and he looks plump and well. He does not perform his duties because he lacks the Spirit of God, but otherwise he enjoys too much freedom and comfort.[18]

Cittadini viewed the local archbishop as the main cause for the haemorrhage of the faithful. While reporting that the people and the sim-

14 See, for example, Redento de la Cruz, Bartolomeo Maria di S. Francesco 1613, f. 1*rv*.

15 On the Armenian friars of Naxiǰewan travelling to collect alms, see van den Oudenrijn 1960, 43; 1962, 106-7.

16 "Mons. Vescovo, qual è la rovina dell'anime per la sua estrema ignoranza. […] Questo ubbriaco vescovo […] quando venne in questo paese, comandò alli Frati che sin che lui viveva, non havessero ardimento di predicare, si che il paese de' catholici è stato 7 anni privo della predica. […] La rovina di questo paese è, in somma, l'estremissima ignoranza di questo vescovo, al quale havendo io detto che dovria predicare, mi rispose che ad un par suo non si conveniva" (Cittadini 1616a; see Alonso 1970, 208-9; see also Cittadini 1621a, 4, 10).

17 Redento de la Cruz, Bartolomeo Maria di S. Francesco 1613, f. 1*r*; see also Redento de la Cruz, Bartolomeo Maria di S. Francesco 1614, ff. 230*rv*.

18 "Ma ch'il vescovo è molestato dalli mori et che bisogna stare per il più in casa non potendo uscire a fare le sue fontioni è mera et espressa buggia. Perche il vescovo non è obbligato niente a mori […] et sta grasso et bene. Delle fontioni non le fa perche non ha lo spirito d'Iddio, che del resto ha troppa libertà et commodità" (Cittadini 1616a; see Alonso 1970, 215).

ple clergy were nothing but eager to be instructed in the teachings and practices of the orthodox Catholic faith, he accused Matt'ēos Miranšah of laziness and simony and blamed him for asking money for administering the sacraments[19] and introducing deviations and errors in the divine office and the mass.[20] The report of Redento de la Cruz and Bartolomeo Maria di S. Francesco said quite the opposite in this regard also, giving Matt'ēos Miranšah credit for re-establishing orthodox practices in line with the Catholic doctrine.[21]

This hiatus between the two Carmelites' reports and those of Cittadini may find explanation in the fact that Redento de la Cruz and Bartolomeo Maria di S. Francesco were advocating the idea of establishing two Carmelite convents in the area: to present the local Catholics as people "of good will and excellent disposition" was probably a point in favor of the validity of their idea. Or it could have been that, in his office of provisor, commissary, and visitor, Cittadini spent more time in Naxiǰewan and living there he got to know (and loathe) local customs more than the two Carmelites had a chance to do when they had travelled through the country.

In any case, this marked the beginning of a dynamic that would occur again and again during the seventeenth century: when visitors, commissaries, or delegates came to Naxiǰewan, they often blamed the members of local hierarchy for being unfit for their office and asked Rome for sending western missionaries (often Italians) to help in the field. In other words, as the local Catholics shared many "abominable" customs and traditions with the "schismatics" (i.e. the Armenian Apostolics), outsiders were needed to redress all practices that did not conform to post-Tridentine orthodoxy.

Accordingly, Cittadini asked the pope for appointing a new archbishop to Naxiǰewan, who must be Italian and from the Dominican Order,[22] and at least six friars from the province of Lombardy.[23] He guaranteed that the journey was relatively safe and that the Armenian language was not that difficult and could be learned quickly.[24] As far as the spiritual and religious life of the diocese went, Cittadini

19 Cittadini 1621a, 5, 6, 9-10.

20 "Moltissimi errori aveva introdotti questo vescovo nell'oficcio divino, li quali con molta fatica ho levati. Non voleva che le 4 Tempore della Quaresima si facessero post primam Dominicam. Oh Dio, oh ch'errori!" (Cittadini 1616a; see Alonso 1970, 209-10).

21 "Pero quando vino este que agora està (i.e. Matt'ēos Miranšah) lo bolvio a introducir de manera que las mismas festividades y aiunos que nos tenemos tienen ellos y las observan de la misma manera" (Redento de la Cruz, Bartolomeo Maria di S. Francesco 1613, f. 1*rv*; see also Redento de la Cruz, Bartolomeo Maria di S. Francesco, 1614, f. 229*rv*).

