

Finally it was 1763 when at long last Fr. Raymond was able to welcome two younger brethren of his Order in Fr. John Baptist de Bernardis and Fr. Vincent Ferrer Ricci, who reached Baghdad from Aleppo, 16.4.1763:<sup>1</sup> later in the year the Bishop of Isfahan remarked that

‘Fr. Raymond had written from Julfa that the number of Catholics remaining there did not exceed 25, and those were often decreasing by death, and marriage of the girls to schismatic husbands for want of finding Catholic youths, so that for so small a flock the three Dominican missionaries now there should be more than ample for the present. . . .’

But the Bishop had to his regret to announce<sup>2</sup> within a few months the death on 5.5.1764 of Fr. Raymond, “the last survivor of the former missionaries who had remained there”, and that

“Fr. J. B. de Bernardis had remained there alone, because his companion, Fr. Vincent Ricci, had previously departed to come here” (Basra), “I know not with what motive: I thought that on receiving news of Fr. Raymond’s death he would have been bound to turn back, in order to keep Fr. de Bernardis company. But it was not so: he decided to continue his journey and, having taken ship from Bushire, had the misfortune to die at sea in a boat near Kharg, where he was buried with all respect. . . .”

A letter of 5.10.1764<sup>3</sup> from Fr. de Bernardis gave more precise indications: “. . . buried near the Carmelite Fathers” (i.e. Fr. Urban); but he added hopefully,

“we have obtained from Karim Khan confirmation of the ‘farmans’ for the free practice of the Catholic religion in the whole kingdom of Persia. . . .”

A third death that year made the position more difficult still, for the Bishop also informed the Sacr. Congregation

“of the death, which occurred at Basra, of one of the two Armenian Catholic priests, who had left Julfa, so there only remains the elder one, an invalid and 60 years old. What distresses these Armenians in seeing me depart” (to Bushire) “is not to have anyone to whom to make their confessions, particularly the women, who can only do it in their native tongue. . . .”

Both Bishops of Isfahan and Baghdad at once did their utmost to persuade the Dominican Fathers, already established at Mausil since 1751, to fill the gap at Julfa, but in vain, the former writing to the Secretary of the Sacr. Congregation, 2.5.1765:<sup>4</sup>

“I beg your Illustrious lordship to send to Julfa a companion for Fr. de Bernardis, O.P. . . . not only for his consolation, but also because of all that might happen in case of his death. I wrote to Fr. Dominic Lanza, the Superior of the Dominicans in Mausil, begging him to dispatch one of those Religious of his, since he had more than sufficient. But I have had no success—if the Sacr. Congregation send Religious to Persia, it would be as well to advise them to take the route Baghdad–Hamadan, as being the easiest, safest and least expensive, because of the caravans of Persian pilgrims coming from and going to the tomb of ’Ali, situated in the territory under the jurisdiction of the Pasha of Baghdad, whereas, were they to take the route Basra–Shiraz in addition to the expense . . .”,

while Bishop Emmanuel of S. Albert in Baghdad, 5.1.1765,<sup>5</sup> stated:

<sup>1</sup> Bishop Emmanuel, *S.N.R.*, VII, p. 211.

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*, p. 275.

<sup>4</sup> *Idem*, p. 347.

<sup>2</sup> *S.N.R.*, VII, pp. 266, 272.

<sup>5</sup> *Idem*, p. 292.