

There was a 'church' for the Franks there, too, also of planks, but fairly large and well-furnished, which was served by the Franciscans of Terra Santa, with whom the two Carmelites lodged for a week, saying Mass daily and marvelling at the liberty, with which the Franciscans could reserve the Blessed Sacrament and celebrate with open doors and ring the altar-bell.

It was only four short days' march from Alexandretta to Aleppo, but the road, hilly for the most part, was very rough and stony, and the countryside had been almost entirely laid waste and ruined in the recent warfare with the rebels, not a single dwelling being intact. The two Fathers found in Aleppo the Father Guardian of the Franciscans from Jerusalem, come to collect funds from merchants in Aleppo for the upkeep of his convent in the Holy City: they were introduced to the French and Venetian consuls, but did not disclose their destination or object of their journey, not even to a Venetian merchant and his boy, who actually travelled with them all the way to Isfahan.

Aleppo in 1608 was one of the most populous cities in the Turkish Empire: its inhabitants were reckoned at 200,000 souls, largely engaged in trade, every creed and race being represented, with the Venetians some 300 as the most important foreign colony, the French rather more in numbers, the English much less, all of them under the label 'Franks' most respected. The three consuls, when they went out of doors, did so with much pomp and ceremony,

"clothed in red damask gowns, with a guard of Janissaries, and accompanied by all their
"nationals: it was their duty to see that the latter were not ill-treated, and no tort done them
"over their merchandize: for which reason the nationals paid an impost of 2 per cent on
"all their goods to the consuls in question, so that the latter could keep up their position
"with dignity and splendour."

The city was situated on five hills, and was full of fine buildings, and mosques, three of the latter being particularly fine, with lofty cupolas. The castle or fortress, of ancient architecture, and stone walls encircled the city. For lack of a caravan to Baghdad the two Carmelites had to remain in Aleppo all February and till 7.3.1609, when the Venetian consul supplied them with mounts and a baggage camel, the Father Guardian with biscuit for the journey. All the way to Bir on the Euphrates the two Fathers were enchanted with the beauty of the scenery, yet sad to see fine gardens and vineyards all ruined and entirely deserted by human beings, as a result of the civil warfare: during the three nights on the way they had to sleep in the open; having passed the river by boat on the fourth day they were in Bir, a strong and strategic place on a hillock, the walls protected by the river. It was a key position for the surrounding country, and so with a strong Turkish garrison, which derived considerable profit from the large numbers of caravans and travellers. From dues collected the governor kept up six ferry-boats. At Bir the Carmelites were detained ten days (they noted that near by were camped a number of poor Indian traders from the district of Lahore): on S. Joseph's day, 19th March, they embarked on a raft floated on skins and for twenty-two days descended the river by the force of the current. The banks of the river were for the most part covered with thick bush, inhabited by bad people and wild beasts, particularly bears, but along them at certain parts were innumerable Arab shepherds living in black goat-hair tents, who in May each year, when the melted snows on the mountains send the river into flood, retired to the hills and after the summer returned. These people had for garb a shirt and an 'abba of wool woven in various colours: they all carried a bow and arrows and a goatskin of water, which served them both as a water-supply in the desert and as a means of crossing the river when necessary: for, tying in a bundle on the top of their heads their few items of clothing, bow and other arms, with the cloth they wind round their heads, and with the left arm keeping underneath their breasts the inflated waterskins, with the right hand they would strike out across the water with an amazing speed and agility and sometimes carry milk across. Not only men and women but also small girls would thus cross the river. The Fathers found it diverting that at points parties of these people would suddenly come out of the woods on the river bank, throw themselves into the water and swim in company with the raft for considerable distances. These Arabs were