22 Cittadini 1616a; 1616b; see Alonso 1970, 209, 215.

23 Cittadini 1616a; see Alonso 1970, 210.

24 Cittadini 1616a; see Alonso 1970, 209.

reassured Rome that he succeeded in "cleansing this Christian vineyard from all errors",[25] that is, he managed to re-established rites and customs in accordance with the orthodox Catholic doctrine, which in his view coincided with "the Italian custom":

> So much progress is being made here in the Lord's way that it seems to be in the early Church. […] Now, every morning, every friar unfailingly says mass, and the divine office is celebrated three times a day, according to the Italian custom […] and the whole people come to church three times a day. Every evening a part of the rosary is recited in chorus, and every Sunday, after lunch, Christian doctrine is taught to the children, which was very much needed. And now this is done in all the churches.[26]

Satisfied with his results, in 1616 Cittadini left the archdiocese to follow a military campaign of Shah ʿAbbas in Georgia,[27] and in 1620 went back to Italy after travelling to India and Persia.

3 The Founding of the Congregation de Propaganda Fide and the Mission of Gregorio Maria Orsini (1623-24)

Some forty years after the suppression of the *Fratres unitores*, another event occurred that increased the interference and meddling of Rome with the Armenian Catholics of the archdiocese of Naxiǰewan: the establishment, in 1622, of the Congregation *de Propaganda Fide*, which started a more aggressive missionary policy towards Eastern Churches, trying and mostly succeeding in centralising the administration and jurisdiction of missions. Two consequences should be stressed here. First, while in the past the representatives of the Orders (either regular or monastic) were given pontifical authority in spreading the faith among local people, Propaganda Fide claimed the right to oversee all missionary efforts (Atamian 1984, 131-3). Thus, the former *Fratres unitores* and now Armenian Dominican fri-

25 "Tota haec Christianorum Vinea ab erroribus expurgata" (Cittadini 1621a, 5).

26 "È tanto il progresso che si fa qui nella santa via del Signore che sembra una primitiva chiesa. […] Adesso ogni mattina infallibilmente ogni Frate dice Messa, et l'ufficio si celebra in chiesa all'usanza d'Italia […] et tutto, tutto il popolo tre volte il giorno viene alla chiesa. Ogni sera si recita a choro una parte del Rosario et ogni Domenica doppo il pranzo s'insegna la dottrina christiana ai putti; del che se n'era un gran bisogno. Et questo se fa per tutte le chiese adesso" (Cittadini 1616a; Alonso 1970, 209). See also Cittadini 1621a, 4-5, where there is a list of all the measures taken by Cittadini to revivify the local Church and remove liturgical abuses.

27 Cittadini wrote about this travel in his *Sincera relatione*, where he spoke in high terms of the Georgian Christians and professed his hopes to "make progress in those lands too as far as our holy Catholic and Roman faith is concerned" (Cittadini 1621b, [7]).

ars were now not only to show obedience to their master general, but they also had to report directly to the cardinals of Rome – and that after they had enjoyed almost two hundred and fifty years of virtually full and unquestioned independency. Unsurprisingly, their new condition left them discontented and made them feel under constant scrutiny. Secondly, as noted by Dziob, "missionary activities" as intended by Propaganda Fide regarded the Catholics of the Oriental Rite and their "dissident brethren" more or less as one and the same thing (1945, 50). Through the lens of the European-tailored orthodoxy ratified at the Council of Trent (1545-63), whereas the "schismatics" were obviously heretic, Eastern Catholics too were to be monitored and corrected for constantly being on the verge of heresy; their supposed "deviations" were to be suppressed in favour of a more reassuring and verifiable westernisation.

