

task than Fr. Basil, a typical example of the evangelist arriving from afar, with no coins and all his possessions on his back, and yet building up single-handed a flourishing mission post—his letters display some of his talents, and the romance of the mission at Basra can be read in detail in the other part of the present work: he was a Portuguese and therefore *persona gratissima* with his fellow-countrymen, seafaring folk who opened their pockets liberally to him. When in the following year, 1624, Augustinian Hermits arrived from Goa and disputed his right to exercise the office of parish priest on the ground that they held the commission of the Archbishop, Primate of the Indies, in whose jurisdiction they claimed Basra to be, it was obviously due in the main to the fact that Fr. Basil was himself a compatriot that little by little they acquiesced in his priority of arrival and his established reputation with the Arabs and trading visitors, and that before long they abandoned that field.<sup>1</sup> Of his energy in building gradually all the premises requisite for a Residence which would house four or five Religious and passing guests and travellers in addition, as well as a chapel, the narrative in his own words, translated in the other portion of this work, furnishes a full description, which need not here be repeated, and to which the reader is referred. Suffice it to emphasize that the Carmelite chapel acquired and opened in March 1624–April 1625 was the first Christian place of worship to be made in Basra, since the Muhammadan conquest at any rate, the site the first Christian settlement. Formerly there had been only mosques, and three synagogues of Jews: there were but half-a-dozen families of Nestorians, Armenians, Jacobite Syrians resident in 1620.<sup>2</sup> All the flourishing Christian population of the present day is of later growth. The Carmelite church at Basra merits, therefore, the reverence of all and doubly that of the Order, for it represents today its oldest Mission, which—except for gaps owing to wars, pestilence and expulsion—has functioned and seen Mass offered in a continuous history since 1624, the sole survivor of the extensive missionary province of Persia and the Indies and more than a century senior to the existing central mission in Baghdad.

The new Pope, Urban VIII, was particularly interested in missionary enterprise and it is on record that, acting on an offer made by Fr. Paul Simon, freshly elected Praepositus General of the Order,<sup>3</sup> to supply “five Fathers to propagate the Faith in Basra of Babylonia, and in “Babylon itself and in Arabia”, he decreed—*teste* a meeting of the Sac. Congregation of Propaganda on 16.1.1624—“a mission of Carmelite Fathers to the said places, and ordered “formal letters patent to be issued”.<sup>4</sup> The Pope too issued a Brief addressed to his “Beloved “sons the Discalced Carmelites setting out for Arabia” on 27.4.1624 (Arch. Vat. *Epist. ad Princ.*, vol. 38, p. 104, No. 501), the text of which is given in the Appendix of Latin Briefs. It would almost seem as if there had been an aim in Rome by both the Sac. Congregation<sup>5</sup> and the Order to establish a separate Carmelite mission for Arabia, centred on Basra—an intention which was anticipated through the dispatch by the Convent at Isfahan of Fr. Basil of S. Francis, and shelved subsequently by acquiescence of Rome in the Residence at Basra being regarded as a dependency of that Convent, a solution which in itself may have appeared natural with the Persian occupation of and suzerainty over Baghdad from 1623 onwards to 1638.

It was that Persian occupation, no doubt, which moved Fr. Prosper to write from Isfahan in his letter of 19.6.1624 that ‘if only he had the friars to send, he would have founded a house ‘in Baghdad’, and Fr. Basil on 9.5.1624 to discuss such a project, when writing to his blood-brother, Fr. Luke, in Rome. Further in connection with the proposal for such an extension of Carmelite activities to Baghdad there is included in the “Instructions” to Fr. Eugenius of S. Benedict, the next Visitor General, in 1624 from the Definitory General one that ‘he should ‘send from Isfahan four Religious, or at least three, to the mission at Basra, *recommended to us*

<sup>1</sup> *Vide* Fr. Basil, 11.4.1625, O.C.D. 241 g.

<sup>2</sup> In 1650 only three Armenian households, *vide* Fr. Matthew of SS. Joseph, 28.4.1651, O.C.D. 241 n.

<sup>3</sup> *Vide* O.C.D. 241 a.

<sup>4</sup> A photographic reproduction is given of this early ‘commission’ by the recently formed Congregation of Propaganda, one of the earliest extant perhaps, on the opposite page: it has the signatures of the first Prefect, Cardinal Ludovisi, and of the first secretary, Mgr Ingoli.

<sup>5</sup> *Vide* O.C.D. 284 g. “Instructions from Mgr Ingoli for the Discalced Carmelite Fathers, who will go on mission to “Basra in Babylonia.”