

“to Shah Rukh in recognition of the friendship there had been between him and his (Shah Rukh’s) grandfather, and also out of commiseration for the unfortunate prince having been blinded by the rebels in the rebellions that occurred. The Persians counted on the son of Shah Rukh, as being descended maternally from the Safawi Shahs, to see the ancient splendour of Persia revived. But the prince in question, being too impatient to rule, rebelled against the Shah his father, and took it on himself in the last few years to besiege him” (i.e. Shah Rukh) “in his own capital of Mashhad. When Ahmad Shah” (i.e. the Afghan) “learnt of that, he hastened with his men and obliged the rebel son to take to flight and to wandering over the territories of the Uzbek Tatars.”

Then the Bishop of Isfahan added a fresh independent princeling to the list:

“Lastly, the fourth is Prince Heraklios, who professes the same faith of the Greeks as do the Muscovites, his associates in the present war against the Ottoman Porte: he continues to maintain absolute control of Persian Georgia, so-called because it was formerly a province subject to and dependent on Persia. . . .

“As to the other territories and nations made subject to Persia by the conqueror, Quli Khan, they have all, or almost all, recovered their freedom and independence, such as the Tatars, the Bukhariots called Uzbaks, the Arabs of Masqat a town situated on the Persian Gulf, the Indians of the kingdom of Sind, and various other races who out of fear or by force had submitted to the tyrant and been made tributaries of Persia.

“Many other small lords . . . in the interior of the country . . . continue to appear independent. . . . It is true that in these last few years Karim Khan succeeded in causing some of them who by their piracies infested the Persian Gulf to submit, but with small profit because, as he did not have sufficient naval forces, these chiefs were wont to take advantage of the neighbouring islands to take refuge there, and thence to continue as before to disturb those shores and navigation, not respecting European ships even.

“Notwithstanding this, the territory subject to Karim Khan can be considered the most peaceful that at present Persia possesses; he being opposed to bloodshed seeks solely to gain for himself by clemency the liking of the Persians: to cause commerce, which had been suspended, to flourish once more in the country: to bring back the horn of plenty through the cultivation of immense tracts of land abandoned by their owners: to revive the former manufactures: above all else to contrive, by means of exemptions, privileges and repeated invitations, to recall to Persia her former subjects whom warfare and the tyrannies of Quli Khan had obliged to take refuge in other countries in such great numbers that many towns and very many villages remained entirely empty of inhabitants. In the city of Baghdad alone there were to be counted more than 100,000 Persians who had taken asylum there. The refugees in Basra, another town in the Ottoman empire, made up two-thirds of its inhabitants. From that it may be easily conjectured what a great number of Persians had gone with their families to the dominions of the Great Mogul, to Arabia Felix, to Bengal, or to other parts of India.¹ It is sufficient to state that the city of Isfahan, which under the Safawi Shahs was not inferior in the number of its inhabitants to Constantinople, and which, even after the straits suffered there in the invasion of the Afghans and in the seven years of their domination there, notwithstanding that (invasion) still counted (that is thirty years ago—1742) about 500,000 (half a million) inhabitants, now (i.e. 1772), as Persians themselves state, does not have more than 40,000 to 50,000 (forty to fifty thousand).²

“Such was the condition of Persia ten years ago” (i.e. 1762). “At present things seem to me to be changed for the better, and create a hope that they will go on improving in

¹ Many thousands in India of Persians and Armenians by origin date the arrival of their progenitors in India to this period 1742–58.

² Apart from the written evidence in this work of a reduction of the perimeter of the city under the second Afghan Shah, many modern travellers will have observed ruins of walls and buildings for wide distances in the plain of Isfahan. But emigration to the extent stated is noteworthy.