

“He rose three hours after midnight: after an hour of mental prayer he recited matins and prime: said Mass and spent half an hour in rendering thanks: then retired to his cell for contemplation (unless people called to consult him) or to compose a treatise. He had compiled two grammars of Armenian, as well as a dictionary. Finally he read philosophy in Armenian to persons competent to understand. He began the practice of causing the brothers Shariman to meet in each other’s houses three or four times a week, when, counting outsiders who dropped in to listen, the numbers sometimes rose to fifty or sixty persons: two hours before the meal Fr. Elias, who kept rigorously to the rule regarding abstinence, would initiate a discussion on some mystery of the Catholic Faith, allowing anyone to express his doubts. . . .”

In a letter of 21.3.1685¹ Fr. Elias thanked their Eminences of the Sac. Congregation for dispensations to the Sarrati family to contract marriages within the prohibited degrees indicated, granted by the Pope and communicated by letter from the Congregation dated 16.10.1683; to the letter of Fr. Elias is attached in the Armenian language a profession of Catholic Faith signed by eleven persons of, or connected with the Sarrati or Shariman family.²

Of this notable race, of whom nothing now apparently remains to be seen at Julfa save a ‘Shariman’ gate, and ‘hammam’, a genealogical table has been made of such members as are mentioned in the archives consulted for the present work: and it is an appendix to this volume: possibly the Mechitarist monastery at Venice will have more complete information, or municipal records in Leghorn and Venice from 1700.

Another letter of Fr. Elias, 19.7.1686,³ asked Rome for a faculty for a house to be taken at Julfa

“at least for a hospice until a Residence could be made there with the sanction of our superiors. The Visitor General has refused, and indicated to us as a hospice, whenever we go to Julfa, the house of Fr. Lucas, the Armenian Dominican. . . .”⁴

These methods of Fr. Elias in making the Faith known proved more effective than preaching: daily the Catholic party among the Armenians grew: and, seeing this, the brothers Shariman decided to make for the Latin rite a second church at Julfa with a small convent, large enough to hold five or six Religious. On 18.12.1691 this new church for the Latin rite was opened by the title ‘Holy Patriarch Elias’ in buildings inherited by the Sharimans from progenitors. Finding that they had some money, about 3,000 scudi, left for some pious use several years previously for which they were trustees, the brothers applied it to the maintenance of the Religious in this new foundation.

Not having sufficient assistance from members of his own Order Fr. Elias took to help him a Religious of the third Order of S. Francis, a Frenchman named Fr. Cherubin in the service of the Bishop-elect of Baghdad, and started a more formal school, where in one year’s time more than 80 sons of leading Armenians in Julfa were studying, to the great increase of Catholic numbers. He began catechism for the men on Sundays, mainly attended by the poor, for afterwards in alms bread and a little money collected by the richer Catholics were given them: on Wednesdays there was catechism for the women.

In his MSS. *Vita P. F. Elia* Lay Brother Francis of S. Sirius relates how the Jubilee year was published and observed in Julfa. Fr. Elias preached in Armenian. On the second day there was a larger gathering and a procession of the faithful at the church of the Jesuits in

¹ S.R., vol. 495.

² On 20.5.1689 Fr. Elias forwarded to the Sac. Cong. a profession of faith of a vartapet, Michael (O.C.D. 236 a).

³ O.C.D. 237 h.

⁴ Besides the Visitor General, Fr. Agnellus, others found excessive the limit to which Fr. Elias went in accommodating the Shariman family:

“Our ‘Residence’ at Isfahan is closed neither night nor day: anyone entered the convent. The Armenians made it a ‘caravansarai, so that on certain days it was full of horses, and horses placed in front of the cells of the Religious. . . .”
26.10.1684, O.C.D. 237 k.