



CAIRO  
TO  
KABUL

*Afghan and  
Islamic Studies*

*presented to  
Ralph Pinder-Wilson  
edited by Warwick Ball and Leonard Harrow*



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## 15 THE ARMENIANS OF KABUL AND AFGHANISTAN

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Afghanistan, whilst predominantly a Muslim country, has been for many centuries the home for four<sup>1</sup> religious minorities; Jews, Hindus, Sikhs and Armenian Christians.<sup>2</sup> As far as the Armenians are concerned, though they appear occasionally in the annals of European travellers there has been very little attempt to write a systematic history of this remote Christian community.<sup>3</sup>

The Afghan Armenians acted as brokers for the overland trade between Europe, Central Asia and India for, as non-Muslims, they were permitted to take and receive interest on loans from Muslims. As active merchants themselves, they played a major role in the overland trade, having close links with fellow-countrymen in India, Bukhara, Iran (in particular, Julfa, the Armenian suburb of Isfahan) and the Ottoman empire.<sup>4</sup> However, with the rise of European imperialism in the 17th century, and the expansion of the East India Company, the

overland trade routes declined with the opening up of faster sea routes.<sup>5</sup>

It is not known exactly when the first Armenians settled in what is today Afghanistan. 19th century sources state that the colony in Kabul, which was by far the largest Armenian community in Afghanistan, was settled there by Nadir Shah Afshar (d. 1747) following his wars with Turkey in c. 1735<sup>6</sup> in order to stimulate trade in the empire.<sup>7</sup> Others say they came later, being brought to Kabul by Ahmad Shah Durrani (d. 1773) from either Mashhad<sup>8</sup> or Lahore.<sup>9</sup>

In fact Armenians had settled in Afghanistan decades before the conquests of Nadir Shah. In c. 1670 Jesuit missionaries in Agra learnt from Armenian merchants from Kabul that certain tribes of Kafiristan (now Nuristan) at one time professed the Christian faith. As a consequence, Benedict de Goës travelled through Afghanistan and from thence to China to ascertain the truth of these reports.<sup>10</sup> At the time the Armenian colony in Kabul was 'thriving',<sup>11</sup> which suggests that the community was already well established. By 1707 the Kabuli Armenians had obtained special privileges from the Mughal authorities, including 'complete freedom of movement, freedom from restrictions on dress, and reductions of various taxes'.<sup>12</sup>

In or around 1737 Nadir Shah resettled some 200-300 Armenian merchants in Afghanistan,<sup>13</sup> whilst Ahmad Shah (ruled 1747-1773) brought a further fifty

<sup>1</sup> V Gregorian, 1969, *The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan*, Stanford, 61 refers to only three religious minorities and omits the Sikhs.

<sup>2</sup> A number of other Christians lived in Afghanistan prior to the 20th century. During the 17th century some 12,000 Georgian cavalymen garrisoned Qandahar for the Safawids, Gregorian, 431, n. 67. In the following century, the Georgian Prince, Giorgi XI of Kartli, with a garrison of Georgian troops, also governed Qandahar for the Safawids. In Kabul in the 1790s, there was at least one Georgian called 'Bagdasir', G A Forster, 1808 (2nd ed.), *A Journey from Bengal to England*, London, ii, 92, 115. There was also the grave of a Georgian bishop, who died sometime in 15th/16th century on Kabul's Koh-i Asmayi, C. Masson, 1842 (reprint Delhi, 1997), *Narrative of various Journeys in Balochistan, Afghanistan, and the Punjab*, London, ii, 275. In c. 1808, there was a native of Constantinople, who 'professed the Catholic religion' who had lived in Kabul for 'ten or twenty years' and a Catholic priest of Greek descent in the same city; M Elphinstone, 1815, *An Account of the Kingdom of Cabul*, London, i, 266-7. The grave of an Englishman, Henry Khan, who had married an Armenian woman from Kabul, was located in the Armenian cemetery in Kabul, C Masson, *Journal*, 1 July 1832-14 July 1833, entry under 18 May 1833, British Library, Oriental and India Collection [hence, OIC], Mss. Eur. E163.11 fol. 19B.

<sup>3</sup> Gregorian, 61-5, has a short section; the best account is M J Seth, 1937 (reprint, New Delhi, 1992), *Armenians in India*, Calcutta, 207-24.

<sup>4</sup> Gregorian, 61-2; M J Seth, 1926, *Armenians and the East India Company*, Calcutta.

<sup>5</sup> Seth, *Armenians and the East India Company*. There were, though, other factors. Political unrest, following the break up of the Saffavid Empire, led to increased insecurity of the roads, in particular, Turkman raids on trading caravan in Iranian Khurasan.