Thus, in November 1622, Cittadini, who in the meanwhile had entered the charterhouse of St. Martin in Naples and changed his name from Paolo to Angelo, was summoned to Rome, to inform the newly established Congregation of Propaganda about the state of the Armenian province and archdiocese of Naxiǰewan. In the General Congregation of 10 January 1623, the cardinals agreed on the following actions to be taken as far as the "Armenian mission" was concerned:

> 1. […] Fr. Gregorio Orsini [provisor of all the eastern convents of the Dominican Order since 1612, whom the master general would appoint as his vicar in Armenia for this mission] would be sent to Armenia. […] 3. A seminary would be established in Armenia [large enough to house] thirty students. […] 4. […] The newly appointed rector [of the said seminary] would promote studying as much as possible, especially Latin, philosophy and theology. […] 6. […] The Armenian archbishop [Matt'ēos Miranšah] would be summoned for an *ad limina* visit. 7. The general of the Dominicans would think of a fit vicar for the said archbishop, who is ignorant and simoniac. This order should not be disclosed so that the archbishop will not know of it.[28]

Only two of the six friars sent by Propaganda Fide managed to accomplish their journey – Gregorio Orsini and Ōgostinos Baǰenc' (who in 1622 was in Rome as the appointed vicar of the archbishop of

28 "Primo, quod in Armeniam […] mittantur […] P.r Ursinus. […] 3° Quod erigatur seminarium in Armenia 30 Alumnorum […] 4° Quod […] Rector […] studia quantum fieri poterit promoveat, praesertim latinae linguae, philosophiaeque ac theologiae. 6° Quod Archiepiscopi Armeni […] ut ad limina Apostolica veniat, committatur. 7° Quod Generalis praedicatorum cogitet de coadiutore idoneo pro dicto Archiepiscopo, quia ignarus est, et simoniacus, sed hoc decretum non publicetur, ne Archiepiscopo significatum efficiat ut venire ad Urbem contemnat" (APF, Acta 3, f. 26*r*).

Naxiǰewan, carrying some letters from him). However, Gregorio Orsini, who during the journey had his left arm severely injured by some bandits, already in 1624 wrote to Rome asking permission to go back to Italy, which he managed to do in the same year.[29]

In the meanwhile, in Rome, Angelo Maria Cittadini was asked by Propaganda Fide to leave the charterhouse and retake the Dominican habit so that he could be appointed archbishop of Myra with the right of succession in the see of Naxiǰewan at the death of Matt'ēos Miranšah. The appointment was ratified in the General Congregation of 30 April 1624, when the cardinals also decreed the establishment of a college in Goa for the education of the Armenian youth of Naxiǰewan and the sending of Dominican friars from Goa to Naxiǰewan for the instruction of the people and the local clergy.[30]

Notwithstanding the practical failure of Orsini's mission, the measures taken by Propaganda Fide reveal a clear agenda: local hierarchy needed to be overseen (and possibly substituted with western clergy) and the youth to be trained in a "certified" curriculum (Latin, philosophy and theology taught by western missionaries). Neither of these projects would be carried out in the immediate future according to the plans of Propaganda Fide. When, in 1627, Matt'ēos Miranšah died, Cittadini never managed to travel back to Armenia to assume his office as archbishop and in 1629 died in Yucatán, where he was raising funds for the establishment of the college in Goa.[31] Ōgostinos Baǰenc', whom the cardinals of Propaganda Fide knew well because of his previous travels to Rome, was appointed as the new archbishop in 1630, following his election by the local Armenian council in 1627.[32] Still, mistrust in the capacity of the Armenian local Catholic clergy to comply with orthodoxy did not vanish, as already in May 1631, just one month after Baǰenc' had travelled back to his archdiocese, Propaganda Fide sent yet another mission to Armenia.

4 The Mission of Paolo Piromalli (1631-34)

Piromalli was born in 1591 in Siderno, Calabria, and took his vows as a Dominican friar around 1610 at the Convent of Our Lady of the Annunciation in San Giorgio Morgeto. He studied in Naples and Soriano, and after 1628 left for Rome, where he became master of the novices at the Convent of S. Maria sopra Minerva. He was said to be proficient in theology, philosophy, logic, Latin, Greek, and a num-

29 See Orsini 1623a; 1623b; 1624.

30 APF, Acta 3, ff. 107*rv*.

31 See Alonso 1970, 97-132.

32 van den Oudenrijn 1936, 175-6.

ber of oriental languages, among which was Armenian.[33] On 31 May 1631 he was appointed by Propaganda Fide as prefect of the Armenian missions.[34] This was his first impression right upon his arrival in the Armenian Catholic archdiocese of Naxĭǰewan in April 1632:

