

“affection for Christianity. When I passed by there, the captain was away and most of the men with the army, but I said to the lieutenant” (‘Naib’, no doubt), “that I would ask permission of my superiors to serve and instruct them in the Faith of Christ. He was very grateful for my offer and said he would consult his people and asked me to stay, but I had to leave that night. When I passed there it was Lent, and the women were keeping it and showing great dislike at having been forced to become Muslims. . . .”

Although it happened several years after the end of Shah Safi’s reign, here may best be included a mention of a later journey of the same Fr. Dionysius to investigate what Christianity survived in that part of Fars:¹

‘On 17.6.1649 he left Isfahan, accompanying the new Vicar Provincial, Fr. Dominic of S. Nicolas, who was proceeding to India, on part of the journey. They travelled together ‘as far as the village of Mayin’ (which lies to the north of the great plain of Ramjird). Thence Fr. Dionysius made his way twelve miles to Durudzan in the district of Ramjird: it was then also called Chirkisabad, from the Circassian inhabitants: there had been many families in the past, but in 1649 Fr. Dionysius found that only the name remained—all had been carried off by an epidemic except two persons: and the Persians said it was a punishment because the Circassians (Christians) had shot hares and drunk wine in a shady place, where there was a shrine of ‘Ali. (Perhaps Imamzadeh Isma’il was meant by the Carmelite.) ‘Similarly at Deh Shaikh, where there used to be many families, only one old man with seven or eight Circassian and Georgian women remained. For thirty years they had all been renegades in that district, it appeared: they did not despair of becoming Christians again but feared they might then be killed by the miscreants infesting that district’ (as they did still in the first quarter of the twentieth century). ‘One woman said that she clung to the faith of Christ. In the evening Fr. Dionysius climbed the pass to Dashtak, where he found to his sorrow that all the Circassians had been marched off to Kandahar’ (in Afghanistan now) ‘to swell the Shah’s forces for the siege. Crossing the mountain range into the district of Chahar Nahieh, the adventurous missionary, after losing his way and clambering with his hands and feet over stones, came down after nightfall to Malikabad and went on before daybreak to Palangiri, then the chief village of the district. Here, 1st July, a poor man with a mare took him across the river on its back: except for baptizing three dying infants he did nothing here: all he found were three old Circassians, and they and their women would not listen to his exhortations to return to Christianity. He learnt that in the Circassian villages, Adamabad, where there had been 49 families, Mashhad, Ramuzabad [*? sic*] which had 20 to 25 families in each, all the men were away at the war, while the women were keeping the Christian fasts and cursing those who had transported them there from the Caucasus. There were 20 families of Circassians at Khusruzar (*? sic* for Kushk-i-Zard) and others at Darabjird. The position was so unpromising that Fr. Dionysius turned back to Nizamabad, a Persian village where he was well treated, and thence marched with a caravan taking rice for their overlord to Isfahan, via Khusru Shirin to Yazdikhvast, where he chanced on an Englishman, who was kind enough to take him back to Isfahan. . . .’

The preceding recital will be further evidence of the widespread hurt inflicted by Shah ‘Abbas I with his cruel deportations *en masse* from the Caucasus of Christians, whom he had ‘enslaved’. It will also be a surprise perhaps to owners of villages in the districts concerned today to learn that Caucasians formerly inhabited them and farmed there: and it is conceivable that it may still be possible to observe traces of a different race in the types.

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¹ O.C.D. 235 d., a report attached to a letter of Fr. Stephen, 18.11.1650.