



FRANCE VIII. TRAVELOGUES OF THE 18TH-20TH CENTURIES

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18th Century travelogues. After the fall of the Safavids in 1722, Persia was plunged for a long period into political anarchy, civil war, and economic and social insecurity. As a result there were fewer Western residents and visitors to Persia in the latter half of the eighteenth century. On the reign of Nāder Shah (1736-1747), accounts by missionaries, notably those by the Jesuit Père Louis Bazin, chief physician to Nāder Shah from 1746 until the latter's assassination (Lockhart, pp. 257, 310-11), form useful complements to the Persian sources. Jean Otter, an official envoy to the Persian court in 1738, and a good linguist (Lockhart, pp. 306-7), wrote an account of his journey from Turkey to Isfahan, where he stayed for almost two years and summed up his impressions in these bleak terms: "The city of Isfahan, which suffered considerably during the siege, and even afterwards, was almost deserted. Entire quarters were abandoned, and the houses were falling into ruin. The same was true of the provincial towns," (Otter, vol. I, p. 224).

About half a century later, in 1783-84, André Michaux explored Hamadān and its surroundings including Mount Alvand and enthused on the pleasures of exploring the mountains and valleys in the east (Bonnerot, p. 17; Gabriel, p.



121). His contemporary, Louis-François Comte de Ferrières-Sauvebšuf, an eyewitness to the civil wars of 1784-85 in Persia, gave an account of the skirmishes as well as the life of the people and of various religious groups. In 1787, the Abbé de Beauchamp, was sent to Rašt by the Académie des Sciences, but failed in his attempt to discover new itineraries (Gabriel, p. 122).

On the eve of the 18th century, Guillaume-Antoine Olivier provides us with a detailed account of his journeys. Sent to the Orient on a scientific and commercial mission (1794), he traveled in Persia in 1796 (Amini, pp. 21-22). Summing up his mission, he states: “a stay of several months at the court [of Āgā Moḥammad Khan Qājār in Tehran] to carry out a mission of the highest importance provided me with the opportunity to observe the great, to study the people, and to collect interesting material about the history of the internecine wars which have ravaged this empire since the death of Nāder Shah” (Olivier, I, p. ix). In his depiction of cities and monuments, he makes frequent comparisons with what they were like under the reign of the Safavids. “The most flourishing cities under the reign of the Sophis consist of nothing but ruins everywhere: three quarters of the inhabitants have perished or fled to the quiet and fertile regions of Indostan” (Olivier, I, p. 224). He also provides valuable detail about topography, agricultural produce, industry and trade, the army and the navy, and the manners and customs of the people he encounters.

19th Century travelogues. A direct outcome of the perennial rivalries among the great Western nations in the early 19th century was a number of diplomatic missions, particularly French, sent to Persia in the hope of concluding agreements with the shah. Among the first French missions, some were also engaged in research on geographical, economic, political and social aspects. Their findings brought home to the west the realization that Persia was not as highly developed, nor as populated and rich as some 17th century travelogues had led them to believe, and the maps that sometimes accompanied the accounts showed a considerable part of the country as barren and deserted.

The French 19th century travelers to Persia came from different backgrounds and professions. In terms of the motives that led them to travel, they may be divided into three categories:

1. Diplomats and travelers on political or military missions. Pierre-Amédée Jaubert was sent to Persia by Napoleon to seek an alliance against England,



and arrived in 1806 (Amini, pp. 71-82). He had already been taught some Persian and Arabic by Sylvestre de Sacy. His account focuses on the political and economic conditions of the country, describing the regions and towns he passes through on his way to the court of Faṭḥ-ʿAlī Shah in Tehran. He describes the physical features of the Shah and the conversations he had with him and the Crown Prince ʿAbbās Mīrẓā as well as their courtiers (Movassaghi, pp. 70-73; Jaktāji, pp. 101-7).

