

“have died, what new disturbances would not have occurred!¹ But now, thanks to Divine providence, we understand that he has completely recovered, and is with a strong force in the province of Hawaizeh, the farthest town on the borders of Basra, whence, it is said, he will soon be seen in these parts to subjugate the Arab rebels of the Persian Gulf, more particularly the above-mentioned Mir Muhanna, chief of Bandar Rig. We shall see in the future what he will succeed in doing:² and I shall not fail in due season to inform your Eminence and the Sac. Congregation about it, for such good as can be got of it and serve for the advantage of the missions. . . .”

Then, going on to discuss the inconveniences likely to arise, were he to move up-country to Julfa at that juncture, including the hostility of the schismatic Armenian ‘bishop’, to whom the civil government had also been entrusted (which will be quoted elsewhere in this chapter), Bishop Cornelius remarked:

“. . . Nor would orders I might be able to obtain from Karim Khan be of service to me, because, firstly, this prince has not yet established his capital in Isfahan, preferring rather to elect to reside in Tabriz, or in Shiraz, where he has for that purpose had a royal palace built. . . .”³

Referring to the above (dated 2.5.1765) as “my last letter, which I had the honour to forward through the ambassador of France”, Bishop Cornelius again addressed the Cardinal Prefect on 11.3.1766,⁴ more especially about that postponed expedition of Karim Khan to the littoral, and its ultimate and awkward results:

“It now remains for me to inform you also of the inconclusive expedition, carried out by Karim Khan in this neighbourhood against two rebel Arab chiefs, the one named Sulaiman K’ab,⁵ who during many years past has made himself master of many places in Persia towards the mouth of the river (which comes) from Basra, the other named Mir Muhanna, famous in these parts for his continual piracies at sea and for his raids by land up to the gate of the town of Shiraz. Karim Khan, indeed, came down at the beginning of the summer” (i.e. of 1765) “but without being able to do anything against either the one or the other because, on the pretext that his men were suffering extremely from the summer heat, he led them back with him to Shiraz, leaving the country to the mercy of the enemy. This hasty retreat of the Persian army left the field free to the two rebels to do worse than before. Not only did the first named retake the lands which the approach of the Persian army had made him abandon, but he extended his conquests farther over the territory bordering on Basra (although in the dominions of the Sultan) and—what he showed more courage in attacking—he made himself master of two English vessels, which were proceeding from India to Basra with very valuable cargoes, as also of another, a warship of 12 guns, belonging to the same nation—a thing that he had never dared to do in the past—and that was on the pretext that the English had furnished his enemies with a vessel of theirs (to use) against him. . . .”

“As to the second rebel, i.e. Mir Muhanna, after having forced the English and Persians to withdraw from the blockade, which they had jointly, with their united squadrons, made on an adjoining island⁶ where that rebel had retired with his men, and frustrated all their efforts which for forty successive days of the blockade they had not ceased to

¹ A true forecast as in fact his relatives did quarrel over the succession, and rival chiefs appear.

² Another letter of the same date, 2.5.1765, from the Bishop (*S.N.R.*, VII, p. 347) addressed to the Secretary to the Sac. Congregation, refers to the route Basra—Shiraz being “infested by robbers, the raids of the rebels . . .”

³ The existing Arg-i-Karim Khani.

⁴ Ambassador of France, i.e. at Constantinople: *S.N.R.*, VII, p. 358.

⁵ Also written and pronounced ‘Ch’ab’, a numerous tribe even to these days living round the shores of the province of Khuzistan, i.e. Persian Arabistan.

⁶ Khargu, a low sandy islet separated only by a channel from the higher, more fertile Kharg island.