

There was, however, a darker side to Shah Sulaiman's personality and influence, as will be shown from accounts by eye-witnesses with a much larger, day-to-day, experience of affairs there than had Père Sanson or European travellers: from those recitals of contemporaries in this quarter of a century under review there emerges an impression of a deterioration from the autocratic but highly individualistic government of 'Abbas I and his grandson; and the venality of courtiers and officials begins to dominate, as it continued until the present century; while in cruelty Sulaiman equalled, if not surpassed, most of the Safawis who reigned. There are besides numerous indications of Muslim prejudices of the population being given that anti-European complexion which, if not altogether non-existent, did not have much weight in the first half of the seventeenth century, but which since have marked the life of the country till present days.

No warlike measures are to be noted in this reign, except for such secondary affairs as that of 1669:

“. . . the king of Persia has some business with the Uzbaks, who have been raiding, but
“there is no open war . . .”¹

and when, in a letter of 1.4.1682,² Bishop Picquet wrote from Abranar in Nakhchiwan of “the war started by the king of Persia against the Georgian”; while seven years later, 18.6.1689, Fr. Elias remarked:

“. . . There are not lacking disturbances on the frontiers by the Uzbaks and the
“Georgians, the former raiding and ravaging, the latter in union with Shah Nazar Khan,
“a Georgian prince, who has arrived from Muscovy and already subjugated a part of Turkish
“Georgia. . . .”

In the letters of Religious serving in Persia, that are extant, no reference has been observed to any special persecution of the Carmelites at Isfahan in 1667 or 1668, such as is alleged by one writer³ in the statement that a manuscript chronicle at Warsaw recounts:

‘in order that the Muhammadan persecution of the Discalced Carmelites at Isfahan should
‘be brought to an end, king John Casimir of Poland sent at the beginning of 1668 an embassy
‘with a letter addressed to Shah Sulaiman . . .’;

but Sulaiman had been some five years Shah when an indication of the measure of intolerance prevailing is afforded in a letter of 27.4.1671 expressing the hope:⁴

“. . . God grant that the news of the Portuguese force from Goa being due this year in
“the Persian Gulf to recapture Masqat” (be true) “for the present Persian government is
“greatly feared by all Christians, because the king is supine in governing, while the chief
“minister, 'Itimad-ud-Dauleh, is the sworn enemy of Christians . . .”:

and again: “. . . The present government is degenerating into being a tyranny.”⁵ A year and a half later⁶ the same Carmelite wrote more forcibly:

“Since this king” (came to the throne) “Persia has been a country where tyranny,
“opprobrium and persecution is the lot of Christians: would to God this were, to be exact,
“*in odio fidei* (in hatred of the Faith); but it is mainly from motives of avarice, and of rage
“against our uncleanness (as they call it), without alleging or making enquiry into the reasons
“why we are ‘unclean’. In this connection, a bishop or Vartapet of the Armenians having
“publicly become a Muslim, *from that time onwards* with one accord in the streets they call
“out after all Christians and Religious: ‘Dog! become a Muslim’: and the little children in
“the streets shout ‘Cursed be the Franks’.

¹ S.R., vol. 434.

² *Idem*, vol. 486, p. 20.

³ *Études Carmelitaines Historiques et Critiques*, 1926, p. 193.

⁴ Fr. Angelus, O.C.D. 236 i.

⁵ *Idem*, 28.4.1671.

⁶ *Idem*, 1.10.1672.