

through there: in Gilan at Anzali, a port on the Caspian Sea, where the other Armenian graduate of the Urban College, Fr. John son of Isaac, was residing,<sup>1</sup> and where there were always Catholic traders from Astrakhan, Georgia and parts of Turkey on account of the silk trade, the numbers of Catholics at times reached thirty, and there was the more room to do good because there were few heretics: at Tabriz there was no longer any church, or Catholic inhabitants. The Armenian administrator ended by mentioning that his own occupation was to teach Christian doctrine, to give the catechism every Sunday, and do every kind of parochial duty. He was hard put to it to find means of subsistence, because he had to get his living by his own industry, and keep up the church as well; he had no income, nor anything but the alms from Masses. As, however, he shared those with the poor of his flock the total was insufficient, and at times he had to go without food and clothing.

It might, however, be noted that on 3.6.1775 and 6.7.1775<sup>2</sup> the Sac. Congregation addressed letters to two Dominicans, one of them Fr. Leopold Soldini, at Khui in the far north-west corner of Persia, and at Salmas, near lake Urmieh inside Persia on that frontier.

For the purpose of this work the archives of letters and reports received by the Sac. Congregation have not been explored beyond this date; but from the late Fr. L. Lemmens O.F.M.'s *Hierarchia Latina Orientis*<sup>3</sup> may be quoted the mention during the session of the Congregation on 21.3.1791:

“The news already had from the Vicar Apostolic in Constantinople and from the pro-  
“vicar of Baghdad regarding the *emigration of the Catholics from Persia* is now confirmed by  
“Fr. John son of Aratun, Administrator of the diocese of Isfahan, in a letter from Julfa  
“dated 30.11.1789. He says that the Persian Mission, at one time so flourishing, because  
“of *oppression by the tyrannical government* there has been reduced to the number of seven  
“Catholics only: all the rest have run away, or are dead. In this state of affairs he has  
“frequently asked advice and assistance from the Sac. Congregation; but, not having  
“obtained it, and being no longer able to exist there, he says that he has decided to abandon  
“the empty churches, and escape with the few Catholics who have remained to Baghdad.  
“Later, a letter has been received from Fr. Fulgentius of S. Mary, pro-vicar in Baghdad,  
“which informs us that the Administrator, together with his Catholics, has safely reached  
“Baghdad, where he thinks of settling. . . .”

It must have been after the death of Fr. John son of Aratun—and the date of that has not been observed—that the following undated<sup>4</sup> ‘summary’ regarding the position of the “Persian missions” was completed in the secretariat of the Sac. Congregation:

“At present the Administrator of that bishopric is the (former) Armenian student” (of the Urban College), “Fr. John son of Aratun, under the leadership of whom the few remaining Catholics emigrated from Persia and established themselves in Basra and Baghdad.<sup>5</sup> . . . He shows himself very well disposed towards the Sac. Congregation, and by his will has made it the legatee of all his possessions. Notice of his death has now been received.

“ . . . In Julfa . . . there are still some Catholics, and three Catholic churches which were left in charge of a Persian. . . . In Tihran<sup>6</sup> eight to ten Catholics have remained. “The church in Chahar-mahal has also passed into the hands of Persians. In Hamadan “there remain six poor Armenian families. In Shiraz, Bushire, Bandar ’Abbas, Gilan . . .

<sup>1</sup> According to *Lettere dalla Sac. Cong.*, No. 34, on 26.2.1774 Fr. John son of Aratun was directed to comply with the request of the Catholics in Gilan, either by going there himself, or by sending Fr. John son of Isaac, and 180 Turkish piastres were assigned for journey money.

<sup>2</sup> *Lettere dalla Sac. Cong.*, vol. 226, pp. 163–99.

<sup>3</sup> No. 10.

<sup>4</sup> But perhaps also after 1806, because parts of it are similarly worded to that below: it is in *S.N.R.*, I, p. 43.

<sup>5</sup> It cannot be too strongly stressed that the present Armenian communities of Baghdad and Basra, in Bengal and elsewhere in India were largely founded by the emigration from Julfa of 1749–60.

<sup>6</sup> Except for Shah Sultan Husain camping there, and temporary halts by Nadir Shah, this is almost the first mention of the modern capital, adopted by the Qajar dynasty.