

“than to go to Hurmuz, where they risked losing everything. Perceiving this, the Captain (of Hurmuz) sent after them, promising in writing not to force them to make purchases, nor to burden them with imposts. Trusting in his word, they returned (to Hurmuz). Later (they say), he did not keep to it: for which reason not only officials from the Indies and Portuguese, but all Franks, who till then had been esteemed men of their word and greatly respected for it in those parts have remained dishonoured in the eyes of Muslims and pagan heathen. With these and like complaints Persians and Armenians are daily going wailing to the Shah of Persia, and to the Khan of Shiraz, his ‘captain-general’, to whom for that reason two or three times the king issued orders not to allow caravans to pass, or ships coming from Hurmuz. In the Customs¹ at Hurmuz they cuff and knife vassals of the king of Persia, and without any cause killed a servant and relative of a Persian ambassador, who was on his way to the king of Spain, just because, as he went on horseback, he knocked against a Portuguese soldier, the road being narrow: forthwith the soldier thrust him through. They did not punish the murderer, who after a few days was walking about openly. The king of Persia resented this greatly, and told the Augustinian Fathers in Persia that they should have the soldier in question surrendered to him so that he could have him executed. They (the Fathers) replied that the Captain of Hurmuz was unable to do so, because the man had taken asylum with the Church. The Shah was indignant at this answer, ascribing it to their having small regard for himself, and said: ‘I should like to have the Franks, who come to my realms, killed and let the murderers take refuge in the mosques.’”²

“There is an ancient custom, based on a favour, which the kings of Portugal followed in respect to the Shahs of Persia, out of the friendly regard which they professed for them, viz.: things which used to come from India for the use of the household of the King of Persia were free of Customs.”³

“The king ('Abbas) complains that in Hurmuz in this matter they have subjected him to many insults and shown him scant respect, even breaking open and trampling under foot declarations under his own seal, in which he certified that the goods contained were for his own use:⁴ and this in the presence of his own servants, and with unseemly words. The Captain of Hurmuz did not want to allow in for him (the Shah) free of duty a present which the Mogul Emperor was sending him, and detained it in the Customs for the payment of duty, saying that it was not for the Shah. The Persian king learnt of this, and gave orders to his agents to leave it” (adding) “that he would go and ‘redeem’ it. Some months passed, and then the Captain had it sold publicly to meet the Customs duties. The Augustinian Fathers have told me that the Captain of Hurmuz knew that the present was for the King of Persia; but he acted in that way, because in *his* time of office⁵ the king had *deprived him of the island of Bahrain, which fell within his* (the Captain’s) *sphere of government*, and brought him much (wealth) from the pearl fishery there is there: and that that was the cause of the other disagreeable things he” (the Captain) “did to the Shah.

“What the King of Persia most resents is that, when ships arrive in Hurmuz from India, they (the Portuguese) take away from the merchants, his vassals, the heathen or Muhammadan boys and girls, whom some of them have purchased there for the king’s service, under the pretext of ascertaining their” (the children’s) “desires, whether they wish to become Christians. They” (the Portuguese) “put them” (the children) “in a convent, where by force of harsh treatment, and beatings (so the Shah says) they make

¹ Note that even this small island boasted a Customs-house as early as 1600, and doubtless previously.

² The custom of “bast”—asylum for a criminal, or fugitive from pursuit, under the shadow of a cannon; in the Shah’s stables; in greater mosques and shrines; was, however, well established in Persia (as it had been in Europe in the Middle Ages) in the next century, even if ‘Abbas professed not to recognize and tolerate it.

³ and ⁴ Early examples in the East of recognized Customs exemption from duty, and of “certified declarations”. But how many monarchs in 1600 or later humbled themselves to make and sign their own affidavits?

⁵ This dates the seizure of the Bahrain Islands from Portuguese control by Shah ‘Abbas’ satellites to in or about 1599–1604.