

REIGNS OF SHAH TAHMASP II (SAFAWI) 1729-1732

'ABBAS III (SAFAWI) 1732-1736

an infant under the control of

NADIR SHAH (AFSHAR) 1736-1747

ALTHOUGH THE archives of the Sac. Congregation de Propaganda Fide contain a quantity of material covering this period of eighteen years in Persia and Mesopotamia, it is deficient in sustained narratives and historical data about the rapidly changing political situation on the one hand, and on the other hand in information regarding the activities of the Catholic Religious: it is no easy task to piece together the story of those years in either domain from those records and a consecutive story will not be forthcoming: from the Carmelites only some sixty letters and reports have been traced in the present search, but twenty of them (and most of these singularly uninformative) written by Religious working inside Persia—the rest come from pens of missionaries across the border in Mesopotamia. Among the latter was one laudable exception, who showed by his remarks his sense of duty in this respect, the pro-Vicar Apostolic (afterwards Bishop) of Baghdad, Fr. Emmanuel of S. Albert, e.g. on 15.1.1749:¹

“During the past three years, since I arrived back in this diocese, I can assure your Eminence that I have never let pass a favourable opportunity without writing in detail everything fresh that had occurred, both in this country and in Persia, and both what concerned the spread of the Catholic Faith and also regarding the revolutions in Persia; but, as I have only received three letters from your Eminence, one of 29th July the two others of 8.1.1748, this makes me think that many of mine have been lost by reason of the corsairs. . . .”

He, however, was away from Baghdad for 12½ years out of the eighteen now under review (even if three of those twelve were passed in Aleppo), so that his opportunities for regular reports were limited. Partly for the reason that he was so punctual with the intelligence he gave, partly too because of the compensation it provides for a lack of news about their posts in Persia, this chapter will include a certain amount of matter communicated by Mgr Emmanuel and his Carmelite missionaries regarding the initial struggles and adversities of the present Carmelite mission in Baghdad, and their pioneer efforts in other parts of Mesopotamia as far as Diarbakr; for, whereas the Residence at Basra till 1770 and later was an integral part of the Persian Mission, the missionaries at Baghdad and elsewhere in Mesopotamia were from the first independent of the control of the Vicar Provincial of Persia, and were ‘companions’ and assistants of the Bishop, or Vicar Apostolic.

There are other salient features about these eighteen years calling for an introductory query. If the missionaries in Persia of the five Orders (not the Carmelites alone) were negligent in reporting (or, to put the more favourable complexion on it, admitting that the number of their letters which safely reached Rome was fewer than in the past), on the other hand the failure for years together to ensure that endowment funds and allowances from Rome reached them and the bishops in Persia and Baghdad, the failure to send recruits to keep alive the convents and Residences, so that gradually the old men of 55 and 65 years of age died off and buildings remained untenanted and dropped to pieces, is all an enigma for the student—did the Sac. Congregation and the five Orders represented come to the conclusion that these missions were wasted effort, that the material in men might better be used elsewhere—was there a complete desiccation of vocations and eagerness for the mission-field in the East in

¹ *S.N.R.*, V, p. 266.