

“to the Shah and his officials at inexpressible expense and laid before them our miseries, they have given us not the slightest relief. . . . This, therefore, we ask, Holy Father, that together with the Christian princes You will recommend us and our possessions to the Persian king by means of an envoy, pious and zealous for the Faith, who will come to us and, having seen with his own eyes our lamentable state, will make it known to the Shah and remain at the Court as agent for your Holiness. . . .”

That was dated 20.10.1699, and a postscript added that:

“another fresh ruination for our Christian religion overtook us on the 6th December of this year, when there arrived here a delegate from the Shah called in their language a *mumayiz* (i.e. expert or assessor) “to write down the names of all Christians, grown-ups and children, of the monasteries, the Religious and the traders . . . in future we shall have to pay double tribute. This intolerable burden will cause all the Catholics to flee. . . .”

Means of overcoming the utter insincerity and irresponsibility and venality of Persian administration under Shah Sultan Husain was lacking to all who had business with it: otherwise there was sympathy and understanding in Rome and, even before the appeal was issued, the Secretary of the Sac. Congregation had written on behalf of the Prefect, Cardinal Barberini, to Archbishop Paul Baptist of Nakhchiwan, 4.5.1699:<sup>1</sup>

“With sentiments of particular sympathy the Sac. Congregation has learnt from your lordship’s letter of the straits, in which the Religious and the other poor Catholics of that province are placed by the ill-usage they receive from the soldiery and other subjects of the Shah; but the Sac. Congregation is confident that such molestation must cease in a short time on account of the pressing representations which will be made to the king in the name of His Holiness by Mgr the Archbishop of Ancyra and by Fr. Conrad and by Fr. Felix Maria de Sellano, the Capuchin, who have been dispatched to the Court of Persia with letters and presents from His Holiness on the suggestion of the Sac. Congregation, in order to obtain divers favours for our Religious and the Catholics in those parts and also in particular for your Religious. . . .”

In Rome, indeed, the Holy See had not been unmindful of the appeal from Bishop Elias for definitely personal pressure, apart from Briefs, to be brought on the Persian Court, some sign from potentates in Europe of protest and dissatisfaction at the lengths to which the Shah’s eunuchs and officials had allowed the schismatic Armenians to go in harassing their Catholic compatriots and the European Religious. In this grievous situation, then, news arrived that the Sovereign Pontiff had instructed his own sister’s son to discuss various matters with Shah Sultan Husain: true, he was a Carmelite and an Archbishop, on his way to be Vicar Apostolic in the Mogul’s dominions.

“In a few weeks,” wrote Fr. John Bartholomew the Dominican from Julfa, 9.3.1699, “there is expected here Mgr the Archbishop of Ancyra on his way to India. They say that he is coming with the authority of a Commissary, and Apostolic Visitor. . . .”

This personage is of uncommon interest in these annals and for a full account of his family connections the reader is referred to the biographical section of this work (Fr. Peter Paul of S. Francis): suffice it to say here that, born a great noble, fifth duke of St. Elia, Don Ferrante Palma d’Artois, according to the family records a “very gallant nobleman, but very dissolute”, in 1672 suddenly changed from his wild life and announced his intention to become a missionary. It is true that already two of his younger brothers were at the time in the Order of Discalced Carmelites, a third a monk, a fourth an abbot, two sisters nuns and that his mother, who bore

<sup>1</sup> *S.N.R.*, II, p. 255.