

“owing to the Visitor General, Fr. Stephen, saying that our Superiors recommend the ‘Observance’ (being followed), mission work has been completely abandoned. He has ‘reduced it to an enclosure of monks, in which there is no missionary activity at all. . . .’”

Outside of Isfahan such a stricture was no longer applicable after 1652, at any rate: and that those Religious, who were in health, were not idle can be perceived from the remarks by the Visitor General, 18.11.1650:

“I have set Fr. Balthazar of S. Mary, with the aid of Fr. Peter of the Mother of God, ‘to translate the sacred Gospels’”

(unaware, no doubt, that this had been done already by Fr. John Thaddeus more than 30 years previously): and by 1653

“Fr. Peter of the Mother of God has translated into Persian more than 70 chapters of ‘S. Thomas ‘Contra Gentes’. . . .’”

Further, the formidable task that the Carmelites had set themselves in the linguistic field by their choice of stations needs to be emphasized and must largely account for the failure of all the other Orders represented in the area, as well as themselves, to make more headway. ‘Turki’ (not Osmanli Turkish) was the language of the Court and widely used at Isfahan and in the north: *Persian* the language of the people and at Shiraz: *Armenian* was required to teach the inhabitants of Julfa: *Arabic* for the Residence at Basra, and with Syrians: if a Religious were transferred to India, or to Basra, he needed more than a small facility for *Portuguese*, not to mention one or more of the Indian tongues. That was not all: to communicate with Chaldaean Syriac was necessary, the Mandaeans of Mesopotamia had a tongue of their own. Religious who were French, Flemish or Spanish by birth needed Italian for conversation and correspondence with their brethren. Not every missionary, even those trained in modern seminaries and colleges, is a born linguist: few could do expert apologetic or translation work, or preach usefully in even two of such difficult oriental languages, in addition to their own. With these Carmelites of the seventeenth century the only possible method of giving them a profound or even thorough knowledge of a pair of those languages, Armenian and Persian, Turkish and Armenian, and that they could know the oriental classics, the Quran, and be able to express themselves accurately in theological argument and preaching, would have been by keeping a Religious to one mission post or area and linguistic environment over five to ten years’ deep application to study, and from oriental teachers. But in the Persian mission, every three or four years or less, exigencies seemed to require the transfer of nearly every one of the Religious to a distant post with a fresh language problem; and the possibility of keeping up tongues previously studied must have been small. Some of the Religious were well aware of the deficiency (particularly when Vicars Provincial were appointed fresh from Europe):

“To” (try to) “look after the missions without knowing the language is a manifest self-deception: the experience of many years demonstrates that to us. When Fr. John Thaddeus and Fr. Dimas of the Cross ruled the missions, they knew the language and put their hands to the plough, the seed was sown and harvest reaped.” (He referred to conversions of Persians and Armenians by these Fathers.) “Some hamlets of Catholic ‘Armenians’¹ converted by Fr. Dimas” (i.e. before 1623) “sent for our Fathers to administer ‘the Sacraments to them, as Fr. Dimas had done, asserting that they were Catholics and ‘did not want schismatic priests. The (Carmelite) Fathers paid not the least attention—

¹ The hamlets seem to have been “in a district called Piria about 4 days’ journey from Isfahan, where there are many ‘Armenian villages, in which Fr. Dimas used to work: and among them there are some Georgians, who at a distance from ‘their own race and never visited by their schismatic priests have errors in baptism, etc.” (*vide* Fr. Dionysius, 15.5.1655). (There were still, 1935, Armenian villages in Piria, reported the Superior of the Catholic mission).