

“brother of our interpreter, who acted as interpreter of the said bishops: and it was a matter for remark to see two brothers contend together and answer, the one contrary to the other, to the questions of the prince, which were regarding the differences in religion. He made us explain the Creed, and the principal question was that of the primacy of S. Peter and the authority of the Sovereign Pontiff, which they obstinately repudiated and we maintained. After three hours’ disputing, standing in the sun, the Prince concluded by saying that, as he had sent to the Shah, his father, the letter from His Holiness together with the petition from the patriarch” (i.e. the schismatic Lazarus of Echmiadzin), “all would remain in their own faith until fresh orders, but no fresh persons might be accepted as Catholics. Immediately I had various true copies made of that order, and dispatched them to divers parts, particularly to Georgia, in order that there might be a truce to the persecution so violently excited there. I also dispatched a petition to the Shah (asking) that, notwithstanding the decree issued, we should be allowed the liberty we had always had, viz. any person whatsoever might come to our churches without being molested. The Messrs. Shariman did not spare expenditure and, having after much effort got access to the ‘king’, obtained another order for everyone to be free to frequent the churches and profess the Faith. On that three persons of some standing, who had handed in to the Armenian bishops that wicked paper, withdrew it, but not without difficulty, thus effacing the scandal caused: and they made to me their act of abjuration. . .”

“Another time” (i.e. later on, and after the return of the bishop to Julfa—several months later, in fact from the summer of 1740), “taken off by the same police agent to Isfahan, I was forced to go and assist in the translation which the Shah had ordered to be made into Persian of the holy Gospels, along with some other missionary in turn from each of the Orders which are here. The Quran is also being translated: and with a great deal of trouble to all concerned on account of the distance of the place—more than half a league away¹—and last summer (it was) each morning and evening, and this autumn in the morning only, but until after midday: and always we have to do the journey on foot because of the impossibility of taking a carriage. I have been obliged to incur many expenses for the reason that one and all in these countries want to be given presents: and it is very difficult to find anyone who will lend any money at all.

“The Armenian bishops and priests have also been assisting in the translation of the Gospel, which is made from the translation in Arabic of our Vulgate, which the Armenians also accept, not from any spirit of obedience or respect for Holy Church, but in order to avoid differences of translation between their Armenian version and our Vulgate. Difficulties are continually being made by the ‘Turks’,² and it is necessary to answer them very carefully, because they do everything they can to defeat and undermine the holy Gospel and to extract from it texts to favour the Quran and deny the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“All are apprehensive of what may be the outcome of this translation. Some say that, when the Shah has returned from the war against the Uzbek Tatars, he will summon the heads of the” (religious) “law of every creed so that they may hold a public disputation and form a new (religious) law. Others say that, as a result of repeated complaints by the schismatic Armenians against the Catholics, he has given these orders just to see what differences there are between them and set up one sole religion among the Christians: and up till now they are questioning me regarding the differences and the reasons for them, which I have to give attached in writing.

“It is now five months since I began to take part in this,³ and there is no telling when it will end. We are now at the beginning of the Gospel of S. John. However, throughout these realms the holy Gospel is being spread by this.

“When I go to the Court, it will be to my interest to take other Fathers with me, and the expense will not be light for a calamitous journey of more than forty days⁴ at a time

¹ i.e. from Julfa to the city of Isfahan.

² A word often used by the missionaries to mean ‘Muslims’ in general.

³ i.e. since the beginning of June 1740.

⁴ A journey of 40 days must imply to Mashhad again, not Qazwin.