



JAPAN III. JAPANESE TRAVELERS TO PERSIA

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In Japan the Edo Shogunate (1603-1867) forbade any visits or trade with foreigners other than those from China and the Netherlands. According to the decree of 1635, the Japanese were barred from traveling abroad and, according to the decree of 1639, the Portuguese were forbidden to enter the main islands of Japan. It was only in 1854 that relations with foreign countries were resumed. This process gathered pace with the advent of the Meiji period (1868-1912), when the Japanese were allowed to go on official visits abroad. In 1929 formal diplomatic relations were established between Japan and Persia.

The Japanese mission of 1880-81. In 1879, Nāṣer-al-Din Shah, returning from his second European tour, received the Japanese minister plenipotentiary Enomoto and secretary Tokujirō Nishi while in Saint Petersburg and expressed his interest in establishing relations with Japan (Yoshida, p. 2, tr., p. 30). In response, the Meiji government sent a formal mission to Persia in 1880. It was composed of the following members: Masaharu Yoshida (1852-1921) from the ministry of foreign affairs, who headed the mission; Nobuyoshi Furukawa (1849-1921), who was a captain in the Japanese army; Magoichirō Yokoyama (1848-1911), the vice-president of the Ōkura Gumi trading company; and



others, including five merchants (E'temād-al-Saltāna, 1984-88, III. p. 2009; idem, 1984-89, I, p. 331, giving the names as: Yošidā Mosaḥḥaro, Yukuyāma Ku'ijirow, Fukārvā Nuluyoš). On April 8 they left Tokyo's Shinagawa harbor on board the battleship *Hiei*. After transit stops at Hong Kong, Singapore, Ceylon, Bombay, Karachi, and Muscat, the battleship anchored at Bušehr (Bushire) on 9 July 1880. The mission entered Bušehr formally on July 11, and on July 25 began the overland journey to Tehran. For the Japanese party this was their first experience of Persia and the Middle East, and they found much to marvel at and compare and contrast with their own very different culture at home. Their travelogues are a vivid testimonial to their impressions and reactions (e.g., Furukawa, pp. 36, 41, 53; Yoshida, pp. 70-71, 73, 135).

On their way to Tehran, they visited the ruins of Persepolis and Pasargadae on August 13 and 14, and were struck by the extraordinary differences in the appearance and architecture of the monuments of the past in Persia and Japan. At Persepolis they saw the cuneiform inscriptions and noted that the ancient characters were called in Persian *mikaki*, derived from the word “nail” (*mik*) (Yoshida, pp. 78-81, tr., pp. 115-26). They made their formal entry into the capital on September 10, and were received in audience by Nāšer-al-Din Shah on September 27 (Furukawa, p. 211, tr., p. 256) or October 2 (Yoshida, p. 145, tr. p. 181). During their stay in Tehran, the party presented and sold their Japanese specialties (lacquer and cloisonné works, swords, etc.) brought from Japan. They left Tehran on December 30, and departed from the port of Anzali on the Caspian Sea for Baku on 12 January 1881 (Yoshida, p. 188, tr. p. 178).

In assessing the nature of this expedition, it must be borne in mind that at the time Japan was actively and successfully engaged in building a modern state, and looked favorably at Persia, a kingdom on the other side of Asia and one of the few countries that had managed to preserve its independence in the colonized Orient. The mission's findings, as reflected in Yoshida's account, were pessimistic. Though he was impressed by the great interest shown by Nāšer-al-Din Shah in the Japanese modernization effort and its achievements, the embassy found the Persian bureaucracy and army in a parlous state verging on the chaotic. Corruption was rife among those in high positions, and public morale was at a low ebb, with little confidence in the government. Among the dignitaries that Yoshida met, he found much to praise in Mirza Ḥasan Khan Mošir-al-Dawla (Sepahsālār), the ill-fated minister who was dismissed and exiled a few days after Yoshida's arrival in Tehran. In his travelogue, Yoshida expresses his concern about the fate and fortune of Persia



in those turbulent years (Yoshida, pp. 129-31, tr. p. 166).

Yoshida's memoirs also contain some illuminating passages on the life of Zoroastrians and Armenians in Persia and an invaluable account on the background to the trading-house of David Sassoon, the opium merchant in Bušehr (Yoshida, pp 22-23, 89-90; tr. pp. 49-51, 122).