<sup>6</sup> See L Lockhart, 1938, *Nadir Shah*, London, 75, 87.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Forster, ii, 87; I N Allen, 1843, *Diary of a march through Sindh and Afghanistan*, London, 312-3; A Burnes, 1834, *Travels into Bukhara*, London, i, 148; J A Grey, 1895, *At the Court of the Amir*, London, 209.

<sup>8</sup> J Wolff, 1835, *Researches and Missionary Labours*, London, 225-6.

<sup>9</sup> Forster, ii, 67; Seth, *Armenians in India*, 207; Masson, *Journal*, 1 July 1832-14 July 1833, entry under 5 June 1833.

<sup>10</sup> Seth, *Armenians in India*, 207; Col. Sir H Yule, 1916, *Cathay and the Way Thither*, vol. 4, Hakluyt Society, series II, no. XLI, 226.

<sup>11</sup> Gregorian, 65; Seth, *Armenians in India*, 222.

<sup>12</sup> Gregorian, 65.

<sup>13</sup> Allen, 312-3; Gregorian, 66.

families from Mashhad.<sup>14</sup> By the end of the 18th century, Armenians were living in Kabul, Qandahar and Herat<sup>15</sup> with trade connections with the Caucasus, the Central Asian Khanates and northern India.<sup>16</sup> In 1755, Ahmad Shah engaged Armenian gunners from Lahore, some of whom were skilled in the art of cannon casting.<sup>17</sup> These Lahori Armenians served as *Janissaries* in Ahmad Shah's bodyguard, accompanying him on military expeditions.<sup>18</sup> They continued to be employed in the same capacity by his son, Timur Shah (d. 1793), though by the time of his death they had lost much of their influence and fallen into penury<sup>19</sup> or drunkenness.<sup>20</sup> The position of these Armenian soldiers declined further in the following two decades as power in Afghanistan shifted from the Sadozai to the Barakzais.<sup>21</sup> Those Armenians still martially inclined, either returned to the Caucasus or found work as mercenaries—one Kabuli Armenian being employed as such by Ranjit Singh.<sup>22</sup>

The Armenian quarter (*mahalla*) of Kabul was located inside Kabul's Bala Hissar.<sup>23</sup> It consisted of a single street of shops, with at least one *sarai* situated on the north side of the main street behind the Jalalabad Gate.<sup>24</sup> In an alley to the left, in a *sarai*-style courtyard, was the Armenians' church, probably established in the latter half of the 18th century.<sup>25</sup> This 'small, dark building', which did not hold even one hundred persons,<sup>26</sup> was carpeted and kept spotlessly clean.<sup>27</sup> The altar, near the east wall, was located on a raised dais and separated from the congregation by a railing. On the altar were six candlesticks,<sup>28</sup> two small crosses and two copies of the

gospels.<sup>29</sup> On the east wall was an icon of the Holy Family, whilst on a small lectern outside of the altar rails, lay a book of daily prayers in Armenian.<sup>30</sup> In May 1832, Revd Dr Joseph Wolff preached in the church during his visit to the Afghan capital.<sup>31</sup>

Under the Sadozai Amirs, the Armenians enjoyed the protection of powerful individuals such as Wazir Fattah Khan and were accorded full rights as citizens of Afghanistan and religious toleration.<sup>32</sup> Later, under the Barakzais, however, they suffered periodic harassment and persecution.<sup>33</sup> After the middle of the 1820s the community did not have the services of a priest<sup>34</sup> but retained their Christian identity. The Armenians, however, adopted Afghan names, spoke Persian rather than Armenian,<sup>35</sup> and observed local customs by removing shoes and weapons before entering their church.<sup>36</sup> Their Muslim neighbours accorded them great respect and Armenians accompanied the bodies of Muslims to the cemetery, gave gifts at Nauroz and 'Id and received them during Easter and Christmas.<sup>37</sup> At Easter one of the local Armenian customs was to visit their burial ground and say prayers over the graves.<sup>38</sup> In May, the Thursday before

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they brought some of the sacred vessels from their church to Peshawar and manuscripts 'of rare antiquity', Seth, *Armenians in India*, 218-20, quoting from the *Englishman*, 11 Feb. 1907 (however, this date is wrong as no such notice appears in this edition of the newspaper). Until recently, two of the silver candlesticks were displayed near the altar of the Peshawar Mission Hospital church. In c. 1977, Revd Dr D Woodberry, then minister of the Community Christian Church of Kabul (an expatriate Protestant church) asked the Peshawar Mission Hospital Church to donate the candlesticks to the newly-built Protestant Church in Kabul. Fortunately they were not handed over, for the church was later demolished by the Afghan government, Revd Dr D Woodberry, *personal communication*, October 2000.

