

“execution they were tied back to back, a rope being put over their breasts which bound the two bodies, thrown on their sides on the ground. Afterwards each of them was again bound with a cord from the neck to the feet as tightly as could be. When they were in such case, the chief magistrate sent to tell and persuade them to make the profession of the Muhammadan faith—the ‘Shahadat’ or testifying to the Muhammadan religion. Yusuf answered: ‘Now it is time for dying and telling the truth. We have abandoned the Muslim religion and hold the Christian faith. Now, do what you will.’ When this answer had been given, the sheriff and lieutenant of police bade the people stone them. When seven or eight stones had struck Yusuf’s head, he said: ‘Throw what you will, it does not hurt me at all.’ When he said this, his skull was already fractured. Hearing those words, a porter took a heavy stone and, drawing near him, brought it down on his head, so that he did not speak again and died. The sheriff and lieutenant went, leaving orders for them to be burnt: and, when the fire had been lighted, they were burnt. And this is what I know as an eye-witness, it being agreed on all hands by the people that they had not said the ‘Shahadat’ (which is the Muslim symbol of faith) and had died infidels: and for that reason the sheriff and lieutenant of police forbade their being given burial and ordered that they be left for the dogs to eat. . . .”

After Alexander had been stoned, but before the other two men had suffered, on 16.2.1622 Shah ‘Abbas left his temporary residence outside Isfahan for the campaign against Kandahar, which his forces were already besieging,

“having given instructions that nothing should be done to us, but respect paid and that we should be allowed to say our prayers, giving it to be understood that what he had done he had been compelled to do. But, as we remained in the hands of officials and the king was so far away, they set a guard on us, asserting that it was by the Shah’s order. . . . We have remained following our Observance arranging that, as we could not go out to preach, we should preach to those who came to us. For we have gained a number of poor people and good Christians through the persecution which in prosperity would hardly have been the case. . . . The Augustinian Fathers are at present in great trouble: the guards wanted to turn them out of their house, solely because they (the Fathers) did not receive them with a little hospitality, or give them anything to eat.” (The Carmelites had no money, but handed over to their guards a mirror and a mule.) “This guard is more like a Mihmandar” (to us). “It is to the great glory of God to see the sentiments of the city in general, for all thought we had died after various kinds of torture. . . . We have our bells, as previously, and are very contented, as it right we should be. . . . We have a . . . district and 43 villages of Christians who had become Muslims. With this example” (i.e. of the martyrs) “they are all ready to die for Christ, and the Shah has ordered that everyone should live according to his own religious faith, and that their books be given back to them.¹ . . . We are now seeking money for food. This persecution has consumed a good deal, and we are much in debt to the relatives of the martyrs. . . . We can already send you relics of the martyrs, as much as you desire: *one body we have in the house, and part of the head of the other. . . .*”²

Despite their reclusion and straitened circumstances the Carmelites at Isfahan had celebrated “as best we could” the canonization of the Reformer of their Order, S. Teresa, and, directly they were able that autumn of 1622, they sent off Fr. Dimas of the Cross with a companion into the district of Chaharmahal to try and win back the 43 villages which as previously related had been forced into partial apostasy by the violence of the Shah in 1621. For seven months the two Religious led a life of missionary sacrifice: they did not enter houses for food,

¹ By these letters of 1622 the narrative of the Armenian Khwajeh Virdi, it would seem, should not be taken as meaning that the inhabitants of the 43 villages in 1621 had *all* returned to the Christian Faith: many or most, evidently, were still in the toils late in 1622.

² Fr. Prosper, O.C.D. 238^d, letter 10.3.1622.