

REIGN OF SHAH 'ABBAS I (c. 1587-1629)

FROM THE signing of this peace there was an interval of three or four years till the death of Shah Muhammad Khudabandeh, which historians have found difficult to date with certainty: and the internal history of Persia during that interval, and indeed for years following it, is particularly obscure. According to the writer of the article in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 10th edition, his reign had been distracted by intestine divisions and rebellion: the Turkish forces "again" (no date stated) invaded Azarbaijan and took Tabriz: Hamzeh Mirza, eldest of the three sons of the Shah,

"upheld his fortunes to the utmost of his power . . . and forced the Turks to make peace and retire.¹ On the east his *youngest* son, 'Abbas, held possession of Khurasan. Hamzeh Mirza also reduced rebel chieftains . . . but was stabbed to death by an assassin. . . . The stories originated (!) by Olearius that Hamzeh Mirza and a *second* son, Isma'il, each reigned a few months may refer to attempts on the part of the Qizil-bash chiefs to assert for one or the other a share of the sovereign power, but do not merit particular consideration.² On the news of the death of Hamzeh Mirza reaching Khurasan, Murshid Quli Khan, leader of the Ustujulu Qizil-bash, who had made good his claims to the guardianship of 'Abbas, at once conducted the young prince from that province to Qazwin, and occupied it. The object was evident, and in accordance with popular feeling. 'Abbas had been proclaimed king by the nobles at Nishapur some two or three years before this occurrence",

(i.e. before 1586, the date of Khudabandeh's demise being assumed as 1585!).

On the other hand Fr. Paul Simon of Jesus Mary, the first leader of the Carmelites, who arrived in Persia at the end of 1607 and by his residence at the Court and relations with those in a good position to learn details of what had happened only 20 years previously, stated in his long report after his return to Rome, 1608:³

". . . The King of Persia is called Shah 'Abbas. He was the *second-born*. Out of fear of his brother (*when his father was dead*) he fled into Khurasan, where he lived incognito and poorly, like a Darwish among the Tatars there. Some of the principal lords of Persia, partial to a change, offered him the kingdom. They caused his brother" (i.e. Hamzeh Mirza, or perhaps Isma'il Mirza) "to be killed by the barber, who cut his throat while shaving him; and they sent for this king" (i.e. 'Abbas), "who with the aid of the Tatars subdued many of the provinces which were willing to recognize him. To those lords, who had made the plot against his brother, he gave the lands and money which he had promised; then, at a banquet, he asked them whether his brother was a good king. They replied 'yes'. At once he had all of them decapitated, and he laid in ruins the district where had been born the barber who murdered him,"

(i.e. Hamzeh Mirza, or perhaps Isma'il Mirza, the other brother of 'Abbas: is meant, seeing that Olearius, in Persia by 1638, relates that Hamzeh was assassinated at the instance of

¹ Sir P. Sykes' *History of Persia* notes that Hamzeh Mirza in an attack in A.D. 1585 killed 20,000 of the enemy: 15 months later he inflicted crushing losses on the Turks, but was assassinated in 995 A.H. (A.D. 1587) by some of his familiars: that in 995 A.H. (1587) a battle was fought near Baghdad, in which Farhad Pasha surprised and defeated a Persian army, 15,000 strong, and the next year took Ganjeh. Turkey tried to lay hands on the provinces of Persian Iraq, and of Khuzistan.

² Clearly, Olearius is justified by Fr. Paul Simon, and the assumption of the *Encyclopaedia* writer wrong.

³ O.C.D. 234 b.