

“and which I received here in Isfahan on 13.4.1746, you were pleased to inform me that our lord the Pope and the Sac. Congregation has committed to Mgr the Archbishop of Nakhchiwan the spiritual superintendence of the city of Tabriz as Apostolic Delegate. As an obedient son of Holy Church I defer to your decision in everything. But with all that, as I have stayed there (in Tabriz) during the winter of 1744, and passed by there again last autumn, when I administered the Holy Sacraments and performed all ecclesiastical functions necessary in accordance with the decree of the Sac. Congregation de Prop. Fide held in the presence of the Pope, 8.11.1632, such delegation of Monseigneur” (the archbishop) “would not appear to have been necessary, except for the fact that, as he was in great straits in his diocese of Nakhchiwan, a province of Greater Armenia in the kingdom of Persia, there would have been no inconvenience in his being assigned some place of residence outside his jurisdiction under some title or other and—although in Tabriz there are only two Catholic families—there are great numbers of other Catholic traders who resort there and have need of spiritual assistance; and, as the French Capuchin Fathers have a residence there and for some years past already, as Fr. Damian from Lyons, who is the superior of it, has been with the Court, it is in need of staff, it would be appropriate, if your Eminence so judge, that this Residence be administered by the Fr. Prefect of the Capuchins of Georgia, for in that case it would be easier to provide missionaries and keep up the mission, seeing that the said Monseigneur” (Archbishop) “of Nakhchiwan left the city in question about one year and eight months ago. . . .”

The Sac. Congregation had been troubled by the question of limits of episcopal jurisdiction and administration uselessly, for the last of the line of archbishops of Nakhchiwan had left the region. Corroboration of this is given in a letter to the Cardinal Prefect from Mgr Dominic Salvani, O.P., himself, dated from Smyrna, 11.12.1746,¹ mentioning that from Aleppo already in May 1746 he had given notice

“of my quitting Greater Armenia, and of the loss of those few semi-villages² termed the diocese of the archbishopric of Nakhchiwan, the inhabitants having abandoned their houses and everything they have on earth in order to save their individual selves, seeing that the Despot,” (i.e. Nadir Shah) “exasperated beyond measure on account of continual rebellions, intends to lay waste those regions bordering Turkish territory, amongst others that of Nakhchiwan.

“After having killed all men of position, put out those eyes that saw well and sold their families to the soldiers, after having taken away from the community all their ploughing animals and removed all the grain for the army, he has turned to harass the people and fleece them with impossible taxes, which leave them as naked as worms, forcing thousands of young men into marriage with girls by cruel beatings of the bastinado till the toe-nails drop off, registering consent in such as did not want to marry because of differences of inclination or of rite and religion, and then dragging them off in troops and a promiscuous mass to Kalat on the farthest borders of Khurasan.³

“In such lamentable state are 54 of my Catholics. Therefore whosoever remained alive after these and other tribulations has fled from Persia, the greater part of my flock taking refuge in Smyrna and others in Thyatira, Adamish and Kanar, two days’ distance away from this port. I too arrived in Smyrna, 2.11.1746, where the Fr. Vicar Apostolic here tells me he has forwarded a duplicate of your Eminence’s letter by way of Erzerum to Tabriz. But to escape meeting Ottoman raiding parties I stuck to the road to Baghdad, and it did not reach me in the desert of Aleppo.”

¹ *S.N.R.*, V, p. 182.

² Such had been the wastage, since even as late as 1653 the archdiocese was estimated to number 4,000 Catholics.

³ For confirmation of this forced transplantation of Catholic and other Armenians to Kalat-i-Nadiri district, see Fr. Leander of S. Cecilia’s letter, 25.6.1747, to the Sac. Cong. (*S.R.*, vol. 733, p. 429):

“Your Illustrious lordship can also write to Mgr the Bishop of Isfahan and enquire about the number of Armenian Christians transplanted from all Persia by Shah Nadir, i.e. Quli Khan, to his province of Khurasan, these Christians being most numerous and deprived of any spiritual aid. . . .”