

The Shah arranged for servants and guides to accompany Fr. John Thaddeus, and an Armenian trader named Lucas was put in charge of expenditure and transport during the journey, on which the Carmelite Father was also accompanied by that Armenian Catholic or Uniat, the priest Khwajeh Shevelin: the foundation of a college in Rome for Armenian youths was one of their joint hopes for the outcome of this expedition. 'Abbas I had directed that they should travel by way of the capital of Taimuraz Khan, the Georgian subject-sovereign, on the death of whose wife the Shah had written letters of condolence: and according to the description left in a report by the Carmelite Religious the Armenian clerics and layfolk in the chief town of this chieftain conducted Fr. John Thaddeus in procession to their church, where they made a profession of submission to the Pope and Catholic creed, and where he afterwards celebrated Mass. Both here by Taimuraz Khan and at Darband by the governor (25.3.1611) the Carmelites were invited to establish branches of their mission.

It is strange that, in the words of the proverb 'once bitten, twice shy', Fr. John Thaddeus had not been warned by the experience of his brethren and himself in 1607 that, for the successful or early accomplishment of his mission, it were best to avoid venturing again inside Astrakhan, or within reach of Ruthenian malice. For that town was in greater confusion and partisan strife than during the anxious time he had passed there some four years previously: suspecting that the mission of the Carmelite friar was not genuinely one to the Grand Duke of Muscovy, but a pretext for machinations against him by the Shah with the king of Poland, and instigated by the Ruthenian schismatics, the governor, a certain Ivan Dmitrivich Forastin, confined him with all his company in a house, which was more properly a prison. In a written statement by the Augustinian priest N. de Mello, at that time living in Astrakhan, Fr. John Thaddeus was alleged to have been even tortured and by his own account in peril of his life

Julfa in order to transfer the spiritual and religious allegiance of the Armenian deportees to their new home in central Persia. A re-translation into English from the Italian and Spanish versions would run:

"We give Our royal order to the priests, monks, governors, grey beards, citizens, and leaders and pastors of the Armenian people living in the royal capital of Isfahan.

"The grace, favour and infinite compassion of the Shah-in-Shah grants you the fulfilment of your desire. Let those specified above know how between Us, the great king, and their Christian Majesties, particularly the greatest and highest throne in the world, His Holiness the Pope of Rome, and his Majesty the king of Spain, there exists the most perfect regard and friendship, and that between Us and Christendom there is unity without division or any dissension whatever. . . . We desire and deem it well to publish that all Christians, from whatever place and nation they may be, shall be at liberty, and for ever, to come and go, to abide and to trade in Our country.

"And because in the city of Isfahan, Our royal capital, many persons of every nation and religion congregate and reside in it, We desire for the convenience of the Christian folk to build here a very lofty and spacious church which, once it is finished and decorated to all perfection, We shall give to the Christians, so that they may say their prayers in it and perform the exercises of the Christian Faith and religion.

"To this end We have sent a person to His Holiness, to ask the Pope to name a prelate for the Fathers and Religious of the Christian Faith and religion, so that he may give directions for prayers and the Divine Office according to the use and rite of the Christian religion, and that We too may share in the merit of those prayers and religious exercises.

"Next, since there are a quantity of great stones, standing in the 'Three Churches' (i.e. Echmiadzin) at Erivan, and the buildings of the 'Three Churches' have remained altogether in a ruinous state, lacking the strength to remain standing through people having tried to excavate and extract relics, and similarly through the priests living at the place digging up the bones of the saints buried in that church, selling them to heretics and leaving the place in ruins, so that it is losing its great beauty and reputation, for that reason We command that the stones in question should be extracted from that place and brought to Our capital of Isfahan so that, when the (building of the) "great church is completed, they may be placed therein, and whenever the stones are brought to the capital all of the Christian Faith should gather together and go to meet them with the greatest delight and festivity.

"And so we command that all, together with you, Mir Shams, Wazir of our sovereign capital, and Muhub 'Ali, tutor of the young men in our palace, should replace the stones in question in the best place and that most suitable in your opinion: and that further you should summon one of our most talented royal architects, and that he should inspect together with you the place and site assigned for the said church, viz. behind the royal garden called Bagh-i-Zarishk [? sic], and make in wood (? on a table) or on paper the model and plan of the great church for the priests and 'Frank' Fathers: and it is Our royal will that you take Us to see it. After We shall have inspected it We command all officials and masterworkmen in our capital to assist in this construction, so that it may be perfect.

"It should be known that it is right to grant this favour to the Christians, so that they may be contented.

"Given in the moon of Sha'ban 1023 A.H."

The writer of MSS. *Hist. Miss.* in the early eighteenth century, Fr. Eusebius, with access to papers no longer to be traced, suggests that the stones in question included certain venerated because by tradition on one Christ had appeared to S. Gregory the Illuminator (it was kept covered with red cloth), others had formed the coping of the well in which S. Gregory was thrown. But, if the great church was to be erected in Isfahan itself, not at Julfa, it would seem that 'Abbas designed to add it as one of the show edifices of his capital.