



LOCKHART, LAURENCE

LOCKHART, LAURENCE (b. London, 9 July, 1890; d. Barrington, 3 May 1975; [Figure 1](#)), scholar and photographer of Iran, employee of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company.

Life. Lockhart spent much of his childhood in South Africa, where his father was working in the mining industry. When he returned home to attend secondary school, he became ill and was sent to Cairo for a winter to recuperate. His time there sparked an interest in the Middle East as he developed an elementary proficiency skill in reading, writing, and speaking Arabic. He studied history at Pembroke College, Cambridge University, where, in 1913, he was awarded a Bachelor of Arts degree. He remained there for two more years to study Arabic and Persian under the guidance of such luminaries as Edward G. Browne and Reynold A. Nicholson, graduating with highest academic honors in these subjects. A knee injury disqualified him for military service in World War I, so he worked as a clerk in the British Foreign Office.

Over the next two decades (1919-39) he worked for the [Anglo-Persian Oil Company](#) (renamed the “Anglo-Iranian Oil Company” [AIOC] in 1935 and “British Petroleum” [BP] in 1954). His first company assignment was a stint in Mexico (1919-26), then he was transferred to Iran, where his Persian-language skills would be helpful to the company’s operation in Tehran. He lived there for four years (1926-30), experiencing firsthand the beginning of Reżā Shah Pahlavi’s reign. Although his work mostly consisted of routine clerical tasks, he was able to make numerous trips through different parts of Iran, photographing the country as it was experiencing this period of great



transition. He also managed to produce his first academic articles.

He returned to the company's London headquarters in 1930 and served there until 1939. During this period, Lockhart continued to engage in academic pursuits in parallel with his business career, publishing numerous short scholarly pieces on a wide range of topics. In his spare time, he conducted extensive research on Iran and Iranian history, with a particular focus on events of the late Safavid period and the 18th century. In 1935, he eventually earned a Ph.D. degree from the London School of Oriental and African Studies in 1935.

A revised version of his doctoral dissertation, the first modern, full-length scholarly study of the eighteenth-century Iranian ruler Nāder Shah Afšār (r. 1148-60/1736-47), was published as a monograph in 1938. One of his most engaging duties at the company was apparently his assignment to write a history of the company for private circulation. This work became the basis for several later official histories of British Petroleum. In 1939, Lockhart published *Famous Cities of Iran*, the collection of his travel accounts in Iran that had originally appeared in *The Naft* magazine (AIOC's inhouse journal).

He put all business and academic pursuits on hold during World War II. His wartime service began in the intelligence branch of the Royal Air Force in North Africa and the Middle East (1940-44), which brought him briefly back to Iran. He then served for some time (1944-45) in the Research Department of the British Foreign Office, working in an office led by the historian Arnold J. Toynbee. After the war, he resumed working for AIOC until 1948, when he retired from the company to pursue scholarly activities fulltime. This eventually led him back to Cambridge, where he resided from 1953 until his death in 1975. During these years, he made numerous journeys to Iran, as well as producing a constant stream of articles and other publications. He also became involved in helping to establish a center for Middle East studies at Cambridge. In recognition of his accomplishments, he was made a fellow of the Royal Historical Society and received a Litt.D. (Litterarum Doctor) degree from Cambridge University in 1960, as well as being awarded the Sir Percy Sykes Memorial Medal of the Royal Central Asian Society in 1964. His last trip to Iran took place in 1971, when he attended the celebration of 2,500 years of the Persian monarchy at Persepolis.

Contributions to Iranian Studies. Although Lockhart never held a formal university position, he remained engaged in academic activities throughout



his business career and even after retirement. His first two articles, published in 1926, were annotated translations of contemporary sources in Portuguese and Spanish on Nāder Shah Afšār. Over the next five decades, he authored a diverse array of works on Middle Eastern and Iranian topics. Two of the most important, *Nadir Shah* (1938) and *The Fall of the Ṣafavī Dynasty* (1958) remain standard monographs in Iranian studies. Martin Dickson wrote a searing review of the latter, a critique sometimes seen as a precursor to Edward Said's analysis of Orientalism. Dickson congratulated Lockhart for uncovering new primary sources and for utilizing Russian scholarship in a novel way, but he also excoriated him for his philosophy of history, which Dickson saw as based on a "hypothetical virility-index" in which Europeans ranked higher than "Orientals," with Persians falling below all others.

Lockhart's other notable works include *Persian Cities* (1960), an updated version of *Famous Cities of Iran*, as well as important articles on the Safavid army (1959), Ḥasan-e Ṣabbāḥ and the Assassins (1930), the development of constitutional laws in Iran (1959), in addition to numerous encyclopedia entries as well as translations and editions of accounts by pre-modern European travelers in Iran. A condensed version of his history of the beginning of the Iranian oil industry was included in Charles Issawi's *Economic History of Iran*. Lockhart was also an editor of the sixth volume of the *Cambridge History of Iran* (focusing on the Timurid and Safavid eras) as well as founding editor of *Iran* (journal of the British Institute of Iranian Studies) between 1963 and 1967. Publication of his work has continued posthumously with the 2002 release of *Images of Persia*, a book edited by Charles Melville and James Bamberg of photographs that Lockhart took on various trips to Iran.

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