<sup>29</sup> In 1849, an elderly Kabuli Armenian, Yusuf Khan, arrived in Calcutta with some manuscripts for sale, including a rare copy of the Armenian New Testament. His asking price was too high and he returned to Kabul with the volume unsold, Seth, *Armenians in India*, 220.

<sup>30</sup> Allen, 311-2, they also had a copy of the Oxford English pocket Bible in the church and claimed to possess a prophetic book written by 'Meiden Nerses, Patriarch of Ech-Miazin', see, Wolff, 227.

<sup>31</sup> Wolff, 226-8.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Burnes, ii, 124; Elphinstone, ii, 266-7; J. Harlan, 1939, *Central Asia; a personal narrative of General Josiah Harlan, 1823-41*, ed., F E Ross, London, 66; Masson, ii, 244, 247; Wolff, 227.

<sup>33</sup> Allen, 313.

<sup>34</sup> Allen, 314; Seth, *Armenians in India*, 208.

<sup>35</sup> At the marriage of Dr Grey, his Armenian servant signed his name in the register in Persian, not Armenian, Grey, 44, 452.

<sup>36</sup> Allen, 316; Burnes, i, 150.

<sup>37</sup> Masson, ii, 246.

<sup>38</sup> Masson, *Journal*, 1832-1833, fol. 163, entry under 13, 14 April 1833, though Masson wrongly claims they were celebrating Ascension Day, which actually falls in mid-end May, or 40 days after Easter (see n. 40 below).

<sup>14</sup> Burnes, *Travels*, i, 148; Forster, ii, 87; Wolff, 225-6.

<sup>15</sup> Forster, ii, 115, 132-3; Masson is wrong to claim that: 'In Khandahar there are no Armenians or Jews,' *Private Notes of Mr Masson as drawn up from Memory*, OIC, Mss. Eur. B218, fol. 44.

<sup>16</sup> Gregorian, 66.

<sup>17</sup> Seth, *Armenians in India*, 207. The famous Zamzam gun, which featured in Kipling's, *Kim*, was cast by an Armenian, Seth, *Armenians in India*, 115-8, 128.

<sup>18</sup> Forster, ii, 87; Seth, *Armenians in India*, 115-8, 128.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Burnes, i, 149; Forster, ii, 87; Ganda Singh, 1959, *Ahmad Shah Durrani*, Bombay, 340; Wolff, 225-6; Masson, *Journal*, 1832-1833, entry under 5 June 1833.

<sup>20</sup> Elphinstone, i, 266-7.

<sup>21</sup> Burnes, i, 148-50.

<sup>22</sup> Wolff, 226.

<sup>23</sup> Masson, ii, 255.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, Allen, 312; Masson, *Private Notes*, fol. 32.

<sup>25</sup> Forster, ii, 186-7; Gregorian, 66; Grey, 209. It is not possible to state exactly when the church was built, but the influx of Armenians in the reigns of Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah would seem to be the logical point when the community was granted its own place of worship.

<sup>26</sup> Burnes, i, 150.

<sup>27</sup> Allen, 311-2.

<sup>28</sup> When the Armenian community was expelled in 1896 (see below),

the Feast of the Ascension, the Armenian women also celebrated the ancient festival of 'Mother of Flowers' (*Calkamor ton*).<sup>39</sup> Masson, records how:

... the females place rings or other trinkets in a vessel filled with roses and flowers, they sing hymns over it, and then as it were draw lots, by which they prognosticate good or bad fortune for the succeeding year—This is in imitation of the apostles who as they say drew lots to ascertain in what countries each should circulate the tidings of the Gospel.<sup>40</sup>

The Armenians of Kabul had their own graveyard, located, according to Masson, 'directly opposite the 'takia' or shrine of Shir Ali Lapchak'<sup>41</sup> near the shrine of Khwaja Khizr. Surrounded by Muslim burial grounds, this cemetery was encompassed by a low, dry stone wall.<sup>42</sup> Burnes noted several inscriptions, presumably in Persian, which confirm that Armenians lived in Kabul before the reign of Ahmad Shah Durrani.<sup>43</sup> One headstone, in the form of a mitre, indicated that at least one priest was buried there.<sup>44</sup> Unfortunately, though Masson sketched the 'Ziyarat of Kheddar',<sup>45</sup> he made no drawings of the graveyard or its inscriptions. In the portfolio of the war photographer, John Burke, taken in 1879, there is an image entitled 'Armenian burying place, tomb near Bala Hissar',<sup>46</sup>

which shows a low, walled enclosure encompassing some ancient trees and one or two unreadable headstones. Behind the graveyard is a burnt brick, domed shrine which is completely different architecturally to Masson's sketch of the shrine of Khwaja Khizr.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, neither Masson's drawing, nor Burke's photograph, bears much resemblance to the present-day shrine of Khwaja Khizr. Thus, so far, it has not been possible to locate the Armenian cemetery in Kabul.<sup>48</sup>

