

“ . . . Already on several occasions I had written to your Eminence how in this town of Julfa, with the persecution pursued by the schismatics against the Catholics, with the excommunications fulminated against the latter and those consorting with them, with marriages prohibited between them, engagements already contracted with Catholics broken off and many other acts of violence on the part of both the secular and ecclesiastical authority, there still shines a more abundant hope of spreading orthodox faith: and how I had brought out a tract entitled ‘Paranetic Letters’ to induce them to embrace truth and charity. I also informed you how certain leading men of this Armenian community—five brothers of the distinguished family of Sarrat¹—had banded together against the insolence of the Vartapets and in particular of Stephen their suffragan bishop of Julfa, and renounced the schismatic communion and had summoned from Tabriz to direct a Catholic institution for their very extensive dependents the reverend Basil,² an Armenian doctor in theology, formerly a student in the Urban Seminary at Rome, and what opposition and trials with him they had to surmount on this account, the case being taken before the Muhammadan judge, in whose presence they confounded their adversaries and signally defeated them. . . .

“At the beginning of this month”³ (i.e. January 1682) “I came to live at Julfa and, joining the reverend Basil not only in spirit and counsel, but in my habitation also, in order that I might the more easily learn the Armenian grammar in which he is very skilled, and that I might assist his truly apostolic work, for which he cares not whether men hate him, persecute and say all sorts of evil against him, by virtue of his intrepid confession and preaching of the Catholic faith. For this he left Rome in the year 1670 and, having suffered almost continuously persecution in the East, came to Isfahan, where his very patrons, who summoned him hither, are suffering persecution.

“On the sixteenth of this month, since according to the old Calendar the Armenians

¹ Also called in his letter of 14.7.1683, “Sons of Sarrat and of Shariman” (italicized, Scerimani or Cerimani, in the correspondence).

² To this individual there are numerous references in the archives: (a) on 30.11.1668 Basil, Armenian priest, writes from Leghorn to the Sac. Cong. (b) On 10.9.1670 (*S.R.*, vol. 424, p. 12) the priest Barsagh, i.e. Basil, in Rome asks permission of the Sac. Cong. to hear confessions of Armenians and Chaldaeans. (c) 1671 (*S.R.*, vol. 427), “Basil Barsagh and John Hagop serve the Sac. Cong. as interpreters in Armenian.” (d) 26.2.1674. A minute in the Sac. Cong. to Card. Sforza regarding “Basil, formerly a student in this College . . . a man of the greatest competence and great utility to the Catholic religion. . . .” (e) 12.7.1682 (*S.R.*, vol. 487, p. 502), Bishop Picquet wrote of “Parsieg the vartapet, who was at Rome in my time, is now (spiritual) director of the house of the Sarratis. . . . Don Basil the Armenian came back from the Urban College in 1670, and since then had been in Constantinople, Erzerum, Tiflis and Tabriz.”

³ Another letter written a year and a half later, 14.7.1683 (O.C.D. 237 h), of Fr. Elias, though giving substantially the same story, contains a number of details of interest, e.g.:

“Five brothers, sons of Sarrat and Shariman, the richest merchants of Julfa, all having houses and families very full of sons, daughters, servants and employees, so that in apportioning the tribute and other taxes on the people of Julfa they had to pay 10 per cent, although now by privilege exempted from paying tribute . . . who had sent for a Catholic doctor from Tabriz, pressed me hard to join him, in order that I might learn the Armenian language with him, and aid him in teaching their children and instructing all their families on Catholic principles, in a house which they gave us. I did not neglect such a fine opportunity, and with God’s grace assisting our joint labours we made a chapel where he celebrates according to the Armenian rite (he had reformed the errors of the schismatic rite and introduced the observances of the Catholic), while I celebrated according to the Latin rite. [N.B.—Of Fr. Elias’ proficiency in Armenian Bishop Picquet wrote 25.3.1683 (*S.R.*, vol. 490, p. 252 *et seq.*) after his arrival in Isfahan: “There is a Discalced Carmelite Fr. Elias, who knows a little Armenian; but he is in the middle of the City: he is active and does what he can with the Catholic family already mentioned”: and, as to the value of “reform of errors,” Bishop Pidou, who presumably possessed a good knowledge of Armenian, stated, 22.9.1691 (*S.N.R.*, II): “. . . Since my arrival I have found many errors in the Catholic Armenian church, left to us by the ignorance of the late Armenian doctor Barsagh, i.e. Basil. . . .”]

“. . . A very severe persecution was stirred up against them” (the Sharimans) “on account of this charitable work . . . which they overcame, although not without some monetary losses. What they felt the most heavily in all their adversities was the loss of a daughter of Khwajeh Markar, the second of the five brothers, whom the king carried off together with another 26 women and girls on the Armenian feast of the Epiphany last past. They attributed it to the malice and diabolical policy of the Kalantar of Julfa who, enraged at being unable to get the upper hand, and at always remaining with his schismatic party defeated by our Catholics, bethought himself to cause it in part to collapse in a general public ruin by arranging that exhibition of all the women of Julfa, in the course of which he separated and pointed out to the king those might please him the most. This Kalantar—an Armenian Christian himself!!—did his best too to compel these gentlemen (i.e. the Sarratis) to become Muhammadans by accusing them of having changed their religion in making themselves ‘Franks’, as they term European Christians . . . although in order not to give rise to any pretexts they might devise about this name of ‘Frank’, I was obliged to withdraw from Julfa for some time. . . .”