> Talk to Our Holiness and tell him that Armenia is ruined: there are very few of friars, and they are ignorant, villainous, and disgraceful.[35]

What Piromalli found there and hastened to report to Rome "for conscience sake", was, in his words, an Armenian archbishop – Ōgostinos Baǰenc' – who lacked "apostolic authority", and a community of friars whose liturgical books included the "fancies of their predecessors [i.e. the *Fratres unitores*] and schismatic rites, to which they [i.e. the Armeno-Dominican friars] conform in their chants and services".[36] Their convents were

> full of women and of sons of friars, with no seclusion nor obedience; and [there are] a thousand words against Jesus Christ and his most Holy Incarnation, and [they say] that the pope is not pope *et alia innumerabilia*.[37]

Young seminarians, though some of them were brilliant, could not study, because they were forced to work in the fields for the most part of the year.[38] During the mass, Baǰenc' supposedly let priests sing songs and hymns from the Apostolic tradition.[39] As far as the laymen were concerned, several converted to Islam, and many left their first wife to marry another woman, "with the support of Mon-

33 On the life and works of Paolo Piromalli, see van den Oudenrijn 1936, 176-80; 1954, 1960, 68-9; Riggio 1940; Eszer 1973, 221-34; 1977, 196-210, 231-3; Amatuni 1974; 1975a; 1975b; Čemčemean 1991a; 1992; Longo 1999, 292-4; 2000; Busolini 2015; Halft 2017; Windler 2018a, 312-17; Lucca forthcoming.

34 Macrì 1824, 43-5; Piromalli left for Armenia a few days later, on 12 June 1631 (Busolini 2015).

35 "Raggionate con N[ostra] S[antità] e diteli, che l'Armenia è rovinata, li fr[at]i pochiss[imi] ignoranti, scelerati, pieni di scandali" (Piromalli 1632e, f. 322*r*).

36 "Devo per scrupolo di coscienza [...] avvisar le sig[norie] loro Ill[ustrissi]me, et Emine[ntissi]me, come [...] fa necessario rivedere li loro breviarij et missali, perche si giudica haver molte aggiuntioni secondo le fantasie d'Antecessori, e riti de' scismatici, alli q[uali] sono uniformi nel canto e nelle cerimonie. [...] Di tutto questo d[ovrebbe]e haverne autorità apostolica, mà io non la trovo" (Piromalli 1632c).

37 "Li con[ven]ti pieni di donne, e di figli di fr[at]i, non si conosce clausura, ne ubidienza, mille parole contro Gesù Cristo, e della sua SS. Incarnazione, e che il papa non è papa et alia innumerabilia" (Piromalli 1632a, f. 315*r*).

38 Piromalli 1632d.

39 Piromalli 1632c.

signor [i.e. the local archbishop]".[40] Moreover, Baǰenc' had a bad habit of opening and peeping into the letters addressed by western missionaries to the Apostolic See.[41]

Their sympathy was mutual. Baǰenc' wrote almost immediately to Rome that, upon his arrival, Piromalli "took over the convent [of Čahuk], dismissing its prior and [the] vicar general" by appealing to the pope's authority, and "forbade the friars from officiating according to the Armenian [Catholic] rite even outside the doors of the church".[42] He added that, while Piromalli stated that he had been sent to Naxiǰewan as vicar general, since he had no documents in his possession to prove such a claim, he had forged the necessary patent letter with the aid of another friar. Morevoer, the novices Baǰenc' entrusted him

> lasted only a few days and then started saying that they had nothing to learn from that teacher but arrogance, lies, falsehood and bad example in many things, especially in terms of keeping lots of money with yourself and spending on food.[43]

As if that was not enough, when Baǰenc' dismissed Piromalli from the convent of Čahuk "because he had made himself loathed by everybody", the Dominican lied to him, saying that he would go back to Rome, while instead he went "to Erewan [...] at the home of the schismatic Patriarch".[44]

As it is apparent from his life and work, Piromalli probably thought that – to the greater glory of God, the Church, and possibly himself – "schismatics" were worthy of more consideration. After all,

40 Piromalli 1632a, f. 315*r*.

41 Piromalli 1632c.

42 Baǰenc' [1632a], f. 271*r* (a copy of the letter was also sent to the pope, see Baǰenc' 1632c).

43 "Pochi giorni stettero, e cominciarono a dire di non voler andare da tal maestro, dal quale non haveano da imparare se non superbia buggie falsità e mal'esempio in molte cose, ma particolarmente in tenere denari in quantità appresso di sé e spendere al mangiare" Baǰenc' 1632c, f. 271*r*.