Travelers to Persia in the late Qajar period. Yasumasa Fukushima (1852-1919) worked in the General Staff Office as an army intelligence officer and was known for his bravery. He made a successful crossing of Siberia on horseback during the winter of 1892 to gather intelligence about the construction of the trans-Siberian railroad by imperial Russia. He started from Germany in February and reached Japan in June. Given the strategic and military significance of Russia, Fukushima thought it was vital for Japan to be fully acquainted with conditions in Russia. He performed three overseas explorations to collect military data during his tenure as an intelligence officer, and specifically to verify the disposition of the Russian troops and the state of the progress of the construction of the Central Asia railroad in Turkestan. The secretive aspect of this mission meant that the reports were not released, and many of his activities at the time are still shrouded in mystery. The relevant parts of his *Ajia ryakuhō* (Brief account of Asia) and *Aō nikki* (Diary of Asia and Europe), in which he described his visits to Persia, the Caucasus, and Central Asia, have not yet been made public (Kaneko, p. 122). His travels to Persia were included as one of the itineraries on his third overseas exploration from August 1895 to March 1897.

Fukushima landed at Bušehr by steamer on 22 May 1896 after making a round of calls on Burma (Myanmar), Thailand, and India. He followed the same route as Yoshida, Furukawa, and the others in 1880, and reached Isfahan on June 23 via Kāzerun and Shiraz. At Isfahan he was received in audience by Mas'ud Mirzā Ẓell-al-Solṭān, the prince governor. Leaving Isfahan on June 28, Fukushima reached Tehran via Qom on July 3. His aim was to inspect the military system of the Persian army and to prepare for his projected exploration of Russian Turkistan. He was received in audience by the recently enthroned Moẓaffar-al-Din Shah on 19 July 1896.

Leaving Tehran on August 2, via Qazvin and Rašt, Fukushima departed from Anzali harbor on a Russian steamship and reached Baku after two days. He then began a thorough survey of Russian Turkistan from the eastern coast of the Caspian Sea to Ashkabad ('Esqābād), Marv, Bukhara, Samarkand,



Tashkent, and Kokand. After that, on September 12, he traveled south to Persia again from Ashkabad and arrived at Mashad via Qučān on September 16. He stayed for a week in Mashad, where the British consulate general gave him some assistance. He was back in Tehran on October 2, where he spared no time and effort to observe the military exercises of the Persian soldiers, whom he found in a state of complete disarray and chaos (pp. 143-44). In his travelogue, *Chūō Ajia yori Arabia e* (Traveling from Central Asia to Arabia), he gives an account of his audience with the Persian king under the title “2 or 3 childish questions in a soulless hall” (Fukushima, p. 77). His accounts of his meetings with Z̄ell-al-Soltān, Amin-al-Soltān (the prime minister), the Naẓm-al-Molk (Italian, Conte di Monteforte, former head of the police), and other dignitaries are of special interest. He also gives an informative account on Şahḥāf-bāši Mirzā Ebrāhim Khan, the first Persian to visit Japan and write his memoirs, and his brother Mirzā Esmā‘il Khan. While in Tehran, Fukushima mainly associated with, and was greatly helped by, Wagner Khan, the Austrian military adviser to the Persian court and a teacher at Dār al-Fonun (q.v.; Fukushima, pp. 41, 65, 70-72, 146-49, 161).

Toyokichi Ienaga (1862-1936) studied politics in the United States and is regarded as one of the Japanese pioneers who acquainted Japan with the politics of the United States. Before embarking on teaching at the University of Chicago, he explored India, Persia, and Turkey from May 1899 to March 1900 upon the request of the governor-general of Formosa Prefecture. Ienaga left Taiwan on 17 May 1899 and arrived in Persia at Bušehr on a steamship from Bombay on July 24 (Ienaga, p. 20). He stayed in Bušehr for three days before he left for Tehran, which he reached on September 10 by traveling via Shiraz, Isfahan, and Qom. On the way, he visited the ancient ruins of Persepolis and Pasargadae on August 20 or 21 (Ienaga, pp. 67-74). He dispatched regular on-the-spot accounts of his travels to *Kokumin shinbun*, a daily Japanese newspaper. These reports were later compiled and printed as a book in 1900. The second to fifth reports relate to Persia. In these, he offered a sketch of contemporary Persian social life, culture, politics, economy, and history, based on his direct and frank personal observations. According to these reports, he suffered greatly from the intense summer heat, something that he had not experienced before, as well as from the woeful accommodations. He also found the landscape monotonous and the royal apparatus pompous but devoid of power, the real authority being exercised by British and Russian legations (Ienaga, pp. 121-22).



