



EDMONDS, C. J

EDMONDS, C. J. [Cecil John] (1889-1979), British political officer and orientalist ([Figure 1](#)).

The son of a British missionary, Edmonds was born in Japan, where he stayed up to the age of eight. He was educated in England at Bedford and Christ's Hospital public schools and finally studied oriental languages at Cambridge under the supervision of E. G. Browne for two years. He served in the consular service as Vice-Consul in [Bušehr](#) (1913-15), as Assistant Political Officer in Mesopotamia (1915-17) and in southwest Persia (1917-18). In April 1918, he was evacuated to England with typhoid fever, after which he returned to Bagdad in May 1919, whence he was eventually sent to the North Persia Force ('Norperforce'; see [GREAT BRITAIN v](#)) as a Political Officer.

From Qazvin he had the opportunity to travel to Rasht and report on the [Jangali movement](#), to Tabriz, where he met Shaikh Moḥammad Kīābāni, and to Tehran, where he had contact with diplomats and Iranian politicians. He made a trip to Baku in December 1919 to join Sayyed Żiā, who had been sent there by Woṭuq-al-Dowla's government (on this mission see *Āḍari-Šahrežā'i*, pp. 35, 99 ff.; Bast). Edmonds had a further mission to Kurdistan in 1922 and subsequently in Iraq (up to 1945), where he held several public responsibilities, after which he worked primarily for the Foreign Office in London until his retirement in 1950.

He then became Kurdish lecturer at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London (1951-57), and collaborated on the Kurdish-English



dictionary of Taufiq Wahby (1966). He published several articles on western Iran and Kurds (see Bibliography, below). Despite these publications, which mainly constituted descriptions of the sites that he discovered in his horseback journeys in Kurdistan, Edmonds was not able to publish an embracing account of his missions in Iran in the very sensitive period of World War I and its immediate aftermath. Unfortunately, the diaries concerning his experience in Persia after April 1920 had long been lost by the time Edmonds wrote his last recapitulatory, posthumously published book relating his experience as a political officer.

In the book *East and West of Zagros ...* (2010) Edmonds “sought to depict the political and social conditions, and the manners and customs of the people,” as he saw them, “in parts of Persia and what is now known as Iraq, during the years 1913 to 1921 that straddle the four years of the War” (p. xix). He presents a vivid depiction of a British consular officer’s life in small provincial towns of southern and western Persia, showing how he controlled local institutions through systematic networking among the tribal, religious, and traditional elite. The fact that Edmonds is rarely mentioned in Persian sources (e.g. ‘Ayn-al-Saltana, p. 5744, dated 2 December 1920) reflects his conventional approval of the [Anglo-Persian Agreement of 1919](#).

Edmonds was first-rank witness to the preparation, in Qazvin, of the February 1921 coup: a friend of Sayyed Žiā, he met Reza Khan several times before the march on the capital. However, the late redaction of Edmonds memoirs and its partial reliance, for this section, on official dispatches and on lately published material (like [W. E. Ironside’s High Road to Command](#)) makes it slightly derivative.

Edmonds remains a model of British semi-colonial administrators in Iran and Iraq and was a very knowledgeable and clever agent. He was personally interested in local culture and customs, particularly in linguistics, and he married twice, fathering four children. His numerous documents, correspondence, diaries, maps, and photographs are deposited at the Archives of the Middle East Centre, St Antony’s College, Oxford.

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