44 Baǰenc' 1632c, f. 271*r*; for other accusations against Piromalli, see also Baǰenc' 1632d. That Piromalli's visit to the catholicos had not been previously planned by Rome is apparent from a letter of 1635 where the secretary of Propaganda Fide Francesco Ingoli appears to mention it as something that he had not envisaged: "And since you happen to be with the said patriarch Philip, see to it that you learn the Armenian language, to be able to discuss with him regarding the union" ("E già che si trova presso cotesto Pat[riarc]a Filippo veda anche d'apprendere la lingua Armena per discorrere con esso dell'unione"; Ingoli 1635, f. 69*v*). As a matter of fact, in the same letter Ingoli encouraged Piromalli to settle his quarrel with Baǰenc' and do what he was sent to do – see to the instruction of the youth: "Vedrà in ogni modo d'accomodarsi col med[esim]o Arc[ivescov]o per attendere ad insegnar alla gioventù, perche fù mandata costi per quest'effetto" (f. 69*r*).

notwithstanding their liturgical abuses and their dubious traditions, Armenian Catholics were already under the jurisdiction of Rome. Armenian Apostolics, on the other hand, must have been to him like the evangelic "one sinner" over whom, if he would repent, there will be more joy in heaven than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.[45]

Thus, at the end of June 1632, when barely three months had passed since his arrival in Naxiǰewan, after exposing in his letters to Rome the "errors" of Archbishop Ōgostinos Baǰencʿ and possibly fearing retaliatory actions by him, instead of trying to deal with the situation at hand, Piromalli resolved to travel to Erewan and visit the prospective prodigal sons, "to study that language [i.e. Armenian] next to the Patriarch [i.e. Catholicos Movsēs III Tatʿewacʿi], [...] given the good disposition he saw in the said Patriarch and his Vicar the vardapet Philip, although they were schismatic".[46] Yet Baǰencʿ managed to have him back to Naxiǰewan by August of the same year, and kept him in prison in the convent of Apararer for twenty-two months, until June 1634, on account of his excesses. Nevertheless, after his liberation, instead of going back to Italy, as he was expected to do, Piromalli went again to Erewan, to discuss the union of the Armenian Apostolic Church with Rome with Catholicos Pʿilippos I Ałbakecʿi, former vicar and successor of Movsēs III.[47]

5 Conclusions

The clash between Baǰencʿ and Piromalli is arguably the most compelling illustration of the dynamic of mutual resentment and suspicion that would affect the relationships between western Dominican missionaries and the local Catholic clergy of Naxiǰewan well past the

45 That Piromalli might have seen his own mission among the Armenians through the lens of this passage from the Gospel could be inferred from one letter he wrote more than ten years later to the secretary of Propaganda Fide, where he likened the Armenian Apostolics to the prodigal son (Lk 15:11-32): "Perché il papa è padre, e questi sono figlioli prodighi. Il figliol prodigo stando ancora da lontano et inviato al padre, quel padre non l'aspettò sin dentro la casa, ma andò all'incontro" (Piromalli 1644, f. 259*r*). Moreover, even though Piromalli had been sent to Naxiǰewan with the primary task of teaching to the novices of the college, he had also been entrusted with the task of prefect of the Armenian missions, which enabled him to preach among the Armenian Apostolics and gave him quasi-episcopal jurisdiction over the mission territories. In the light of the superimposition Propaganda Fide often made between Eastern Catholic Churches and "schismatics", it is easy to see how Piromalli could indeed feel that the authority he was invested with by Rome was superior to that of the local archbishop, as Baǰencʿ claimed he did (Piromalli 1632c, f. 271*rv*).