By the early 1830s, the Armenian community of Kabul, which in its heyday comprised some 500 people,<sup>49</sup> had dwindled to some twenty to twenty-five individuals; four male heads of households and their wives and children.<sup>50</sup> Due to economic circumstances, the Armenians relied increasingly on the distillation and sale of wines and spirits,<sup>51</sup> which were enjoyed by Muslim and Christian alike.<sup>52</sup> Thus when, in 1826 Dost Muhammad Khan became Amir of Kabul and banned the drinking of alcohol by the Muslim population, this was another body blow to a community already in decline.<sup>53</sup> The increased political involvement of the British and other European powers in the affairs of Afghanistan, however, meant that the Armenians were able to supplement their income by hosting visiting foreign Christians<sup>54</sup> and acting as translators for them.<sup>55</sup> This involvement with European imperialism expanded when, in 1839, the 'Army of the Indus' entered Kabul and placed Shah Shuja' al-Mulk<sup>56</sup> on the Afghan throne. During the period of the occupation of Afghanistan

<sup>39</sup> For the traditions of this festival see, J. R. Russell, 1987, *Zoroastrianism in Armenia*, Harvard Iranian Series, V, 375-8. In another place I have argued for a link between 'Mother of Flowers', another ancient Armenian festival, that of Vardavar, and the New Year festival of Gul-i Surkh, celebrated in Balkh during March-April, see J. L. Lee, *The New Year's Festivals and the Shrine of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib at Mazar-i Sharif, Afghanistan*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Dept. of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Leeds, September 1998, 168-79.

<sup>40</sup> In 1833 'Mother of Flowers' was celebrated by the Armenians on 22 May, Masson, again, mistakenly refers to this as the Feast of Ascension, Masson, *Journal*, fol. 20b, entry under 23 May 1833.

<sup>41</sup> Masson, ii, 274, but no such shrine is known to the present *mutawalli's* of Khwaja Khizr or Panja-yi Shah-i Mardan, but in the autograph the reading 'takia' is doubtful, see Masson, *Journal*, 1832-1833, fol. 12b, entry under 2 June 1833. In the autograph journal, Masson gives a different location for the graveyard, to the right of the road leading to the shrine of Panji Shah-i Mardan on the way to 'Killa Aga Yaqt', (a place which also appears to no longer be known), Masson, *Journal*, fol. 17b, entry under 3 May 1833.

<sup>42</sup> Burnes, i, 248-9; Masson, ii, 274-5.

<sup>43</sup> Burnes, i, 248-9.

<sup>44</sup> Masson, ii, 275.

<sup>45</sup> Masson, *Sketches and Drawings*, OIC, Eur. Mss E64, no. 120 [IOR Neg. 20861].

<sup>46</sup> *John Day Photographic Collection*, OIC, Photo 98/16; but another copy in the OIC merely reads, 'Tomb near Bala Hissar' *Curzon Photographic Collection 'Afghan War 1878-79'*, OIC, Photo 430/2.

<sup>47</sup> Burke's photograph bears more resemblance to one or other of the *gunbad*-style Timurid shrines which lie further down the Sher Darwaza hills, north and west of the present road to Panja-yi Shah-i Mardan. Given Burke's lack of local knowledge, it is possible he mistook one of these buildings for the shrine of Khwaja Khizr and hence his photograph is not of the Armenian graveyard at all.

<sup>48</sup> The shrine of Khwaja Khizr today consists of a single storied, mud roof building dating, at the earliest, from the 1920s, when the present *mutawalli's* family took charge.

<sup>49</sup> Gregorian, 430, n. 62; Seth, *Armenians in India*, 208, quoting from a letter of Amir 'Abd al-Rahman Khan to the Armenians of Calcutta, 1896.

<sup>50</sup> Wolff, 226; Burnes, i, 149 has 21 persons. A decade or so later, the community had increased to 35 persons, Allen, 312-3.

<sup>51</sup> Allen, 313; Burnes, i, 148-50.

<sup>52</sup> Masson, ii, 246. Fattch Khan (d. 1803), Wazir to Shah Mahmud Sadozai (reigned in Kabul 1800-1803 and 1809-1817), was more than a little partial to the Armenian wines, Masson, *Journal*, fol. 19A, entries under 17 and 18 May 1833.

<sup>53</sup> Burnes, i, 148-50; Masson, ii, 246-7; Wolff, 226.

<sup>54</sup> Burnes, i, 150; Masson, ii, 245; Wolff, 226.

