

Vicar of Julfa, had written to the Cardinal Prefect from Isfahan, 25.4.1741,¹ expressing particular pleasure at the election of Pope Benedict XIV, whom he had known in Rome at the time when the new Pope had been created cardinal, when Fr. Thomas Aquinas himself had arrived from Naples in Rome to study in the Seminary of San Pancrazio, and giving some further information:

“By the grace of God, after so many years of warfare in Persia, one begins to breathe a little, with some hope of tranquillity. Wali Na'amat, the monarch who has usurped this kingdom, has already returned victorious from India, laden with the spoils taken from the enemy and with treasures of immense value, having with his shrewd power there subjugated that empire to his proud and upstart Persian throne. On his arrival he had granted the missionaries many privileges, not only in confirmation of those ancient ones obtained from his legitimate predecessors, kings of Persia, in past times, but also giving liberty to any and every race to follow whichever creed it preferred. And so the seven schismatic Armenian bishops in Julfa no more molest the missionaries and the Catholic people; though it is true enough that but a short time ago, to the glory of the holy Roman Faith, we had all together suffered insults, beatings, prison, abuse and oppression. But at present we are enjoying the sweet fruits of our poor labours, and it can be seen daily how many schismatics . . . return to the apostolic vineyard. . . . Among some thirty in number . . . an Englishman named Master George Britten [*sic*], a harsh and sworn enemy of our holy Faith, who being in Julfa during the recent persecution which happened to the Catholics at the hands of the schismatics and, observing the sufferings of the poor missionaries . . . was by that reason alone led to abjure his false beliefs at our church in Julfa, and became a son of the holy Roman Church, recognizing it as sole mistress of the Universe. . . . It is sufficient to know that we have observed which were the true and which the feigned Catholics: that for the missionaries will be a norm for the future. I can say in company with our Mgr Bishop of my Order that, if there had not been the Messrs. Shariman, Armenian Catholics and heads of Julfa, who by paying a great sum of money to the Persian government obtained a glorious victory over our enemies, the schismatic 'bishops', who were crying out against the poor missionaries, like real perverse Hebrews against the Church—'Tolle, tolle'—crucify, crucify, and if the missionary Fathers had been expelled from Isfahan, which was the intention of our adversaries, I do not know what would have happened to the innocent Catholic people. . . .”

Confirmation of the statement by Fr. Thomas Aquinas regarding the relief afforded by Nadir Shah in 1741 to the Catholic missionaries is provided in a letter of Count David Shariman brother of three of those at Julfa, written from Leghorn, 15.5.1741,² to the Cardinal Prefect when, referring to the persecution, he remarked:

“by God's help it has been overcome to our advantage, which has been no little assisted through our being well considered by Shah Nadir . . . as also their friendship with principal officials at the Court, who have afforded them every protection with *Shah Nadir*, who expressly gave orders to the schismatics not to trouble the Catholics, on pain of being severely punished. . . .”

Nearer Echmiadzin and Armenia the persecution was not so soon checked by imperial orders, but still checked it appears to have been. The 'physician' of the soldier Shah, the Capuchin Fr. Damian from Lyons, was able to put to account the appreciation shown of his skill: in his letter dated “from the army of the king of Persia in the mountains of the Caucasus near Darband, 21.9.1742”,³ he stated:

¹ *S.R.*, vol. 788, p. 399. He died before June 1741 according to Fr. Leander's statement above, since the translation took about a year to complete.

² *S.N.R.*, V, p. 65.

³ *Idem*, p. 75.