



GREAT BRITAIN VI. BRITISH TRAVELERS TO PERSIA

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The British, more than any others, have been prolific authors of travelogues, and memoirs about Persia. Anthony Jenkinson of the Muscovy Co. led the way with his account of his travels there in 1562; journeys by other Muscovy Co. merchants followed a few years later. Their reports were published at the end of the century by R. Hakluyt. Next, Samuel Purchas, making use of manuscripts left by Hakluyt and other sources, published in 1625 his own collection of Englishmen's travels, among them those of Anthony Sherley, the preacher John Cartwright, and the merchant John Newberry, although both Sherley's and Cartwright's stories had already been published. William Parry traveled with Anthony Shirley to Persia while Robert Coverte was probably the first Englishman to travel (1609-10) overland across Persia to England.

Books by Thomas Herbert and John Fryer are the most impressive of these early travelogues. Herbert was a member of Dodmore Cotton's 1628 embassy to Persia and wrote what Curzon considered "by far the most amusing work that has ever been published on Persia" (Curzon, I, p. 18), and is valuable for its descriptions of Persepolis and towns. Fryer, an East India Co. surgeon, spent the years 1677-78 in Persia and was no less diligent in his descriptions of



towns, buildings, and people. Another interesting record of this period is that of Robert Stodart, also a member of Dodmore's mission, but only published in 1935 after the discovery of his manuscript in Oxford's Bodleian Library.

Because of political turmoil in Persia during much of the 18th century, British and other travelers were few. The outstanding British work of this century is that of Jonas Hanway, a Muscovy Co. merchant (and energetic social reformer on his return to England), who spent much of 1744-45 in Gilān and Māzandarān seeking to pro-mote Anglo-Persian trade. His four volumes tell us much about this trade and the troubled reign of Nāder Shah Afšār (1148-60/1736-47). James Spilman, also a Muscovy Company merchant, provides another valuable, if shorter, account of an earlier visit to Gilān. Earlier in the century two Scots in the employ of the Russians under Peter the Great had visited Persia and later wrote about their experiences: John Bell, who served as a doctor from 1715-18 in the suite of the Russian ambassador to the last Safavid shah and Peter Bruce, an officer in the Russian army during its 1722-23 campaign against "the rebel Persians bordering on the Caspian Sea" (Bruce, p. 227), after which he helped survey the Caspian.

Descriptions of Gombroon (Bandar 'Abbās), Bušehr and Kārg island during the mid-18th century are given by Alexander Hamilton, Edward Ives, a naval surgeon, Abraham Parsons, a merchant, and Thomas Howel, an East India Co. doctor. Three other members of the East India Co. wrote about inland Persia at this time: George Forster, who traveled from India overland to England (in 1783-84); William Francklin, who was in Shiraz in 1787; and Scott Waring, who spent some months in and around Shiraz in 1802, when he made a serious study of the Persians, their government, poets, etc.

Many more British wrote about their travels in Persia during the first half of the 19th century: army officers going home or returning to India from leave (Johnson, Lumsden, Keppel, Alexander, Conolly, Mignan), other officers on intelligence gathering missions (Kinneir, Pottinger, Burnes), diplomats and their staffs (Malcolm, Hollingberry, Morier, Price, William Ouseley, Charles Stuart), members of military missions (R. Macdonald, Wilbraham) and of exploratory expeditions (Ainsworth). The doctor and diplomat John McNeill never wrote his memoirs, but many of his letters from Persia are included in his granddaughter's Memoir published in 1910.

There were a number of adventurous individuals who, for one reason or another, traveled in Persia at this time: Robert Ker Porter, who, encouraged by



