

“if it were possible from the money which the late Monsignor had given for the picture  
“of S. Gregory, etc., which remained at Naples, to recover at least the money which I lent  
“him, it would be doing me a great kindness. . . .”

The great picture of S. Gregory the Illuminator may, therefore, never have reached Persia at all. Something else, which did however actually arrive in that country (though too late for the two enthusiasts, in advance of their time, who sponsored its introduction, Shah 'Abbas I and Bishop John Thaddeus) was the printing-press with Arabic characters: it was presumably the first printing machine of any kind ever brought into Persia—an historical fact and date perhaps not without interest to 'literati' and journalists in twentieth-century Iran. It will be recalled by the reader that at the audience of Fr. John Thaddeus<sup>1</sup> in Qazwin in 1618 the Carmelite had

“presented to the king an alphabet in Arabic and acquainted him with the printing of  
“Arabic and Persian letters, about which he ('Abbas I) showed much interest and expressed  
“a wish to introduce it into his own country,”

and how Fr. John Thaddeus added in his letter:

“that it would be a great advantage to our Religious to have a set of type, and the Shah  
“has even charged me to procure it”,

(a statement confirmed by Pietro della Valle, who termed it an Arabic alphabet printed by Raimondo, with the letters enlarged four times the natural size—see his *Viaggi* under date, 8.5.1619).

That the Arabic type was accordingly obtained by the Order is demonstrated by the final clause of the 'Instructions' from the Praepositus General, Fr. Paul Simon, to the Visitor General, Fr. Eugenius, in 1624:<sup>2</sup>

“Your Reverence will give notice whether the ship, in which you will sail, will have to  
“touch at Malta . . . so that we shall be able to send there the Arabic printing-type and  
“other things. . . .”

Evidently, however, its dispatch was delayed until the journey of Frs. Dominic of Christ and Matthew of the Cross in the autumn of 1628; for the former, writing from 'the Desert of Arabia' (six days before reaching Baghdad) on 6.12.1628,<sup>3</sup> mentions that:

“It is 47 days today since we left the city of Aleppo. . . . The printing-type, which we  
“are bringing, costs us a good deal of money, as it is so very heavy, to such an extent that  
“one camel can hardly bring it. In the middle of the desert, according to what some  
“friendly persons told us, little was wanting for the printing-press not to go any farther;  
“because some officials of the 'king of the Arabs' ” (i.e. an Arab Shaikh) “came to levy  
“the dues which the caravans pay him, and at that time they are wont to have a look at  
“all the loads and merchandise. So, in order that they should not open up our loads  
“with the printing-type, it was necessary to give them 10 piastres; if they had opened it  
“and found the lead” (i.e. the leaden letters) “they would have detained it, and even  
“adjudged that we were carrying war material to the king of Persia, their enemy. So, to  
“escape that inconvenience, we thought it well to make them some present; and also little  
“wanted for a book containing the four Evangelists in the Arabic language to be sent to  
“the Shaikh of those Arabs.”

<sup>1</sup> O.C.D. 237 m., letter of 3.1.1619.

<sup>2</sup> O.C.D. 284 g.

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*, 237 c.