

Carmelites in Persia available to carry dispatches to Europe. But the colour afterwards given to his action by the Bishop of Isfahan himself was as follows:¹

“ . . . It happened that to the letters from the king of Persia there were added commissions of great moment with regard to the confederacy with the Christian princes against the common enemy, on account of which the king of Persia pressed the Archbishop of Ancyra to return (to Europe) with the replies, refusing to allow him to pass on to India unless he should fulfil his mission here. I was proposed, as having the same kind of function and thus possessing as it were the like authority for such an office. For, in order to forestall the ratification of peace the Shah had ordered the messenger, sent in advance to the Christian princes so that they should be forewarned of a bearer to follow later with the royal letters, to explain their purport and other business to be settled by his authority. But this messenger was robbed and stripped, his letters being carried off and kept back by the Court of Muscovy: and, if by God’s favour the negotiations for the alliance could have attained their objective and become effectual, it would have gained us the utmost goodwill and influence with the Shah and the Persian Court, making for the safer propagation of the Christian Faith. . . . ”

Elsewhere² he had written of himself as having come to Rome to represent:

“the very urgent needs of his oppressed Catholic flock, of all the Christians of Persia in danger, and of his own person, abandoned in the midst of such great hardships, which have obliged him, in order to seek the most efficacious remedies, to profit by the opportunity . . . to come to these parts with letters and commissions with which he has been charged by the king of Persia. . . . ”

Having appointed as his Vicar General Fr. Antonio Desterro, Prior of the Augustinian Hermits in Isfahan,³ he set off, 14.10.1699,

“having quitted Isfahan at a juncture of extreme misery for our Catholic flock, in order not to burden it still more I contented myself with very small travelling money, believing that I should be able to do the journey in six or seven months . . . ”⁴

He was accompanied by the Carmelite Fr. Antony Mary and some servants and by a Capuchin Father and Jesuit Lay Brother, and a Georgian

“nobleman named Gaspar, who had been deprived of all his property because of his courageous stand for the Faith, along with his son who was to be entrusted to the Sacred Congregation for education, and by some Armenian traders, impoverished and risking to lose their religion there in Isfahan, who helped me without any pay throughout the journey with the balance of their money, though in part I recompensed them out of the gift of 300 ‘ungari’ from his Majesty the Emperor. . . . ”⁵

Instead of taking the route via Baghdad to Aleppo or via Basra and then across the desert direct to Aleppo and Alexandretta, whence he would have reached Genoa or Marseilles in a few months, the Bishop of Isfahan chose to go by the long overland route through Muscovy, with the consequence that like his Carmelite predecessors on their first expedition and Fr. John Thaddeus later he became involved in serious trouble and long delay in that schismatic land. This journey of Bishop Elias proved to be a series of mistakes and fruitless halts from beginning to end, and in the case of an emissary entrusted with political negotiations and

¹ *S.R.*, vol. 543, *post* p. 200, 26.9.1702.

³ *S.N.R.*, II, p. 421, letter of Fr. Antonio Desterro, 5.4.1702.

⁴ *S.R.*, vol. 539, p. 298, Bishop Elias, Warsaw, 4.6.1701.

² *Idem*, vol. 541, p. 455, 13.6.1702.

⁵ *Idem*, undated, 1703?, *S.N.R.*, II, p. 348.