<sup>55</sup> Masson, *Journal*, fol. 12B, entry for 13 July 1832.

<sup>56</sup> Seth, *Armenians in India*, 224, on the basis of a coin inscription attributed to Shah Shuja' al-Mulk which is mentioned in the *Tarikh-i Sultani* of Sultan Muhammad Khan, transl. J. Rodgers, 1888, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal*, LVII/1, claims that Shah Shuja' had an

by the British-Sikh army, two Armenian merchants 'were instrumental in procuring provisions' for the force.<sup>57</sup> The community, who had not had a priest for many years,<sup>58</sup> asked the British army chaplains to conduct baptismal services and on two separate occasions Revd G Piggott and Revd I N Allen, performed this sacrament in their church, using the Anglican rite.<sup>59</sup>

Following the British withdrawal in 1842, the Armenians' fortunes continued to decline. By 1847 another of their families had left and the community was reduced to twelve individuals.<sup>60</sup> In this same year, Dost Muhammad Khan's second son, Sardar Muhammad A'zam Khan, fell in love with one of the daughters of Timur, a Kabuli Armenian. Timur, however, opposed the union and, fearing the girl would be taken by force, the community appealed to Major Lawrence, British Political Agent in Peshawar, to intervene.<sup>61</sup> In response, Lawrence wrote 'privately and friendly to the Amir ... to request his interference on their behalf'.<sup>62</sup> Dost Muhammad Khan too, initially opposed the marriage, but by the summer of 1848 he had given his consent to the marriage, after having 'satisfied himself that the girl was willing'.<sup>63</sup>

Following the death of Dost Muhammad Khan in 1862, Afghanistan plunged into a bitter civil war. In 1867, A'zam Khan assumed the Amirship in Kabul after the death of his elder brother, Afzal Khan. He ruled less than a year, being deposed by another brother, Sher 'Ali Khan and fled to India, where he died shortly afterwards. In 1868, A'zam's son by Timur's daughter, Sardar Ishaq Khan, fled to Samarkand where he supported the claims of his half cousin, 'Abd al-Rahman Khan.<sup>64</sup> During the reign of Sher 'Ali Khan (1868-

1879) the Armenians again found themselves on the wrong side of the political divide. Their association, by marriage, with Ishaq Khan appears to have led to occasional harsh treatment. Seth even claims the Amir tried to forcibly convert them and turn their church into a mosque.<sup>65</sup> More certainly, we know that in c. 1870 several Armenians<sup>66</sup> were imprisoned and were subsequently released 'through the intercession of the missionary at Peshawar'.<sup>67</sup> It is likely, however, that this persecution was political rather than religious, for in this year the Amir imprisoned Ishaq Khan's mother, accusing her of fomenting disturbances in Kabul.<sup>68</sup>

The Armenians' association with the CMS missionaries in Peshawar, implied by their intervention in the case of Ishaq Khan's mother, was well established by the 1870s. The Peshawar Mission Report for 1870-71 states that one Kabuli Armenian had been educated in the Mission school and had a 'fair knowledge of English'.<sup>69</sup> It was probably this individual who later acted as translator for Dr Grey during his residence in Kabul.<sup>70</sup> The report continues that whilst the Armenians 'have not been able to make much effect towards the spread of Christianity,' on two occasions they had referred Muslim 'enquirers' to Peshawar and records how a certain robber, after an unsuccessful attempt to steal the church plate, had 'delivered himself up to the Armenians and begged for Christian baptism'.<sup>71</sup>

Following the fall of Sher 'Ali Khan in 1879 and the occupation of Kabul and Southern Afghanistan by British troops, Kabul's Armenians could be forgiven for thinking that their fortunes had turned. However, the reverse was the case. On 16 October 1879, the magazine in the Upper Bala Hissar exploded and all but destroyed the fortress' ancient bazaar,<sup>72</sup> its royal residences,<sup>73</sup> the

Armenian mother. However, the inscription, which declares the Amir to be the 'light of the eyes of Lord Burnes and the dust of the feet of the Company' (*mur-i dastm-i larid burnes, khak-i pai-yi kampany*) is a manifest forgery and doubtless struck by Shah Shuja's enemies.

<sup>57</sup> Lady F Sale, 1843, *A Journal of the Disasters in Afghanistan*, London, 58.

<sup>58</sup> Their priests were appointed by the Archbishop of Julfa, Seth, *Armenians in India*, 208. It may be that the mitred tomb in the Armenian cemetery was that of the last Armenian priest to minister to this community, see Masson, ii, 275.

<sup>59</sup> Allen, 311-5; Seth, *Armenians in India*, 222-3. Allen baptised by full immersion.

