

“who keep watch over the eternal salvation of the aforesaid Catholics, are not less dear to Our heart, We commend them on that account in greater fashion to the supreme protection of Your Highness . . .”

while the latter, on 27.5.1690 (*Epist. ad Princ.*, vol. 79, p. 180) wrote:

“. . . Since it concerns the Roman Pontiffs in the first place to aid with every help and assiduity everywhere in the world the Christian faithful entrusted to their pastoral charge, We, who, although undeserving, by the appointment of Divine providence have been lately raised to the highest station of the Pontificate, in trying to fulfil the functions of the office committed to Us cannot refrain from begging Your Highness pressingly to ratify the privileges, which the distinguished king of the Persians, Your father, granted by royal benevolence to the Christians living in Armenia, and to be pleased to save them from the oppression with which at present those same people are assailed, even to the point of cruelty, by bidding Your officials there to observe integrally the aforesaid privileges. . . .”

That, notwithstanding Shah Sulaiman's letter translated above, the persecution of Christians continued in this northern province of his empire, in particular the economic pressure put on them to become renegades in order to preserve their poor possessions, may be judged by a further appeal to Shah Sulaiman at the end of his reign when, in recommending to him the successor of Mgr Sebastian Knab in the archbishopric of Nakhchiwan, Fr. Paul Baptist Hovannes, Pope Innocent XII's Brief of 7.6.1692<sup>1</sup> was worded:

“Illustrious and most puissant king, greeting and the light of Divine grace. Cleaving as We do to the solicitude with which Our predecessors, the Roman Pontiffs (in whose room We have been elected not by any previous deserts of Our own, but only by God's providence so ordering it) have gained from Your Highness's lavish kindness that the Christians in Greater Armenia should be immediately subject to Your royal control, We ourselves earnestly beseech of that same kindness that You will permit these very same Christians, who have been reduced to almost the utmost destitution to pay only that tribute which in past times they were wont to pay according to their ability, the present collector of taxes who is greatly detested by them being removed, and another more acceptable substituted. But, as the soldiers of the Khan of Nakhchiwan inflict very harsh vexations on the said Christians, We strongly desire You to bid them depart from the aforesaid province: and with Our feelings no less roused We set Ourselves earnestly to gain from Your Highness's broadmindedness that you will not allow those professing Christianity to be despoiled of their property to the advantage of their kinsfolk of another (religious) persuasion. Lastly We earnestly entrust to Your Highness's most exalted patronage Our venerable brother John” [? sic for Paul] “Baptist to the end that he may be enabled in all respects to fulfil the office of Archbishop of Nakhchiwan, which We have conferred on him owing to the virtues wherewith he is amply endowed. You will also do Us a great favour by making a special point of protecting from the plots and insults of godless men Father Stephen of the Order of S. Dominic, who is going out there with him to enter on the duties of the post of provincial” (i.e. of the Dominicans) “as well as the members of that same Order. It remains for You to welcome right kindly the aforementioned Archbishop of Nakhchiwan, who will hand You a certain modest pledge of Our goodwill. Meanwhile We shall not cease to ask continually of the Lord of Lords to grant Your Highness favourable successes and especially to show You the way leading to life.

“Given at Rome . . . the 7th June 1692, in the first year of Our pontificate.”

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<sup>1</sup> Arch. Secr. Vat. *Epist. ad Princ.*, No. 80, p. 186.