

Fr. Dimas died in 1639, and there are few remarks on Shah Safi's own closing years to be observed in letters preserved. But here, from Shiraz, dated 16.2.1640,¹ is a different type of missionary, writing to the Sac. Congregation and praying that he be allowed to go to the Shah and represent to him some of the falsities of the Quran—Fr. Dionysius of the Crown of Thorns, a Belgian:

“. . . *This king is of a simple character, very different to his grandfather and predecessor*” (Shah 'Abbas), “*who was very crafty and double-faced. . . .*”

In 1638, of course, came the overwhelming descent on Baghdad of Sultan Murad IV with a great army—the numbers given in MSS. *Hist. Miss.*² are fantastic—over half a million—opposed by 160,000 Persian mounted troops.

‘The latter,’ states the account (no original report by Catholic missionaries has come to notice) ‘did not dare oppose the Turks, who laid siege to the city, 9.11.1638. The Persian garrison numbered 40,000. Many attacks were repulsed with bloodshed. But the walls were breached, and on the fifth day after the breach had been made, i.e. on Christmas Day, after fighting from sunrise till two or three hours before sunset the Turks got into the city and began to butcher those within. Mustafa “Capitan” Pasha, who first had entered to re-plant the Turkish standard on the city, obtained from his master withdrawal of the parole previously promised by the Sultan to some 25,000 survivors of the Persian force, and had them massacred, so that blood ran in torrents in the streets, only some 27 of the principal Persians being kept for his triumph. But the Sultan's troops had lost 40,000 killed in fighting, 20,000 by disease in the short campaign, and another 10,000 were wounded. The city was looted. In a letter sent to Shah Safi Sultan Murad threatened to come and find him, and not by himself alone, in the following year. . . .’

Thus came to an end the fifteen-year possession by the Persians of the famous Mesopotamian city, and with the change of sovereignty the work of Catholic missionaries became much impeded and checked; for, whereas the Persian administration was tolerant of European clerics, Turkish methods allowed of no church, which had not existed prior to Turkish occupation of Mesopotamia.

Like Baghdad, too, in its unquiet existence as a frontier possession, Kandahar was once more lost to Persia in this reign, re-occupied and suzerainty resumed by the Mogul empire of Delhi: it had been “traitorously” surrendered by a governor, whom Shah 'Abbas I had appointed.³ But Shah Safi was not devoid of martial spirit and energy in defending attacks, and he was about to march to regain Kandahar when he died.⁴

Between 1632 and 1634⁵ a Genoese merchant, Giovanni Cavallini, had left the Carmelites of Isfahan the sum of 400 scudi towards the construction of a larger and more ornate church, and by 1638 it was finished. It had four lateral chapels and a campanile with two bells, one of medium size, the other small, which were sounded day and night for the Office. (There were 6 cells “after our fashion with a dormitory: hitherto each one had been at a distance from “the other.”⁶) The Carmelites had been aided in this effort by the arrival of the ambassador from Poland, mentioned above, and, though they had eventually obtained a farman from Shah Safi permitting the erection, the missionaries thought to strengthen their position by asking the king of Poland to become ‘protector’ of this church of theirs. Before starting back for Poland the ambassador pressed for one of the Carmelites to accompany him as chaplain, and Fr. Melchior of the Kings, a native of Arras in Artois, was selected:

¹ *S.R.*, vol. 209, p. 68.

² Chap. 27, book 5. Wild exaggeration of estimates in figures is habitual still in Persia. One-tenth of the figures here given seems more probable.

³ See *Lettres écrites par le R. P. Bernard de St. Thérèse*, published by Monsieur Leon Mirot: letter of October 1642.

⁴ See letter of 17.1.1643 from Gāmburun, *English Factories in India*.

⁵ Fr. Dimas, letter of 14.2.1631 and subsequent letters.

⁶ Fr. Dimas, 31.10.1634.