the President of the Russian Academy of Fine Arts, made drawings of Persepolis and elsewhere; Claudius Rich, the scholarly East India Co.'s Resident in Baghdad, who died in Shiraz; James Buckingham, writer, traveler, and social reformer; Robert C. Money, a religiously-minded servant of the East India Co., who spent a year traveling around Persia; Thomas Alcock and T. B. Armstrong, traveling together, who reached Tehran shortly after the murder of the Russian ambassador Alexander Griboedov (q.v.) and his staff in 1829 and described the tragedy in their books, as does George Fowler, who was also in the country at the time and whose two volumes contain much interesting, if not always accurate, information about the country and its history; James Baillie Fraser (q.v.), who traveled through lawless and unexplored Turkmen country in 1822 and returned to Persia twelve years later on a secret mission for the British government when he traveled through little known Kurdistan; J. H. Stocqueler (Jaochim Hayward Siddons), an observant journalist from Calcutta, who wrote at length about his travels. Also in these years a number of pioneering Christian missionaries visited Persia: Henry Martyn who helped translate the New Testament into Persian; Peter Gordon, a retired sea captain; Joseph Wolff, son of a Bavarian rabbi and father of Henry Drummond Wolff, a future British minister in Tehran (1887-90); Anthony Groves, a former dentist traveling with John Kitto, a deaf-mute who later became a Doctor of Divinity.

Many of these author-travelers were well versed in ancient Persian history and through their books contributed much new information about a country then little known in Europe. In particular the illustrated and lengthy volumes of James Morier, Ker Porter, and William Ouseley drew attention to the monuments of Persia's glorious past. Fraser was the first European to write authoritatively about the Turkmen and Kurdish tribes, as did Austin H. Layard about the Bakhtiāris, among whom he lived in 1841-42. Edward L. Mitford, who had accompanied Layard from London as far as Hamadān, wrote many years later an interesting account of his travels across Persia en route for Ceylon.

Improved communications and expanding interests brought many British residents as well as travelers to Persia in the years 1850-1914. Books were written by officials coming from India (Binning, Stack, Bradley-Birt): intelligence gathering army officers (Marsh, Baker, Macgregor, Le Messurier, Sawyer, Stewart); frontier makers (Loftus, Bellew, Tate, Hubbard); Indo-European Telegraph officials (Goldsmid, Anderson, Floyer, Wills); diplomats (Eastwick, Mounsey, D. Wolff, Gordon, Nevill, C. and A. Hardinge); consuls (McKenzie, Wratislaw, and the "Indian Politicals" Yate, Sykes, Kennion,



Wilson, Skrine, O'Connor); journalists (Geary, Harris, O'Donovan, Chirol, D. Fraser, Moore); missionaries (Stern, a naturalized British subject interested in Persia's Jewish communities, N. Malcolm, who spent five years in Yazd); and a number of independent individuals (Ussher, Pollington, Arnold, Brittlebank, Freshfield, Browne, Curzon, de Windt, Bingham, Landor, Williams). Particularly interesting are Edward Eastwick and Charles Wills' accounts of their years in Persia, Edward Browne's fascinating and instructive *A Year amongst the Persians*, and George Curzon's combination of travelogue with a penetrating study of Qajar Persia. The books by Robert Binning, Edward Stack, Charles M. Macgregor, and Arnold Savage Landor contain much useful information. Wilfred Sparroy has an unusual tale to tell about his time as a tutor in the family of Mas'ud Mirzā Zell-al-Soltān, who also brought Edward Collins, an eye specialist, to Isfahan from London.

Neither Charles Murray, minister in Tehran 1855-59, nor Robert Murdoch Smith, who spent twenty years in Tehran as head of the Indo-European Telegraph Department, wrote memoirs but a few of the former's letters from Persia and many of the latter's were published in their biographies by Herbert Maxwell and William Dickson listed in the Bibliography. George Rawlinson's memoir of his brother Henry, the decipherer of the Bisotun cuneiform inscriptions (q.v.), draws on the latter's letters and diaries.

Lady Sheil, the observant wife of the British minister Austin Sheil to Persia, was the first woman to write about the country in a perceptive book about her stay there in the years 1849-53. It was not until 1891 that another lady, namely Isabella Bird (q.v.), known as Mrs. Bishop, went into print. She was a middle-aged and indomitable traveler who wrote a lively account of a winter's ride from Baghdad to Tehran and travels among the Baktiāris and Kurds. Other women followed: Mary Bird (Isabella's cousin), the first unmarried missionary in Isfahan; Gertrude Bell (q.v.) on the first, in 1892, of her many Middle Eastern journeys; Ella Sykes, who accompanied her brother Percy Sykes to Kermān in 1895; Lady Durand, wife of the British minister Mortimer Durand, toured western Persia in 1899; M. E. Hume-Griffith, a missionary's wife, spent 1900-3 in Kermān; Edith Benn, wife of the first British consul in Sistān; and Susan Townley, wife of the British minister in Tehran on the outbreak of the 1914 war. Elizabeth Ross, whose letters from Persia were published posthumously, went there as a missionary doctor but found life in Jolfā so dull that she preferred to work as a doctor, 1909-14, among the women-folk of the leading Baktiāri khans. Clara Rice, another missionary-wife, combines both



travelogue and memoir in her perceptive book on Persian women.

