

“will your Reverence please have them sent to the Superior of our mission so that personally he can go and help and comfort these people? Let the order be firstly for them to be helped financially . . .”

Apart from the death of the noted Ruy Freire d’Andrade, evidently a prime mover in this scheme for their settlement, the reason for the collapse of the proposal in regard to Duba is given by Fr. Basil a year later, 15.11.1634,¹ in a letter to the Sacr. Congregation:

“The Viceroy gave” (the Mandaean) “the land for which they asked, at Dubba in Arabia in the Straits of Hurmuz; but when they arrived they found it occupied by Arabs except the fort, which was of no use to them, as they wanted to till land and live by it. So they remained in Masqat, and many returned to Basra. . . .”

Almost simultaneously with the suggestion by Fr. Basil that the Superior of the Carmelite missions should go to the ‘spiritual help’ of the Mandaean emigrants stranded on the Arabian coast, the Visitor General, Fr. Euphinius of S. John Baptist, still in Goa, had taken action:

“The Prior of Goa wrote me² that the Visitor had in mind to found a Residence on the Straits of Masqat at a place called Duba, taken by the Portuguese a few years ago from certain Arabs, and to colonize it with the Sabaeans, whom Fr. Basil sent to India.

“I do not know whether it would be an advantage to us, particularly because the Arabs are always fighting the Portuguese, and already in those parts the Arabs have recaptured many things and lands which the Portuguese had seized from them” (20.5.1634).

There was justification for the scepticism of the Vicar Provincial: and the sequel to this is to be read in a letter of Fr. Eustace from Isfahan, 26.9.1634:³

“Last December” (1633) “I arrived in Masqat in company with the head man of the ‘Christians of S. John’ and the other Mandaean who had gone with him to Goa, in order to take possession of the concession granted them by the Viceroy, i.e. lands sufficient for them to settle, and to transfer the rest of their race, which is scattered in Basra and elsewhere, as they had undertaken to do. The lands in question are on the seashore of the strait of Hurmuz, the chief place being called Duba, together with four or five other small ones. I was sent by the Visitor General to found a convent at Duba and stay and tend those ‘Christians’ in our Catholic Faith and little by little to purge them of their errors, which are not few, as far as I could see in the short time I passed and conversed with them.

“But, after all the trouble the Fr. Visitor took in negotiating with the Viceroy for these lands and when we thought that everything had been done and the business settled, on our arrival at Masqat to go and take possession, I found all the officials of the ‘king’⁴ of this country opposed to these people, and all that coast of Arabia at war with the Portuguese, the Arabs having already conquered a good part of it, chiefly Duba with all its district. So the Portuguese, being unable to carry on the war, came to make terms of peace with the Arabs, who remain masters of all the land conquered, and the Portuguese with the little that is left. Finding the country in that condition the ‘Christians’ (of S. John) were unable to enter into enjoyment of the concession made them, and I unable to execute that object for which I was sent. I stayed at Masqat three months in the house of the Augustinian Fathers. When after five months a reply came to my report to Goa, it was not that desired. For the Viceroy, seeing the Straits of Hurmuz in that state and peace also made, since there was no lack of lands in India to accommodate the Mandaean, summoned them to go there, where he could arrange for them better than in the Straits. But obstinately they declined to go to India and say openly that they will not go:

¹ S.R., vol. 135, p. 491.

³ O.C.D. 236 b.

² Fr. Dimas, Isfahan, 20.5.1634, O.C.D. 237 b.

⁴ Shaikh or Sultan is doubtless meant.