



LORIMER, DAVID I. IN PERSIA

LORIMER, David Lockhart Robertson (b. Strathmartine, near Dundee, Scotland, 24 December 1876; d. London, 26 February 1962), British Iranist and military and intelligence officer (see [SOAS website](#) for photographs). He was the son of Rev. Robert Lorimer. In 1910 he married Emily Martha Overend (1881-1949), who was a trained linguist in Germanic languages. She became his close co-worker: almost all the linguistic materials written down by Lorimer were typed and carefully collated by her. Lieutenant-Colonel D. L. R. Lorimer belonged to the category of Western diplomats and political and military agents who, apart from their main work, contributed much to the study of the regions where duty took them.

i. LORIMER IN PERSIA

Lorimer joined the Indian Army in 1896. From 1898 to 1903 he served with the Q.V.O. Corps of Guides, and was seconded with the Khyber Rifles during 1901-03. He entered the Indian Political Service in 1903, serving there until 1924. His posts included H.B.M.'s Vice-Consul for Arabistan, present-day Khuzestan (1903-10); Political Agent, Bahrain (1911-12); H.M. Consul, Kerman and Persian Baluchistan, and ex-officio Assistant to the Political Resident, Persian Gulf (1912-14); Assistant Political Agent, Chitral (1915); Field Services with the Indian Expeditionary Force "D" in Mesopotamia, and Civil Governor, Amara (1915-16); H. B. M. Consul, Kerman and Persian Baluchistan (1916-17); Political Agent, Loralai, Baluchistan (1920); and Political Agent, Gilgit (1920-24). Lorimer retired from the Army in 1927. In subsequent years, recognition of his scholarly achievements included the Leverhulme Research Fellowship



(1933-35), Triennial Burton Memorial Medal from the Royal Asiatic Society (1948), and an Honorary Fellowship, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London (1953). He was a member of the Royal Asiatic Society, the Royal Geographical Society (where he did not miss an opportunity when in London to give a lecture and tell about his experiences), and the Norwegian Academy of Sciences and Letters.

Lorimer was primarily a military officer rather than a linguist. He was often assigned to collect information on significant people, roads, strategic sites, and do other intelligence-gathering functions. His other activities in Iran comprised of establishing friendly relations with tribal chieftains and dignitaries and using this influence to further British policy in the region. There are abundant documents showing Lorimer's crucial role as an intelligence officer in southern Iran between 1903 and 1909 (for example the archives of Great Britain, Foreign Office 416: vols. 13:2-17:1, 17:2-22:1, 22:2-29:1, 29:2-33:1, 33:2-37:1). This includes a report on Bakhtiari chieftains and their internal relations as well as the attitude of each towards the British (see Lorimer, 2001). This report was prepared during Lorimer's posting as Vice Consul (1908-10) in Arabistan (i.e., Khuzestan). It contains a detailed evaluation of the personal character of each tribal head, and the specific relations prevailing between the various tribal chieftains. The importance of his activities in southern Iran cannot be underestimated, considering the vital British interest in Iranian oil and the geopolitical importance of the region for India's security.

At the same time, Lorimer had a keen interest in the dialect and folklore of the region. He used to collect his material on dialects from elderly informants and would spend the evenings working with them. He collaborated with his wife, who helped make several typewritten drafts of the materials. Only part of this dialectal material found its way into print during Lorimer's lifetime. The extensive unpublished materials (mostly typewritten texts without translations), together with Lorimer's photographs and glass slides, were bequeathed to the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London (see SOAS and AIM25; for other archival sources, see references in AIM25, Sluglett, and Tuson). The written materials have formed the basis for publications by the present authors and others (see Bibliog. and part ii).

D. L. Lorimer used a peculiar system of recording linguistic materials. It is a pure phonetic transcription, fixing every nuance of the pronunciation (especially of vowels). This system demonstrates the numerous variants that



occur for every form, depending on the phonetic environment; the probably semantic accent in the sentence; and the character of speech of the given informant. Despite inconsistencies—he sometimes used different signs for the same phoneme—Lorimer’s system of transcription shows the living phonetic processes of the crystallization of linguistic material, leading to the further development of forms. It allows one to develop diachronic perspectives on the language by defining its inner tendencies in a given period.

Lorimer’s older brother, John Gordon Lorimer (1870–1914), also made a lasting contribution to area studies. He joined the Indian Civil Service and held posts in the Punjab and on the North-West Frontier before serving in the Gulf region. He is most noted for the compendious, six-volume survey, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, ‘Omān and Central Arabia* (Calcutta, 1908-15; repr., 1970, 1986).

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(Fereydun Vahman and Garnik Asatrian)

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