46 Piromalli 1654, ff. 21*rv*-22*rv*.

47 Baǰencʿ 1637, f. 274*rv*; see also Piromalli 1637. On Piromalli's later missionary activity among the Armenians, see Lucca, forthcoming.

seventeenth century. The former would often treat the latter condescendingly, if not contemptuously; the latter would more than once complain about the missionaries and their attitude and style, claiming that they failed to understand the country. For example, according to Baǰenc‘, Piromalli dared to demolish a church in a field,

> where the people used to gather four times in the year to attend the Holy Mass […] and made for himself an Italian oven with its bricks, to the great scandal of all the Catholics.[48]

It is difficult to find another explanation for such an act of bravado other than showing who really was in command. Clearly Baǰenc‘ felt himself diminished, not only in front of his own flock, but also before the Armenian Apostolic clergy, as Piromalli travelled twice to Ējmiacin without informing him (let alone asking for his permission). Moreover, the Armenian clergy probably viewed their own latitude and authority reduced also by the fact that the missionaries sent to their diocese came from the Dominican order and that they must owe obedience to them both as envoys of Rome and delegates of the master general. In a letter that Baǰenc‘ wrote to the cardinals of Propaganda Fide in 1632, he did not hide his dissatisfaction for having to dismiss the Carmelite friar who had so far been carrying out missionary work in his diocese because of the arrival of the Dominicans posted by the Congregation.[49] Years later, in 1638, he asked again the secretary of Propaganda Fide for Carmelite friars to be sent to Naxiǰewan;[50] in 1643, he feared not to write to Rome that “the Italians [as the majority of the Dominican friars that were sent to Armenia actually were] do not bear fruit here because they are not able to accommodate to the customs of the country” (Atamian 1984, 141). That the question at issue was one of autonomy and authority is clear also from a letter that another western Dominican missionary wrote a few years before from Naxiǰewan, complaining that Baǰenc‘ wanted the provincial and missionaries sent from Rome to be subject to him.[51]

On the other hand, it is quite apparent whose side Propaganda Fide was on. Notwithstanding the letters sent by two other western missionaries in support of Baǰenc‘[52] and the (most probably forced) retraction

48 “Essendo una chiesa per la metà distrutta in mezzo d’un campo, nella quale almeno quattro volte l’anno concorreva il popolo, e si celebrava Messa, et egli la destrusse a fatto per fabricarsi un forno all’Italiana con quelli mattoni, il che apposto a quelli Cattholici grandissimo scandalo” (Baǰenc‘ 1632d).

49 Baǰenc‘ [1632b].

50 Baǰenc‘ 1638, f. 163*rv*.

51 Vitale 1641. On Vitale, see also Čemčemean 1991b.

52 Andrea da Madalone 1632a and 1632b; Biagio della Corte 1632.

that Piromalli wrote while in prison in August 1632[53], Rome seemingly did not enforce disciplinary measures against Piromalli on account of the "excesses" reported by Baǰenc'. In fact, when Piromalli, after his release from prison, retracted his retraction, the secretary of Propaganda Fide wrote to Baǰenc' asking him to take measures against the abuses he and his clergy were accused of.[54] Moreover, a few years later Piromalli was sent to Poland to settle the quarrels between the local Armenian community and its archbishop (which he did not manage to do) and, after Baǰenc' died in 1653, was elected as the new archbishop of Naxiǰewan against the resolution of the local Armenian council, which had chosen the Armenian Matt'ēos Yovhannēs instead.

Likewise, it is suggestive of the attitude of Propaganda Fide and the mistrust that Rome hierarchy had of the Armenian Catholic clergy of Naxiǰewan the fact that, notwithstanding what had been agreed upon in the above-mentioned General Congregation of 10 January 1623, the establishment of a proper Armenian seminary was never achieved neither in Goa nor in Isfahan nor in the province of Naxiǰewan. A college for the education of the youth would intermittently function in Aparan until 1724,[55] but already in 1644 the general chapter of the Dominican Order ordained that, after studying and taking vows in Armenia, the most promising Armenian novices should be sent to Rome to study philosophy and theology at the *Collegium Urbanum*, in order to receive an orthodox education before returning to their homeland as missionaries (Reichert 1902, 176-7). A new generation of Armenian clergy began to form that Rome would use as interpreters, delegates, and visitors to send back to Armenia and help western missionaries to check the orthodoxy of local clergy, friars, and parishioners, and proselytize among the Armenian Apostolics. As a matter of fact, in 1635 the secretary of Propaganda Fide wrote to Paolo Piromalli that the union of the Apostolic Church with the Church of Rome was "more important than the […] college".[56] Unsurprisingly, Propaganda Fide, while appointing the rectors of the college, did not send regular financial support and "never considered it financially worthwhile to support [it] with Cittadini's or other funds" (Atamian 1984, 141, 144).[57]

53 See Piromalli 1632b. Ironically, in this letter Piromalli wrote that he had been ill-informed about the state of the diocese by the same Carmelite friar whom Baǰenc' praised in his above-mentioned letter to the cardinals of Propaganda Fide for being an example "of the greatest edification" (1632b, f. 245*rv*).

