

WILEY



Recent Journeys in Persia: Discussion

Author(s): Nasir-ul-Mulk, Frederic Goldsmid, Mortimer Durand, C. E. Stewart, Mrs. Bishop and Captain Sykes

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much interest in the photographs that I had taken on the Baluch frontier. Moreover, I had the opportunity of making the acquaintance of the leading Persian statesmen, one of whom, His Excellency the Nasir-ul-Mulk, is here to-night, having paid us the compliment of returning to England the moment his official duties on the continent were finished.

In conclusion, I would mention that, after travelling for many thousand miles in Persia, I still wish to travel there again, and, although perhaps the free open-air life and the glorious climate have something to do with this, I cannot but feel that it is also owing to the Persians themselves being so hospitable and friendly a race.

Before the reading of the paper, the PRESIDENT said: We have to welcome here this evening an officer who has seen a good deal of a very interesting part of Persia, and from whom we have received several letters of great interest, though I believe we have not before had the pleasure of listening to him in this room. I will now call upon Captain Sykes to read his paper.

After the reading of the paper, the following discussion took place:—

The PRESIDENT: I would now ask his Excellency, Nasir-ul-Mulk, to open the discussion by some observations.

His Excellency, the NASIR-UL-MULK: I am very pleased to have had the opportunity of being present at this meeting, and of listening to the very interesting lecture of Captain Sykes. As you have seen, Captain Sykes has shown himself a very active explorer, and has availed himself of the opportunities afforded him to give you new information about the outlying parts of Persia. I am afraid that all he said was about the outlying parts and the deserts, and that may give you the idea that all parts of Persia are the same. As you know, Central Persia is desert, but the borders are very beautiful and fertile places, and I am sure that Captain Sykes on another occasion will give you information about these parts also. I have to thank him for the kind allusion he has made to myself, and again to express the pleasure I have had in being present at this meeting.

Major-General Sir FREDERIC GOLDSMID: I am afraid that any remarks which I can make on the very interesting paper we have just heard would involve too distant a retrospect to warrant attentive consideration on your part. My knowledge of Persia goes back to so ancient a date, that anything I may now say on that country must be of comparatively little interest. About thirty-four or thirty-five years ago I had the honour of addressing this Society at a meeting presided over by Sir Roderick Murchison. I had then recently returned from the coast of Mekran, which I had been sent to explore under orders from Bombay. Although we, in Sind, were neighbours to Mekran, we knew very little of that province in those days. I was ordered to go along the coast as far as I could, and see whether the country was fitted for the setting up of our telegraph line, whether the people were fitted for protecting that line, and whether I could make any permanent arrangements for its protection. Accompanied by an escort of Sind horse, I reached Gwádar in about seven weeks, exploring and taking notes the whole way, and making my report to the Bombay government. From Gwádar I should have continued the exploration, but was directed to return, lest our little acquaintance with Western Mekran should lead us into political complications. Consequently, I put my camels and horses into boats, and returned to Karáchi. A few years later, I reached this very place, Gwádar, from the neighbouring port of Charbar,

having travelled thither by a strictly "overland" route from the Caspian. Later again I reached Gwádar direct, coming from the same starting-point in Northern Persia. When the late Sir Henry Yule kindly measured my journeys, and put them down at 7000 miles in Persia and Baluchistan only, I confess to a feeling of gratification; but I could not then foresee the work that was to be accomplished by other travellers in Asia during the second half of this memorable period of sixty years which we are now celebrating.

The paper we have heard read is an admirable one in many respects. It is simple, truthful, we all understand it, and, more than that, it shows what we have to do. The points which the writer has touched upon are points of very great interest indeed, and I only hope that, by further study of these particular regions, we may soon have a more complete map than heretofore. I do not like taking up your time further, but, as relevant to the occasion, will ask your permission to quote a few words from a lecture which I delivered at the Royal United Service Institution in 1877, when Sir Rutherford Alcock was in the chair:—

"We require consuls both on the east and west of Persia: good, well-trained men who are likely to promote, by their personal character, the honour and credit of our country. Kerman or Yezd in the east, and Kermanshah and Shuster in the west, Meshed in the north, and Bunder-Abbas on the seaboard, would all be points worthy of consideration in any scheme for the extension of the Asiatic consular service. . . . Holders of these posts, like the late worthy consul, Keith Abbott of Tabriz, might, by judicious local exploration and inquiry, be scientifically, as politically, useful." In referring to Consul Keith Abbott of Tabriz, I would interpolate the name of Colonel Stewart, also of that city, whose presence here to-night at once recalls his travels and services.