<sup>60</sup> Political Diary of Maj. G. Lawrence, 1-7 Aug. 1847, *Punjab Government Records, Lahore Political Diaries, 1846-1849*, vol. IV, 378.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*; Political Diary of Maj. G. Lawrence, 8-14 Aug. 1847, 4-10 June 1848, *PGR, LPD, 1846-1849*, vol. IV, 380, 498.

<sup>62</sup> *Id.*

<sup>63</sup> *Id.*; Political Diary of Maj. G. Lawrence, 30 July-5 Aug. 1848, *PGR, LPD, 1846-1849*, IV, 528. Two more sons of Dost Muhammad Khan expressed an interest in marrying two other of Timur's daughters, though nothing seems to have come of this, Political Diary of Maj. G. Lawrence, 13-19 Aug. 1848, *PGR, LPD, 1846-1849*, IV 537.

<sup>64</sup> J L Lee, 1992, *The 'Ancient Supremacy', Bukhara, Afghanistan and the Battle for Balkh, 1732-1901*, Leiden, 317-8, 340-1.

<sup>65</sup> Seth, *Armenians in India*, 223.

<sup>66</sup> 'Some Account of the Armenian Christians in the City of Cabul', Appendix to, *CMS Peshawar Mission Report, 1870-71*, extracts(?) of which are published in Seth, *Armenians in India*, 208, which says the Kabul Armenians consisted of 6 males and 12 females. However, under the census organised by Sher 'Ali Khan, the total number of Armenians in Afghanistan was put at 100 persons, see Government of India, 1895, *Gazetteer of Afghanistan*, part IV, 'Kabul', Calcutta, 360.

<sup>67</sup> Seth, *Armenians in India*, 209, from CMS, *Account, 1870-71*.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 208, 224. One Kabuli Armenian did provide occasional intelligence to the British Political Officer in Peshawar, see *Peshawar Confidential Diary*, 12 Feb. 1881, OIC, L/PandS/7/27, fol. 1401-3.

<sup>69</sup> Seth, *Armenians in India*, 208.

<sup>70</sup> Grey, 44. A photograph of Grey with this Armenian in native dress appears in his book facing p. 230. This Armenian accompanied Grey to England and acted as a witness at Grey's marriage. It appears he had relatives in London, Grey, 433, 449-52, 460.

<sup>71</sup> Seth, *Armenians in India*, 209.

<sup>72</sup> In the early 1830s there were some 1,000 houses and shops in the Bala Hissar-i Payin, Masson, ii, 255.

<sup>73</sup> With the exception, ironically, of Shah Shuja' al-Mulk's *Diwan Khana*, traces of which can still be seen today.



armourers' shops,<sup>74</sup> the Arinenian church and most, if not all, of the Armenians' private residences.<sup>75</sup> As one ninety-year old Armenian woman from Kabul remarked, the church 'built by a Mahomedan king for their use' had been 'destroyed by Christians'.<sup>76</sup> A few months after the explosion, *mujahidin* under Musk-i 'Alam took the Bala Hissar and plundered its bazaars.<sup>77</sup> On its recapture, the British dismantled what was left of the private houses, gardens and bazaars in the Lower Bala Hissar to make way for a new parade ground and a 'fine road'.<sup>78</sup> And so, within a matter of a year, this famous and reputedly impregnable fortress, lay derelict and abandoned.<sup>79</sup>

In 1880 the British forces withdrew, 'Abd al-Rahman Khan became Amir of Afghanistan and appointed Ishaq Khan as governor of Balkh. It seems that on his appointment some Kabuli Armenians, made homeless by the British, decided to seek their fortunes in Afghan Turkistan, for by the end of 1885 there were more Armenians living in Mazar-i Sharif than in Kabul. When the remaining Kabuli Armenians petitioned the Amir for permission to join their fellow-Christians in Afghan Turkistan, he ordered them all to move north and nearly 40 families sold up and left for Mazar.<sup>80</sup> At the same time, they wrote to the Government of India complaining about the Amir's rule, for he had threatened to confiscate all their goods and to expel them completely from Afghanistan.<sup>81</sup>

In the autumn of 1888 Ishaq Khan rebelled, but was swiftly defeated and he and members of his family living in Turkistan, fled to Samarkand, never to return.<sup>82</sup> In the aftermath of the uprising, 'Abd al-Rahman Khan inaugurated a 'Reign of Terror' unprecedented even in Afghanistan's blood-spattered history.<sup>83</sup> Amongst others, the Amir's wrath fell on members of Ishaq's family still in

the country.<sup>84</sup> Ishaq's maternal aunt, and at least two of her brothers, were living in Kabul at the time of the uprising. A third brother, Lucas A Joseph, or Sarwar al-Din Khan,<sup>85</sup> was in charge of the gunpowder factory in Jalalabad. Joseph was ordered to Kabul and put under house arrest. Shortly afterwards he, his brother, Badr al-Din, and another brother, were imprisoned.<sup>86</sup> Their mother, meanwhile, was confined 'in a very narrow place', and the rest of Joseph's extended family placed under house arrest.<sup>87</sup> A month later, the Amir expelled the whole clan to Peshawar and auctioned all their property.<sup>88</sup>