54 See Ingoli 1635, f. 69*r*.

55 *Notizie dell'entrate* s.d. [3].

56 "E s'ella havesse qualche speranza di ridurlo alla med[esim]a unione, non si partirà da lui, perché ciò importa più, ch'il d[ett]o Colleg[i]o" (Ingoli 1635, f. 69*v*).

57 On the history of the Armenian college, see Čemčemean 1990b; 2000.

It is also telling that, in almost 230 years (1584-1813), only two Armenian Dominicans obtained the degree of Magister in Theology: Yovhannēs Dominikos Nazarean and Grigor Corcorecʻi in the 1650s.[58] If Armenian Dominicans came in handy as envoys and interpreters when Rome sought access to the palace of the shah, when it came to doctrinal matters, they could hardly free themselves from the burden of the "fancies" of their predecessors the *Fratres unitores*, as Piromalli had labelled their customs. Accordingly, Propaganda Fide trod carefully when entrusting them tasks that involved doctrinal issues or granting them jurisdiction and authority over the Armenian Catholics in the territories just outside the archdiocese of Naxiǰewan, for example those who lived in the region around Erewan (Atamian 1984, 151, 153).

The years during the 1610s, 1620s, and 1630s were thus formative for the attitudes and feelings that, like a karst stream, would often resurface over the subsequent hundred years in the relations between Rome and the Armenian archdiocese of Naxiǰewan. Two factors are apparent here. First, the accusations of doctrinal deviations and abuses raised by western Dominican missionaries were instrumental in developing a sense of mistrust towards the Armenian Dominican hierarchy of Naxiǰewan that would be embraced by Propaganda Fide and western hierarchy. Second, the contempt and condescension shown by many missionaries were a trauma to local clergy that persisted well past the seventeenth century. The exploits of Piromalli and his scornful attitude especially fuelled the resentment the Armenian Catholic clergy of Naxiǰewan felt towards the Dominican hierarchy appointed by Rome, marking their relations with western "outsiders". Suffice it to say that, still in 1711, to the great scandal of the Augustinian, Franciscan, and Carmelite missionaries in Isfahan, an Armenian Dominican friar named Grigor Guliar consociated with a certain Paolo d'Abraam in conjuring against the newly appointed provincial of Naxiǰewan the Polish Anioł Smolinski (who, incidentally, one year after would be removed from office by the local friars with the accusation of not knowing the Armenian language), and plotted to imprison him until he died, remembering what their brethren had done more than seventy years before to Piromalli:

> Fuit appud nos in nostra Provincia Armenie P[ate]r Piromalus tribus annis detentus in carceribus. Istum vero Provincialem nos tenebimus usque ad mortem, donec moriatur in carceribus.[59]

58 van den Oudenrijn 1960, 51. On Yovhannēs Dominikos Nazarean, see Čemčemean 1991b; 1993. On Grigor Corcorecʻi, see Čemčemean 1993, 63-70; see also van den Oudenrijn 1935, 53-5; 1960, 56, 234-6.

59 "We held Fr. Piromalli in prison for three years in our province of Armenia. But this provincial – we are going to hold him until his death, until he dies in prison". (Rai-

Abbreviations

ACSP	Archivum Conventus S. Petri de Galata (Istanbul)
Acta	Acta Sacrae Congregationis
AGOCD	Archivum Generale Ordinis Carmelitarum Discalceatorum (Rome)
APF	Archivum S.C. de Propaganda Fide (Rome)
Lett. volg.	Lettere volgari
Misc. div.	Miscellanee diverse
Reg.	Registro
SOCG	Scritture originali riferite nelle Congregazioni Generali
SC	Scritture riferite nei Congressi

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