Let me add that in three of the places named, consuls or vice-consuls have in late years been appointed. I think I am right in saying that General Maclean was appointed to Meshed, one or two officers were appointed at various times to Yezd, and Captain Sykes is, we know, at Kerman. One word more, if I may be allowed to say it—and it would be ungrateful and ungracious if I did not do so—that is, that I agree in every word that Captain Sykes has said in regard to Persian hospitality. I can, from my own experience, testify most heartily and honestly to this estimate of the native character.

Sir MORTIMER DURAND: There are many here so much better fitted than I am to continue the discussion of Captain Sykes's lecture from a geographical point of view, that it is inadvisable for me to take up your time very long. I would only like to say that I entirely concur with everything Sir Frederic Goldsmid says about the credit due to Captain Sykes for his remarkable journey, and I wish a great many more would follow his example. I have often been struck by the small number of English travellers who visit Persia. I am sure my distinguished friend, the Nasir-ul-Mulk—whom I take this opportunity of congratulating upon the high honour conferred on him by Her Majesty—will bear me out in saying that the Persians, as a nation, very thoroughly appreciate, in more ways than one, any sympathetic interest which Europeans show towards them. I think it is in every sense desirable that more Englishmen should travel through Persia to learn something of the country and people. It is a most interesting country and people. There is one aspect of the question which has not been touched on to-night, and about which I should like to say a few words—I mean the interest of the country from an artistic point of view. I think it would well repay any one of artistic tastes to spend some months or a year in Persia. He would see that it is a very beautiful country. We have heard a great deal of the arid nature of the mountains. There is a very great deal of barren and bare country about the capital, but

if you could see the exquisite colours which the barren hills take at sunset, and at other times, you would agree that Persia has its beautiful side. I remember when I left Tehran on February 14, I was particularly struck with this. It was a typical Persian day, the sky cloudless, the sun bright. To the north stretched a long range of mountains of dazzling purity, covered with snow from the summit to the foot, and far away to the east, rose the mighty cone of Demavend. To the south we saw the great plain stretching into the blue distance, and rising out of it, range after range of snow-clad hills, the more distant being considerably over 100 miles away, yet, in the exquisitely pure dry Persian air, the farthest range was perfectly clear. The whole was one of the most beautiful things I have ever seen. Now, that is merely one aspect of Persia, but it is worth dwelling upon. From every point of view, I wish I could see more English travellers in the country, but they must be travellers of the right stamp, like Captain Sykes and the charming and intrepid lady who accompanied him in his wanderings. I hope I may live to see more Englishmen following their example, and that greater interest in, and knowledge of, Persia may gradually result.

Colonel C. E. STEWART: It is some sixteen years since I read a paper before this Society on Persia, where I spent many years, and I am now glad to listen to a paper by Captain Sykes on that country. Captain Sykes told you that on his way to Persia he came to me at Adessa and asked me for letters of introduction. I gave him one to a friend of mine, a chief of the Yomut Turkomans whose friendship I had gained some years ago. I am sorry my friend did not treat Captain Sykes better; at all events, I had found him most kind. It surprised this chief very much, when I was with him, to hear that I possessed a portrait of him. This portrait had been done by my wife, who had met him on board a Caspian steamer when he was an officer in the Russian service. Sixteen years ago, a man was scalped in my presence in this part of the world; but on the present occasion we had a good dinner, with knives and forks. Whatever else the Turkomans have done, they have advanced much in civilization, which is due to Russian example. This chief, after holding a commission as major in the Russian service, had entered the Persian service as colonel of cavalry. I must say I found him a most pleasant, intelligent host, and in every way I enjoyed my time with him. I am sorry he was not more civil to Captain Sykes.