Like Fukushima, he frequently used the British telegraph offices as lodging houses while traveling in Persia; he also carried a letter of introduction from the British minister in Japan, which he found useful, given the considerable power and prestige enjoyed by Britain in Persia in those days. On 13 September 1899, he had an audience with the shah, and on September 17 he left Tehran for Rašt via Qazvin, Manjil, and Rostamābād. On September 21 he left Persia from the Anzali harbor on a Russian steamship destined for Baku (Ienaga, pp. 105, 117).

Masaji Inoue (1876-1947) was a typical colonial official of the Meiji Era. He is regarded as one of the earliest Japanese pioneers to visit Central Asia from the Caucasus (Kaneko, p. 127). During his university summer vacations while studying at a European university, Inoue embarked on a journey to Central Asia from Europe (16 August-6 November 1902). On his way back to Europe he traveled through Persia.

On September 10, Inoue arrived at the small Persian port of Mašhadsar (later Bābolsar) on the southeast shore of the Caspian Sea (Inoue, p. 194); this was on the sea route from the Russian harbor Krasnovodsk on the east shore of the Caspian Sea. It was a daring venture to take this obscure route to enter Persia. He crossed the Alborz range and arrived in Tehran on September 15 (Inoue, pp. 229, 333). Inoue stayed in Tehran for five days; he lodged at a hotel under British management, where both Fukushima and Ienaga had also stayed, in 1892 and in 1899 respectively.

Inoue met some eminent Persians in Tehran and also visited the royal palace, but did not have an audience with the shah. After leaving Tehran on September 20, via Qazvin, Zanjān, Solṭāniya, Miāna, and Tabriz, Inoue crossed into Russia at Jolfā on September 30. He observed and wrote frankly in his travelogue about many aspects of his visit, the people he met, modes of transport, industries, and natural scenery. His description of the conditions in Gilān and Māzandarān is informative and rich in detail (Inoue, pp. 216-43).

Naokichi Nakamura (1865-1932) was a merchant whose insatiable curiosity led him to travel first to the United States (1888-98) and subsequently on a world trip (1901-07). Late in May 1902, Nakamura arrived at Bušehr harbor on a British steamship from Karachi. He stayed in Bušehr for five days before he left for Tehran, where he arrived some time around 9 October 1902, traveling via Shiraz, Isfahan, and Kāšān. He traveled with little money and sought the support of various people on the way. He was helped by the manager of the



Anglo-Persian Bank at Shiraz, who had also looked after Fukushima when he visited the city. He also stayed at the same lodging house belonging to the British consulate at Isfahan where Fukushima had stayed in 1896. After a week's stay in Tehran, Nakamura left on October 16; passing through Qazvin and Rašt, he reached Anzali to embark for Baku. There are few details in his travel account about the places he visited or even on relevant dates and time, but the book contains vivid recollections of his conversations with people he had met on his travels.

Kakō Ōba (Kageaki, 1872-1921?) traveled to Persia in 1910 and to almost every corner of the world as a reporter for the *Ōsaka mainichi shinbun* newspaper. He left Japan on March 15, on the battleship Ikoma. He reached Persia, arriving in Anzali harbor from Baku, and went to Tehran from Rašt on October 25 via Manjil and Qazvin. Although the length of his stay in Persia was less than two weeks, which included several days in Tehran, his writings contain a very detailed description of the city of Tehran and Māzandarān province, depicting the natural scenery, industry, transportation condition, religion, social custom, issues relevant to women, newspapers, diplomatic relations, etc. He pointed out to the strong influence that Russia and Britain wielded over Persia. Ōba left Persia from Mašhadsar on October 4, returning to Japan on 27 October 1911 by way of Central Asia and such towns as Marv, Bukhara, and Samarkand.

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