

"In this country there are the undermentioned provinces in the possession of the king, i.e. . . . Greater Armenia, Khurasan, Kashan, Harat . . . and Gilan, in there last-mentioned of which there are troubles at present, as I wrote to Your Highness, because the inhabitants had risen in revolt.¹ In the kingdom of Persia there are 62 towns, the principal being Tabriz, the capital of all the empire, Qazwin, Nakhchiwan, Shamakha, and others which I shall not name one by one; but I shall only say that throughout the whole kingdom there is not one which is walled—all are open places. The buildings are in sooth very ugly and of poor class. The houses all of mud, i.e. mud and chopped straw mixed together, nor are there mosques nor are there other edifices which could confer any beauty on this city. Although ordinarily the situations are very fine, the streets are horrid because of the quantity of dust, and hardly is it possible to pass along them, and in consequence in winter there is an abundance of mud.

"There is a very great abundance of corn usually, although it may rarely rain; but they are wont to bring down the water and irrigate the fields, one week in one direction, the next week in another. In this way they are able to convey so much water to the corn and vineyards that it suffices: and up inclines and in other places where water cannot be drawn they use them as pasture-grounds. There is also a great quantity of meat-stuffs and especially of sheep, and of such size that in Tabriz I have often seen the tails weighing 10 *batmans*² which in the reckoning of this country" (i.e. Venice, where he was writing) would be 40 lb. With that they are very dear in relation to the incredibly large quantity which is sent (into market), and this happens, I believe, because there is no nation in the world which eats more than the Persians do, it being an ordinary thing in all the old men, not to speak of the youths, to eat four times daily, and that because of the water supplies being so excellent, and assisting digestion.³ They are rather a poor people than otherwise. In the towns, in their houses they use few ornaments; everyone sleeps on the ground, and those who are of some quality use mattresses laid on carpets, the rest simple felts. The women ordinarily are all dark, but of very fine features and noble mien, although their dresses are not so smart as those of the Turkish women; but they are wont to clothe themselves in silk, wearing on their heads the *kafstan*,⁴ allowing anyone they wish to see their faces, and hiding their faces when they do not wish them to be seen. They wear pearls and other jewels on their heads, and from this it comes about that pearls are of great price even in those countries, though it is not long since they began to be used.⁵

"The reverence and love that is borne by the whole people for the king, notwithstanding the matters already mentioned, for which it would appear that he ought the rather to be hated, is incredible, because they worship him not as their king but as a god. Those who are in sickness and misfortune call not so much on the name of God for help as they do on that of the king, making vows some of them to offer him presents, others to go and

¹ Narrative B mentions among the provinces subordinate to the Crown:

" . . . Gilan, Lar, Hawaizeh; but these three last are *only tributary*. . . . He also had some towns of the Georgians, who have now revolted against the Turks. Tribute is also paid by *Lar*, which is a province five days' distance from Hurmuz. Farther down there is the town of Hawaizeh, which is the seat of an Arab chief, on the borders of Basra, near the river Tigris, which flows all around it. Their chief . . . pays as tribute 20 horses and mares of very great value; but at present he is in rebellion, and has gone over to the Turks, as I wrote to your Highness. . . ."

Not a hint in either list of the Persian Gulf littoral being under the rule of the Shah. Yet

"Throughout the *sixteenth* century the Portuguese owing to their sea-power dominated the Persian Gulf to the intense anger of the Shahs, whose ports were raided and whose subjects were oppressed without mercy,"

is an assertion made by the writer of the revised survey of the *History of Persia* in the 14th ed. of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* under the initials "P. M. S." It would be interesting to have concrete evidence by dates, and authors produced for the latter part of that statement. The ports were, as related in these contemporary letters here quoted, controlled by Arab Shaikhs completely independent of the Shahs in Ardabil or Qazwin: what documents recording the anger of Isma'il I, Tahmasp I, Isma'il II, let alone Khudabandeh, can be cited? Resentment occurs with 'Abbas I after 1600, i.e. seventeenth century.

² The *batman-i-Tabriz* of modern times, the standard weight for customs purposes, has been reckoned as 6.5 lb. avoirdupois, English.

³ Alessandri could hardly have travelled in southern Persia, where the water supply over large areas is notoriously cruel on the digestion—*experto crede*: in comparison with natives of India the Persian peasant eats copiously.

⁴ By *kafstan* the black *chadar* = veil, or sheet, in which the women shroud themselves, is probably meant.

⁵ For jewellers and others to note—in 1574 the vogue for pearls was fresh in that part of the East.