In another part of Persia described by Captain Sykes, I have been as far as Naiband. He describes Naiband as a sort of Paradise, but I suffered a good deal in crossing the desert to get there. My recollections go back more readily to the Turkomans than to the desert, because they live in a beautiful green country, where, if it were not for the mosquitoes, one could spend a happy time. I remember on two occasions I could not see the colour of my hands, they were so covered by mosquitoes.

Mrs. BISHOP: My claim to be a Persian traveller is rather a slight one. I travelled in Persia for a year for about 1500 miles. The region in which I travelled was chiefly Western Persia, from Baghdad to Isfahan and in the Bakhtiari country, and the Karun region, from Dupulun to the source of the Karun, and then through what is sometimes called Persian Kurdistan to the Turkish frontier near Urumiah. I should like to ask Captain Sykes if in the desert, between Meshed and Kerman, he met with any traces of ancient irrigation, irrigation canals, ditches, or reservoirs, such as occur in immense numbers in some other parts of Persia now entirely desert. I should also like to know whether there was any desert vegetation, such plants as *assafœtida*, which is plentiful on the Upper Elam mountains, and also the *colocynth* gourd, which affects deserts. There is one more question: Has the road for which a concession was granted when I was in Persia, I mean from Ahwaz to Burujird, become an accomplished fact?

Captain SYKES: In reply to Mrs. Bishop's three questions, I do not think that there was ever more irrigation or cultivation in the Dasht-i-lut than nowadays; in pre-historic times there is reason to believe that the desert formed an inland sea, in support of which theory, Sir Frederic Goldsmid mentions that at Yunasi or Yunsi, on its north-west edge, there is a tradition that the prophet Jonah, or Yunas, was cast up there and hid for three days under a gourd. As to the second question, I am afraid that I am not much of a botanist, but I have seen *assafetida* growing in the hills near Kerman, but always at a higher elevation than any portion of the Dasht-i-lut, where, indeed, one only sees stunted camel-thorn bushes. Finally, I regret to state that the Ahwaz-Burujird road has not, as yet, been commenced.

The PRESIDENT: We have listened to a very interesting paper this evening, and as regards the journey from Khorassan to Kerman, I believe, from what Captain Sykes has told us, that we shall be able to make some not unimportant additions to the map of Persia which was brought out under Mr. Curzon's supervision a few years ago. I therefore think we may all look forward with great interest to the additions Captain Sykes will be able to give us. We have all noticed, I think, how very interesting it is for an accomplished traveller like Captain Sykes to travel over a country little known, but which has many geographical and many historical reminiscences connected with it, and I was particularly interested in hearing him refer to the routes of Alexander and to the identification of places mentioned by Marco Polo and Friar Odoric. It reminds me how very much we owe to our late associate, Sir Henry Yule, as regards this country and other parts of Asia. If it had not been for his elucidations of the great work of Marco Polo, and for his having first brought to the notice of Englishmen the very interesting narrative of Friar Odoric, we should not now be able to listen to the researches of those travellers who have benefited by what Sir Henry Yule has written. We have much to thank Captain Sykes for besides the paper he has read to us. We have all been extremely interested in looking at the very beautiful photographic sketches he has shown us on the screen, especially those buildings at Kerman, and the golden-domed mosques and tombs at Meshed. We also have to thank him for kindly bringing here, and placing in the next room for our inspection, a number of interesting products connected with the province of Kerman, also some tiles and other older remains. I feel confident, therefore, that you will all wish me to convey to Captain Sykes a very cordial vote of thanks for his communication this evening.

A JOURNEY TO SIWA IN SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER, 1896.

By WILFRED JENNINGS-BRAMLY.

THE famous oasis of Siwa, which lies about 300 miles west of Cairo, cannot be said to have fallen from its high estate, for it is probably much as it was when Herodotus, Strabo, Diodorus, Plutarch, and Pliny thought it worthy of mention; only it has stood still while the world went on. What it was in the days of its fame before the reign of Cheops it is still—the first halting-place on the great desert high-road to the west. Alexander the Great visited it, and it was well known in the Roman occupation of Egypt, but it was not until 1792 that its fame reached Western Europe through the visit of Alexander Browne. Mehemet Ali sent an expedition which gathered much knowledge of the place, and enabled him to fix the taxation

VI.—DECEMBER, 1897.]

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