He was followed by General Claude Mathieu de Gardane (q.v.), who arrived in Persia in 1807 as an official representative to set up the details of the cooperation between the two countries. The mission itself ended in failure, but the scientific research carried out by its members, providing a detailed study of the country intended perhaps as a guide in case Napoleon’s plans for an invasion of India materialized, remains its lasting contribution. Thus J. M. Tancoigne took an interest in the behavior and habits of Persian women, a subject he illustrated with some fine drawings and also made topographical observations, referring to Tehran in 1807 as “a rectangular enclosure surrounded by wide brick walls,” (Scarce, p. 917, ref. to Tancoigne, Letter XX, pp. 179-80). Adrien Dupré, who acted as a dragoman to Trézel in their journey to Baghdad and to Persia (Movassaghi, pp. 75-76) provided a vivid geographical, historical, economic and anthropological account. Camille-Alphonse Trézel explored the provinces of Gīlān and Mazandarān. Hilarion Truilhier, studied problems of water supply and irrigation, and also wrote on Yazd, describing its local cotton and silk industry and its Jewish and Zoroastrian minorities. Joseph Rousseau, traveled in western Persia and noted its archaeological sites, including the Ṭāq-e Bostān monument.

In 1825, the scholar Charles Bélanger, a botanist attached to the Ministry of Marine, gave an account of city life, the army, and the position of the British and Russians in Persia and their relations with the Persians. The position of the British and the commercial interests of France in the Persian Gulf were also discussed by Victor Fontanier, sent as an envoy to the Persian Gulf in 1834. The same considerations must have underlined the goodwill mission (“mission de courtoisie,” de Sercey, p. 29) of Édouard Comte de Sercey, sent to Persia as ambassador extraordinary by Louis Philippe in 1839-40. A failure in terms of its political objectives, the mission was highly successful from an artistic point of view. It included Eugène Flandin and Pascal-Xavier Coste (see [FLANDIN AND COSTE](#)), who succeeded in exploring most of Persia (1839-41) and produced their magnificent oeuvre on its archaeological monuments.



When Comte de Sercey arrived in Persia, he was welcomed by Eugène Boré, another pupil of de Sacy a generation after Jaubert (Movassaghi, pp. 73-75) and Charles Texier, who were engaged in restoring archaeological monuments and bas reliefs. They also took a wide interest in the political, economic, and cultural conditions of the country.

In 1845, Charles de Gatines who had accompanied the Comte de Sartige in his mission to the Persian court, wrote an account of his return journey, describing among other things the art of professional dancers and the fabrication of forged medallions by Jews in Hamadān. Two years later, in 1847, Xavier Hommaire de Hell embarked on a study of topics relating to astrological lore, geography and geology of Persia but he died suddenly in August 1848 in Isfahan (Jaktājī, pp. 91-96). His companion Jules Laurens continued his mission and produced some of the finest drawings ever made of the country. Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau (q.v.) arrived in Persia on his first visit in 1855. An admirer of Persia, he was responsible, even more than Montesquieu, for the appearance of Persia and motifs taken from Persian literature in French literature (Boissel 1973, pp. 81-113). During the years 1858-61, Émile Duhousset, a military adviser to the army, wrote not only about wild life and hunting in Persia but also made detailed anthropometric measurements of members of a regiment in Solṭānīya in his anthropological research. During his long stay in Persia, Julien Comte de Rochechouart, who took over the French legation in 1863 from Gobineau, made a grand tour of the country studying its architecture, pottery and ceramics production, as well as other handicraft and the conditions of merchants and artisans (Jaktājī, pp. 136-37). A decade later, Jules Patenôtre spent three years (1873-76) in the north of the country and described the silk and carpet markets in northern Persia, as well as the route from Rašt to Tehran. Other travelers of the period included Gabriel Bonvalot, who traveled in the north of Persia in 1885 on his way to a geographical mission to India and wrote about music and medicine; and Albert Develay and Georges Pison, who studied different aspects of Kurdish life in 1890. But perhaps the most important single account of the last years of the century was that of Dr. Jean-Baptiste Feuvrier (q.v.), an army doctor and the shah's physician in ordinary (1889-92), who gave a vivid account of the court, the personality of the shah, as well as the events surrounding the debacle of the Tobacco Régie.