Sometime during the next eight years Lucas Joseph and his family, consisting of some twenty-one persons,<sup>89</sup> returned to Afghanistan, where he was reinstated as manager of the Jalalabad gunpowder factory.<sup>90</sup> In the same period, Lucas' first wife died, for in early 1896, Joseph, described as a 'widower with three motherless children, two boys and a girl',<sup>91</sup> left Kabul for Calcutta to find a new wife. He took with him a letter from the Amir addressed to the Armenians of that city, urging them to send 'ten or twelve families, men of education and some profession, to live in the Dominions of Afghanistan'.<sup>92</sup> Doubtless Joseph briefed the leaders of the Calcutta Armenians about the way in which the Amir had treated his family and tried to deter any of them from undertaking such a dangerous enterprise.<sup>93</sup> The Amir's iron rule also deterred any eligible woman from agreeing to become Lucas Joseph's wife.

In rejecting 'Abd al-Rahman Khan's appeal, the leaders of the Calcutta community couched their reply in carefully worded phrases. Whilst acknowledging, 'the high honour conferred on us' and promising to encourage Armenians to move to Afghanistan, they informed the Amir that regrettably, 'no families are likely to remove from

<sup>74</sup> J. Duke, 1883, *Recollections of the Kabul Campaign, 1879 and 1880*, London, 176.

<sup>75</sup> Duke, 176, 314; *Gazetteer of Afghanistan*, IV, Appendix C, cxliv; C M MacGregor, 1985, *War in Afghanistan, 1879-80*, ed. W Trousdale, Detroit, 108-10.

<sup>76</sup> Grey, 209.

<sup>77</sup> *Gazetteer of Afghanistan*, iv, 371.

<sup>78</sup> Duke, 168.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*; *Gazetteer of Afghanistan*, iv, 386 and Appendix C.

<sup>80</sup> *Kabul Newsletter*, 1 Jan. 1886, OIC, L/P&S/7/46, fol. 1190; *Trans-Frontier Journal*, March 1886, OIC, L/P&S/7/47, fol. 1428.

<sup>81</sup> *Peshawar Confidential Diary*, 13 Feb. 1886, OIC, L/P&S/7/47, fol. 1548.

<sup>82</sup> Lee, 507ff. In his autobiography, the Amir unjustly calls Ishaq Khan 'illegitimate' and his mother 'one of the women of the harem, and not one of my uncle's wives', Sultan Muhammad Khan, 1900, *The Life of Abdul Rahman Khan*, London, ii, 262-3.

<sup>83</sup> For an account of the 'Reign of Terror' see Lee, Chap. IX.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. The fate of Ishaq Khan's father-in-law, Najm al-Din, *Kabul Newsletter*, 14 Sept. 1888, OIC, L/P&S/7/55, fol. 480; C L Griesbach, *Memorandum on the Disposal of the Turkistan Prisoners*, 13 Aug. 1889, OIC: L/P&S/7/58, fols 147-9.

<sup>85</sup> Seth, *Armenians in India*, 212-3.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. *Kabul Newsletter*, 24 and 28 Aug., 4 and 7 Sept., 1888, OIC, L/P&S/7/55, fols. 19, 21-24, 189, 193; *Peshawar Confidential Diary*, 12 Sept. 1888, OIC, L/P&S/7/55, fol. 499.

<sup>87</sup> *Kabul Newsletter*, 25 Sept. 1888, OIC, L/P&S/7/55, fol. 619.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*; *Kabul Newsletter*, 3 and 9 Oct. 1888, OIC, L/P&S/7/55, fols. 691, 707.

<sup>89</sup> This would indicate that perhaps Dr Grey's Armenian interpreter was a member of the Joseph family.

