

After this pioneer work by the Carmelites in Baghdad and upper Mesopotamia during the period covered by the present chapter, which was the more encouraging because in previous decades residence as well as activities of Latin missionaries had been frequently interrupted or prevented by Turkish officials, there remains to be noted the situation of the Catholic units in the Armenian Caucasus and Tabriz, which was discouraging and indeed desperate. As regards Tabriz little is to be observed after the Capuchin mission reopened, following the earthquake and sack by the Turks. In 1738 Fr. Clement from Oleron was transferred thence to Isfahan to replace the dead Fr. Denys from Bourges: and in that year the physician Fr. Damian from Lyons was sent to Tabriz, though he was absent with the Persian monarch for most of the time. But in the province of Nakhchiwan Fr. Thomas Aquinas of Shiran in Alingia, Prior of one of the Dominican convents, on his way to collect funds, represented in Rome to the Sacr. Congregation, 16.6.1736:<sup>1</sup>

“in the wars between the Turks and Persians . . . the former after a great rout they “suffered” (doubtless the defeat of 'Abdullah Pasha Kupruli in August 1735) “returned to “vent their anger on the Christians, of whom they slew a great number, among them the “Dominican friars of that province, so that of seventy Dominicans that there were only “six remained” (elsewhere he was more precise—17 Dominicans had been killed together with many lay Catholics). “All the others having been, some killed, some put in prison “and carried off as slaves: and the Turks, not having stopped at that in their rage, destroyed “their convents to such an extent that of ten there had been previously only two remained “standing, and they carried away with them all the sacred furniture and other ornaments “of the churches. . . .”

It was in that parlous condition that, returning from Europe after his consecration, Archbishop Dominic M. Salvini, O.P., found his diocese and flock on his arrival in the autumn of 1736: he had sent in a report to the Sacr. Congregation to that effect.<sup>2</sup> An examination of the registers in the series *Epistolae ad Principes* in the Vatican secret archives showed only five Briefs issued to the Shahs of Persia from the beginning of the Afghan invasion, i.e. over the years 1722 to 1740: three were on behalf of the Dominicans: that of 18.7.1737 addressed to “Sak Nadir regi Persarum,” was worded (*Epist. ad Princ.*, vol. 106, p. 417):

“Pope Clement XII to the illustrious and most puissant Shah Nadir King of the Persians.

“Although the disturbed condition of everything in the famed kingdom of the Persians “has been such that it is not to be wondered that many things have happened there which “can by no means be held to have befallen in a peaceful state, yet howsoever that be held “somewhat of weight to excuse a misfortune suffered, to alleviate it nothing else than kind “acts of Your Highness can avail.

“It is to these, therefore, that the orthodox, members of the very religious Dominican “family, flee for safety. How cruelly in the previous years they have been harried there by “the raging hurricane of warfare is probably not hidden from Your Highness. Some of “them carried off by hunger, others perished by the sword, the rest, their houses burnt, “their fanes demolished and pillaged, the remaining ones wandering scattered and fugitives “live a life harder than any death, detained there only by Christian charity lest the Catholic “Armenians, whom they have been in the habit of instructing in the worship of sacred things, “should be wholly left without their help.

“But since they are unable any longer to practise so very wretched a mode of living, and “an immense anxiety possesses Us by virtue of Our supreme charge of the entire Christian “people, We recommend them most especially to Your guardianship so that they may be “able freely to fulfil the office undertaken long ago, and We entreat that You will be “pleased to revive with Your most powerful royal protection those same companions and “particularly their Superior Alexis son of Alexis and his associate Peter son of John, and

<sup>1</sup> *S.R.*, vol. 687.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, vol. 703, p. 433.