British military intervention in Persia during the 1914-18 war resulted in a number of memoirs by officers about their time there, Latham S. Blacker, William R. Dickson, Martin Donohoe, Reginald E. Dyer, Lionel C. Dunsterville, Alfred Rawlinson, Francis C. Forbes-Leith, and F. James. F. Hale writes about these war years as a bank official in Kermānshāh and Birjand, where he saw much of the ruling 'Alam family. The *Diaries* of Edmund Ironside, who commanded British troops in Persia immediately after the war, contain background information about Reżā Khan's coup of 1299 Š./1921 (q.v.).

During the inter-war years, 1918-39, most travelers abandoned the horse and mule for the hardy Model-T Ford, among them Ronald Sinclair, alias Teague-Jones, who was forced to change his name and disappear for fear of the Bolshevik death squads. The most interesting travelogues and letters of this period are those of Freya Stark, the irreverent art-historian Robert Byron, and the archaeologist Aurel Stein. Vita Sackville-West, wife of Harold Nicholson, then counselor at the British Legation in Tehran, wrote two very readable books about her travels and the coronation of Reżā Khan. A number of other intrepid women wrote about their travels during these years, including Mrs. Patrick Ness, Constance Alexander, Alice Fullerton, Onèra A. Merritt-Hawkes, Angela Rodkin (Sarell), Rosita Forbes, while Olive Suratgar, who had married Loṭf-'Alī Şuratgar (a Persian academic) in 1936, wrote about her not always easy life in the years that followed.

Hugh Knatchbull-Hugessen, minister to Persia 1934-36, has a chapter about those years there, while Reader Bullard, minister/ambassador, during the difficult World War II years wrote about them in *The Camels Must Go* and his *Letters* published posthumously. Others who wrote briefly about their experiences in Persia at this time were William Slim, commander of the Anglo-Indian forces that invaded Persia in August 1941; Fitz-roy Maclean, who kidnapped General Fażl-Allāh Zā-hedi in Isfahan; Thomas E. Rogers, an "Indian Political," who served in the Bušehr and Bandar 'Abbās consulates; Clare Hollingworth and George Rodger, both war correspondents.

Except for Roger Stevens' *The Land of the Great Sophy*, Anthony Parsons' account of his years as ambassador (1974-79), culminating in the fall of the shah, and Monty Woodhouse's *Something Ventured* with interesting background to the coup d'état of 1332 Š./1953 (q.v.) that toppled Moṣaddeq's government, and Desmond Harney's eyewitness account of the Islamic



Revolution *The Priest and the King*, no books of lasting importance were written by the many travelers who went to Persia or resided there during Moḥammad-Rezā Shah's reign. Sacheverell Sitwell's book is noteworthy for its excellent photographs by Alexandra Metcalfe, Lord Curzon's youngest daughter; Sarah Hobson, disguised as a boy, describes her stay in a Qom *madrasa*; Horace Phillips and John O'Regan write about their lives as diplomats, while the former has also something to say about his life in Tehran as a businessman at the time of the shah's fall. Both Harold Macmillan, the future conservative prime minister, and David Owen, labor foreign secretary 1977-79, write about Anglo-Persian relations.

Despite the difficulties in obtaining entry visas after the establishment of the Islamic Republic, Christina Dodwell and William Dalrymple, an Oxford undergraduate, succeeded in visiting Persia and writing about their experiences there, as did John Simpson of BBC. Hassan Dehqani-Tafti (Dehqāni Tafti), the Anglican Bishop in Persia at the time, and now a naturalized British subject, writes about the harassment of Christian missionaries and the murder of his son by the revolutionaries; so, too, does Paul Hunt, the bishop's chaplain. The journalist and a long time resident in Persia, Roger Cooper, has also written an intriguing account of his trial in Tehran followed by five years in the notorious Evin Prison.

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