2. Travelers on archaeological missions. After the diplomats, the archaeologists held pride of place. The Third Republic (1870-1944) confirmed the policy of



French colonial expansion, adding to it a keen enthusiasm for archaeology. The remarkable surveys carried out by Charles Texier, Coste, Flandin, Laurens, and subsequently Henri Binder in Kurdistan (1885) were followed by other important missions, including those of the Dieulafoys (qq.v.) in 1884-86, and Jacques de Morgan (q.v.) from 1897 to 1912. It should be noted that the contributions made by Jane Dieulafoy (q.v.) and those of the engineer Charles Babin and botanist Frédéric Houssay who accompanied the Dieulafoys transcend the realm of archaeology and delve into other aspects of life in Persia including the nomadic life of the Baḳtīārī (see [DÉLÉGATIONS ARCHÉOLOGIQUES FRANÇAISES](#)).

3. Soldiers of fortune and tourists. The development of steamships, especially after 1850, and the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, led to more rapid voyages to the Black Sea and the Persian Gulf. Moreover, the Romantic movement in literature permeated western culture in general and introduced a vogue for journeys to lands regarded as exotic. There was thus a ready market for books by travelers, frequently accompanied by fine illustrations.

Persia was very much part of this general trend and was a coveted destination for European travelers in search of adventure. Major Gaspard Drouville's well-known account of manners and customs of Persian society, including marriage, divorce and religious ceremonies, and the army, its weapons and organization as witnessed in 1812-13, contains fine engravings (Jaktājī, pp. 54-56). Other narratives include those of Joseph-Pierre Ferrier, a military envoy who sporadically traveled over most parts of the country between 1839 and 1846; and Henri de Coulibšuf de Blocqueville, who had been captured and kept a prisoner by the Turcomans for over a year while on a punitive expedition against them.

Among the scientists who visited Persia, one can single out Rémi Aucher-Éloy who collected botanical and zoological specimens in 1835-37.

Among the tourists, the most observant were: Jules-Charles Teule (1841), E. Guilliny (1858), the Comte de Panisse (1865), Ferdinand Méchin (1867), Ernest Orsolle (1882; Jaktājī, pp. 127-29), Jean de Pontevès de Sabran (1888), Carle Lefèvre-Pontalis (1892), Auguste Lacoïn de Vilmorin (1894; Jaktājī, pp. 158-61) and George Grillières (1899). Most of these travelers kept to well-trodden routes and their accounts are often replete with inaccurate and superficial judgments. However, some of them broached original topics and relatively unexplored aspects of their contemporary scene including the description of



local male and female costumes in Gīlān (Guilliny, p. 91), incidents of drunkenness, prostitution, and homosexuality in Tehran (Panisse, pp. 117-120), the royal palace of Negārestān and salacious reports about its slide used for erotic purposes (de Pontevès de Sabran, pp. 138-40), and the Zoroastrian community in Yazd (Méchin).

20th Century travelogues. The rapid development in both the means of transport and communication in the 20th century meant that although the number of foreign visitors to Persia increased dramatically, the reasons and the urge to compose narratives of journeys in the manner of the previous centuries had disappeared. Nevertheless, until the outbreak of the First World War, one still finds narratives of journeys, like those of Pierre Loti, Claude Anet (Jaktājī, pp. 14-15) and Henry-René d'Allemagne (Jaktājī, pp. 3-13) which as well as describing the manners and customs of the people, also report on archaeological finds and provide detailed accounts of local handicrafts. To these could be added accounts given by some members of the French archaeological delegation such as Georges Bondoux, the botanist Louis-Charles Watelin and Émile André. Certain French observers also wrote about the major political upheavals of the time, such as the Constitutional Revolution (Eugène Aubin, Jaktājī, pp. 16-20) or the Anglo-Russian rivalries in Persia (Jouannin, Bouillane de Lacoste).

The political and social upheavals after the First World War induced some travelers, including the orientalist Henri Massé and H. Weaver of the International Bureau of Labor in Geneva and the special correspondent Maurice Pernot to analyze the process of modernization in Persia, including, in the case of Weaver, the condition of labor in newly established industries. After the Second World War and indeed up to the present, French academics and researchers visiting Persia have continued this tradition of informing the French reading public at home through a mixture of personal narrative and direct observation against their own background of reading and analysis of Persian history and culture.



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