

REIGN OF SHAH 'ABBAS II (1642-1666)

ABBAS II, son of Shah Safi, had been born on Friday, 18th Jamadi I 1043 A.H.¹, i.e. early in November 1633 and, as he ascended the throne on Friday, 26th Safar 1052 A.H. = 26th May 1642, he was then not yet nine years of age.

He was not brought to the capital for many months. The MSS. *Hist. Miss.*² states, on evidence not cited, that:

“he made his solemn entry into Isfahan early the next year” (i.e. 1643) [“the Europeans “rode out nine miles to salute him,”]

remaining in the interval at Qazwin, always a favourite royal city of the Safawis: for, 14.8.1642, the Visitor General of the Carmelites,

“Fr. Charles of Jesus Mary, accompanied by Fr. Felix of S. Antony, set off from Isfahan “for Qazwin, about thirteen days’ distance, where the new king, Shah 'Abbas, was at that “time, in order to petition him for the confirmation of the royal ‘privileges’ granted by his “predecessor to our Fathers . . .”

(i.e. assignment of premises belonging to the royal domains for the Convent, and permits for their settling and movements elsewhere with liberty of the exercise of their calling). If his first entry into Isfahan was in fact “early” in 1643, he had left again later, for a letter of 7.11.1643³ from the convent stated:

“Three days ago the king, Shah 'Abbas, entered this city. . . .”

Generally speaking, from this reign onwards there was not the intimacy, or the frequency of direct negotiation between the Shah and European Religious at Isfahan (certainly not in the case of the Carmelites, and presumably in that of the other Orders) that had marked the previous half-century: and to that changed order several causes may have contributed, e.g. there was no longer a quasi-permanent state of hostilities between the empires of Turkey and Persia, nor were European sovereigns seeking assistance and diversions from the East against the Turks for the Fathers to be called in to assist as envoys and interpreters: for another ten years the Shah was to be a youth and stripling, who would not be likely to desire the conversation of foreign priests for enlightenment on European matters—here was a monarch who was content to leave policy and affairs of state to his chief Wazirs—while from this reign onwards the sovereigns appear to have been gradually hedged round with Court ceremoniousness and kept in a majestic aloofness, which rendered them less accessible to the people. Then—for the Carmelites in particular Pope Urban VIII, who had kept up his predecessors’ special interest in their mission and in his epistolary relations with the Shahs, died in 1644: with his successors they were not to the same extent ‘the Pope’s representatives’. Moreover, it must be admitted, with one or two exceptions and those spasmodic and ill defined, the Fathers in this reign failed to maintain the standard of correspondence of their forerunners or, indeed, to carry out the ‘Instructions’ of the Definitory General to report frequently and on all events

¹ This date is four years later than that given by Claude Barbin in his book of 1671, p. 171, *Le couronnement de Soleiman III*: “Soleiman nasquit l’an de l’Egire 1057, son père étant alors âgé de 18 ans . . .,” which would make 'Abbas II born in 1039 A.H. = 1629-30, and 13 years old at the date of Shah Safi’s death in 1642 (Friday, 26 Safar 1052).

² Chap. 18, vol. 4.

³ Fr. Dionysius of the Crown of Thorns, *S.R.*, vol. 62, p. 214.