

## THE INTERREGNUM

FROM 1747 AS FAR AS 1780

STRICTLY SPEAKING, this chapter scarcely deals with the 'Mission' of the Carmelites in Persia: there were isolated and individual Religious residing in one or other of the Residences for a few years at a time, and the Order continued to designate as an entity—the Persian 'Mission'—missionaries sent out to Mesopotamia, to appoint Vicars Provincial and occasionally Visitors to this 'Persian' Mission; but the only living continuity among the Carmelites in the Residences was at Basra, nominally in the Ottoman dominions. The mother-convent in Isfahan of their Eastern missions was occupied by one Lay Brother till 1758: when Fr. Sebastian of S. Margaret quitted Julfa in 1752 in order to be consecrated bishop of the diocese he left, strangely enough, no Carmelite priest behind him there; nor in any other Residence in Persia, for the premises at Shiraz lay razed to the ground. True, there was Fr. Urban then working at Bandar Abbas, and that later at Kharg and Bushire buildings were purchased and erected, and useful work done over a decade or less. In illustration of the abnormal position in the supply of data and information thus created it may be mentioned that out of 142 letters of Carmelite Religious examined or used for this chapter only 8 were actually written inside the present limits of Iran, the rest in Mesopotamia or farther afield by members of the Order working in that area: the balance of the material on affairs in Persia, which is particularly copious, comes from non-Carmelite sources, from Dominicans and others. It is unavoidable, therefore, that conditions prevailing in Persia from 1747 onwards should be recounted in the words of these contemporary writers before the reasons for abandonment of the mission posts can be realized and judged. The period is treated by a number of European historians, some of them writing less than fifty years later: their presentation of the facts can thus both be used by the student to supplement the details here given, collated from a number of writers, and be detected, when incorrect or doubtful in the light of this evidence by intelligent European observers watching the scene of action.

"After the death of Nadir, commonly called Tahmasp, 'Ali Quli Khan under the name "of 'Adil Shah,<sup>1</sup> seized the sovereignty of the kingdom of Persia . . ."

explained to Rome Archbishop Dominic Salvini of Nakhchiwan on 22.9.1748;<sup>2</sup> but, nearer at hand and few months after the assassination, Fr. Sebastian of S. Margaret, Vicar of and writing from Julfa, 16.8.1747,<sup>3</sup> stated:

" 'Ali Quli Khan, his nephew, at present reigns under the title of 'Adil Shah: the noted "Fr. Damian, the Capuchin missionary, serves him as physician, and it is hoped that "under this new government the country and its subjects will breathe, as he has ordered "that for three years to come taxes should not be paid, nor any sort of excise. . . ."<sup>4</sup>

Archbishop Salvini's letter—news from Tabriz in August 1748—went on:

"Civil war has broken out at Tabriz, as also in the province of Erivan and its dependencies. . . . Ill content" (with 'Adil Shah) "the people of Tabriz proclaimed the

<sup>1</sup> Literally the 'Just Shah'.

<sup>2</sup> *S.N.R.*, V, p. 254.

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*, p. 201.

<sup>4</sup> That hope was extinguished. In 1746 the Jesuit Lay Brother Brazin replaced Fr. Damian: in 1747 the Father was back in the hospice at Tabriz, but before long he was badly beaten by thieves who thought he must have brought back treasure from the army, and after three days he died from his injuries.