A dispute over parochial jurisdiction between the Augustinian and Carmelite missionaries in Basra had arisen in the early period of the dual mission.\(^1\) Certainly from 1624 the Augustinians were claiming authority to act as parish priests, as a consequence of which the Carmelites would have needed their permission to administer the sacraments. Initially confined to the pastoral care of Portuguese and other foreign traders visiting or living in Basra, this dispute would spread after 1633 to that of Mandaean families who might migrate to Portuguese territory. The Augustinian claim was based on the appointment of their superior in Basra as parish priest by the archbishop of Goa, responsible for the ecclesiastical administration throughout the Portuguese East under the Padroado, while the Carmelites’ counter-claim of the Carmelites, under the authority of the Propaganda, was based on their reading of a Brief of Clement VIII conceding the privilege of acting as parish priests in those mission regions without a bishop.\(^2\)

Initial Claim and Counterclaim

As we have seen, initial relations between the missionaries in Basra were extremely cordial, although it was to be expected that the representatives of each would promote the interests of their own Order. Nevertheless the Carmelite Basílio had still accompanied the Augustinian Nicolau Perete on his visit to the pasha to request permission to found the latter’s convent, and in his letter to his Superior general which includes news of the death of Perete, he notes their friendship and describes him as ‘a fine

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\(^1\) Similar disputes had arisen in Shiraz, Tatta in India, and other places where the two Orders had established missions almost contemporaneously. At the beginning of 1629, the Propaganda instructed the Augustinian Prefect in India to promote concord between his subjects and the Theatine missionaries sent to Georgia, as well as with the Carmelites of Basra. (Rome, APF Acta, vol. 6, f. 213 in Analecta Augustiniana 27 (1964), 244–245.

religious’ (‘buon religioso’). The two successors to the first missionary of the Augustinian Order in Basra were so grateful for the hospitality afforded them by the Carmelite that they presented him with a number of liturgical items he still lacked, and that good relations still existed even after the question of jurisdiction had been raised is confirmed by Pietro della Valle.

The issue first appears in Rome in June and August of 1625, where the Carmelite prior of Isfahan, Próspero do Espírito Santo complained that the Augustinians in Basra, being vicars of the archbishop of Goa, are claiming to be parish priests and prohibiting the Carmelites from administering the sacraments to the Portuguese. It seems that no official action followed, but things were taken more seriously with the arrival in Rome of a detailed account by Basílio of difficulties in Basra. Having described the founding of the Basra convent, he cites the 1604 Brief of Clement VIII as the basis for his parochial ministry, having translated and displayed the same for the benefit of European visitors to the Carmelite chapel. However, the Augustinians sent from India, supported by letters patent from the prelate of Goa, had laid claim to exclusive jurisdiction. Basílio notes that he had decided to proceed diplomatically, suggesting that the three missionaries should amicably exercise their joint ministry until a decision from their superiors was received, and that such had largely been the case. He notes that when asked on what this right was based the Augustinians replied that the simple fact that the archbishop of Goa had done so demonstrated his ability to do so, without producing any documentation to support their claim. Things had recently taken a turn for the worse, as the Augustinians had threatened to excommunicate those who fulfilled their Easter obligations in the Carmelite chapel, and even to forbid the Carmelites from preaching. Even now, however, a letter from Basílio to the Carmelite general, insisting on the need for a papal decision to settle the question, states that relations between the missionaries of both Orders remain harmonious.

Based on Basílio’s information, the Carmelite general presented a memorandum to the Propaganda in January 1626, one section of which raised the problems of parochial jurisdiction between the Augustinians

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3 Arch. Gen. OCD, pluteo 241, a, doc. 6.
4 Viaggi, part III, La Persia, III, 374–375.
6 Rome, Arch. Gen. OCD, pluteo 241, g, doc. 8.
7 Ibid., doc. 9.