<sup>90</sup> Seth, *Armenians in India*, 212-4.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, quoting from an English translation of the Amir's letter.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 217. In the end, the only persons who return with Lucas were two 'superannuated Armenians of the never-do-well class'.

here, for the reason that they are established in business and in the practice of their several professions, having also all their connections of kinship ... which they would be loath to sever.<sup>94</sup> They then appealed for the Amir to allow the Kabul Armenians to visit Peshawar to meet with an Orthodox priest and to permit the children of the Kabul community to study in the Armenian school in Calcutta.<sup>95</sup>

The Amir appears to have taken this snub badly, for less than a year later Joseph and his family were again expelled from Afghanistan. Stripped of all their assets, the impoverished Armenians arrived in Peshawar bearing the sacred vessels and manuscripts they had managed to salvage from the wreck of their church.<sup>96</sup> Abandoning all hope of returning to their homeland, many settled in Calcutta or Dhaka.<sup>97</sup> Some, though, settled in Peshawar and in 1907, Archbishop Sahak Ayyadian paid them a pastoral visit and, finding that their children had already been baptised in the Anglican Church, he confirmed them according to the rites of the Armenian Orthodox Church.<sup>98</sup>

The Peshawar Armenians attended All Saints Church where they sat together in one section of the transept and were distinguishable from the Punjabi Christians and Muslim population, by their distinctive clothing.<sup>99</sup> Amongst those who settled in Peshawar was Sarwar al-Din, or Lucas A Joseph. One of his daughters, Kathleen Arathoon, or Arathuniyan,<sup>100</sup> studied medicine at the Medical Missionary College in Ludhiana. Known as 'auntie Kitty' to the Christian community, she lived near the Mission Hospital with her sister,<sup>101</sup> Kinosit Hyripiet, or 'auntie Kinnie', who was a trained nurse-midwife. The passports of the 'two aunties' stated that they were born in Kabul of Armenian descent.<sup>102</sup> The two sisters are now dead, 'auntie Kitty' dying in 1999 at over one hundred

years of age.<sup>103</sup> Lucas Joseph's son, Paul Joseph, now also deceased, was Medical Superintendent of the Peshawar Mission Hospital from 1945-1958.<sup>104</sup> Dr Joseph's daughter, Mary Joseph, by his first (American) wife, now lives in England. His son, Dr Dennis Joseph, born to him by his second (Panjabi) wife, currently teaches at Edwardes College, Peshawar.

It appears, though, that at least one family of Kabuli Armenians either survived the expulsions of 1896, or returned to Afghanistan, and remained in the country until the late 1990s. In the spring of 2000, an Afghan refugee, Abil Armaniyan, son of Araj Manukiyani<sup>105</sup> and Mariyam, claimed to be of Armenian descent and that he had fled Afghanistan in 1999, following the persecution of his family. Abil's father, who died when he was four years old, originated from the Shor Bazaar area of the old city of Kabul, but later moved to Kot-i Sangi on the north-west side of the city. Abil states he is the last member of his family to leave Afghanistan, and claims that up to some fifty years ago as many as one hundred persons of Armenian extraction, were living in Kabul.<sup>106</sup> Given that his name and that of his family are Armenian, his claim appears to be genuine. If so, Abil and his daughters by his first, Armenian, wife, are some of the last representative of one of the most unusual Christian communities in Central Asia.

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 214-5.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 215-6.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 217-8. Seth blames this expulsion on the machinations of the Ottoman Sultan, 'Abd al-Hamid.

<sup>97</sup> Mr D Rowley and Revd Dr D Woodberry, *personal communications*.

<sup>98</sup> Seth, *Armenians in India*, 217, 219.

<sup>99</sup> Revd W Jukes, 1925 (reprint, Peshawar 2000), *Reminiscences of Missionary Work in Amritsar, 1872-1873, and on the Afghan Frontier in Peshawar, 1873-1890*, CMS, London, 8; Revd S Azgar, *personal communication*, April 2000.

<sup>100</sup> Possibly this was what the 'A' in Lucas A Joseph stood for.

<sup>101</sup> Or maybe half-sister, as in 1895 Lucas Joseph was said to have had two sons and one daughter by his first marriage. It may be that he did, after all, find another Armenian wife, once he had settled in Peshawar.

<sup>102</sup> Mr D Rowley, *personal communication*. Mr Rowley used to handle some of the aunties' affairs, including renewal of passports etc. According to him, 'auntie Kitty's' passport stated that she was born in Kabul in 1888.

<sup>103</sup> D Rowley, *personal communication*.

<sup>104</sup> Dr Catherine Ujager, *History of the Mission Hospital, Peshawar*, n.d. (photocopied publication in possession of Mission Hospital, Peshawar); D Rowley, Miss Mary Joseph, Miss Joy Arathoon, Dr J Shaw, *personal communications*, September 2000.

<sup>105</sup> Son of Safdariyan. Abil had three brothers (Azim Armaniyan, Safi Armaniyan) and two sisters (Rahima, Murmina). His first wife, who died in Herat in c. 1995, was called Maduna, her mother, Mayikurds, her sister (Abil's maternal aunt), Jamal Mayikhurd.

<sup>106</sup> Abil Armaniyan, *interview*, 8 May 2000.