

“the Turks and Persians, and thus plagued by the raiding. It was only a few months since the Shah of Persia had taken it. The inhabitants of these lands live in tents in the open, fifty of them together, or more: they are rich in cattle and will stay 15 days in one place, then move on to another, as the Tatars do.

“On the road we suffered considerably in the matter of victuals because, as we were not accustomed” (to the way to do things), “and the Khan had ordered that we should be given all we needed, as they are wont to do for foreigners who come there with letters from” (foreign) “princes, we had not made any provision: and the country people did not willingly give us anything, nor would they sell it (although we had given instructions to the interpreters to purchase it), fearing lest the king and the Khan should punish them should they take money from ambassadors—so they call anyone whatsoever who is going to their king with letters from foreign princes—for they are obliged to supply them with food gratis. For this reason they were concealing all they had, and making excuses, saying that they did not have what was asked of them: so that the man from the Khan, who was our guide, was obliged to use the stick: and, although it be not an unusual or new thing for them, yet we could not bear to see it, but contented ourselves with that little we had—mostly a little rice and unleavened bread made of barley, and water: our companions had meat.

“On the 28th October we reached Ardabil, and halted at a hamlet three miles from the town. Weary of the difficulties that for the past eight days we had had over food, I sent Fr. Vincent with one of the Armenians to get ready some rooms in the hostelry for us, as we did not wish to continue further at the expense of the king, nor to take his men with us, because, besides suspecting that the Khan might have given them money to purchase provisions in the town of Shamakhi, for every one coin they spent on us they were wont to take four from the peasants, and sometimes came to agreement for a cash bribe and arranged that not even for money should anything be given.

“When the Khan’s man learnt that I had sent the Father to get the hostelry ready, he came with tears begging me not to do that, because, besides it being an insult to the king, they would put him to death, thinking that he must have been a bad guide for us on the journey. I answered him that I was sorry for his grief, but was unable to do less, since we had not come to take things from the peasants, nor to have them sticked, but had received from His Holiness our needs (in funds). Seeing that he was unable to cause us to change our decision, he went off at once to inform the governor of the town, who without our knowing it had a good house got ready for us. On the 29th we left for the town. Before our entry there met us 25 Persians on horseback, well equipped according to their custom and with good horses. One of them greeted us in the name of the governor, and said that they had been sent to accompany us. When we entered the town, I told our men to turn towards the hostelry, where the Father had made arrangements for us: those who accompanied us would not consent: we stayed arguing about it for a little, telling them that we were not ‘ambassadors’, even though we had letters for the Shah, but poor friars: they finally answered that in no wise would they endure it that we should do such an affront to their king, that they knew who we were, and that the hostelry was for traders not for the like of us. They conducted us to the house prepared by the governor.

“Ardabil is a fairly large and well-populated town. It is situated in a plain to the south of the Caspian Sea, abounds in streams of water, and in every sort of commodities of subsistence. It is not a stronghold, nor walled. This king of Persia recaptured it a few years ago from the Turks.¹ The inhabitants belong to the Persian form of their religion and are more fanatic than them because they keep the bones of that Sufi king who introduced their form of creed, which is different from that of the Turks, and from whom these Shahs of Persia are descended. He is buried in a very ornate mosque, called

¹ Ardabil and district was thus recaptured by ‘Abbas I from the Turks only between 1598–1606.